

Saturday, 21 June, 2008

HULLS UNVEILS VIETNAMESE BOAT PEOPLE MEMORIAL

Acting Premier Rob Hulls today unveiled Australia's first memorial to commemorate the plight of Vietnamese refugees.

The Vietnamese Boat People Monument of Gratitude, which is located in Footscray's Jensen Reserve, has been created to express the gratitude of the Vietnamese boat people towards the governments, non-government organisations and other Australian individuals whose efforts over many years have assisted in the resettlement of many Vietnamese refugees.

It also is dedicated to the commemoration of the thousands of Vietnamese people who perished in their search for freedom.

The monument was initiated and erected by the Archive of the Vietnamese Boat People (AVBP), a not for profit organisation based in Melbourne that aims to collect, archive and preserve information about the Vietnamese people who fled Vietnam from 1975 to 1996.

"This inspirational monument is testimony to the courage of the thousands of Vietnamese people who lost their lives in the pursuit of freedom," Mr Hulls said.

"It also acknowledges the many selfless, humanitarian acts of kindness by Australians and represents the solidarity of the Vietnamese community in Victoria."

The design of the monument depicts a boat with two sails – like two brothers. The taller sail is engraved with an English inscription and the smaller one with a Vietnamese inscription.

An elderly member of the local Vietnamese community, Mr Ngu Ha, who lost his whole family at sea, has been invited to read the Vietnamese script at the unveiling ceremony.

"The boat design is clever and emotional," Mr Hulls said. "The message is simple – as human beings, we are all in the same boat."

"I am proud that Victoria again leads the way by being the first to erect a monument which commemorates the plight of the Vietnamese boat people and acknowledges Australians' acts of kindness and compassion."

"It also acknowledges that for more than 30 years, Vietnamese people have contributed greatly to the multicultural fabric of Victoria and continue to be valued and vibrant parts of the community."

The unveiling coincides with National Refugee Week, a timely reminder of the contributions refugees have made to their own communities and to Victoria.

Mr Hulls said the Brumby Government committed almost \$20 million in the recent State Budget towards refugee support in Victoria.

"The \$20 million committed by the Brumby Government has the potential to make vast improvements to the lives of some of Victoria's most vulnerable people," he said.