

HYPERBOLE AND HOW IT DETRACTS FROM CREDIBILITY [APRIL 10, 2018](#)



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Unlike Donald Trump the people who ran the British Empire realised very early that understatement was a more effective communication tactic than hyperbole.

Certainly there was racism and awful exploitation (see Shashi Tharoor's *Inglorious Empire* – or just watch the YouTube version of his contribution to the Oxford Union debate which preceded the book) but lots of aristocratic mumbling was a good way of hiding massacres, mass famines and contempt for the lesser breed and colonials. Indeed, the Brits did a good job of convincing many people (eg Tony Abbott and the historian Niall Ferguson) of the virtues of Empire.

But in one colonial outpost – Melbourne – the mumbled understatement approach has never permeated the thinking of those who support, fund or organise the Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park. Indeed, the Grand Prix hyperbolic approach was exemplified by the late Ron Walker who successively claimed the Grand Prix television audience was greater than that of the Soccer World Cup, the Olympics and the total global population. Or former Premier, Jeff Kennett, who said in 1993 that "Victorian taxpayers would not be asked to meet the cost of the event, with the State Government only prepared to act as guarantor for loans required to establish the race." Estimated annual losses are now around \$60 million.

Sadly the Grand Prix is still getting away with the hyperbole even though the Save Albert Park organisation continues to expose it and provide the evidence of just how much genuine fake news the organisers churn out. A few journalists bell the cat such as Greg Baum's wonderful article – All hail the grandiose Grand Prix in *The Age* (23 March 2018). The article, step by step, exposes every one of the dodgy hyperbolic claims the Grand Prix organisers make each year – from attendance figures to financial benefit.

As Baum wrote: "The Grand Prix is the acme of political brainwashing. When it comes to fake news, the Grand Prix Corporation makes Donald Trump look like an apprentice. Take this single statement in a story on its website acclaiming the success of last year's staging: 'An estimated 296,600 fans attended the 2017 Australian Grand Prix, with an additional 7.314 million viewers nationally and 390 million viewers worldwide.' Let's work back down that grid ... 390 million viewers worldwide? Formula One itself claims only that many for its entire 21-race season. When Liberty Media took over operations from Bernie Ecclestone last year, it revised the figure down to around 350 million. So Melbourne's grand prix out-rates all the other 20 combined, according to the Melbourne grand

prix. Taking into account time zones, resistance group Save Albert Park say the true figure is probably no more than 15 million.

“Then there’s the gate, nudging 300,000. Here, the Grand Prix Corporation is at its Goebbel-esque best. The figure, you will note, is round, jolly and estimated. That is because the grand prix does not count numbers through the gate. It says that the cost of putting electronic turnstiles at seven gates, or even to issue a few hand-held scanners, is prohibitive.”

The Save Albert Park group has exposed yet another problem with the attendance and the possibility of counting numbers through the gate – the ticketing company has offered to provide hand-held scanners free. While this might be the only benefit taxpayers will ever get, it’s beyond remarkable that the Grand Prix organisers declined the generous offer to establish categorically what the attendances (even with freebees) are.

Save Albert Park [website](#) provides example after example of misleading and deceptive claims about the event; misleading ‘economic impact’ studies; the struggle to attract high level sponsors; Press Council adjudications on specific newspaper reports on the dodgy attendance figures; the number of overseas visitors to the event; and the extent of Grand Prix losses. It also contrasts them with embarrassingly accurate Auditor-General cost benefit analyses.

Yet the Government is apparently drawing up a Master Plan for Albert Park which will lock in the Grand Prix for years; reduce the much-used and loved Albert Park Golf Course to nine holes (hopefully by getting rid of the holes on which the blog has sliced or hooked balls into either the lake or the road); and increasing the development density.

What makes it all worse is that the Labor Government has known the event is a dud for many years but is frightened to can it because research suggests that could be seen as favouring inner urban people over the knuckle-dragging section of outer urban voters in marginal seats.

But there is a fundamental lesson in all of this - not only for politicians but also for PR people – credibility is in inverse proportion to the hyperbole employed.