

Kiwis want our Rambo

Brazen bid to boost Christchurch tourism

By LOUISE THROWER

NEW Zealand has accused Australia of pinching many things, from Phar Lap, pavlova, Russell Crowe and Split Enz.

Now the hoof is on the other foot.

The Mayor of Christchurch, Bob Parker, has launched a brazen bid to seize the Big Merino and other giant things as a tourism drawcard for the earthquake ravaged city.

He met with Mayor Geoff Kettle last Friday to sign a memorandum of support to loan Goulburn's best known icon.

Weighing up logistics of moving the 97-tonne 'Rambo,' Mr Parker was buoyed by news it had in fact shifted location five years ago, albeit 750 metres up the road.

"So it can be moved?" he quipped to agog Big Merino staff.

"You can't have it," came the indignant reply.

Undeterred, Mr Parker continued his Australian tour, negotiating with mayors and town representatives for the loan of the Sunshine Coast's Big Pineapple, the Big Chook in Mount Vernon and the Big Cow and Big Macadamia in Nambour.

Funny thing was, Big Merino part-owner Robert Rampton knew nothing about it.

"We've had some contact from Mitsubishi wanting to do an ad with the sheep in the background, but not from New Zealand," he said.

"I don't think you'd move it over there ... We want tourists here in Goulburn, not New Zealand.

But on reflection he said "anything was available at a price."

The moving bill could be prohibitive. In 2007 it cost about \$140,000 to shift the icon further along Hume St to a service centre - and that was on a truck.

It's all a bit tongue in cheek, says Cr Kettle. In any case, he's agreeing to loan an image of the Big Merino to Christchurch, not the icon itself.

"He's (Mr Parker) really on a mission to get more people to visit Christchurch," he said.

The Kiwi mayor said tourists were flocking to Christchurch from all over the world but Australian visitors were staying at home, missing out on what was happening in the "magnificent gateway to the South Island."

"Australia is a big country, full of people with big hearts and big ideas and big pineapples," he said.

"They're crazy about big stuff. So we decided to borrow some and put them around Christchurch to make our Aussie mates feel more at home in our place."

With the help of his trusty assistant, he's even sussed out potential locations. Rambo is looking good for the Botanic Gardens but the Re:Start Shopping Mall - a brightly coloured shipping container mall - and the city's other landmarks including the International Antarctic Centre, and open air farmers and arts markets are judged equally suitable for all the 'Big Things.'

Rambo is touted as the star attraction during Show Week and a possible winner of 'Best in Breed.'

Negotiations may be hitting a snag but the Christchurch mayor has a serious message to deliver.

An open letter published in Sydney and Melbourne newspapers last week, and an online video diary of his Big Things tour, stresses that Christchurch is open and ready to entertain the city's Australian visitors.

■ Continued page 2



TRUE BLUE: Moving the Big Merino up Hume St may have been a cinch but Christchurch's bid for the city's icon is bound to hit snags. Left: Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker last month tried to twist Goulburn Mulwaree Mayor Geoff Kettle's arm to loan the Big Merino to the New Zealand city.

**SUPER
SUPER
SALE!**
**MUST END
SUNDAY!**

**PRICE
MELTDOWN!**
ON FURNITURE & BEDDING!