

18th August 2009

EPBC Ref: 2009/ 5027 Department of Agriculture and Food (WA)/Natural Resources Management/Perth metropolitan area/WA/Eradication of the European House Borer, Perth metropolitan area, WA.

SAVE OUR TREES Submission

Alex Jones - Promoter of www.saveourtrees.net (a privately funded website established in 2007) and of two petitions to the Legislative Council of Western Australia:

Petition for the Protection of Mature Trees on Public Land in Urban Areas, *September, 2006*

Petition to Save Mature Trees and Bushland and to Stop the Use of Synthetic Chemical Herbicides and Pesticides on Public Land in Urban Areas, *November, 2008*

INTRODUCTION

I urge the Federal Environment Ministers to immediately stop the further destruction of our pine trees in the greater Perth metropolitan area because arguments for their removal are weak and show little or no regard for the trees' many environmental and health benefits. Our managing authorities have for decades lacked the will to preserve many of our mature trees and have shown an obsession with the removal of "weeds", including many non indigenous trees. This obsession has resulted in the loss of precious vegetation and wildlife habitat, and also in the widespread use of toxic chemicals on our landscape for the control of weeds. The issue of the European House Borer is a further example of the preparedness of our authorities to destroy trees when evidence shows that the eradication of the Borer by means of clear-felling and the removal of live trees is out of all proportion to the nature of the problem, placing short -term business and financial concerns above the resultant enormous damage to an environment that is already under siege from urban development, pollution, salinity, climate change and global drying.

LEVEL OF ASSESSMENT

1. How many trees?

Will the Ministers for the Environment apply an appropriate level of assessment to this proposal to ensure the availability of information relating to the total number of trees already removed during Phases 1 and 2 of the Emergency Plant Pest Response Plan, and the total number of trees that will be removed in the proposed "accelerated" clear felling of plantation timber and other living pines in the greater metropolitan area during Phase 111-Eradication, January 2009-2015? Detailed financial costs relating to the potential for damage to property have been extensively discussed in the proposal even though more than 95 per cent of urban external infestations have been controlled and there is little or no indication of infestation to housing timbers. **Where is the reporting on the Environmental costs?**

2. Extent of environmental damage.

Will the Ministers for the Environment provide an appropriate level of assessment to ensure proper disclosure of the estimated negative environmental impact of wide scale tree removal and clear-felling, including the following:

- Loss of the CO₂ sequestration performed by trees. Mature trees sequester up to 70-80 times more CO₂ than saplings. What is the average age of the trees, how many have been targeted for removal and how much CO₂ do/ did they sequester?
- Loss of the safe storage of CO₂ inside the trunks of trees, and release of CO₂ into the atmosphere as a result of the wood-chipping process.
- Loss of trees as a vital link in local and global climate. Through their absorption, transpiration and general recycling of water, trees help to retain water in the environment, both in the air and in the ground- "Trees bring rain and rain brings trees". Wide scale tree removal and clear-felling lead to desertification and drying climate.
- Loss of shade and leaf litter that protect the soil from erosion and the drying effects of sun and wind. Subsequent degradation of the exposed soil.
- Loss of vital wildlife habitat on public land that currently helps to compensate for loss of habitat due to agricultural practices and urban development. Pine trees have become important habitat for the endangered Carnaby's Cockatoo, and it will be too late to monitor the birds and plan for ecological linkages after so much more of their habitat is destroyed.
- Loss of the air pollution filtration and run-off prevention performed by the leaves of trees. Bare earth cannot trap or slow down heavy rain which leads to erosion and run-off of precious water. Global predictions of less rainfall and more extreme events suggest that we need to capture and retain rain when it falls rather than allow it to rapidly disappear and cause havoc in the process.
- Loss of the pumping action of living tree roots that in many locations help to prevent rising water and salinity.

3. Emergency Plant Pest Response Plan hysteria overrides Sustainability.

Will the Ministers for the Environment provide an appropriate level of assessment to ensure that a balanced view of the European House Borer incursion allows for control of the potential threat to property by all the available means other than the removal of living pine trees and the use of toxic chemicals? –

Trapping, baiting with pheromones, detector dogs, pruning of dead wood, acoustic detection and most importantly-the mandatory use of treated pine in new homes, are all available for the control of the European House Borer. If, as stated in the Allen Consulting Group report, the South African EHB infestation was ultimately controlled by legislation to enforce the use of treated pine in buildings, the same can be achieved in Western Australia.

Furthermore, the Gnangara Park Concept Plan “was approved by Cabinet in 1996 as a strategic part of the Government’s response to the issue of increasing salinisation and eutrophication of the State’s land and water resources.” The “accelerated” clear-felling of the pines (22,000 hectares) as proposed in the EPPRP effectively overturns earlier plans for “balanced pine harvesting and rehabilitation approach”. Plans to “increase available habitat for a range of fauna species and actively encourage fauna to reintroduce into the Park” will also be significantly stymied if clear-felling of pine trees proves fatal for the endangered Carnaby’s Cockatoo.

4. Emergency Plant Pest Response Plan ignores the vital role of trees.

Will the Ministers for the Environment provide an appropriate level of assessment to ensure that the issue of environmental sustainability does not become obscured by the relatively short term interests of the housing and energy industries?

In stating that “ the eradication of EHB from infested plantations is aided by other pressures to clear trees such as the need for more land for housing development as well as the fact that the largest plantation is situated on the Gnangara water mound, which is the major water supply for the Perth northern suburbs”, the proponents appear to be oblivious to the internationally recognized need to retain vegetation for the protection of our climate and ground water, and to the fact that wide-scale tree removal promotes desertification and impoverishes the health of the general environment and community. There is also a strong view in the community that building should occur on already cleared land and that tree removal is not acceptable.

The EPPRP also states that “since 2002, 40 per cent of the 6,500 ha of Gnangara plantation has been cleared” and that “a bio-energy electricity generation plant is being planned to use plantation harvest waste as renewable source of energy generation.” The proposed construction of the plant in 2010, with commissioning in 2011 cannot be used to justify the tree removal without an environmental assessment of both the tree removal and the operations of the plant.

5. The role of State and Local authorities in managing the environment.

Will the Ministers for the Environment provide an appropriate level of assessment to ensure that our relevant authorities better inform themselves of the damage to the environment, community health and wildlife habitat due to ongoing tree removal practices?

We have seen and continue to see Local Government tree replacement policies, State “weed” tree removal policies and outrageous forestry vandalism of old growth forests such as the felling of 6-800 year old trees in Victoria by Vicforests in January 2009, as reported in Clean Food Organic magazine, page 8, 08/2009. There are strong community views that more needs to be done at a government level to protect our vegetation and landscape from destructive and unnecessary policies and practices.

CONCLUSION

Although the European House Borer is a serious threat to the building industry when no control measures are taken, international evidence shows that it can be effectively controlled by the use of treated timber. The available new treatments for pine timber and the previously mentioned methods of control of the spread of EHB are relatively safe and should be used. The failure of our housing industry to ensure the use of treated pine in new homes and the failure of our quarantine controls to prevent the incursion of EHB do not justify the ongoing removal and accelerated clear-felling of our State's pine trees, particularly in view of the fact that the Borer only attacks dead wood and not living trees. If allowed to live, the trees will continue to provide important health, environmental and habitat benefits with or without the Borer.

Alex Jones

www.saveourtrees.net

email: alx_jones@yahoo.com.au