

Land values and fashion drive excess felling in the suburbs, regardless of broader consequences, advocate says

Disappearing trees victims of Perth's rush for land

TORRANCE MENDEZ

Where have all the trees gone?

Too many trees are being cut down around Perth for the sake of beautification at a time of rising land values with scant regard to the potentially catastrophic impact on the environment, according to a new pressure group.

Nedlands woman Alex Jones, founder of Save Our Trees, is browbeating State Parliament's Legislative Council to examine the cumulative effect of lost trees in public places.

Her 1600-signature petition calling for a moratorium on tree removal from street verges, parks and open land is before the Upper House standing committee on environment and public affairs.

It says the removal of mature trees harms air quality, wildlife habitat, landscape values, local amenity, protection from the sun, mental and physical health, soil salinity, climate change, financial costs to communities and real estate values.

Save Our Trees wants a publicly funded campaign to promote the consequences of tree removal. It believes root surgery and height control are effective management tools.

"We don't know how many trees are being lost throughout the suburbs," Ms Jones says. "There is no accountability."

Some local authorities want rid of certain tree species because their root system poses a costly risk to underground sewerage, cable and power lines. Other authorities allow individual householders to bear the cost of cutting down verge trees.

"There needs to be an organisation that oversees the removal of trees in any one given year," Ms Jones says. "How many have been lost and how many are planned to be felled?"

Her point is simple. Mature trees, however unfashionable, perform an ecological role in a streetscape or public place which should not be forsaken lightly. Not one variety of saplings, which often replaced axed species, could replicate the environmental role of a grown tree.

Ms Jones says tree removal has been exacerbated by rising land values where landowners demand removal of some street trees to make way for driveways.

That scenario is compounded when local authorities alter the species of street tree for aesthetics. "A lot of trees are disappearing. And we're changing them to make a fashion statement," she says. "There's debate about which tree should be the replacement tree. I don't see the need to chop down perfectly healthy trees."

City of Nedlands explained its policy of replacing Queensland box trees with other species, in response to preliminary inquiries by the committee.

"As existing box trees die and require replacement, the city will plant replacement trees in accordance with the nominated tree species for each street," the council said. "If a property owner requests the replacement of a healthy box tree on the verge adjacent to their property the city will do so only if the owner pays the full cost of removal, disposal and replanting of the nominated species . . ."



Regret: Alex Jones with a recently felled tree in Kings Park, where she says too many big exotic species are targeted for removal. Picture: Ian Ferguson

Nedlands would also consider replacing other species such as the Hills fig, Japanese pepper and Cape lilac or "other inappropriately located tree species" on a case by case basis, with the property owner bearing full cost.

City of Subiaco reported that 600 trees had been replaced over a five-year period to make way for underground power lines.

And the Town of Cottesloe

identified a problem: "Ratepayers and residents vary in their attitudes to street trees and individual trees may suffer damage or die from 'unknown causes' in areas where they cause problems to houses and properties."

Ms Jones said even Kings Park targeted big exotic trees at an unacceptable rate.

Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority chief executive Mark

A lot of trees are disappearing. And we're changing them to make a fashion statement.

ALEX JONES

Webb responded: "In the bushland area we do have an active program of removing mainly sugar gums from South Australia because in some areas they are in very high numbers and are impacting on the smaller native shrubs and other herbaceous material and reducing biodiversity of those areas because they aggressively compete for light, nutrients and moisture. But in developed areas we're retaining those exotic trees."

Mr Webb said more than 30,000 native canopy species including tuart, banksia and marri had been planted in the past five years which would more than replace exotic trees lost in bush.

Former environment minister Tony McRae spelt out the difficulty of protecting mature trees on public land and parks when he told a parliamentary committee in February that it was unlikely their removal was regulated by the Environmental Protection Act.

And former local government minister Jon Ford told the committee in November that the Local Government Act did not provide for a moratorium on tree removal. "I am advised that even if a moratorium on the removal of trees were possible, it is likely that it would be difficult to implement because of significant management issues."

The best way to effect change was through each local authority, he said.

Ms Jones says: "To go to individual councils is frustrating and causes me grief and gets me nowhere."

Committee chairwoman Louise Pratt said Ms Jones's petition was still being deliberated.

Sri Lankan asylum seeker deported after medical treatment

GIOVANNI TORRE

One of the 83 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers intercepted by HMAS Success on February 20 is being deported after having received medical treatment in Perth.

The 31-year old man is the only member of the group to have accessed legal assistance in Australia and was hospitalised for months after being found in Australian waters.

The man, who is a member of the Tamil ethnic minority in Sri Lanka, had a piece of shrapnel embedded in his brain from a bomb blast.

David Mann, from the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, said the man also had "other serious medical problems, serious enough for the Government to recognise he cannot get proper care on Christmas Island or Nauru". He added the asylum seeker was fearful of talking to the media or

having his photograph published because of the ramifications if his story received coverage in Sri Lanka.

Mr Mann said that "indefinite exile on Nauru" for the 83 Sri Lankans created obstacles to proper legal representation, which he described as a human right. He added that although the asylum-seeker was on the Australian mainland he was precluded from applying for any visa, effectively "shut out of the legal system".

The man appealed to Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews to use his personal discretion to lift that prohibition, which was the only way he could put his case for protection under the Australian legal system, but the Minister refused. Mr Andrews did not answer questions on why he refused to intervene.

"It's made crystal clear in very recent reports from the United Nations that Tamils face the real pros-

pect of serious, brutal human rights abuse," Mr Mann said. "This man has suffered past trauma and persecution and that is a powerful indicator of future risk as well as demonstrating the fact it would be in the public interest to provide him with protection in Australia."

The Minister refused to comment on what grounds the man's application for refugee status may be rejected.

deutscherandhackett
specialist fine art auction house & private gallery

important fine art auction
melbourne • august 2007

now
consigning

For obligation-free appraisals, please call
Melbourne
03 9865 6333
info@deutscherandhackett.com
www.deutscherandhackett.com

Deutscher and Hackett Pty Ltd is not associated or affiliated with Deutscher Menzies Pty Ltd



Mark Olson: Money better spent on existing staff.

Nurses union says recruitment overseas a slap in face to staff

CATHY O'LEARY

The Australian Nursing Federation has attacked the WA Health Department's lure of \$20,000 in relocation costs to attract British mental health nurses to WA, saying the millions of dollars it could cost would be better spent on retaining existing staff.

Secretary Mark Olson said it was a slap in the face for local nurses to learn that overseas nurses would be paid handsomely to have what many would use as type of extended holiday.

The Health Department is sending a team of health professionals to England and Scotland next week to recruit up to 300 mental health nurses

and allied staff for positions in the metropolitan and country areas.

Mental health executive director Steve Patchett said that as part of the State Government's \$173 million mental health package more than 300 mental health staff had been appointed and another 300 vacancies would emerge within the public system by the end of next year.

An earlier recruitment drive in 2004 resulted in 35 staff coming to WA.

But Mr Olson said the campaign was a waste of money and resources, and overworked nurses who were already in the system and waiting for a pay rise felt undervalued.