

Alexandra Jones

(Address removed)

10th October 2006

Hon Louise Pratt MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
Perth WA 6000

Dear Ms Pratt,

Petition No 34 -

Regarding the Protection of Mature Trees on Public Land in Urban Areas

On the 5th October 2006, I spoke with Mark Warner and later received an email from him advising me that in addition to the 1-2 page submission it would be appropriate to also attach a number of relevant documents.

Copies of most of these documents were made available to Hon Giz Watson and Hon Ray Halligan on the 18th September, along with the petition containing 1,453 signatures to be presented. My understanding is that Hon Giz Watson tabled the petition (735 signatures) on the 20th September and that the rest will be submitted at Parliament's next sitting. The current total is 1,490.

As stated in the email to members of the Legislative council on the 8th August 2006, we had hoped to have the Petition presented by more than one political party in recognition of the varied backgrounds of the individuals who had contributed to its wording and general content.

Further to the explanatory letter (attachment 1) and the other 5 items listed in the covering letter to the two tabling Members (attachment 2), there have been numerous relevant newspaper articles (attachment 3), and presentations to Subiaco Council from concerned individuals relating to development proposals for Mueller Park (attachment 4).

The author of recent letters to the Post newspaper (attachment 3, 14/10/06, 23/09/06), (name removed), is planning to organise a public gathering in the western suburbs as an expression of the concern about mature tree removal and its relevance to environmental degradation and loss of amenity. (Name removed), a resident of Subiaco, is willing to speak about the issue of trees and public liability, and I expect there will be considerable input from other residents in the metropolitan area.

My concern about tree removal goes back to the 1990's when I first observed the unnecessary loss of trees due to thoughtless development or questionable local council policies. Through the local newspaper, I realised that my concerns were often

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shared by others in the western suburbs. In an effort to make some contribution to the community, I joined the local sustainability group at Nedlands Council, Local Agenda 21, and was a member from 1998–2001. However, after four years I was still observing the same ongoing problems with tree removal.

Over the years I wrote several letters to the editor, and later in 2004 I took photographs of street verges showing the effects of tree removal in our Hollywood ward and submitted them along with a letter to the Mayor and Councillors of Nedlands (attachment 5). I did not receive any response from those to whom the letter had been addressed, only a very brief response from the Parks Manager (attachment 6). I delivered the letter again to the Mayor and to each councillor individually addressed. Not one councillor responded.

As mentioned in attachment 1, the tree removal and replacement policies of various councils (attachment 7) continue to allow the removal of trees unnecessarily in the opinion of some residents. Even as a visitor to this country, the travel writer Bill Bryson, in his book *Down Under*, expresses regret at learning of the removal of healthy *Ficus* trees from some parks because of their non indigenous status. Although the Petition focuses on Western Australian practices, tree removal is an issue that appears to raise concerns nation-wide.

The criteria for tree removal under current tree management strategies are questionable. For trees whose lifespan far exceeds that of most humans, expressions used to justify tree removal, such as “post maturity” and “in decline”, are often not convincing. Claims by council arborists about termite infestation, inappropriateness of species or imminent danger from falling debris are often a source of frustration to observers who believe that issues of convenience or fear of litigation are the true reason for removal.

Current tree- pruning practices that do little to control the height of trees or the length of limbs are often misguided. In many cases the easily reached lateral branches are pruned while the larger and higher branches remain, as they are more difficult and costly to remove. Trees pruned in this way appear devoid of foliage, while their excessively long limbs remain, causing concern to some residents and leading to requests for tree removal. This, coupled with the fear and uncertainty of litigation further contribute to tree removal by councils.

The most flippant criterion for tree removal under current policies is that which allows healthy verge, median or park trees to be removed and replaced with trees of a different species. There is evidence provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics about our increasing greenhouse gas emissions in Western Australia and we have frequent reminders in the media about climate change and salinity. Given this, the overall protection of our natural environment becomes of paramount importance and more thought should be given prior to removing trees for reasons of biodiversity, individual preference or to fast-track the creation of new avenues of trees. Although the issue of biodiversity is significant in natural bushland, the removal of healthy trees from urban areas for the sake of replacement does not give consideration to the broader environmental and social benefits that these trees provide.

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As the promoter of the Petition, I have been reassured by the moral support and anecdotal evidence provided to me in discussions with individuals from various suburbs. They value the protection of trees for their beauty and health-giving properties and they are determined to ensure that every effort is made to stop their senseless destruction and the subsequent environmental damage.

I sincerely hope that members of your Committee will support an investigation into the issues raised and that positive steps will soon be taken to protect and properly maintain our mature trees on public land in urban areas as a valuable asset to our natural environment and future generations.

Yours sincerely,

(signature removed)

Alexandra Jones

Promoter: Petition for the Protection of Mature Trees on Public Land in Urban Areas
Convener: Save Our Trees

Enclosed : ATTACHMENTS

1. Explanatory letter emailed, 17/07/2006, to all members of the Legislative Council.
This accompanied the Petition and its purpose was to provide some background information.
2. Covering letter to the Petition presented to the two tabling Members, 18/09/2006.
3. Newspaper articles relevant to the issues raised in the Petition and the Explanatory Letter.
4. My submission and questions to Subiaco Council at Public Question Time, 28/08/2006.
Council Minutes will show other relevant submissions made by other members of the general Public.
5. My letter to the Mayor and Councillors of the City of Nedlands.
6. A response to my letter (attachment 5) from the Parks Manager.
7. Excerpts from some Council Street Tree Strategies highlighting how facilitation of removal is occurring.

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