

**Save Our Trees started as a small network of residents in the western suburbs in 2005.**

We came together for the purpose of stopping the destruction of our urban trees. This loss of trees has been occurring mainly due to the Tree Removal and Tree Replacement policies of our state and local authorities. We are confident, however, that there is plenty of medical and scientific information to support our case that to destroy so many mature trees for whatever reason has a negative impact on public health, the natural environment and our local amenity. We have seen the leafy well established character of many parts of our suburbs destroyed in this senseless way.

- - **Our first petition** which was specifically for the protection of our urban trees was tabled in the Legislative Council in 2006.

**We are suspicious when thousands of trees and shrubs die**

In 2007 when about 8,000 trees and shrubs died due to the herbicide poisoning of many sumps in the cities of Joondalup and Stirling, we decided to also campaign to stop the widespread use of herbicides and pesticides. There had been growing concern for many years about this other practice of state and local governments which is to control grass or weeds on public land with herbicides.

**The Poisoning Practice**

The practice of poisoning grass was impacting and continues to impact on the appearance of our suburbs whereby dead yellow patches and long strips of dead grass appear well before the heat of summer. Mostly, just after the winter rains bring nature's new green growth, suddenly almost overnight, widespread yellow-orange patches of dead grass start to appear. Not only is this far from aesthetically pleasing but more important is the question of the impact on public health and the natural environment.

**Environmental harm due to herbicides and pesticides**

Over recent years we have presented our local and state managing authorities with evidence of scientific literature from around the world linking the use of herbicides and pesticides to the loss of beneficial fungi and microorganisms in the soil, and to the increased risk of herbicide resistant weeds and the inevitable contamination of our waterways and drinking water. Our 2008 Petition to the Legislative Council, however, was virtually ignored and our politicians and authorities are all mute on the subject and simply do not engage in this conversation.

**Medical and scientific information exists**

We know that the medical and scientific information exists to support our case that this practice of poisoning public land is bad for our health and environment. One of our big concerns is why our authorities do not seem to know or do not seem to care about the overwhelming evidence of links between pesticides and serious life-threatening and life-altering illnesses, until of course it is too late such as in the case of the very recent banning of ENDOSULFAN.

This insecticide has brought devastation to the lives of many around the world, leading to horrendous deformities in humans and animals, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and various other conditions. Why is the APVMA, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, so slow to listen and to take action to ban products that are known or suspected of being harmful to our health and natural environment? Why do we not invoke the **Precautionary Principle** as has

been done in other countries? The **devastation to people, fish stocks and animals world-wide due to Endosulfan and other pesticides is well known.**

**Dogs are affected too. – Is this another case of the canary in the coal mine?**

There is ample anecdotal evidence as well as medical and scientific literature linking tumours and the often reported allergic conditions in dogs, to the herbicides that are routinely used around trees, park benches, poles, bollards and elsewhere in parkland where dogs love to go and sniff, lick and roll around. Please check our website and see how Asha, the Blue Heeler dog suffered for almost 2 years after repeated exposure to herbicides. Scientific literature also tells us that pesticides not only make animals sick but that they can alter their immune system, making it difficult for animals to recover from illness.

**How about human health and sufferers of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity?**

We know that in 1999 two Swedish oncologists linked the common Glyphosate to NonHodgkins Lymphoma. Non Hodgkins Lymphoma has increased dramatically since the 1970's as have many cancers and neurological diseases, many of which have been linked to pesticides. There is scientific literature linking the endocrine disruptors in many pesticides to a weakened immune system in humans too. Please go to our website for Stella's story in the Western Suburbs Newspaper article. Stella has to leave home because Council exclusion zones during spraying are simply not adequate.

I was surprised to discover that a state- wide group of people known commonly as the MCS group or the sufferers of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity had been working for many years to protect their health against pesticides. Much of the support for the work of Save Our Trees and our 2008 petition has come from determined MCS individuals who know that **there is a connection between the state and local government chemical weeding practices and their ill health.** There is now a re-energized MCS Task force that will hopefully assist in the community effort to clean up our environment for our general well-being.

**Now - The use of the word "safe" - How "safe" is "safe"? .....**

It is contrary to both the APVMA and the international pesticide code of practice for any authority to suggest that a pesticide is "safe". We have received written responses, however, from both local and state authorities who claim that the pesticides are "safe" if used according to instructions. This is simply wrong because it is up to the public to determine if any level of unsolicited exposure to a pesticide is desirable and particularly if it is "safe". Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the pesticide operator is applying the pesticide according to instructions and that pesticides are not being substituted. Most of the instructions relate to protection for the operator and there is very little information, if any, in regard to chronic and long term adverse health effects suffered by the public. Why should we trust any of our authorities to tell us that it is "safe" to have any level of exposure to pesticides? ..... Many European countries and the Canadian provinces, such as Quebec and Ontario have introduced bans on both the sale and the use of these pesticides for cosmetic purposes.

**There is also the issue of Herbicide Resistance**

Most of the herbicides come with warnings and disclaimers from the manufacturers about the risks of **Herbicide Resistance**, whereby repeated use can lead to even stronger weeds developing.

We know that this has already become a serious problem in agriculture in the United States and now in Australia where more than 100 Rye grass populations have become resistant to the herbicide Glyphosate and now apparently even to the herbicide Paraquat . What does this say about the ongoing use of herbicides in bushland? Are the common poisoning and planting programmes desirable or environmentally sustainable?

### **How about frogs and other creatures ?**

We hear so frequently about the plight of our frogs and other creatures in the wild. Professor Mike Tyler, frog expert, has said on numerous occasions that herbicides are bad for frogs, with much of the blame being attributed to the surfactants that are mixed with the active ingredients. But will we ever know if the frogs, insects, spiders, underground- living birds and other creatures approve of any of this? Why are we so presumptuous as to think for one minute that any little creature would be happy to have this stuff sprayed over their habitat and into their home?

### **We also know of the risks to the aquatic environment**

25 pesticides were detected in the Swan Canning Catchment drains that were tested by the Department of Water and the Swan River Trust. The most common were Simazine, Diuron and Atrazine. Others were: Diazinon, Trifluralin, Chlopyrifos and Dieldrin. We know that these, almost without exception, have been banned overseas. Simazine is a soil sterilant and a suspected endocrine disruptor, Atrazine is a mutagen and a carcinogen. The story is the same for many pesticides, and even more problematic is the lack of scientific information about “ Mixture Toxicity” as has been highlighted in the European Commission’s ”State of the Art Report on Mixture Toxicity”.

### **National and State Weed Strategies**

Our National and State Weed Strategies that have in many ways contributed to our mentality of weeding at any cost, even with toxic and persistent chemicals, must be urgently reviewed. In fact, a well regarded environmental expert who has had proven success in the restoration of barren, depleted land has questioned the need to remove as many weeds as we do in light of our drying climate and our diminishing vegetation. The work of Peter Andrews, farmer and author of **Back from the Brink** and **Beyond the Brink** has helped to shed much light on the controversies over our land management practices.

We need our environmental and health professionals to get on board with the community in the same way that the **Canadian physicians, oncologists and the Suzuki Foundation supported the bans in the Canadian provinces of Quebec, Ontario and other provinces throughout Canada. We also need leadership and determination at all three levels of government in order to change the entrenched policies and practices that are poisoning our land and our people and destroying our trees.**

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The **Save Our Trees campaign is currently active with a Petition** that is available for anyone to use. **It combines the need to protect trees and to stop the use of pesticides.** Please download the petition and present it to your relevant land management authority.

We have a **Questionnaire** that we are attempting to have answered by the various local and state authorities. So far very few have acknowledged receipt of the Questionnaire while some have only responded to a few questions. Please help to make your authorities accountable for what they do.

**We also have an ongoing Residents' Pesticides Complaints list** and we invite anyone who has been adversely affected by exposure to pesticides or who has concerns about current practices to send us their story and to add to the public litany of complaints.

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