

Croydon Conservation Society Inc.

Inc. No. A0031156D ABN 36 236 152 916

P.O. Box 869, Croydon, 3136.

23rd October, 2015.

The Manager,
Environment Protection Authority,
PO Box 21428,
Little Lonsdale Street, VIC. 8011.

Submission re Environment Protection Authority

Croydon Conservation Society is aware of the role played by the EPA in protecting our waterways, reducing litter, monitoring air quality and taking action when individuals or companies allow an action that compromises the nature of water, air or the environment.

Our major focus is currently on Climate Change and all that that entails both locally, and on a State basis. We cover two major points here the first being about our local living environment and specifically trees, the second is relating to Coal Fired Power Stations.

Our major concern is for the natural environment that is our residential land and the benefits of the tree cover to the whole general community. CCS believes that the EPA is the best authority for imposing fines on environmental destruction caused when tree canopy is removed or poisoned deliberately for a person or business's personal gain.

The Planning department of the State Government Planning department has some controls in place about what can be excavated or whether the land is subject to slip or whether a proposal for development causes loss of sunlight to neighbours as examples.

Local Government, Councils, can implement some controls during the development application phase. It has at its disposal overlays to protect sites of Biological significance, the depth of excavation effecting water table, it has neighbourhood Character overlays, and Councils actively encourage denser development closer to activity centers with shopping and transport nearby, as most people agree it should be.

Trees however are a very vexed issue. Currently there is no general understanding that trees and vegetation on private land are anything but the owners, purchasers or developers property.

There is no general understanding nor acceptance that trees and vegetation in our living environment have a collective impact on our local living environment, health of the people, or the land, which holds significantly less water when under built form or areas of impervious materials.

There is no ONE NO AUTHORITY specifically charged with protecting the vegetation canopy that is extensive in many areas of Melbourne.

As Climate Change continues to impact all of us, it is essential that residential land is developed in a way that complies with environmental standards being, Water Sensitive Urban Design; Environmental Building Standards; Energy Efficiency; Passive Solar Systems; or methods of collection of organic materials being removed from waste streams as well as retention of Canopy Trees. CCS understands that the State Minister for Planning has an application before him from a coalition of Councils requesting that a set of environmental principles be used broadly in new buildings rather than the cherry picking of one or two which is the status quo.

The following passage is a direct quote from DR Greg Moore of Melbourne University, a well qualified and passionate advocate for the health of our living environment, being surrounded by as much urban forest as we can muster.

“Mature trees are significant assets to our environment and our society regardless of where they occur or whether they are native or exotic. A great deal of effort has gone into establishing, managing, conserving and preserving them. Considerable human labour and time has been expended on the trees as well as energy in the form of fossil fuel that has underpinned their maintenance. Significant quantities of water have been allocated to their growth and development. They are community assets in every sense. Society has invested resources in their establishment and management, and they have matured as assets and are providing many and diverse benefits to society in return (Moore, 1997).

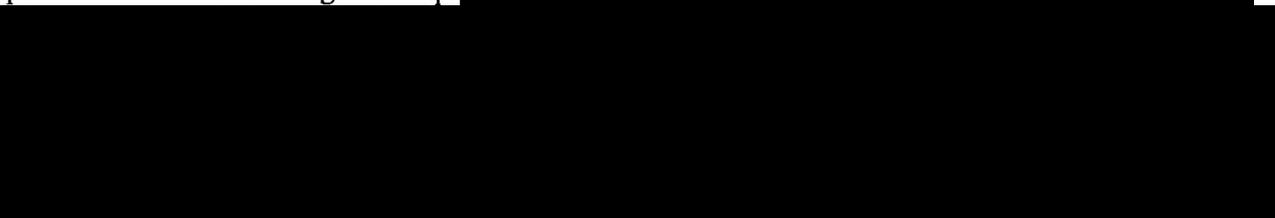
While costs, damage and nuisance values attributed to trees are widely known, the benefits they provide are often subtle and under-appreciated. A monetary value should be assigned to trees as this raises the status of the tree to that of an asset, and allows for the proper recognition of trees in the decision making processes by those who may fail to recognize the inherent value of trees.

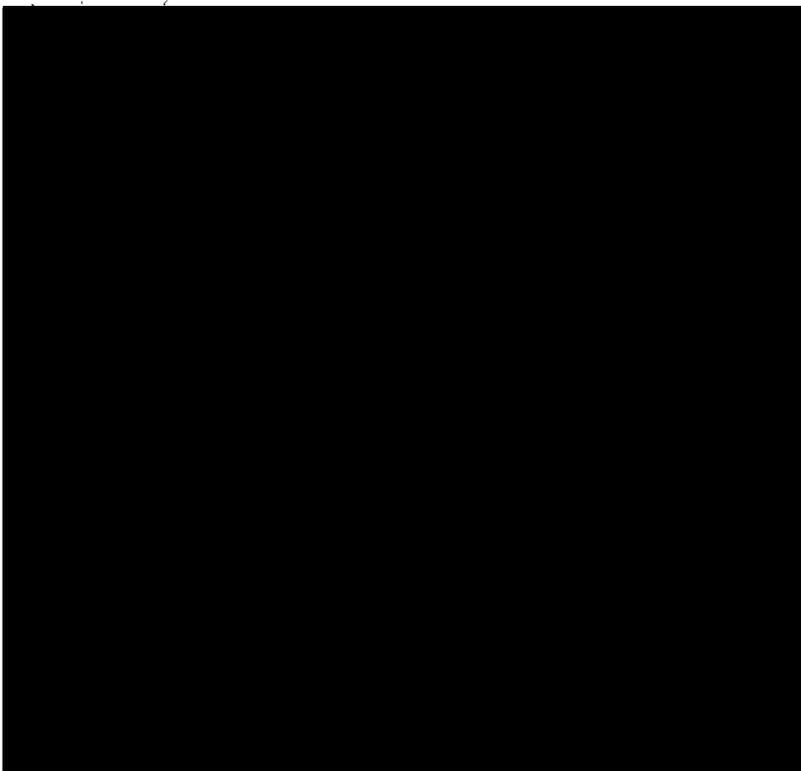
It is worth noting that with the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect, heat waves and climate change the environmental and ecological services provided by urban vegetation have a profound effect on human health, life styles and the State’s medical system. For the elderly and those with certain medical conditions the presence of open space especially that dominated with a good tree cover can be a matter of life and death.”

Ref...https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/BuildingandPlanning/Planning/planningschemeamendments/Documents/Amendment%20C212/c212_expert_witness_statement_national_trust_australia_greg_moore.pdf

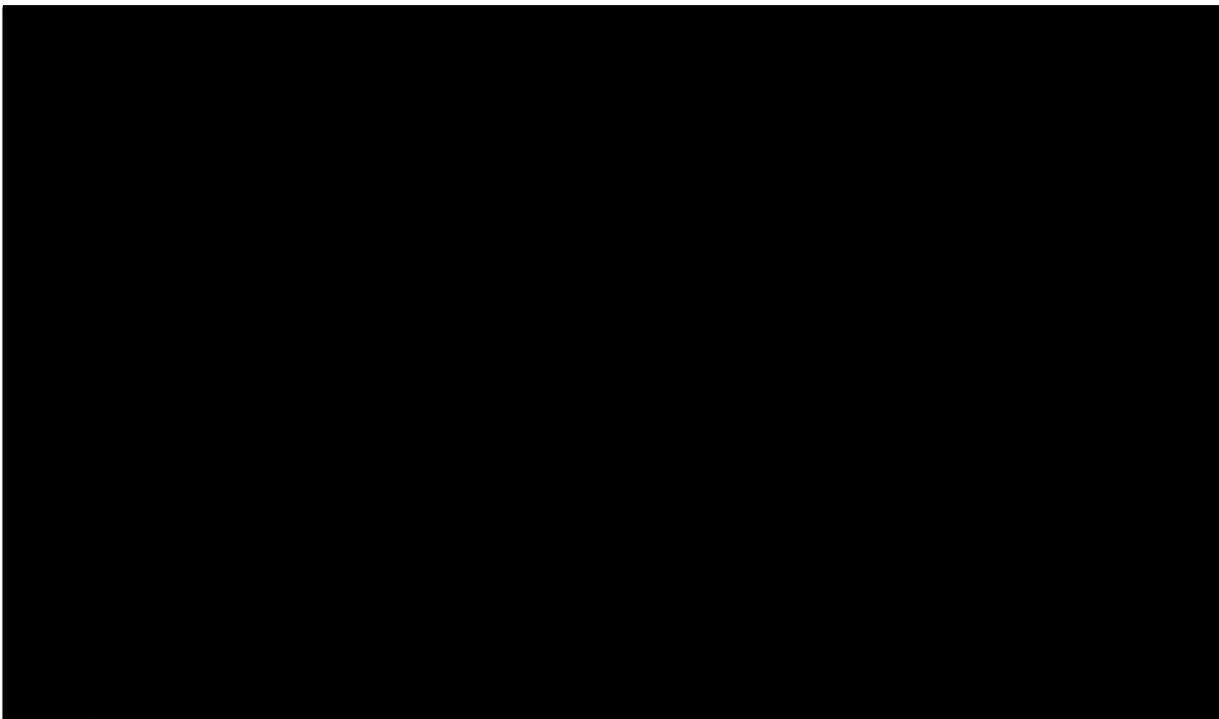
At a recent local tree forum where Dr Moore spoke in The Basin earlier this year he said that land under built form has been found to contain around 27% water, whilst uncovered land has up to 62% water, the trees and vegetation holding this water in the land make it less vulnerable to drying out, subsequent movement and changes in water tables. The list of benefits of trees is endless. One of the most common requests we get from the public at Croydon Conservation Society is “how can we stop our neighbours from either having a tree removed or cutting the roots during a subdivision, requiring the tree to be removed at a later stage”

Our Council receives over 1500 requests for tree removal annually and since many of these are for multiple trees it is evident that we are fast losing our environmentally essential tree cover. This is supported by photos we use at CCS using Nearmap.





In the very many instances of this type of environmental vandalism, there is currently NO authority given the status of being able to effectively prosecute the individual, which sets a very troublesome precedent for anyone else who wishes to clear-fell land with no regard for the environmental consequences to us all. The following picture shows the entire of Hochkins Ridge, which is an essential component of the Wicklow Ridgeline. The foreground green hills of the ridgeline are a feature that can be seen from the top of Mount Dandenong, which is a tourist destination providing views over Melbourne to the bay.



The cleared section is indicated on the lower LHS outlined in black. Council did have tree protection overlay Significant Landscape Overlay and Vegetation Protection Overlay, over this land but the clearing was done by stealth, entering the property from an adjoining side property. Unfortunately no action was taken by Council within 12 months of clearing, so the opportunity for restoration has been lost.

Global Warming is the driver for all of us in society to become aware of the great need to retain, as well as plant, many more trees in our urban environment. We believe the EPA is the right body to take action on the illegal action of the removal of trees that in essence belong to all of us no matter whose land they happen to be on (within reason) of course. We don't expect dead, dying, diseased or dangerous trees to be in this category but we also believe that if a weed species is removed it should be replaced with a more suitable species.

In essence, we believe that the EPA is an effective authority for all things relating to the environment and should therefore be considered to take on extra jurisdiction over the issue of illegal tree removal, having the authority to issue and pursue offenders with substantial fines that act as an effective deterrent to anyone who thinks they can destroy our environment without consequences.

Coal Fired Power Stations

CCS agrees with **Environment Victoria's recommendations** that would lead to the phasing out of the state's ageing coal power plants. Almost half of Victoria's emissions come from the four largest brown coal generators in the Latrobe Valley. CCS ask that climate change laws be strengthened, including giving the EPA powers to regulate green house gases. We also ask that programs be available to make homes and businesses more energy efficient, including retrofitting low income households.

We are also concerned about the countless environmental laws that are in force but are not effectively used by businesses or enterprises to protect or clean up the environment. Examples of recent concern that the EPA should address are:

- **the monitoring and regulating of polluted industrial sites** to be cleaned up before being converted into residential land. Legislation regulating this issue is 45 years old and the government needs to be informed about any new policies available to avoid major land contamination in the future. With Victoria's population expected to double by 2050 there will be continued demand for high density urban development much of it on former industrial land. A looming example is the clean-up of 575 hectares of land at Alcoa's defunct Point Henry aluminium smelter.
- **Serious fauna loss.** The EPA have a critical role to help save Victoria's critically endangered faunal emblem, the Leadbeater's possum where 45% of its habitat was destroyed in the 2009 bushfires. This would move Victoria away from old growth logging in the Victorian highlands to create a proposed 355,000 hectare Great Forest National Park.

CCS believes that a focus on three major issues would help to ensure a more effective Environment Protection Authority:

1. Empowering the public by providing a consolidated source of information on whether regulatory agencies are implementing and enforcing their regulatory responsibilities under key environmental laws. The information will be a resource for the community for submissions or discussions with government, to encourage greater action and compliance by government.
2. Improving the implementation and enforcement of environmental laws by encouraging greater action and compliance by government agencies. In our view, the public should be able to obtain this information without the need to make a Freedom of Information request.
3. Effective compliance monitoring and enforcement would reassure the public that the EPA can identify and analyse regulatory risk as well as prioritising the risks and undertaking compliance activities to mitigate risks.

On behalf of members of Croydon Conservation Society
Liz Sanzaro, President,
Croydon Conservation Society.