

INDIGENOTES

Green Streets of Maribyrnong: Street Tree Strategy 1998

By Ken Duxbury

Introduction

The City of Maribyrnong's new "Green Streets" street tree strategy report was released on 25 April 1998. However, the strategy is still being refined, and further public consultation will be carried out before plantings of individual streets are implemented.

One of the aims of the strategy is to ensure that: "Trees connect the urban environment to the natural landscape. Consistent planting attracts birds and provides ecological corridors through the urban fabric."

The dilemma in achieving this aim by the use of locally indigenous tree species is, of course, that most of the City of Maribyrnong is, in its natural state, treeless grassland. A limited number of tree species occur naturally along watercourses and on rocky escarpments; for example, River Red Gum, Blackwood and Drooping Sheoak. There are also tree-like shrubs such as Sweet Bursaria, Silver Banksia and Tree Violet which have the potential to be used for street planting.

Another option is to make use of trees which occur within the western region of Melbourne, but outside the boundaries of Maribyrnong, for example the Melbourne form of Yellow Gum, Grey Box and the White Cypress Pine.

To some degree, the strategy has made use of both of these approaches.

The strategy also takes into account such considerations as enhancing neighbourhood amenity, aesthetics, historical themes and cultural landscapes. Many of the tree choices appear to reflect the modern cultural diversity of the City of Maribyrnong. For example, the selection of fruiting Olive trees and several Asian tree species, such as the Southeast Asian Ash, the Chinese Pistachio and the Chinese Elm. (In its acceptance of both indigenous and Asian species, the strategy would not perhaps appeal to proponents of the sort horticultural crypto-Hansonism which now appears to thrive in such leafy eastern suburb municipalities as Boroondara and Stonnington.)

The strategy divides Maribyrnong into 23 streetscape character precincts, which form 7 different categories of 'base conditions' for street tree planting and thematic development.

Fifty four tree species have been selected as being the aesthetically and practically most reliable trees for the City. Eleven of these species are either indigenous to

the City of Maribyrnong, or to a more extended area of Melbourne's western and north-western suburbs, as follows:

Lightwood	<i>Acacia implexa</i>
Blackwood	<i>Acacia melanoxylon</i>
Drooping Sheoak	<i>Allocasuarina verticillata</i>
Silver Banksia	<i>Banksia marginata</i>
Sweet Bursaria	<i>Bursaria spinosa</i> var. <i>macrophylla</i>
White Cypress Pine	<i>Callitris glaucophylla</i>
River Red Gum	<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i>
Yellow Gum	<i>E. leucoxylon</i> ssp. <i>connata</i>
Yellow Box	<i>E. melliodora</i>
Grey Box	<i>E. microcarpa</i>
Swamp Gum	<i>E. ovata</i>

(Note: Although included on the initial list, Drooping Sheoak has since been deleted on the grounds that it is 'messy' and 'untidy'.)

The various streetscape character precincts of Maribyrnong have widely varied street tree planting proposals, as follows:

Core and Fringe Activity Areas

These areas include Footscray District Centre and its environs. The planting for the Core area will be predominantly exotic and includes Oriental and London Planes, Chinese Elm, Fruiting Olive, Crepe Myrtle and Southeast Asian Ash. The only locally indigenous species is Silver Banksia. The species used would provide dense summer shade and winter sunlight, and a more formal and uniform appearance than could be achieved by using local species. The species chosen also appear to reflect the multi-cultural character of Footscray.

My own view is that indigenous species are not always ideally suited to achieving the functional and aesthetic planting needs of shopping streets. When they have been used, for example along Sydney Road, they can appear somewhat contrived and incongruous. This can be counterproductive to the wider acceptance of indigenous species. However, I believe that there is great scope for the use of indigenous species such as Yellow Gum to shade car parks, and a wide diversity of other locally indigenous species can be used around the edges of carparking areas, and in planting bays. Indigenous species also have the potential to be used in the landscaping of traffic islands, roundabouts and similar traffic control devices.

The proposed landscaping for the Fringe Activity Areas emphasises exotic tree species introduced to Australia between 1850 and 1900, including Hackberry (*Celtis australis*), Southeast Asian Ash (*Fraxinus griffithii*),

Chinese Pistachio (*Pistachia chinensis*), Oriental and London Plane, Chinese and Golden Wynch Elms, Pin Oak and English Oak.

Industrial Areas

The proposed planting for these areas aims to 'provide visual structure and linkages to the natural environment.' The trees are predominantly native species, and several locally indigenous species are included, such as Lightwood, Blackwood, Yellow Box, Grey Box and Sweet Bursaria. The non-indigenous species include Weeping Myall (*Acacia pendula*), *Angophora costata*, *Eucalyptus leucoxylon ssp. megalocarpa*, Brush Box and Water Gum. Deciduous trees are used to identify residential pockets within fringe industrial areas. These include English Oak, *Malus ioensis* 'Plena', and Manchurian Pear (*Pyrus ussuriensis*).

Historic Residential Areas (Pre 1930's)

It is proposed to mainly use deciduous exotic trees such as Planes, Oaks, Elms and Maples. The only local species proposed is *Banksia marginata*. Only two non-local native species are proposed: *Eucalyptus leucoxylon ssp. megalocarpa* and *Agonis flexuosa*.

Established Residential Areas: Post War

No local species are proposed for these areas, although a wide variety of non-local native species are proposed, including small growing species for narrow nature strips, for example *Callistemon salignus* and *Callistemon viminalis*. Larger growing native species include Scarlet Flowering Gum, Water Gum, Brush Box and *Agonis flexuosa*. Non-native species include *Arbutus unedo*, Cape Chestnut, Golden Ash, *Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia', and Chinese Elm.

New Residential and Mixed Use Developments

These areas are generally located alongside the Maribyrnong River, on former government land. The selection includes indigenous and other native trees to connect to the riverside landscape and exotic trees to provide seasonal variety to residential streets. The locally indigenous species proposed include Lightwood, Blackwood, *Eucalyptus leucoxylon ssp. connata* and Yellow Box. Drooping Sheoak is included on the original list but as previously noted it has been deleted on the grounds of being 'untidy' and 'messy'. The non-indigenous native species include Brush Box, Water Gum, Weeping Lilly Pilly, Flame Tree (*Brachychiton acerifolia x populneus*) and Scarlet Flowering Gum. The exotic species comprise Trident Maple, Golden Ash, *Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia' and Chinese Elm.

Main Roads and Railway Corridors

It is proposed to use a limited range of large-growing trees along the main road and railway corridors "to create unity within the City of Maribyrnong's diversity' and to assist navigation. It is proposed to plant Spotted Gums along the median strip of Geelong Road, with side plantings of White Cedar. This would continue Council's established policy.

[Note: Spotted Gums have the advantage that they have a strong sense of visual identity which can help create a sense of visual unity. It would be possible to plant indigenous grasses and ground flora species, especially ornamental species such as *Brachyscome multifida*, along the central median strip, in place of the existing mown grass. It would also be possible to plant locally indigenous species such as Drooping Sheoak in copses on the embankments of the overpass adjacent to Whitten Oval; this would help to define and accentuate the sacred character of the spiritual heart of the western suburbs, much as one might plant an English Oak outside an Anglican Church.]

It is proposed to plant Crepe Myrtle, White Cedar, Oriental Plane and Chinese Elm along Ballarat Road, where planting space is somewhat limited.

It is proposed to plant Pin Oaks at stations along the Ballarat Railway, linked by linear plantings of White Cypress Pines. The Cypress Pines were chosen "to evoke the traditional pine plantings along the railway corridor." In my opinion it would be appropriate to use a range of more immediately locally indigenous species, especially as there are several areas where the railway corridor is quite wide, and would enable the development of an effective indigenous vegetation, wildlife and recreational corridor. Appropriate species could include Drooping Sheoak, Blackwood, Lightwood, Sweet Bursaria, Tree Violet and Silver Banksia. Indigenous grasses and other ground flora species should also be included, and there may be scope to develop permanent and ephemeral wetland areas. I believe that the use of a single dominant species represents a wasted opportunity in an area where opportunities for greening and restoring natural ecosystems are very limited.

It is proposed to plant Peppercorn trees around the stations along the Geelong railway line, connected by linear plantings of Pin Oaks. The use of Peppercorn trees at the stations would reinforce existing plantings and self sown trees along the line and, particularly, at Seddon Station, where Peppercorns form an exceptionally effective avenue. Peppercorn trees are very much a 'character' species for Victoria's railway lines.

I believe that the choice of Pin Oaks is inappropriate both visually and - more importantly - physically, as conditions along the line are dry and stony, a far cry from the moist conditions where the species naturally occurs and in which it thrives. The more appropriate species would be Drooping Sheoak, which would grow well in the

conditions, and would also complement the roundheaded, drooping form of the Peppercorn trees. Indigenous shrubs, grasses and other ground flora species would also be appropriate. This treatment would be consistent with the recent planting of Drooping Sheoaks (in a small densely planted copse), with grasses and ground flora species, adjacent to Yarraville Station.

A wide diversity of tree species is proposed for other main roads and through routes and historic local collector roads. These are predominantly exotic and non-local native species. The only local species proposed are Sweet Bursaria and Silver Banksia.

It is proposed to use several locally indigenous species along the Spotswood industrial rail line reserve " to express the natural landscape and provide a visual and conceptual link to the tree species of the adjoining industrial area, including Swamp Gum (*Eucalyptus ovata*), River Red Gum (*E. camaldulensis*), Blackwood and Lightwood. It is a pity that Swamp Gum and River Red Gums have not been used more widely, or not used in more highly visible and widely visited locations.

Vehicular Gateways to Maribyrnong

These are generally associated with parklands and watercourses, providing opportunities for extensive and unimpeded plantings. "Large, handsome, memorable trees, with good form and colour" are proposed to express these entry points to the City.

For the locations where Cordite Avenue, Wents Road Extension and Raleigh Road cross the Maribyrnong River it is proposed to use *Angophora costata* or Brush Box. It is rather surprising that Brush Box has been chosen. This rainforest tree is unlikely to achieve its best form and character in such dry and stony conditions. I believe it would be better to use locally indigenous species which would also express the character of the Maribyrnong River corridor, and the fact that the Gateways lead to the City of Maribyrnong and the western suburbs. These trees could include River Red Gum, Blackwood, Lightwood, Drooping Sheoak and Sweet Bursaria. One possibility would be to use *Angophora costata* as a feature tree, with its smooth pinkish-white trunks contrasting with a dark backdrop of Blackwood, Drooping Sheoak and other indigenous species.

At Ballarat Road / Maribyrnong River, Geelong Road / Tottenham Parade and Ballarat Road / Duke Street gateways it is proposed to use Lemon-scented Gum or Yellow Box. I believe that Yellow Box would be the more appropriate species, especially at Maribyrnong River where there are existing indigenous plantings, on both sides of the river. There may also be scope for extensive and dense plantings of River Red Gums, especially as there are some mature trees - possibly remnants of the original vegetation - in the area.

At the points where Hopkins Street and Napier Street

cross the Maribyrnong River, it is proposed to plant Canary Island Palms or White Cypress Pines (to link with the Ballarat Rail Line). It might be possible to use some combination of Canary Island Palms and locally indigenous species, so as to reflect both the cultural and natural landscapes of the Maribyrnong River, and the City of Maribyrnong.

At the Williamstown Road / West Gate Freeway and Sunshine Road / Stony Creek entries it is proposed to plant Golden Wynch Elm (*Ulmus glabra* 'Lutescens') or Chinese Elm. Neither of these species would be particularly appropriate, as they do not relate either to the natural or established cultural landscapes of the City. There is an especially strong case for using locally indigenous species at these locations, as they within the Stony Creek Corridor, for which a comprehensive revegetation strategy is being developed.

Discussion

It is encouraging to see that so many indigenous trees have been included on the the list, and almost all of the potential candidates have been included. It is especially pleasing that Lightwood, Blackwood and Sweet Bursaria have been included on the list, as these can be very attractive and long-lived street trees, and should perhaps be much more widely planted throughout the Melbourne region.

It is disappointing that Drooping Sheoak has been deleted on the grounds of being messy and untidy. Sheoaks do have a tendency to shed fine branchlets, and this can be a particular problem where cars are parked, especially as they can get into the ventilation system where they even have the potential to start fires. However, it still has the potential to be used where the branchlets would not cause problems, for example on median strips and roundabouts, and along railway lines. Drooping Sheoaks are perhaps the key tree species which defines Melbourne's western suburbs and a strong effort should be made to incorporate it into the planting scheme.

The main limitation of the strategy is that indigenous species - and the larger-growing tree species in particular - could be used more prominently in the industrial areas and associated rail lines, with very limited use in residential and commercial areas, major traffic arteries and prominent entries. This seems to demonstrate something of a 'horticultural cringe'.

In addition, much more could be done to maximise the way in which railway reserves serve as indigenous plant and wildlife corridors, although the rare orchids which once grew along the Ballarat Line have, sadly, disappeared forever.

Other Indigenous notes readers may like to write about the Street Tree and other landscaping policies of other municipalities.

NatureNest Project

We would like to introduce you to the *NatureNest* project and to seek your support. This project aims to improve the availability of nesting sites for native birds and small mammals in semi-urban areas by encouraging many landowners to establish nest sites on their land.

Why start the NatureNest Project?

Since the beginning of European settlement, land has been cleared for agriculture, industry, forestry, roads and housing. This clearing, combined with the ravages of fire and removal of dead trees for firewood, has destroyed millions of natural breeding sites over vast areas of habitat. In addition, our precious native species suffer from aggressive displacement and competition by introduced starlings and Mynahs and from increased vulnerability to predators such as cats and foxes. While no factor acts alone, the loss of safe natural nesting sites has contributed to the disappearance of small native mammals and birds from many areas. The *NatureNest* project seeks to supplement natural nest sites options.

We also believe that there is a need for improved long-term housing for urban brush and ring-tail possum populations. Since it is now illegal for possums to be trapped and relocated, provision of possum nests is encouraged by government agencies and the RSPCA. *NatureNests* are suitable for both possum types and provide a simple solution for urban councils.

Features of NatureNests:

- Quality construction from structural 7 ply with stainless steel strapping for long life
- Provides weatherproof insulation and protects eggs and young from predators
- Tree-friendly attachment hangers (to prevent long term strangulation)
- Three interchangeable entry ports to suit the nest for several species
- Hinge-free access port to allow cleaning or removal of pest birds
- Comprehensive instruction and advisory sheet
- Free and optional registration allow long term nationwide survey by Birds Australia
- Attractive hexagonal presentation package suitable for gift and display

The *NatureNest* Project is the first large-scale attempt to increase nest sites Australia wide. The project is supported by the RSPCA, NPWS, DNRE and Birds Australia (formerly RAOU). Each nest comes with an optional registration slip to enable Birds Australia to develop a database for long term research survey of the nests and to learn about the nesting habits of native species.

NatureNests are very well designed and constructed and we expect their structural ply and stainless steel construction to provide a safe haven for many generations of colonising animals. Cheaper "one year wonder" boxes will not achieve the same level of long-term breeding security for important species.

NatureNests are hand built in Australia and we distribute them wholesale in cartons of eight (each nest is individually boxed). An attractive screen-printed display stand is available free with orders of two or more cartons of *NatureNests*.

What can you do to help?

We hope that all Councils and local government associations (and so on) around Australia can join with and support the *NatureNest* project, by establishing a display stand in their foyer and by encouraging ratepayers to become involved by purchasing a nest.

Recommended retail price for the *NatureNest* is \$57.00 or resellers can buy a carton of eight for \$380.00 including sales tax and door-to-door freight for full cartons only. The minimum order from Animal Control Technologies is a carton of eight.

Order by fax; specify street address for delivery. Fax order to (03) 9315 1745.

Invoice will be sent separately by mail. Our payment terms are 30 days from invoice date. Tax exempt agencies can purchase the boxes for use within parks at \$39.50 each.

Please call Mr. Ben Hall on (03) 9315 1424 if you would like more information.

We hope that the *NatureNest* Project will help increase awareness of the housing shortage for many of our smaller animals and will gradually increase the abundance and diversity of mammals and birds in your neighbourhood. Please help us to establish the project Australia-wide.

**Yours Sincerely,
Linton Staples
Managing Director
Animal Control Technologies (Aust.) P/L
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Victoria 3025
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Bannockburn: One Year Later

One year ago, at Harvey's Block, Bannockburn, Barwon Water cut down 8.5 ha of magnificent rare old growth Yellow Gum Woodland to create sewerage ponds. This disgraceful act was carried out in spite of substantial concern from a wide range of the community.

Barwon Water were informed by their consultants that Harvey's Block:

- was of state significance for fauna conservation,
- was the last 40 ha of this type of vegetation left in the Geelong / Otway Region.
- provided habitat for birds that were threatened with extinction due to the loss of old trees.
- was protected by the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.
- was a part of an ecosystem of which only 0.5% remains in Victoria.

Bannockburn Yellow Gum Action Group (BYGAG) was formed out of concern for the Yellow Gums. It was just one of the many groups and individuals that opposed Barwon Water's actions. BYGAG does not oppose sewerage for Bannockburn township. It believes that better less damaging sites were available. The Bannockburn community should not have been expected to pay extra because of bad planning.

There are significant concerns about the way the process was handled. At the initial public meeting at Bannockburn in 1993 attended by 200 locals BW was asked if the old Yellow Gums would be cut down. The reply was "No Madame we don't cut down trees, we plant them". The residents of Bannockburn went home thinking everything was OK.

In August last year, Senior Barwon Water Officers organized a meeting with BYGAG to discuss alternatives to cutting down the trees. They then surreptitiously went in the day before the meeting and cut down most of the trees.

The Approval Process

The site was protected by four separate applications under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. However a permit for removal of 18.5 ha was granted by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. This was approximately half of the remaining Yellow Gum woodland.

BYGAG approached DNRE for evidence to support their claim that biodiversity would not be affected. They

have never responded.

Requests to access documents relating to the approval process under the Freedom of Information Act were denied. The reason - 'not in the public interest'. Contrary to their own guidelines, Department of Infrastructure granted approval without requesting an Environmental Effects Statement. BYGAG wrote requesting an explanation. They have not responded to this day.

Barwon Water's Role

Barwon Water ignored community concerns, their consultant's advice and their own Environmental Policy. Barwon Water used the media to single out BYGAG and label them 'extremists', and to accuse them of spreading 'mis-information' and 'half truths'. BYGAG has written requesting Barwon Water to justify these claims. No response. BYGAG believes all statements made by the group to be true and fair. The actions of Barwon Water mimicked some of the big ruthless corporations, crashing through with their agenda regardless of community concern or environmental impact, then spending money on Public Relations campaigns to improve their image.

Tree planting should be a part of the development of this type of sewerage treatment plant. It does not, however, compensate for loss of significant habitat. Yellow Gum's take 200 years to form hollows. Removal of each old woodland tree means less food and habitat for vulnerable wildlife. What remains of Harvey's block is fragmented and will be subjected to ongoing degradation caused by the impact of the sewerage lagoons. Weed invasion is already evident.

Some of the positive outcomes from this debacle are a heightened awareness of the values of grassy woodlands and a newfound community strength, including the formation of the Geelong Community Forum.

The removal of the Yellow Gums from Harvey's Block was the most serious breach of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* seen in the Geelong region. It could have been avoided.

Mark Trengove, Geelong West
Stuart McCallum, Bannockburn
Andrew Stephens, Bannockburn
Andy Marshall, Shelford
Steve Murphy, Teesdale
Members of BYGAG

From The Age 28 May 1998

From the Editor:

It's been another busy month but I am finally getting something out that I think you all will enjoy.

Alot of this month's issue is material cut and pasted from one of my favorite publications: *Whole Earth*. *Whole Earth* is publishing descendent of the *The Whole Earth Catalog* and *Coevolution Quarterly*; they have been publishing information about "tools" for living for over 25 years. This quarter the material they have included varies from stories about the long wave of economic growth to restoring natural systems to the wierd consumer culture that has emerged in Chile. I consider *Whole Earth* a must read to stay on top of the issues that face us in this worls of ours on the ecological brink. So, if I don't get much original local material you will get stuff that I think is interesting from elsewhere.....

I will again ask for more material and feedback.... Most of what I hear about my work is positive but sometimes I wonder if everyone out there thinks so... Tell me what you think and send storeis indigenous flora and fauna and restoring our natural systems etc. whenever you like.

Again, my new email address is:
lwkern@i-o.net.au

Please use my P. O. Box in Preston for all snail mail...it gets to me quickly as well.

IFFA activities:

IFFA (Vic) Meeting:

No meeting for October

General Meeting

Venue:

SPIFFA

Public meetings are on the first Monday of every month at 7:30 pm at the Waterfall Gully Community Centre, corner of Bayview Rd. and Nixon St., Rosebud.
Contact: Jon Greening (03) 5985 5561.

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Contributions to *Indigenotes* should be sent to the editor — the deadline for the next issue is November 15th. Contributions can be typed or hand written but computer disk copies on PC-compatible format is preferred.

The views expressed in Indigenotes are not necessarily those of the Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association.