

10 May 2019

Dear Merredin Shire,

I am writing to provide comments on the recent draft *Street Tree Master Plan* published by the Merredin Shire.

Overall, the draft plan seems reasonable at first glance, and it is good that the shire is giving consideration to this issue.

On page 2, there is discussion of the choice of deciduous or evergreen trees. It mentions that deciduous trees are preferred in urban situations due to various reasons. It is worth bearing in mind that most deciduous trees are not native to Australia, although this does not mean totally discounting them.

The fact that deciduous trees allow more light in during the winter months is welcome, although some people may consider them unsightly when bare. It is also worth noting that deciduous trees are at greater risk during the winter months due to ignorant and stupid people who erroneously claim that the tree is dead and hence remove it.

Evergreen trees will drip water after rain, but rainfall events are not sufficiently frequent for this to be a significant concern, especially as climate change is resulting in reducing rainfall here. Related to this is the mention of "algae/moss growth on pavements" beneath evergreen trees, but again this is not likely to be a major concern in Merredin due to low and decreasing rainfall.

Evergreen trees are ideal for Merredin, especially due to the year round shade they provide and their better ability to cope with drier climates.

Of interest was the reference to *Ficus* (fig) trees on page 3, and how they can cause infrastructure damage. Whilst they may not be suitable to be placed close to infrastructure, they could still be planted away from infrastructure where they would not cause damage. Fig trees can be really impressive, for example the fig trees in the Adelaide Parklands in South Australia.

As mentioned on page 3, diversity of species is very important for the reasons mentioned there.

On page 5, there is discussion about the distances from power lines. The conflict between powerlines and trees seems never ending, and yet there is little to no consideration of the most effective way of managing this – put the power lines underground!

This would not only negate the current power line/tree conflict, but also have many other benefits as varied as improved radio reception to improve visual amenity. It would also improve traffic safety, as currently certain power lines block or partially block the view of oncoming traffic at certain intersections.

Cost is often claimed as an excuse for not putting power lines underground, but putting them above ground results in far higher regular maintenance costs. In any case, it could be done progressively – it does not have to all be done at once. It could be as simple as saying all new powerlines must be underground along, and with a percentage of all existing ones put underground in any one year.

On page 6, the plan discusses the 'justifications' for removing street trees, and in the first paragraph states that: *The form the justification may take...[includes] if they are considered "wrongly placed", "annoying" or, in the absence of a professional assessment, are considered "a risk".*

This is an extremely broad "justification" and will result in every tree being at ongoing risk of removal. After all, developers usually deem all trees to be annoying and a risk, which almost always leads to the removal of the trees.

The plan mentions that it is unlawful for a person to remove a street tree, but we all know this is meaningless, as there is no enforcement and negligible penalties for such offences.

The plan also mentions that the Executive Manager of Engineering Services will make the final decision on removal of street trees. I don't think this is appropriate, as such a decision should be taken by elected officials, as elected officials are able to be held accountable via the ballot box. Executive Managers are not able to be held accountable by electors.

The plan also states that trees can be removed if they are affected by infrastructure works. In my view, the infrastructure works should be rejected or modified at the design and planning stage so as to avoid trees being affected by infrastructure works.

Something that is worth consideration is for all new paving to be made of permeable or semi-permeable materials. This would reduce runoff and improve infiltration, which would benefit trees and other vegetation, and minimise the huge puddles that can form at the bottoms of some streets after heavy rain.

Anyway, those are my thoughts for now.

Regards,
Grant Stainer