

Cultural Significant Trees – A Management Tool for Local Government

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Introduction

Many Council's are now proactively managing their trees as assets, and are identifying those with special relevance to the community.

Councils including Mount Barker have adopted the Tree Protection Policy under the Development Act 1993, but this only covers limited attributes of trees which are defined under the Act. Some trees in rural areas are protected under the Native Vegetation Act 1991, but once again many trees fall through the gaps with these processes.

Indigenous communities have many culturally modified trees, such as canoe and shield trees, are recognised under the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

Trees may be important for a number of reasons, such as formal plantings as memorials (RSL Avenues of Honour) or less formal plantings in recognition of a person or event (such as trees reflecting a visit by a dignitary, or in remembrance of a person who has died).

Some are excellent examples of specific trees, either as individual specimens or as part of a continuous avenue planting and representative of a specific period of urban design.

Many of these plantings are now in decline or under threat. (As an example of this, many first world war plantings were of the "Lone Pine", - *Pinus halepensis*. These plantings are now over 90 years old, and have a safe lifespan of 80-100 years. Many of these senescent trees are becoming hazardous. Some have been damaged or lost due to road works or other infrastructure maintenance or development, and incomplete avenues may lose a great deal of their significance in the landscape. In some cases the reasons why some of these individual or avenues were planted can no longer be remembered.

Many individuals and organisations are becoming increasingly concerned about the decline in memorial and culturally important tree stocks. Organisations such as the RSL, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Trust, the Heritage Branch of the Department of Water, the Environment and Natural Resources and TREENET are providing Councils with information about the location of these surviving or lost trees. While this is helpful it has highlighted our lack of information about the significance of many trees in our care.

Discussion

The District Council of Mount Barker received funding support through the LGA Research and Development fund to develop guidelines and a criteria and checklist which can be used to assess trees against to identify those with special significance for the local or broader community.

Council staff established a working party, with representation from other Councils and key stakeholder groups to develop a project brief which clearly defined the scope and aims of the project.

Project Brief

- Identify key stakeholders at local, regional, State and Federal levels.
- Develop a standard consultation process for use with all key stakeholders (and agreed by the National Trust).
- Create a methodology to generate a register of all culturally important trees.
- Develop a set of criteria to measure trees against to rate their significance.
- Develop an audit checklist to provide information on the status, health, completeness (of avenues) risks (current and potential) and site constraints for these trees.
- Develop templates for setting management strategies against timelines.
- Develop a checklist to ensure the concurrence of all specific stakeholders and with all relevant legislation.

Implementation

David Cooney , DC of Mt Barker was responsible for the successful procurement of funding from the LGA and in kind support from others. He managed all reporting to stakeholders and disbursement of LGA grant funding.

David Lawry, Director of TREENET, was commissioned to coordinate the project and facilitate the distribution of the final document and for it to be presented and promoted through the Treenet forum.

Sam Cassar of Symatree Pty Ltd was engaged to undertake all research and to write the final document.

Fundamental to the broad acceptance of the Guidelines was the development of a process to assist with the identification and engagement of key stakeholders (such as the RSL and the National Trust) when considering the management , replacement or relocation of culturally significant trees. The guidelines have been completed and are available for other Councils to use via the TREENET and LGA websites. It is hoped that the guidelines will be promoted nationally for use by Councils through the LGA, TREENET , The National Trust and the RSL among many other stakeholder groups.

Conclusion

This project developed principles and guidelines to assist Council's to recognise, identify and manage culturally important trees. Application of the methodology should allow Council's to objectively plan for short and longer term succession plantings to ensure the continued representation of these trees in the built and natural environment. It will allow organisations and individuals to liaise with bodies such as the RSL and the National Trust on issues relating to culturally significant trees, and assist communities in the preservation and management of the values these trees represent.