

Deputation to the City of Melville Council

Item: 15.3 Motion with Notice – John Connell Reserve Clearing Permit

14.10.2025

Speaker: Sally Sibbald

Good evening Madam Mayor, Councillors, and City Officers and thank you for providing this opportunity to speak. My name is Sally Sibbald and I have been a resident of Applecross for 25 years.

I am speaking on behalf of myself and not affiliated to any particular group although I do follow several environmental groups including Melville Tree Canopy Advocates and support Action to Save Perth Cockatoos. I'm also Convenor of The Friends of Applecross Foreshore at Jeff Joseph Reserve and am an active participant in various conservation groups. I have an interest in the environment and am mindful of the catastrophic consequences of habitat destruction on the native flora and fauna in the Perth region and the rising heat effects due to lack of canopy.

First of all I would like to point out that I am in favour of a second cricket pitch. I am aware that there is a need for increased sporting facilities in the area and that clubs often struggle to find suitable grounds. It's important for the community to have access to sports, change rooms and social meeting points and that young people are encouraged to engage in a range of sporting activities.

What I am not in favour of is the clearing of 0.68 hectares of biodiverse, cockatoo foraging habitat to extend the current oval for a second cricket pitch. There appears to be a conception that the area surveyed for clearing is degraded scrub and therefore of little value. However, the Dept of Water and Environment Report indicates that this patch is of significant value and that clearing will impact foraging opportunities for cockatoos and also impact the adjoining banksia woodland and the flora within it.

Some priority needs to be given to decision making around retaining remnant bushland where at all possible if the City of Melville is serious about preserving habitat, cockatoos and canopy.

Alternatives

John Connell Masterplan – what is it?

I'm aware that the land next to the proposed clearing under discussion has been a waste tip and there are concerns for toxic waste and concern around ground and water levels. However, I would urge Council to look holistically at the entire John Connell Reserve and review the master plan of 21-22, providing recreational and club facilities for the whole community within this area and to prioritise the conserving and enhancing of precious bushland. Do not fast track this oval extension. A second pitch could be accommodated by retaining the current bushland and having the cricket pitch located nearby by reclaiming the degraded area. Or more think more creatively around realigning other assets ie the golf

course. Maybe look at utilising the waste land for sports that benefit from undulating land. This removes the need to clear this important remnant vegetation corridor that are used by resident cockatoos. A holistic view of the entire reserve could be a way around meeting the needs of the sporting clubs but not at the expense and gradual demise of cockatoos, native wildlife and endangered flora.

Remnant bushland removal (even that classified as degraded) in isolation doesn't allow for an understanding of the full ramifications this has across the city. Trees are being removed daily on private land for developments, 33 mature trees were removed at Aquinas College recently for Tennis Courts, last week 2 mature trees Canning Hwy had to be removed due to the Ogilvie Road works. There are mature trees being removed from verges due to fears around falling limbs. In Feb 2024 there was observed significant loss of tree canopy due to heat stress during a very long, hot, dry summer. Consideration also needs to be taken around the effects of shot hole borer.

While it is commended that the City of Melville planted 700 trees across the city the sad fact is that 50 % of these may not last two Perth Summers unless a significant amount of watering and nurturing are included to maintain them. I would predict that 700 trees of varying size may have also disappeared/died during this period.

The City of Melville is already significantly below the target 30% tree canopy cover recommended by the State Government. Removal of these mature trees will increase the gap between the current tree canopy cover and the proposed target and will further increase the time it will take to reach the target if ever. It's a never ending game of catch up.

I reference from the Birdlife Organisation "*habitat clearance and degradation are the major threats to Carnaby's and development in the Perth metro region is rapidly reducing the remaining habitat in the area*". Cockatoos feed on a variety of trees and need a constant food source close to their roost. Evidence shows that this patch of land provides a food source from a range of banksia, hakea and tottiana. I believe they have a roost on the Melville Glades Golf Course. This is an important corridor of bushland that will just disappear for them. Saplings around the edge will not suffice.

Offset and Sapling planting.

I'm concerned that individual projects that include removal of remnant bushland will become commonplace because Dept of Water and Environment approve them but require large offset targets. To some this might sound very good. It allows developments to go ahead but at the same time gives the impression that the environment is being conserved, a even enhanced and therefore not such a bad thing. Clear some old degraded scrub out and plant out another area with mass saplings and it is all great. This is a very short sighted way of conserving habitat. Native saplings require a lot of care, nurturing and water. Many will fail at cost to the ratepayer. Saplings, if planted towards the end of Winter dry out very quickly once the summer starts. Tubestock or very small seedlings have a better rate of survival. The main disadvantage is that they will not benefit wildlife or provide habitat diversity ie nests, food or canopy, and shade for decades to come and again many will fail.

Meanwhile cockatoos and other native birds are pushed to the fringes competing for ever decreasing habitat and canopy.

You don't know what you have got till its gone.

The Flora, Fauna and Vegetation Assessment report of 2020/20221 highlights areas of excellent and good in the bushland. DWER report also highlights the significance of this patch of land. The area immediately south of the proposed clearing area is mostly classified as Excellent & Very Good condition and qualifies as Banksia Woodland Threatened Ecological Community.

So, we are very aware that this is an area of significance, is fragile and under threat and this is reflected in the magnitude of the DWER proposed offsets. The offset requires a whopping 7.34 hectares of revegetation.

When I visited in August I sighted 20 Carnaby Cockatoos resting on high branches I have received numerous photos of visitors to the site seeing cockatoos in the trees there daily and bobtail goanna. I understand that Aboriginal Elders were consulted on this issue on 4 separate occasions and they have overwhelmingly stated the bushland should be retained. These people know the land if they say it is significant then why are they being ignored. The hope is that the area deemed currently degraded, which generally refers to weed infestation, can be rehabilitated and enhance the adjoining threatened ecological banksia woodlands of the swan coastal plain. Look at what has been achieved a Wireless Hill for example – degraded habitat can be restored. Maybe go further and plant feed sources for cockatoos in other parts of the reserve particularly jarrah and marri which are species of large trees often hundreds of years old disappearing in the metro.

To conclude

Would it not be better to conserve this current area of unique bushland which can never be replaced, that is noted to be good and excellent habitat in parts.

Even if it is classed as degraded in parts it is working 24/7 all year to provide shade, canopy, carbon absorption and habitat. The cricket pitch on the other hand while providing sports access for a section of the public will incur costs via maintenance possibly weedkiller, fertilizer, water costs, will provide no canopy, shade or benefit to wildlife while only being used for part of the year.

I would urge the City of Melville to review the master plan and perhaps look at accommodating a whole range of sports on land that doesn't destroy the precious habitat we already have, will provide an excellent sports facility for the whole community and doesn't add to the piecemeal destruction of the flora and fauna in this area.

Thank you

Reference : (reference Choose for Black Cockatoos, Birdlife Western Australia.
birdlife.org.au/carnabys/plants-for-carnabys)

