

Submission on “Regulated trees amendment”

Submission from
Doctors for the Environment Australia Inc.
David Shearman, Hon Secretary
5 Fitzgerald Road PASADENA SA 5042
Phone: 0422 974 857
Email: admin@dea.org.au
<http://www.dea.org.au>



The following are members of our Scientific Committee and support the work of
Doctors for the Environment Australia

Prof. Stephen Boyden AM; Prof. Peter Doherty AC; Prof. Bob Douglas AO; Prof. Michael Kidd AM;
Prof. David de Kretser AC; Prof. Stephen Leeder AO; Prof. Ian Lowe AO; Prof. Robyn McDermott;
Prof. Tony McMichael AO; Prof. Peter Newman; Prof. Emeritus Sir Gustav Nossal AC; Prof. Hugh Possingham;
Prof. Lawrie Powell AC; Prof. Fiona Stanley AC; Dr Rosemary Stanton OAM; Dr Norman Swan;
Professor David Yencken AO

Doctors for the Environment Australia is a voluntary organisation of medical doctors in all Australian states and territories. We work to address the diseases – local, national and global – caused by damage to the earth’s environment. The medical profession has a proud record of service to the community. This record not only includes personal clinical care, but also involvement in global issues that threaten the future of humanity. We aim to use our scientific and medical skills to educate governments and industry, the public and our colleagues to highlight the medical importance of our natural environment. In effect we function as a public health organisation.

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) has human health concerns about this Development Plan Amendment enacted in November.

It would seem that the amendment has already resulted in unnecessary tree removal and if this continues it will remove an important health protection measure in urban and suburban areas.

There are many increasingly complex decisions confronting government and we find that adverse impacts occur to human health because decisions are made without thinking and moving laterally to other departments that might have their responsibilities affected.

In making this amendment we would like to be assured that the health department was asked to consider the potential health implications and we feel sure that the public would be reassured by publication of their report on this issue on your web site.

The case against any increase in tree removal, apart from that due to safety and bushfire imperatives is:-

(1) Climate change mitigation and resilience

SA will suffer increasing temperatures under climate change and the number of heatwaves will increase in intensity and duration (CSIRO reports).

It has been documented that deaths from heat waves are increasing and will continue to increase steadily over the century. The elderly, young and those with concomitant illness are most affected. These events will result in significant increases in health costs and energy consumption.

The Australian events and their significance are discussed in the national report <http://www.pwc.com.au/industry/government/assets/extreme-heat-events-nov11.pdf>. The number of deaths far exceeds those from cyclone, bushfire and flood and is projected to treble by mid century.

An important feeder to heat waves and therefore deaths and hospital admissions in cities and towns is the heat island effect whereby the temperature of a built-up area during hot weather is several degrees above the surrounds. This phenomenon is accepted in planning decisions internationally and is discussed in the national report.

<http://www.pwc.com.au/industry/government/assets/extreme-heat-events-nov11.pdf>

Trees are a very important mitigation in this equation and even the local environment created by the transpirational cooling by a single large tree is significant. All trees are effective in this regard whether native or deciduous. This matter is discussed and promoted by the US EPA.

<http://www.epa.gov/heatisld/mitigation/trees.htm>

In terms of climate change mitigation and protection of human health and living conditions such matters increase society's resilience at very little cost.

Policy should be to increase the number of mature trees in urban areas and in this regard the less than adequate performance of the government in keeping urban trees alive in the recent drought was very unfortunate and suggests that government does not fully understand the issue.

(2) Air Pollution Mitigation

The importance of urban pollution particularly from vehicles is increasingly recognised as a cause of cardio-respiratory disease. Vegetation provides an important removal mechanism for pollutants (US EPA) and is important in providing acceptable urban living conditions.

This was recognised in our recent submission to the Victorian Environment and Planning References Committee inquiry into environmental design and public health.

http://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/Env_Design_PH_Sub_Vic_11.07.2011.pdf

In conclusion we hope that this matter is not just one of tidying up legal niceties in the interest of so-called 'development' for it is an issue of sustainability in a rapidly changing world. In this changing world trees on private property are in effect a community resource to be preserved as a public health measure where the wishes of the individual are to some degree subservient to the common good.

The circumstances under which we would wish to appear before the Committee would relate to how thoroughly the issues above have been explored with urban planning and health experts before amendment decisions were made.