

Lady Dawson

The Chairman
Victorian Environmental Assessment Council
Level 6, 8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002

13 February 2009

Dear Sir/Madam,

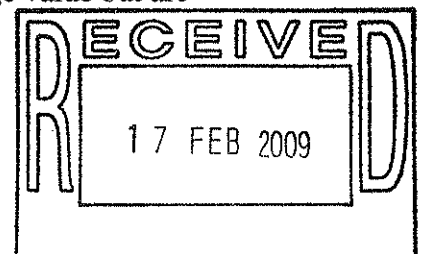
Crown Land Use In Greater Melbourne

As a resident of inner Melbourne for over forty years, I would stress to your committee just how vital open public recreational space is to those who live and work in the city. The nature of inner-city housing means that private outdoor areas are limited. With the huge growth in the number of central business district apartments in recent years, our parks are of paramount importance.

The 2004 census figures (The Age, News 3, Thursday, 16 June 2005) show that the number of CBD apartments jumped from 375 in 1992 to 12,693 in 2004. These figures did not include Southbank or Docklands. Five years later in 2009 there must be a huge increase in these figures.

These figures show why parks in and around the city should be maintained, improved and, if possible, extended. They should not be allowed to be used for commercial purposes and should be available for use as parks by the public at all times.

My park, Yarra Park, has been abused and degraded for decades. Despite the City of Melbourne's costly attempts to keep it alive and maintain its function as a park, it continues to decline. This is entirely due to the use of the land for car parking and the lack of proper action to protect important trees, many of which have grown to have a heritage value but are now endangered by the compaction of their root zones.



Yarra Park is the only park serving East Melbourne and Richmond which is large enough for ball games, dog walking off-leash, jogging and similar activities. These are not permitted in Fitzroy, Treasury or Carlton Gardens. Because Yarra Park is covered with cars for well over one hundred and fifty days a year, it is effectively unavailable for use as a park during those times, which mainly occur at weekends and upon public holidays. Moreover, since the surface of the open spaces is consistently damaged by cars (often reduced to gravel and dust), it discourages its use as a park at other times.

Public transport to the MCG and the Sports and Entertainment Precinct is excellent. The Government's policy to encourage the use of public transport is at loggerheads with the use of Yarra Park as a car park. It can only be so used with the approval of the relevant Minister and it is inexplicable that he or she does not withhold approval and stop this misuse of public land.

More generally, my concern is that the immense benefits which our parks can contribute are not being recognised. With the devastating, widespread loss of native fauna and flora during the last week or so, these pockets of crown land should be allowed to play a large part in encouraging biodiversity of both plant and animal life by the replacement to some extent of lost habitat. See enclosed article by Dr Peter Fisher (The Age, 23 January 2009).

We must not lose any more of our parks and gardens by whatever means. Melbourne is lucky to have what it does, despite what it has already lost. We look to your committee to make recommendations to preserve and enhance these crucial assets.

Yours sincerely,

Lou Dawson

It's time literally to go green

As air-conditioner sales soar and concrete abounds, the role of trees, grass and other plant life in helping reduce carbon emissions is often overlooked, writes **Peter Fisher**.

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OVERNMENTS are seriously overlooking what city trees can do to reduce water use and fight climate change. This week's scorches have certainly focused the mind on how to stay cool. For

some years Australia has experienced a staggering growth in the installation of air-conditioners, with sales surging by as much as 10 per cent each year, and some houses having more than one. Whether the looming recession results in less take-up and use, or a resort to electric fans, remains to be seen.

These units are ravenous electricity users, imposing heavy demands on peak-load generating capacity, especially the older, less-efficient models. And they're the most pernicious of black balloons with their own feedback spiral — the more air-conditioners to fight the stifling heat, the more the carbon emissions, the more the planet heats up, and so on.

Adding to their workload is the explosion in hard surfaces — patios, pebble gardens, car parks, walls, roads and buildings — that retain heat, causing an urban heat island effect. That is, areas with excessive hard surfaces can experience a temperature spike.

While this effect has been known for some time, not so well understood is the extent that trees, shrubs, lawns and wall gardens can cool places. Estimates by the Co-operative Research Centre for Irrigation Futures, for example, are that they can lower temperatures by 2-8 degrees because increases in evapotranspiration reduce building energy use by 7-47 per cent.

Importantly, much is on private land — it's not just in public parks and along roads and nature strips — so that even in a densely settled locality like East Melbourne 60 per cent is in street blocks.

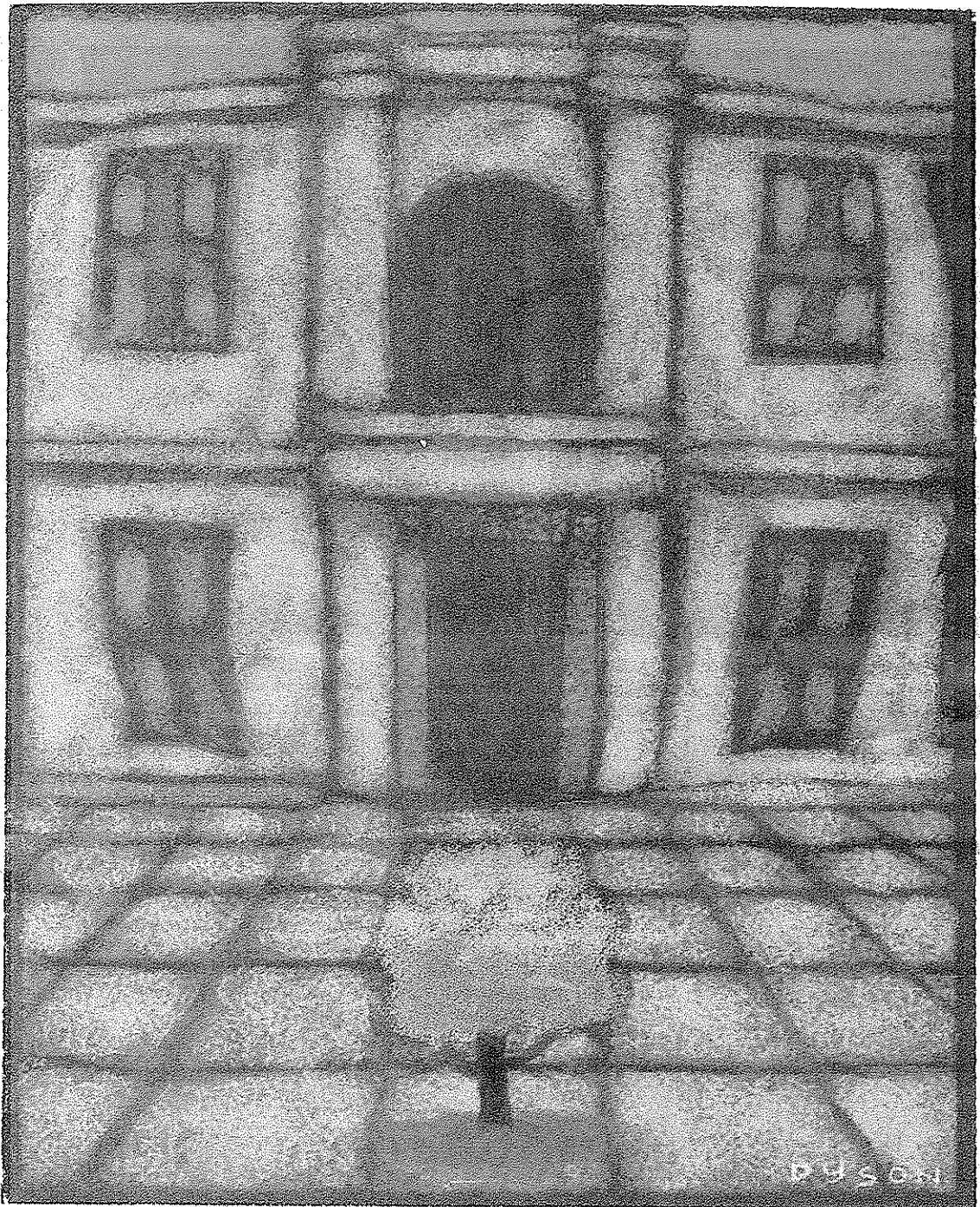
This green infrastructure is a legacy of the dedication of generations of gardeners and plenty of rain. As much time and effort and precious water has been invested in the trees alone, they represent an asset that should not be squandered.

Greg Moore, of Burnley Horticultural College, has calculated that the 100,000 mature trees in inner Melbourne sequester 1 million tonnes of carbon, worth close to \$20 million. These trees have the capacity to offset the more extreme temperatures and ferocious winds in prospect while helping to mitigate climate change. As such, they are worthy candidates for inclusion in Australia's emissions accounting.

Last month's rainfall provided some relief for the city's drought-stressed specimens; quite a few of the deciduous varieties had seemed reluctant to set leaf this spring. Many still look sickly, even prematurely colouring — especially the elms. Others appear to have come good but some may still throw in the towel in the hot months ahead.

The longer-term outlook is similarly bleak. Extreme winds, in combination with deluges, which weaken root anchoring, may lead to domino tree falls and withering heat may fry plants and have detrimental effects on pollinators.

Although plants could initially benefit from increasing carbon dioxide, they will wilt if average global temperatures rise by more than a few degrees. They could also



strong storm surges; and an expanded variety of resilient food plants suitable for backyard plots.

The possibility of harsher water restrictions implies that tap water released to the environment for urban gardens is a luxury we can no longer afford. But, might this be a false economy?

The water saved in power stations due to lower demand for air-conditioning in cities because of shade trees may be greater than that saved from zero or drastically reduced irrigation of suburban gardens and public lands.

Equally, the loss of trees (which began to gather pace last autumn) means we are steadily losing an opportunity to lessen the "carbon footprint" of our city — a typical mature tree can store as much as 10 metric tonnes of carbon. Then there are the other environmental benefits they can provide: stormwater retention, dust settling and air pollution absorption.

This sort of greenery also goes some way towards offsetting what Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson — who popularised the idea that we are biologically drawn to natural landscapes — has called our entry into an

Ereozoic age, an age of loneliness, isolated from all other living organisms.

A greater commitment is needed to help people maintain and develop suitable gardens to avoid Melbourne becoming a hot, dusty, desiccated landscape in the decades ahead — something that could be

As it turns out, Melbourne has a rich assortment of trees, shrubs and grassed areas — a resource known as the urban forest.

hard to reverse given the difficulty of growing back large trees with reduced rainfall.

Certainly, the trend to treeless, hard-surfaced private spaces should not be encouraged where it translates into an overall diminution in an area's green coverage. Regular, systematic audits of the city's tree canopy are well overdue.

Dr Peter Fisher works in the environment industry, specialising in water and climate change adaptation.

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