

Legislative enquire into local groups regarding climate change

Croydon conservation society which is a not-for-profit community group in the east of Melbourne have been working continuously for the past 55 years to maintain the treed nature of our region. For all those years the people of Croydon have supported and valued their green and leafy environment. Natural reserves and parklands have thrived while providing habitat for wildlife and a healthy neighbourhood for many generations. **Recently, however according the ABS Maroondah ranked second in the race to the bottom in terms of loss of tree canopy cover in Melbourne.**

Previously some of our members may have got two or three Planning Alerts via email, per month we are now receiving up to 5 per week at least, and they are for vegetation removal and in particular canopy trees. The requests are coming thick and fast for increased development, often for infill second dwellings at the rear which puts trees along side and rear boundaries within 3 m of new houses and subsequently they can be removed.

Tree removal is also occurring, because we have some larger than average blocks, it is quite common for one house to be removed and up to 5 two story units are built on the same land with a large amount of hard-standing concrete driveways to the five different garages leaving precious little open space in which to accommodate canopy trees. This has the effect of covering the land in impervious material which is altering soil hydrology and making it more difficult for trees on adjoining properties to remain fit and healthy.

Through all this the Croydon Conservation Society volunteers have quietly and politely raised awareness, co-operated on policy with the Croydon and then Maroondah Council, planted thousands of trees and fought inappropriately designed developments. The many 'Friends of...' groups have tended their local parks and waterways and groups have connected together to form a network of people who care and are willing to put their back into showing their commitment. Sustainability groups, recycling groups, community gardens, wildlife rescuers and carers all work freely. Across the state, we save the Councils and Government millions. We will be glad and encouraged to see the Government getting behind these community quiet achievers, by supporting our efforts

At a time when we're been told by global experts that one of the best ways to change the direction of climate change is to plant millions of trees around the world we are finding the situation of mature tree removal to be both contradictory, depressing and the complete antithesis of the advice to reduce our carbon footprint, It is also devastating in terms of habitat loss to the other wildlife residents we live alongside in Maroondah.

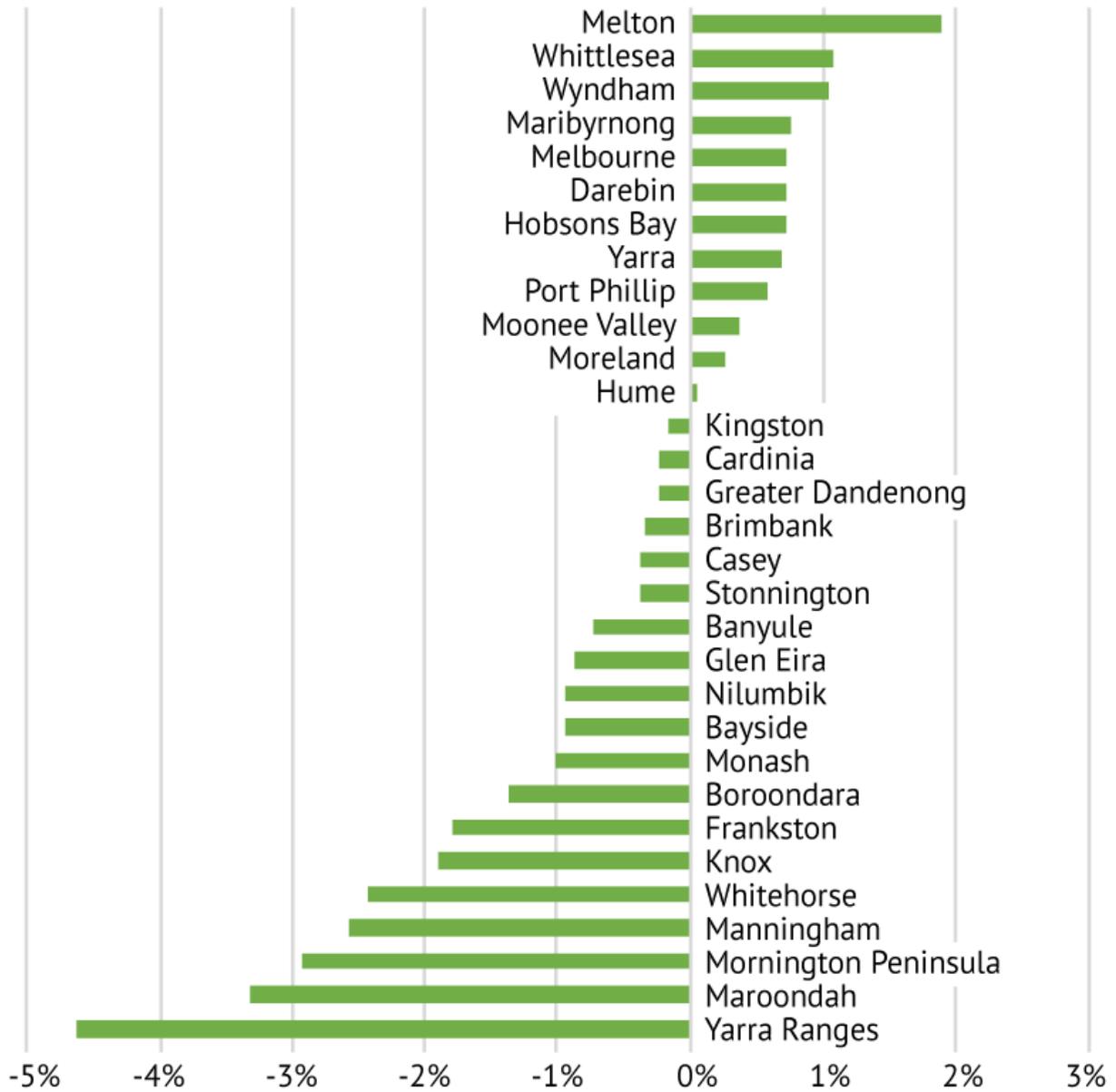
So in this situation what the Victorian government can do, is to find a way to ensure that for every tree removed at least another one and possibly two are put back in a similar area. Illegal tree removal needs to bring a serious fine, not \$800. This needs changes to the State Government rules that apply to fines for environmental damage.

It also will mean changes to the municipalities planning scheme and it most definitely means that Councils are going to need to re- evaluate priorities to allow for additional compliance officers to ensure that those newly planted trees remain healthy and continue to thrive. Our previous experience has been that replacement trees are lost to our community as trees die or are removed by new residents.

In the interim period we are already witnessing desperate wildlife competing for diminishing habitat faster than it can be replaced. **We consider this to be a very serious situation not just for our municipality and for Victoria, but also Australia and in fact the entire world when we are looking to combat Climate Change.**

Change in tree cover

Local government comparison of tree cover change 2014-18 in urbanised areas



Source: ABS urban centres and localities

An excerpt from our response to Maroondah Councils Vegetation and Biodiversity Strategy, currently underway.

There are 10 factors from which to rank causes of vegetation loss.

CCS believes these would be best looked at in two distinct groups, those caused by mankind, and those now caused by Environmental changes. Both need to be tackled concurrently from high to low priority

We would rank them as follows

Man induced causes:

1. Removal of trees for construction
2. Removal to manage risk, to property or life (perception of threat)
3. Fragmentation of Habitat, caused primarily by 1 & 2 above
4. Off site impacts, runoff erosion, human impact on soil and plants, lack of understanding about indigenous (scrappy) bushland in reserves.
5. Cut and fill of land for poorly designed development, paying scant regard to terrain

Environmental causes:

1. Decline of Stringy bark species, dominant type of indigenous eucalypts across the municipality
2. Loss of critical dependencies, pollinators, fungi, hollows, prickly shrubbery, habitat trees
3. Drying of soil, from poor storm water management to drain quickly, environmental factors
4. Competition from weedy species, and invasive plants, more adapted to new climatic conditions
Sweet Pittosporums in particular.
5. Changes in Fire regimes

Quote! Business as usual will not prevent continued loss of Biodiversity in Maroondah P14.

Options for action

The four themes are appropriate,

- **Planning scheme,**
- **Public land and asset management,**
- **Supporting community,**
- **Leadership and Good Governance.**

CCS believes stronger mechanisms for protecting existing trees, vegetation and permeable surfaces to allow for soil hydration one of the most critical edaphic factors; are of the utmost importance within the planning scheme, for our municipality to retain the critically important tree canopy.