



# Mt Barker & District Residents' Association Inc.

PO Box 19 Mount Barker, South Australia 5251

*For the Community*

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13 March 2023

Minister Tom Koutsantonis MP

Cc Mr Evan Knapp

GPO Box 1533  
Adelaide SA 5001

Minister.Koutsantonis@sa.gov.au

Dear Minister Koutsantonis

Over the past year, the Mount Barker & District Residents' Association (MBDRA) has raised the issue of tree loss on many occasions as development of the rezoned land at Mount Barker has proceeded. We anticipate that this erosion of the remnant natural vegetation and wildlife habitat will continue due to the pressure of financially optimised development, even with current planning guidelines in place. In order to shift from a purely reactive situation regarding tree and habitat loss, our representatives at a recent meeting with DIT suggested a possible alternative proactive course. Attached is a broad outline of that strategy, as requested by Evan Knapp at that meeting.

We much appreciate your interest in this matter, for better environmental outcomes and better consideration of wider community concerns, in your provision of infrastructure needs.

## **Historical Legacy**

The original surveys of the Adelaide Hills have left us with a fine network of rural roads, well suited to their time – narrowish (one chain) road reserves that were quite sufficient for the narrow road pavements necessary to allow mostly slow moving and infrequent wagons and travellers to pass each other. On either side of the road reserve, trees and scrub on private landholdings was usually cleared for agriculture and grazing right to the property boundary. Trees on the strip between the pavement and those boundaries were left, both for reasons of economy, but also to provide shade for travellers. New growth germinated in this strip too, over 150 years, to form random avenues of now substantial trees. Also, for low speed travel (10 kph), sharp corners following boundary surveys were quite acceptable. With so much land cleared of natural vegetation, the roadside vegetation became an essential food source, and habitat, for native wildlife. Additionally, the hollows in these old, remnant trees provide essential nesting sites for birds and animals.

## **The Present, and Future**

While the old rural roads provide the delightful charm of a leisurely drive through The Adelaide Hills, the increase in residents in rural areas, but more particularly the expansion of housing in villages and towns has added irresistible pressure on the road network. Speed, carriageway width for passing trucks, improved alignment and sight lines, the impact risk of trees immediately adjacent to the roadway and the sheer increase in traffic flows (particularly commuter flows), all demand upgrading of significant parts the road network andnd will continue to do so.

## **Planning**

Ten years ago, 1300Ha around Mount Barker were rezoned from Rural to Residential and Industrial. The expansion of Mount Barker has been dramatic and is set to continue. With the rezoning, a notional master plan was produced indicating the new and upgraded roads necessary to support the growing population. Only now are some of these upgrades being undertaken. More – including upgrades of earlier upgrades – are to be expected. But that’s a ten year lag from identification to implementation.

It is suggested that there should be a two-stage policy to compensate for tree loss due to roadwork upgrades, to take advantage of this planning time lag in the first instance, and then address the particular situation on any site at the later immediate detailed design stage.

## **Strategic Provisions**

The long-term aim is to establish compensatory habitat away from the roadsides, by implementing or enhancing wildlife corridors within the adjacent landscape. This could/should be done in conjunction with Landscape SA and Local Council overlays. When a potential road upgrade is identified in the early strategic planning stage, an assessment would be made of the possible wildlife habitat and tree loss. While all the existing would remain untouched at this stage, a new habitat and ‘forest’ reserve would be established, in the immediate area if possible, but away from roadway hazards, in accordance with the wildlife planning overlays. The new plantings could be a mix of tube-stock and advanced trees, with appropriate understorey for smaller birds and land animals. There might be a, say, 5 new to 1 old replacement ratio based on trunk circumference. These new plantings would be cared for and grown on, resulting in a more mature compensatory habitat being prepared for if or when roadside trees actually need be removed.

Alternatively, blocks of existing native vegetation could be acquired and given public reserve status (as a minimum), if these areas were under threat of clearing.

## **Immediate Provisions**

During the final planning and design stages, due consideration should be given to minimising tree removals, notwithstanding the earlier provisional plantings. This is particularly the case with iconic, centuries-old specimens, which take many human lifetimes to replace. It would also be required that additional planting be undertaken prior to construction commencing, as a direct compensation for those trees that actually need be removed, along the same lines as outlined above. Relocation of wildlife may be possible into the earlier ten-year-old plantings, though it is recognised that this is not a simple process. At least some habitat elements may be transferable, or

their equivalent provided. After construction work is completed on the site, it would be expected that well-designed landscaping would be undertaken and maintained.

## **Conclusion**

While the primary intent of such a scheme as outlined is to compensate, hopefully nett positively, for the inevitable loss of native vegetation and habitat along roadsides, it would provide DIT with a policy that could avoid the disputation arising from what would otherwise be a loss to the environment and the community. Though some may benefit from the improved road conditions, this would be at the expense of the wider community in its loss of natural amenity. It is in considering the wider community that this proposal would need to be shared across the various branches of Government, and while there would be some costs involved, these too would be indirect compensation for those who may not benefit directly from the roadworks, through the maintenance and enhancement of their environment.

Kind regards

*Douglas McCarty*

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**Chairperson**