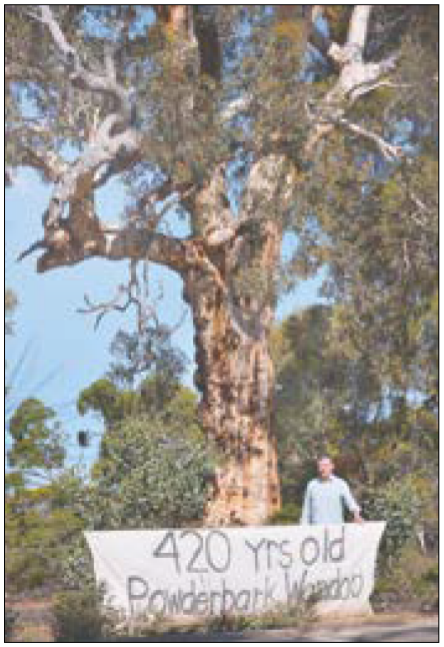
Main Roads says 'exploring options' to save two 400-year-old trees from axe



Local resident Andrew St John with one of two 400-year-old trees facing destruction.

TWO 400-year-old Toodyay trees listed for destruction on a flora-designated road have become the latest battleground for local environmentalists seeking to limit damage to native vegetation in ongoing upgrades to Toodyay Road.

The two large Powderbark Wandoos stand near the intersection of Toodyay Road and Salt Valley Road, about eight kilometres south of the Toodyay townsite.

A Main Roads WA plan to re-align the intersection to make it safer for traffic includes axing the two trees.

Environmentalists say the trees stand in an area popular with spring wildflower tourists for its abundance of Leschenaultia and red flowering pea bush.

One of the trees (*pictured*) is estimated to be 420 years old and predates the arrival of Australia's first European explorers at Cape York in Queensland in 1606 and at WA's Shark Bay in 1616.

A submission by Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads group member Elaine Hall to last month's Toodyay Shire Council meeting said the intersection could be re-aligned without destroying the two trees.

Ms Hall said the area was a significant habitat for Black Cockatoos and Chuditch in a wheatbelt region that had undergone a high level of clearing.

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Coming events

Bush Poets
State Championships
November 5 - 7
Toodyay Farmers Market
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Activists fight to save two 400-year-old trees

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"IT IS unacceptable that such an emphatic statement as the Powderbark Wandoos at the beginning of the flora-designated road should be demolished when there is an alternative," Ms Hall said.

Acting Shire Planning and Development Manager Hugo de Vos told last month's council meeting that there was no dispute about the need to upgrade Toodyay Road.

"The Shire of Toodyay has no decision-making authority in this case," Mr de Voss said.

The work was being funded by Main Roads WA.

Local and State Government members had undertaken "significant" advocacy to "to take advantage of available funding to complete projects to the benefit of the community".

Mr de Voss said ongoing opposition to the proposed works could result in Main Roads WA reconsidering the scope and "possible loss of funding for these works".

Main Roads WA had to consider its own budgets and "ideally will develop a project which is addressing the environmental, economic and social elements of sustainable development".

"Too often, however, the outcome is not a balanced one and it is the environment that makes way for a more dominant focus on economic and social impacts," he said.

"The cost that the community bears is the loss of important environmental assets which, in the case of a 420-year-old tree, cannot be replaced quickly through the usual environmental offset process.

"Is there a better way that does not involve the loss of this vegetation?

"There may, or there may not be."

Mr De Voss said the shire's Environmental Advisory Committee had recommended that "further conversation" was needed.

"Importantly, it is a strong message that the council is giving to its community that it supports the environment and that this is a major part of who we are and what we stand for, and also that it is listening to the community and using its powers of advocacy to obtain better outcomes."

The council voted 7-1 (Cr Susan Pearce against and Shire President Rosemary Madacsi on sick leave) to note Ms Hall's submission and write to the WA Department of Water and Environmental Regulation "requesting further dialogue occurs about the planning to achieve an outcome balancing the preservation of natural assets with budget and design constraints".

Main Roads WA said it had examined six design options for upgrading the Salt Valley Road intersection.

The final selection was based on "environmental, engineering and safety considerations".

"The selected option results in reduced overall clearing of native vegetation, large habitat trees, Black Cockatoo foraging habitat and priority flora species compared to other options," a spokesperson said.

"These comparisons were presented to the Project Community Reference Group which endorsed the preferred alignment.

"Main Roads is continuing to refine the road designs and is exploring options to avoid the two Powderbark Wandoo trees at the intersection while ensuring safety objectives and environmental approvals are met."