



MANAGEMENT OF SIGNIFICANT TREES

JANUARY 2026



PART ONE: BACKGROUND

Purpose

These guidelines set out a process for identifying and assessing an individual tree or groups of trees, that may have State or local cultural heritage significance. They also explain how to manage trees that have cultural heritage value and how this works alongside the planning process.

The guidelines outline options for local governments to manage trees, which do not meet the threshold for cultural heritage significance but are still important for other reasons, such as contributing to the amenity of an area or as habitat for wildlife.

Overview

The *Heritage Act 2018* (the Act) provides the framework for the identification and management of heritage places in Western Australia.

The Act identifies that a heritage 'place' may include, among other elements:

- gardens and man-made parks or sites; or
- a tree or group of trees (whether planted or naturally occurring) in, or adjacent to, a man-made setting.

Man-made settings can include buildings, structures or other man-made infrastructure.

For the purposes of this document, place and tree are used interchangeably.

Once a place is determined to have cultural heritage significance, it can be added to a local government's local heritage survey (LHS) and heritage list

or State Heritage Register. This listing helps to ensure the place is managed and protected with reference to its heritage significance.

Sometimes, communities ask for a particular tree to be protected under the Act, often when the tree is at risk. While this is possible, it's not always the best option. Trees that are important for shade, beauty, or wildlife habitat can be protected through local government planning tools, such as a significant tree register or a local planning policy.

Application

These guidelines can be applied whenever there is a need to assess whether a single tree or group of trees has cultural heritage significance. The guidelines are primarily intended for local governments to determine the inclusion of places in their local heritage survey or heritage list; however, they may also inform other processes where an assessment of cultural heritage significance is required.

The Act does not apply to those places that consist only of the 'natural environment', where it is considered that the application of other legislation, such as the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* or *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*, is better suited.

The Act does not apply to a place that has cultural heritage significance 'solely on account of its connection with Aboriginal tradition or culture'. These places are protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*.

The assessment and management of natural heritage and Aboriginal cultural heritage may require the application of different practices and processes that are not covered in these guidelines.

The *Planning and Development Act 2005* and *Planning and Development (Local Planning Schemes) Regulations 2015* will only apply to places that have been included on the State Register or a local government heritage list.

Objectives

These guidelines are intended to:

- ensure a consistent approach in determining cultural heritage significance for a tree whether on private or public land;
- identify examples for the inclusion and exclusion of a tree in the LHS; and
- inform local governments and their communities about alternative approaches for the identification and protection of significant trees such as significant tree registers



PART TWO: IDENTIFICATION

Assessing a tree for cultural heritage significance

Understanding the cultural heritage values and historical importance of a place, in this case a tree, is the basis of all good heritage decisions.

This is the first step of the process in the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance (the Burra Charter 2013), which guides heritage best practice.

The first step in the assessment process is to gather documentary and physical evidence for the tree. This evidence includes information that will inform a series of value statements that define its cultural heritage significance. Each tree will have its own combination of values that are assessed against various criteria. The assessment of a tree should address the following values and be guided by a thematic history of the local district or region:

- Aesthetic
- Historic
- Scientific
- Social
- Spiritual.

A practice note entitled *Understanding and assessing cultural significance* accompanies the Burra Charter and provides additional questions that can be used to consider each of the values, as well as further guidance on the assessment process.

The following examples explain how the values for cultural heritage can apply to a tree and discusses some common issues or misconceptions.

The examples should be used in conjunction with the *Guidelines for the Assessment of Local Heritage Places 2022* and *The State Register of Heritage Places - A Guide to Assessing Cultural Heritage Significance 2023* when determining the significance of a tree.

Aesthetic Value: It is significant in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the community

Overview

All trees have some form of aesthetic qualities. Height is often the sole attribute used to justify the inclusion of trees in terms of landmark qualities, although if it is unusual for the species, it could be considered. To consider a tree or group of trees for its landmark qualities it should contribute to a locality's sense of place. Therefore, additional indicators should also be considered, such as whether a tree is used by the community as a reference point in the locality (see example one). Other possible examples may include an aesthetically pleasing formal avenue of trees that provide an identifiable entry point to a town, or trees that form part of gardens and cultural landscape settings (see example two).

Indicators

A tree demonstrating this value should have importance:

- to a community for its contribution to the aesthetic values of the setting demonstrated by a landmark quality or having impact on important vistas;
- for its contribution to the aesthetic qualities of the cultural environment or the natural landscape within which it is located;
- for contributing to the aesthetic character created by the individual components that collectively form a significant precinct; that is, streetscape, townscape or cultural environment; and
- an unusual growth form either by natural or human intervention.

Guidelines for exclusion

A tree will generally be excluded if:

- its landmark or aesthetic qualities have been lost, irreversibly impacted, or compromised by subsequent activities or surrounding or infill development
- the tree has qualities that just relate to its growth form such as height or canopy size, or as healthy example of its species
- the tree has become rare in a locality only due to the removal of other trees for a planned development.

EXAMPLES (INCLUSION)

Example One: Norfolk Island Pine Precinct, Cottesloe

The Norfolk Island Pines trees are a recognisable Cottesloe icon, having dominated the town's landscape and skyline throughout the twentieth century, contributing to the local and wider community's identity and sense of place.



Example Two: Oakover Vineyards, Gardens and River Meadows (part of Oakover Homestead)

Oakover, is significant as a traditionally laid out 19th century farm homestead complex in the Swan Valley. The buildings and their associated setting extend to the river and beyond, and include stands of Olive trees, a mature Oak and Cape Lilac, that form an aesthetically pleasing cultural environment.



Historic value: It is significant in the evolution or pattern of the history of Western Australia

Overview

The historic values associated with a place should be explored with reference to the thematic history for the locality and/or region.

INDICATORS

A tree demonstrating this value should have importance:

- for the density or diversity of cultural features illustrating the human occupation and evolution of the locality, or region such as within a formal park, within a town or a garden;
- in relation to an event, phase or activity of historic importance in the locality, or region;
- for close association with an individual or individuals whose life, works or activities have been significant within the history of the locality or region; and
- plantings of individual or avenues of trees that commemorate individuals or an occasion, or that were part of an historic planting program.

The associations should be strong and verified by evidence.

Guidelines for exclusion

A tree will generally be excluded if:

- no reliable or verifiable physical, documentary, oral or historical evidence exists to demonstrate

the association of the tree with an historical event or phase in the locality;

- the tree has an association with, or demonstrates evidence of an historical event or phase that is of low or questionable historical importance in the locality;
- there is only an incidental or distant association with local historically important activities, processes, people, or events;
- it is a particularly old example of the species but does not demonstrate a connection with a historic reason as listed in reasons for inclusion; and
- if the tree has become rare in a locality only due to the removal of other trees for a planned development.

EXAMPLES (INCLUSION)

Example One: Proclamation Tree and Marmion Memorial, Fremantle

The Proclamation Tree, a Moreton Bay Fig, was planted by Governor Sir William Robinson in 1890 to celebrate the granting of responsible government to the Colony of Western Australia.



Example Two: Balingup Avenue of Honour

The Avenue of Honour was planted to commemorate fallen soldiers of World War One who had lived in the Balingup district. It is also associated with Field Marshall Sir William Birdwood who played an important role in commanding the Australian and New Zealand forces in Europe.



Scientific value: Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the history of the locality or region

Overview

In considering scientific value in relation to trees, it is important not to confuse propagative or horticultural value with cultural heritage. Horticultural value includes species rarity, genetic value, disease resistance, seed propagation capability or form of the tree. Therefore, additional indicators should also be considered such as historic value as the trees can be used for research potential.

INDICATORS

A tree demonstrating this value should have importance:

- for its potential to yield information contributing to a wider understanding of the history of human occupation of the locality or region.

Guidelines for exclusion

A tree will generally be excluded if:

- the information it might yield is likely to be of low or questionable historical importance to the locality or region.

EXAMPLES (INCLUSION)

Example One: Hamel Nursery

The site of this former State nursery includes remnant mature plantings in the nursery and associated arboreta, that have the potential to provide information on the species used in the development of a wide range of cultural landscapes in Western Australia, including King's Park, Hyde Park, Beatty Park, Karrakatta and Fremantle Cemeteries.



Example Two: Boundary Tree, Swan Locations 4 and 5, Baskerville

The tree is associated with the early exploration and survey of the Swan River Colony in 1827 and 1829. It has scientific value for its contribution to the wider understanding of the cultural history of British settlement by providing evidence of historical surveying techniques relating to the early settlement period. It also meets the criteria for historic value due to its association with an event that has played an important part in the State's/locality's history.



Social value:
It is significant through association with a community or cultural group in the locality or region for social, cultural, educational or spiritual reasons

Overview

Places of social value make a positive contribution to the local 'sense of place' and identity. When applying this value to trees, they may have symbolic or landmark qualities in the community. Places need not be valued by the entire community to be significant; they may be valued by a section of the community or a cultural group.

INDICATORS

A tree demonstrating this value should:

- be highly valued by a community or cultural group for social, cultural, symbolic, or spiritual reasons for an extended period;
- make a positive contribution to the local 'sense of place' and identity; or
- be located in a public place or be distinctive in the local landscape.

Guidelines for exclusion

A tree will not normally be considered if:

- the associations are not held very strongly or cannot be demonstrated satisfactorily to others
- the social value is historical rather than in the present day.

Care should be taken not to confuse cultural heritage significance with amenity, such as a large shade providing tree valued by the community.

EXAMPLES (INCLUSION)

Example One: Happy Tree, City Beach Oval

A former giant Tuart tree, hand carved with fantasy figures, which fell during strong winds in 2019. Originally located in a suburban street, the tree, was for years, a location for children's storytelling, becoming a local tradition. Large sections of the tree were salvaged and incorporated into a new community play-space at City Beach Oval, including the trunk with original smiley face. A 'little library', now sits on the original trunk, providing an opportunity for the storytelling tradition to continue.

Image courtesy Town of Cambridge website



Spiritual value:
It is significant because it embodies or evokes intangible values and meanings, which give it importance in the spiritual identity, or the traditional knowledge, art and practices of a cultural group

Overview

Trees demonstrating this value should have importance for contributing to the spiritual identity or belief system of a cultural group. Trees that meet this value are uncommon but may include scar trees that have importance to the Aboriginal community; however, these would not generally meet the criteria to be included in a LHS unless it demonstrates additional indicators.

INDICATORS

A tree demonstrating this value should:

- contribute to the spiritual identity or belief system of a cultural group.

Guidelines for exclusion

A tree will not normally be considered if:

- the associations are not held very strongly or cannot be demonstrated satisfactorily to others
- the spiritual value is historical rather than in the present day.

The significance of trees may be further determined by giving due regard to the additional qualities of rarity and representativeness.

Importance in demonstrating uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of local heritage

A tree may demonstrate rarity with respect to any of the values; aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, or spiritual.

GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSION

A tree will generally be included if it:

- includes rare, endangered or uncommon plantings or landscapes
- is associated with a custom, way of life or process that is no longer practised or is in danger of being lost in the locality or region.

EXAMPLES (INCLUSION)

Example One: Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive - Fig Trees

Planted along the main street of Dongara in 1906 to enhance the status and amenity of the town, the trees are a rare, extant example of the 'City Beautiful' philosophy that was current in the State at the time. The place is also of aesthetic value as an uncommon landscape arrangement of large Ficus trees forming the principal street planting, the large enclosing canopies of which create a visually impressive avenue.



Example Two: Gloucester Tree, Pemberton

This place is significant as a rare example of a very tall Karri tree that was used as a fire lookout tower from 1946 until spotter planes took over the fire surveillance role in 1974. The tree represents an aspect of cultural history that is no longer practised.

Image courtesy Bron Anderson Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.



GUIDELINES FOR EXCLUSION

A tree will generally be excluded if:

- there is no reliable or verifiable physical, documentary or historical evidence that can demonstrate the rarity status being claimed
- the claimed rarity is dependent upon too many indicators
- the claimed rarity is of questionable importance, for example, its rarity is only related to its species.

Importance in demonstrating the characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments in the local district

A tree may demonstrate representativeness with respect to any of the values; aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, or spiritual.

GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSION

A tree will generally be included if it:

- is a representative planting or landscape
- is associated with a custom, way of life or process that is no longer practised or is in danger of being lost in the locality or region.

EXAMPLES (INCLUSION)

Example One: Jarrah tree, Armadale

It is an important representative remnant tree of the Jarrah forests that were subsequently cleared and felled after European settlement. The tree is also associated with Thomas Shaw who sold the land on which the tree stands, as well as with Armadale Primary School from 1904 to 1987 where it was located in the playground.



GUIDELINES FOR EXCLUSION

A tree will generally be excluded if:

- there is no reliable or verifiable physical, documentary or historical evidence that can demonstrate the representativeness status being claimed
- the claimed representativeness is dependent upon too many indicators
- the claimed representativeness is of questionable importance, for example, it is only related to its species.

Defining a place

Defining a curtilage for a significant tree

Curtilage refers to the boundary of the identified place, such as the property lot boundary used for a heritage listed place (building). In the case of a tree, the Tree Protection Zone (TPZ) could be used as the curtilage. It is determined in accordance with the AS4970-2009 Protection of Trees on Development Sites. It extends to the edge of the canopy and provides a zone around to the tree to prevent damage to its roots or canopy. Clearly defining this helps in locating and identifying the tree in future and indicates the area over which conservation controls may need to be applied.

If a tree or group of trees has landmark value or is part of a cultural landscape, changes in the surrounding area could affect its heritage value or health. To protect it, some of the surrounding landscape may need to be included in the curtilage. For example, a stone wall near a significant tree may be included

in the curtilage, so any change to the wall, or change of ground level which could damage the tree's roots and overall health could be evaluated prior to works commencing.

Trees included within the curtilage of a State registered place

Trees located within the curtilage of a State registered place are usually not individually registered as the Act notes that they need to be in, or adjacent to, a man-made setting. Their heritage value is determined by their contribution to the cultural heritage significance of a place. For example, they may be part of a historic garden that features mature trees, form part of an important avenue, border plantings or specimens, or form part of a picturesque setting or rural landscape. The value of a tree may be referenced in broader terms in the assessment, such as 'landscaped gardens', 'mature plantings', or 'cultural landscape', terms that are not immediately obvious as being relevant to a specific tree. If in doubt of a tree's listing, please contact the Department.

Local government listings

Once it has been determined that a tree or group of trees has cultural heritage significance it should be included on the local government's LHS. A tree may also form part of a listing of a place already included on the LHS. The process for this is outlined in the *Guidelines for Local Heritage Surveys*.

The physical evidence in the LHS should include a map/coordinate of the tree's location, dated photographs of the tree, measurements such as height, diameter, and canopy spread.

When recording the name of the tree, it should include both the common and scientific name, as well as any other cultural names it may have.

A local government can also consider the listed tree for inclusion in the heritage list. The heritage list is associated with the local planning scheme (LPS) and determines which places are subject to the heritage provisions of the scheme. More information is available in the *Guidelines for establishing a heritage list*.

Inclusion of a tree in the heritage list gives a statement of intent from the local government that it should be retained. Not all trees included in the LHS will necessarily be included in the heritage list, as there could be several reasons why the local government does not consider it appropriate to apply protection through the heritage provisions of the local planning framework.

Management of heritage listed trees

The general intent of conservation is to take whatever action is needed to retain the cultural heritage significance of a tree. The general intent is to retain the tree in situ, in good health. If this is not possible, any alternative actions should be guided by the heritage values of the place, as detailed in relevant management documents for the place/tree.

As a living organism, a tree has a natural lifespan, which needs to be managed by the landowner through regular inspections for pests and disease, as well as regular pruning to reduce the risk of falling limbs or other damage to nearby buildings and infrastructure. Maintenance of a tree

throughout its life is the responsibility of its location's landowner. A tree management plan can assist landowners to manage significant trees.

As a guide, general care and maintenance of gardens and landscapes, such as minor pruning or removal of dead branches will be part of the regular maintenance of the tree. Pruning listed trees should be in accordance with AS 4373-2007 Pruning of Amenity Trees. Any proposal for substantial works, which are any works other than maintenance pruning, should be based on professional advice from a qualified arborist.

When development occurs around a locally significant tree it should be protected as per AS4970-2009 Protection of trees on development sites with measures such as fencing to include the whole of the TPZ.

Trees of local heritage significance

If a tree is on the local heritage list, any development nearby must take its heritage significance into account. The *Planning and Development (Local Planning Schemes) Regulations 2015 Schedule 2 clause 67* identify that when considering an application for development approval, due regard should be given to:

- *the conservation of any place of cultural significance*
- *the likely effect of the development on the natural environment*
- *whether any trees or other vegetation on the land should be preserved.*

A local planning policy (LPP) for trees also provides guidance to local governments and property owners on the appropriate management of significant trees to ensure heritage values are retained.

A tree in the public domain, usually street trees or those in parks and reserves, can have both heritage and amenity values. These places can be protected from inappropriate development due to their designation as reserves in the LPS.

Trees of State heritage significance

Major works including substantial pruning, impact to canopy or root system or removal of a tree must be referred to the Heritage Council of Western Australia for advice. Other construction activities in proximity to a tree that have the potential to affect the heritage values of a place, such as its setting or views, may also require referral to the Heritage Council. Such proposals should be based on professional advice from a heritage consultant and/or qualified arborist and reference AS 4970-2009 Protection of trees on development sites.

Where works are part of a development proposal for the site they will be referred as part of the planning application process. There is an opportunity to discuss the proposal with the Department prior to submission, to identify any likely heritage concerns or if it is unclear if the work affecting the tree is exempt or not.

Risk to a significant tree

Trees that are nearing the end of their expected life or are deemed hazardous may need radical action to resolve public risk. Decline in tree health may be due to natural deterioration, environmental pests, or other factors such as nearby construction, disturbance of the root zone or poor pruning practices.

Where storms or circumstances such as fire have caused damage to a tree, the damage should be photographed and recorded, and included with proposals for remedial action, so that the impact on the tree's significance can be assessed.

Polyphagous shot-hole borer

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) is conducting activities to inspect, trap, and where necessary prune or remove trees affected by the Polyphagous shot hole borer (PSHB). DPIRD have identified that the top host trees are Box Elder Maple (Acer), Black Locust (Robinia), Coral tree (Erythrina), Moreton Bay and Port Jackson Fig trees (Ficus), Poinciana (Delonix), Mirror bush (Coprosma) and Castor Oil (Ricinus). Any signs of the PSHB should be reported to the Pest and Disease Information Service through DPIRD who will assist landowners to manage the affected trees. More information can be found on the [DPIRD website](#).

Loss of a significant tree

When a significant tree is lost, there are ways to keep its heritage value. One common approach is to plant a new tree. If the species is important to its heritage value, the replacement should ideally be the same species.

In some cases, another species may be chosen to reflect the history of the place or suit the location better.

In rare cases the tree's heritage value comes from its genetic link, such as being grown from a seed from a specific site or as an example of an endangered species. If possible, the replacement should keep this link by using a cutting or seed from the original tree or its source.

If losing the tree affects its cultural heritage significance, interpretation can help share its history and significance. For example, some of the wood could be used on-site as a bench. Any changes should be documented in records and updates to the heritage assessment.

Alternative approaches for identification and protection of significant trees

Trees which fall below the threshold for cultural heritage significance but are still important for other reasons, such as amenity, can be managed and protected by local governments within the planning management framework. Matters relevant to the retention of trees that can be addressed in the LPS are set out in the *Planning and Development Act 2005* Schedule 7, and include:

Preservation and conservation – the conservation of the natural environment of the scheme area including the protection of natural resources, the preservation of trees, vegetation and other flora and fauna, and the maintenance of ecological processes and genetic diversity.

Urban forest planning

Some local governments have created an Urban Forest Plan or Strategy to direct the management of their urban forest and retain canopy. This can include policy controls such as significant tree registers, tree preservation order and LPPs as well as ongoing activities that manage the environment.

The WA State Government has committed to developing the Perth and Peel Urban Greening Strategy which was published on 16 January 2026.

Significant Tree Registers

A significant tree register is a document that can be used by local governments to identify local trees worthy of protection under the LPS. Individual or groups of trees may be considered for inclusion on a significant tree register if they meet one or more criteria contributing to botanic, aesthetic, historic, scientific, or social significance. For example, a tree providing a natural habitat for local fauna may be included. Trees do not need to be of cultural heritage significance. The register includes the name, location, a description of each significant tree and the reason for its entry.

Anyone can nominate a tree, on private or public land, for inclusion on a significant tree register. A rigorous assessment process by the local government is completed before a tree is placed on the register, with consideration given to the level of significance, health and structure of the tree and any potential implications for private property owners. Arboriculture advice will be required to assess the significance and impact of works.

The identification of trees on a significant tree register allows them to be managed through specific local planning policies and/or development control provisions relating to tree preservation and removal.

Tree Preservation Order (TPO)

A TPO is a scheme mechanism that allows local governments to serve a notice requiring landholders to preserve a tree or group of trees that are included on a significant tree register. The notice prevents the removal, cutting, or destruction of any preserved tree without approval, or the revocation of the notice or order. To meet the criteria for a TPO, a tree must meet at least one significance criteria, usually specified in the LPP, including: heritage significance, aesthetic quality, species significance, and landmark or landscape significance. Trees meeting these criteria require assessment by a nominated expert to determine the condition of the tree and any existing or potential impacts.

LPPs for tree retention and preservation

LPPs provide guidance for landowners and sets the direction of the local government. For example, they could address the management of the local urban forest, preservation of significant trees on public and private land, or the retention of trees within the design of residential development. Provisions can include landscape zones, protection of trees as conditions of development, replacing trees that were removed and approvals required for tree removal.

The Western Australian Local Government Association has developed a model LPP for tree retention, which can be used by

local governments to encourage and facilitate the protection of trees, clarify when a development application is required for a tree damaging activity and prioritise the retention, protection and the provisions of trees on private land and adjacent reserves in the planning process.

Other legislation

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions manages the implementation and administration of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* and the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*. These Acts ensure endangered species and habitats are conserved.

The Office of the Environmental Protection Authority administers and operates the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*, which provides for the conservation, preservation, protection, enhancement and management of the environment.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* does not specifically refer to trees but describes an Aboriginal place as an area in which tangible elements of Aboriginal cultural heritage are present. This could include places such as Scar Trees.

Related Documents

The following documents relate to this guideline:

- Guidelines for the Assessment of Local Heritage Places 2022
- Local Heritage Survey Guideline 2019
- A Guide to Assessing Cultural Heritage Significance 2023



The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of land and waterways across Western Australia. The Department is committed to reconciliation to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to work together to provide a culturally-safe and inclusive environment.

Disclaimer

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Published by the
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491 Wellington Street
Perth WA 6000

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Published January 2026

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