

Grassy Plains Network

The Trustees,
Remembrance Parks Central Victoria
5 Victoria St, Eaglehawk VIC 3556

5 July 2023

Dear Trustees,

Re: Damage to Critically Endangered grassland at Donnybrook Cemetery

The Grassy Plains Network is an independent organisation representing land management professionals, academics, ecologists and community members concerned about the ongoing decline of grassy ecosystems across Melbourne and its surrounds. We advocate for improved grassland protection and management.

We are concerned that significant damage has been done to the Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain at Donnybrook Cemetery. This sort of clearing of native vegetation is illegal.

Victoria's grasslands are on the brink of extinction. Only one per cent of their original extent remains, and patches such as at Donnybrook Cemetery are among the best of those remaining. These are living museums of what our state used to be like, incredibly precious, and part of our national heritage.

Cemeteries are one of the last areas that high-quality remnant grassland can be found: land that has never been ploughed, and never been grazed by cattle or sheep. Some of the finest patches of grassland remaining are in pioneer cemeteries such as Truganina, Bannockburn, Rokewood and Donnybrook.

Donnybrook Cemetery is a unique place. The combination of plants there is unlike any other grassland. It is the connecting link between Kalkallo Common to the north and the Stony Rises to the south.

As Trustees, you have an important responsibility to ensure this national treasure is kept in good quality for future generations.

Sadly, the current management does not reflect that. The latest damage comes from trucks, but it is clear management has been poor for many years. A turning circle has been worn into the grassland, vegetation is being dumped, signage is absent, cars are parking on the grassland and there are no barriers (e.g. bollards) to prevent that, weeds are rife, and there is an urgent need for a burn to reduce biomass across the site.

As an immediate measure, all contractors and staff working on site should receive induction explaining the conservation significance of the grassland, and what actions to avoid and undertake. Contractor damage is too common. In February this year a contractor incident at Truganina Cemetery threatened the most important population of a Critically Endangered daisy (Button Wrinklewort) in Australia. Last year, at Sewells Road Grassland, fencing contractors for the adjacent developer almost destroyed a rare population of Pimelea – and the fines for that would have been very substantial.

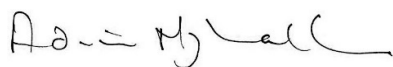
If properly managed, the cemetery's grassland could be a remarkable asset. Globally, there is a move towards cemeteries as places of biodiversity and experience of nature and life. GMCT has initiated a native grassland planting ('Project Cultivate') at Melbourne General Cemetery. The new sections of Faulkner Cemetery are similarly focussed on nature positive actions.

We urge you to commit to a path of action that delivers good management outcomes for the grassland at Donnybrook Cemetery. There are numerous options to weigh, including engaging experienced grassland contractors such as Merri Creek Management Committee, or allowing Hume City Council to take responsibility. Outcomes regarding Conservation Area 24 (as Donnybrook Cemetery is known) should be negotiated with the Melbourne Strategic Assessment team at DEECA.

We also urge you to review your practices at your other 10 memorial locations.

By acquiring Donnybrook Cemetery in October 2022, your organisation has been entrusted with the care of irreplaceable remnant grassland of national significance. Please respect the responsibilities that come with that, and ensure you take the necessary steps to ensure its good management into the future.

Sincerely,



Dr Adrian Marshall
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