Site 114. Clarence Rd Treed Paddock, Wantirna

A treed paddock at the western end of Clarence Rd, reserved for possible future use in an interchange between EastLink and the proposed Healesville Freeway.

Summary of significant features:

- Locally significant: a stand of large, old Mealy Stringybarks (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*) – a species that is endangered with dying out in Knox and that is recognised as providing good habitat for native birds, possums, invertebrates and probably bats;
- Locally significant: a small ecological stepping-stone for wildlife movements between the Bateman Street Bush (Site 49) and habitat to the north and northeast, e.g. Yarrabing Wetlands Reserve (Site 50).

Aerial photograph and plan: See page 350.

Boundaries

The site is outlined in magenta on the aerial photograph on page 350, unchanged from the previous (2010) edition of this report. It measures 0.62 ha. Two sides of the triangle are property boundaries; the third is a former property boundary that was marked by a fence at the times of the previous editions of this report (but no more).

Land use & tenure: Publicly owned land, set aside for a freeway interchange if the Healesville Freeway is built. Since the 2010 edition of this report, the southern end of the land has become used for growing-on of potted plants as part of the Plantmark business fronting Boronia Rd.

Site description

Since the 2010 edition of this report, this former grazing paddock's canopy of large, naturally occurring Mealy Stringybarks (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*) has reduced from approximately 0.37 ha to approximately 0.18 ha, i.e. half the canopy has been removed. The tree removal has fragmented the canopy but approximately 0.16 ha retains a natural canopy density. The trunk diameters of the surviving eucalypts are up to one metre, typically 60 cm. As a species, the Mealy Stringybark provides good wildlife habitat, being a high producer of carbohydrates and often with hollows (as in this case). Its dominance of the canopy in Site 114 is indicative of the regionally-endangered vegetation type, Valley Heathy Forest (as at the adjacent Bateman Street Bush, Site 49).

The original native understorey was almost entirely replaced by introduced plants during many years of grazing that ceased sometime since 2010. Some of the few indigenous understorey plant species that survived up to the previous botanical survey of the site in 2002 could not be seen in 2024 (but the land was only inspected from the fenceline in 2024).

Relationship to other land

The site represents a small supplementation of fauna habitat in the neighbouring Bateman Street Bush (Site 49) and a potential ecological stepping-stone for wildlife movements between there and habitat to the north and northeast, e.g. Yarrabing Wetlands Reserve (Site 50).

Bioregion: Gippsland Plain

Habitat type

Valley Heathy Forest (EVC 127, **regionally Endangered**), dominated by a pure stand of *Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*, with sparse cover of native grasses and very localised occurrence of the characteristic species, *Bursaria spinosa*.

Plant species

The following wild, indigenous plant species were observed by the author on 20th May 2002. Asterisks mark those also seen from the fenceline on 6th August 2024. Additional species might be detectable in other seasons. The column headed 'Risk' indicates the indigenous species' risk of dying out in Knox, with 'C'=Critically Endangered, 'E'=Endangered and 'V'=Vulnerable.

Risk	Species
	Acacia dealbata, Silver Wattle*
C	*Amyema pendula*, Drooping Mistletoe
	Austrostipa rudis subsp. *rudis*, Veined Spear-grass
	Bursaria spinosa, Sweet Bursaria
V	*Epilobium billardiereanum* subsp. *cinereum*, Variable Willow-herb
	Epilobium hirtigerum, Hairy Willow-herb*
E	*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*, Mealy Stringybark*
C	*Gahnia radula*, Thatch Saw-sedge
	Juncus amabilis, Hollow Rush
	Lomandra filiformis subsp. *coriacea*, Wattle Mat-rush
	Microlaena stipoides, Weeping Grass

Flora and fauna of special significance

None detected.

Fauna habitat features

The large Mealy Stringybarks are good habitat trees for native birds, possums, invertebrates and probably bats.

Significance rating

The following is an assessment of the site's biological significance against the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action's standard criteria (Amos 2004).

Ecological Integrity and Viability

The site's tree canopy represents a small ecological link for local-scale movements of native fauna between the Bateman Street Bush (Site 49) and habitat to the north and northeast, e.g. Yarrabing Wetlands Reserve (Site 50). Criterion 1.2.6 assigns **Local** significance to habitat links like this that can be described as 'Important at local Scale – Link between individual remnant habitat blocks or within subcatchment'.

Regionally Threatened Vegetation Types

Hardly any of the site has a native understorey cover of 10% or more, which means the standard criteria do not recognise any significance for the presence of the regionally-endangered EVC, Valley Heathy Forest.

Locally-threatened plant species

Eucalyptus cephalocarpa is locally threatened and the site has a viable population of this species, thereby meeting criterion 3.1.5 for **Local** significance.

Threats

- Continued removal of native vegetation and its replacement with infrastructure for the Plantmark nursery;
- Removal and suppression of native understorey (e.g. Sweet Bursaria) by the regular slashing that is occurring;
- Ongoing eucalypt deaths and debilitation, with possible causes including: (a) the water runoff from the Plantmark nursery; (b) worsening droughts associated with climate change; and (c) worsening storms associated with climate change;
- Road construction, in the event that a decision is taken to build the Healesville Freeway.

Strategic planning

- As a result of the previous edition of this report, this site is covered by Schedule 4 of the Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO4). That edition cited the local biological significance and the recommendation in the 'VPP Practice Note on Biodiversity' to apply the VPO to 'scattered living food trees with an exotic understorey'. Since that edition, the eucalypt canopy has halved in area but the local significance remains and the site still contains 'scattered living food trees with an exotic understorey'. The loss of so many eucalypts since 2010 might be taken to indicate that either VPO4 is ineffectual or the level of planning protection should increase. The present author is unaware of the circumstances that led to the removal, so no recommendation is made here for change to VPO4;
- The site is part of a property larger than 0.4 ha and is therefore ineligible for the size-based exemption from the state-wide baseline planning controls over removal of native vegetation (clause 52.17);
- The planning scheme zoning is Transport Zone 2 – Principal Road Network (TRZ2).

Information sources used in this assessment

- Botanical surveys of the property by Dr Lorimer on 14/6/02 and Rik Brown on 20/5/02, for the first edition of this report. This included:
  - Compilation of lists of indigenous and introduced plants;
  - A description of the vegetation's structural and floristic composition and ecological condition;
  - Incidental fauna observations; and
  - Checks for fauna habitat, ecological threats and management issues;
- An inspection by Dr Lorimer from outside the fence on 6th August 2024 for this edition;
- A search for flora and fauna observations stored in the Atlas of Living Australia (of which there were none from this site);
- Aerial and satellite imagery from between 1946 and 2025;
- The Victorian Government's 'NatureKit' website;
- Maps of geology, topography and strategic planning information produced by agencies of the Victorian Government.