

## Site 37. Pickett Reserve, Ferntree Gully

A sports reserve located at the northwestern corner of Burwood Hwy and Commercial Rd.

Summary of significant features:

- Locally significant: viable populations of plant species threatened with dying out in Knox;
- Remnants of a regionally endangered Ecological Vegetation Class (Valley Heathy Forest) in poor ecological condition due to previous clearing and mowing, plus extensive revegetation.



### Boundaries

This 2.8-hectare site is outlined with blue dashes above. It includes most of Pickett Reserve as well as a narrow triangle of road verge abutting the reserve's southern boundary, next to the Burwood Hwy traffic lights. Compared with the previous (2010) edition of this report, two lots fronting Mossfield Avenue have been excised from the site due to loss of eucalypts there. The oval, buildings and some of the car parking areas are of no environmental significance but are included in the site because activities in these areas can affect the significant

vegetation, and because of desirability of aligning site boundaries with cadastral boundaries. The triangular extension southwards from the reserve's cadastral boundary, near the traffic lights, is intended to include all the native vegetation between the reserve boundary and the footpath.

**Land use & tenure:** Council reserve mainly utilised for sporting activities, with some buildings and car parks. The smaller lot fronting Mossfield Av provides a treed car park for the adjoining gymnastics stadium. The narrow triangle at the southern tip of the site is formally part of the road network but it functions as part of the reserve.

### Site description

Pickett Reserve is on the upper slope of a broad, low ridge, which is oriented roughly northwest to southeast. The natural surface of the ground has a shallow slope facing generally southwest. Earthworks have provided a level surface for the oval, leaving batters to the northeast and southwest. The site's elevation range is approximately 110–115 m. The soil is shallow, clay loam over clay subsoil, derived from weathering of the underlying Lower Devonian siltstone of the Humevale formation.

The aerial photograph above shows a fair cover of remnant eucalypts around the fringe of the reserve. Some of the eucalypts are large.

The most significant vegetation is the treed expanse of approximately 75 m × 25 m adjoining in the site's southeast corner. This includes the triangle that extends into the road reservation, which is occupied by a batter descending to the Burwood Hwy footpath; the rest of this area is at the natural soil level. As well as the full canopy of remnant eucalypts, there are two Golden Wattles (*Acacia pycnantha*), a few Yarra Burgan (*Kunzea leptospermoides*), groundcover dominated by indigenous grassy species, and small numbers of indigenous forbs, namely onion-orchids, Small Poranthera (*Poranthera microphylla*), wood-sorrel (*Oxalis exilis/perennans*) and Variable Stinkweed (*Opercularia varia*).

The batter on the southwestern side of the oval contains one or two Blackwood trees (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and no other indigenous understorey. The lot fronting Mossfield Av has no indigenous understorey at all but there is a tiny cluster of Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) and Thatch Saw-sedge (*Gahnia radula*) 6 m to the east. There are a few more Sweet Bursaria plants along the reserve's northern boundary, along with extensive young revegetation beneath a full canopy of remnant eucalypts. The revegetation and remnant eucalypts continue along the reserve's eastern fringe. That takes us back to the reserve's southeast corner.

### Relationship to other land

Remnant vegetation within Pickett Reserve is rather isolated from other native vegetation. Some remnant trees occur in residential properties to the north and east.

**Bioregion:** Gippsland Plain

### Habitat type

Valley Heathy Forest (EVC 127, **regionally Endangered**): Estimated to occupy 0.7 ha, comprising c. 300 m<sup>2</sup> in ecological condition C (fair) at the site's southern tip and the rest in ecological condition D (poor).

Canopy trees: Dominated by *Eucalyptus cephalocarpa* and *E. goniocalyx*, followed by scattered *E. melliodora* and very few *E. radiata*.

Sub-canopy trees: A few scattered specimens of *Acacia melanoxylon*, *A. mearnsii* and *Exocarpos cupressiformis*.

Shrubs: A few *Bursaria spinosa* and *Kunzea leptospermoides*.

Vines and ferns: Absent.

Groundcover: Very scarce except for the southeast corner, where dominated by *Microlaena stipoides* and *Rytidosperma racemosum*. See above and below for the other groundcover species.

### Plant species

The following list contains the species of wild, indigenous plants observed by the author in July 2024, except that the three with asterisks were last recorded on 24th May 2002 in a survey for the first edition of this report. The column headed 'Risk' indicates the indigenous species' risk of dying out in Knox, with 'C'=Critically endangered, 'E'=Endangered and 'V'=Vulnerable. Additional species would be detectable in spring or early summer.

Risk	Wild indigenous species	Risk	Wild indigenous species
V	<i>Acacia mearnsii</i> , Black Wattle		<i>Kunzea leptospermoides</i> , Yarra Burgan
V	<i>Acacia melanoxylon</i> , Blackwood		<i>Lomandra filiformis</i> subsp. <i>filiformis</i> , Wattle Mat-rush
V	<i>Acacia pycnantha</i> , Golden Wattle		<i>Lomandra longifolia</i> subsp. <i>longifolia</i> , Spiny-headed Mat-rush
	<i>Austrostipa rudis</i> subsp. <i>rudis</i> , Veined Spear-grass		<i>Microlaena stipoides</i> , Weeping Grass
	<i>Bursaria spinosa</i> , Sweet Bursaria	V	<i>Microtis ?parviflora</i> , Slender Onion-orchid
	<i>Dichondra repens</i> , Kidney-weed*	V	<i>Opercularia varia</i> , Variable Stinkweed
E	<i>Eucalyptus cephalocarpa</i> , Mealy Stringybark		<i>Oxalis exilis/perennans</i> , Wood-sorrel
V	<i>Eucalyptus goniocalyx</i> , Bundy	E	<i>Plantago varia</i> , Variable Plantain*
E	<i>Eucalyptus melliodora</i> , Yellow Box		<i>Poranthera microphylla</i> , Small Poranthera
E	<i>Eucalyptus radiata</i> , Narrow-leaved Peppermint	E	<i>Rytidosperma pallidum</i> , Red-anther (or Silvertop) Wallaby-grass*
V	<i>Exocarpos cupressiformis</i> , Cherry Ballart		<i>Rytidosperma racemosum</i> , Clustered Wallaby-grass
C	<i>Gahnia radula</i> , Thatch Saw-sedge		
	<i>Juncus pallidus</i> , Pale Rush		

### Fauna of special significance

None recorded.

### Fauna habitat features

The remnant indigenous trees provide suitable habitat for urban-adapted fauna, including birds, possums, invertebrates and perhaps tree frogs. The largest trees are most important, in that respect.

### Significance ratings

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

#### *Regionally Endangered Ecological Vegetation Class*

The reserve's native vegetation belongs to a regionally-endangered EVC – Valley Heathy Forest. However, none of it meets the definition of a 'remnant patch' adopted by the standard criteria, i.e. a continuous area of at least 0.25 ha with at least 10% native understorey cover throughout. The standard criteria only recognise occurrences of regionally-endangered EVCs if they are 'remnant patches' (see criterion 3.2.3). Otherwise, it would seem reasonable to recognise Pickett Reserve's Valley Heathy Forest as being locally significant.

#### *Locally-threatened plant species*

Some of the surviving locally-threatened plant species listed above have viable populations, thereby meeting criterion 3.1.5 for **Local** significance.

### Threats

- Human-induced climate change, which is predicted to cause more severe droughts, heatwaves and storms, as well as substantially lower rainfall (particularly in winter);
- Decline of eucalypt health. Eucalypts are quite vulnerable to the abovementioned droughts and storms and also vulnerable to soil compaction from vehicles in the car parks;
- Lack of recruitment of indigenous vegetation because of mowing;
- Loss or decline of plant species whose populations are so small that they are vulnerable to inbreeding, poor reproductive success or elimination by incidents such as digging by dogs;
- Potentially, removal of remnant vegetation to allow future expansion of recreational facilities.

### Strategic planning

- This site is covered by Schedule 2 of the Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO2) as a result of the second edition of this report in 2010, which cited the presence of the regionally-endangered EVC. The main ecological changes since then are the loss of a small number of eucalypts and the planting of many indigenous species along the northern fringe and east of the oval. There is little need to change the application of ESO2 to the site

but it would be appropriate to amend the Mossfield Avenue boundary to match the site recognised here. The reserve's low biological significance also opens the possibility of removing ESO2 altogether;

- If ESO2 were to be removed, the state-wide baseline planning controls over removal of native vegetation (clause 52.17) would continue to provide a rudimentary level of planning protection;
- The reserve is zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ). The narrow triangle at the southern tip of the site is zoned 'Transport Zone 2 – Principal Road Network' (TRZ2).

#### **Information sources used in this assessment**

- An ecological survey by Rik Brown on 24/5/02 for the first edition of this report. This included a description of the composition and condition of the vegetation, compilation of lists of indigenous and introduced plant species, incidental fauna observations, and checks for fauna habitat, ecological threats, management issues and populations of scarce or threatened plant species;
- An inspection and botanical survey of the reserve by Dr Lorimer on 24th July 2024 for this report;
- Records of flora and fauna observations stored in the Atlas of Living Australia, except that the only records found were of Spotted Dove and Rainbow Lorikeet;
- Aerial and satellite imagery from between 1976 and 2025;
- The Victorian Government's 'NatureKit' website;
- Maps of geology, topography and strategic planning information produced by agencies of the Victorian Government.