

MEDIA RELEASE

13th of October 2011

Newcastle's weeping figs on death row!

The National Trust is formally objecting to the planned destruction of 14 heritage listed fig trees at Laman Street in Cooks Hill, Newcastle.

National Trust CEO Will Holmes à Court has written to the New South Wales Minister for Environment and Heritage, Robyn Parker, to express the Trust's serious concerns about the council's decision to remove the iconic trees.

The Trust is urging the Minister to consider making an emergency order through the Heritage Act to provide immediate protection for the trees.

The Trust's Advocacy Manager, Graham Quint, says the Trust has a long interest in both the trees and the heritage significance of the area, listing the City Hall Group (which includes the trees) in 1981.

"The Cooks Hills Weeping Fig Trees have landmark significance and are a vital landscape feature of Laman Street and Civic Park. Like Sydney's Hyde Park figs, they are a much loved avenue of trees that could not be replaced to their present stature in our lifetime."

"Newcastle City Council is arguing that the trees are unsafe to traffic, but independent arboriculturalist reports contradict this view. In any event, there is a proposal by the Council to close this area off to traffic on a permanent basis."

"Mature trees such as those in Laman Street are highly valued for their landscape, botanical and nature conservation significance and for the shade that they provide on a hot summer's day. Replacement trees will take decades to grow anywhere near the height and size of the existing eighty year old trees."

The Trust has deep concerns that the tree removal is being undertaken under the provisions of the Roads Act on the grounds that they allegedly present a traffic hazard.

Newcastle City Council applied last year for federal funding for "an Anzac Centenary Place" which proposed a reduction and possible removal of all vehicle traffic in that part of Laman Street.

The Trust supports the introduction of a private member's bill to ensure that councils cannot misuse the Roads Act, as appears to be occurring in Newcastle.

Media Enquiries:

Amelia Frelander – Media and Communications Officer

Ph: 02 9258 0131 Mob: 0402 623 462 Email: afrelander@nationaltrust.com.au