

Avenue of Honour, Hamilton Highway, Mortlake (VHR H2342)

Q and As P31655

Background

The Avenue of Honour, Mortlake is included in the Victoria Heritage Register (VHR). It is an avenue consisting of Monterey Cypress (*Hesperocyparis macrocarpa* formerly known as *Cupressus macrocarpa*) trees. Planted on the Hamilton Highway, the avenue begins at the Ararat-Mortlake Road, to the north-east of the township of Mortlake, and runs approximately 2.2 kilometres to Cemetery Lane. The Avenue of Honour is historically significant for exemplifying rural Victoria's reaction to both World War I and II. The Avenue of Honour is aesthetically significant as an outstanding planting of Monterey Cypress which is highly distinctive as a commemorative planting.

What has happened?

On 28 October 2021, Heritage Victoria received a permit application for the proposed staged removal of all Monterey Cypress trees and staged replacement with Holm Oak trees.

The Monterey Cypress trees in the avenue are close to the end of their life. There have been significant tree losses in recent years because of tree maturity and condition, as well as damage through the disease Cypress Canker. More recently several trees have been lost to storm damage. Further tree losses will occur, ultimately resulting in loss of the entire Avenue. The permit application was placed on public notice pursuant to s94 of the Heritage Act 2017 from 9 February to 23 February 2022. No public submissions were received.

On 27 May 2022, a permit was issued by Heritage Victoria for the staged removal of all remaining Monterey Cypress (*Hesperocyparis macrocarpa*) trees (approximately 137) forming the Mortlake Avenue of Honour and replacement with Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*) (approximately 198) for the following reasons:

- The tree removal and replacement work proposed in this permit are essential for the ongoing protection and conservation of the place.
- The Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) is an appropriate selection for the heritage landscape, and once established will be able to meaningfully contribute to both the aesthetic and historic values of the place well into the future.
- While there will be harm to the aesthetic and historic values of the place in the loss of original Monterey Cypress plantings, these values will be reinstated over time by the Holm oak replacements.
- An interpretation strategy, required in the conditions of the permit, will ensure that the heritage values associated with the place are adequately communicated onsite, including the date and reasons for the species change.

Heritage Victoria approved a tree species change due to the significant impacts of Cypress Canker on the Avenue of Honour and the broader region. Block replacement in stages is proposed, as is best practice for removing and replacing Avenue plantings. The replacement species of Holm Oak is an evergreen oak tree native to the Mediterranean region with dark foliage. It grows well in the area and is known to have been available historically at the time of the Avenue's planting.