

DCC listed ash tree submission, August 2025

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this Plan Change Hearing.

My name is Sue Michelsen-Heath. My husband Tim Heath and I own a 2-hectare property near Osborne, overlooking Purakaunui Inlet. The original part of our house was built in 1869 when a dairy farm was established on the land by the Foote family. The property now has many large, mature and beautiful trees planted during the 1870s by the Footes, including a group of 25-metre-high ash trees, which were much later added to the DCC's register of significant trees.

Our background and philosophy

We agree with the principles and intent of the Protected tree schedule within the District Plan. Tim is both a registered architect and a trained landscape architect, and I have degrees in Zoology and Wildlife Management. We love trees and we have planted many, now mature, native and exotic trees on the property since moving there 32 years ago. The beautiful tree-setting of our property was the prime reason for our purchase.

Details of our listed trees

- The five ash trees recorded on our property were planted over 125 years ago, and are probably closer to 140 years old. None of these trees has ever received care from anyone with skilled knowledge of arboriculture - primarily because they are now registered as significant trees and we cannot fell, trim or manage them ourselves under the restrictions of the plan.
- The trees are now misshapen, over-mature, with brittle branches which frequently fall in high winds, or when foliage is water-laden after rain. The smallest of the trees is now completely dead but still overhanging our drive. A second tree from the original group of 5 fell across our driveway during last year's storms. At nearly a metre in diameter, the trunk took several days to cut through to allow access to and from our house. In an emergency this could have prohibited access for rescue vehicles, or for us to make the 25 km journey into Dunedin. With climate change, such incidents are occurring more frequently given the age and condition of the trees. After every strong wind we retrieve many large ~300mm diameter fallen limbs, many of which are spear-headed into the lawn after their fall from the ash trees. The tallest branches of the remaining ash trees, if they fell, are long enough to potentially damage our veranda or one side of our house.
- We consider that these ash trees are over-mature and dangerous. They are no longer good specimens of their species. We have other fully mature and beautiful trees on the property which are unlisted, such as fully mature native red and mountain beech, a mature exotic copper beech and more than a dozen very large Pohutukawa, many of which we have planted. In themselves, these have high landscape value, and we are maintaining these conscientiously. We understand that our concerns and sentiments about the condition of the listed ash trees were shared by Luke McAllister (DCC landscape architect) and Mark Roberts (consultant arborist), when they visited the property and made an assessment of the trees in June of this year.

In summary

For the above reasons, we respectfully request that all remaining trees be removed from the DCC's schedule of listed trees.

