

**Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) Draft 2026 Community Local Laws submission**  
**March 2026**

In April 2025, YCAN made a variety of suggestions and comments to the YourSayYarra consultation on the review of the Local Laws.

We commented on four sections relevant to our aims of working for a safe climate and sustainable future by promoting, protecting and monitoring effective climate and environmental action – viz:

- 2.1 Significant Trees**
- 2.2 Open air burning**
- 4.1 Noisy vehicles**
- 5 Animals**

This submission re-iterates and expands on our suggestions/comments. We're disappointed that the new draft leaves the content basically unchanged. We had hoped that the updated laws would strengthen steps towards a safer healthier greener Yarra, as reflected in the 2025-2029 Municipal Plan and other Plans.

**2.1 Significant trees and/or canopy trees**

Currently Yarra's regulations about protecting trees are confusing and contradictory. The review of the Local Laws provides an opportunity to remove contradictions and clarify Council's vital role in protecting trees. This Draft fails to do this.

The Draft Local Law refers to 'significant trees', and 'trees on the significant tree register' – with different definitions. The Planning Laws refer to 'canopy trees' with a different definition again. The significant tree definition refers to trunk diameter, whereas the Planning Law definition refers to trunk circumference - surely more practical as it can be easily measured.

YCAN suggests a different structure for this section – hereunder we set out our suggestion:

1. *Why Council protects trees*
2. *Which trees does Council protect through regulation/law?*
3. *How does Council protect trees on public and private property?*

*1. Why Council protects trees*

*Trees offer us many benefits. They reduce carbon emissions and air pollution. They provide shade, reducing air conditioning demand. They provide habitats for urban wildlife and increase biodiversity. Exposure to green spaces reduces stress, anxiety, and blood pressure. Improved air quality reduces respiratory issues, while shade lowers risks of heat-related illness. Trees reduce stormwater runoff and soil erosion, provide privacy and sound barriers and increase property values.*

*2. Which trees does Council protect through regulation/law?*

*a. Significant trees*

*These are listed in Council's significant tree register. They are identified as 'significant' because of their impressive size, age, rarity, ecological value, or cultural and historical significance. They can be on private property or public land. There are currently 191 trees on the register in Yarra.*

*b. Canopy trees*

*Canopy trees are defined as per Yarra's Planning Scheme (Sect 52.37-1 of Amendment VC289).*

*Canopy trees have:*

- *A trunk circumference of 50 cm or more, measured at 1.4 m above ground level; and*
- *A height of more than 5m above ground level; and*
- *A canopy diameter of at least 4 metres.*

*If the tree has multiple stems, the circumference is the total of the stems measured at 1.4 m above ground level.*

*3. How does Council protect trees on public and private property?*

*As per the Draft Plan*

## **2.2 Open air burning**

YCAN proposes the Local Law bans the use of solid fuel, wood and other substances for fires whether for cooking or other purposes such as heating both outside and inside buildings. Emissions from internal burning of solid fuels and wood are not contained within a building and immediately become a health hazard in the neighbourhood atmosphere.

There is overwhelming evidence of the [negative health impacts](#) associated with breathing in wood smoke, and that there is no safe level of exposure to wood smoke. The health cost of wood heater smoke in Victoria alone is [estimated as \\$8 billion](#) over the next decade, while the annual cost Australia-wide is estimated at [\\$3.4 billion](#) per year or \$4000 - \$5600 per wood heater per year. Yarra City Council is well aware of this evidence, and its website currently includes advice and information to this effect. <https://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/about-us/council-mayor-and-councillors/governance/local-laws>

The ACT is the first Australian Government to start phasing out wood heaters by banning installation of new wood heaters, and offering financial incentives to remove existing wood heaters <https://www.climatechoices.act.gov.au/energy/wood-fuel>

YCAN proposes that Yarra follow this example to protect the environment and our health. If not feasible to include in the 2026 Local Law review, we urge Yarra to work towards phasing out wood heaters, including collaboration with other councils and advocacy to the Victorian Government.

## **4.1 Noisy vehicles**

The Draft Local Law 2026 states that: *A person must not leave the engine of a heavy motor vehicle running while the heavy motor vehicle is stationary, except ...*

YCAN proposes that the idling of **all internal combustion engine vehicles** should be recognised, not just heavy vehicles. While heavy vehicle idling is the worst, the noise from the idling of all fossil fuel vehicles is annoying, intrusive and generally unnecessary.

Furthermore, YCAN contends that the Local Law should be widened to recognise the nuisance/health impacts from the [emissions](#) generated by stationary, internal combustion engine vehicles, not just the noise pollution.

Exposure to traffic-related emissions has been shown to significantly increase childhood asthma incidence and prevalence. Young children are most at risk outside schools and childcare centres due to their proximity to idling vehicles.

Two national groups, Doctors for the Environment and Parents for Climate, have recently launched *Idle Off*, a public awareness campaign aimed at changing vehicle idling behaviours. The campaign calls for potential health impacts to be part of the decision-making process for [heavy vehicle laws](#), noting it has been overlooked in policy debate to date. Other recommendations include moving trucks away from residential areas, schools and childcare centres, moving freight on to rail, and accelerating the shift to electric and cleaner trucks and buses.

If it is not feasible to address emissions impacts in the current Local Law review, YCAN urges Yarra Council to actively support the *Idle Off* campaign, including collaboration with other councils and advocacy to the Victorian and Federal Governments.

### **5.1 Keeping of Animals and Birds**

YCAN strongly supported Yarra's introduction of a 7 pm – 7 am cat curfew from January 2024.

It is unclear to us why the Draft 2026 Local Laws don't include reference to the curfew. Is the curfew codified elsewhere in Yarra's laws?

We again submit that the curfew should be extended to a 24-hour curfew - confining pet cats at all times to the owner's property. This recommendation is in line with Zoos Victoria's support for 'Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife' program ([www.safecat.org.au](http://www.safecat.org.au)). Over one-third of Victorian LGAs have already introduced an overnight curfew and 10 have introduced a 24/7 curfew to protect cats and reduce impacts on wildlife. A good example is City of Whittlesea, which developed the following educational material to support cat owners as part of the introduction:

<https://engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/catmanagement/catfaqs>

Thank you for the opportunity to Have Our Say.  
We look forward to your response.

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