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Dear Michele

RE: APPLICATION TO LIST EUCALYPTUS OLEOSA AT THE AUSTRALIAN INLAND BOTANIC GARDENS AS AN ITEM OF ENVIRONMENTAL HERITAGE

As instructed, I have reviewed the application that has been prepared by Victor Eddy to list an eucalyptus oleosa tree known as the 'Wow Tree' located at the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens as an item of environmental heritage in *Wentworth Local Environmental Plan 2011*. I have also reviewed the draft planning proposal prepared by Cadell Consulting to amend the planning scheme.

Qualifications

I am a human geographer and town planner with over 30 years' experience including recognised expertise in heritage conservation and management. I established and managed the heritage conservation program at Eurobodalla Shire Council in 1998 and have prepared many heritage impact statements, assessments of heritage value and conservation management plans as a consultant. I have degrees in the social sciences and planning and attended the Heritage Planning in Practice short course run by the NSW Heritage Office in the year 2000. In my practice as a heritage consultant, I am qualified to carry out a peer review of the assessment of the heritage values of the Wow Tree prepared by Victor Eddy.

Statement

The application prepared by Victor Eddy is comprehensive and demonstrates that the significance of the Wow Tree satisfies the criteria for assessing heritage significance as contained in guideline *Assessing heritage significance* published by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment dated May 2023. These criteria and a response are given below.

Criterion (a) Historic significance - An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

The Wow Tree is the longest surviving example of the species *Eucalyptus oleosa*. This species is also known as the water mallee. It occupies an important place in both the cultural and natural history of NSW, given its significance in the spiritual life of the Indigenous tribes of western NSW including the Barkindji nation that occupied the Wentworth district. The species possesses symbolic meaning to the local Indigenous community and was a key part of traditional and religious life. It was regarded by Indigenous peoples as having spiritual properties in returning the rains to drought-ridden areas and the roots of the tree were a source of water during dry times.

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Criterion (b) Historical association – An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

The Wow Tree has special significance to the Indigenous inhabitants of the Wentworth district who have occupied the Australian continent for around 60,000 years. Ancient communities had the capacity to live and adapt to the natural environment. They lived close to nature and used the roots of the species *Eucalyptus oleosa* to obtain water.

The tree also has a special association with the life and works of 19th century ecologists and explorers of the Australian continent, including Edward Eyre, Ernest Giles, Richard Kimber and James Noble, who witnessed the use of the roots of the species by Indigenous peoples as a source of water.

Criterion (c) Aesthetic/creative/technical achievement – An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area).

The Wow Tree demonstrates aesthetic characteristics that contribute to the scenic qualities of the semi-arid landscape of the Wentworth district. It is a landmark tree and representative of a landscape that has been largely cleared and modified for European agricultural pursuits.

Criterion (d) Social, cultural and spiritual – An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural, or spiritual reasons.

The *Eucalyptus oleosa*, of which the Wow Tree is the longest surviving example, has a special association with the Barkindji people who were the early inhabitants of the area and whose descendants still remain in and around the Murray River region. The species possesses symbolic meaning to the Barkindji and was sacred due to its life-giving properties as a source of water.

Criterion (e) Research potential – An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

The characteristics of the Wow Tree yield important information that enables an understanding of the natural and cultural history of NSW. As the oldest example of the species, it remains a benchmark or reference for the natural landscape that existed before European settlement in the district. Being located at the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens enables visitors to gain knowledge and an understanding of the importance of the species to the Indigenous people and of the characteristics of the landscape before settlement.

Criterion (f) Rare – An item possesses uncommon, rare, or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).

Over 35% of the *Eucalyptus oleosa* species has been cleared in NSW. The species is not considered uncommon or rare and is not listed as critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable in the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. However, the Wow Tree is rare in terms of its age which is estimated to be 2,500 years.

Criterion (g) Representative - An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments (or a class of the local area's cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments).

The Wow Tree is a stand-alone indicator of the ability of the species *Eucalyptus oleosa* to withstand natural disasters including bushfires and prolonged drought and more recently human-induced climate change. It is a representative example of the type of vegetation that has thrived and survived over thousands of years in a semi-arid landscape.

In summary, the application to list an *eucalyptus oleosa* tree known as the Wow Tree as an item of environmental heritage is supported. The assessment and *Statement of Significance* adequately demonstrate that the Wow Tree is of local heritage significance within Wentworth local government area. The Wow Tree is deemed to be of cultural significance due to its setting, associations and meanings and is particularly representative in terms of historic, social and spiritual values to past, present and future generations of the Indigenous Barkindji people.

It is recommended that the planning proposal to list the Wow Tree as an item of environmental heritage in *Wentworth LEP 2011* proceed.

Yours sincerely,



Allen Grimwood BA(Hons), MURP, RPIA
Director