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## Residents Decry 'Ham-Fisted' Tree Removal as Elsternwick Golf Course Becomes Nature Reserve

July 27, 2025

— Categories: General News



The transformation of Elsternwick Park's former golf course into the Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve (YWNR) has sparked outrage among residents over Bayside City Council's (BCC) heavy-handed tree and log removals, threatening wildlife habitats. While the \$22 million project aims to create a biodiverse wetland, community clashes highlight mismanagement concerns. This article explores the tensions, the reserve's vision, and the need for better oversight.

Since the Elsternwick golf course closed in 2018, BCC has worked to convert the 13-hectare site into a nature reserve featuring wetlands, woodlands, and a "chain of ponds"

to boost biodiversity and mitigate flooding in the Elster Creek catchment (The Age, 2025). However, disputes have erupted over BCC's methods. In January 2025, plans to remove logs prompted Yalukit Willam Nature Association (YWNA) volunteers to chain themselves to them, fearing habitat loss for native species like parrots and frogs (The Age, 2025). More recently, the council's early morning removal of rocks, vital for frog habitats, was labeled "ham-fisted" by YWNA member Burns, who noted, "A little trust has been burnt" (The Age, 2025). The rocks were later returned after treatment, but tensions persist.

YWNA president Gio Fitzpatrick criticized BCC's use of a geosynthetic liner for the wetland, arguing it's unnatural and risks flooding (The Age, 2025). Mayor Hanna El Mouallem defended the liner as "non-negotiable" per Melbourne Water's standards, dismissing volunteer concerns as misinformation (The Age, 2025). Yet, El Mouallem was the sole vote against a \$4 million wetland contract, citing community unrest (The Age, 2025). Locals, passionate about the reserve's 400+ bird species, feel sidelined, with one resident telling ABC News, "This place is a sanctuary, but the council's bulldozing our trust" (ABC News, 2025).

The project, backed by McGregor Coxall and the Boon Wurrung Foundation, aims to restore pre-colonial wetlands and honor Indigenous heritage (McGregor Coxall, 2025). Yet, BCC's top-down approach risks alienating the community and undermining ecological goals. As urban green spaces become vital, transparent collaboration is essential to balance conservation with community trust.