

# The West Australian

Environment Local Government WA News

EXCLUSIVE

## WALGA boss Karen Chappel slams attempts to withhold vital biosecurity information on the invasive borer



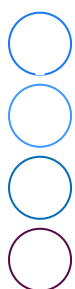
**Caitlyn Rintoul** The West Australian

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Caitlyn Rintoul



Any attempt to withhold vital information on the invasive polyphagous shot-hole borer causing chaos in Perth has been described as “unacceptable” by the WA local governments boss Karen Chappel. Credit: Daniel Wilkins/The West Australian



Any attempt to withhold vital information on the invasive polyphagous shot-hole borer causing chaos in Perth has been described as “unacceptable” by local governments boss Karen Chappel.

Her call comes after The West Australian revealed a gag order had been circulated through local governments mid-last year denying access to “maps, plans, diagrams, data, technical information, and analysis” unless signed.

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's ultimatum had left many seeking legal advice and questioning why the important information isn't readily accessible.

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"Any attempt to withhold this information is unacceptable," Ms Chappel said.

"WALGA understands that DPIRD can share information with other Government Departments, therefore Local Government, as a key part of the response, should automatically be provided with the same information as a matter of urgency."

The tiny Southeast Asian beetle has led to the destruction of more than 4000 WA trees since its August 2021 detection in an East Fremantle backyard.

Ms Chappel – who oversees 139 councils – said more than half of the local government's in biosecurity quarantine area covering the Perth metro area had already signed.



ENVIRONMENT

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Caitlyn Rintoul



WA 



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Caitlyn Rintoul

Those lagging to sign a "PSHB Confidentiality Deed Poll" were resent requests earlier this month.

The follow up request to councils included a "frequently asked questions" page which stated the deed was designed to "safeguard" sensitive information from "misuse which could potentially damage community relations".

The confidentiality agreement stated that councils must not make a "public statement, press release or other communication" containing information deemed

confidential by the agency.

“We need to act fast to help stop the spread of the Borer,” Ms Chappel said.



ENVIRONMENT

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Claire Sadler



“In order for Local Governments to act they need the most up-to-date information about the location of infected trees.

“If we catch PSHB early, we can potentially save the tree and reduce the overall impact of this pest on our ever-dwindling urban tree canopy.”

WA shadow environment minister Neil Thomson slammed the gag orders saying transparency should be a priority amid the serious biosecurity threat to Australia.

“It seems outrageous that a State Government entity would require a non-disclosure agreement by a local authority on an issue like this because the only way we are going to combat the spread is through transparent sharing of information,” the Mining and Pastoral Region MP said.

“We cannot control the polyphagous shot-hole borer without absolute transparency.

“This gives the impression that the State Government is trying to suppress important information on the polyphagous shot-hole borer in the lead up to the State Election in March.

“As a principle I very much disagree with the concept.

“The more communication a community has the better, as it’s the only way we can combat this COVID for trees.”



📷 Mr Thomson also questioned Minister Reece Whitby’s (pictured) \$150 “treebates” announced last week for residents to help Perth’s dismal tree-canopy. Credit: Daniel Wilkins/The West Australian

Mr Thomson also questioned Minister Reece Whitby’s \$150 “treebates” announced last week for residents to help Perth’s dismal tree-canopy.

“It’s a pathetic gimmick. The money would have been better spent on supporting (tree) nurseries which is a sector now struggling with demand from the polyphagous

shot-hole borer,” he said.

“There’s no accountability. How are they going to manage it?”

City of Vincent chief executive officer David MacLennan revealed the inner-city council which covers heavily-impacted Hyde Park was among those who had signed the deed.



STATE ELECTION



## West Aussies to receive \$150 to plant trees in their yards

Dylan Caporn

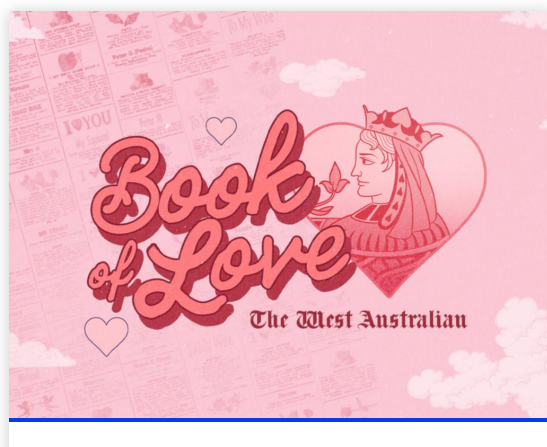
“This will allow us to better understand the hotspot areas of Vincent that have been impacted by PSHB and how we can address and manage the issue,” he said.

“By obtaining heatmaps and information from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, it will assist our Parks team to focus on inspecting public tree canopy in our streets and parks around private properties which have infested trees.

“This will also enable us to be proactive in the early detection of the borer and seek treatment to help stop the spread.”

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