

Public Question Time – Answers to questions taken on notice*

1. Can Council advise what it regards as a “sustainable” number of possums in the Catani Gardens, how is this number determined and on what basis are those individual animals deemed as surplus selected for destruction? (Why does Council think possum numbers need controlling since they managed not to over populate the Gardens in the past 50 years and have maintained sustainable numbers by themselves?)

(Julianne Bell)

2. Under Council’s “management plan” who removes possums from the Catani Gardens for destruction? Are they licensed animal handlers and/or licensed pest exterminators and/or are veterinarians employed?

(Julianne Bell)

3. The previous Council’s justification for the possum management plan was an erroneous and ridiculous belief that possums were “eating palm fronds” and so damaging the trees. Why is this program being continued, given that possums have been completely excluded from all palms since November 2007?

(Jill Quirk)

4. Promises were made by successful council candidates prior to the last election that the metal possum exclusion bands, which disfigure and degrade Victoria’s most significant Canary Island Palm avenues, would be removed. Will the council now agree to remove these redundant fittings and return the heritage listed palms to their natural state?

(Jill Quirk)

Response to Question 1

- Within the Management Plan for Brush tail Possums at Catani Gardens it states “dependant upon the available refuges or housing the possum population should be between 18-30 animals.”

Response to Question 2

- Possums have been removed by licensed Contractors following the Management Plan for Brush tail Possums at Catani Gardens

Response to Question 3

- The City of Port Phillip has not culled possums since the initial program.
- The City will continue to monitor the implementation of the management plan
- The City of Melbourne and Park Victoria both utilise bands on their palm trees

Response to Question 4

- During the election period discussions occurred with some candidates in relation to the removal of bands in Catani Gardens. It should be noted that no commitment was made to remove the bands, rather that if the candidate was successful the relevant information would be reviewed. This has occurred and will continue to occur.
- The tree bands shall remain in place as part of the protection mechanism for the Palm trees.
- The exclusion bands have helped in improving the health of these trees due to removing access of animals to feed upon the trees.

As part of the Questions provided by Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. and Friends of Catani Gardens there were listed notes of context as follows

On 2 February 2009 Rod Quantock, Deputy President of protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc., asked Council a question:

“Will council...immediately halt the extermination of the colony of tame protected ringtail and brushtail possums which has been in the gardens for 50 years and which constitute an iconic tourist attraction for Melbourne?”

Our Organisation received a reply from council as follows: *“The City of Port Phillip is following the process outlined in the Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment Guidelines for management of Brushtail Possums in Municipal Gardens ... As per requirements of these guidelines, council has facilitated a Management Plan which has been endorsed by DSE in the interests of maintaining a sustainable number of possums in the Catani Gardens”*

Council has not been asked to respond to this query.

**Note: answers to any questions in Public Question Time which were answered at the meeting are included in the minutes of that meeting.*