

Arboricultural Report Writing Guide

Bass Coast Shire Council has prepared this guide to assist applicants and their Arboricultural consultants in the preparation of documents for submission to Council to support their application or the Council's request for information. This guide sets out the minimum requirements for the preparation of Arboricultural Reports.

It is important that Arboricultural Reports meet relevant professional standards and are undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced persons. This guide is based upon the Australian Standard AS4970:2025 – *Protection of Trees on Development Sites* and Australian Standard AS4373: 2007 - *Pruning of Amenity Trees*. These guides must be used in the preparation of any reports and documents where required as a condition of Tree Protection under Local Law or where vegetation is protected through a Planning Scheme. A non-conforming report is likely to be rejected.

Tree assessment skills require a high level of training, knowledge and experience. This guide recommends that Arboricultural Reports and documents should only be prepared by a suitably qualified and experienced arborist with a Diploma in Arboriculture* (AQF Level 5) or higher relevant qualification. A report that is not prepared by a suitably qualified professional that meets the above standard may not be accepted. (*Recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)).

Reports that do not meet the standards outlined within this document may be rejected. Council may request that a submitted report or document is revised at any stage. Significant errors or omissions within a report may result in Council's rejection of a report.

Where an Arborist Report accompanies an application for tree removal under the Local Law (Protected Tree Permit), then the Report must provide clear evidence as to why the tree cannot be retained.

Council requirements for Arborist Reports.

The following information must be included, but not limited to, in Arboricultural Reports

1. Cover page:

This section has the report title, the client who commissioned the report and the address of the site to which the report relates. The name of the Arborist who undertook the site inspection and carried out the assessment, their qualifications and contact details.

Client's name and address. (Where applicable the client's company or business name and contact details should also be provided).

Date of the report preparation, site inspection date(s) and any applicable documents that have been reviewed.

2. Introduction:

This section outlines the scope of the report and must include the site address, the date the site was inspected, a basic review of the site characteristics and a brief overview of the retention value of the trees assessed.

3. Method:

The method must include the description of the inspection process used (for example a Visual Tree Assessment (VTA), including the techniques and the tools used e.g. tape measure, Clinometer, tangent height gauge, digital camera, Resistograph, Fractometer, Picus Sonic Tomograph, etc.)

The method should also state that the report is based upon the Australian Standard *AS4970:2025 - Protection of Trees on Development Sites* (or an alternative basis where this is warranted) and any further investigation that may or may not have been undertaken (i.e. root investigation, ground penetrating radar etc.)

The method should also include any limitations in the assessment (i.e. site access, access to neighbouring properties, weather constraints etc.) where required.

4. Site map/plan:

An aerial image or survey of the site showing the location of all trees referred to in the report and giving them an individual identifying reference number. This reference number is to be used to identify the tree within the text of the report.

5. Vegetation Controls:

The report must discuss what local planning policies, tree protection laws or ordinances apply to the site. The report should note that the objectives of the relevant policies or laws have been considered in part in determining the retention value of the trees.

6. Observations:

Tree Data Table which includes;

- a. Tree number
- b. Botanical name
- c. Common Name
- d. Origin (Native, Exotic, Indigenous etc.)
- e. Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) in centimetres - measured at 1.4 metres above natural ground level (including multiple stems or the calculated diameter (AS4970:2009))
- f. Basal diameter (diameter of tree above root flare)
- g. Height in metres

- h. Canopy spread in metres (widest point)
- i. Health condition (Good, Fair, Poor, etc.)
- j. Structural condition (Good, Fair, Poor, etc.)
- k. Age Class (Juvenile, Semi-mature, Mature, Senescent etc.)
- l. Arboricultural Value (High, Medium, Low)

Rating	Typical Indicators (includes but not limited to)	Retention Guidance
High	Good health and vigour, strong aesthetic or heritage/ecological value, prominent in landscape, long lifespan (20+ yrs)	Priority for retention
Medium	Fair–good condition, moderate ecological or amenity value, visible from surrounding properties, medium lifespan (10–20 yrs)	Consider retention
Low	Poor condition or form, low-quality or replaceable/weedy species, short lifespan (<10 yrs)	Consider removal

The report must provide a brief description of the site (size of parcel of land, basic soil type (where known) etc.) within the area of expertise of the author. The site observations should provide details of the vegetation on the site (i.e. exotic/native planted garden setting, natural bush environment etc.) and how it relates to the local area. The site observations should also describe the dominance of the vegetation on the site when compared with the local area.

7. **Arboricultural discussion** of data collected:

Analysis section to discuss relevant industry research of the observational data collected such as detailed information regarding structural dysfunction, wounds, impacts on root zones, pests and diseases or other observations pertaining to tree health.

This section must provide an overview of the retention value and significance of the trees assessed. The determination of the retention value should be primarily based on the Arboricultural characteristics observed; however, the retention value may also consider the objectives of any local planning controls and or tree protection laws. Retention value must not be based on any preconceived development that may be proposed for the site.

Photographs of each tree are generally not required, however, photographs of specific areas of interest may be provided where this supports the removal of a tree (i.e. photographs of areas of decay and or specific structural defects are acceptable, or photographs may aid in tree assessment when the report is reviewed).

8. Recommendations:

This section outlines management strategies for remediating tree health, pruning and/or removal works (compliant with AS 4373-2007). This section must address ALL options available in the circumstances, including reasons as to why they are, or are not, being recommended.

Where removal of a tree is recommended, supporting documentary evidence is to be provided to illustrate/support findings. Recommendations for removal are to be based on arboricultural findings only.

9. Conclusion:

This section uses the analysis of the data collected to formulate a decision about the observations made.

10. References:

Where references are used within the report, a list of all publications must be included at the rear of the report using an acceptable academic format.

11. Appendices:

The Appendices section is where additional tree data tables (where applicable), glossary/explanation of terms and any other supplementary information must be placed. The glossary/explanation of terms should detail those terms which are not considered as standard and are specialised and relate to the field of Arboriculture. The definition of terms should be clear, concise, and succinct.

Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA)

An AIA should be prepared as part of the development design process to identify any site and/or any development constraints posed by trees. This information will enable conclusions to be formed on whether there are design and construction options which can be employed to successfully retain trees that may be impacted by a development proposal.

An AIA should be used to assist with designing the proposed development and to implement procedures and controls to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts to trees to ensure the long-term

viability of any tree on the site that has been deemed appropriate for retention. It will also encompass the necessary tree management strategy for that proposal.

The AIA identifies tree impacts, necessary tree removal, transplants, and retention, once all design options have been explored.

The AIA must be prepared by a Consulting Arborist with an Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) Level 5-Diploma in Arboriculture or Horticulture (Arboriculture). **Note:** Reports that are not prepared by a Consulting Arborist with a Qualification Framework (AQF) Level 5 in Arboriculture or Horticulture (Arboriculture) will not be accepted at application lodgement by Council.

Council requirements for an AIA

In some instances the AIA will be a secondary report to a Preliminary Arboricultural Report, a Preliminary Arboricultural Report must focus on the Arboricultural characteristics of each tree and define the size, the health and vigour, the structural condition, the trees' longevity and to identify the trees' retention value using a high, medium, and low rating system.

Consideration must be given to the requirements of the Preliminary Arboricultural Assessment as defined in *Section 2.3.2 of the Australian Standard AS 4970:2025 – Protection of Trees on Development Sites*. The Preliminary Arboricultural Report should also identify the Notional Root Zone (NRZ) and the Structural Root Zone (SRZ) of each tree. The tree data collected must be presented in a table format within the Appendices of the report.

The Preliminary Arboricultural Report must consider trees on adjoining land whose NRZs are likely to enter the site and must follow the same format as described in Council requirements for Arborist Reports.

In circumstances where no Preliminary Arboricultural Report has been undertaken, the Arboricultural Impact Assessment must include all sections relevant to a Preliminary Arborist Report as well as a specific section that details the impact of the development.

The following information is the minimum required to be contained within an AIA submitted to Council (please note bold is used for suggested report headings):

1. **Cover page:**

As per section 1 Council requirements for Arborist Reports.

2. **A Summary of the report:**

The summary of the report must include the site address, the scope of the report, the date the site was inspected, a basic review of the site characteristics and a brief overview of the retention value of the trees assessed. The overview of the recommendations should highlight what tree/s have been given a high, medium, and low retention value.

3. **Introduction:**

This section includes the brief for undertaking the report, date of the site inspection and a description of background information relevant to the report.

4. **Method:**

As per section 3 Council requirements for Arborist Reports. Included in this section must be the method of TPZ and SRZ calculation and method of calculating encroachment percentages.

5. **Tree Data and Observations Table:**

Each tree is to be identified by both common name and botanical name, Tree Physical Dimensions: - height, canopy spread and diameter at standard height (DSH taken at 1.3m above ground), Estimated Life Expectancy (ELE), Notional Root Zone (NRZ), Structural Root Zone (SRZ) measurements and encroachment percentages into NRZs.

6. **Discussion**

This section where collected data is discussed and analyses the potential effects of a proposed development on existing trees based on the recorded tree data covering impacts to tree health, modifications to habit (i.e. canopy modifications) and or root zones.

7. **Recommendations**

This section outlines methods to avoid or minimise potential damage to trees on the site and, where appropriate, on immediately adjoining properties. This would include, but is not limited to recommendations on the following issues:

- a. Specification of design alterations and/or construction methods which will be employed to avoid or minimise impacts to trees being retained such as the use of pier and beam construction as opposed to strip footings.
- b. Specification of trees being retained, and trees being removed.
- c. **Tree Protection and Management Plan** addressing the following subsections, this can be supplied as an individual document and may be requested by the Council when one has not been supplied:
 - i. Proposed construction methods to minimise damage to identified trees e.g.: use of pier and beam construction as opposed to strip footings.
 - ii. Specifications for tree protection measures should be applied as prescribed in *AS 4970-2025 – Protection of Trees on Development Sites*.

- iii. Specification of remedial tree works pre and post development compliant with *AS 4373-2007 – Pruning of Amenity Trees* and *AS 4970-2025 – Protection of Trees on Development Sites*, if necessary, and in line with recommendations.
 - iv. Proposed inspection schedule to assess tree health for the various stages of development such as site establishment, construction work, hard and soft landscaping practical completion.
 - v. Specification and scheduling of necessary tree care/maintenance required before, during and post construction (such as watering and fertilising trees).
8. **Tree Protection Plans** which incorporates elements from the recommendations but not limited to the following:
- a. All trees must be clearly numbered and correspond with the tree data,
 - b. Location of site sheds,
 - c. Location of protection fencing to demarcate a Tree Protection Zone(TPZ),
 - d. Trees identified to have trunk and canopy protection measures,
 - e. TPZ areas to be mulched (in accordance with recommendations/conditions of consent),
 - f. Location of Haulage roads (where applicable),
 - g. Location Building storage materials,
 - h. Location Building waste areas,
 - i. Location Site toilets being used (Where applicable and must be outside the TPZ),
 - j. Location of installations of services and methodology to be used.

10. References:

Where references are used within the report, a list of all publications must be included at the rear of the report using an acceptable academic format.

11. Appendices:

The Appendices section is where additional tree data tables (where applicable), glossary/explanation of terms and any other supplementary information must be placed. The glossary/explanation of terms should detail those terms which are not considered as standard and are specialised and relate to the field of Arboriculture. The definition of terms should be clear, concise, and succinct.

This section must include where applicable:

- i) Diagnostic Testing -Where the results of diagnostic testing of trees is being provided to support the report these results must be included as an Appendix; results are to be provided in a clear legible format and unaltered.
- ii) Root Mapping Reports where requested as additional information they must be included as an Appendix; results must be provided in a clear legible format and unaltered.

Additional Information

All reports are to be written from an impartial perspective and not as an advocate of the client. Arboricultural reports submitted to Council will be read by a variety of people, not all of whom have specialist arboricultural knowledge. Reports must therefore be written in plain English, avoiding jargon as much as possible.