A TOOLANGI tree that sprouted during the life of Shakespeare and remains standing today has been awarded as the National Trust’s inaugural Victorian Tree of the Year.

The Kalatha Giant tree, near Kalatha Creek in the Toolangi State Forest, was announced as the Tree of the Year by the National Trust on Monday, 8 August.

The Mountain Ash tree is believed to be at least 400 years old, stands 65 metres tall and is the seventh largest tree in Victoria by volume - it was named with eight other standout trees from around the state by the organisation as part of the award.

Toolangi resident and nominator, Steve Meacher, told the Mail that he saw the award mentioned on social media and made a quick submission for the tree, but did not hear anything more until the award announcement.

He said the Kalatha Giant “ticked all the boxes” for the award, due to its height, age, size and symbolism in the community.

Mr Meacher said a large fire scar along the tree became a symbol of resilience in the community after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires impacted the area.

In 2013, a boardwalk was built around the tree and opened by then Environment Minister, Mark Butler, with Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF) money paying for the walk.

“There are other large trees in the area, but the thing about the Kalatha Giant, it’s quite close to the road, so people could visit it,” Mr Meacher said.

“It’s a tree that began its life during Shakespeare’s lifetime, it was already in its prime when Captain Cook landed; it’s clearly past its prime now, in that its lost its top, the top is in decay and the tree is all hollow down the middle, but it’s a healthy tree.”

He said the tree was now a “very popular drawcard” for the area, a sentiment that Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) acting District Manager for Murrindindi, Mick Morley, agrees with.

“Oh yes, it’s reasonably popular,” he said.

“Toolangi forest is one of those places where there’s a steady stream of visitors, really, seven days a week - it’s (the Kalatha Giant) certainly visited every day, every weekend.”

“But we think, as with Steve, that ... it could certainly handle more visitors, and it’s certainly worth seeing.”

Mr Morley said he hoped the National Trust award would raise the profile of the tree, and encourage people to take the drive into the Toolangi forests to visit it.

“I think it’s started already,” Mr Meacher added.

National Trust of Australia’s acting Advocacy and Conservation Manager for Victoria, Anna Foley, said the contest was “a chance to celebrate Victoria’s wonderful national heritage”, and to tell the stories of significant trees.

“The Kalatha Giant is a symbol of bushfire survival to the locals in Toolangi,” she said.

“After Black Saturday, the locals got together to build a walking trail around the tree.

“It’s story is a beautiful example of the important meanings that people ascribe to trees.”

The Kalatha Giant boardwalk can be found by driving about 10 kilometres along Sylvia Creek Road into the Toolangi State Forest then turning left at the orange sign for the tree.
DELWP’s Mick Morley and nominator Steve Meacher at the Kalatha Giant in the Toolangi State Forest. Picture: JESSE GRAHAM