

NURSERY PAPERS

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REMOVING BARRIERS TO URBAN GREENING

Across Australia there is core-level support for the principles of urban greening in our large towns and cities. However, legislative and policy barriers exist at all levels of government that need to be overcome before widespread adoption can occur at the rate required to achieve the 2020 Vision goals. This Nursery Paper summarises a report by Josh Byrne & Associates detailing the existing barriers and the recommended actions that can enable planners to implement more green space in urban developments.

Summary

- Government policy plays a major role in driving the amount and type of green space in Australia's public and private urban realm.
- While there is a range of influencing policy spheres (environment, infrastructure etc.), urban land use planning and development policies are key.
- Understanding how government policy impacts on green space is an important step to protecting and enhancing the amount of green space in rapidly changing cities.
- Green space policy challenges are similar around Australia, and efforts to promote change through the 2020 Vision could therefore be a collaborative effort by stakeholders.

IDENTIFYING POLICY BARRIERS TO GREEN SPACE

The 2020 Vision is a collaborative effort to create 20 per cent more green space in our urban areas by 2020. It brings together industry, business, non-government organisations, government, academia and individuals and provides them with the tools, resources and networks necessary to achieve the goal.

This research project was developed and conducted in response to the nursery industry's desire to understand the:

- regulatory and policy framework that drives investment in space for living green assets
- lack of cross-sector collaboration when planning for green space
- competing priorities of land availability for projected population growth and green space needs.

WHAT IS URBAN GREEN SPACE

In the context of a city, the term 'green space' refers to any area of public or private land containing vegetation of any kind, including:

- natural areas of bushland, parkland and wetlands
- revegetated areas or constructed wetlands
- community parks and sports grounds
- street trees and roadside verges
- private front and backyard gardens
- green walls and rooftop gardens.

Many terms such as 'urban forest', 'green infrastructure' and 'green assets' are used in conjunction, and interchanged, with the term 'green space'.





THE RESEARCH

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The three major objectives of the project were to:

- Undertake a review of the regulatory/policy environment at the national, state/territory and local levels and identify where changes may be made to drive greater use of green space in Australian cities and communities.
- Identify and address the underlying barriers to urban planning and regulations to ensure that what is being achieved and passionately supported by the nursery industry is entrenched into the legislation for future use.
- Devise an action plan to address the above objectives that link to the 2020 Vision and identify areas of future investment/prioritisation.

10-POINT ACTION PLAN

After participating in the 2020 Vision 'Growing the Seeds' tour and conducting extensive research of current legislation and policy instruments used in Australia, the project team consulted with a range of stakeholders to identify the current policy barriers to the expansion of urban green space and develop a 10-point plan of action for stakeholders to use in negotiation with legislators and policy makers at all levels of government.

1. Put urban green space objectives at the core of planning policy in every state, territory and local government.

A 'National Green Space Policy', with full statutory support must be embedded in the 'National Urban Policy' objectives and the 'Australian Infrastructure Plan' to deliver nationally coordinated objectives.

Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) process, encourage the development of a 'National Green Space Strategy', administered by the Australian Government, to deliver the objectives of the 'National Green Space Policy'.

The Australian Government Minister for Cities and the Built Environment position created in late 2015 is the key portfolio that could support national green space policy improvement.

2. Incentivise state, territory and local government to improve their understanding, planning and management of current and future urban green space.

Develop and implement a voluntary or mandatory Green Space Enhancement Program (enacted by legislation) that requires state, territory and local governments to establish canopy objectives and targets, conduct benchmarking and ongoing measurement of urban green space assets with the intent to embed green space enhancement practices in the long term.

Reward successful outcomes of a Green Space Enhancement Program

through access to funds from a national green space financial program, or a tax concession program, to help fund future green space activities.

3. Realise the carbon benefits of urban green space through recognition in climate change policy and programs.

The inclusion of urban green space as eligible carbon offsets in the National Carbon Offset Standard may create a market value for urban green spaces, promoting their protection and creation. It will allow councils to offset their own emissions and further trade with businesses within their municipality.

The National Clean Air Agreement should acknowledge the contribution of urban green spaces towards cleaner air, and the beneficial contribution to human health and the environment.

4. Embed urban green space protection and enhancement principles in existing federal, state and territory legislation.

Several key national instruments require review and possible amendment to acknowledge and support urban green spaces, such as the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Each state and territory could consider better addressing protection and enhancement of urban green space through the most appropriate legislative tools and introducing effective penalties for the destruction of protected trees and vegetation.



5. Incentivise developers and architects to integrate green space needs within urban building design and construction practices.

Opportunities exist to include green space measures in several mandatory and voluntary rating schemes used in the urban building design and construction industries and to the energy efficiency performance requirement under The Building Code of Australia (BCA). Mandatory schemes, including NatHERS*, NABERS* and NSW's BASIX, and voluntary schemes, such as GBCA* Green Star and the ISCA* Infrastructure Sustainability (IS) rating tool, could be extended to address green space elements in their credit scoring items.

State and local government could seek to embed minimum infrastructure performance measures, via the IS rating tool, in construction and development through their tender and contract processes.

6. Improve knowledge and delivery of green space through the development of minimum standards for green space provision and management.

A large amount of information exists regarding the management of natural ecosystems; however less information is available to support the management of urban green space. An Australian standard/guideline that addresses holistic tree health and green space management practices would support local councils in the ongoing management of their green spaces.

A multi-disciplinary advisory group of professionals with an understanding of the management and benefits of green space (such as from the horticulture, arboriculture, climate change, landscaping and planning sectors) would provide expert advice and guidance to the Australian/ State and Territory Governments on green space policy, education and communication needs.

7. Embed the preservation and enhancement of green space in roadside management policies.

Some states, including Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, have developed roadside vegetation guidelines that contain elements that favour the use of vegetation to assist driver sightlines and safety, visual amenity and ecological health.

The 'Roadside Environment' section of the 'National Road Design Guidelines' requires revision to consider the value of green space for visual amenity, noise mitigation, fauna habitat, water management and driver focus/attention.

8. Improve streetscape management systems and policies to protect and enhance urban green space.

Queensland's 'The Next Generation Planning: A handbook for planners, designers and developers in South East Queensland' is a key reference for other states as it directly addresses the value and uses of trees, noting the need to address possible clashes with building/street infrastructure, water management and traffic.

A review of state and territory development planning provisions could consider wider road enclosures, permeable surfaces in (urban) road and pavement design/best practice guides, traffic calming practices, which may create planting areas, and inclusion of more vegetated areas and water sensitive urban design practices in carpark design.

Each state and territory could review their utility management policies, considering opportunities such as combined sub-surface service delivery, develop agreed planting and maintenance regimes (species/ siting/pruning) and establish appropriate set-back zones, in light of technological advancement and knowledge.

9. Embed the provision of adequate green space requirements within urban land use and development policies.

State and territory governments could consider moving to the application of 'form-based codes' that blend building requirements and public open space needs in a single regulatory tool.

Development regulations could consider holistic land coverage via calculating percentage coverage of 'hard infrastructure' such as buildings (roofs), roads and footpaths, in combination with minimum development-wide 'soft landscape' requirements that allow the identification of landscape and water infiltration opportunities.

State and territory planning bodies could ensure that Residential Design Codes do not encourage the construction of residential building with excessive footprints within their land envelope. The desire to create more green space must be clearly communicated to the community and address concerns over increased building height and housing density.

10. Improve bushfire vegetation management policies to protect urban green space, the public and infrastructure.

Each state, but particularly New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, could review, and where required amend, current vegetation clearing rules for bushfire mitigation.

The South Australian 'Managing Vegetation – Reduce the Impact of Bushfire' guideline includes a provision that affords protection for Regulated or Significant Trees, which could transfer easily to other states.

The Victorian 'Landscaping for Bushfire' guidelines for the use of appropriate types and forms of vegetation in fire risk zones provides guidance that is applicable nationwide and could inform best practice in other high fire-risk areas.

* NatHERS – National House Energy Rating Scheme; NABERS – National Australian Built Environment Rating System; BASIX – Building Sustainability Index; GBCA – Green Building Council of Australia; ISCA – Infrastructure Sustainability Council of Australia



IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

The research project identified numerous examples of successful policy changes already enacted in Australian jurisdictions that overcome the previous barriers and actively encourage more green space developments

In some cases, planning schemes and environmental policies that had accumulated over the years were removed and replaced with new, strategic guidelines that better reflect the desire to integrate green infrastructure policy into the local government planning process.

While state government approval may be required for some new local policies, this is not necessarily an arduous process provided the new policies are aligned to the intent of the state and federal government legislation and regulations.

MOU with key utility providers

Melbourne Council has developed arguably Australia's most comprehensive local council policy and planning structure (and content) to deliver its urban forest objectives.

In a practical response to the profusion of below ground utility services that were limiting the street space available for planting, the City of Melbourne established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with key utility providers that sets out best practice management processes that meet the infrastructure needs while also allowing more streetscape plantings.

Trade-offs for green space

The City of Fremantle's Amendment 49 to the Local Planning Scheme No. 4 allows developers to apply for increased building heights on some sites in the Fremantle city centre in return for the establishment of more off-street parking—freeing up valuable space for streetscape improvements.

When Fremantle Ports reclaimed 27 hectares of seafront, Fremantle Council's Development Guidelines required the establishment of a dedicated area of public open space landscaping and a number of guidelines provided for minimum landscaping requirements and verge management practices.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS FOR THE NURSERY INDUSTRY

The barriers that exist can be addressed and many local governments are already developing and implementing creative and balanced policies and planning tools that will support the increased investment in urban greening.

As the policy barriers are removed and replaced with more strategic planning instruments that enable and encourage green space developments, the whole nursery industry stands to gain through increased demand for a wide range of nursery and landscaping products and expertise.

Continued industry advocacy at all levels of government will result in more progressive and strategic planning tools for planners and designers to work within to deliver benefits to the industry and the community. The nursery industry is well positioned to support these efforts, particularly through supporting and promoting the 2020 Vision.

LINKS TO RESOURCES

2020Vision website: www.2020vision.com.au

NGIA website: <http://www.ngia.com.au>

Final Report (Project Number: NY14007): Identification of Barriers to Adoption of 2020 Vision Goals, Josh Byrne & Associates

Jacobs, B., Mikhailovich, N., and Delaney, C. (2014) Benchmarking Australia's Urban Tree Canopy: An i-Tree Assessment, prepared for Horticulture Australia Limited by the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney.

Images supplied by Josh Byrnes & Associates

This project (NY14007) was funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited using the Australian Nursery Industry levy and funds from the Australian Government, and was undertaken by consultants Josh Byrne & Associates.

The study identified the legislative and policy barriers that exist at the local, state and federal levels of government to the implementation of the industry's 2020 Vision campaign.