



23 July 2020

Parliamentary Officer
Natural Resources Committee
GPO Box 572
Adelaide SA 5000

The Joinery
Level 1, 111 Franklin Street
Adelaide, SA, 5000

(08) 8223 5155

general@conservationsa.org.au
www.conservationsa.org.au

ABN: 22 020 026 644

Email: NRC.Assembly@parliament.sa.gov.au

RE: Natural Resources Committee Inquiry into Urban Green Spaces

Congratulations on undertaking this Inquiry. We welcome the opportunity to contribute.

As South Australia's peak environment body, representing many of our state's key environment groups, we have had a strong interest in the creation, enhancement and preservation of vibrant and healthy urban green spaces since our formation in 1971.

Over the last twelve months, we have particularly focused on urban tree canopy.

Urban Tree Canopy

In partnership with the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Environmental Defenders Office, National Trust SA, Nature Conservation Society of SA, Treenet and Trees for Life, we have produced a summary report in June 2020 on *What's Happening to Adelaide's Trees*.

Available here: <https://www.conservationsa.org.au/trees2020>

Many of the issues we address in this report are reflected in the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry. We encourage members of the Committee to access this Report.

Here is an extract from the Executive Summary:

Adelaide is losing its significant, regulated and mature trees at an alarming rate.

The true level of harm has been difficult to capture or recognise, because it is often caused by incremental loss on private land. Despite this, there is increasing public concern at the scale and speed of change.

The evidence is clear: big trees improve our health and wellbeing, increase property values, and reduce the build up and trapping of heat. They are arguably the single best infrastructure investment to prepare our streets and suburbs for a changing climate.

While Councils and communities are working hard to plant new trees, there is not enough available space on public land to replace what we are losing from people's backyards. And it will take many years for a newly planted tree to provide similar benefits to one that is mature.

There is no city-wide, comprehensive data on the scale of the loss, but what we have been able to collate in this report indicates between a 1–6% reduction in tree canopy (depending on the area and the timeframe). For example, the City of Campbelltown has an estimated tree canopy loss of over 6% from 2006–16, while the suburb of Burnside has experienced a similar loss in half that time.

This trend is completely at odds with local and state government targets.

The causes are many, including inadequate protection through our planning system and a lack of appreciation by some in the community of just how valuable our trees are.

Potential solutions include planning law reform, better valuation and incentives, improved assessment practices involving arborists, and stronger reinforcement of the community's love of big trees.

This report has been prepared by community, non-profit and professional organisations concerned with what's happening to our trees. We hope government and council decision-makers will recognise the value of preserving big trees in Adelaide's landscape and take all necessary steps to reverse this damaging trend.

We need to act – and act quickly – before it's too late.

Alongside this Summary Report, we have been working with a large network of experts from across Councils, Government, Landscape Boards and the community to identify the best way to reverse the damaging trend of tree loss.

Their recommendations include:

- Reversing the 2011 changes to the Significant & Regulated Trees Regulations (inc. circumference, 10 metre dwelling rule, pruning, urban tree fund undervaluation, dead trees and species list)
- Creating a 'Living with Trees' information campaign to counter the more negative 'Managing Trees' narrative
- Removing the exemption for the Highways Commissioner (DPTI) and Education Dept (2017 regulation changes) which allow DPTI in particular to bypass normal development assessment procedures and public consultation when contemplating the removal of trees adjacent to transport corridors

- Collating and releasing ongoing tallies of tree loss to make the loss more visible to the community and decision makers
- Amending the Planning & Design Code to prioritise retention, and
- Visual storytelling to show the value of trees (eg. heat maps)

In addition, there are other opportunities we encourage the Committee to consider, including the use of land tax.

Rearranging how land tax is calculated could provide a modest but significant recurring incentive that will encourage greater canopy and garden green cover by deducting the percentage area of canopy and green garden cover from the tax determination.

Such an approach is not new. When rural property owners dedicate areas of native vegetation to be protected through heritage agreements, they can achieve a council rate reduction. The idea is that they are protecting that land for the environment rather than alternative land uses so they receive a reduction in charges for that area of the property. The same concept could be applied to protecting trees and gardens based on the area of canopy and green cover area. There is now ample technological capability to assure an accurate determination.

Another option is for Councils to place a caveat or other property title encumbrances over properties for sale where significant trees or vegetation occur so new owners understand their responsibility.

Much more practical assistance could also be provided to households, such as helping the ageing population with the management and maintenance of big trees (eg assistance with removal of leaves from gutters).

Infill Development

There is no doubt that increasing levels of infill development without appropriate protection measures in place, will only encourage ongoing loss of Adelaide's urban tree canopy, with a devastating impact on our wellbeing, urban biodiversity and liveability.

We do not believe the draft Planning & Design Code has got the balance right.

Water

Hand in hand with the challenge of reversing the loss of mature trees and other urban biodiversity is the consideration of how we will be able to maintain these natural assets, and in particular, how much water will we need.

To this end, we have commissioned consultants Edge Environment to explore the following issues:

- How much water is required for greening key assets?
- What is the potentiation impact of climate change on the availability of water and greening needs?

- What policy changes including pricing, could encourage a different approach to water use for greening in Adelaide and how does this align with current state and local government policy?

Their report will be available in August, and we would be happy to forward a copy through to the Committee on request.

Green Adelaide / National Park City

The creation of Green Adelaide offers a great opportunity to focus on strategic and targeted greening across our City.

In particular, there is clear inequity and poor distribution of urban tree canopy, with wealthier areas in general blessed with more cover, and poorer areas more exposed to urban heat island effect through less cover.

Green Adelaide is well placed to help address this imbalance through targeted greening in areas of greatest need.

And concepts such as promoting Adelaide as a 'National Park City' offer a positive way to connect with and inspire Adelaide's residents to care for the natural spaces that surround them every day.

To see what is possible, London provides an inspiring example:

<https://www.nationalparkcity.london/>

I would welcome the opportunity to present to the Committee in person. I can be contacted at craig.wilkins@conservationsa.org.au or 0417 879 439.

Yours Faithfully



Craig Wilkins

Chief Executive, Conservation SA
Member, Premier's Climate Change Council
Member, Adelaide Parklands Authority