

Newcastle Greens Policy on **Urban Forest and Tree Management**

Greening our city: "Speak for the trees"

Newcastle Greens believe that Newcastle council, community groups and organisations, neighbourhoods, households and individuals all have a significant role to play in managing our urban forest. An urban forest is the totality of trees and shrubs on all public and private land in and around urban areas (including bushland, parkland, gardens and street trees). It is measured as the percentage of canopy covering the total area, and is recognized as a primary component of the urban ecosystem.

The urban forest provides important environmental, social, economic and cultural benefits that include:

- cooling the air and shading to reduce the heat island effect, thus reducing energy use;
- cleaning the air by filtering particulate matter and absorbing polluting gases, which reduces the greenhouse effect;
- sequestering carbon (the US Department of Agriculture claims that urban trees are fifteen times more effective at reducing CO₂ than are rural trees);
- reducing stormwater load through canopy capture of stormwater, which is then partially evaporated, with the remainder slowed, increasing permeation into the ground;
- reducing erosion and sediment runoff;
- imparting a sense of well-being and reducing fatigue and depression in people who spend time in and around trees and greenery;
- providing habitat and enhancing biodiversity, and;
- positively affecting consumer perception and behaviour and increasing real estate values.

Newcastle Greens believe we should use the adopted Newcastle City Council Urban Forest Policy and related strategies as a basis to develop an urban forest plan that draws on existing knowledge, research and community involvement, and incorporates a vision for a sustainable urban forest across the LGA. This plan would aim to provide the best environmental, social and economic outcomes as efficiently as possible, as well as strategy and action plans to work towards the vision with 50 to 100 year horizons. An urban forest with optimum canopy cover and quality and tree diversity including age, longevity, size, species, form, aesthetics and uses, should be envisioned and planned for. The quantity and quality of the urban forest should be maintained and improved until the vision is attained, and tree removal and planting strategies should reflect these goals.

The Newcastle Greens will work to:

- Establish an Urban Forest and Tree Management Committee with broad community and external expert representation to provide ongoing advice on council's Urban Forest Policy and tree management protocols and practices.
- Review Council's tree management strategy in order to develop and maintain an integrated urban forest and tree management plan that follows world's best practice, including a review of Council's current practices for managing large, mature trees and develop a 'big trees policy' to address the need for maintaining large trees in urban areas.

- Develop a Register of Significant Trees in collaboration with the community, and incorporate this into relevant council policies, planning documents, and tree management protocols, to ensure that such trees are better protected.
- Ensure that Council undertakes trees risk assessments based on world's best practice that:
 - use appropriate risk assessment methods by appropriately qualified technical staff;
 - take into account genuine cost/benefit analyses, acknowledging that an evaluation of tree benefits is integral and essential to the tree risk management process;
 - recognise trees as dynamic living assets, and;
 - recognise risk management decisions have significant policy dimensions, especially when affecting significant trees.
- Establish processes whereby Council can provide education, training and ongoing support to community groups, neighbourhoods, and individuals who wish to help manage local street trees, bushlands, parklands and gardens.
- Investigate opportunities for Council to enter into partnerships with existing community groups and local organisations to promote and run biodiversity for backyards programs.
- Investigate how Council can assist older people living in their homes with caring for their trees, particularly managing debris in roof gutters and on the ground, and pruning of deadwood.
- Advocate for incentives to be provided for property owners who contribute to quality urban forest canopy cover.
- Advocate for impacts on urban forest coverage and biodiversity to be genuinely considered in development assessments.
- Amend the LEP and / or DCP so that landholders are responsible for providing their fair share of urban forest.
- Ensure that Council's use of s.88 of the Roads Act to remove trees on the grounds that they are a "traffic hazard" is restricted to cases where trees present a genuine and immediate danger, and lobby for changes to the Act to reflect this.
- Negotiate appropriate Memoranda of Understanding or Protocols with relevant utility providers (such as Ausgrid, Hunter Water, public transport providers, etc) covering mutual interest issues related to tree planting and management, including placement and pruning of street trees.
- Revive the Red Cedar City concept so that Newcastle is promoted and becomes known as the Red Cedar City, similar to Grafton and its successful use of its jacarandas.