



Reference: DOC/23/19729

24 February 2023

The Parliamentary Officer
Environment, Resources and Development Committee
GPO Box 572
ADELAIDE SA 5001
Email: ERDC.Assembly@parliament.sa.gov.au

Dear Parliamentary Officer,

RE: Submission to the Inquiry on Improving the Resilience of the Urban Forest

Introduction

Mount Barker District Council is the fastest growing Council in South Australia and is set to become the second largest city in South Australia within the next 10 years.

This significant growth has increased pressure on our natural environment including our trees and green spaces.

Council acknowledges the significance of urban forests in providing a range of benefits to communities, including aesthetic, ecological, and socio-economic benefits. As such, Council has already developed a range of policies and strategy aimed at preserving and enhancing our natural environment, these include:

- Incorporating tree protection measures in the planning and land division process including the creation of Land Management Agreements to protect trees;
- Use of a web based tree management system called *Forestreet*;
- Conducting regular tree audits with over 20,000 having been completed;
- Promoting community awareness and participation in tree planting and care programs;
- Undertaking tree canopy mapping to identify urban heat sinks and guide additional tree planting; and
- Creation of a tree management policy which provides guidance for Council to meet its urban greening and ecological sustainability goals.

Council is pleased to provide the below submission to the Inquiry on Improving the Resilience of the Urban Forest.

Comments on the Inquiry

Topic	Council comment
<p>Best Practice and Innovative Measures to Assist in the Selection and Maintenance of Site Appropriate Tree Species for Urban Infill Development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the yet to be published report from Council titled "Land Cover Change and Tree Canopy Cover in Mount Barker 2008-2019" seeks to quantify the change in canopy cover between 2008 and 2019 across the entire Mount Barker township. The data from the report will be used to explore drivers of land cover change, establish a benchmark of tree canopy cover, and identify opportunities for tree planting. • One of the key findings of the report is that, for the purposes of considering urban canopy cover within residential areas, Zone 2 (the older growth area of Mount Barker) showed a canopy cover of 22%. There was a drop in coverage between 2008 and 2019 on private land and an increase on public land during the same time period. This highlights the need for innovative measures and best practices to be put in place to ensure the selection and maintenance of site-appropriate tree species in urban infill developments. • To improve the resilience of the urban forest, it is recommended that a collaborative effort be made to identify and plant a diverse range of trees across <i>family, genus</i> and <i>species</i> classifications, that are well-suited to the specific conditions of the site. This includes taking into account factors such as available soil volume and structure, solar access, and potential stressors such as compaction, pollution and climate change.
<p>Legislative and Regulatory Options to Improve the Resilience and Longevity of Trees Comprising the Urban Forest.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The persisting lack of legislative alignment between the PDI Act (and Code) and the Native Vegetation Act results in poor coordination and application of policy

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	<p>outcomes. The current situation promotes confusion and uncertainty for general application of both sets of legislation in a concurrent manner. In areas covered by the Hazards Bushfire (High Risk) and the Hazards Bushfire (Medium Risk) Overlays there is limited protection for urban trees due to operation of the PDI Act unassessed ‘blanket’ 20 metre clearance provision. The provision does not serve legislative intent, it ignores fire science and the asset protection benefits of large trees in bush fires. It promotes misunderstanding of what is and isn’t a bush fire risk and to some extent has served as de-facto direction from State Government to clear urban trees rather than retain them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To address this issue, it is recommended that legislative and regulatory options be explored to improve the resilience and longevity of trees in the urban forest. This may include the development of a more coordinated and integrated approach to tree protection across different legislative and regulatory frameworks. • Furthermore, it is recommended that greater protection be afforded to urban trees in areas with higher risks of bushfire. This will include revising the current blanket 20 metre clearance provision and perhaps returning to the CFS assessed method which provided for professional application of fire science, bushfire ready education and the retention of trees beneficial to properties in the event of a bushfire. Prior to the 2011 Development Amendment Act ‘Regulated Trees’ and the imposed blanket 20 metre clearance provision , Mount Barker District Council’s experience was the CFS refused 90% of applications to remove Significant trees from applicants who may have thought

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	<p>the trees were creating a bushfire risk. To prove the legitimacy of the claims above, Mount Barker District Council and high level CFS officers lobbied together to reverse the 20 metre blanket clearance provision with MP’s Bob Such and Michelle Lensink at a Parliamentary sitting with the facts and figures soon after the blanket 20 metre provision was enacted but to no avail back then.</p>
Other Related Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that at least one tree is planted per new dwelling will improve the amenity of future neighbourhoods and meet the canopy cover targets in the 30-year plan for Greater Adelaide. As shown in the Council research (Land Cover Change and Tree Canopy Cover Report), relying solely on street trees and planting within reserves will not produce the desired outcomes, such as liveable neighbourhoods, reduction in urban heat, and increased canopy cover. • Therefore, any requirement for trees planted on private land should be in addition to developers providing a minimum of one street tree per frontage when designing a subdivision. Additionally, requirements for street trees should be included in the prescribed requirements for subdivision (regulations 80-85). • Encourage the establishment of green infrastructure networks that link parks, reserves, and other open spaces to create corridors for wildlife and increase urban biodiversity. • Increase funding and resources for research on the urban forest, including the development of tools and technologies to improve the selection and maintenance of urban trees.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop long-term plans and targets for urban tree canopy cover that are consistent with the 30-year plan for Greater Adelaide.• Ensure trees and greening can thrive by providing access to soil and water – Good WSUD policies need to be consistently applied in every zone, without exceptions, to ensure the same outcomes are met across all developed areas. For example, WSUD performance outcomes should apply to group dwellings, residential flat building, battle-axe dwellings and other land uses. The positioning of underground services should also be regulated to create more space for trees to grow and thrive.• Protect biodiversity assets – State Planning Policy 4.1 (ensuring significant habitat protection) is not reflected in the Code. South Australia could lead the way by developing a Critical Habitat Overlay for integration into the Code to ensure protection of critical habitat for threatened species and ecological communities listed at state and national level. This mapping should be integrated with CFS mapping product BMaps to enable balanced bushfire resilience and biodiversity outcomes.

Conclusion

Council is committed to working with relevant stakeholders to achieve these outcomes and contribute to the sustainability of our community.

We would also welcome further input into the inquiry should the opportunity arise. Please contact me should you have any further questions on the details below.

Yours sincerely

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