# Final Report

# Metropolitan Urban Forestry

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Metropolitan Urban Forestry – NY17005

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# Content

# Summary

The work is targeted at horticulture industry levy payers and industry stakeholders involved in the 202020 Vision. The data and findings generated will not only provide industry with a comprehensive understanding of metropolitan urban forestry in Australia but will also inform the continuing development and strategy of the 202020 Vision over the next 3-5 years.

The work undertaken for this project delivers a coordinated review or 'state of play' or urban greening across Australia, including retrospective information about key changes over the past six years. Historically, there has been a strong programmatic focus on the role of local governments in urban planning, but over the past 18 months we have shifted focus to a metropolitan/state approach as the 202020 Vision believes that incorporating urban forestry into state planning is the fastest and most effective way to create new green spaces in our city's urban areas. In doing so we can make informed recommendations as to how nursery and garden industry levy funds can be utilised for greatest impact in the 202020 Vision program moving forward and ultimately foster increased demand for trees and plants within the horticulture industry. Therefore, the central question that guided our work was how can the 202020 Vision program best assist urban forestry efforts at a metropolitan/state level.

The project's objectives were as follows. Provide the horticultural industry with

1. **A deep understanding around state level urban greening policy in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia), and to better understand barriers to implementation.**

   Key insights from each state are as follows.

   NSW
   - Early in 2018, the State government announced $37.5 million of funding for urban green space through the 5 million trees package. How this funding will be spent and where the trees will be planted is not yet clear.
   - Following the 2016 council amalgamations, internal governance has left many local councils unable to redesign their targets to align with the proposed Great Sydney target of 40% canopy.
   - Several trends continue to threaten the future of urban greening in NSW. These include rapidly increasing population size, competition for space, under-resourced councils and a lack of community awareness about the benefits of urban greening.

   QLD
   - Compared to other states, the canopy cover in QLD is relatively high and there is an abundance of water. As such, common drivers of urban forestry, like drought and the urban heat island effect are less severe in urban and metropolitan parts of QLD.
   - Due to this relatively high level of canopy cover in QLD, the urban forestry movement has struggled to gain traction across all levels of government. There is a sense of complacency and a lack of urgency within the QLD community.
   - The major threat to urban greening in QLD is rapid greenfield and urban infill development. South East Queensland is the fastest growing region in Australia and as a result, trees are being removed at a rapid rate to make way for infrastructure development.

   SA
   - The last five years have been a period of growth for South Australia with rapidly increasing population size and urban sprawl. Fortunately, because of the work of local councils, urban greening has been incorporated into a variety of policy agendas including environment, health, planning, livability and sustainability.
   - Several factors threaten future opportunities for greening in South Australia including urban infill development, low rainfall, an ongoing struggle with a changing climate and a lack of funding for local councils.
   - In March 2018, a Liberal Party government was elected in the state for the first time in 16 years. This could potentially lead to changes in policy direction and there are some concerns across the sector that the change of government could lead to re-contextualisation and de-prioritsation of urban greening.

<u>VIC</u>
- VIC is leading the country in the number of metropolitan local governments with dedicated urban greening policies, accompanied by financial commitments to ensure they are achieved.
- VIC has done a great job of fostering cross-sectoral collaboration between stakeholders and government departments on urban greening, leading to improved policy changes (e.g. Greening the West).
- The major trends threatening future opportunities for greening in Vic include increasing temperatures and erratic weather patterns, increased urban development, lack of green space provision and a lack of community awareness about the economic and health benefits of trees.

<u>WA</u>
- The greatest success in WA has been the broad uptake of local councils designing and implementing urban forestry strategies. This has been further supported by a recent change in state government (the first Labor government in nine years) which has brought changes to planning regulations.
- Western Australia researchers, private consultants and community groups continue to advocate to the State government for sweeping reforms that will result in greater urban green space, however there is a growing sense of frustration with the slow rate of change.
- The major trends threatening future opportunities for greening include a loss of green space on private property, an increasing urban population, community attitudes to plants and trees and climate change.

*For a complete detailed report outlining the context, key organisations, policy, local government progress, canopy loss trends and hot spot, challenges and opportunities for the urban greening sector and insights for communications for each state please see Appendix 1.*

2. **Key recommendation on how to best assist each state in their urban forestry efforts over the next 3-5 years.**

The 202020 Vision recognises that each state has specific drivers for increased urban green space however despite these differences, there are shared challenges. Two major areas of national focus stand out:

1) Successful community engagement is a vital factor in supporting policy action at a state level. The way that the benefits of urban green space are communicated is of critical importance. Working with councils to see what has worked and gaining a deeper understanding of consumer sentiment will support the development of council tools to help facilitate a broad-base support and demand for urban greening.
2) Having a consistent approach to measuring is a key priority for the urban greening movement. The Urban Monitor tool is likely to become the standard for urban green space measurement. Supporting, translating and disseminating these findings will become a key priority of the program moving forward.

*For detailed recommendations for each state please see Appendix 1.*

3. **An updated analysis of where every urban Local Government Area (LGA) in Australia is on their urban forestry journey via the Urban Forestry Council Index.**

The overall findings from the 2018 National Urban Forestry Index show a positive trajectory of local councils moving towards stronger urban greening policy and budget allocations. When compared to the 2016 data, it's clear that councils who were in the Planning and Prepared phases are progressing towards Planting.

Western Australia and South Australia both showed great progress, with a high proportion of councils moving into the Planting phase. These findings are in line with the expert interviews and desk research conducted for this report which reveals the strong emphasis the respective state governments have put on the importance of urban greening in recent years.

Benchmarking each council not only provides strategic insight into where to target efforts moving forward but it also demonstrates the effectiveness of the 202020 Vision program. Since the program's inception in 2012, XX% of councils are now on the pathway to urban greening. In 2012, this percentage was only 14%.

Throughout this process, many councils referenced their reliance on the 202020 Vision's *How to Grow an Urban Forest* guidebook, the *Where Are All the Trees?* report and the *Where Should All the Trees Go?* report to inform their policy development and direction. This feedback reaffirms the effectiveness of the 202020 Vision in creating tools to help local councils overcome barriers to progression.

One-to-one contact (via phone and follow up email) was made with every urban LGA in Australia to gauge the status of each council on their urban forestry journey. The following questions were asked:
- Is there an urban forestry strategy in place?
- Are there budgets for trees and plants per year?
- Are there canopy cover targets and if so what are the completion dates?
- Was there a tree inventory conducted in 2018?
- Was the vegetation/tree canopy surveyed in 2018?

Each council was then categorised by four classifications formulated for the 2016 Urban Forestry council index: Pre-Action, Planning, Prepared, Planting.

| Phase | 2016 | 2018* |
|-----------|------|-------|
| Pre-Action | 43 | 30 |
| Planning | 29 | 27 |
| Prepared | 25 | 32 |
| Planting | 27 | 48 |

*Total number of LGAs increased to 137 as our focus is expanding to all LGAs within Australia's top 20 largest cities. This currently accounts for 79.13% of Australia's population.

*For more detailed information on the status of each state please see Appendix 2.*

4. **A review of the current communications landscape in relation to urban greening in metropolitan Australia to develop insights into key trends and opportunities for the sector to generate deeper game-changing conversations to promote best practice, innovation and highlight gaps to progress.**

Language was identified as a major challenge and we recognise the need to simplify and contextualise language to connect with the wider community on urban greening and avoid being technical and industry specific, especially if we want to talk to those not directly in the sector.

The major community trends reported on a regular basis by major metro and industry media have been identified as follows:
1) The loss of the suburban backyard
2) The growth of urban farms and community gardens
3) Negative community attitudes to urban green space (trees are perceived to be bad and expensive)

The major media trends were identified as follows:
1) Podcasts are increasing in popularity year on year and this relatively new channel of communication could be an effective way to engage with our urban greening network.
2) Many people are now using Twitter to look for urban greening information.
3) Using real-time data analysis (e.g. from social media) has the potential to change the conventional ways of gathering insights.

*To see the final detailed communications audit please see Appendix 1.*

5. **An engaged and growing green space network (the 202020 Vision's Living Network) via consistent eDM communication and an active LinkedIn group.**

Fortnightly eDMs were developed, designed and distributed to the 202020 Vision database of over 3,000 subscribers. These communications are incredibly important as they position the 202020 Vision as the go-to organisation for the latest information on urban greening. The eDM consistently performs well with average open rates of 35-45% (industry average 20%) and click through rates of 15-25% (industry average 2%). We see this as a vital component of the program moving forward to maintain the status of the program. It also

offers a platform for open communication between the 202020 Vision team and the network.

This project also saw the re-engagement of the 202020 Vision LinkedIn group, with an increase in membership to 1,897 members and consistent posting and engagement from the 202020 Vision team and the broader group. This channel is incredibly important to the program. It is a closed and trusted forum where people can share information, network, learn from others and raise their own professional profile.

# Keywords

Urban forestry; metropolitan; urban greening; urban greening policy; green space

# Introduction

The 202020 Vision is a collaborative initiative to create 20% more and better urban green space in Australian cities by the year 2020. Since 2013, the program has supported and activated government bodies and organisations in their efforts towards urban greening across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australian and Western Australian states.

The work undertaken for this project delivers a coordinated review or 'state of play' or urban greening across Australia. Historically, there has been a strong programmatic focus on the role of local governments in urban planning, but over the past 18 months we have shifted focus to a metropolitan/state approach as the 202020 Vision believes that incorporating urban forestry into state planning is the fastest and most effective way to create new green spaces in our city's urban areas.

The team identified the progress made, as well as the barriers and opportunities for urban greening at a metropolitan and state level. Research-based recommendations on how each state can promote urban forestry efforts into the future have been identified and a strategic direction for the 202020 Vision program over the coming three years has been refined.

Although the program has shifted focus to a metropolitan/state level it is still incredibly important to maintain program relevance at a local level as a lot of the action and progression towards urban greening happens within local governments. The work undertaken specifically for the updates to the Urban Forestry Council Index allowed for this and ensured the maintenance of existing and the facilitation of new relationships with the right people at each urban LGA in Australia.

The communications audit offers insights to key trends and opportunities for the sector to galvanise communication channels and generate deeper, game-changing conversations to promote best practice, innovation and highlight gaps to progress.

# Methodology

The broad knowledge base that we draw upon for this project, as well as the subsequent insights and recommendations made, come from over six years of learnings. We have engaged hundreds of organisations as network partners and thousands as tour participants. By staying in constant communication via the media, eDMs, surveys, interviews, meetings, formation and management of a LinkedIn group and one-on-one support we have ensured a consistent feedback loop of information which has enabled us to recognise trends, identify new partners and opportunities, set program direction, inform research projects and make informed recommendations as to how nursery and garden industry levy funds can be utilised for greatest impact in the 202020 Vision program moving forward.

The daily work of the program team involves listening to and understanding specific concerns and ideas, connecting the dots between various players, identifying opportunities and understanding barriers, and then providing the tools and support to overcome these. These activities have informed a body of work that has uniquely positioned the 202020 Vision to not only understand what the policy, research and practitioner environments are in each state, but to support progress in each state.

In addition to the program activities outlined above, and specifically in preparation for this report, the 202020 Vision team has conducted desk research and media analysis, held face to face meetings, distributed surveys with industry experts and key stakeholders, held positions on panels, and attended key events related to urban greening development. The communications and engagement strategies used have been unique to each state, and reflect the varied political landscapes, business and consumer trends across the country.

The 202020 Vision team attended/were involved in the following:

| Event/Committee | Location | Position on panel held? |
|---|---|---|
| Grey is the new Green Event | Sydney | No |
| Tree Health & Resilience | Perth | No |
| CAULHub Horizon Scanning Workshop | Canberra | No |
| Sydney Build Event | Sydney | Speaking position |
| WSROC Turn Down the Heat Advisory Panel | Western Sydney | Yes |
| RC100 Resilient Sydney Advisory Panel | Sydney | Yes |
| Splash Network Member Committee | Sydney | Yes |

Who we spoke to?
Face-to-face (where possible) and phone interviews were conducted with the stakeholders and organisations listed below:

| Organisation | State |
|---|---|
| Junglfly | NSW |
| City of Sydney | NSW |
| NSW Office of Environment and Heritage | NSW |

| | |
|---|---|
| CAULHub, Thrive Research Hub | QLD |
| Brisbane City Council | QLD |
| Environment officer | QLD |
| Urban Forester | QLD |
| Redlands City Council | QLD |
| Brisbane City Council | QLD |
| TREENET | SA |
| Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources | SA |
| News Corp | SA |
| Seed Consulting Services | SA |
| Department of Health and Ageing | SA |
| Water Sensitive SA | SA |
| Frasers Property Australia | VIC |
| Urban Forest Consulting | VIC |
| City of Melbourne | VIC |
| Maribyrnong City Council | VIC |
| Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) | WA |
| Perth NRM | WA |
| Development Engineering Consultants | WA |
| Environmental Officer | WA |

**Who are our media?**

Throughout this process we have re-identified and reached out to a range of media around Australia to understand the types of stories they are covering and how we can best work with them to ensure timely and relevant storytelling. The following contacts have been identified as the primary major metro and trade/industry contributors in Australia for urban greening stories.

| *Name* | *Organisation* | *National or State* |
|---|---|---|
| Andrew Taylor | Sydney Morning Herald, reporter across urban planning and development | NSW |
| Jacob Sualwick | Sydney Morning Herald, City Editor | NSW |
| Richard Unsworth | Sydney Morning Herald, Garden Writer | NSW |
| Ruth McCosker | Brisbane Times, Brisbane City Council Reporter | QLD |
| Jack McKay | The Courier Mail, General News Reporter across development and planning | QLD |
| Annette McFarlane | The Sunday Mail, Gardening Columnist | QLD |
| Renato Castello | The Advertiser, Urban Development Editor | SA |
| Jade Gailberger | The Advertiser, City Editor | SA |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| John Masanauskas | Herald Sun, City Editor | VIC |
| Clay Lucas | The Age, City Editor | VIC |
| Emma Young | Western Australian, General News Reporter covering planning and urban greening | WA |
| Sabrina Hahn | ABC Radio, Gardening expert | WA |
| Lisa Cox | The Guardian, Environment Reporter | National |
| Benedict Brook | news.com.au, National News Reporter with a focus on the environment | National |
| Nicole Hasham | Fairfax, Environment and Political Reporter | National |
| Branko Miletic | Architecture & Design, Editor | National - trade |
| Brenton Gibbs | The Urban Developer, Editor | National - Trade |
| Carolyn Jackson | Sustainability Matters, Editor | National - Trade |
| Karen Smith | Hort Journal, Editor | National - Trade |
| Tasmin O'Neill | Green Magazine, Editor | National - Trade |
| Tina Perinotto | The Fifth Estate, Editor | National – Trade |
| Tim Langdon | Eco Voice, Editor | National - Trade |
| David Twomey | Eco News, Editor | National – Trade |
| Vaidehi Shah | Eco Business, Assistant Editor | National - Trade |

Number of surveys distributed (via email)

| | |
|---|---|
| NSW | 133 |
| QLD | 104 |
| SA | 93 |
| VIC | 100 |
| WA | 124 |

Number of interviews conducted with councils (via phone and direct email) are listed below.

| | |
|---|---|
| NSW | 32 |
| QLD | 10 |
| SA | 19 |
| VIC | 35 |
| WA | 30 |
| NT | 2 |
| TAS | 7 |
| ACT | 1 |

For more detailed information on specific data collated about local government areas please see *Appendix 2*.

# Outputs

- Final Metropolitan Urban Forestry national report (See Appendix 1).

- State specific surveys distributed in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland to align with the Green Light tour (NY17000) events.

- State-of-play reports developed for Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland outlining each state's progress towards urban greening, clear insights into major barriers that may be overcome through R&D efforts, a gaps and opportunities analysis and strategic recommendations around how best to prioritise assets and resources to support these groups/stakeholders.

- Final Communications Audit (See Appendix 1).

- An updated council which gives a current snapshot of the urban forestry progress of each urban LGA in Australia (See Appendix 2).

- 12 fortnightly Living Network eDMs developed and distributed to existing database as per agreed schedule.

- Re-activation and re-engagement of the 202020 Vision Linked In group growing total members to 1,897. 100% of enquiries were responded to within 24 hours.

- 16 LinkedIn posts by 202020 Vision team sharing organic content, articles and resources as per agreed schedule.

- 12-month plan for engagement, with supporting 3-year road map delivered (See Appendix 1).

# Outcomes

This project resulted in the following outcomes

1. Demonstrated involvement in metropolitan/state level conversations around urban greening.

   This project demonstrates the unique and crucial role the 202020 Vision plays in metropolitan/state urban greening in Australia. This project will define the 202020 Vision's role in metropolitan/state level urban greening over the next three-five years.

2. Demonstrated relationships with key influencers and stakeholders involved in urban greening.

   The 202020 Vision is unprecedented in forming key relationships to build, maintain and facilitate the largest urban greening network in Australia.

3. Clear identification of progress of each state to date towards urban greening to inform strategic direction of the 202020 Vision program moving forward.

   This project updates the 2016 Urban Forestry Council Index and highlights the progress of each urban LGA in Australia as well as the overall progress of each state towards urban greening.

4. Distribution of the 202020 Vision's relevant projects, insights and learnings to relevant partners and stakeholders.

   This project promotes the value of the program, positioning the 202020 Vision and the team behind it as leaders in this space.

5. Refreshed understanding of communications landscape including
   - identifying key opportunities and challenges for communications at a national level
   - reigniting conversations with media who we haven't been active with for almost 12 months
   - identified trends around language, community engagement and new forms of media relevant for the sector

   This project evaluates the state of communications within the urban forestry sector and enables a strategy for improvement and optimisation.

6. Minimised risk and maximised possibilities via external relations management (communications support).

7. Active, well-managed and engaged LinkedIn community.

   This project fosters the activity and growth of the 202020 Vision LinkedIn group, which is the primary urban greening group on this platform. The forum for knowledge sharing, communication and networking facilitated by this forum cannot be underestimated.

8. Engaged and supported Living Network (via eDMs and LinkedIn and other communications support).

   This project allows for the maintenance and growth of the 202020 Vision Living Network, with almost 7,000 members. This is the largest network of green space professionals in Australia.

# Monitoring and evaluation

This project provides valuable findings and insights on metropolitan urban forestry for the Australian horticulture industry.

The work successfully delivered on all project outcomes and provides

- An up-to-date detailed outline of urban greening policy in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia through interviews, leveraging existing relationships, event attendance and extensive desk research.

- A research-based recommendation on how to move each state forwards in their urban forestry efforts.

- A detailed analysis of every urban LGA in Australia and their progression towards urban forestry.

- A refreshed understanding of the communications landscape through interviews and desk research.

- A clear direction of the 202020 Vision program for the next three to five years outlining priority focus areas.

- An engaged and growing Living Network via regular eDM distribution (maintaining a click through rate of 35-45% and an open rate of 15-25%, well about industry averages).

- A re-engaged and growing LinkedIn group, providing an open forum for green space professionals to discuss ideals, share insights, promote their own work and network with others.

Limitations

- The trusted relationships that much of this information, and the program more broadly, rely on have been built over many years since the program's inception. This mean that often information gets shared in confidence and cannot be shared publicly.

- We spoke to numerous sector representatives from each state to complete this project, however we cannot speak to everyone. There may be narratives and intricacies that have not been included because we aren't privy to them.

- The NSW council amalgamations in 2016 slowed/stopped urban forestry progression in many pre-existing councils. This limited the state's overall ability to progress and effects the final results.

Ongoing monitoring of the 202020 Vision program will be important over the next five years to ensure the nursery marketing and R&D program investment is delivering on optimum ROI.

# Recommendations

Around Australia, the 202020 Vision recognises that each state has specific drivers (urban heat, climate change, drought, conservation etc.) for increased urban green space, and the way that the benefits are communicated also varies slightly. Despite these differences, we see shared challenges and the national requirement to balance increasing density with livability means positive change in planning codes, regulations and development applications – unlocking more land to plant on, and minimum targets and standards for urban canopy and green spaces.

**Two major areas of [national] focus now stand out, when considering the implementation of such positive policy change:**

Firstly, we've learnt that successful community engagement is a vital factor in supporting progressive policy action at a state level and paves the way for councils and technical officers to more seamlessly implement these actions on the ground. The way that the benefits of urban green space are communicated is of critical importance in garnering this support, and a key angle for the conversation continues to be the health and wellbeing benefits of plants and trees. The 202020 Vision team has a strong role to play in supporting both state and local government with this conversation; leveraging our deep knowledge of the space, but also the communications experience of the program delivery team. Working with councils to see what's worked and deepening our understanding of consumer sentiment will enable us to develop council tools that grow broad base support for urban greening.

Another key priority for the urban greening movement is agreeing upon a consistent approach to measurement. The 202020 Vision team observes that that the Urban Monitor tool will increasingly become the standard for urban green space measurement as it allows not just experts to understand green cover but gives planners and decision-makers a more holistic understanding of where urban green space should be prioritised and legislated for at the street level. Supporting, translating and disseminating this work will therefore become a key strategic priority of the 202020 Vision moving forward.

Specific project opportunities for the 202020 Vision project across Australia include:

- Conducting further research into, and clearly communicate the health benefits of urban green space.
- Translating technical information available to urban greening professionals into narrative form and making it accessible to Australian communities.
- Hosting pilot or demonstration projects that communicate the benefits and multiple uses of urban green spaces.
- In partnership with government and industry partners, consider a 'White Label' public awareness campaign that could be adapted to local audiences.
- Supporting, encouraging and funding more projects and case studies that demonstrate best practice for incorporating urban green space into unusual, dense and non-traditional spaces (such as roofs, walls, plazas, courtyards, carparks etc.)
- Advocating for integrated water management, where state governments should ensure that all are barriers removed, and incentives put in place for developers to irrigate green infrastructure.
- Promoting a community-led, 'Citizen-Science' approach to mapping, cataloguing and integrating the green network, and thus providing community engagement opportunities.
- Supporting the relevant people and organisations to effectively influence and share government decision-making in each state.

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# Intellectual property, commercialisation and confidentiality

No project IP, project outputs, commercialisation or confidentiality issues to report.

# Appendices

Please note: All appendices below are confidential.

Appendix 1 National Metro Urban Forestry Report and Communications Audit.pdf

Appendix 2 LGA Index 2018