

5.11 Urban Forest (05-038-04-2211 LS)

Laura Simes, Environment Policy Advisor

Moved: Mayor Heather Henderson
Seconded: Cr Sharron Hawkins Zeeb

That WALGA:

- 1. Advocate and work with the State Government to further prevent the loss of urban tree canopy, which is a significant environmental and social issue for communities across the State; and**
- 2. Work with member Councils to develop a system of appropriate market based and regulatory instruments to promote the increase in the urban tree canopy on private property.**

RESOLUTION 13.1./2017

CARRIED

In Brief

- The loss of tree canopy cover is a significant issue for Local Government.
- A number of Local Governments have sought to address the loss of canopy through the preparation and implementation of locally appropriate urban forest strategies.
- The key challenges identified by Local Governments in implementing their plans include inconsistent State policies (specifically the R-Codes and Liveable Neighbourhoods), inadequate protection for existing trees, and the lack of a requirement for revegetation in new developments. Funding and a lack of knowledge (from community, staff and councillors) around the benefits of an urban forest were also identified as issues.
- WALGA proposes to collaborate with the Department of Planning in developing an Urban Tree Canopy Project, which currently involves providing input into a proposed urban forest communications campaign.
- It is proposed that WALGA continue to work with the State Government and continue to advocate for a strategy to meaningfully address the existing impediments faced by Local Government to tree retention and planting.

Attachment

Nil.

Relevance to Strategic Plan

Key Strategies

Engagement with Members

- Deliver a broad range of benefits and services that enhance the capacity of member Local Governments;

Sustainable Local Government

- Continue to build capacity to deliver sustainable Local Government;
- Provide support to all members, according to need;
- Represent the diversity of members' aspirations in the further development of Local Government in Western Australia;

- Foster economic and regional development in Local Government.

Policy Implications

Nil.

Budgetary Implications

Nil.

Background

Loss of tree canopy cover

The loss of tree canopy cover is a significant issue for Local Government, due to impacts on public health, local biodiversity and visual amenity. However, Local Governments are currently finding that pressure to meet urban infill targets, along with the loss of native vegetation through clearing for greenfield developments, is resulting in a significant loss of canopy cover.

The need to address this issue has been reflected in a number of WALGA Zone resolutions that stress the importance of appropriate State planning mechanisms to better protect and expand Perth's urban forest on both private property and public land, along with the need for a community engagement campaign to promote awareness around the benefits of trees.

In the absence of appropriate State planning mechanisms, a number of Local Governments have sought to address the loss of canopy through the preparation and implementation of locally appropriate urban forest strategies. The key challenges identified by Local Governments in implementing their plans include inconsistent State policies, specifically the R-Codes and Liveable Neighbourhoods, inadequate protection for existing trees and the lack of a requirement for revegetation in new developments. Funding and a lack of knowledge (from community, staff and councillors) around the benefits of an urban forest were also identified as issues.

WALGA's work to date

In response to Local Government concerns in relation to this issue, WALGA has produced a range of materials, consulted with Local Government and run workshops:

- release of *Urban Street Trees Policy Discussion* (May 2014);
- street trees workshop for Local Government (June 2014);
- *Street Trees Guidance Report* (January 2015);
- *2020 Vision: How to Grow an Urban Forest* workshop (November 2015);
- Climate Change Collaborators urban forestry session (March 2016);
- Concurrent session on urban forestry at the WA Local Government Convention (August 2016); and
- hosting a Department of Planning (DoP) Urban Forest workshop for Local Government (November 2016)

Collaboration with the Department of Planning

Following the November 2016 workshop, WALGA was approached by the Department of Planning (DoP) to partner with them in developing an Urban Tree Canopy Project. The WALGA Chief Executive Officer indicated WALGA's interest in being involved, and outlined key issues and priorities which should be included in the project. In summary, these were:

- clear objectives, supported with a strong evidence base;



- an output that includes provision of a consistent methodology to measure canopy cover; and
- identification of impediments to addressing the barriers to tree retention and planting (in particular, planning policies and procedures).

DoP has advised WALGA that the first part of this project is a communication strategy and campaign on the benefits of preserving and growing the urban tree canopy.

Comment

It is expected that DoP will proceed with the project (beginning with the communication strategy and campaign) whether or not WALGA collaborates with DoP.

By choosing to collaborate, WALGA has a valuable opportunity to influence and shape the scope, content and outputs of the project. In this way, WALGA can provide value to its members by seeking to ensure the project outputs:

- cater to the diversity of Local Governments;
- provide practical tools to assist Local Government; and
- meaningfully addresses the existing impediments faced by Local Government to tree retention and planting.

If State Council approves this recommendation:

- WALGA will continue to advocate and work with the State Government to further prevent the loss of urban tree canopy, which is a significant environmental and social issue for communities across the State; and
- Members will be advised on the progress of the Urban Tree Canopy Project with the Department of Planning and any opportunities for input into the project.