

Submission
No 133

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING SYSTEM AND THE IMPACTS
OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND
COMMUNITIES**

Organisation: Institute of Australian Consulting Arboriculturists
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The Chairperson
PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 7 – PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT
NSW Legislative Council

RE; Inquiry into the planning system and the impacts of climate change on the environment and communities - IACA Submission.

Dear M/s Higginson,

The Institute of Australian Consulting Arboriculturists (IACA) are pleased to provide some general feedback in relation to the Urban Forest and its role within your inquiry.

A well-managed urban forest is fundamental to optimising liveability in urban areas. The planning system must ensure that urban forest in NSW's urban areas is adequately accommodated in the planning system.

Urban forest provides significant environmental, ecological, social and economic benefits. These include but are not limited to:

- mitigating heat,
- improving air quality,
- sequestering and storing carbon,
- improving water quality,
- ameliorating stormwater impacts,
- improving physical and mental health,
- enhancing social cohesion,
- contributing to biodiversity and providing habitat and food for wildlife.

It is believed that at least 30% and up to 40% urban forest canopy is the level of canopy target to which should be aspired. Currently the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Area has around 20% urban forest canopy, many regional centres are even less. The City of Wagga Wagga recently undertook a review of canopy coverage and city wide averaged about 10%! To its credit it has developed an Urban Cooling Strategy.

The NSW planning system must address the following matters to ensure that appropriate urban forest targets are set and achieved. It is recommended that:

1. Councils are required to specify urban forest canopy targets in their Local Environmental Plans (LEPs).
2. Councils should be urged to develop and implement Urban Cooling Strategy Plans.
3. LEPs specify urban forest canopy targets for all land use zonings.
4. State and federal government controlled property (eg. schools, hospitals, defence land, universities and TAFEs, transport corridors, power and telecommunications corridors, etc.)

are required to have urban forest canopy targets and to develop strategies to achieve those targets.

5. All private land should be required to contribute to urban forest canopy.
6. The planning system investigates and introduces incentives for contributing urban forest canopy. For example, property that contributes 60% canopy may receive rebates compared with a similarly rated property with less than 10% canopy.
7. Larger species size and increased longevity should be recognised in relevant planning instruments as significant factors in improving sustainability of the urban forest and achieving greater urban forest benefits. Consent for the removal of trees usually requires replacement trees to be planted. Often the number of new trees exceeds the number of trees approved for removal in an attempt to adequately compensate for the loss of existing canopy. However, this can have a counter-productive outcome. Ten short-lived, small stature wattle trees will provide nothing like the medium and long-term urban forest benefit that a single relatively large species size, relatively long-lived eucalypt will.
8. Development should be required to be tree friendly. Buildings must be designed and constructed to tolerate soil movement that can be anticipated in a soil environment that provides up to 60% canopy. Stormwater, water supply, sewage, transport, telecommunications and power infrastructure should be designed and constructed to co-exist with the necessary green infrastructure.
9. Planning and planning authorities need to recognise that existing large trees with long useful life expectancy need to be recognised as an asset and the development should make every effort to support their retention. It is stating the obvious that if you remove a tree that is 30 to 80 years old, you do not get another one the same for a similar period of time. Removal of large trees takes decades to replace - if they are planted as replacements - and often they are not.
10. Existing urban forest canopy should be sustained for as long as possible. New and retrofitting development should be required to fully consider and retain existing trees as much as possible. Approval should only be given to remove existing trees when a strategy to improve the urban forest canopy can be clearly demonstrated.
11. There needs to be clear public education on the benefits of trees to our urban environments, and why we need to maintain existing trees whenever possible and develop strategies on improving canopy coverage across our urban areas.
12. Offset schemes often have a negative effect. Developers will adopt the offset scheme to allow clearing of the development area. This means that the developed area is not contributing to canopy coverage and the urban forest. There are numerous examples of large residential developments where 5-10 years after all the houses are built, the canopy coverage is less than 5%.

Future urban development is inevitable and a requirement. Unless the general public are educated as to why urban canopy is actually very important, and planning authorities are afforded meaningful support to maintain and improve our urban forest, our urban forest will not offer meaningful

mitigation to climate change or liveability in our cities and urban areas. We will continue to go down the same pathway and housing in particular will require more energy not less to cool dwellings.

Regards,

Wade Ryan
Chair - Advocacy Committee.
Institute of Australian Consulting Arboriculturists
PO Box 1302 PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

Website www.iaca.org.au