



# NATIONAL URBAN FORESTS PLAN

## Greener, cooler, healthy cities

*The Greens' plan to protect and regenerate natural habitats in our cities*

The rapid growth of our cities has come at a cost to our natural environment. Better protection for these remaining areas and a new network of green corridors through our cities and suburban streets will improve the quality of life, ensure wildlife and natural habitats are preserved for future generations, and transform our cities to cooler, more liveable, healthier places to live.

The Greens have a plan to keep our city cool and beautiful with a protected network of Urban Forests, linked together with green corridors, tree-lined streets, parks and backyard gardens.

With smart planning and commitment to transforming our cities we can all live within a 5 minute walk of our local park or greenway, stay cool in summer, and protect our precious natural places.

### > AN URGENT TIPPING POINT

Australia's cities have experienced rapid and uncoordinated growth that has resulted in the loss of unique natural habitats like forests, bushland, woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands. Urban sprawl and inappropriate planning in all of our cities is eating into rural and natural areas, impacting on some of our most endangered habitats and species.

Australian wildlife is under great pressure from our expanding cities and suburbs encroaching on increasingly threatened natural habitats. Establishing a network of Greenways— which are connected corridors of native vegetation and urban bushland in each city provides the best insurance to protect endangered species and also improve the quality of life in our built environment.

The city is where most of us live – but we are treating nature as something to see and experience outside the city. The Greens are standing up for cities that protect and enhance natural environments, which in turn nurture us through healthy air, clean water, and places to reflect and enjoy our natural world. Green spaces in cities act as lungs for the cities, and also promote our physical and mental health.

### > OUR VISION

The Greens' **National Urban Forests Plan** includes the proposal to protect and re-grow corridors of biodiversity at the metropolitan scale in each of our 18 major cities, and by

2030 protect these Greenways as a series of Urban National Parks.

The main goal of the Greens initiative is to provide a new national framework for protecting and regenerating green space in our cities. Greenways are connections across the metropolitan area that link up areas of natural habitat, while supporting other land uses such as conservation, transport (walking and cycling) and recreation.

The **National Urban Forests Plan** is an ambitious plan to transform our cities.

The long term goal is to create a healthy and protected Urban National Park in every Australian major city, comprised of a series of significant protected bushland areas, connected together by metropolitan scale Greenways (or urban forests), green streets and household backyards across the metropolitan area.

**The Greens propose \$25 million per year over ten years for:**

- **\$15m Urban Forest Acquisition Fund** to enable the states to purchase areas of high conservation value natural habitat in urban areas, particularly areas under direct threat from development or neglect
- **\$5 million Community Grants** to enable local communities to contribute to the Greenways through precinct-scale or neighborhood scale plantings or infrastructure such as amphitheatres, interpretive centres, walking trails and so on
- **\$1m Household grants** to subsidise local area biodiversity plantings in front verges and backyards, to enable households to directly link in to the local greenway; made available via local Landcare groups, local councils and native nurseries
- **\$1m to assist states and local councils develop local Urban Forest Plans** including mapping and planning linkages
- **\$2m to establish an Aboriginal Stewardship Committee in each state** to steer planning and mapping of the greenways networks, and to engage Aboriginal businesses to develop cultural trails and deliver cultural, education and eco-tourism programs

- **\$1m for ongoing maintenance** including tree audits every 3 years to measure tree canopy cover and health, and an interactive website with mapping tools and education resources
- **Introduce a federal moratorium on clearing of urban bushland** until each city has completed Strategic Environmental Assessment and an assessment of by the Threatened Species Commissioner
- **Establish an Urban Biodiversity Taskforce** within the re-established Major Cities Unit, responsible for coordinating the Greenways initiative from a planning and infrastructure perspective
- **Create a new category of National Park called ‘Urban National Parks’ by 2020 - consisting of a series of interlinked urban forests and greenways.** This will be added to Australia’s National Reserve System, affording it maximum protection and status possible in Australian law. Australia’s National Reserve System currently includes and manages about 70% of Australia’s protected habitats, including National Parks.

## > BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The Parliamentary Budget Office has estimated this plan to cost \$100 million over forward estimates.

## > WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE IN YOUR CITY?

Greenways can range from small corridors created by local communities to large corridors that stretch across the many different landscapes of a metropolitan area.

It works at three scales:

- **At the metropolitan (and bioregional) scale:** critical habitats under threat are given permanent protection and a new network of dedicated walking and cycling paths that allow access to the Greenways.
- **At the local street scale** a new ‘urban forest’ is regrown along the corridors in between areas of existing natural habitats and parks. Greenways offer the opportunity to turn our local streets and verges into a series of biodiversity rich, linear parks.
- **At the individual household level,** everyone would be able to contribute directly to the Urban Forests project through planting native species in their back yards and front verges.

The Greens goal is for all residents of Australian cities to live within a 5 minute walk of a Greenway and a 10 minute bicycle ride of a protected reserve of regional significance.



Case study: Visualisation of City Road, Southbank.  
Source: Melbourne’s Urban Forest Strategy

## > BENEFITS

Urban forests and green spaces in our city offer valuable environmental, economic and health benefits and should be viewed as the missing part of our infrastructure and healthcare systems.

Green spaces improve our city’s liveability, providing places to socialise, exercise and somewhere for our kids to play. People who live in greener suburbs are more likely to have active lifestyles including walking and cycling.

According to a federal government report, heatwaves kill more Australians than all natural disasters combined including bushfires, floods and cyclones, with about 500 recorded in 2011. The same report warns the number of heatwave-related deaths in Australia’s major cities will quadruple by 2050, with Perth and Brisbane predicted to be hit hardest. With our summers already longer, hotter and more extreme, it’s vital to start planning now to reduce the impact of the Urban Heat Island effect, which can add up to 4 degrees to temperatures<sup>1</sup>.

Greenways and Urban forests maintain environmental quality and act as lungs for the city, significantly reducing air pollution. Urban forests also cool the temperature of cities and remove

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carbon from the atmosphere, essential in the fight against global warming. It is estimated that street trees can cool urban communities by 4-6 degrees Celsius. They can also sequester between 11-31 tonnes of carbon per hectare. Urban wildlife also relies on green spaces in cities and urban areas for their food and habitat.

All of these services have significant economic benefits. For example, the Brisbane Urban Forest initiative estimated 575,000 street trees are providing an annual \$1.65 million in benefits for air pollutant removal, carbon sequestration and rainfall harvesting.

## > CONNECTING TO CULTURE

*“The establishment of Cultural Trails offers cultural restoration, individual and community healing and the creation of a new Australian Culture that recognizes, respects and applies the best elements of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Culture in Australia.”*

- Dr. Noel Nannup, Noongar elder.

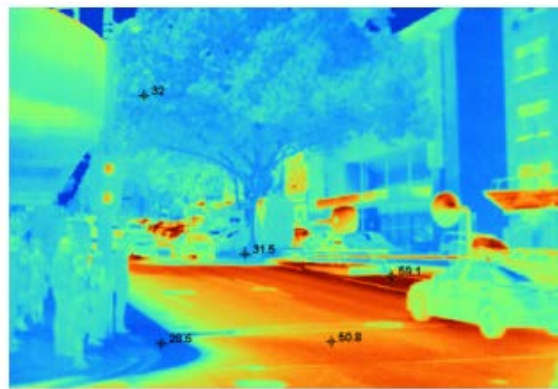
The National Urban Forests Plan will provide funding to establish and integrate a layer of Cultural Trails – which are connected corridors of protected urban bushland that knit together sites and songlines of significant cultural value to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This idea draws on the work of Cultural Corridors Inc., a not-for-profit organization established by WA Noongar elder Dr Noel Nannup, which has identified and mapped significant sites to create a network of Cultural Trails. Some of these sites can be used for educational and cultural activities as well as being sites where cultural-tourism and eco-tourism can thrive.

To achieve this, it will provide \$2m nationally per year over ten years to establish an Aboriginal Stewardship committee to steer the planning and mapping of the greenways networks in each major city, engage Aboriginal businesses to develop cultural trails and deliver cultural, education and eco-tourism programs within the greenways network, and legislation to provide higher levels of protection for Aboriginal heritage and significant sites.

## > SAVING OUR ICONIC SPECIES

Australian wildlife is under great pressure from our ever expanding cities as they encroach further into sensitive and diminishing habitats like coastal reserves, wetlands, grasslands and forests.

As reported on Four Corners in 2012, as our cities expand and bushland is cleared for new residential developments, the displaced wildlife does not move on but is lost altogether<sup>ii</sup>, and even iconic species like koalas are being affected.



Heat image mapping of a Melbourne street shows the temperature difference between the street, buildings and tree canopy. Source: City of Melbourne

Development in expanding suburbs around Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, the Gold Coast and the Redlands of south-east Queensland is having a huge impact on local koala populations<sup>iii</sup>. Koala populations in NSW, Qld and ACT have dropped so rapidly that following a Greens’ initiated Senate Inquiry into the health of our koalas, this iconic species has been added to our national threatened species list<sup>iv</sup>.

**Iconic species like Koalas in Brisbane and the north coast of NSW, Southern Brown Bandicoots in Melbourne and Adelaide, and Carnaby’s Black Cockatoos in Perth are now federally listed as endangered, largely due to loss of habitat in our urban areas.**

Greenways in each city provide the best insurance at the metropolitan scale to save these species and others across our 18 major cities, from the very real threat of extinction, and to provide vital corridors for food, habitat, and safe movement through our urban landscapes.

Our cities are also home to thousands of native species and rich biodiversity not found anywhere else in the world. Yet hundreds of species that are unique to the bioregions our cities also occupy are threatened with extinction, with land clearing being one of the biggest current threats<sup>v</sup>.

## > CASE STUDIES

City Greenways have been introduced in many cities around the world.

**Melbourne:** The City of Melbourne’s inspiring Urban Forest strategy aims increase Melbourne city’s canopy cover to 40% coverage by 2040, green the city’s vast rooftop spaces and dramatically increase biodiversity through planning the “urban forest of the future”.

**New York:** New York’s iconic High Line is a 1.6 km linear park built on a section of the former elevated New York Central Railroad spur, running along the lower west side of Manhattan. It has been redesigned and planted as an aerial greenway.

**Singapore:** The greenway movement in Singapore began as a proposal for an island-wide network of green corridors, in the late 1980s. Singapore capitalised on the under-utilised land along canals and beside major roadways for a pilot greenway project. The scheme has had strong public support and Singapore is now seen as a model for greenway planning for other rapidly growing cities in Asia<sup>vi</sup>.

**Sydney:** In 2012 NSW Greens MP Jamie Parker presented a petition with over 10,000 signatures in support of the *Cooks River to Iron Cove GreenWay* in Sydney's Inner West<sup>vii</sup>.

With support of four local councils and funded by the NSW Environmental Trust the project is now complete. It provides an urban green corridor that has a safe walking and cycling path, recreational areas and hosts a variety of community and arts projects, and home to a range of wildlife including an endangered population of Long-nosed Bandicoots.



Sydney's Cooks River to Iron Cove Greenway map<sup>1</sup>.

[http://www.ashfield.nsw.gov.au/page/greenway\\_sustainability\\_project.html](http://www.ashfield.nsw.gov.au/page/greenway_sustainability_project.html) ;  
<http://www.greenway.org.au/index.php/about-the-greenway>

## > INACTION FROM OTHER PARTIES

The Coalition's recent budget provided \$20m over two years from 2018 to support green corridors and urban forests – though this was simply reallocated from the National Landcare program, is not at a scale large enough, and is at direct odds with its record on approving catastrophic levels of urban bushland and wetland clearing. The Coalition is also committed to handing over the important layer of federal oversight and protection of regionally significant natural environments in our urban areas to the states.

<sup>i</sup> Australian Government Department of Infrastructure (2013) State of our Cities Report at

<https://infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure/pab/soac/index.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2012/08/16/3569231.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> Darryl Jones "Koala Cul-de-sac? Development a dead end for wildlife" *The Conversation* 12/8/2012 <http://theconversation.com/koala-cul-de-sac-development-a-dead-end-for-wildlife-9047>

<sup>iv</sup> Senate Inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia's koala population

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate\\_Committees?url=ec\\_ctte/completed\\_inquiries/2010-13/koalas/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=ec_ctte/completed_inquiries/2010-13/koalas/index.htm)

<sup>v</sup> [https://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/report2009\\_05.pdf](https://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/report2009_05.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204604001331>

<sup>vii</sup> [http://www.jamieparker.org.au/nsw-parliament-hears-10000-strong-petition-build-the-greenway-now/;](http://www.jamieparker.org.au/nsw-parliament-hears-10000-strong-petition-build-the-greenway-now/)