



URBAN FOREST STRATEGY

ENGAGEMENT REPORT

TRANSPORT CANBERRA
AND CITY SERVICES

MARCH 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Canberra’s urban forest is a key part of what makes our city the most liveable in Australia. The urban forest, made up of all trees, vegetation and systems that support them, is part of our identity as the bush capital: a city within a landscape.”

CHRIS STEEL, MINISTER FOR CITY SERVICES

This report presents results of community engagement undertaken in 2020 to provide feedback on the ACT’s draft Urban Forest Strategy.

It explains the processes used to present information and seek input from ACT residents, businesses and other stakeholders and gives an overview of the suggestions made to government as a result of these engagement efforts.

Over 240 people or organisations took the opportunity to have their say on the draft Strategy from a wide cross section of the community. Those who responded contributed with suggestions on how the ACT can ensure the urban forest prospers under a unique set of challenges – changing climate, a lack of species diversity, an ageing tree population, population growth and urban densification. These suggestions were overwhelmingly positive, demonstrating a high level of public support for the Strategy.

This report also discusses how responses and feedback on the draft Strategy have been collated and considered for possible inclusion in the Strategy. These suggestions have been grouped further for the purposes of this report into ten key insights. The report also includes analysis of the survey results for the support of the Strategies’ vision and objectives, the importance of trees, the prioritisation of actions and the potential opportunities for partnering with the community.

INTRODUCTION

URBAN FOREST STRATEGY 2020-2024

The Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045 (the Strategy) sets out the ACT Government's vision for a resilient and sustainable urban forest that supports a liveable city and contributes to the wellbeing of the community in a changing climate.

The Urban Forest Strategy 2020-45 has been prepared in response to a unique set of challenges facing Canberra's urban forest. The Strategy was developed in response or with reference to the *Planning Strategy 2018*, *Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025*, *Canberra's Living Infrastructure Plan* and *ACT Transport Strategy 2020*. This recognises the importance of the urban forest as part of a wider system that contributes to our liveable city.

Central to the strategy is its vision, *for all Canberrans to enjoy the benefits of streets lined with healthy trees. An urban forest that is resilient and sustainable and contributes to the wellbeing of the community in a changing climate.*

The strategy sets out six key objectives.

1. Protect the urban forest.
2. Grow a resilient forest.
3. Balance and diversify the urban forest.
4. Take an ecological approach and support biodiversity.
5. Develop infrastructure to support the urban forest and liveability.
6. Partner with the community.

We invited the community to provide feedback on the [**draft Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045**](#), including the key objectives it aims to achieve and the actions that must be taken to ensure the urban forest prospers.

Community feedback will be incorporated into the final Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045 and guide how we grow and maintain the ACT's tree canopy and garden city character.

WHY WE ENGAGED

On 20 July 2020 a community engagement process commenced to seek views and feedback on the draft Urban Forest Strategy.

During this process we invited the community to provide feedback on the draft Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045, including its vision, the key objectives it aims to achieve and the actions that must be taken to ensure the urban forest prospers.

The Strategy was released on the ACT Government's YourSay website, where people were invited to complete a survey and/or provide feedback through a written submission.

Presentations requested by community groups were provided to the Belconnen Community Council in August 2020 and the Griffith Narrabundah Residents Association in February 2020.

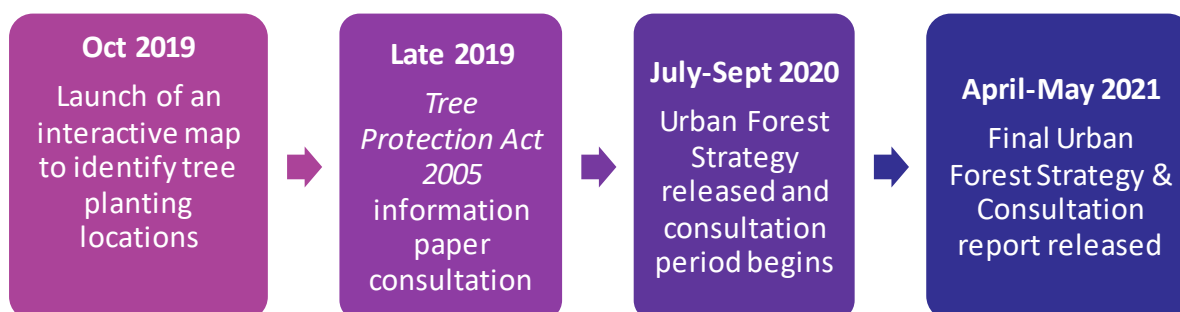
Feedback from past community engagement activities undertaken in 2019, including the review of the *Tree Protection Act 2005* and a call for suggested tree planting sites, was also incorporated into the development of the draft Strategy prior to its release.

The original closing date for consultation was 31 August 2020 but this was extended to 10 September 2020 in order to provide more time for the community to have their say.

We heard the community's thoughts and ideas for the ACT's Urban Forest Strategy including suggestions on how to enhance our urban forest to meet the tree canopy target.

Feedback was sought by reading the [draft Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045](#) and:

- completing the [survey](#)
- emailing a submission to communityengagement@act.gov.au



WHAT WE ASKED

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from a series of questions asked in the online survey. These questions were designed to both gauge support for key elements of the draft Strategy, and guide future opportunities for community engagement in urban forest management.

The survey asked:

- Do you support the draft Urban Forest Strategy?
- Do you agree with this vision statement?
- Do you agree with the objectives?
- How important are trees?
- When you think about Canberra's urban forest, which actions should be prioritised?
- How would you like to partner with the ACT Government to deliver the future urban forest (e.g. community planting days, volunteer programs)?

Written submissions were also welcomed, which enabled stakeholders to provide more detailed feedback.

WHO WE ENGAGED WITH

The draft Strategy was released for public consultation on 20 July 2020 and the consultation period closed on 10 September 2020.

In line with the COVID-19 pandemic Public Health Emergency declaration in the ACT no face-to-face engagement activities were held and online engagement was undertaken.

The ACT Government's YourSay website was used, with a page on the Urban Forest Strategy created under the Trees in the ACT landing page where all engagement opportunities on tree-related projects are promoted. A survey was made available on the YourSay website and written submissions were also invited.

Highlights during the consultation included:

- 199 surveys were completed
- Very high positive responses across all questions
- 48 written submissions were received.

A variety of community stakeholders were engaged during the consultation for the draft Strategy, including:

- Volunteer and 'Friends' groups
- Community Councils
- Resident associations
- Environmental groups
- Institutes and industry associations.

Members of the community who have previously taken part in tree-related engagement activities, such as those that have suggested a tree planting location, were emailed to encourage them to provide feedback on the draft Strategy.

Given the close relationship between the urban forest and good environmental and climate change outcomes, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) were closely consulted on the development of the Strategy.

WHO WE HEARD FROM AND HOW

Over 240 people or organisations from a wide cross section of the community took the opportunity to have their say on the draft Strategy.

The survey on the YourSay website received 199 individual responses. A further 48 written submissions were received via email. The submissions were received from many individual residents, as well as community councils and resident associations and environmental groups.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

199

Surveys completed

48

Written submissions received

64

Email invitations sent to
organisations

2,086

Unique website visits

788

Engagements on social media

12,274

People reached on
social media

WHAT WE HEARD

SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE ENGAGEMENT

Feedback from the survey and the written submissions indicates that the draft Strategy is strongly supported. The large number of extensive written submissions and their knowledgeable content clearly highlights that the urban forest of Canberra is highly valued by the community, community groups, key stakeholders and institutions.

The feedback confirms that the vision and objectives of the strategy reflect community values, integrate well with other ACT Government strategies and policies and align with policy positions of other land managers:

- **Broad support for the strategy** - Over 75% of responded said they were either extremely supportive or very supportive of the draft Urban Forest Strategy
- **Canopy coverage is key** - Maintaining existing trees and increasing canopy cover and equitable distribution of canopy coverage are the top priorities
- **You agree with the vision** - Over 92% agreed with the strategy's vision statement
- **The objectives are right** - Over 97% agree with all six objectives in the strategy.

The strategy has been revised to reflect feedback received during the consultation period where appropriate. Several key insights were consistently raised through the consultation process.

Key insights

Insight one

Seeking greater detail on the implementation of the strategy.

"The Strategy needs to be more definitive on the implementation of its recommendations particularly on short-term priorities and reform in relation to current practices which are putting existing trees at risk."

Insight two

Adequate provision of ongoing resources to implement the strategy.

"As with many such strategies the proof of ability to meet the objectives depends on the detail of the actions to support them. In turn, these actions depend entirely on sufficient resourcing to achieve their implementation."

Insight three

The need for subsequent monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

“An evaluation framework be developed to provide transparency, accountability and to measure the implementation of this Strategy. This evaluation framework needs to form the basis of regular reviews of the program to gauge progress and make adjustments when necessary. Five yearly LiDAR surveys, drone technologies and community data should be included for monitoring, evaluation and to form the basis for adapting processes when required.”

Insight four

The relationship between the Strategy and fire, from a climate change mitigation perspective and from an ecological standpoint.

“The Urban Forest Strategy has not clarified how the risks associated with urban trees predominantly around bushfire and extreme weather are mitigated. These key risks, including extreme heat and storms, are modelled to be increasing over the life of this plan due to climate change.”

Insight five

Protection and retention of existing trees is essential.

“Developing a legislative framework for tree protection is essential but must be integrated across planning and development, construction industries, parking officials and other relevant sections of government services, and the community. Without an integrated approach to legislation the actions that cause continued damage to trees, the historical patterns of tree plantings with recognised heritage value, particularly along avenues with registered tree plantings, and Canberra’s heritage listed housing precincts, will continue.”

Insight six

The importance of water provision, soil moisture, water sensitive urban design and stormwater harvesting.

“The urban forest strategy should explicitly consider the integration of trees and understory in relation to: storm water run-off (including provision for water infiltration to tree roots); improving lake health (consideration of leaf fall in run off); road and transport infrastructure (including reducing maintenance costs by shading, cooling the roads); and social development.”

Insight seven

The importance of collaboration and integrated governance of the forest.

“All authorities need to collaborate as there are discrepancies between various departments and stakeholder groups as to the urban ecology and its prioritisation of approach.”

Insight eight

Development of design guidelines to inform development and urban character.

“In order to provide an adequate balance of tree species, fundamental approaches to street design, site design, clearances etc. are required to expand species options for specifying and designing sites.”

Insight nine

Support for data sharing, communication, knowledge sharing and education.

“This objective (Objective 6: Partner with the community) is to be commended and, with the provision of scientifically based resources forming the basis for an education program for volunteers, should assist increasing the community’s understanding, appreciation and knowledge of the vital role trees play in our lives.”

Insight ten

The importance of successional planning for future canopy cover and landscape character.

“Actively and systematically reduce the number of trees at the upper end of the age distribution and plant new trees to bring the forest into a more balanced distribution as part of on-going forest management.”

DETAIL OF INSIGHTS FROM THE ENGAGEMENT

ENDORSEMENTS

No.	Summary of comments
1	The strategy is very comprehensive, takes an ecological approach, considers biodiversity, climate change preparation and hydrology, not just human amenities.
2	Sustainable, strategic, community engaged, environmentally sound.
3	The objectives when implemented will ensure sustainability of the urban tree canopy and as such human health for now and future generations. Higher urban temperatures have been proven to cause more pressure on the health system and associated A and E admissions. The expansion of the current canopy of trees will be imperative as developments and urban infill continue across the city.
4	Trees are integral to the liveability and character of Canberra and are critical to mitigating the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change on our city. Significant measures need to be taken to increase canopy cover in Canberra.
5	Nature parks and the abundance of trees are core to Canberra's identity. As listed in the document there are numerous benefits to large tree cover such as: reduced urban heat island effect, increased habitat for native species and increases recreational and exercise area for people. One of the best things I've heard the ACT government introduce.
6	Trees are a fundamental part of the Canberra landscape both aesthetically and ecologically. We, the community and the Government, should have this as a top priority.
7	Trees and the urban forest are fundamental to Australian Cities. They provide shade, habitat, amenity and sense of connection to suburbia.
8	It is clear the benefits derived from our tree canopies will become increasingly critical for our quality of living as climate change impacts our city & surrounding urban areas. A forest strategy is a logical step in maintaining and improving our forests into the future.
9	All efforts to swing the balance in favour of our environment are welcome. This is a comprehensive and positive report. The long-term nature of the plan is good to see. Assessment and publication of the progress being made in the steps toward the end objectives will be paramount for its success. The Urban Forest recommended changes to policies and rules that flow from them, must be clear at every stage to ensure public understanding and strong and dedicated enforcement.
10	A much-needed strategy to increase the tree coverage that is essential to a liveable city.

11	The strategy is on the correct path in line with the W B Griffin's vision.
12	I have been watching Canberra's trees suffer over the last decade or so and it is fantastic to see a dedicated effort going toward caring for them.
13	We need to do whatever we can to ensure that we are responding to the predictions around climate change and I feel this strategy helps this. We want our children and grandchildren to be able to play outside and canopy cover will help this.
14	This strategy is very positive and has some great examples of community involvement in other parts of the world.
15	Critical issue for Canberra's future liveability
16	The Urban Forest programme is for the greater benefit of all Canberrans on many levels.
17	To begin this great strategy there needs to be plan, and this is it.
18	One of Canberra's signature characteristics/features is our tree landscape - the Bush Capital, the Garden City. We must strive to preserve, expand and enhance this aspect of our city, particularly to counter a push to increasing housing density.

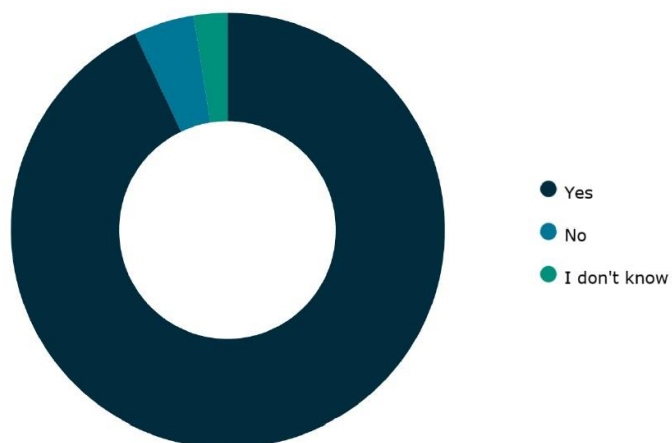
VISION STATEMENT

'Our vision is for all Canberrans to enjoy the benefits of streets lined with healthy trees. An urban forest that is resilient and sustainable and contributes to the wellbeing of the community in a changing climate.'

The survey results are overwhelmingly supportive of the vision statement. This indicates a strong alignment with community values and understanding of the fundamental role of the urban forest in contributing to the liveability and character of Canberra.

Do you agree with the vision statement?

Answer choices	Percent	Count
Yes	92.96%	185
No	4.52%	9
I don't know	2.51%	5
Total	100.00%	199



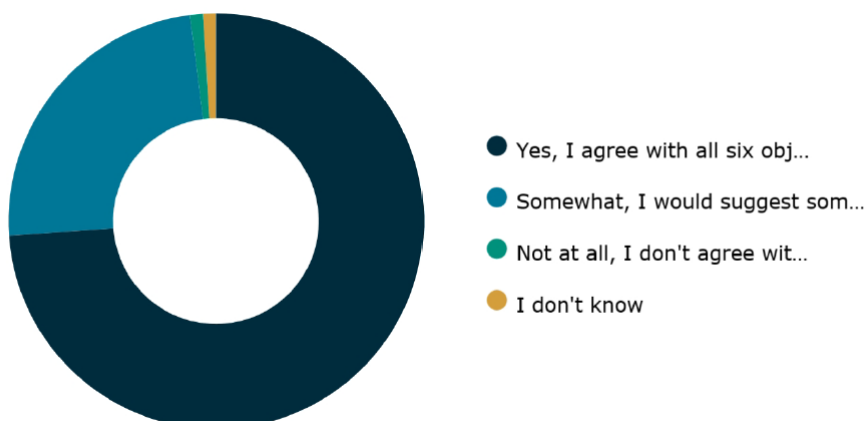
OBJECTIVES

- 1 Protect the urban forest
- 2 Grow a resilient forest
- 3 Balance and diversify the urban forest
- 4 Take an ecological approach and support biodiversity
- 5 Develop infrastructure to support the urban forest and liveability
- 6 Partner with the community

The survey results are very supportive of the six objectives. A total of 97.99% of respondents were either fully or generally in support of the objectives. This is a great reinforcement of strong alignment with community values and expectations.

Do you agree with the objectives?

Answer choices	Percent	Count
Yes, I agree with all six objectives	73.87%	147
Somewhat, I would suggest some changes to the objectives	24.12%	48
Not at all, I don't agree with any of the objectives	1.01%	2
I don't know	1.01%	2
Total	100.00%	199



IMPORTANCE OF TREES

The survey results indicate a knowledgeable understanding among the community of the value of trees across a range of environmental services and habitat provision. By combining the responses for respondents that rated the values as extremely or very important we see the very high results of:

- 91.46% for combating climate change
- 93.97% for providing a habitat for wildlife
- 90.95% for providing natural beauty
- 94.47% for cleaning the air
- 84.93% for cooling your home in summer
- 92.47% for contributing positively to your mental health
- 93.46% for providing shade.

The high level of understanding reinforces the strong support for the strategy and the recognition of the role of the urban forest now and into the future.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important	I don't know	Count
Combating climate change	75.38% 150	16.08% 32	5.03% 10	1.51% 3	2.01% 4	0 0	199
Providing a habitat for wildlife	76.38% 152	17.59% 35	5.03% 10	1.01% 2	0% 0	0% 0	199
Providing natural beauty	64.82% 129	26.13% 52	6.03% 12	2.51% 5	0.50% 1	0% 0	199
Cleaning the air	73.87% 147	20.60% 41	5.03% 10	0.50% 1	0% 0	0% 0	199
Cooling your home in summer	67.34% 134	17.59% 35	14.07% 28	0.50% 1	0.50% 1	0% 0	199
Contributing positively to your mental health	67.34% 134	25.13% 50	5.53% 11	1.51% 3	0.50% 1	0% 0	199
Providing shade	74.87% 149	18.59% 37	6.03% 12	0.50% 1	0% 0	0% 0	199

PRIORITISATION OF ACTIONS

In the prioritisation of the nine actions outlined in the survey, respondents evenly ranked seven of the nine actions, with the two relating to community engagement and education indicated as lower in priority.

The responses indicate a strong recognition of the need to increase canopy cover, create equitable distribution, maintain existing trees and encourage biodiversity. Diversity and resilience, replacement of ageing trees and hot spot reduction also rank highly.

Overall, the traditional 'government' actions rate more highly than the 'community' interactions with the urban forest. Contemporary views of urban forestry see the importance and myriad benefits gained through community involvement and active participation. While the community perhaps sees the management of the forest through a more traditional lens there is an important role in developing a more shared accountability for the governance of the urban forest.

Action	Score*	Count
Improving resilience and species diversity	5.17	199
Increasing canopy cover and equitable distribution of canopy coverage	5.92	199
Reducing hot spots and the heat island effect	5.24	199
Replacing ageing trees that have reached the end of their life	4.78	199
Providing habitat connections and pollination corridors	5.58	199
Infrastructure that supports the urban forest such as permeable surfaces in nature strips	5.06	199
Educating the community on caring for trees	4.20	199
Community and volunteering programs	3.12	199
Maintaining trees including watering them	5.94	199
Score* Ranking position based upon weighted responses.		

PARTNERING

The survey provided two options for respondents to indicate a desire to partner with the ACT Government in the delivery of the future urban forest. One question was around how respondents would like to participate and the other on registering for future updates on the project.

Of the 199 respondents, 116 expressed an interest in being kept informed on the project and there was a range of suggestions for partnering. Community planting days was prominent along with support for 'friends' groups. A number of suggestions were for education, knowledge sharing and harnessing the resources of groups such as schools, scouts and guides, and other organisations.

There are numerous suggestions to increase greening in the private realm, including provision of plant material and information on species selection and cultural requirements in relation to establishment and maintenance.

Also suggested is engagement with Indigenous and business groups which will broaden the governance of the urban forest, increase accountability and first nation's perspectives.

NEXT STEPS

The Urban Forest Strategy is an integral part of the suite of ACT Government strategies and priorities that supports a vision for Canberra to be a sustainable and liveable city that is responsive to the future and resilient to change.

This strategy puts forward objectives and actions that will guide the short and long-term planning, development and management of the ACT urban forest in contributing to the future vision. It also outlines a set of targets to evaluate the success of implementation.

Creating an urban forest that is resilient and sustainable and contributes to the wellbeing of the community in a changing climate requires forward planning framed by a long-term vision to inform management and development. The implementation will require both long-term (strategic and spatial planning) and shorter term (project-focussed planning) outcomes.

The six objectives outlined in the Strategy are supported by expected outcomes and actions. Each action has an identified timeframe as follows:

Ongoing:	Ongoing for the duration of the strategy
Immediate:	Within 2 years
Short:	Within 5 years
Medium:	Within 10 years
Long:	Within 20 years

An implementation and evaluation plan will be developed to ensure that the actions are being taken and assess the results. Reporting against each action will be required every five years over the life of the 25 year Strategy.

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey or made a submission, we value your feedback.

To find out more about the *Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045* and other initiatives, policies and projects in Canberra visit www.yoursay.act.gov.au.

APPENDICES

A SURVEY QUESTIONS

B SOCIAL MEDIA

A SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Have you read the draft Urban Forest Strategy?
2. What is your overall level of support for the draft Urban Forest Strategy?
3. Please tell us why you selected your last answer.
4. Do you agree with this vision statement?
5. Do you agree with these objectives?
6. If you answered somewhat or not at all, please explain why.
7. How important are trees for the following:
 - a. Combating climate change
 - b. Providing habitat for wildlife
 - c. Providing natural beauty
 - d. Cleaning the air
 - e. Cooling your home in summer
 - f. Contributing positively to your mental health
 - g. Providing shade
 - h. Increasing your property value
8. When you think about Canberra's urban forest, which of these actions should be prioritised?
 - a. Improving resilience and species diversity
 - b. Increasing canopy cover and equitable distribution of canopy coverage
 - c. Reducing hot spots and the heat island effect
 - d. Replacing ageing trees that have reached the end of their life
 - e. Providing habitat connections and pollination corridors
 - f. Infrastructure that supports the urban forest such as permeable surfaces in nature strips
 - g. Educating the community on caring for trees
 - h. Community and volunteering programs
 - i. Maintaining trees including watering them
9. How would you like to partner with the ACT Government to deliver the future urban forest (e.g. community planting days, volunteer programs)?
10. Do you have any comments on the draft Urban Forest Strategy?
11. To stay updated on this project, please leave us your email address.
12. How satisfied were you with this opportunity to provide feedback?

B SOCIAL MEDIA

ACT Government
24 Jul. at 7:58 am

From a virtually bare rural landscape to a city rich with green open spaces and tree-lined streets, Canberrans have always loved nature 🌱

These photos show the growth in Canberra's tree canopy cover from the viewpoint of Mt Taylor.

As Canberra grows and evolves, we're adding more trees and caring for those in the ground which will be guided by the Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045.


Have your say on the draft strategy at www.yoursay.act.gov.au

Produced by Transport Canberra and City Services

As Canberra grows and evolves, we're adding more trees and caring for those in the ground which will be guided by the Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045.

Have your say on the draft strategy at www.yoursay.act.gov.au

Produced by Transport Canberra and City Services




1970

41 Likes • 7 Comments • 10 Shares • 2.9K Views

Transport Canberra and City Services
@TCCS_ACT

The ACT's first Urban Forest Stra-tree-gy is now available for community comment 🌳 It provides a framework for maintaining & growing a healthy urban forest, ensuring it is renewed & enhanced for future generations. Have your say by 31 August at yoursay.act.gov.au



CANBERRA'S 1ST URBAN FOREST STRATEGY


yoursay.act.gov.au

2:46 PM · Jul 20, 2020 · Twitter Web App

3 Retweets • 7 Likes

Transport Canberra and City Services
@TCCS_ACT

The view from Mt Taylor in 1963, 1970 & 2020. The growth of our urban forest is unbe-leaf-able 🌳 Achieving a 30% tree canopy cover in 25 years will be guided by our Urban Forest Strategy. Comment on the draft strategy @ yoursay.act.gov.au



1963

0:17 / 701 views


4:44 PM · Aug 7, 2020 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

5 Retweets • 21 Likes

Transport Canberra and City Services
@TCCS_ACT

Leaf us your comments before it's too late! Consultation on the ACT's draft Urban Forest Stra-tree-gy closes 31 August. Visit yoursay.act.gov.au



CANBERRA'S 1ST URBAN FOREST STRATEGY

yoursay.act.gov.au


12:59 PM · Aug 26, 2020 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

3 Retweets • 2 Likes

Transport Canberra and City Services
@TCCS_ACT

We have some tree-mendous news 🌳 Consultation on the draft Urban Forest Strategy has been extended & now closes at 5pm on 10 September. Leave us your commen-tree at yoursay.act.gov.au



Have your say
Canberra's Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045
Visit www.yoursay.act.gov.au by 10 September

1:37 PM · Aug 31, 2020 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

3 Retweets • 3 Likes



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TRANSPORT CANBERRA
AND CITY SERVICES

March 2021