



Draft Loss of Mature Native Trees Action Plan

REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

The Conservator of Flora and Fauna has prepared a draft Action Plan to address the Loss of Mature Native Trees Key Threatening Process.

The Conservator of Flora and Fauna declared the loss of mature native trees as a key threatening process under the Nature Conservation Act in 2018.

Mature native trees provide multiple benefits to the environment and to other species. Their hollows, branches, and canopy provide food, shelter and other services that younger trees cannot. They provide specialised habitat for many birds and animals, including threatened bird species such as the Superb Parrot, Little Eagle and Brown Treecreeper. Remaining mature native trees are threatened by development, land clearing, fire, climate change and dieback. In urban and rural areas, mature native trees may be pruned or removed due to public safety concerns and are threatened also when the groundcover surrounding them is cleared or their roots and trunks are damaged.

In March 2022, the Conservator released the draft Loss of Mature Native Trees Key Threatening Process Action Plan (the Action Plan) which aimed to engage the community on how we can prevent more losses of mature native trees in urban and rural areas and in our reserves.

THE CONVERSATION

Community consultation took place on the draft Action Plan from 25 March 2022 until 27 May 2022.

Written submissions were invited through YourSay, the ACT Government's engagement website. Face-to-face conversations were held with key stakeholders such as the ACT Biodiversity Conservation Forum and the Dharuwa Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee to discuss the draft plan. The consultation period extended for nine weeks, three weeks longer than the statutory minimum period requirement. Four late submissions were received.

This document outlines the key messages received from the community during this consultation period.

WHO WE ENGAGED

The Conservator received 33 written submissions, including nine submissions from conservation organisations and community groups

Some of the key stakeholders engaged include the ACT Scientific Committee, the Dharuwa Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, the Conservation Council (ACT Region), the Canberra Ornithologists Group, Friends of Grasslands, and the ACT Woodlands and Wetlands Trust. The Conservator received 33 submissions, including 9 submissions from conservation organisations and community groups.



Key insights from the community

The need for an action plan

There is strong support in the community for an action plan to address the loss of mature native trees in the territory. The need for an action plan was supported by 32 of the 33 submissions. Most submissions welcomed the draft Action Plan as an important step in mitigating the loss across the landscape of mature native trees and they supported most actions.

The need for retention instead of mitigation

Many submissions emphasised the fact that, due to the very long timeframes of up to 150 years needed for the establishment of mature native trees, there is a need for retention of mature native trees instead of mitigating their loss.

Loss of mature native trees in greenfield development sites

The submissions were of the common view that greenfield development is the single biggest threat to the survival of mature native trees in the ACT. Several submissions proposed the early identification and mapping of mature native trees prior to planning of future urban areas commencing, with the requirement to retain most, if not all, mature native trees in new development areas and only remove trees as a last resort.

Protecting the ecological context of mature native trees in urban areas

A need was identified by many of the submissions for the establishment of mini-reserves around mature native trees in the urban area (at both infill and greenfield sites). It was suggested that these areas should be fully fenced, with appropriate buffers, and that they should be planted with suitable similar species and landscaped as soon as possible to aid ongoing recruitment after the site's hand-over. Some of the submissions noted that current public land management practices (e.g. mowing and tree removal) are inconsistent with protecting and enhancing the understorey biodiversity and the ecological context of mature native trees. Suggestions made include leaving fallen timber under the canopies of mature native trees and planting of sapling species with consideration for the structure of species of trees present in the planting area.

Benefits of strengthening the role of the Conservator

Many of the submissions recommended that the regulatory powers of the Conservator of Flora and Fauna could be strengthened to better protect mature native trees from current and future threats, including urban development. Various examples were provided in the submissions of how these regulatory powers could be enhanced as part of future legislative reforms including to planning laws and frameworks.

Applying offset principles when removing mature native trees

Many of the submissions identified that the ecological value of mature native trees cannot meaningfully be offset and therefore offsetting their removal should not be considered a valid option. Many submissions viewed that whilst replanting can be done cheaply, its effectiveness is questionable. Various submissions suggested that the full cost of a mature native tree needs to be calculated and factored into the development costs to encourage developers to consider other options than removal.

Data analysis

There is strong support for research and analysis of mature native trees to be carried out across all landscape contexts, including rural areas, reserves, and national parks, as well as urban environments. Several submissions suggested that all



data should be publicly available, and that a public register should be established to report annually on the status of mature native trees in the ACT. LiDAR analysis should differentiate between losses from bushfires and other losses.

Perceived risk of having mature native trees in suburban areas

There was a variety of views presented in the submissions about the risk of falling trees on residences in urban areas. This risk is in part determined by how close people are allowed to build to mature native trees when an area is developed. The fear that a large tree might fall on their house and cause significant damage must be addressed by educating people in the care of such trees and the placement of new trees where tree roots will not affect buildings in future years or, vice versa, where the presence of a house limits the growth of a tree. The minimum extent of the buffer around such trees should be reconsidered to inform future development involving the retention of large native trees of significance. Proactive planning should ensure that native trees in the urban landscape are retained within a site in such a way that they are not later identified as causing safety concerns.

Plan implementation

Various submissions viewed that there needed to be clear timeframes for the development of a mature native tree action plan. A timeline for action implementation should be given to give a better appreciation of priorities and what the plan is aiming to achieve in the short term. Also, the Government must ensure that there are adequate funds to ensure necessary actions of the Draft Plan are completed and are appropriately resourced.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Submissions will be considered in the finalisation of a Loss of Mature Native Trees Action Plan that will address the key threatening process in the ACT over the next five years. A full consultation report and publication of the final plan is anticipated by the end of 2022.

To find out more about the Draft Action Plan and other initiatives, policies and projects in Canberra, visit www.yoursay.act.gov.au or follow us on Facebook (@ACTParks, @EnvironPlan, @ACTGov)

Key Timings

25 March 2022 – Public consultation opened on the draft Action Plan

27 May 2022 – Public consultation closed

September 2022 – Listening report released
We are here

Late 2022 – Final plan and consultation report released

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK****892**

People reached via YourSay

2The draft Action Plan was
featured in two press articles**4**We delivered four
presentations to Community
Organisations**2**Community groups directly
engaged**10**Emails sent to community
groups and organisations**5231**People reached on social
media**33**We received 33 written
submissions**96%**Submissions were
supportive of the need for
an Action Plan