

Case Study: A model for bringing back our indigenous tree canopy

COUNCIL NAME

Sutherland Shire
Council

WEB ADDRESS

www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au

POPULATION

226,220

Overview

Sutherland Shire Council developed an online mapping tool to assist in species selection when making planting decisions for development assessment conditions, bush regeneration, street tree planting and in reserves. Selecting plant species based on location and existing vegetation also contributes to a stronger Green Grid and will support local biodiversity.

Background

The urban form of Sutherland Shire comprises large lots with pockets of bushland. However, increasing urban density, larger individual houses and ageing canopy trees has resulted in decreased opportunities to accommodate trees on private land.

Residents consistently cite the proximity to bushland and connection to nature as the reason they live in the Sutherland Shire. While residents value the existing tree canopy and bushland as a fundamental element of the local sense of place, they do not expect tree retention to be at the expense of them developing their land. In addition, reviews undertaken during this project also found inconsistency in tree selection decisions across functional areas of Council with suboptimal results.

In response to these conflicting positions and inconsistencies, Council has developed a framework to assist in plant selection. Central to the success was the development of an online plant selection tool based on the 46 vegetation communities of Sutherland Shire. It tailors plant selection for the exact location where the planting is to occur, which helps maintain local biodiversity.

Objectives of the project included:

1. To protect and enhance Sutherland Shire's unique sense of place
2. To plant the next generation of canopy trees in the face of rising urban density
3. To coordinate all the planting selection decisions across Council's functional areas to increase habitat and improve biodiversity outcomes
4. To undertake large-scale tree planting in the public domain and better engage the community in tree planting decisions
5. To achieve the best outcomes from new tree planting in terms of survival rates and long term maintenance costs

Implementation

Implementing the project across Council units required several key components:

- Developing the Urban Tree and Bushland Policy set Council's commitment to address canopy loss through planting indigenous trees. It included replanting requirements, with four replacement trees for each tree removed and includes the provision to allow offset replanting on public land.

REFERENCES

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=x-
471txWeco](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-471txWeco)

[Native Plant
Selector](#)

- Development of an [online tool](#) to bring together mapping of the Shire's 46 vegetation communities and provide tailored species lists for any location.
- Alignment of Council's development control plan (DCP) to include the requirement to use indigenous tree species.
- Working with Bushcare volunteers and Council's plant nursery to collect seeds and cuttings from local reserves.
- The establishment of a dedicated green streets team to work with the community, including schools, to undertake a proactive planting program.

Outcomes

The success of the policy can be measured by the large number of indigenous trees that have been planted, blending the remnant bushland pockets into the urban canopy and maintaining the Shire's unique sense of place in the face of rising urban densities. The Green Streets Program alone planted 2,911 indigenous trees from January 2016 to May 2017, with another eight projects and a further 446 indigenous trees planted by July 2017.

An unexpected outcome of the project was overcoming the functional silos across Council. The development and refinement of a common specification for planting allowed each group within Council to learn from the success and failures of others. The result is now a very robust and successful approach to planting and maintenance.

Key Learnings

The project has demonstrated that a successful model for restoring the indigenous tree canopy is dependent on four factors:

1. Working across all functional areas of Council.
2. A quality planting specification gives trees the best chance of success. The use of mulch, borders and cages makes initial planting attractive and shows the community that Council is committed to success.
3. Working with the community to gain their support and respond to their concerns.
4. Ongoing maintenance is critical. Budgeting for two years maintenance is money well spent.

While the project started in response to ongoing tree loss due mostly to development, it is now clear that it will also reap dividends in the long term through fostering a strategic approach to tree planting, maintenance and removal.

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This project was the 2017 winner of the Innovation in Planning, Policies and Decision Making Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards