



# WHERE WILL ALL THE TREES BE?

Local Government Survey Results





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

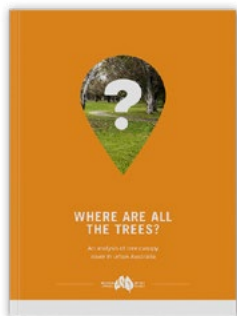
We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, where the Greener Spaces Better Places team is located and to the people of the Woiwarrung and Boowarung language groups of the Eastern Kulin Nation, where RMIT University and Melbourne University are located. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge that all cities are on Indigenous Country that has not been ceded, and that as urban researchers and professionals, it is our responsibility to support processes of reconciliation, treaty making, and land repatriation.

The “Where Will all the Trees Be?” Benchmarking report is the third in a series which was first undertaken in 2013.

**2013**

### **Where Are all the Trees?**

Australia's first ever national benchmark of urban canopy, across all Australian cities and suburbs.



**2017**

### **Where Should all the Trees Go?**

The second report in the benchmarking series overlayed urban heat and socio-economic data to provide an overall vulnerability indicator per state and LGA.



**2020**

### **Where Will all the Trees Be?**

This latest report looks at changes over time as well as which places will be most and least challenged to grow and maintain green cover in the future.



This year, the report is being released in three phases.

1. Canopy Benchmarking
2. Survey Results
3. Engagement

We are here



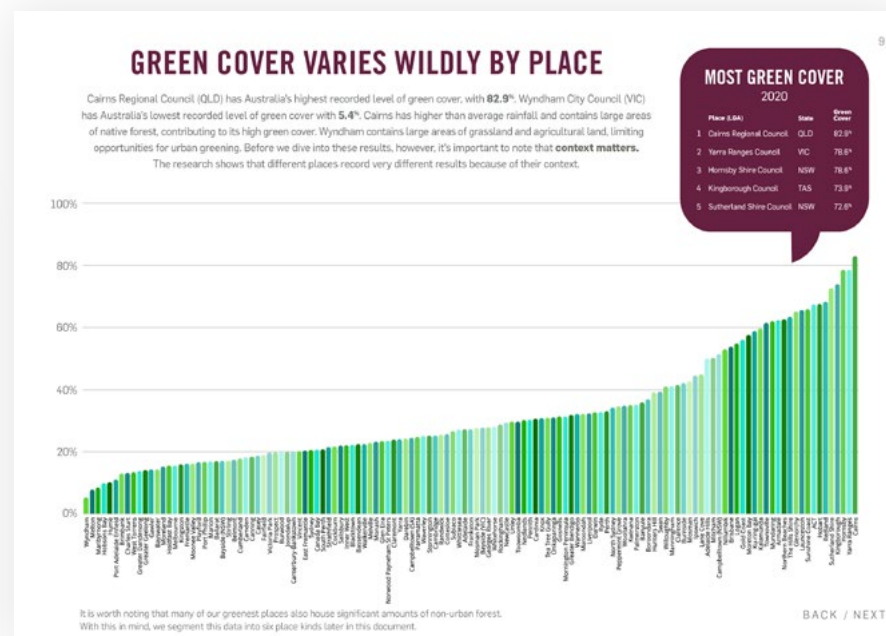
## TO FIGURE OUT WHERE ALL THE TREES **WILL BE**, FIRST WE FOUND OUT WHERE THEY ARE.

This was completed in the phase one benchmarking report.



# THE 'WHERE WILL ALL THE TREES BE?' BENCHMARKING REPORT

Identified green cover\* loss and gains as well as 'Best on Ground' Local Government Areas, who are proving that as their city grows, so too can their green cover.



\*green cover is the urban forest



# THE BENCHMARKING RESULTS SUGGESTS THAT THE **CONTEXT** WITHIN WHICH YOU ARE GROWING AN URBAN FOREST REALLY MATTERS



## RAINFALL

How much rain  
falls on the place



## URBANISATION

How much of the  
place is built up



## DENSITY

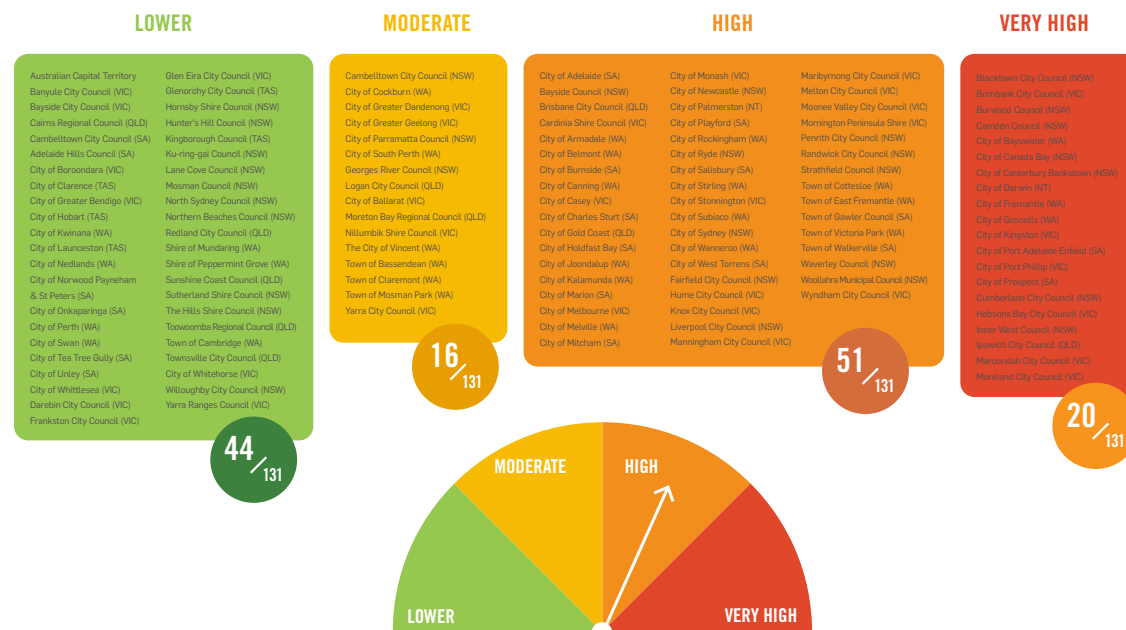
How many  
people per km<sup>2</sup>

## DESPITE MORE THAN 88% OF URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS HAVING AN URBAN FORESTRY POLICY (OR EQUIVALENT), THE FUTURE IS CHALLENGING

Over the next decade, 87/131 (66%) of urban places will face moderate to very high challenges to maintain or grow green cover.

The 'challenge rating' developed by RMIT researchers identifies how quantifiable factors such as rainfall, population growth, density, socio-economic indicators, existing green cover and cultural background can influence urban greening outcomes.

Unsurprisingly, most urban councils in Australia are finding it challenging to maintain existing green cover levels, let alone increase them.



## BUT THIS ONLY TELLS PART OF THE STORY.





## TO UNDERSTAND WHAT COUNCILS **DO** HAVE THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE,

they were asked directly in the National  
Urban Green Space Survey.



## THE NATIONAL URBAN GREEN SPACE SURVEY

Our researchers surveyed 169 people whose job it is to green our cities at the local council level to learn more about the influence of local government on greening outcomes through policies, resourcing, community engagement and 'effort'.<sup>1</sup>

This included council planners, arborists, landscape architects, engineers, parks teams and sustainability officers (referred to herein as 'respondents') from each<sup>2</sup> of the urban Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Australia.

**40%** of the survey respondents had ten years' experience or more employed at their current council.

**19%** had been there for 5-10 years and...

**21%** had been there for 3-5 years.

For more information and an in-depth analysis, head to the [Greener Spaces Better Places website](#), to find the '[Where Will all the Trees Be?](#)' Report and online tool.

<sup>1</sup> All quotes used in this report were pulled anonymously from the National Urban Green Space survey. They represent the views of the 169 respondents.

<sup>2</sup> There are 131 LGAs in this study, covering all major urban and second tier urban areas in Australia. The scope of coverage was set by the earlier studies in the research series.

## QUESTIONS ASKED

The survey was designed to better understand specific enablers and barriers to better urban forestry management at the local government level using self-completed surveys.

Themes covered include:

- Nature of strategy and policy for urban forest management
- Mechanisms to protect and enhance canopy cover (policy, targets, tools, decision-guidelines etc)
- Number and nature of projects and programs for urban greening
- Budgets and staff resourcing for urban greening initiatives and urban forest management
- Institutional arrangements and support
- State policy context, level of support for and integration with local agenda/initiatives
- Use of planning or building permit processes to engage with urban greening
- Level of community support and community barriers and enablers

The research used the Likert Scale to assess the attitudes of respondents from strongly agree to strongly disagree, to understand their perceptions of their own policies and strategies' successes, key challenges and to better understand their perception of state government planning policies and instruments.

When reporting results here we often report simplified agree/disagree findings. These results combine agree and strongly agree; and disagree and strongly disagree. Due to rounding of survey response statistics, some totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures.

# — FINDINGS —

# THE BIG PICTURE

The big revelation from the survey is that



## 88%

of local councils reporting having an Urban Forest Strategy or are developing one.

- Community support is critical when it comes to urban forestry
- The most progress is being made on public land
- Compared to seven years ago, most councils report progress



However,

## 54%

of local councils are experiencing high or very high challenges.

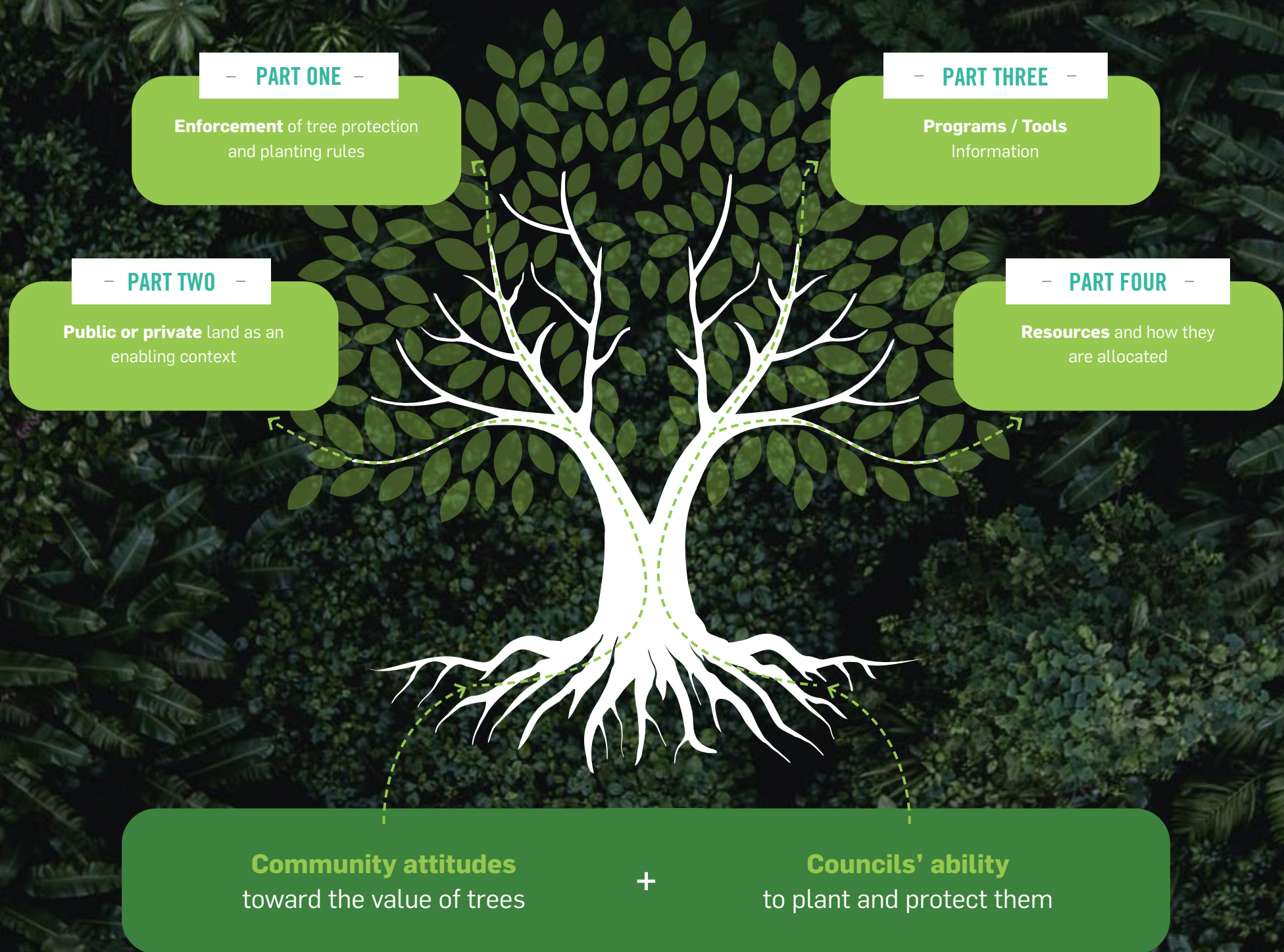
- Most local councils are losing more green cover than they are gaining
- Losses are mainly on private land, in part due to resourcing and limited/ineffective planning policy and controls
- Where it is being lost, there is limited community support for urban forestry



SO, WHAT IS THE FORMULA  
FOR ENSURING THAT  
AN URBAN FORESTRY PLAN  
**ACTUALLY WORKS?**







— ONE —

# ENFORCEMENT



# 1

## ENFORCEMENT OF TREE PROTECTION & PLANTING RULES - SUMMARY

Protecting existing and planting new trees on public and private land depends on the ability of councils to enforce those rules.

The survey responses indicate that simply *having* an urban forest strategy does not necessarily mean that it is *effective*.

### THE GOOD NEWS:

**88%** said that they have an Urban Forest Strategy or are developing one. However, these mostly focus on public land. Whilst these policy measures mostly focus on risk and removal, in general, they are working.

Endorsed targets on **public land**



**61%**  
agreed



**27%**  
disagreed

Endorsed targets on **private land**



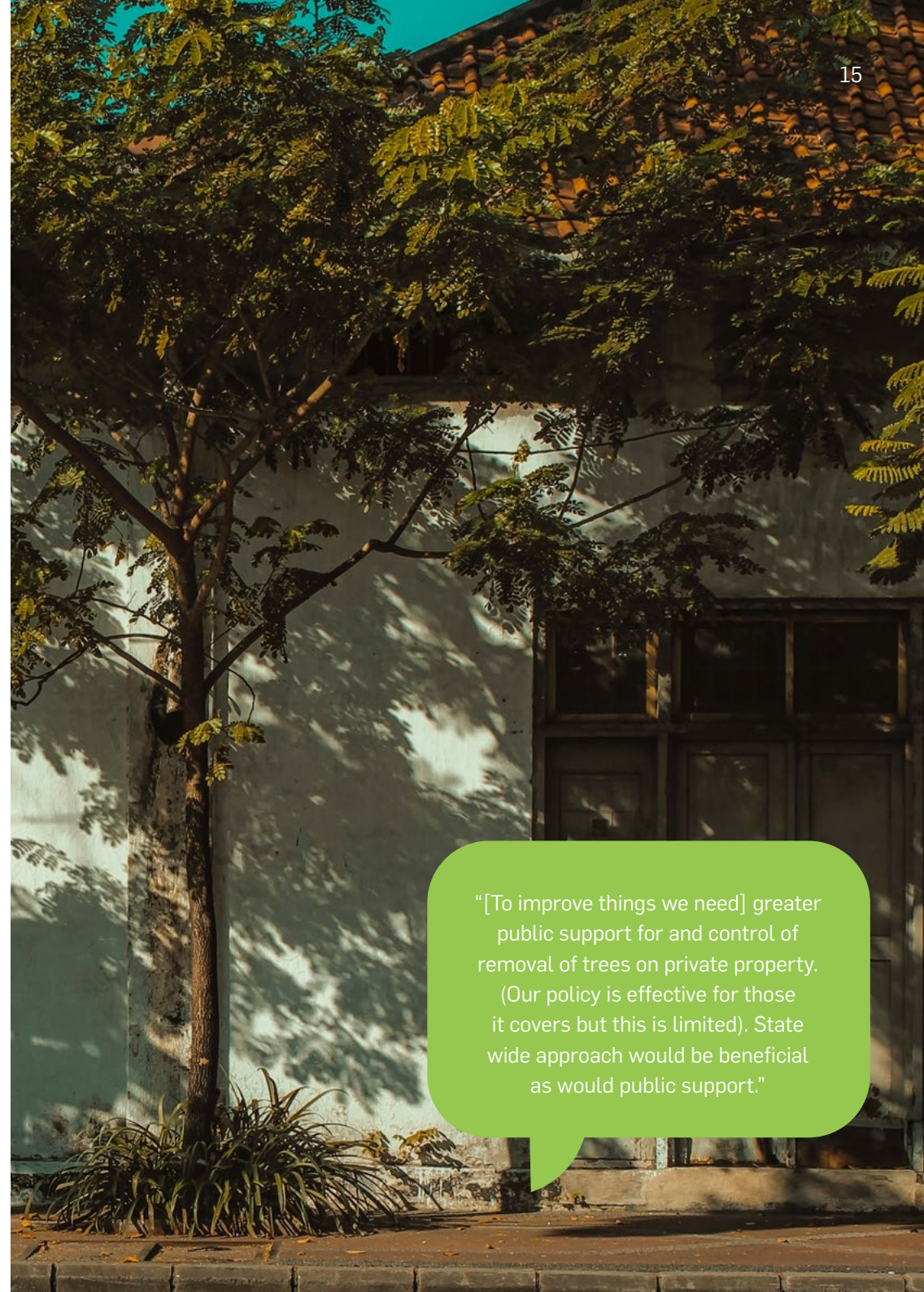
**26%**  
agreed



**57%**  
disagreed

Urban forest management is now the norm across most LGAs, but there are some issues with implementation and effectiveness. On private land, less measures are included in Urban Forest Strategies **and** there is much less confidence in the policy basis.

"[To improve things we need] greater public support for and control of removal of trees on private property. (Our policy is effective for those it covers but this is limited). State wide approach would be beneficial as would public support."



# 1

## ENFORCEMENT OF TREE PROTECTION & PLANTING RULES - RESULTS

RESPONDENTS AGREED THAT THEY ARE USING THE FOLLOWING POLICY MEASURES:

BUT FEWER RESPONDENTS AGREED THAT THESE MEASURES ARE EFFECTIVE:

### Tree removal policy

**79%**  
agreed

**64%**  
agreed

### Protection of trees on public land procedure

**73%**  
agreed

**49%**  
agreed

### Tree management policy

**69%**  
agreed

**51%**  
agreed

### Private land planning controls

**51%**  
agreed

**23%**  
agreed

Survey respondents were asked, "to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement on strategy and policy in your Local Government Area?"

We have a council endorsed Urban Forest or Tree Strategy/Plan outlining our desired urban forest and how we will get there



We are currently developing an Urban Forest or Tree Strategy/Plan



We have an endorsed target or set of targets for the urban forest (e.g. canopy cover, urban forest diversity, urban forest health)



We have an endorsed target or set of targets for the urban forest on private land (e.g. canopy cover)



We have a council endorsed Tree Management/Urban Forest Policy (e.g. a documented process or the management of urban trees)



We have a Tree Management/Urban Forest Policy that is effectively implemented and enforced



We have council endorsed Tree Removal Policy



We have council endorsed Tree Removal Policy that is effective in minimising tree removal on Council owned or managed land



We have a documented process to protect trees on Council owned and/or managed land



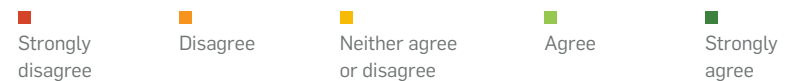
The protections over our trees on Council owned and/or managed land are properly enforced



We have planning controls to protect trees on private land



We have planning controls that are properly enforced to protect trees on private land





# 1

## ENFORCEMENT OF TREE PROTECTION & PLANTING RULES - RESULTS

When asked how to improve council strategies, they said:

"Planning protection for mature trees; enforcement of landscape plans that include canopy replacement; council-wide focus on tree canopy retention and growth."

"We are currently working on a strategy to cover private trees, however the council do not wish to pursue a local law or planning scheme amendment to protect private trees."

"Councillor education - councillors can be against tree protection and think it should be easier for residents to remove trees."

"Stat planning, arboriculture and enforcement to triage works from inception to completion."





## 1

**ENFORCEMENT OF TREE PROTECTION  
& PLANTING RULES - CHALLENGES****PUBLIC LAND URBAN FORESTRY MEASURES**

Most agree they have them, and slightly fewer agree they are effective.

Overall, there is a significant amount of policy out there, and in general it is working.

**THE CHALLENGE IS TO:**

expand this to LGAs where  
there is limited or no policy

**and**

to learn from each other to  
ensure policy is effective.

**PRIVATE LAND URBAN FORESTRY MEASURES**

Many have planning controls, but a minority agree they are enforced.

Most have not set private land targets.

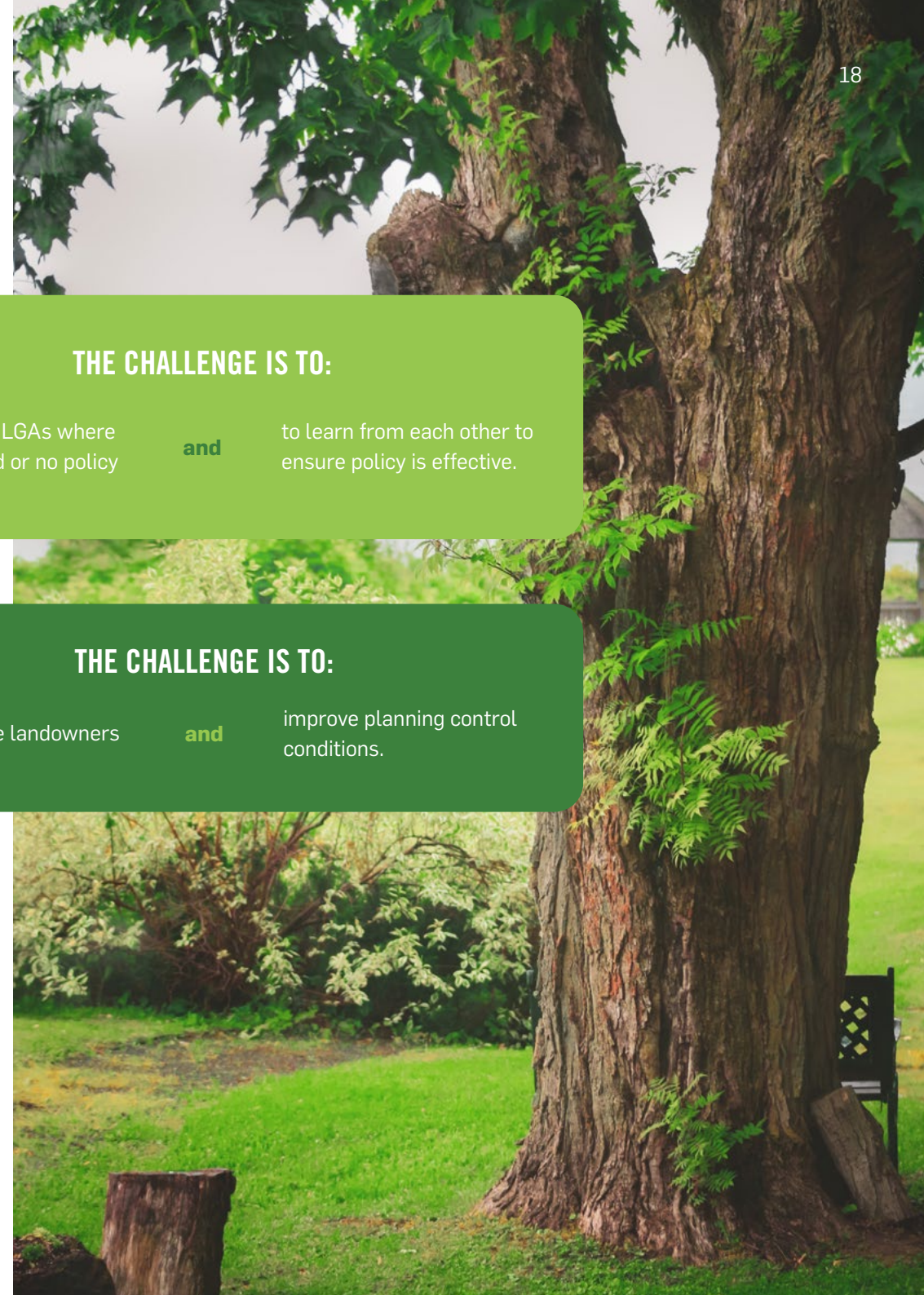
**THE CHALLENGE IS TO:**

engage private landowners

**and**

improve planning control  
conditions.

While local councils have direct control over public spaces, the ability to protect and enhance the urban forest on private land is much harder. Given that most Local Government Areas' land cover is privately owned, the extent of this challenge is immense.



# 1

## ENFORCEMENT OF TREE PROTECTION & PLANTING RULES - SOLUTIONS

Respondents have provided the following solutions:

"A **compliance program** that checks all aspects of compliance and is followed up properly."

"Planning protection for mature trees; enforcement of landscape plans that include canopy replacement and a council-wide focus on tree canopy retention and growth."

"Trees need to be viewed as assets and not just barriers to buildings and development. This could be achieved by **requiring that all trees on development sites are valued using the 'Thyer Method'** to an amount greater than the current \$10,000 limit. Currently, the valuation required in our Tree Management Policy is not enforced by senior development and building staff. The funding of a dedicated Environmental Planning/Development Compliance Officer who could review DA's, investigate and enforce tree breaches on development sites, would really help."

"Further compliance resources and support for new planting and maintenance."

"Resources in statutory planning, arboriculture and enforcement to **triage works from inception to completion.**"

"The issue is that the planning department and arboricultural department have different outcome requirements. Planning wants to get through endorsing building works regardless of tree loss and the Arboricultural department wants to retain trees both on private property and on council-owned land. Another issue is the problems with **council planning permits and private surveyor permits.** Council permits can deal internally with tree issues and recommendations made, such as move a driveway from one side to another to allow for retention of a street tree, but a private certifier building just allows for building works without any check on trees. For example, houses have been built with a driveway where a council street tree is and as a result, council refuses its removal. This could have been resolved if there was initial consultation with Council, but there is no requirement to do so."

"On ground compliance with policy including the need for an **Urban Forest Officer position** to coordinate delivery of the UFS."

— TWO —

# PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC LAND



## 2 ENABLING CONTEXT - PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE LAND - SUMMARY

The distribution between public and private land context in which a local council exists plays a major role in affecting its ability to support retention and tree planting.

While many communities are perceived to support tree planting and urban greening on public land, **the majority of land in most LGAs is privately owned.**

When it comes to urban greening, **NIMBYism (Not in My Back Yard) is perceived to be rife**, with the majority of respondents agreeing that their communities request more trees to be removed than to be planted.

Council Officers reported that increased community and Councillor engagement would help convert tree NIMBYs into tree YIMBYs (Yes! In My Backyard).

Does the community recognise the importance of your urban forest?



54%

Yes



22%

No

Do more people request that trees be removed than planted?



65%

Yes



8%

No

Is tree vandalism an issue?



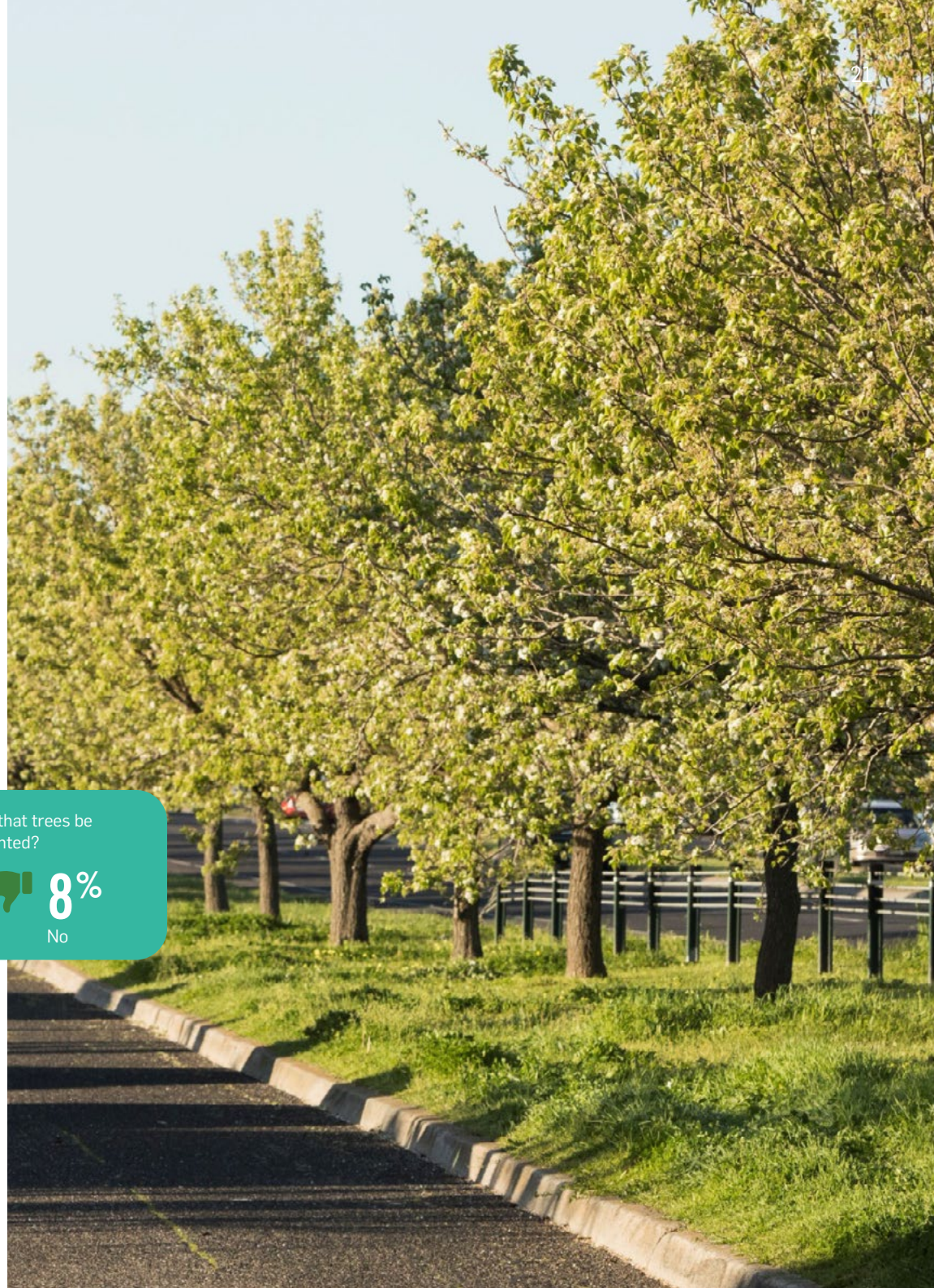
65%

Yes



8%

No





## 2 ENABLING CONTEXT - PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE LAND - SUMMARY

Survey results suggest that there is much more support that State Governments and Territories could offer to enable better local urban forestry outcomes.

Is there adequate State Government/Territory policy direction and land use planning controls that support urban forestry?



13%

Yes



57%

No

Do you feel as though the State Government supports and encourages urban forestry in your state or territory?



10%

Yes



52%

No

**Respondents had the following to say about their planning context:**

"Planning reforms to place greater importance on existing trees and allocation of adequate space for new trees."

"On public land we are making fantastic progress toward our canopy targets, but on private land we fight a losing battle because we effectively [have] no power to prevent tree losses and limited influence over developer decision making."

"Unfortunately trees are a topical issue - it's a love/hate relationship, mostly hate - for the 'damage' they do to roads. If adopted, [the urban forestry] policy will protect trees on council land (nothing on private land) and facilitate tree planting plans to grow and maintain an urban forest. I fear it won't be picked up [by council] or will be watered down and that budget won't be spent on trees. The planning process does nothing to protect mature trees on private land — they are constantly being removed it's not good enough!"

## 2 ENABLING CONTEXT - PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE LAND - RESULTS

Leadership and support from Council for urban forestry depends entirely on whether the trees are on public or private land.



72%

say that there is council/  
organisational support for greening on  
**public land**



ONLY  
36%

say that there is council/  
organisational support for greening  
on **private land**

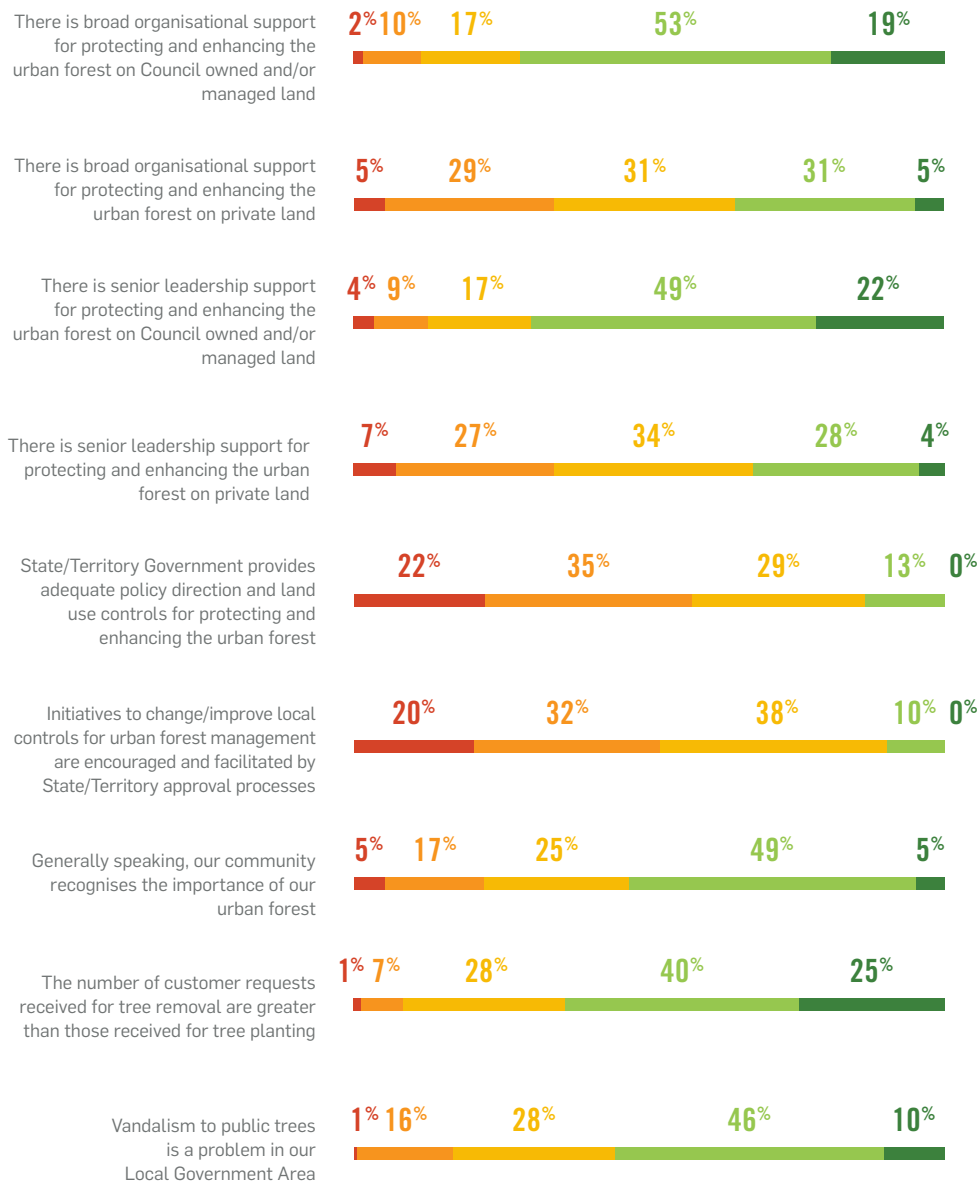


ONLY  
32%

say that there is senior leadership  
support for greening on **private land**

On **public land** organisational support was generally seen as good (72% 👍 /12% 👎) as was support from senior leaders (71% 👍 /13% 👎) and the community (75% 👍 /7% 👎).

Survey respondents were asked, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on support for urban forest management in your Local Government Area?"



Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree Strongly agree

## 2 ENABLING CONTEXT - PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE LAND - CHALLENGES

There is a perception from the respondents that people generally like trees, but not necessarily in their back (or front) yard.

If true, this is problematic as the majority of urban land is privately owned.

### THE CHALLENGE IS TO:

educate about the benefits  
of the urban forest

and

engage private landholders  
in urban forestry protection  
and enhancement.

More work needs to be done to promote the many benefits of trees on both public, but more importantly - private land.

Most reported that there is limited and ineffective effort to influence cover on private land. This is a critical area for improvement, with "Planning Controls to regulate what happens on private land" cited as the biggest barrier to increased tree planting and protection.

### THE CHALLENGE IS TO:

strengthen policies and  
strategies that positively  
affect private land canopy  
and green space

and

scale opportunities for  
cross jurisdictional learning

### Respondents said:

"Protection of trees on private land is an issue. We are currently working on a strategy or deal with this, but council do not wish to pursue a local law or planning scheme amendment that would protect private trees, as **they are largely pro-development.**"

"Our key issue is canopy loss on private property. Existing "trees of significance" protections on private land are limited to a few dozen trees. While we have planning incentives to encourage preservation of existing trees, **we really need the power to require planning approval for the removal of trees.**"

"There needs to be a greater focus on new subdivisions providing viable space for tree planting."

"Greater effort needs to be focused on **educating the community** on the benefits of trees and canopy cover. We have an extensive street tree planting program however the community can often be a blocker as they do not fully appreciate the benefits trees offer. Also, many streets in our growth areas are very narrow (as set out by the PSP), there are typically several cars per property, which means trees often have to compete with unofficial car parking spaces on nature strips."

"We need a Council endorsed position on protection of trees on private land before and during development activities. The key barrier to achieving this is elected members reluctance to engage on the matter due to it being **historically politically unpalatable** within the district."

"We need greater **Councillor education** - councillors are generally against tree protection and think it should be easier for residents to remove trees."



## 2 ENABLING CONTEXT - PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE LAND - SOLUTIONS

When asked how to encourage greater appreciation and protection of trees on private land, **respondents answered:**

**"Moving tree management discussions out of council meetings,** more community engagement, better spatial mapping of urban trees, incentives for landowners to manage canopy trees on their land."

"Rolling back the size of homes on lots to provide more space for trees on private land. Advocating for overhead wires to be reduced, or relocating overhead wires to one side of the street to allow for taller trees on one side of the street."

**"Greater support from elected Councillors and from state government.** As a growth city, there is strong support for growth which places huge pressure on trees and their canopy."

"Resilience of elected officials and senior management to abide by policy and strategy."

"Better understanding from Executive leaders on the benefits of trees."

## 2 ENABLING CONTEXT - PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE LAND - SOLUTIONS

When asked how to encourage greater appreciation and protection of trees on private land, **respondents answered:**

"A better partnership with Councillors, who like the end goal but are not necessarily supportive of the operational requirements to achieve the goal."

"**Better legislation** for tree protection on private land."

"Strengthening of planning provisions for retention of significant trees and retention and expansion of canopy coverage on private and public land."

"Community understanding and trust in Council's day-to-day activities which are designed to manage the urban forest. Our policy is in draft and will need to be worked through Council, for this to work well **we need to engage the silent majority** as we hear a lot from the two ends of the spectrum. The alignment of people, processes and systems to effectively manage tree assets across cities that are involved in a range of council services e.g. capital works, leisure centres, active recreation in reserves."

"Competent senior management who make decisions based on science & facts not emotion. Commitment to enforce Greening Plans. Provide funds to implement Tree Master Plans."

"Stronger planning controls in terms of requirements for tree retention/ planting on properties pre and post-development. A contribution scheme for the loss of trees to ensure there is funding for identifying new tree planting sites, and undertaking tree planting. More control over as-of-right development and building permits to prevent unnecessary tree removal and ensure adequate replacement tree planting."

— THREE —

# PROGRAMS & TOOLS



# 3 PROGRAMS / TOOLS / INFORMATION - SUMMARY

There are many tools programs and information that can help support urban forestry efforts.

These include:

- Community education and engagement programs
- Technical arboricultural inventories & tree management systems
- Place-making programs that integrate urban greening into planning.

**ACROSS THE BOARD, RESPONDENTS SAID THAT WHILST THEY FELT WELL-EQUIPPED WITH TOOLS TO TARGET PLANTING AND MAINTENANCE OF TREES ON PUBLIC LAND, **EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS** TO BUILD SUPPORT FOR THE URBAN FOREST WERE LIMITED.**

Do you have a dedicated tree planting program?



**91%**  
Yes



**6%**  
No

Does your council have dedicated programs that encourages tree protection and planting on **private land**?



**22%**  
Yes



**51%**  
No



You can't manage what you can't measure. Some respondents expressed concern that their councils had inadequate tree asset management and inventory resources. Without these, it becomes almost impossible to devise strategies and plans that effectively manage, monitor the existing urban forest — or access a reliable database to test new approaches to maintenance and planting.

“[To improve things we need] a Tree Protection Register for trees on private land and a dedicated officer who manages this register while also working with private landowners to plant more trees on private land.”

# 3 PROGRAMS / TOOLS / INFORMATION - RESULTS

Results point to a major discrepancy between “programs and tools” for trees on public, verses on private land.

Whilst the majority of respondents said they had council-run planting programs on **public land (91% 👍)**, inspection and maintenance programs **(74% 👍)**, and a dedicated tree renewal program **(56% 👍)**, numbers drop when it comes to **private land** programs **(22% 👍)** and tools **(37% 👍)**.

In general, there is less confidence in the tools than the programs, with a minority saying that are keeping complete tree inventories.



**45%** of respondents reported that they had complete and up-to-date tree inventory on public land. Slightly fewer (36%) include their tree inventories in their Asset Management System.

Survey respondents were asked, “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on programs, tools and information in your Local Government Area?”



# 3

## PROGRAMS / TOOLS / INFORMATION - CHALLENGES

Overall, the key concern expressed by respondents was that the resourcing of tools - particularly tree inventories - is inadequate. There is concern about silos within government, which in turn leads to difficulty in implementing good urban forestry outcomes.

### Respondents said:

"A detailed tree protection policy/specification that is rolled out to all internal departments that is inclusive of **a trigger mechanism** to initiate conversation between Councils Arborists and design/development/civil teams."

"Resourcing the tree inventory management is an ongoing issue."

"Barriers includes resources (staff and \$) to develop the tools and programs, and convincing key internal stakeholders (e.g. strategic and town planning). Ideally, the state government would develop consistent framework for all to use."





# 3 PROGRAMS / TOOLS / INFORMATION - SOLUTIONS

According to the survey results, local councils say they need more resourcing to help enable better auditing and management of green cover in their areas. This includes access to appropriately qualified people who can implement policy, work across silos and influence senior management protocols, and engage and build support among the community. Investment in inventory and mapping tools such as GIS mapping was also reported as a key means through which to access information to better inform tree maintenance, protection and growing plans.

## To improve things, respondents said they needed:

"A comprehensive audit and database of the urban forest to know exactly what we are managing."

"Better data, better coordination between departments, use of data in managing tree stock, complete the strategy."

"Better data on loss of trees; better integration of capital project planning with potential green infrastructure, list of species per key landscape type based on indigenous species and an analysis of fit for purpose exotic species for urban space types, a program of community engagement through local areas to select street tree species and numbers and locations per street; a better focus on arboricultural tree management rather than pruning and removal; a suite of responses for those 'problem' trees that have roots or drop leaves or fruit, and the promotion of the value of trees in the urban landscape."

"Improved internal planning and operational coordination. Dedicated team to Urban Forest - we have no officers committed just to Urban Forest, it is spread across Open Space, Planning and Arboriculture - hence to **coordinated leadership**."

"Better integration of green infrastructure policies into civil design and asset renewal. More research into effects of trees/differential moisture loss on reactive soils to inform building and civil design standards."

# 3 PROGRAMS / TOOLS / INFORMATION - SOLUTIONS

To improve things, respondents said they needed:

"State level reform of power line bundling, electrical line clearance regulations would assist local resourcing."

"Education of compliance staff; Review of planning controls, Reduce tree removal 'exemptions', Increase power lines assets underground, Revise road construction to increase green space."

"Greater resourcing to follow up that development application conditions are being met and implemented. Resourcing to include enforcement if tree DA conditions not being met. Education of decision makers and developers to understand the values and benefits of trees. Increased state and federal support for green infrastructure"

"A reactive planting program to ensure that where trees are removed, replacements are arranged within a short time frame. Thus allowing the annual planting program to add canopy cover rather than purely offset canopy loss. A detailed tree protection policy/specification that is rolled out to all internal departments that is inclusive of **a trigger mechanism to initiate conversation between Councils Arborists and design/development/civil teams.** A detailed Tree inventory is difficult to manage an urban forest if you are unaware of what exactly you have to manage."

"More lateral thinking on species selection. There is a focus on using local indigenous species, however they rarely make good street trees on domestic verges."

— FOUR —

# RESOURCES



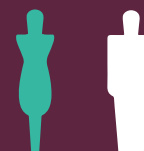
# 4 RESOURCES (AND HOW THEY ARE ALLOCATED) - SUMMARY

As identified earlier in the report, whilst most councils do already have an Urban Forestry Strategy (or equivalent), most councils agree that effective implementation relies on a range of factors already mentioned (including but not limited to enforcement of tree protection, the influence over planting on private versus public land, and programs / tools to manage the urban forest and engage the community).

The extent to which these factors can support or inhibit an effective program comes down to resourcing. The survey results found that it isn't necessarily just how much of a council's budget is allocated to resources that matters - but how this budget is allocated, and what the resources are.

**THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT MANY, LOCAL COUNCIL STAFF FEEL CONFIDENT THAT ADEQUATE BUDGET IS BEING ALLOCATED TO URBAN FORESTRY, AND THOSE BUDGETS ARE BEING MANAGED EFFICIENTLY.**

However, lack of budget is still an issue for some. Also, the survey results reflect significant points of contention as to how effectively these budgets are being spent.



**47%**

agreed that they had enough qualified arborists either in house or as contractors to deliver our tree management/urban forest program



**54%**

agreed that they had enough arborists who could influence good urban forestry outcomes

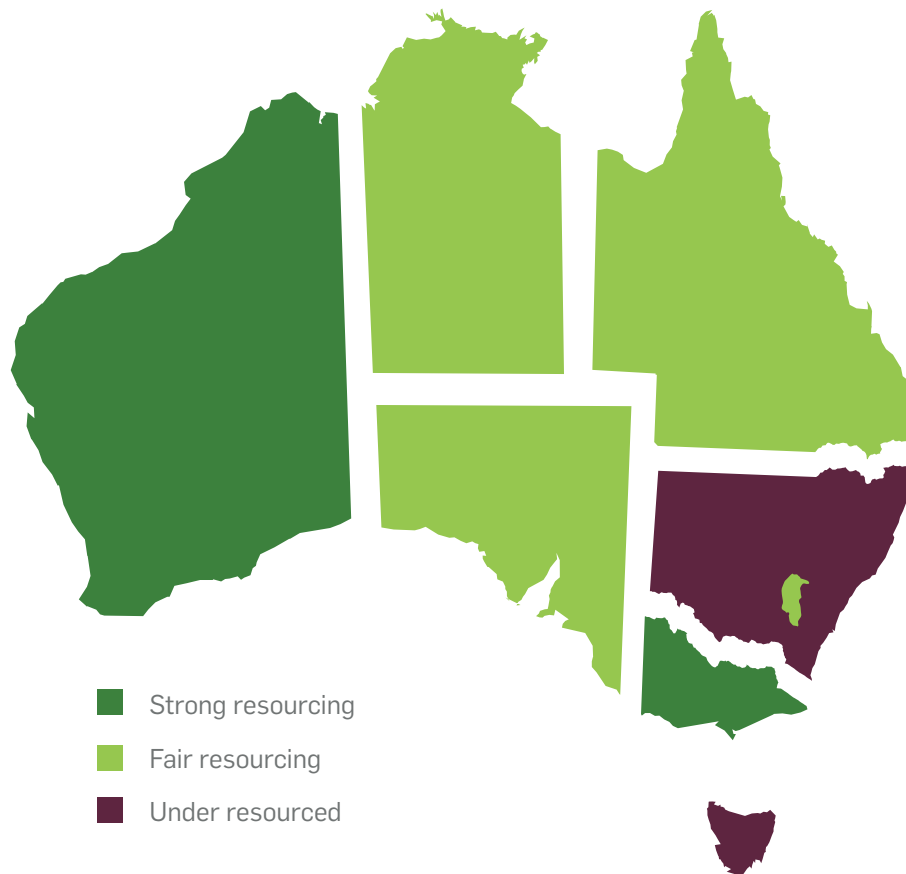


**ONLY 28%**

agree that they have dedicated enforcement officers who ensure that planning requirements for tree protection/provisions are met

# 4 RESOURCES (AND HOW THEY ARE ALLOCATED) - SUMMARY

Finally, attitudes toward adequate levels of resourcing varies state-by-state: respondents in Western Australia & Victoria said they had strong resourcing; the Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia reported only fair resourcing; respondents in Tasmania and New South Wales feel under-resourced to manage their public urban forests.



There is need for a more cohesive approach to both public and private urban forest management, that is supported by council. Often, even when an urban forestry management plan in development, a strategic approach may be impeded by isolated concerns.

One barrier that is often cited is concern about the level of resourcing that managing trees requires. Community engagement on the subject of trees requires skills, money and time - combined with a clearly stated position of council. These are often not all provided. And when they are, planning directives from State Government and Territories can override local initiatives.

# 4 RESOURCES (AND HOW THEY ARE ALLOCATED) - RESULTS

The results show that despite many local councils allocating budgets toward tree planting, there is a lack of appreciation for the complexity of Urban Forest Management and therefore, a lack of adequate resources to support initiatives such as innovative design, auditing and monitoring.



56%

**agreed** that the budgets they have allow them to plant more trees each year than they remove.



42%

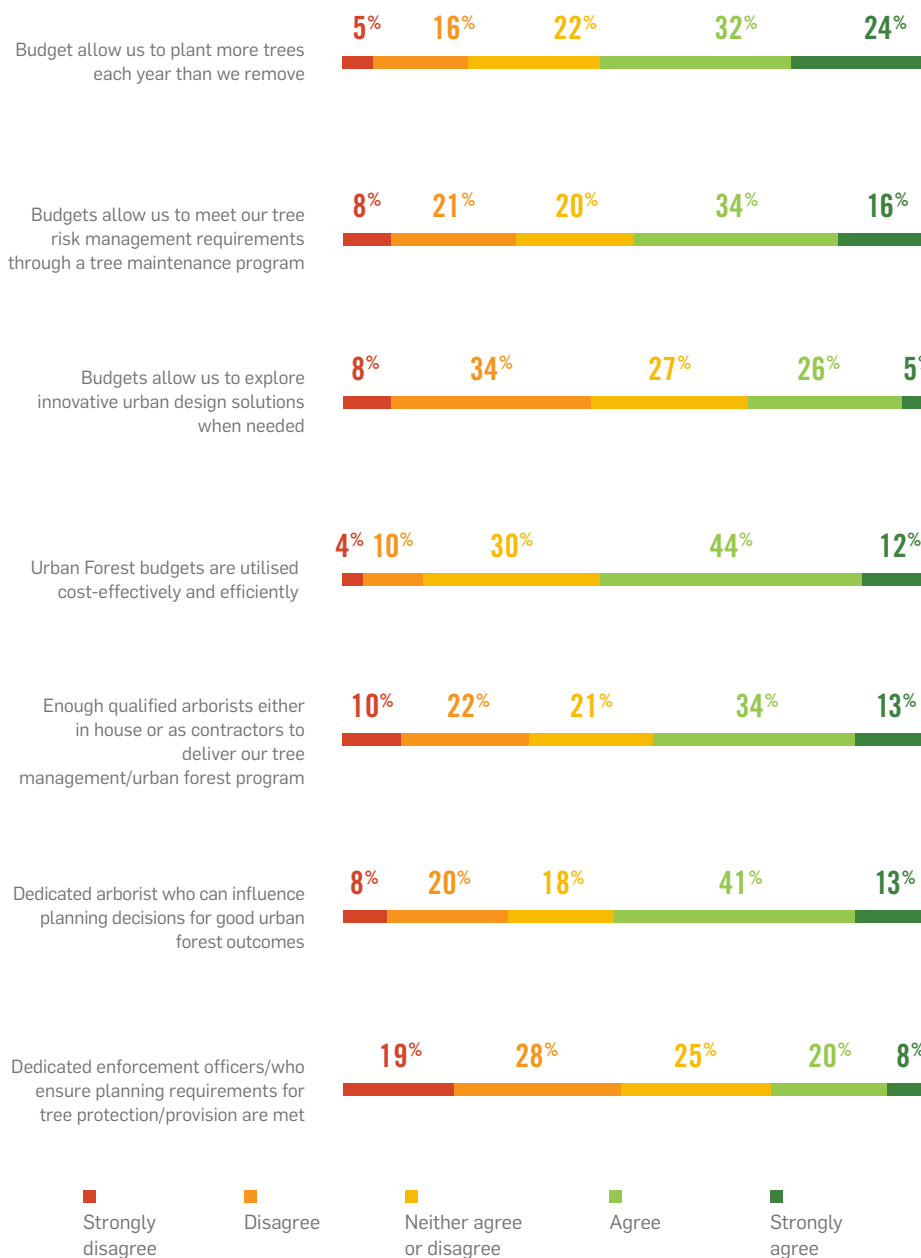
**do not agree** that the budgets have enabled them to explore innovative design solutions when needed.



29%

**do not agree** that budgets allow councils to meet their tree risk management requirements.

Survey respondents were asked, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on resources in your Local Government Area?"





# 4 RESOURCES (AND HOW THEY ARE ALLOCATED) - CHALLENGES

Whilst the responses to questions regarding resourcing were incredibly varied and largely determined by the local context, there were some common threads in terms of the resourcing barriers that were identified, including;

- suitability of staff,
- their enforcement capacity and
- appropriate allocation of resourcing to tree management systems.

## Respondents said:

"Tree resources need to be allocated within statutory planning as well as within arboriculture so that we are getting good outcomes from inception (planning) to triage (tree teams)."

"We need more funding, and **resourcing to monitor and enforce tree planting requirements**. We need programs that promote trees as an essential service rather than for amenity and 'nice to have'. Trees and vegetation seem to be secondary to build infrastructure, and that's something we can educate people on."

"We don't have up to date tree canopy and tree data. **We need the ability to use permit data sets to analyse canopy loss in a way that integrates with GIS.** We don't have a great understanding of the issues affecting tree survival for younger trees, or if current practices are working. More resources are needed across the board - open space, enforcement, GIS and an improved understanding and maintenance processes to improve tree survival after planting."

"We need an increased budget for planting and maintenance. Other organisations who work in the public domain see green infrastructure as the same constraint as other infrastructure types, but they do not see the value."

"We need for the maintenance resources to match the large number of trees that we are planting."

## 4 RESOURCES (AND HOW THEY ARE ALLOCATED) - SOLUTIONS

Respondents have called for specialised funding and a more comprehensive approach to Urban Forestry Management, with councils understanding the complexity of programs and policies required to successfully maintain and increase green cover in Australia's cities and suburbs.

Suggestions include funding for dedicated staff to oversee green cover management, and increased investment into the development of digital platforms that would both promote urban forestry services and better engage with the community.

### Respondents have called for:

"A Tree Protection Register for trees on private land and a dedicated officer who manages this register while also working with private landowners to plant more trees on private land."

"The funding of a part-time, dedicated Environmental Planning/ Development Compliance Officer who could also review DA's, investigate and enforce tree breaches on development sites."

"Clearer information on tree protections, compliance and appropriate restoration in terms of preparation of the site, species and species placements."

"Alignment of people, process and systems for both internal and external customers along with the officers and contractors involved in the day-to-day key functions which deliver our urban forest management. A consistent approach amongst Councillors on the key objectives/principles would build community trust and confidence. Increased investment into systems including digital platforms to promote our services and engage with customers would also help."

"Additional resourcing in areas that support the urban forest would make a difference, for example: we need it to be someone's' role to manage/update electronic tools and info or take on conservation and land management thereby assisting with all open spaces tree management. It would be great if we had a more sustainable approach to open space management - more conservation sites, and less mowed areas."

"We need contracts with developers that cover all public realm space with development bonds. We currently apply an amenity tree valuation for development but a more holistic approach may create better outcomes."

"A more comprehensive approach to treating public trees as assets, including planning, establishment and formative maintenance, and renewal at the end of lifecycle. The challenge is the significant cost and resourcing needed eg an i-tree assessment of the entire LGA is a hugely involved project, and given the changing nature of trees this needs to be undertaken regularly to be effective and useful. Which in turn diverts resources from actually planting and managing trees in the ground."

# CONCLUSIONS

This survey highlights that while there are very good intentions (expressed at the strategic policy level to encourage the growth of urban green cover), these aspirations are not always being translated at the implementation level.

There remains a disconnect within planning systems that don't fully appreciate the value of green cover.

**AMONG THE BROADER COMMUNITY AND ESPECIALLY POLITICAL LEADERS, GREEN, LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE IS NOT YET RECOGNISED AS ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE, OR VALUED AS SUCH.**

**THE GOOD NEWS** is that among the vast majority of urban local councils, there is a clear recognition of the value of trees and urban green cover. This recognition is translated into Urban Forest Management Plans (or equivalent) that have been endorsed by councils.

**THE BAD NEWS** is that just having this policy isn't enough to allay, and reverse the overall trend of urban canopy and green cover decline.

The capacity to ensure that green cover can grow as our cities do depends on:

- The community's attitude toward trees.
- The council's ability to plant more and protect what they have.

This survey offers policy-makers, leaders and advocates a very clear set of solutions that, if implemented, would achieve some excellent

outcomes and enable the full benefits of urban green cover to be realised throughout Australia.

It is important to note that the results of this survey help to partially explain some of the losses and gains seen in green over across the country (as reported in the Where Will All The Trees Be? benchmarking report).

While local councils have direct control over managing vegetation in streets, parks and other public spaces, the ability to protect and enhance the urban forest on private land is much harder.

A lack of resources, organisations and community support, coupled with weak State Government and Territory enablers, demonstrates the challenges local council face in managing trees and vegetation on private land. Given that most Local Government Areas' land cover is privately owned, the extent of this challenge is immense.





## NEXT STEPS

Core to the Greener Spaces Better Places program is the idea that effective collaboration leads to effective and tangible change. When read alongside the benchmarking report, these survey results help clearly identify the barriers that are preventing actions and a lightening rod for collaboration.

Over the coming months and years, the Greener Spaces Better Places team will use this work to guide thinking and facilitate the Living Network to connect, share solutions, replicate and scale programs and tools that are working and avoid needless duplication of efforts.

In the meantime, please take a look at the resources and guides available on our website, and don't hesitate to get in touch with our team if you have a solution, an idea or a questions.

### WEBSITE

### EMAIL

## CREDITS & AUTHORSHIP

This document/information is based in its entirety on: “Hurley, J., Amati, M., Deilami, K., Caffin, M., Stanford, H., Azizmohammad, S. (2020) Where Will all the Trees Be? - an assessment of urban forest cover and management for Australian cities, prepared for Hort Innovation by the Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University, Melbourne” and Greener Spaces Better Places. The research was conducted by RMIT University for Hort Innovation Australia and supported by the Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub, funded by the Australian Government’s National Environmental Science Program.





is a national initiative that brings together state and local government, universities, business and industry to make our urban areas greener.

We're on a mission to make sure our green spaces grow as our urban places grow and, in doing so, make Australia's cities the greenest in the world.

For more information please visit

[greenerspacesbetterplaces.com.au/](http://greenerspacesbetterplaces.com.au/)



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