

# Public Tree Management Policy

Biosecurity Act 2015

## 1. Policy Statement

Townsville City Council (Council) recognises the value and important role of trees in the urban landscape. In managing Townsville's public tree network, Council must balance various risks against the social, economic and environmental benefits public trees can provide.

This policy:

- establishes Council's commitment and strategic direction for the preservation, management, enhancement and maintenance of public trees on Council controlled land within the Townsville local government area;
- addresses public tree management and maintenance issues faced by Council; and,
- provides a framework for decision making, documentation and standardised process to ensure consistency of the management of public trees on Council controlled land within Townsville.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Council's Public Tree Management Guideline.

## 2. Principles

Trees have a significant value to the Council, the community and Townsville visitors, providing:

- a cooling effect that can reduce energy consumption and Townsville's carbon footprint;
- screening for buildings, blending structures into the natural landscape;
- a means for reducing soil erosion and decreasing flooding;
- a filter for wind;
- reduction of noise and air pollution;
- aesthetic appeal and economic health; and,
- community identity.

Across Townsville's public tree network, Council's activities and resources shall be prioritised based upon the following order of principles:

- manage risks to public safety;
- manage risks to property or infrastructure;
- preserve and maintain the health and structural soundness of Townsville's public tree network including its significant and highly significant public trees;
- improve Townsville's image, liveability and the well-being of the community by prioritising the integration of public trees within the urban landscape; and,

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- support the health of Townsville’s ecosystems through investment in its public tree network.

### 3. Scope

This policy applies to the management of all public trees on Council controlled land that are Council’s direct responsibility.

This policy excludes:

- public trees within Council-leased areas where vegetation management is explicitly stated as a responsibility of the lessee;
- trees on privately owned land;
- trees in State controlled road reserves maintained by Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR) or their contractors, but excluding areas maintained by Council under the Road Maintenance Performance Contract (RMPC);
- trees in National or State reserves managed by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) or the Department of Resources (DR);
- trees in Council controlled bushland and natural reserves; or,
- any vegetation in drainage reserves and firebreaks.

### 4. Responsibility

The Director of Infrastructure and Operations and the General Manager Construction and Maintenance Operations (CMO) are responsible for ensuring this policy and any supporting standards, guidelines or procedures are understood by all Council workers working on Council controlled land.

All Council workers and managers, are responsible for ensuring this policy is adhered to.

All inspected public trees on Council controlled land shall be recorded as non-financial assets on a register to be maintained by the Asset Custodian.

All Council workers and the community are encouraged to promptly report any public tree management concerns to Council’s SERVE Centre.

### 5. Definitions

**Asset Custodian** - the section of Council nominated from time to time by the Director of Infrastructure and Operations as being responsible for ensuring that Council’s public trees are managed and maintained according to Council’s policies, guidelines and standards. Currently, Council’s Open Space Team is the nominated Asset Custodian.

**Community** - in this policy, refers to the broader Townsville population, and all groups (communities) that are part of it. It is important to note that people usually see themselves as belonging to one community of place but more than one community of interest or identity.

**Council Controlled Land** - in this policy, refers to land under Council freehold ownership or Crown land or reserve managed by Council under trust. It also includes Council controlled road reserves and State controlled road reserves that are managed by Council under the Road Maintenance Performance Contract (RMPC). It does not include (1) State and Federal controlled reserves (E.g.

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National Parks, State Forests) or (2) bushland areas subject to Council's environmental management strategies.

**Interference with a public tree** - means to carry out an activity that damages, disfigures, mutilates, or otherwise interferes with the growth and health of a tree. Interference includes but is not limited to:

- ringbarking or removing bark from a public tree;
- lopping, modifying or removing a public tree;
- applying a substance to the public tree or its roots that is harmful and adversely affects its health;
- damaging a public tree with heat, including by burning, scorching or singeing part of the tree;
- damaging a public tree's protection zone by any means, including excavating, filling, compacting or applying a harmful substance;
- cutting or tearing branches, roots or the trunk of a public tree; or,
- permanently or temporarily, fixing any object to, or inserting object into, any living tissue or surrounding bark of the public tree.

**Manager** - an individual responsible for overseeing and coordinating specific functions, departments, teams or projects within Townsville City Council.

**Offset Tree Planting** - refers to new public tree plantings intended to offset the tree canopy lost from a previous public tree removal. Offset tree plantings are intended to achieve no net canopy loss within three (3) years of the approved public tree removal.

**Private Tree** - means any tree located within the boundaries of privately owned property.

**Public Open Space** - refers to publicly accessible land that is set aside for informal and formal community use. The land typically supports a variety of civic, cultural, recreation and sporting activities whilst also providing stormwater management, amenity, and environmental benefits.

**Public Tree** - in this policy, refers to any tree within the local government area that has any part of its trunk growing from Council controlled land.

**Public Tree Network** - is the network of public trees on Council controlled land within the local government area.

**Public Tree Works** - means approved activities such as pruning, removing, (re)planting or tree care activities that are undertaken on a public tree by approved officers in order to achieve a specified tree management objective. In accordance with Local Law 3, Part 5, Section 17(c), public tree works can also be undertaken on a private tree that is a declared community safety hazard.

**Risk** - the likelihood that a harmful consequence (death, injury or illness) might result when exposed to the hazard. This will include the level of use of the areas surrounding trees, and the proximity of roads, buildings and other structures. In the context of trees, risk combines with the likelihood of a conflict or tree failure occurring and affecting a target with the severity of the associated consequences - personal injury, property damage or disruption of activities.

**Road Reserve** - refers to areas of land set aside for road purposes, extending from property boundary to property boundary. It includes not only the area covered by the actual road formation (carriageway) but encompasses the entire area of land dedicated for the use of the travelling public as indicated on the registered survey plan. This includes any areas of public open space within or adjacent to the carriageway where public trees, gardens and grass are planted.

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**Significant Public Tree** - means a public tree that is recorded in the Significant Public Tree Asset Register and has been classified in accordance with the Public Tree Hierarchy Classification Table (Table 1) contained in Council's Public Tree Management Guideline.

**Tree** - Trees are long lived woody perennial plants usually greater than three (3) metres in height; and have one, or relatively few, main stem or trunk. Tree includes palms for the purposes of this policy. Public trees are either owned or managed by Council.

**Workers** - includes employees, contractors, volunteers and all others who perform work on behalf of Council.

## 6. Policy

Tree management in urban areas requires a balanced approach to risk management whilst maximising benefits to the local community.

Council's Public Tree Management Guideline is an operational document which supports this policy. It further clarifies the responsibilities and operational details for tree management on public land, as well as the principles for decision making around the aspects of tree management.

Council will:

- be objective, consistent and transparent in its management of hazards relating to trees;
- implement a balanced, sustainable and best practice approach to assessing and managing the risks and benefits posed by trees on public land in accordance with the relevant Australian Standards, legislation and defined criteria, as outlined in Council's Public Tree Management Guideline;
- acknowledge, maintain and protect trees that have cultural, environmental or landscape significance;
- maintain public trees and provide a consistent response to resident requests for tree maintenance, planting and removal;
- where removal of a public tree is unavoidable, arrange offset tree planting in a suitable location;
- ensure the protection of trees on public land, so far as is practicably possible, from damage during construction activities;
- ensure a balance between managing the community's safety and infrastructure, simultaneously acknowledging the significant benefit trees provide within the landscape in terms of the social, environmental, economic and cultural wellbeing of the community; and,
- manage unauthorised interference with public trees on Council land in accordance with local laws and relevant legislation.

### 6.1. Tree Inspection, Assessment and Works

As part of the tree inspection and assessment process, Council will consider the health of trees and any risk to the local environment from the removal of trees, in addition to the risk impacts on life and property.

Determination of works required on trees is dependent on (but not limited to) the inspection and level of risk mitigation the works will achieve.

Customer requests for pruning (where works are not for mitigation of risk) will be assessed against the amenity value of the tree, for the community.

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Requests for tree removal or ‘non-risk’-based pruning will not be automatically approved. Each tree will be assessed on its own merits by Council’s Principal Arborist, representative or appropriately qualified contractor.

Decision making, criteria, authority and framework of tree inspections, assessments and works are contained in the Public Tree Management Guideline.

The guideline allow for development of a Significant Public Tree Asset Register, as resources permit.

## 7. Legal Parameters

### **Federal Government**

*Biosecurity Act 2015*

*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

### **State Government**

*Biosecurity Act 2014*

*Electrical Safety Act 2002*

*Environmental Protection Act 1994*

*Local Government Act 2009*

*Local Government Regulation 2012*

*Nature Conservation Act 1992*

*Neighbourhood Disputes (Dividing Fences and Trees) Act 2011*

*Planning Act 2016*

*Vegetation Management Act 1999*

### **Local Government**

*Local Law No. 3 (Community and Environmental Management) 2011*

*Local Law No. 4 (Local Government Controlled Areas, Facilities and Roads) 2011*

## 8. Associated Documents

AS 2303-2015 Tree stock for landscape use

AS 31000:2009 Risk Management

AS 31000:2009 Risk Management Principles

AS 3743-2003 Potting mixes

AS 4373-2007 Pruning of amenity trees

AS 4454-2003 Composts, soil conditioners and mulches

AS 4970-2009 Protection of trees on development sites

Townsville City Council Public Tree Management Guideline

Townsville City Plan

Townsville Local Government Area Biosecurity Plan

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