



KYLEA TINK MP

Independent Federal Member for North Sydney



The Hon Mr Paul Scully MP
Minister for Planning
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Mr Scully

Urgent need to help Councils prevent environmental vandalism

I am writing to you in relation to a matter of significant concern in the federal electorate of North Sydney: the illegal clearing of hundreds of mature trees, and the lack of any effective way to prevent it and preserve our vital tree canopy.

Around the world cities are working to protect, maintain and restore precious urban ecosystems which are critical for mental health, biodiversity and sustainable development. Yet here, in North Sydney, we have lost many hundreds of mature trees as they have been pushed aside to make way for large infrastructure projects with opaque to nonexistent, disconnected business cases.

On top of this profound loss, in recent months we have had two devastating instances of illegal tree decimation. Two hundred and sixty-five trees with poison, drills, and chainsaws in Castlecrag, and approximately two hundred and eighty-five with handsaws in Longueville. According to ecosystem and forest science expert, Greg Moore, the size of the massacres in recent months are "almost unheard of" and Lane Cove Council has described it as the worst act of environmental vandalism in Lane Cove's history.

This is not a new problem. But it is now critical. More than half of Sydney's councils have lost urban forest cover since 2013, leading experts to warn that suburbs lacking sufficient trees may become unlivable as the effects of the climate crisis bite.

Despite years of lobbying by local councils, we have not seen any appropriate, effective response where it is most needed: the State government level. University of Melbourne ecologist Dr Moore has described tree protection laws in Australia as "completely inadequate". Last September, Ku-ring-gai mayor Jeff Pettett wrote to then Planning

Minister Anthony Roberts lobbying for an increase in penalties for the illegal removal of trees. As of 23 February 2023, no response was forthcoming.

By way of contrast, in recognition of the crucial importance of trees in the urban environment, the ACT government has recently undertaken significant legislative reform to provide greater protection for Canberra's trees, repealing and replacing the *Tree Protection Act 2005* with the *Urban Forest Act 2023*. Similarly, in South Australia, 16 local councils in Adelaide have recently collaborated with the state government to undertake a regional tree canopy assessment of Metropolitan Adelaide providing state and local government representatives with a robust benchmark dataset that can assist in the management of Adelaide's urban forests for years to come.

Arguably, in view of the greater urban density of many of cities in New South Wales, our need for urgent legislative reform is even greater. The NSW Local Government Association undertook a study in 2018 indicating widespread interest among local governments to integrate natural asset vegetation assessments.

I have written to the Hon Ron Hoenig MP, Minister for Local Government, in relation amending the Local Government Act 1993 to protect tree canopy by including it as "natural capital" or "natural assets" under the act.

I call on you, as the current Minister for Planning, to act now to protect our precious urban tree canopy by urgently increasing the penalties for tree vandalism so that they adequately reflect the value of this critical natural asset; the widespread horror in the community at these crimes; and can achieve the deterrent purpose they are intended to, but manifestly fail to do. By way of example, in the recent reforms in the ACT which come into effect on 1 January 2024, Canberrans who knowingly inflict damage on protected trees will face fines of up to \$80,000.

Yours sincerely



Kylea Tink

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