Australasian Green Infrastructure Network

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Position statement on Urban Green Infrastructure

Urban Green Infrastructure for resilient communities

Join us to preserve, enhance and expand Urban Green Infrastructure (UGI). It is one of the most efficient and cost-effective solutions to transform our growing cities into resilient, nature-positive spaces where communities flourish and impacts from climate change are reduced.

UGI is the network of natural, designed or cultivated vegetated urban landscapes that range in scales from small balcony gardens to large parklands, open space corridors and reserves. UGI also includes blue-green infrastructure like riparian zones, wetlands and vegetated stormwater systems.

UGI is the living infrastructure component of our cities, critical for mitigating natural hazards like fire, flood, heat, and drought. It nurtures biodiversity, enables recreation, improves public health and wellbeing, leading to greater resilience and thriving nature-positive cities. However, despite its immense value, UGI is often an afterthought, with no clear accountability for its creation, management, or protection.

Image supplied by Noel Corkery

In denser, rapidly urbanising cities, UGI is often compromised by competing priorities like housing development, transport infrastructure, and renewal projects. But the positive outcomes from UGI and development are not mutually exclusive. UGI complements and enhances development - if we make it a priority.

To create resilient urban landscapes that adapt to and recover from climate impacts, and support health and wellbeing we must embed UGI as a core component of urban policy, planning, and asset management.

Our recommendations (with equal weight) for advancing UGI:

1. **Establish UGI as a recognised asset class:** UGI must be appropriately valued and included in Local, State, and Federal Asset Management Frameworks to ensure its appropriate integration into urban planning, infrastructure development, cost benefit analyses and allocation of funding for its management.

2. **Appreciate UGI's complementary role:** Recognise how UGI complements other urban infrastructure elements by enhancing their value and functions.

3. **Prioritise UGI for climate resilience:** Clearly define UGI's role in planning for, preventing, minimising, managing, and recovering from natural hazards (e.g. fire, flood, heat, drought) in a changing climate.

4. a) **Develop a National UGI Standard/s:** Create data-driven performance standards that define best practice for planning, building and maintaining UGI and considers metrics and benchmarks such as canopy cover, green cover, biodiversity, connectivity, vegetation health and quality.

   b) **Integrate the National UGI Standard into infrastructure guidelines:** Incorporate UGI metrics and benchmarks into Local, State, and Federal infrastructure and design manuals and guidelines.

5. **Secure funding for UGI:** Ensure infrastructure budgets include provisions for protecting, maintaining, regenerating UGI and expanding climate-resilient UGI on existing or newly acquired land. Clear accountability and recurrent funding for maintenance responsibilities is essential to ensure long-term performance and community benefits.

6. **Expand training opportunities:** Address the significant shortage of skilled UGI professionals by providing high-quality, consistent training opportunities across all states. This will improve UGI outcomes and meet growing demand.

Urban Green Infrastructure is a necessity - not a luxury. Public and private sector organisations must act now to integrate UGI into asset management frameworks and policies that ensure existing UGI is protected and managed sustainably and high-performing UGI is expanded.

As cities face mounting climate challenges, we cannot afford to continue treating UGI as the neglected sibling of urban grey infrastructure. Collectively, we can redefine how we value, design, fund, and manage UGI to create liveable, resilient cities for generations to come.