

# Growing the urban forest movement: opportunities and challenges<sup>©</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of the “urban forest” is increasingly becoming a topic of interest around Australia and internationally. The urban forest consists of the living environment and green spaces within urban areas, including both public and private gardens, parks and even individual trees. Research is increasingly showing the critical role the urban forest plays in supporting the health and wellbeing of our cities and their communities. Some commonly recognised areas which are supported by quality urban forest include the following (Table 1):

Table 1. Some commonly recognised areas which are supported by quality urban forests.

<b>Social</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Environmental</b>
General wellbeing and quality of life	Real estate value Sports field value	Urban cooling and heat island effect
Social cohesion	Industry turnover and employment	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions
Mental health	Economic activity in the tourism sector	Carbon sequestration
Provides recreation	Energy minimisation for cooling in summer	Biodiversity
Reduces obesity		Air quality
Reduces crime		Soil stabilisation
Juvenile delinquency		

This recognition is leading to a range of actions around Australia, with the creation of a number of initiatives and research projects which are seeking to advocate for urban forest protection and enhancement. There are numerous areas in which propagators and IPPS Australia (as their representative body) can get involved to create better, healthier landscapes and improve opportunities for the propagation industry.

## DISCUSSION

In Western Australia, a group of peak horticulture industry bodies and aligned organisations from the landscape industry came together to form the Green Space Alliance (GSA). With the support of a number of WA Government agencies, the GSA is WA's lead representative body seeking to improve Perth and regional town's urban forests.

The GSA established a vision: To live in a community that values green spaces at its core, which deliver benefits to everyone through improved health, wellbeing and live ability by using innovative water and urban planning solutions.

The GSA worked with Josh Byrne & Associates (JBA) to run a number of consultation events with a wide range of network members, at which the GSA membership developed a set of principles which articulated their desire to see growth in green space. This resulted in the development of a Position Statement, as well as a Discussion Paper (Figure 1) which explores pressures on green space and opportunities to address these concerns.

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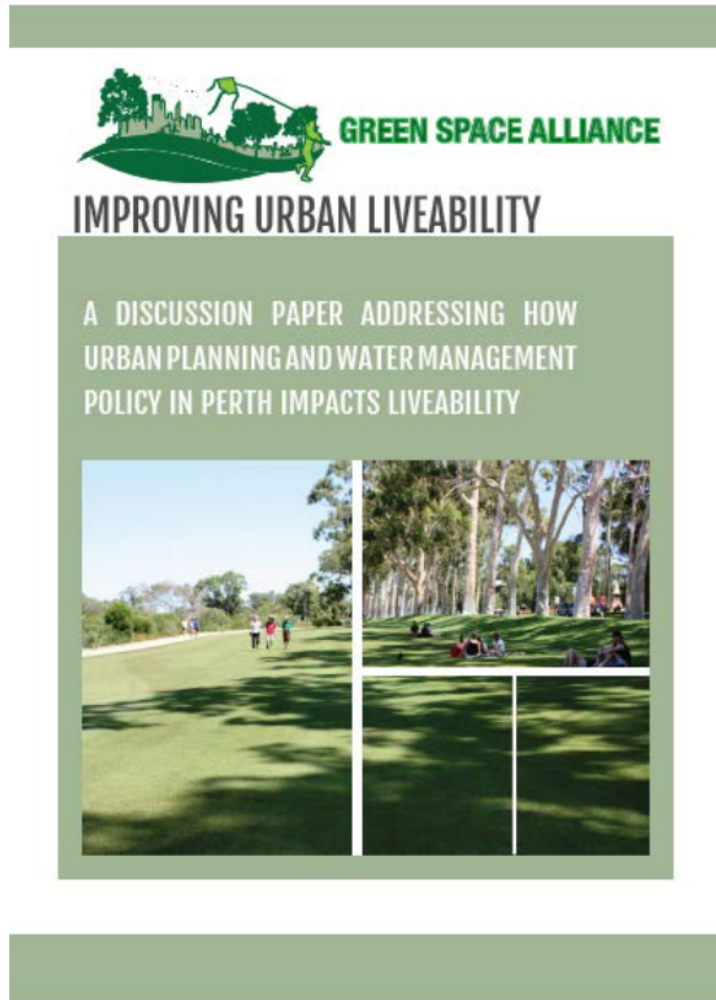


Figure 1. Discussion paper.

As an advocacy organisation, the GSA has met with Government Ministers senior bureaucrats to communicate to the need to develop progressive policies which address green space challenges and promote an environment of innovation which supports the development of green space for Perth.

The GSA model has been explored by other states and similar bodies which are starting to form in other States. No doubt these organisations would welcome the contribution of the IPPS and its members. The GSA also works with a national level initiative, the 2020 Vision.

The 2020 Vision, an initiative of Horticulture Innovation Australia, is a national program seeking to increase Australia's urban green space by 20 per cent by 2020 and is funded through levy by the sale of plants and trees. The 2020 Vision has hundreds of supporting organisations, ranging across private horticulture and landscape firms, to developers and engineering contractors through to government agencies.

The 2020 Vision is a successful blend of a community communications campaign, technical research, and resource development for organisations involved in urban forest creation. Research conducted by Josh Byrne & Associates for Horticulture Innovation Australia to support the 2020 Vision investigated the policy opportunities and challenges surrounding urban greening. The research recognised early on that this is a complex space and that there are a great range of stakeholders involved in the creation of green space (Figure 2).

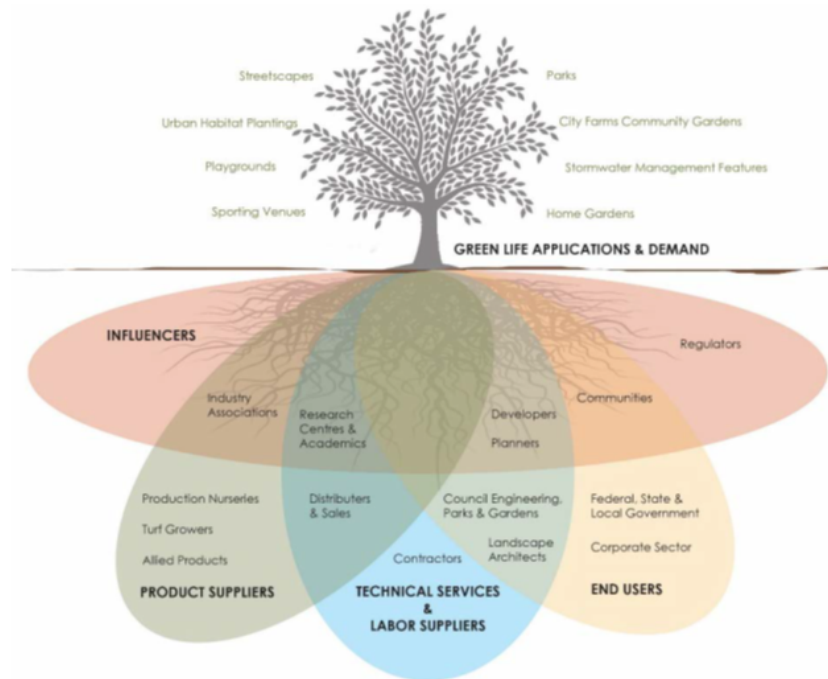


Figure 2. Stakeholders involved in the creation of green space.

The research took an inter-governmental perspective and found a lack of federal policy stifles progress being made in at state, territory, and local levels. Whilst state governments are seeking to support urban forest creation.

Local governments are the most active, but are not always well resourced and do not have the policy strength to deliver the desired outcomes. The research also revealed local government is the key provider of green space and it is this level of government that is well positioned to create change.

## CONCLUSION

Creating significant policy change in Australia often requires industry to speak out. In the urban forest sphere, this is taking place around Australia via the 202020 Vision and in Western Australia through the GSA. IPPS-Australia and its members can leverage these activities all along the supply chain (and plant lifecycle) from plant propagation through to caring for mature plants in a public park or streetscape.

State, territory, and local government need to improve their understanding, planning, and management of current and future urban green spaces. Propagators can contribute to this process by sharing their knowledge with government, and groups like the GSA and 202020 Vision can provide this avenue. In short—get involved!

