



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Transport
and City Services

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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Australian Multicultural Action Network Inc
32 Quandong Street, O'CONNOR ACT 2602
ABN: 40 172 914 431 Assn No: A06217

Mr Ravi Krishnamurthy JP
PRESIDENT

Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Transport and City Services

Inquiry into the Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Submitted by:

Ravi Krishnamurthy
President
Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)

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Introduction

The Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Standing Committee's inquiry into the **Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026**.

AMAN strongly supports the ACT Government's commitment to protecting and enhancing Canberra's urban forest while recognising the Territory's growing need for housing, infrastructure and sustainable urban development.

The Bill proposes significant reforms to improve the management of regulated and public trees, introduce a clearer framework for tree removal associated with development proposals, strengthen canopy contribution arrangements and better integrate planning with urban forest management.

AMAN believes these reforms should not simply balance development and tree protection—they should create a long-term vision where environmental sustainability, community wellbeing and inclusive planning reinforce one another.

As an organisation representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities across the ACT, AMAN encourages the Committee to ensure that implementation of the Bill is transparent, community-centred, evidence-based and inclusive.

About AMAN

The Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN) is a not-for-profit organisation working across the ACT to strengthen community wellbeing through multicultural

engagement, environmental sustainability, health promotion, community resilience and social inclusion.

AMAN partners with government, universities, environmental organisations and community groups to deliver initiatives that improve public participation and empower communities to contribute to public policy.

We believe that healthy urban environments are essential to healthy, connected and resilient communities.

AMAN's Position

AMAN broadly supports the objectives of the Bill.

In particular, we welcome:

- stronger alignment between planning and urban forest management
- recognition of community health within the objectives of the Urban Forest Act
- increased emphasis on sustainability and long-term tree renewal
- recognition of community involvement in protecting the urban forest
- clearer tree management processes
- greater certainty for planning decisions.

However, successful implementation will depend on how these reforms are delivered in practice.

Why Urban Forests Matter

Urban forests provide far more than aesthetic value.

They contribute to:

- climate resilience
- cooling during extreme heat
- improved air quality
- biodiversity
- mental health
- physical health
- flood mitigation
- neighbourhood identity
- social cohesion

For multicultural communities, accessible green spaces also provide culturally important gathering places that support recreation, family life and community connection.

Key Principles

1. Balance Growth with Environmental Stewardship

Canberra continues to grow rapidly.

Additional housing is essential.

However, development should not occur at the unnecessary expense of mature trees.

Planning should seek solutions where:

development

and

urban canopy

are strengthened together.

The best development protects environmental assets while meeting community needs.

2. Trees are Public Infrastructure

Trees should be recognised as essential public infrastructure.

Just as roads, drainage and utilities are planned strategically, so too should urban tree canopy.

Healthy trees reduce long-term public expenditure by:

- lowering urban temperatures
- reducing stormwater runoff
- improving public health
- lowering energy demand

Investment in urban forests should therefore be viewed as preventative infrastructure investment.

3. Community Ownership

Urban forests belong to the whole community.

Residents are far more likely to support planning decisions when they:

understand the reasons,

have genuine opportunities to participate,
and see transparent decision-making.

AMAN Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Develop an ACT Urban Forest Community Partnership Strategy

Beyond regulation, the ACT should establish a long-term partnership model involving:

- community organisations
- schools
- multicultural associations
- environmental groups
- Traditional Custodians
- residents

This would create shared responsibility for protecting and expanding the Territory's canopy.

Recommendation 2

Create Multilingual Urban Forest Education

Many multicultural residents are unfamiliar with:

- tree protection laws
- development approval processes
- planting responsibilities
- environmental benefits

The Government should provide:

- translated information
- Easy English resources
- short videos
- community workshops
- culturally tailored education

This would improve compliance and strengthen community participation.

Recommendation 3

Introduce Community Canopy Partnerships

AMAN proposes a new initiative:

Community Canopy Partnerships

Every approved tree removal should provide opportunities for local communities to participate in replacement planting.

Possible partners include:

- schools
- multicultural organisations
- sporting clubs
- youth groups
- seniors groups

This transforms tree replacement into community ownership.

Recommendation 4

Develop a Digital Urban Forest Portal

A publicly accessible platform could allow residents to:

- view protected trees
- monitor canopy growth
- track replacement plantings
- understand planning decisions
- report tree damage
- volunteer for planting events

Open access to information builds trust.

Recommendation 5

Strengthen Climate Resilience Planning

Urban forests should become a central component of Canberra's climate adaptation strategy.

Future planning should prioritise:

- heat-vulnerable suburbs
- areas with limited canopy
- culturally diverse neighbourhoods
- schools

- aged care precincts
- community facilities

Recommendation 6

Measure Success Through Outcomes

Implementation should include annual public reporting on:

- canopy coverage
- replacement tree survival
- biodiversity indicators
- community satisfaction
- heat reduction
- tree loss
- development approvals involving tree removal

Evidence-based evaluation will improve long-term policy.

Innovative Proposal

ACT Living Urban Forest Partnership Program

AMAN proposes establishment of a Territory-wide initiative bringing together:

ACT Government

-

Universities

-

Community Organisations

-

Traditional Custodians

-

Schools

-

Businesses

The partnership could coordinate:

- annual planting campaigns
 - citizen science
 - environmental education
 - urban biodiversity projects
 - youth leadership
 - volunteer stewardship
 - multicultural environmental ambassadors
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Multicultural Environmental Leadership

The ACT is becoming increasingly diverse.

Environmental policy should reflect this diversity.

AMAN recommends establishing:

Multicultural Green Ambassador Program

Community leaders could receive training on:

- urban biodiversity
- climate adaptation
- tree protection
- sustainable neighbourhoods

They could then educate communities in multiple languages.

This would significantly increase community understanding while strengthening environmental stewardship.

Health and Wellbeing

The Bill appropriately recognises community health within the objectives of the Urban Forest Act.

AMAN recommends expanding this concept by recognising that urban forests contribute to:

- mental wellbeing
- reduced social isolation
- physical activity
- healthy ageing
- children's development
- cultural inclusion

Environmental policy is therefore also public health policy.

Future Innovation

AMAN encourages the ACT Government to explore:

Smart Urban Forest Management

Using technology such as:

- GIS mapping
- remote canopy monitoring
- AI-assisted tree health analysis
- predictive climate modelling

to improve long-term planning.

Green Infrastructure Innovation

Future planning should integrate:

- tree canopy
- water-sensitive urban design
- biodiversity corridors
- renewable energy
- sustainable transport

rather than treating each separately.

Community Environmental Dashboard

A publicly available dashboard could monitor:

- canopy targets
- new plantings
- survival rates
- biodiversity outcomes
- neighbourhood progress

This encourages accountability and community participation.

Building Canberra's Future

Canberra has long been recognised internationally as a garden city.

This legislation presents an opportunity to reaffirm that identity while demonstrating that:

economic development,

housing,

environmental sustainability,

and

community wellbeing

can be advanced together.

Conclusion

AMAN welcomes the Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 and supports its overall direction.

We encourage the Committee to ensure that implementation reflects not only sound planning principles but also long-term environmental sustainability, public health, transparency and inclusive community participation.

By combining evidence-based planning with meaningful community engagement, the ACT can establish itself as a national leader in sustainable urban development.

AMAN looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the ACT Government, environmental organisations, planning authorities and community stakeholders to strengthen Canberra's urban forest for future generations.