

X taken on 7 or notes

Chair/ Dep Chair/ Member

Forestry Aus thanks you for the invitation to appear, and to make an opening statement.

I acknowledge the TOs and pay my respects.

As the name implies, FA is the professional organisation for foresters and others committed to forest science & management.

I'm Co-Chair of ACT group of c 150 members, and PoF @ ANU.

We see a number of important contexts for the Urban Forests Bill: the first set date back to the establishment of Cbr:

- Cbr conceived by Griffins, in a vision realised by Charles Weston, Lindsay Pryor & successors as a city in a forest;
- that vision is a large part of what give Cbr its special character, and it was a vision ahead of its time – evidence has been growing over the past few decades, accelerated by experiences during covid, of the physical and mental health benefits of urban trees/ parks; and the accelerating impacts of CC have emphasised the importance of urban trees in mitigating heat stress (I note as an aside that some of the original reasons for planting trees in Cbr was to mitigate the impact of cold & cold winds – do both)
- the importance of urban trees in these contexts has been recognised in the Living Infrastructure Plan and Urban Forest Strategy – we welcome these policy initiatives

the second set of contexts relate to the maturing and development of Cbr

- much of our established urban tree stock is ageing, and maintenance and replacement aren't keeping up;
- many longer established suburbs, and our town centres, are being redeveloped and densified, and that also poses challenges to maintaining what have been high levels of canopy cover;
- many of our newer suburbs have been established at building densities and plot ratios that make the achievement of reasonable canopy targets difficult.
- canopy cover, inequitably distributed across Cbr, & so are benefits

The Urban Forest Bill is straddling, and trying to reconcile, these two sets of contexts – it's important for the future character, liveability and health of Canberra that it do so well.

That's why we think the objective that specifically recognises that dynamic should be retained in the final Bill, as it was in the Draft Exp.

We think it's quite a hard juggle to perform, and so one of our key points is that we should be consciously adaptive in our implementation of the Bill, in whatever form it's finally passed – we should review how it's playing out over the next few years, before committing to the longer term.

X key points:

- the first is that the Cbr-wide canopy cover target isn't a good guide to the level of canopy we should be maintaining in each suburb – we have a round a dozen suburbs > 30%, and we should protect those higher levels as the assets they are;
- for those suburbs < 30%, we agree with ISCCC submission that it would be desirable and helpful to have interim targets. We also argue that the ultimate target should be higher – more like 40%
- if we're going to sustain the urban forest as climate changes, as infill and redevelopment occur, and as trees reach the end of their safe life, we are going to need to allow the sort of flexibility envisaged in the Bill, where some protected trees can be removed – so long as they are replaced by others that will deliver at least the same suite of services

But, as I noted earlier, the approvals process and levels of contributions are going to be need to be calibrated appropriately, so it's not too easy simply to remove trees of high value, in terms of the services they deliver, and replace them with trees that will never deliver those services. Otherwise, perverse outcomes ...

Particularly an issue for commercial residential/ business develop.

- the current proposals rely on regulation and cost contributions – we think it's worth thinking about some form of incentive for retention of high-value trees – some carrots as well as sticks.

- lastly, we draw to the Committee's attention that the resourcing of urban tree management in Cbr is seriously inadequate to meet current needs for maintenance, and the goals of the Living Infrastructure Strategy.
- To return to my starting point, our urban trees are an asset that deliver Canberrans multiple benefits – ecosystem services that are hard to value accurately, but have been estimated at an average of \$250/ mature tree/ year ... (500K mature trees/ \$100M/ yr)
- Those benefits are delivered primarily by trees that are proximate to where Canberrans live and work – that is, in the streets/ suburbs/ town centres where people spend their daily life.
- The Urban Forest Bill needs to help us protect and grow the value those trees deliver at the very local scale, and we'll need to monitor its impacts closely to make sure that we achieve its objectives.

