

ACT for Bees

Submission on Nature in Our City

Opening statement Wednesday 10th April 2019

The recent reports of a worldwide decline in insect populations has implications for food security, not only for humans but also for the food web which sustains biodiversity. Globally 90% of wild flowering plants depend on pollination and these plants are crucial for the continuing functioning of ecosystems to provide food and habitats for a wide range of species. The [Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#)¹ highlights the importance of biodiversity conservation in cities as an integral part of sustainable cities and the value of pollinators and pollination.

Another [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#)² to be released in May 2019 by the UN has serious conclusions about the loss of biodiversity: that the rapid decline of the natural world is a crisis even greater than climate change. “The loss of species, ecosystems and genetic diversity is already a global and generational threat to human well-being. Protecting the invaluable contributions of nature to people will be the defining challenge of decades to come. Policies, efforts and actions – at every level - will only succeed, however, when based on the best knowledge and evidence. This is what the IPBES Global Assessment provides.” – Sir Robert Watson, IPBES Chair.

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world [with 86% of the population living in just 0.22% of Australia’s land area](#).³ The importance of biodiversity conservation in cities is critical and the protection of pollinators is a key aspect which is often overlooked.

In our submission we provide evidence that the US, Canada and EU are already taking action on protecting pollinators and Australia needs to follow suit. ACT for Bees has outlined a list of 10 practical and relatively easy to implement recommendations in our submission to Nature in Our City. The ACT Government has a unique opportunity through developments like Ginninderry, the free plant issue scheme and street tree planting to support bees and other pollinators, birds and biodiversity by:

- Pesticide management- developing a labelling system for plants sold at nurseries that identifies that the plant from seed to sale has not been exposed to neonicotinoid pesticides,
- establishing of pollinator corridors through the strategic planting of street trees for year round flowering.
- adopting the recommendations made by ACT for Bees group to the MIS 25 planting list given to developers and used for the tree replacement scheme.

ACT for Bees additions to the MIS 25 planting list includes flowering times, nectar, pollen seeds resources and species of forager or animal using that particular plant for habitat and is vital in the decision making for street planting, open spaces and also for the tree replacement scheme. Given the rise in medium and high density housing, the lack of gardens in new developments and a warming climate, the provision of adequate green spaces and regulated flowering is vital for biodiversity and also for the health of the ACT population.

Since listening to a number submissions to Nature in Our City and the concerns about the rapid increase in medium and high density developments in the ACT and subsequent loss of open green space, I wanted to draw attention to a number of studies which show the significant benefits of green space for the health and wellbeing of people and reduced rates of hospitalisation and mental health issues.

Vegetated areas have many functions relevant to public health including maintaining a favourable climate, improving air quality and reducing traffic noise according to Active by Design, 4 and Clean Air and Urban Environments Research (CAUL).⁵

Studies by the Heart Foundation⁶ have shown that residents with larger neighbourhood parks within 1600 metres engage in 150 minutes more recreational walking than those in smaller parks. Walkers exercising in urban parks report greater happiness and lower anger and depression scores and adults with a wide range of green spaces round their home report 37% lower hospitalisation rates and 16% lower self report of heart disease or stroke.

A new 30 year study of 900,000 people in Denmark⁷ (March 2019) has shown that growing up in a home surrounded by trees and vegetation, rather than city buildings provides significant mental health benefits and perhaps lowers the risk of psychiatric disorders. "This nation-wide study covering >900,000 people shows that children who grew up with the lowest levels of green space had up to 55% higher risk of developing a psychiatric disorder independent from effects of other known risk factors. Stronger association between cumulated green space and risk during childhood constitutes evidence that prolonged presence of green space is important. Our results show that green space during childhood is associated with better mental health, supporting efforts to better integrate natural environments into urban planning and childhood life" p1

I also wish to support the submission made by Australian Association of Environmental Education which also focuses on the importance of schools having easy access to wildlife corridors and quality outdoor education. Education for learning for Sustainability is a vital part of our school curriculum particularly given the ACT's ecological footprint which exceeds any other Australian jurisdiction with on average of 8.9 hectares which is 3 ½ times the global average. "It becomes increasingly important to engage the ever growing population of the ACT with the ecosystems which sustain and surround them. Enhancing awareness of their impact on the environment could lead to a reduction in the use of resources, thus reducing our ecological footprint"⁸ Officer of the Commissioner of Sustainability Annual Report 2017/18 p17.

With an increasingly warming climate and increased urbanisation, planning for significant green spaces within urban developments in the ACT with year round flowering (and not treated with pesticides harmful to pollinators) will help to support the health of the ACT's pollinators, biodiversity and also beneficially affect human health and wellbeing. This also has a positive flow on effect to the overburdened health system.

Key recommendations from the submission from ACT for Bees to Nature In Our City

1. ensuring all Government agencies do not use any neonicotinoid products in their undertaking of business including plant production and street plantings,
2. that the ACT Govt consider banning the sale and use of neonicotinoid products in the ACT:
3. a labelling system for plants sold at nurseries is developed that identifies that the plant from seed to sale has not been exposed to neonicotinoid pesticides:
4. The Chief Minister writes to the APVMA requesting a review of pesticides in light of recent studies of the ecological effects of neonicotinoids on pollinators.
5. The Chief Minister seek to include in the next Agricultural Minister's forum seeking support to restrict, if not prohibit the external use of neonicotinoid pesticides in Australia
6. The Yarralumla Nursery ensure that bee friendly plants are available under the Plant Issue scheme
7. Recipients of the plant Issue Scheme have access to information about the importance of bee friendly plants and when they flower (education)

8. The information about bee friendliness and flowering times of plants listed in MIS 25 be incorporated into the Standard to provide developers with the opportunity to establish bee friendly landscapes within their developments
9. That the Government and TAMS give favourable consideration to the planting of bee friendly trees, as identified in MIS 25 when undertaking the Tree Replacement Program
10. That the government and TAMS consider tree and other plantings in the urban landscapes that establish pollinator corridors with year round flowering.

¹Refer

https://www.ipbes.net/system/tdf/downloads/pdf/ipbes_4_19_annex_ii_spm_pollination_en.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=28363

² Refer https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/ipbes_global_assessment_primer_english.pdf

³ Refer <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sp.urb.totl.in.zs>

⁴ Refer <http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/>

⁵Refer <https://nespurban.edu.au/>

⁶Refer <http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/design-features/public-open-spaces/evidence/>

⁷Refer <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/116/11/5188.full.pdf>

⁸ Refer https://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1273048/CSE_AR1718_Acc_02.pdf

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