



## A Call for a National Green Infrastructure Strategy

### 1.0 Executive Summary

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is calling for the development of a National Green Infrastructure Strategy (the *Strategy*) to be led by Infrastructure Australia. The Strategy seeks to advance the significant contribution that ecological and biological systems can contribute to the development of city, regional and rural infrastructure.

The Strategy will acknowledge that nature itself operates as an enabler of more effective systems, providing important ecosystem benefits to our city, regional and rural communities.

Together, a strong and effective national policy will enable our cities, regions and rural areas to realise their potential, build better and healthier places, and create more sustainable communities.

AILA strongly advocates for the Strategy to be developed by Infrastructure Australia and to be supported by leading experts and peak industry bodies.

### 2.0 Background

Green Infrastructure provides the opportunity to embed not only ecosystem services within our network of infrastructure investments, but also enhance human health and well-being by providing open space networks of parks, trails and corridors.

The benefits of a Green Infrastructure Strategy in the development of cities will flow through to other sectors of society. Well-designed and accessible urban open spaces contribute to reducing the incidence of non-communicable chronic physical and mental illness. Deploying Green Infrastructure Strategy to combat the impact of heatwaves across cities through urban cooling policies will reduce the incidence of peak load demand and further contribute to reducing health risks for vulnerable members of the community.

A Green Infrastructure Strategy will enhance the functionality of urban infrastructure (e.g active transport, surface water) affording multiple recreational benefits to communities. Studies show that greening the grey infrastructure can be cost effective and leading to improve biological and ecological outcomes further enhancing the resilience of urban ecosystems.

A Green Infrastructure Strategy provides a framework to protect and enhance urban and peri-urban ecological and biological systems. This will assist government to meet international obligations in relation to biodiversity conservation as set out in the Environmental Protection Biodiversity Conservation ACT (1999). Australia's urban footprint is growing at more than double the average rate for developed countries and is concentrated in areas of highest species diversity. Half of Australia's nationally threatened animal species occur in areas planned for urban development. Therefore a Green Infrastructure Strategy represents an opportunity for biodiversity conservation and protection of urban ecological systems through integrating Green Infrastructure principles into urban development and renewal.

A Green Infrastructure Strategy can improve the sustainability of the built environment through the delivery of a range of ecosystem services. As cities grow in population and increase in density,

protecting and managing urban ecosystem services such as water and air quality, biodiversity and ecological communities will require a far more integrated approach.

Overall, a Green Infrastructure Strategy would provide a framework for federal infrastructure investment to catalyse the restoration of the nation's urban landscape, which AILA considers to play a significant role in promoting prosperity, productivity and health and well-being for Australia's cities and towns.

### **3.0 What makes now a good time to develop a National Green Infrastructure Strategy?**

- i. A Green Infrastructure Strategy should contribute to conversation and debate about what our cities will look like in the future with greater density, congestion, increased population and the need to reimaging expectations of liveability. This would support the recent call of a National Settlement Strategy and the delivery of liveability and health outcomes that might come from it.
- ii. Urban greening must play an integral role in helping Australia to achieve targets to reduce carbon emissions.
- iii. The burden of chronic disease is a major policy challenge for government and a Green Infrastructure Strategy can play a role in addressing this health agenda. There is increased awareness for the physical and psychological health benefits of green infrastructure.
- iv. A green infrastructure strategy can help to make cities cooler and as a result, more liveable; support the cross-government objective of achieving energy efficiency; and build resilience in our cities to respond to more regular extreme weather events and the disaster risks associated with climate change impacts on our cities.
- v. There is a need for better policy integration of existing Green Infrastructure principles and strategies in the planning and financing of urban development.
- vi. There is a need to support all species that populate our cities by adopting a whole of city approach to landscape planning and management.

### **4.0 What policy objectives can a Green Infrastructure Strategy support?**

#### *4.1 Smart Cities Plan*

The Smart Cities Plan aptly identifies the need for government to become smarter investors in our cities' infrastructure. A National Green Infrastructure Strategy will provide a framework for rigorous green infrastructure decisions to be made within this context.

A National Green Infrastructure Strategy can support the classification of green infrastructure to be formally recognised as an asset class to be valued during business case development for major federally funded projects.

## 4.2 City Deals

City Deals are an excellent initiative and demonstrate leadership from all levels of government. A National Green Infrastructure Strategy will provide an anchor point and framework for how green infrastructure can be integrated into City Deals to guide investment and support. Green Infrastructure has already been included in varying degrees through existing City Deals. A Green Infrastructure Strategy will further focus Green Infrastructure Investment to achieve

## 4.3 Future Cities: Planning for our growing population

This report provides advice to Australian governments on improving the productivity and liveability of our largest cities as they grow over the next 30 years. The paper calls out a number of recommendations relating to green and open space.

There is currently a disconnect between the Green Infrastructure recommendations in the Future Cities report and the Infrastructure Priority List. A National Green Infrastructure Strategy could identify relevant Green Infrastructure Strategy initiatives to guide appropriate prioritisation and subsequent investment.

There are great benefits to be gained from deploying a more systematic approach Green Infrastructure evaluation with in the existing National Infrastructure Priority List.

## 4.4 Response to United Nations Sustainability Goal 11

Goal 11 seeks to make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Goal 11 is underpinned by detailed targets and indicators.

The Australian Government is already making a significant contribution toward achievement of Goal 11 through key domestic initiatives such as the Smart Cities Plan, City Deals, the Smart Cities and Suburbs Program and the National Cities Performance Framework.

A National Green Infrastructure Strategy will further support the Australian Government's contribution and leadership towards supporting Goal 11.

## 4.5 Federal Government's Inquiry into their Role in the Development of Cities

A National Green Infrastructure Strategy will provide an opportunity for the government to provide leadership in the environmental performance of cities and underpin several of the recommendations that were presented to Parliament recently.

## 5.0 What could be in a National Green Infrastructure Strategy?

- i. *Green Infrastructure Policy Statement* — This statement will articulate the overarching position of the government with respect to its investment in infrastructure projects and how they will be used to enhance Australia's network of green infrastructure.

- ii. *Goals and Objectives* — These goals and objectives will start to frame the elements to be implemented through the Strategy, including criteria for funding approval, scoping elements of the planning and design process, supporting policies that may be required across state and local government, collaboration between government, private and non-profit sectors, research interests and sharing of data and information.
- iii. *Green Infrastructure Investment Action Areas* — Each of the goal areas above will be further detailed and arranged into a set of specific actions, proposed timing of implementation and identification of responsible stakeholders. Key action areas may include the facilitation of a national Green Infrastructure review/audit, establishment of green infrastructure incentive programs for project development, ‘State of the Australian Landscape’ reports, adoption of analytical tools to advance landscape enhancement in project development and a national landscape research roadmap to innovate and push best practice.
- iv. *National Green Infrastructure Investment Criteria* — A suite of criteria will be developed based on the Green Infrastructure Policy Statement, and used to assess requests for federal funding of infrastructure projects.
- v. *Governance and Implementation* — A clear framework of governance for Green Infrastructure investment will be developed, which will look to build collaboration between all three levels of government, the private sector, research institutions and non-profit groups. Arrangements (roles and responsibilities) for implementing the Strategy will be developed, as well as the process of continual monitoring and reporting against the goals and objectives of the Strategy.

## **6.0 AILA’s Leadership and Support of the Development of a National Green Infrastructure Strategy**

### *6.1 About AILA*

AILA is the growing national advocacy body representing over 3,600 active and engaged landscape architects, promoting the importance of the profession today and for the future. Committed to designing and creating a better Australia, landscape architects shape the world around us. Landscape Architects conceive, reimagine and transform the outside world from streetscapes to parks and playgrounds, transport solutions to tourism strategies, new suburbs and even cities.

Landscape architects shape project outcomes in a variety of ways. We bring a critical eye to the potential opportunities and constraints of a place, site, or landscape. The vegetation, soils, watercourses often navigated by infrastructure projects are but some of the technical issues we bring expertise to. We create conditions for nature to function and thrive, ensuring that infrastructure puts back as much as it takes from Australia’s ancient landscape. We bring together other disciplines, in an integrated way to generate better outcomes.

We are active on infrastructure development teams of all types, often leading, connecting, facilitating and navigating to help achieve shared outcomes. Landscape Architects lead design for the environment and people of all ages and cultures. Landscape architects represent a profession increasingly dominating the debates to lead policy making to deliver exemplary outcomes for our cities, towns, regions and their inhabitants.

The work of Australian landscape architects is increasingly being recognised worldwide for our unique skills in creating liveable cities, healthy active spaces and sustainable design outcomes.

### *6.2 Green Infrastructure Position Statement*

AILA is currently developing a Green Infrastructure Position Statement which will be released in the first quarter of 2019. The Position Statement will provide thought leadership on what could be included in a National Green Infrastructure Strategy and we look forward to sharing it for feedback from the broader industry and government.

## **7.0 Supporting Organisations**

AILA has previously coordinated industry and government representatives through the [Living Cities Alliance](#) where there was support from over 30 organisations for the development of a National Green Infrastructure Strategy to be developed. This includes organisations such as the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council, Green Building Council of Australia (further supported by their recently released paper, [Building with Nature](#)) and the Nursey and Garden Institute of Australia.

AILA remains at the disposal of Infrastructure Australia to once again play a leadership role in facilitating a national conversation on the topic and provide expert advice to support the development of a strategy.

