



# **NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

## **URBAN GREEN SPACES**

Constitution Room, Old Parliament House, Adelaide

Thursday, 15 October 2020 at 9:30am

**(OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT)**  
**PARLIAMENT OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA**



**WITNESSES**

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## MEMBERS:

Ms P.M. Leuthen MP (Presiding Member)  
Hon. N.J. Centofanti MLC  
Hon. J.A. Darley MLC  
Dr S.E. Close MP  
Mr P.N. McBride MP  
Mr A.S. Pederick MP

## WITNESSES:

BOLTON, SALLY, State Manager, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, SA Chapter

BENNETT, DANIEL, Registered Landscape Architect, Fellow and President, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, SA Chapter

19 The PRESIDING MEMBER: Good morning. Thank you, witnesses, for joining us today for the hearing of the Parliament of South Australia's Natural Resources Committee. I would like to introduce the members of the committee. On my left is the Hon. John Darley; next to him is the Hon. Dr Susan Close, member for Port Adelaide; and Kate Bryson, our parliamentary research officer. I am Paula Leuthen, member for King; then we have Shannon Riggs, our parliamentary officer; the Hon. Adrian Pederick, member for Hammond; Nick McBride, member for Mackillop; and the Hon. Nicola Centofanti.

This is a public hearing and will be broadcast to the public online via the parliament website. A transcript of today's hearing will be published on the committee's website. All persons, including members of the media, are reminded that the same rules applying to the reporting of parliament apply to this hearing. I understand that information on committee processes and the protections afforded to witnesses has been provided to you.

I remind witnesses that, in giving evidence to the committee, you are protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you are protected from legal action with respect to the evidence you provide to the committee today. This protection only applies to evidence given at the hearing and published by the committee. You are not protected if you publish your evidence elsewhere or repeat your evidence outside the hearing.

The committee prefers to hear evidence in public where possible. If there is any matter you wish to discuss in private, please indicate this to the committee at the start of your evidence. Unless you have any questions, I now invite you to introduce yourself and make an opening statement, followed by questions and discussion with the committee.

Mr BENNETT: Thank you so much for having us; it is a real privilege to be able to share our thoughts and our submission with this very esteemed group of elected members. My name is Daniel Bennett; I am a registered landscape architect and fellow and President of the South Australian Chapter and a former national president of the Institute of Landscape Architects. I have some key pictures and words on the screen, and I also have Sally Bolton, who is the state manager for our institute here in South Australia.

Once again, we were very pleased when we saw this come up to submit on behalf of our members. We have over 3½ thousand registered members across Australia and about 300 in South Australia. Predominantly, they are now working in private practice but growing in government, and I think we have doubled our numbers in local government in terms of influencing policy and all the way through to delivery.

Urban green space does matter, it really does. I was reading an article this morning about what is happening on the barrier reef with the coral bleaching up there, and I think that there are things we can do here and now. Congratulations on having this inquiry first and foremost. I have a presentation, which is backgrounded by a lot of our award-winning projects, which shows that it's

not that difficult to achieve good-quality green urban spaces in South Australia. I might lead you through that very quickly, and I am more than happy to answer any questions you have.

We champion quality design and it is really important to use that word 'design'—these things have to be designed to meet a whole lot of objectives, not just planting street trees but also listening to local communities. As you know, they know their places really well, so local government has a role as well in doing that. We represent, as I said, over 3½ thousand members. This is from the 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide in 2017. There was a target of increasing urban tree canopy cover or green cover by 20 per cent by 2045. We might come back to that target in a minute.

So, 85 per cent of all new housing will be within established urban areas by 2025—again, from the same document, the 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide. Currently we are looking at about three quarters of that new growth going into infill areas and the rest in traditional areas on the fringe, towns and rural areas. This is why we think it matters.

This is a heat map from Resilient East a couple of years ago now of the urban heat island effect in Adelaide. You can clearly see the River Torrens through the middle. The hills do not have mapping on it there on the right, but you can see the red areas where it gets really hot. So this is why this matters—this affects so many things. Again, from the 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide, we are predicted to have up to, depending on who you listen to, 47 more days per year of temperatures over 35 degrees Celsius, which matters. It means you hop in the car more, which means you will burn more fossil fuels and you will add more to that effect and it manifests on itself.

Simple things like growing a tree canopy can help offset that heat, and so that target that we talked about a minute ago is really important. However, depending on who you listen to, that is going backwards. Based on some analysis that was done by RMIT in South Australia, we are down nearly 2 per cent. So, what do we need to do?

I really have to applaud you for this again, the first part of your inquiry, which is to look at all these things. I can simply wrap all of that up into one term, which may help, and that is the term that we use a lot now, which is 'green infrastructure'. That is not just planting trees and making green spaces, but it's having a performance measure around the values of having greener infrastructure. It is a catch-all term for rethinking everything from our parks and open spaces to how we use our water pipelines, how we use our roads, how we use our rail corridors. All those things form part of an opportunity and, typically, they have networks across the city, across Adelaide, that are often forgotten about but can form a critical part of softening the impacts.

The state has been doing a lot of work in this area over many years—before the change of government and with the current government as well. We applaud the work that's happening. We are part of this—you may have heard or you may not have—Healthy Parks, Healthy People, South Australia. It is a movement between the Department for Environment and Water and Wellbeing SA. It sets out some principles that protect and enhance our green open spaces, with six principles that help us try to digest across government what all that means, so that we can create those qualities green spaces.

This is all published. This is an action plan for 2020-22, which we have been a key part of. It is all nice to have policy, but what does it actually mean to have greener places for healthy and sustainable communities? Obviously, community health and wellbeing is never more important than the current time in Australia and around the world. Connecting with nature has proven to help people's mental health and wellbeing, but it is also nice. It is actually nice to see nature and be part of it. It helps, then, to build stronger communities and deliver connectivity and access. It actually builds on neighbourhood character, which again is that sense of ownership, which then builds in resilience. They are really good principles.

There are so many good intentions across government, and it can get really confusing as a practitioner and someone who has worked in local government in terms of which agency do I listen to. Which one? There are so many. You've got planning, you've got the Open Space fund, you've got Places for People grants, the Planning and Development Fund. You've got the planning reform that has happened. You've got DIT doing large amounts of projects and delivery. You've got schools and education. Green Adelaide boards are a great initiative.

There's the 30-year plan targets, as I have mentioned. Then you've got some conflicting parts, which I am sure you are aware of, around significant regulated trees. A lot of work is happening in health and wellbeing, then you've got the things that are there like our rivers, creeks, parks and waterways and, obviously, the Parklands. It can, at times, be incredibly hard to work out which target or which series of measurables we use to foster change.

Our reflection—and it is in our submission—is that we believe that local government is often the most effective agency to make these changes, and pragmatic changes. They manage their own green spaces. They look after them. They usually fund them through recurrent spending. They also know their places so are in the best position, often, to do things. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that they usually have the mechanisms in place to deliver on greening. I know the state has some other things that they hook into, like the Greener Neighbourhoods grants. Typically, elected members on councils always have a view on trees. That's fine; that's always going to happen. But generally speaking, the strategic avenues for them on open space policies, design manuals, etc., guide them on what they need to do. Often, it is just cutting through all of that and going, 'Right, let's use the data to inform what we need to do.' There is an example of that within the City of Adelaide, the Adelaide Design Manual, which gives very, very pragmatic and very, very clear advice on how to get a tree in a street.

Some of the challenges you have asked to hear about. If there isn't a tree somewhere, there is usually a very good reason, and these are just some of the reasons. Service and utility authorities are governed by state and federal legislation. They rarely coordinate, and so often if there is a street without a tree that is why, or for the stuff overhead or underground. Despite the very best intent, it's often impossible to even just dig a hole to put something in the ground.

I think there is still a bit of work for us to do on the true value of a tree in a street in particular. No doubt you have heard about mature trees in our suburbs versus putting in lots of new trees and the value of a 300-year-old eucalyptus versus a sapling. I did see yesterday on the steps of parliament a great example of that. It's saying that mature trees have a real value beyond them just being there and providing shade, habitat and biodiversity—all the things I mentioned earlier.

There is also an aspect of pragmatism about the right tree for the right place. You don't put a river red gum in a laneway. You don't put maybe a small deciduous tree in a massive parkland. Again, it's really using expertise to guide the outcomes we are seeking. We have seen a whole lot of things in the last year that have really challenged us—obviously, our current situation with COVID and the bushfire. Bushfire risk is a huge and omnipresent danger in most parts of South Australia and that adds another complexity to it.

I mentioned the significant regulated tree act and perhaps some conflicts with other initiatives that are around at the moment. Again, we firmly believe that that is something that needs to be addressed. That links to the next point, which is about some conflicts with planning reforms and no doubt a lot of the community angst.

One of the other things I would say in regard to that is that often there are ways to work around existing trees. We can just design around them. There are means and ways to do it and often it's not expensive. Going back to the very first point about service authorities, we need to actually call them to account. They have more of a role than just providing their service. They have a commitment to their communities as well. I know some of them do do that, like SA Water, for instance.

I guess one of our recommendations would be to bring all that together and put it in one spot and give the people of South Australia the best opportunity to address some of these falling targets in terms of healthy green open spaces. So our recommendation is some sort of agency to pull all that together and really provide pragmatic advice, not so much policy. We've got lots of policy, but how do we achieve it?

To work with local government is a really effective delivery agency, and perhaps the state needs a green infrastructure policy to bring all this together. There is a lot of good work happening out there and that will demonstrate leadership and commitment.

In regard to the second part of that recommendation, we think there is a massive opportunity in all existing announced projects and that is just putting some green targets on them.

That is not very difficult. It can be done immediately. It shouldn't add any cost to those projects because most of them do include some of it, but we can celebrate the fact that we are doing it.

In regard to the second part of the inquiry, which is more resource driven and what is happening elsewhere and obviously all those things, again, we just point to our first recommendation that that agency and that approach to bringing it all together will be a very, very good step and that green infrastructure policy may be the way for us to perhaps address all these issues. That is my presentation. Thank you for listening and for the opportunity.

20 The PRESIDING MEMBER: Thank you, Mr Bennett. Are there any questions?

21 The Hon. J.A. DARLEY: You mentioned the six principles. Could you quickly elaborate what they are?

Mr BENNETT: Yes. The six principles, which I did go through very quickly, which are outlined in this document, really do talk about promoting community health and wellbeing. That's the first one. There is connecting with nature—the importance of being able for children to connect with nature. There is building stronger communities, which is on page 19. There is delivering connectivity and access for everybody, which is equitable access to open space. There is contributing to neighbourhood character and supporting resilient neighbours. They are the six principles.

22 The Hon. N.J. CENTOFANTI: I might have a question more for clarification. You had on one of your slides 'avoiding too many of the one tree species which may to climate risk'. I assume that is because of disease?

Mr BENNETT: It's disease but also biodiversity, and more biodiversity reduces the risk of a series of trees dying, and we have seen that with Dutch elm disease in Melbourne. We have seen it with a couple of species here in South Australia so, yes, it is about diversity of species.

23 Dr CLOSE: I am interested in your ideas about minimum targets for projects in the city. Is there some science that sits behind how one would go about setting those that is readily available? I invite you to elaborate.

Mr BENNETT: The idea is that we actually have some because at the moment there aren't a lot in projects. So a minimum tree canopy target for, say, the South Road project would be: you would work out what it is now and a stretch target, and you would embed that in the contract so that whoever is delivering it has to meet that target and demonstrate it. The good thing about having those up-front and early is that as we know trees are living things. They are not roads, they are not fixed, they do actually grow with age, so there is an opportunity to track that over time and you can demonstrate the benefit.

With minimum targets for things like treating stormwater, I went to university in the nineties when they still taught things like how to manage water in the catchment at a catchment level, so where the water falls, you try and deal with that there, instead of it all flowing out to the gulf. I know we have some recycling of water but dealing with it at its source is one of the easiest ways for us to improve that local environment.

So, again, setting a percentage area target for a project to do that will help offset a lot of the challenges that we are facing and also increase the greening of that area. Those types are very pragmatic targets. Things like that you can add to working within budgets, delivering on time, so they should be thought about like targets within our projects.

24 Mr PEDERICK: I was of the understanding with housing developments that it was already set at 12 per cent green space; is that correct?

Mr BENNETT: Yes. Through the planning reform that is part of an offset, that if you can demonstrate, I think it is 12½ per cent open space in a development, you don't pay into the Planning and Development Fund. I guess that is lacking some quality targets, and I think anecdotally my experience as a professional has been that over the years that has been stretched to the point where often the requirement of 12½ per cent open space is just for recreation, and an offset to building lots of houses can be twisted in some way to say, 'Okay, we'll provide that 12½ per cent but we also need it for our detention basin,' so in winter it is wet and unusable.

So I think, yes, that is there. Absolutely now it is a really good thing to have, but where are the qualitative measures that sort of base and build on that requirement? I think they are some of the challenges we have.

25 The PRESIDING MEMBER: I appreciate your suggestion around the education of councillors in local government in terms of the value of greening. I also know that one of the challenges for elected members, especially in local government, is lots of residents are asking for their trees to be cut back, pulled out because there are bits falling off of them or things getting into their gutters.

I wonder if you might be able to share your ideas, if you had any, around two things: one, would you make any recommendation to councils in terms of what trees would make good council trees that might cause less issues for residents; and, secondly, do you think there is some benefit in educating the broader community on the value of those trees?

Mr BENNETT: Thank you for the question. In regard to your first question, absolutely, I think we need to do some more research in South Australia. There are a few aspects to that: one is we are an arid climate. We are not even temperate anymore, it is really arid, and so that changes perhaps the water requirements and the establishment times for various trees and then how the trees respond.

I could list all the species that give residents the irks and, of course, we are always going to have a debate about the different species of trees because if we live in a street we know what it does every year and we are going to complain about it. There is some more research we need to do on more appropriate species, and that would be really good if it was available to everyone, so I think that is one way we can do that.

Absolutely, yes, we should be doing some more education around the value of trees and how to manage them. Again, anecdotally in my experience when I was at the City of Adelaide, the people who manage our street trees do an amazing job—they really, really do—with a very, very limited budget. So I think a little bit of recognition that we do look after a lot of our street trees and occasionally accidents happen to living things. Like us they fall over, the wind blows the wrong way and they might drop a branch. I think a little bit more education, a little bit more awareness and also some involvement from our local communities might address some of these issues.

26 The PRESIDING MEMBER: Ms Bolton, do you want to contribute to the discussion further?

Ms BOLTON: I think I might just add around community engagement that the Healthy Parks, Healthy People initiative and the work we are doing with Wellbeing SA and DEW is really important for building that message with community. That is a really good example of that cross-agency relationship that has been highly successful in bringing together local governments, industry and developers. That's a very good model to look at and that's one of the outcomes out of one of those action plans.

27 The PRESIDING MEMBER: Were there any broader comments that you want to make to us today?

Ms BOLTON: No. Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr BENNETT: No. I can't wait to hear the outcomes. We are really happy to present.

28 The PRESIDING MEMBER: Thank you very much for your contribution. We can certainly see how passionate you are about the subject, as well. Thank you for your attendance today. You will be provided with a transcript of the evidence to review, as well.

Mr BENNETT: Thank you very much.

Ms BOLTON: Thank you.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW