

Intent

The purpose of the Vegetation Management Policy is to guide the management of all vegetation on Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) controlled land in urban settings.

The objectives of this policy are to ensure that TRC:

- meets its responsibility to manage vegetation with public and property safety in mind
- commits to retain public tree stock and its continued maintenance
- actively seeks opportunities for appropriate new plantings
- promotes the positive contribution of vegetation to open spaces, for people, wildlife and climate mitigation
- addresses TRC's strategic and operational commitments
- provides clear and consistent guidelines relating to vegetation management and protection of trees on TRC controlled land.

Scope

The Vegetation Management Policy is intended for use by:

- TRC workers and contractors – as a guide for the provision and management of trees on TRC controlled land.
- Landholders and developers – to assist in the selection of tree species and understanding of TRC's management of trees.
- Community – to promote better understanding of tree management.

The policy applies to the management of all vegetation under TRC's direct responsibility on TRC controlled land in urban areas.

The policy does not apply to:

- Rural areas
- Trees on private property
- Trees on State controlled land and road reserves
- Trees within TRC controlled areas where vegetation management is explicitly stated as the responsibility of the Lessee.

Policy Statement

TRC recognises the significant contribution of vegetation to wellbeing and quality of life in the Tablelands area. Economic, social and environmental benefits of managing public trees and other vegetation across the landscape include visual amenity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, improving biodiversity values and reducing maintenance costs. The risks of public trees to people and property are minimised and balanced against economic, social and environmental benefits.

1. Principles

TRC's vegetation management activities and resources shall be prioritised upon the following order of principles:

1. Manage risks to public safety.

2. Manage risks to property or infrastructure.
3. Preserve and maintain the health and structural soundness of public trees.
4. Improve the region's image, liveability and community wellbeing through the strategic use of public trees.

2. Planting on TRC controlled land

TRC will plant the right vegetation, for the right location with consideration given to its whole of life maintenance requirements and the possible impacts to private and public infrastructure, and public safety. Tree planting will be undertaken to support and enhance built environments, establish new avenues and increase canopy cover across open spaces. TRC has a long-term goal to establish a healthy and sustainable street tree network across the region.

Species selection will be based on careful consideration of the environmental, social and historic character of individual urban areas and townships. Preferred plant species are detailed in the Planning Scheme Policy PSP6 – Landscaping & Preferred Plant Species, Schedule A.

Planting of sizable and long-lived trees are a preferred landscaping option, where environmental conditions, community support and site factors allow. Growing characteristics of tree species must be considered before planting to reduce the potential for conflict with private and public infrastructure and services.

Species selection will consider site specific requirements including views of neighbouring land and obstructing neighbouring services such as solar panels or tv/satellite receptors.

All planting of new vegetation on TRC controlled land requires a formal approval and must comply with:

1. the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Council's Development Manual (FNQROC), and
2. TRC Planning Scheme Policy 6 – Landscaping and Preferred Plant Species, and
3. Australian Standard - Pruning of amenity trees AS 4373-2007, and
4. TRC Local Law No.8 (Local Government Controlled Areas and Roads) 2019.

Community groups

Community groups taking responsibility for vegetation (plantings, weed management and vegetation maintenance) on TRC-controlled land must submit a Community Project Request when the aim is to add new plantings to the project area or requiring in-kind support from Council, such as transport of collected waste/ weeds. Approval of the community project depend on favourable assessment of, and agreement on, long term maintenance arrangements. The groups commit to working closely with appointed TRC staff, following advice on species to remove or plant and on maintenance techniques. These agreements are restricted to vegetated areas with no development plans from Council. Proximity to infrastructure (above or below ground) triggers a permit application process for Alteration and Improvement of Local Government Controlled Area.

Unauthorised planting

Where vegetation has been planted on TRC-controlled land without prior approval or in non-compliance with the above guidelines, standards and rules, the person or group may be asked to remove it if it is not considered the right vegetation for the right location or it negatively impacts private or public infrastructure.

TRC reserves the right to recover costs incurred when the vegetation is not removed within the timeframe advised and for any damages and remedial work necessary as a direct result of the unauthorised planting.

3. Tree protection

To realise the benefits provided by public trees, their protection and retention shall be given a high priority during the assessment of development applications, delivery of infrastructure projects, performing maintenance activities, and when assessing event applications likely to cause impact to public trees.

Development applications (including Operational Works)	Applicants may be requested to provide information relating to the potential impact of development activities on public trees and planned mitigation. Tree protection and retention conditions may be applied to ensure no negative impacts on the long-term health and structural integrity of public trees.
Road and open space maintenance	Activities will be carried out in compliance with the vegetation protection provisions of the FNQROC Development Manual Version 8. Damage to public trees will be eliminated or reduced as far as practicable.
Management of trees in the vicinity of public infrastructure and powerlines	Where practicable TRC will avoid installing infrastructure within proximity of public trees. TRC will engage with infrastructure providers to minimise damage to trees and to encourage tree sensitive design of new infrastructure.

4. Vegetation asset management

TRC is committed to managing vegetation assets in a proactive and efficient manner to maximise longevity, enhance amenity and achieve excellent vegetation health outcomes whilst managing risks to public safety, property and infrastructure.

Asset management	TRC will conduct vegetation maintenance activities in line with industry standards and guidelines.
TRC as a steward and efficient manager of trees	TRC will provide educational information to promote the benefits provided by trees and other vegetation, care and upkeep, species selection, economic value and TRC's management approach.

5. Tree pruning and tree removal

When TRC receives requests to remove part or all of trees on land under its control, decisions will be made by suitably qualified TRC staff and/or consultant arborists. Trees will only be removed or pruned after consideration of potential risks and benefits.

Acceptable works

- Removal of trees that have been professionally assessed as presenting an unacceptable hazard.
- Removal of trees that have been identified as unsuitable species for the location.
- Removal of trees in conflict with utilities and built structures if there are no other practicable mitigation solutions available.
- Maintenance pruning to remove dead, dying, diseased or damaged branches or where they present an unacceptable safety risk.
- Selective pruning to remove branches causing conflict, such as encroachment onto buildings.
- Vegetation works to protect above and below ground services including water, sewer, power and telecommunications.
- Vegetation works to reduce unacceptable hazards to pedestrians or vehicle access.
- Pruning for vehicle sight lines, public signage and to meet the requirements of the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices and the Australian Standard, the Queensland Guide to Temporary Traffic Management and Austroads.
- Root pruning of trees to avoid damage to built or natural structures.
- Minimal vegetation works to trees that are identified as providing habitat to threatened species. TRC will remove the minimum amount determined to make it safe, whilst still retaining habitat value (e.g. leaving a hollow stump for nesting birds or marsupials, roost trees).

Where a decision is made for a tree to be removed TRC parks and gardens, land protection or natural assets staff must be consulted to determine the biodiversity and cultural value of the tree. Where necessary, a fauna spotter and catcher will be contracted to rehome animals before the tree is removed. The closest possible location will be found to replace the tree with a seedling of suitable species.

TRC may approve permits to remove or prune vegetation within its road reserve for building or renovating purposes or constructing a driveway. A permit process ensures public safety, checks for utilities (e.g. water, sewer, power and telecommunication) and makes sure that the integrity of the road verge is maintained.

Adequate Tree Protection Zones must be established around existing trees near proposed works. Tree Protection Zones consider both the crown and root area of a tree that requires protection for long-term viability.

Unsupported works

Tree pruning or removal are not supported in the following circumstances:

- to provide benefit to private views
- for leaves, flower, fruit, minor branch or sap drop, or animal faeces
- of trees which are assessed as medium to high value to biodiversity or cultural heritage
- of trees which are inhibiting grass growth, shading property or are creating a firebreak
- of trees which are claimed to be damaging buildings, water, or sewage pipes, unless certified evidence is provided that indicates that tree roots are the cause of the damage
- for private insurance purposes
- of healthy and stable trees that do not present an unacceptable risk
- to facilitate private construction works including fences
- of vegetation to allow vehicles to park on road verge
- for private and commercial signage
- for vegetation works that will cause the tree health to decline or die
- for clearing vegetation in public areas due to customer requests other than for valid safety concerns.

6. Unlawful interference with vegetation

TRC will ensure that vegetation on TRC controlled land is protected from unlawful interference.

TRC will be proactive by promoting community awareness and education as a key mechanism to ensure the protection of vegetation and encourage reporting of vandalism.

Suspected unlawful interference with vegetation will be investigated. The provisions of State legislation and TRC Local Laws will be enforced in line with TRC responsibilities and head of power.

Under the *TRC Subordinate Local Law No.8 (Local Government Controlled Areas and Roads) 2019*, prohibited activities include:

- Damage, remove or interfere with any animal, vegetation or facilities, notices, official signs, equipment or property owned by local government.
- Dig up, disturb or remove any soil, clay, gravel, sand, stone or mineral.
- Throw vegetation or other objects into any watercourse.

TRC may revegetate areas to repair unlawful interference with vegetation. Revegetation work may include erecting temporary fences and screens and depositing plant and materials on site.

TRC will actively promote community involvement in revegetation, vegetation stewardship and maintenance and may target community education initiatives toward high-risk vandalism areas.

7. Roadside vegetation management

Slashing, Mowing, Herbicide Treatments and Biosecurity

TRC's roadside maintenance schedule ensures road user safety by maintaining line of sight visibility, reduction of fire hazards and that biosecurity obligations are met by reducing the spread of weeds.

Alternative Roadside Vegetation Management

TRC will consider alternatives to mowing, slashing and spraying of roadsides. Low growing vegetation could minimise maintenance costs over time, while offering multiple benefits to the environment and public including visual amenity, additional carbon sequestration, habitat, food for insects and other animals, reducing fire risk, shading out weeds, and reducing seed load to adjacent properties, stabilising soil and filtering road runoff.

Context

Vegetation on land under Council control is a natural asset of TRC and contributes to the wellbeing of the community and the natural environment. The Vegetation Management Policy contributes to achieving the vision of Council and community to protect, maintain, restore and enhance our natural environment, which attracts tourism, encourages economic development and increases resilience to natural hazards and disasters.

Vegetation plays a critical role in maintaining ecological processes and preventing land degradation. Degraded land may detrimentally affect land and water resources, both in situ and elsewhere in the landscape.

Vegetation plays a significant role in the carbon cycle, and the maintenance of carbon stored in vegetation and soils contributes to reducing and offsetting greenhouse gas emissions.

Vegetation provides habitat and food for wildlife and shade for people, parking lots and buildings. It decreases lower surface and air temperatures by providing shade and through evapotranspiration. Increasing shade trees for people, cars and infrastructure and decreasing urban heat islands is aligned with TRC's Climate Risk Management Strategy and the Tablelands 2030+ Community Plan.

Biodiversity, natural heritage, and the climate make the Atherton Tablelands a highly desired place to live, work and invest. Public trees and vegetation support these values and maintain our landscape character and amenity.

Poorly managed vegetation, especially in roadside corridors and on public land, can interfere with public safety, traffic, infrastructure and amenity.

Definitions

- **Vegetation** includes groundcover, shrubs and trees; street trees and other plant species.
- **Public trees** are trees on TRC controlled land that are used by the community, such as in parks, on road verges and around public buildings.
- **Urban areas** are developed areas such as towns, and suburbs. Urban areas include residential, industrial, community facility and centre zones.

Alignment to Risk Register

This policy mitigates the following corporate risks:

- COR7 Inability to effectively engage with the community – poor communication and engagement
- COR15 Infrastructure planning and delivery fail to meet community and service standards

Relevant Legislation

- *Local Government Act 2009*
- *Local Government Regulation 2012*
- *TRC Local Law No.8 (Local Government Controlled Areas and Roads) 2019*
- *Vegetation Management Act 1999*

Related Documents

- Code of Conduct
- TRC Climate Risk Management Strategy
- Queensland State Policy for Vegetation Management v.4
- TRC Planning Scheme – Planning Scheme Policy 6 – Landscaping & Preferred Plant Species
- Australian Standard - Pruning of amenity trees AS 4373-2007

- Local Government Mutual Services - Tree Risk Management Guide 2021

Corporate Plan Links

This policy aligns with the following Corporate Plan 2021– 26 themes:

- Our community is active, inclusive, connected and empowered.
- Our infrastructure is well planned, integrated and fit-for-purpose.
- Our organisation is progressive, efficient, transparent and collaborative.
- Our economy is growing, diverse, resilient and agile.
- Our environment is valued, managed and healthy.

Human Rights Commitment

Tablelands Regional Council has considered the human rights protected under the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld) when adopting and/or amending this policy. When applying this policy, TRC will act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights.

Responsibility

Council is responsible for the adoption, amendment and repeal of the policy and the Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the development and amendment of any associated procedures and guidelines relevant to the policy.

This policy is to remain in force until otherwise amended or repealed by resolution of Council.

Adopted By	Council	Responsible Officer	Manager Environment & Natural Resources
Adopted Date	25/01/2024	Review Date	25/01/2027
Version	1	This policy repeals any previous versions.	