

Bushfires Scenario

Whilst the urban forest cover over Greater Melbourne is about 15%, in the outer north-eastern suburbs the canopy is more than twice, and in some places, three times that. Dandy Lion Shire has an average urban forest canopy of 40% but this includes urbanised areas with as little as 15% cover, plus areas of intact bushland. The more established areas have well-treed, larger allotments.

After a disastrous summer of bushfires, the president of Saving Houses in Towns, Ms Dee Nyer, is proposing 1) that large numbers of trees be removed to disrupt continuous canopy, 2) that trees which are closer than their height to an asset may be removed without approval and 3) that all low level scrub is control burned each year. The local state member, the Hon. Justin Case MLA, is sympathetic to Ms Nyer's proposal although a little concerned that her strategies may be too extreme and stimulate vocal opposition from the local environmental movement. He has offered to convene a community bushfire defence committee to consider Ms Dee Nyer's proposals.

The editor of the local newspaper, Mr Red Iteer, has published an article that states that minimisation of risk must be the principal consideration of the community bushfire defence committee. The article focusses mostly on risk from bushfire but touches on an earlier interview with an expert on urban forestry, Ms Ash Wood, who highlighted the risks from excessive heat, poor air quality, too much solar radiation and the release of approximately 4 tonnes of atmospheric carbon for every medium sized tree removed. Red Iteer also included an editorial that states there is a lot of concern about the threat from bushfires and there appears to be quite a bit of support for Ms Dee Nyer's proposals.

Three months ago, Dandy Lion Councillor, Theresa Green, proposed that the council sets an urban forest canopy target for the whole area as well as for the various precincts. Despite opposition, the proposal was adopted but there is a diversity of opinion about what the canopy targets should be. Some councillors support a robust target with a minimum of 25% in all areas. Other councillors are convinced by Ms Dee Nyer's arguments and believe the canopy targets must allow for clearing and thinning trees to guard against bushfire.

Council's strategic planner, Ms Ann Serse, must report to Council with recommendations for an overall canopy target as well as targets for the various precincts.

She has invited you to a workshop to identify relevant issues and options for improving appropriate canopy cover from which she will prepare an informed discussion paper to be used in public consultation and as a basis to prepare the report to Council.