ACT Government
City and Environment

Decision Making Framework

Urban Forest Act 2023

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1.1 Policy

This framework supports the application of the *Urban Forest Act 2023* (the Act), ensuring decisions about tree removal are lawful, transparent, and ecologically responsible. The framework incorporates the statutory approval criteria outlined in the *Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2025 (No 1)* or relevant criteria that are notified, pursuant to Section 20 of the Act, from time to time and considers ecological significance as defined in *Schedule 2* of the Determination.

1.2 Purpose

To guide decision-makers in assessing tree activity applications consistently and in accordance with legislative requirements, balancing urban development, public safety, and environmental stewardship. This framework supports accountability, clarity, and continuous improvement.

1.3 Scope

This decision-making framework has been established to guide strategic, operational, and policy-related decisions in relation to regulated and registered trees under the Act.

These decisions have potential environmental, financial, reputational, or legal impacts and are made in line with the objects of the Act and ACT Government priorities.

This framework does not go into details of how to undertake a tree assessment and the use of the Urban Forest Management System. These are addressed in the Urban Treescapes' Tree Protection Unit Tree Assessment Policy and Standard Operating Procedure and TPU - Salesforce - Urban Forest Management System Manuals.

1.4 Risk Assessment

Section 23 of the Act requires that a tree assessment is carried out in response to an application to undertake a tree activity (submitted under Section 21). These assessments are carried out by qualified Tree Protection Officers (TPOs). TPO's hold a (minimum) Certificate 3 in Arboriculture and/or relevant experience and expertise in arboriculture. The approved ACT Government risk assessment method is built on the VALID framework. VALID has applied the International Organisation for Standardisation ISO 31000 - Risk Management, and the associated Tolerability of Risk Framework (ToR) to tree specific benefit-risk management and assessment. Under VALID, the Tree Protection Unit assess the risk from Canberra's urban trees and branches falling using four (4) easy-to-understand risk ratings.

1. **Not Acceptable** risks will be reduced to an Acceptable level
2. **Not Tolerable** risks will be reduced to an Acceptable level, but with a lower priority than red Not Acceptable risks
3. **Tolerable** risks are not reduced but may require an increased frequency of assessment than green Acceptable risks

4. **Acceptable** risks are not required to be reduced

The evaluation of risks to public/private safety, infrastructure, and ecological value is carried out and outcomes of the tree assessment are recorded on a Tree Assessment Report in the Urban Forest Management System, along with photos and the original application.

Where applicable, the urgency of an application is considered under section 32 of the Act. Section 32(4) of the Act allows the decision maker to approve an application as soon as practical if satisfied that the circumstances require the application to be considered urgently and the activity is necessary to protect the health or safety of people or animals, or public or private property. Tree Protection Officers are also decision makers for the purposes of Section 32.

To comply with the criteria, remedial treatments and risk mitigation measures must be considered in conjunction with the assessment.

Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2025 (No 1) Schedule 1, Section 1(1)(h) states that the decision maker must consider whether "all other reasonable remedial treatments and risk mitigation measures have been determined to be ineffective" before making a decision to approve proposed damage to a regulated tree.

1.5 Records Management

Record keeping requirements are identified throughout the Tree Protection Unit Tree Assessment Policy and Standard Operating Procedure and in line with the *Territory records Act 2002*. Information regarding applications is held in the Urban Forest Management System and Objective.

1.6 Procedure

1.6.1 Step 1: Review Application and Confirm Completeness

Confirm completeness and accuracy of submitted documents. This includes:

- ensuring required consent forms have been submitted as per Section 21 (2); and
- ensuring applicable supporting documentation has been supplied, such as:
  - shadow diagrams (if shading is cited);
  - -tree management plans where multiple activities are applied for or the application refers to groundworks;
  - pruning plans; and
  - arborist or other professional reports (engineers, plumbers etc).

Section 22 of the Act allows the decision maker to require further information or a document that the decision-maker reasonably needs to decide the application, within the time stated in the notice. If the request is not fulfilled, the decision maker may close the application.

1.6.2 Step 2: Conduct Tree Assessment

The Urban Treescapes' Tree Protection Unit Tree Assessment Policy and Standard Operating Procedure provides a detailed procedure on conducting tree assessments under Section 23 of the Act. Summary details of this procedure include:

- Conducting a risk assessment onsite, prior to entering the leased land;
- confirm protection status of the tree (is it regulated, registered, public, not protected, and/or remnant);
- identify species and check against Schedule 2 (local ecologically beneficial species);
- assess health, structure, form, and vigour;
- evaluate ecological and landscape value;
- undertake VALID risk assessment; and
- determine potential for remedial treatment.

This assessment report is subsequently submitted for deciding by the decision-maker.

1.6.3 Step 3: Apply Approval Criteria

In making the decision, the decision-maker considers the approval criteria as notified under Section 20 of the Act, details included in the application, and the tree assessment carried out by a qualified TPO.

The current criteria, notified **7 March 2025** is known as the *Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2025 (No 1)*. This criteria allows the decision maker to approve the removal of a tree when:

(a) the tree is in decline and its life expectancy is short; or

(b) the tree represents an unacceptable risk to public or private safety; or

(c) the tree is shown to be causing or threatening to cause substantial damage to a substantial building, structure or service; or

(d) the location of the tree is inappropriate given its potential size and growth habit (excluding remnant eucalypts); or

(e) the tree is causing excessive shading to the lessee's residence, or neighbouring residence, during winter between the hours of 9am to 3pm and pruning is not sufficient to remedy this (excluding remnant eucalypts) and is supported by shadow diagrams; or

(f) the tree has poor form or low vigour and is of low amenity or ecological value to the surrounding landscape or canopy cover; or

(g) where the tree is part of a close planting of a number of trees, the removal of the tree will allow the other trees to develop; and

(h) all other reasonable remedial treatments and risk mitigation measures have been determined to be ineffective.

1.6.4 Step 4: Consider Ecological Importance

1.6.5 The decision maker may also consider whether the tree has ecological importance to the local environment, if the species is listed in *Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2025 (no 1) Schedule 2* (local ecologically beneficial species). Step 5: Make Decision

In making the decision for any tree damaging activity, the decision-maker considers:

- the approval criteria;
- details included in the application;
- the tree assessment carried out by the TPO;
- the advice (if any) of the advisory panel;
- the advice (if any) of an entity to which the application was given under section 25 (for example the Heritage Council and representative Aboriginal organisations;
- anything else the decision-maker considers relevant.

The decision maker also considers:

- whether there are any exceptional circumstances that have been raised by the applicant, taking into account advice from the Tree Advisory Panel;
- the importance of the tree in the surrounding landscape;
- whether the tree has ecological importance to the local environment (see 1.6.4).

In addition, when assessing an application for major pruning, the decision maker may give approval when:

(a) the work is required:
  i. as a remedial treatment; or
  ii. in the general interests of the health of the tree; or
  iii. to reduce an unacceptable risk to public or private safety; or
  iv. to reduce the risk of damage or prevent further damage to a substantial building, structure or service.

(b) the tree is substantially affecting solar access to the lessee's residence, or neighbouring residence, during winter between the hours of 9am to 3pm and minor pruning is not sufficient to remedy this (excluding remnant eucalypts).

The approval of lopping should only be considered when criteria (1) is met and the retention of the tree is considered necessary (for example habitat element retention or heritage values).

When assessing an application to undertake prohibited groundworks within the tree protection zone of a regulated tree, the decision maker may give approval if they are satisfied that the groundworks will have minimal impact on the tree, if the activity complies with the conditions stated in the approval. Groundworks application should be accompanied by a tree management plan that shows what protection measures will be put in place to ensure the impact of groundworks on the health and structural stability of the tree will be minimised.

Consideration of external reports

When engaging highly qualified and skilled professionals [in a different field] such as engineers or plumbers, to determine that the tree in question is the causation of damage, the decision-maker expects that any associated reports provide adequate detail, demonstrating what investigative measures have been applied. Reports are expected to specify what investigation has taken place, regarding the causation of damage, including the exploration of other potential causes (eg. water, other construction or maintenance faults, clay soils etc). This is required to ensure that the reported damage is likely a result of the tree, rather than an assumed based on correlation to the presence of tree roots.

With regards to damage to pipes, generally, tree roots cannot break/cause holes in pipes. If roots are entering PVC pipes at the joint area it is likely due to poor quality of the installation of the pipes, resulting in water leakage that provide a preferred environment for root growth.

When reviewing reports in the assessment stage, the decision-maker will consider:

- evidence presented in the report such as images, DNA testing of root material to establish origin of roots, at a minimum has the site been excavated to uncover tree roots;
- information on the condition of infrastructure/structures and what the observed damage is– are there any defects, for example breakage of pipes, soil moisture, defective guttering, construction details (reinforced concrete, meets building codes), has the structure been engineered correctly;
- if a camera is used to inspect the pipes, it will measure the distance the camera has travelled. This can be helpful in determining the location of the blockage and where the roots have entered. This information can be used to determine which tree/shrub has caused the damage; and
- what mitigating measures or extent of works are required to address the issues, i.e replacement of terracotta pipes with pvc, repair of defects, such as pipe breakage. What are the estimated costs of any works/repairs.

It is acknowledged that the presence of the large tree can have an impact on the foundation moisture levels and therefore the differential movement of the footing and slab system. Other factors such as overwatered gardens, blocked drainage pipework and inadequate surface water drainage can also influence the foundation moisture and performance of the overlying building. Removal of trees that are within close proximity to structures may also cause substantial variation in moisture conditions and lead to differential settlement and cracking as a result. These are issues that would need to be considered and addressed by the engineer when making recommendations about remediation.

The decision-maker for these decisions are the delegates of Conservator or Flora and Fauna, under Section 141 of the Act. Delegates are updated from time to time, however for the purposes of this framework currently include (at July 2025):

- the Conservator Liaison;
- Senior Director, Urban Treescapes;

- Senior Director, Licensing and Compliance;
- Director, Tree Protection;
- Assistant Director, Tree Protection; and
- Tree Protection Officers (for urgent circumstances and minor works only)

1.6.6 Step 6: Notification of decision

Under Section 29(2) of the Act, if the decision-maker (Conservator of Flora and Fauna) approves an application made under section 21, the decision-maker must give written notice of the decision to the following:

(a) the applicant;
(b) the lessee of, or custodian for, the land where the tree is located;
(c) the lessee of, or custodian for, the land where the activity is to be carried out;
(d) the occupier of land that-
    a. adjoins the land where the tree is located; and
    b. is within 50m of the tree;
(e) if the application relates to a heritage tree – the heritage council;
(f) if the application relates to an Aboriginal cultural tree – the heritage council and each representative Aboriginal organisation.

The decision-maker may give written notice of the decision to anyone else the decision-maker considers appropriate.

If the decision-maker rejects any application made under section 21, the decision-maker must give written notice of the decision to the applicant and the lessee of, or custodian for, the land where the tree is located.

If a decision is made to approve an application under Section 32 – urgent circumstances or minor works, notification of the decision is made as soon as practicable after making the decision. The notice may be given orally or in writing but the decision-maker must make a written record of any notice given orally as soon as practicable after giving it. If the application relates to a heritage tree, the decision-maker must give written notice of the approval to the heritage council.

1.6.7 Step 7: Review of decisions

Should an application for removal be rejected, applicants have 14 days from the date of the Notice of Decision to submit an Application for Reconsideration. Reconsideration is decided by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, who is advised by an independent panel of experts on tree related matters (the Tree Advisory Panel). There is a fee for applying for a reconsideration under Section 143 of the Act.

If an applicant does not agree with the Conservator's reconsidered decision, they may lodge an appeal with the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT), which has the power to review the matter.

Applicants may also seek review of the decision under the *Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1989* or by contacting the ACT Ombudsman if they have concerns about the decision.

Should the condition of a tree change after an assessment, or further information has been obtained to support an application, another application for a Tree Activity may be submitted via the City Services website. There is no cost for this application.

1.6.8 Decisions on development applications referred from Planning

When providing comments back to Planning (via the Conservator), the response must include the following:

- **Criteria Assessment** - Provide the assessment outcome against the criteria in the *Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2025 (no 1)*;. Do the trees proposed for removal meet the criteria under the Act or not?
- **Tree Retention Value** - When trees proposed for removal do not meet the criteria – assign a tree retention value. Using the guidance in section 4.3 of the Urban Treescapes' Tree Protection Unit Tree Assessment Policy and Standard Operating Procedure provide a rating of Registrable quality, High, Medium or Low.
- **Canopy Contribution Agreement -** If there are proposed removals (even if they do not meet the criteria) a reference to the requirement to enter a CCA, should a removal be approved, must be included in the email.
- **Approving Removals** - If you approve any removals under the criteria – a CCA relating to these trees must be attached to the email.

When preparing a response for Planning, it is expected the following is considered when drafting feedback:

- **Avoid additional comments**. The Tree Protection Unit is responsible for providing an assessment under the *Urban Forest Act 202*3 and a retention value for EPSDD to consider under design grounds. Comments indicating whether planning may approve it, or the conservator would object in an Assessment and Environment Advisory Panel (AEAP) meeting, is not the role of the Tree Protection Unit.
- **Clear language**. Avoid using jargon or technical terminology without an accompanying definition.

1.7 Human Rights compatibility

The *Human Rights Act 2004* guides us as public servants in how to take human rights into account in the decision that we make. The Act engages the following sections of the Human Rights Act 2004:

- section 9 – Right to Life (promoted)
- section 27 – Cultural and Other Rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Other Minorities (promoted)
- section 27C Right to a healthy environment (promoted)

- section 21 – Right to a Fair Trial and Hearing (limited)
- section 12 – Right to Privacy and Reputation (limited)
- section 8 – Right to Recognition and Equality before the Law (limited)
- section 17 – Right Take Part in Public Life (limited)

For more information on this engagement visit the compatibility statement on the legislation register at https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/View/es/db_66450/20220803-79329/html/db_66450.html

ACT Government
Transport Canberra and City Services

Guidance Notes

Contractor Tree Removal Program Procedure

This procedure outlines the process of nominating and assigning large trees, or trees that are difficult to remove, to the Contractor Tree Removal Program (CTRP) for removal under contract, as well as the communication protocol for enquiries relating to the CTRP.

**Please note, all remnant native trees, living or dead, should be discussed with the Operations Manager prior to committing to removal. Urban Treescapes have a policy, consistent with the VALID approach, to retain and/or habitat prune hollow bearing mature native trees where this management option is appropriate.*

1. All tree removals should be collected in Field Maps. All relevant data including address, dimensions, removal reason and if replanting should occur should be collected.
2. Structurally unsound trees are high priority trees that must be done inhouse – regardless of the size of the tree or access issues.
3. Any tree requiring powerline clearance must have had the clearance organised and undertaken before being assigned to Contract. This should also be noted in Field Maps.
4. If the depot is not able to remove the tree (due to size, poor access, etc), please communicate directly with the Operations Manager and the Programs team via email ([redacted]@act.gov.au or [redacted]@act.gov.au).
5. Trees nominated for CTRP must be able to stand for a minimum 12 months.
6. If a tree is structurally sound and can stand for a minimum of 12 months, nominate it for CTRP in Field Maps and tell residents it is low priority tree removal. Always include the Salesforce enquiry number in Field Maps. Do not assign a tree to a particular Program year in Field Maps or commit to a timeframe for removal with residents.
7. The tree will remain on the depot's works schedule until the Programs team place it onto the CTRP. Until then, it is only nominated to be on program, and it could be a year or more until the tree is removed.
8. When an upcoming CTRP program is organised, we will notify the depot of trees accepted to CTRP and those that have not made the program. Trees not on this list will not be removed via the upcoming CTRP but will remain on Field Maps for future CTRPs if the tree is safe to stand for a minimum of a further 12 months.
9. When we assign a tree to the CTRP, the Programs team will update the associated Salesforce enquiries to close the job and inform residents that the trees will be removed within the timeframes stated in the contract.
10. Please do not signpost a tree nominated for CTRP at inspection. The Programs team will signpost for removal when it is assigned to a specific CTRP program. ** Please note, for inhouse removals - trees should not be signposted well in advance of the planned removal date, and the date the sign was posted must be included.*

11. Dead trees do not require signposting, only living trees to be removed need to be signposted at least 14 days before removal.

Communication protocol:

12. All enquiries relating to the decision to remove a tree which has been accepted onto the CTRP are to be fielded by the person who nominated the tree for removal. In the event that an issue concerning the decision to place a tree on the CTRP cannot be resolved by the person who placed the tree on the program, then the matter is to be escalated to their direct manager.
13. The coordinator of the CTRP shall respond to all questions relating to the administration and delivery of a tree accepted onto the CTRP (e.g. removal timing, rectification issues etc).

ACT Government
Transport Canberra and City Services

Guidance Notes

Assessment of Public Trees

Document ID	Title	
CREATION	**DOCUMENT PREPARED BY**	**DATE PREPARED**
1.0	Assistant Director Tree Protection, Urban Treescapes	31/03/2021
REVIEW	**DOCUMENT OWNER**	**REVIEW DATE**
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Final	Executive Branch Manager, City Presentation	28/4/23

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28 April 2021

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Background

Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) is the ACT Government agency responsible for managing Canberra's urban trees and employs a team of suitably skilled staff to carry out this task.

Ensuring public safety is not compromised by the presence of trees within the urban area is a high priority for TCCS and decisions relating to the management of trees are based on meeting this objective. TCCS employs a team of skilled and experienced staff to undertake tree assessments and determine the appropriate management action.

The Assessment Process

Trees in the urban areas of Canberra are inspected in response to requests from the community, to maintain tree health and identify potential hazards that could pose a risk to public safety.

Trees in high use areas such as district parks and shopping centres are regularly inspected to identify structural defects and/or other risk factors and address them in a timely manner.

When a member of the public expresses concerns regarding public safety or the health of a tree on public land, a site visit is programmed and the subject tree or trees are assessed by qualified staff.

The assessment considers safety concerns to persons, property and services. To do this, the assessor considers the potential target (person, property, etc) and the duration of occupancy of a target within the target zone. Other factors include whether a target can be moved or excluded (i.e. through the creation of a natural or built barrier/exclusion zone) from the target zone if required.

A visual tree assessment is then carried out on the tree itself. Trees are inspected from the ground. Any observed or suspected health defects in trees are examined more closely through techniques such as an aerial inspection, sonic tomograph, sounding or probing to ascertain the likelihood of failure and the level of risk that is present. No invasive testing is carried out during the initial inspection.

An assessment of a tree/s will include, but is not limited to, an assessment of:

- the structure and stability of the tree/s;
- the presence and extent of any factors/defects/wounds;
- the identification of pests or diseases;
- a determination of tree health (canopy density and distribution, presence of epicormic shoots, presence and density of dead branches within the canopy);
- the habitat value or ecological benefit of the tree/s;
- the heritage or cultural significance of the tree; and
- the amenity value of the tree and its significance in the landscape.

Assessment Tools

In additional to their qualifications and experience in the field, assessors may utilise the following assessment tools, or a combination of them, when assessing public trees:

- Visual Tree Assessment (VTA)
- Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA)
- Risk matrix: the likelihood and consequence of tree failure
- International Society of Arboriculture -Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ)
- International Society of Arboriculture - Basic Tree Risk Assessment

Urban Tree Maintenance

Based on the outcomes of the inspection, a number of maintenance options can be programmed including:

- No work required
- More extensive assessment required (including aerial inspections, sonic tomograph etc)
- Scheduled/increased monitoring of the tree
- Tree pruning to maintain safe, healthy trees, to satisfy requirements for free pedestrian and vehicle movement and maintain sight lines and clearance for traffic lights and street signs
- Tree removal
- Lopping (only as a method of reducing risk to allow the retention of a tree for habitat purposes)

TCCS takes a conservative approach to the removal of public trees. The management decision will take into account the assessment outcomes, the benefits of the tree/s to the urban environment and relevant government policy (including the *ACT Climate Change Strategy*, *Canberra's Living Infrastructure Plan*, the *Nature Conservation* Act 2014, the *Tree Protection* Act 2005 and the *Urban Forest Strategy 2020-2045*).

Factors to be considered following an assessment of the tree are exposure to hazards, the extent of tree hazard, the environmental impact of the proposed maintenance, available resourcing and the appropriate prioritisation of works, and the cumulative impacts of management responses on our canopy cover.

Monitoring

Public trees that are identified as requiring more frequent monitoring will be noted and a monitoring schedule will be developed. The frequency and level of detail of future monitoring will be determined on a tree by tree basis depending on the issues identified in the initial inspection and the location of the tree.

Pruning

Pruning is carried out when required to enhance public safety and urban amenity and to improve or maintain tree health. Priority is given to trees in areas of high public use, such as streets, carparks, shopping centres and picnic areas.

Pruning work on all our trees is restricted to the reduction and elimination of hazards. Pruning work can only be done by our employees or representatives and will be in line with approved, professionally accepted arboriculture practices such as outlined in the *Australian Standard for Pruning of Amenity Trees* (AS4373-2007) and the minimum industry standards for arboriculture and vegetation management workers.

Qualified staff may carry out the following pruning activities:

- Formative pruning of young trees in the first five years following planting.
- Pruning to avoid interference with streetlights and other services.
- Removal of lower branches to give clear pedestrian and traffic access as well as clear sight lines, particularly for vehicles entering and leaving driveways or approaching intersections.
- Removal of lower branches on main roads and major streets.
- Removal of large deadwood, or diseased, cracked, hollow or otherwise unsound wood.

Root pruning is to be avoided and only carried out when deemed necessary. The need for root pruning will be assessed on a case by case basis in relation to the structural root zone of the tree and species tolerance to root disturbance.

Removal

TCCS adopt a conservative policy towards the removal of trees on public land.

Trees are considered for removal on a case-by-case basis following an inspection by qualified staff when:

- they are dead (and provide no habitat or ecological benefit), damaged or in irreversible decline
- they constitute a traffic hazard/other identifiable hazard to public safety which cannot be corrected by pruning
- they are interfering with above or below-ground services such as power lines or water pipes and mitigating measures are ineffective
- the tree is an unsuitable species for where it is planted, for example, poplars and willows near stormwater lines
- they are part of a dense planting which requires thinning to promote the health of the remaining tree.
- they were designated as temporary in the original landscape design and have reached the end of their intended life span.

Trees are not removed due to:

- householder preference for no street tree or for a different species
- appearance (unless this is related to very poor tree health)
- solar access
- concerns about leaf litter, twigs, fruit or seed material, or droppings from wildlife
- insects or animals, including bees and possums
- release of pollen, i.e. allergies or asthma
- householder desire to improve or allow a view
- tree roots protruding above the ground or competing with lawns or garden beds.

If it is necessary to remove a living tree from a nature strip, regardless of whether the tree was planted by the ACT Government or the householder, the resident will be notified. Consultation will be more extensive where a group of trees are to be removed. Where the site and surrounding services allow, a tree of an appropriate species will be replanted in a similar location.

Habitat retention

Mature native trees which are dead, damaged or in irreversible decline may be pruned and retained in the landscape where they:

- provide habitat for wildlife such as through hollows
- are a remnant of the original vegetation of the ACT, or have regenerated from one
- are in a location where they do not constitute an identifiable hazard to public safety.

Habitat trees are created by pruning the main branches to leave a 'totem' with exposed hollows to provide habitat for birds and animals. In certain cases, artificial hollows and/or nest boxes may be added to enhance habitat.

Mitigating measure

Mitigating measures can also be implemented in response to the assessment of the tree/s. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Establishment of exclusion zones under the canopy of trees, for example, landscaping treatments, physical barriers, fencing or the erection of signage in the area.
- Physically removing a target from the target zone, for example, moving a seat or redirecting a path or road.
- Upgrades or repairs to infrastructure, for example, aged/damaged underground pipes.
- Root pruning and root barriers

ACT Government
City and Environment

Urban Treescapes' Tree Protection Unit Tree Assessment Policy and Standard Operating Procedure

1.0 Document Information

TITLE	Tree Assessment Policy and Standard Operating Procedure
OWNER	Tree Protection Unit, Urban Treescapes

1.1 Policy

The *Urban Forest Act 2023* (the Act) provides the legislative framework for the protection of trees in Canberra. Under the Act, for a person to undertake a tree damaging activity on a protected tree, it must be assessed and deemed to meet the approval criteria (the criteria).

1.2 Purpose

This policy and procedure provides direction for assessing tree damaging activities on protected trees under the Act. Tree Protection Officers (TPO) are responsible for carrying out Tree Assessment Reports (TAR), in response to a Tree Activity Application (TAA), or assessing trees against a tree damaging activity outlined in a Development Application (DA). This SOP proves guidance as to the application of the criteria under the Act and how each should be addressed when completing a TAR.

1.3 Scope

This SOP is to guide the assessment portion of a TAA process, completing a TAR on site when inspecting tree(s).

This SOP does not include the use of Salesforce, please see TPU - Salesforce - Urban Forest Management System Manuals for operating instructions and quick reference guide.

This SOP does not include the process for scheduling inspections or contacting occupants.

This SOP does not include instructions against generic, self-explanatory tick boxes in the TAR, for example: *Applicant/Occupant present? ☐ Y ☐ N*.

1.4 Risk Assessment

When attending a site you must complete a general take 5 risk assessment upon arrival. This can be completed using the booklet or undertaken cognitively.

The TPO must confirm on the TAR that a risk assessment/take-5 has been conducted on site.

For sites with Dog's - see Appendix A

1.5 Records Management

Record requirements are identified throughout the procedure.

Procedure

2.0 Tree Assessment Report (TAR)

All mandatory fields on the TAR must be completed before submitting for Delegate approval.

2.1 Assessing an Activity that was not applied for

If the applicant has applied for an activity, and when attending site, the TPO notes that either:

a) this activity would not be approved, but an alternative activity with similar outcomes for the applicant would meet criteria; or

b) the activity applied for would not be sufficient to remedy the issue, and an alternate activity on the tree would meet the criteria.

The TPO should select the additional activity under the "Activity Recommended by TPO**"** on the TAR.

2.1.1 Obtaining consent from the Applicant for additional activities

If the applicant is on-site at the time of inspection, or the TPO has phoned to discuss, and they have agreed to the activity being added to their TAA, a follow up email should be sent from Salesforce, confirming their agreement was provided on site.

If the applicant is not on-site at the time of inspection, nor able to be contacted via phone call, the TPO must email the applicant seeking a response to **confirm their agreement to the activity** before finalising the TAR.

Obtaining the above agreement may be exempt in the case of urgent circumstance.

2.2 Measuring the Tree

It is expected that at least **one** measurement is taken for any tree with a TAA, to provide for record keeping on its regulation status. Where measuring is not feasible, i.e. due to inaccessibility, written documentation of an estimation must be provided.

The definition of a tree is defined on our website as any of the following:

- a woody perennial plant (excluding bamboo)
- a plant resembling a tree in form and size
- any other plant prescribed by legislation (such as a palm tree).

Hedge plants will be classified as trees under the Act if they are unmaintained hedges that have grown into trees that meet regulated size requirements.

Hedge plants will not be classified as trees under the Act if the original intent of the planting was for the purpose of a hedge and the plantings are maintained as a hedge.

2.2.1 Measuring for Removal

If the TAA is for tree removal, the tree's size **must** be recorded on the TAR. Accuracy in measurements is important for removals, to ensure a Canopy Contribution Agreement (CCA) can be appropriately generated.

Mandatory Measurements for Removals: Height and Canopy Width

Mandatory Measurements for Dead native tree removals: Circumference at 1.4m above ground level

2.2.2 Measuring to confirm regulation size

For TAAs **excluding removal** - if it is clear the tree is of regulation size (height, canopy width and/or DBH) the 'regulated' box may be selected with only one regulation size measurement recorded.

Canopy Measurements

To be taken using a measuring tape along the ground, across the widest point of the canopy, or via step measurements if confident. If the widest point is not accessible, a recent ACTMapi aerial measurement may be used.

Height Measurements

To be recorded using a clinometer. TPOs should refer to the guide associated with their assigned clinometer to ensure accurate use and measurements.

Trunk measurements

Single trunk trees can be measured using a diameter tape at 1.4m from ground level. If the trunk has a circumference of ≥1000mm or a diameter of ≥318mm, the tree is regulated.

For multi-trunk measurements, where the tree does not meet height or canopy regulation size but may be regulated based on trunk size:

Each trunk should be measured 1.4m above ground level to calculate the average circumference. Measurements are to be entered into Salesforce for an automatic calculation of the average.

For a multi-trunked tree to be regulated it must have at least one trunk that is 1m or more in circumference (per single trunk regulation); or
- an average circumference of the trunks of ≥625mm **and**
- the sum of all trunk circumference measurements is ≥1m; **or** the sum of the diameters is ≥318mm.

Dead native Trees

Dead native trees can be measured using a DBH tape at 1.4m from ground level. If the trunk has a circumference of 1880mm< or a diameter of 600mm<.

2.1 Dead Native Trees

Assessments of Dead Native Trees should be undertaken in conjunction with the Dead Tree Assessment Check List.

All other regulated tree assessment continued below.

2.2 Powerline and Structure Proximity

2.2.1 Powerline Clearance

EvoEnergy states that trees must be kept a minimum of 1.5m from exposed low voltage lines and 1m from insulated low voltage lines and service lines. High voltage lines require a minimum 2m clearance.

Approval is not required if you are carrying out a pruning direction issued by a utility company, provided that any conditions in the direction (such as how the tree is to be pruned) are followed.

2.2.2 Structural Clearance

The general applied tolerance for clearance is ≥2m [from trunk] clear of substantial buildings, structures or services. This is a general tolerance and not a blanket rule.

There may be situations where tolerance is greater or lesser than 2m. Officers are expected to apply subject matter knowledge of considerations such as growth habit of the tree species when conducting clearance assessments.

2.2.3 Recording Proximity Measurements

The proximity of powerlines and/or structures is not a mandatory requirement for the completion of a TAR. The TPO may make a discretionary call as to whether the distance should be recorded. For example, where the applicant has referred to this in their TAA, or where the tree is within (or close to) the intolerable range.

If measurements are guessed, this must be clear on the TAR, e.g. *approx. 3m*.

If measurements are taken and recorded, this can be recorded as the measurement and should be to the closest 100mm/10cm, e.g. *2500mm.*

2.3 Aesthetic value or prominence

When assigning aesthetic value in *Tree Details* the below factors/considerations may be applied to assigning a value between 1 and 5.

Rating	Factors/Considerations
1	• Negative or no visual character • Growth severely restricted by above or below ground influences/amenity/assets • Provides minimal canopy cover to the site/surrounding area
2	• Low visual character • Partially visible from surrounding properties • Provides little canopy cover to the site/surrounding area
3	• Fair to medium visual character • Visible but not prominently located • Provides medium level of canopy cover to the site/surrounding area

4	• Visually prominent • Provides contribution to the visual character of the area • Provides valuable canopy contribution to the site/surrounding area
5	• Prominent and visible from considerable range from multiple directions • Provides positive contribution to local amenity and visual character • Provides high value canopy contribution to the site/surrounding area

2.4 Inspection Assessment

2.4.1 Stability

Visual assessment for features and Y/N response. If Y response, comments must be provided on the identified features.

2.4.2 Previously Lopped

Visual assessment and Y/N response. If Y response, comments must be provided.

2.4.3 Root Damage

Visual assessment and Y/N response. If Y response, comments must be provided.

2.4.4 Trunk Damage

Visual assessment and Y/N response. If Y response, comments must be provided.

2.4.5 Evidence of Borers or Termites

Visual assessment and Y/N response. Y includes evidence of prior activity that is not currently active. If Y response, comments must be

2.4.6 Evidence of Fungal Infestation

Visual assessment and Y/N response. If Y response, comments must be provided.

2.4.7 Evidence of weak branch unions

Visual assessment and Y/N response. If Y response, comments must be provided.

2.4.8 Evidence of Stress Fractures

Visual assessment and Y/N response. If Y response, comments must be provided.

2.4.9 TPZ disturbance

Visual assessment and Y/N response. If Y response, comments must be provided. Includes: compaction, digging, construction, additional fill.

2.4.10 Epicormic growth – major/minor/none

Visual assessment and Major/Minor/None response. If major or minor is selected – note detail as necessary.

2.4.11 Foliage Insects – major/minor/none

Visual assessment and Major/Minor/None response. If major or minor is selected – note detail as necessary.

2.4.12 Deadwood - major/minor/none

Visual assessment and Major/Minor/None response. If major or minor is selected – note detail as necessary.

2.4.13 Previously Pruned major/minor/none

Visual assessment and Major/Minor/None response. If major or minor is selected – note detail as necessary.

2.4.14 Causing Drain Blockages – yes/no/not evident

'Yes' should not be selected unless supporting evidence is provided (such as a plumbing report with images).

If a report has been provided – provide comment on what evidence was provided and the assessment outcome regarding the tree roots.

'Not evident' is to be used when no report has been supplied.

Comments

Additional comments may include, but are not limited to, reference of:

- Included union/unions.
- Bifurcations/multileader trunk arrangement
- Poor branch length/girth ratios
- Over extended limbs
- Storm damage that pruning will not alleviate.

2.4.15 General Health

Healthy	Appears in good health, no major branch mortality (<10%), 0-10% crown dieback
Light to moderate decline	Branch or twig mortality less than 50%, 11-50% crown dieback
Severe decline	Branch or twig mortality greater than 50%, 50% or greater crown dieback
Dead (biotic)	Tree is dead. No evidence of human cause.
Dead (abiotic)	Tree is dead, evidence of poisoning, ringbarking or other abiotic interference.

2.4.16 Growth Stage

- Juvenile
- Mature
- Over Mature
- in Decline

2.4.17 Other special features

Free text field to add any special features evident at the time of inspection, that the TPO deems relevant or important to reference on the TAR file. These will assist decision makers.

2.5 Criteria Assessment

Before proceeding with an assessment to undertake a tree damaging activity, it must be established that all other reasonable remedial treatments and/or risk mitigation measures have been determined to be ineffective.

The criteria are labelled in accordance with their letter assignment in the instrument DI2025-16, valid as of 28 February 2025.

When undertaking VALID Assessments, a recorded detailed assessment is not always necessary. If a Basic Assessment has determined the risk rating as Acceptable or Tolerable, this should be recorded as "Basic – Acceptable" on the TAR. If the Basic Assessment results in a Not Acceptable or Not Tolerable assessment outcome, a Detailed assessment must be undertaken on the VALID App and saved onto the TAR for reference.

Refer to the VALID Tree Benefit-Risk Assessment Procedure for further information.

2.5.1 Excessive Shading Assessment

Excessive Shading is only to be assessed where the applicant has applied under this criterion and has provided Solar Diagrams to support their TAA.

Solar Access is defined in the Definition of Excessive Shading Policy.

2.5.2 Removal, Major Pruning or Lopping

If Removal is applied for – all criteria must be assessed.

Criteria	Considerations that may result in a YES
1(a) Life expectancy is short	• If health status is **severe decline** (per 2.4.15) • If growth stage was 'in decline' (per 2.4.15)
1(b) Unacceptable risk to public or private safety	• VALID Assessment Result to be recorded. If result is Not Acceptable or Not Tolerable, detailed assessment is required. • Removal of unsuitable or hazardous trees subject to replacement plantings being undertaken where necessary • Is this urgent? Process under Urgent Circumstance
1(c) Causing / threatening to cause substantial damage	• VALID Assessment Result to be recorded. If result is Not Acceptable or Not Tolerable, detailed assessment is required. • Is this urgent? Process under Urgent Circumstance • If there is a claim of roots causing damage to structure or plumbing, an associated engineers or plumbers report must be provided to be considered (per 2.4.1).

1(d) Inappropriate location (excluding remnant eucalypts)	• Are powerline or structural distances not within tolerance (per 2.2) and pruning to obtain clearances is not a viable option • Has the tree reached its mature size
1(e) Tree is substantially affecting solar access to the lessee's residence, or neighbouring residence, during winter between the hours of 9am to 3pm and minor pruning is not sufficient to remedy this (excluding remnant eucalypts).	• Solar access diagrams provided (per 2.5.1) • Excessive Shading evident in diagrams, per excessive shading policy definition • NA should be selected in all cases where diagrams are **not** provided
1(f) Poor form/low vigour and low amenity/ecological value or canopy cover	• structural defects; • supressed growth; • decay or damage; or • other growth or vitality issues. **And** • low value in the landscape – ie. does not contribute significantly to the surrounding landscape based on its overall form, structure, vigour & aesthetic value; • low or no habitat value; or • limited canopy cover.
1(g) Part of close planting	• Removal of the tree will allow other trees in close range to develop. If deemed part of a close planting, a canopy contribution is **not** required.

Canopy Contribution

Where an applicant applies for removal and the removal is approved, they must enter a Canopy Contribution Agreement, unless an exemption applies. Applicants will include their planned replanting locations (and number of trees) as part of their TAA or indicate their inability to replant on site.

When assessing trees for removal, the TPO must also assess the ability to replant on-site.

On-site canopy contributions must include, for each removed tree:

- 2x trees of the same mature height as the removed tree; OR
- An alternative combination to replace the lost canopy of the removed tree.

If the site does not permit for either of the above, the applicant may be required to pay a financial contribution of up to $1200 for each tree that is approved for removal.

Record recommendations for replanting in the 'Room to replant?' section of the TAR and in the TPO Replant Recommendations section on the individual application section. For example, the applicant has marked two replacement trees under the powerlines, to replace a removed 15m tree.

A recommendation may include: *it is recommended that the on-site canopy contributions are planted on the Eastern side of the block, away from the overhead powerlines. Alternatively, 4x small trees (insert potential species recommendation) may be planted in the proposed location, to enable sufficient powerline clearance to be maintained as they mature.*

2.5.3 Major Pruning or Lopping – additional criteria

- Has a pruning plan been provided so pruning can be appropriately assessed against the criteria?
- For Lopping: Is the retention of the tree considered necessary? If so, it must also meet a criterion in table 2.5.2 above.

Criteria	Considerations
Is it a remedial treatment	• Has it been damaged, and will this activity prolong it's life expectancy?
In the general interests of the health of the tree	• Will pruning enhance biomechanical structure and biological functions, or correct issues that arise in its culture?
Reduce an unacceptable risk to public or private safety	• Conduct a VALID assessment – is the assessment result Not Acceptable or Not Tolerable?
Reduce the risk of damage or prevent further damage to a substantial building, structure or service.	• Does the canopy overhanging/in general vicinity of substantial structure have defects or indicators of potential failure? • Size of any overhanging canopy
Tree is substantially affecting solar access to the lessee's residence, or neighbouring residence, during winter between the hours of 9am to 3pm and minor pruning is not sufficient to remedy this (excluding remnant eucalypts).	• Solar access diagrams provided – see 2.5.1 • Excessive Shading evident in diagrams, per excessive shading policy definition

2.5.4 Prohibited Groundwork

- A Tree Management Plan or Site Plan must be provided to accompany the Application (whether TAA or DA). Site plans may be sufficient in cases of very minor works, where the applicant can demonstrate no impact to the tree will be incurred, without the need for a technical TMP.

Criteria	Considerations
Works will have minimal impact on the tree, if the conditions of the approval are complied with	• Has this been demonstrated in the TMP? • Does the TMP comply with the guidelines? • If there is a protected Dead Native Tree, or significantly reduced (canopy) living tree, consider whether the TPZ needs to be increased to encompass the SRZ that is not captured by the reduced 'canopy' +2m

2.5.5 Minor or Major Pruning of a Registered Tree

Criteria	Considerations

For Major or Minor pruning of Registered trees	
To maintain the health and safety of the tree.	• Will pruning enhance biomechanical structure and biological functions, or correct issues that arise in its culture?
To maintain clearance from services.	• Are powerline or structural distances not within tolerance (per 2.2).
As a remedial treatment.	• Has it been damaged, and will this activity prolong it's life expectancy?
When assessing Major pruning, the activity must also not:	
• Substantially alter the tree's shape or form; • Cause the tree to become unsafe; or • Result in the decline or death of the tree; or • Necessitate the removal or destruction of the tree.	

2.6 Dead Native Trees

Assessments of Dead Native Trees should be undertaken in conjunction with the Dead Tree Assessment Check List.

2.7 Exceptional Circumstance

There are times where an assessment may take place and the outcome is determined in opposition to the professional opinion of the TPO. If this occurs, the following circumstances may be considered before a recommendation is made to the delegate.

- any exceptional circumstances that have been raised by the applicant, taking into account advice from the Tree Advisory Panel and the approval criteria. E.*g. extreme applicant distress*
- the importance of the tree in the surrounding landscape
- if the tree is a species listed in schedule 2, whether the tree has ecological importance to the local environment.

3.0 Urgent Circumstance and Minor Works

Urgent Circumstance approvals may be provided verbally to applicants, via phone or in person. When providing verbal approvals, a TPO must remind the applicant of their obligation to submit a written TAA after the fact.

Deciding on an urgent circumstance (or minor works) approval, as at the discretion of the TPO in line with the provisions provided for in the *Urban Forest Act 2023*.
When completing the formal TAR, following receipt of the written TAA, it is preferable that a VALID report is completed and attached to the TAR record, where possible. If a tree was actively failing at the time of approval, a VALID report is not required.

Minor works approvals are most commonly assigned a 2-year validity period from the date of approval; however this is at the discretion of the TPO on a case by case basis and may be less than 2 years if deemed applicable.

Minor works may be approved for an activity that is, or may be, prohibited groundwork in the protection zone for a protected tree if the decision-maker is satisfied the activity will have little or no adverse impact on the health or stability of the tree. The notice of a decision may be given orally or in writing, but the decision-maker must make a written record of any notice given orally as soon as practicable after giving it.

Groundworks that are not defined as prohibited groundwork means excavation to a depth of less than 10cm over an area of $4m^2$ or raises the soil level by less than 10cm above the natural soil level over an area $4m^2$ or larger.

4.0 Tree Management Plans and Development Applications

4.1 Canopy Contribution Table

Prior to assessment, if any trees are proposed for removal as part of a Development Application, the TPO must sight a completed Canopy Contribution Table as part of the Tree Management Plan associated with the Development Application. If this has not been completed the TPO should revert back to the applicant to seek this.

Regulated	***Public***	**Total**	
TAS identifier	**TAS identifier**		
Number of protected tree removals proposed			
Number of retained protected trees			
Proposed number of replants, assuming all removals are approved			
Type of replant proposed (for non-homeowners^)	**Identifier on landscape plans**	**Identifier on landscape plans**	
Conifer			
Introduced under 10m			
Introduced 10-15m			
Introduced 15m+			
Native under 10m			
Native 10-15m			
Native 15m+			

**** this table is only required if there are proposed protected tree removals.***

^ Not required for homeowners. See the Tree Calculator for further information.

4.2 Assessing for removal under the *Urban Forest Act 2023*

Refer to Section 2.5 of this procedure to complete the assessment against the criteria. A full TAR is not a requirement for a DA assessment but may be completed at officer discretion. If the tree meets criteria, approval is granted. If the tree does not meet criteria, an assessment must be made under section 4.4 of this procedure.

If you approve any removals under the criteria – a CCA relating to these trees must be attached to the email back to planning. The CCA can be prepared by emailing urbanforest@act.gov.au and providing the information on the approved removals including:

- tree canopy width(s), tree height & species
- The tree number of trees approved for removal.
- whether the applicant is a home owner or non-home owner. If non-homeowner, the zone of the block
- if they have indicated they intend to replant or are paying a financial contribution in the Canopy Contribution Table (see 4.1).

4.3 Measuring Trees as part of a Development Application

If an assessment under Section 2.5 has not been undertaken, as it is evident that that the trees under application would not meet criteria for **removal**, tree measurements must be recorded in order to inform any potential Canopy Contribution Agreement.

Measurements are only required for trees proposed for **removal**. See Section 2.1.1.

4.4 Tree retention value - rating for removal on design grounds

When a tree does not meet removal criteria under the Act, a rating must be assigned to the tree to provide guidance to the Landscape Review Panel when determining whether the tree may be approved for removal on *design grounds*.

TPOs may apply professional knowledge and discretion when assigning values to trees under development, with the below methodology to be used as a guideline on an as needed basis to ensure consistency across decision making.

The tree retention value system has been developed using a combination of industry approaches, including the Sustainable Retention Value Index (SRIV) developed by the Institute of Australian Consulting Arboriculturists.

	Environmental and/or Amenity Value						
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
VALID Assessment							
Dead Native Tree*	High		Medium		Low		
Acceptable	High			Medium		Low	
Tolerable	High		Medium		Low		
Not Tolerable**	Medium				Low		

*Dead non-native trees, or trees with a Not Acceptable VALID risk rating are not factored into this assessment, as they would meet the criteria for removal under the Act.

** Where risk mitigation is possible, tree retention may be argued for moderate value trees

Plus "registerable quality" on top of High

4.4.1 Amenity and Environmental Values

Example factors to consider when determining an amenity and/or environmental value assigned to the tree. To assign a value, the tree should *ideally* meet 3 or more criteria in a rating range. For Dead Native Trees, 1 or more criteria* should be met to assign a rating.

	Very High (6-7)	High (5)	Medium (3-4)	Low (1-2)
Crown Size	Very Large (200m2<, 14m wide Canopy)	Large (100-200m2, 10-14m wide canopy)	Medium (50-100m2 7-10m wide canopy)	Small (40m2>, less than 7m wide canopy)
Canopy Density (in full leaf)	Dense – 90-100% foliage cover	Normal – 70-90% foliage cover	Thinning – 50-70% foliage cover	Sparse – less than 50% foliage cover
Visual Prominence or Impact*	Located in a visually prominent position in the landscape. A landmark or visible from a considerable distance.	Visible from surrounding properties, the street or other thoroughfares	Visible from surrounding properties.	Not visible from surrounding properties (obscured by other trees or built forms).
Form and habit	Very good form and branching habit, excellent specimen, aesthetically distinctive and/or an excellent representation of the species.	Good form and habit, minor distortion or suppression, a good representation of the species.	Fair form and habit, a fair representation of the species.	Poor form and habit and/or an atypical or poor representation of the species.
Environmental Significance	Listed on Schedule 2, threatened or key species in the community; or is a Remnant tree.	Endemic species & representative of the original vegetation of the area.	Planted or self-sown exotic or non-local native tree.	-
Botanical importance	Rare or few in the region. The only example of its type, a species endemic to ACT.	Uncommon in cultivation.	Common in cultivation.	Very common in cultivation, widely represented in the area.
Habitat Value*	Provides important habitat (nesting/foraging/food source/shelter) for threatened fauna species.	Provides habitat for native wildlife. Located within a wildlife corridor. Evidence of nesting hollows, known food sources, and/or other visible evidence of wildlife (markings, nests etc)	Beneficial for native wildlife.	Little or no value to native wildlife

Amenity and Ecological Value assignment guidance table

TPOs may assign values outside of the above guidance table, at their discretion, provided that details of their decision are noted on the case prior to submitting the response to Planning. Values assigned outside of the above may include, but are not limited to:

- Retention priority – where removal or retention may result in disproportionate impact to the surrounding area.
- Professional opinion – where something exceptional (or the opposing) is observed that is not accounted for in the guidance table.

4.5 Providing comments to EPSDD (planning)

When providing comments back to EPSDD (via the Conservator), the response must include the following:

1. **Criteria Assessment** - Provide the assessment outcome against the criteria in the *Urban Forest Act 2023*. Do the trees proposed for removal meet the criteria under the Act or not?
2. **Tree Retention Value** - When trees proposed for removal do not meet the criteria – assign a tree retention value. Using the guidance in section 4.3 provide a rating of Registrable quality, High, Medium or Low.
3. **Canopy Contribution Agreement -** If there are proposed removals (even if they do not meet the criteria) a reference to the requirement to enter a CCA, should a removal be approved, must be included in the email.
4. **Approving Removals** - If you approve any removals under the criteria – a CCA relating to these trees must be attached to the email. The CCA can be prepared by emailing urbanforest@act.gov.au and providing the information on the approved removals including:
   - tree canopy width(s)
   - whether the applicant is a home owner or non-home owner
   - if they have indicated they intend to replant or are paying a financial contribution in the Canopy Contribution Table (see 4.1).

When preparing a response for Planning, it is expected the following is considered when drafting feedback:

- **Avoid additional comments**. The Tree Protection Unit is responsible for providing an assessment under the *Urban Forest Act 202*3 and a retention value for EPSDD to consider under design grounds. Comments indicating whether planning may approve it, or the conservator would object in an LRP meeting, is not the role of the Tree Protection Unit.
- **Clear language**. Avoid using jargon or technical terminology without an accompanying definition.

4.5.1 Template Emails

The full response template must be used and can be found at 4.7. For the avoidance of doubt, below are some example excerpts of the **comment section**, aligning with the requirements in 4.4.

Example 1. Supported - Proposed removals that meet UFA Criteria

Conditions/Comments/Advice:

The development application (DA) is supported as the tree is poor quality and showing signs of decline. The tree meets criterion 1(1)(a) the tree is in decline and its life expectancy is short in the *Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2023 (No 1).*

A Canopy Contribution Agreement has been prepared and is attached to this advice.

Example 2. TMP only, supported, no proposed removals.

Conditions/Comments/Advice:

The development application (DA) is supported on the condition that all works proceed in accordance with the following plan/s and condition/s.

Plan/s:

1. Drawing title: Demolition Plan, Project No: 22215, drawing no: DA02, issue no: B, dated 08/16/2023.

2. Drawing title: Site Plan, Project No: 22215, drawing no: da01, issue no: b, dated 16/08/2023.

3. Drawing title: Tree Management Plan, Dwg. No. 4661-G201 C, Sheet No. 2.1, dated 16/06/2023 and the Tree Protection notes listed on this plan.

Example 3. DA not supported, trees to not meet UFA criteria.

Conditions/Comments/Advice:

The development application (DA) is not supported as trees 1 to 5 (as referenced in the attached TMP) are medium quality trees. This is consistent/inconsistent with the supplied TMP/Arborist report. These trees do not meet criteria for removal under the *Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2023 (No 1).*

Additionally, the Canopy Contribution Table is missing from the Tree Management Plan (TMP). A link to a template for TMPs in line with the TMP Guidelines is available Tree Management Plan template. Please also see the below note regarding Canopy Contributions.

Example 4. TMP only, not supported.

Conditions/Comments/Advice:

The development application (DA) is not supported due to insufficient information provided in the Tree Management Plan (TMP). The TMP provided provides inadequate detail to determine the effects of the proposed groundworks. The Tree Protection Unit will require a TMP compliant with the *Urban Forest (Tree Management Plans) Guidelines 2023 (No 1)* prior to supporting this DA.

A link to a template for TMPs in line with the TMP Guidelines is available Tree Management Plan template.

Example 5. not supported with details on each tree number

The development application (DA) is NOT supported.
Trees 43, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 62, 63, 68, 69,70, 72, 73, 74, 76, and 80 are all Fraxinus oxycarpa and of poor quality and show signs of decline. These trees would meet removal criteria under the Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2023 (No 1). The criteria being 1.1(a) the trees are in decline and their life expectancy is short.
A Canopy Contribution Table (see below) Must be completed for these trees.

Trees 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50 and 51 are all Casuarina cunninghamiana and are medium quality trees. The trees currently do not meet criteria for removal under the Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2023 (No 1). The removal of these will need to be considered under a design consideration by the Assessment and Environment Advisory Panel.

Trees 77, 78 and 79 are all Fraxinus oxycarpa and are medium quality trees. The trees currently do not meet criteria for removal under the Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2023 (No 1). The removal of these will need to be considered under a design consideration by the Assessment and Environment Advisory Panel.

Trees 71 is Cupressus sp. and not a Pinus radiata (pest species) as indicated in the Tree assessment report. The tree is therefore regulated under the Urban Forest Act 2023. The tree is a medium quality tree and does not currently meet criteria for removal under the Urban Forest (Approval Criteria) Determination 2023 (No 1). The removal of these will need to be considered under a design consideration by the Assessment and Environment Advisory Panel.

Trees 48, 58, 61, 67 and 75 do not meet the regulated size requirements in terms of the height, canopy width or trunk circumference under the provisions of the Urban Forest Act 2023, therefore, no approval is required.

Trees 57, 64,65 and 66 have been identified as dead and not of size and/or species to be regulated and, therefore, no approval is required for its removal under the Urban Forest Act 2023.

Tree 52 is listed as a Eucalyptus obliqua and is located on a neighbouring block. It is indicated that significant impacts to the tree are likely to occur, with proposed excavation within the Structural Root Zone (SRZ). Excavations into the SRZ will not be supported.

4.6 For large scale DA's with existing arboricultural reports

Where a TMP, attached to a DA, has been prepared by a consulting arborist (or equivalent) and includes a larger number of trees, TPOs may:

- Undertake spot checks to confirm measurements and assigned retention values to trees in the provided TMP; and
- Accept the TMP contents without a full audit, if spot checks find no inconsistencies between provided TMP and TPO assessment.

If the TPO finds inconsistencies when conducting the spot check, a full audit may be conducted or alternatively the TPO can advise the proponent that a revised TMP is required, as the submitted document is not a true reflection of the trees on site.

4.7 Template Email

DA No: 202642100

Description: - **PROPOSAL FOR MULTI UNIT RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEASE VARIATION …**

BLOCK:	SECTION:	DIVISION:
10	48	Holder

The Tree Protection Unit has undertaken a site inspection and reviewed the attached Development Application and can provide the following advice in accordance with **section 107** of ***Urban Forest Act* 2023**:

No regulated tree/s on the site (nor on neighbouring block/s)	
Supported with Conditions	X
Advice for the Applicant	X
Not Supported	
Further Information/Amendments Required	

Conditions/Comments/Advice:

The development application (DA) is supported on the condition that all works proceed in accordance with the following plan/s and condition/s.

Plan/s:

1. Drawing title: Demolition Plan, Project No: 22215, drawing no: DA02, issue no: B, dated 08/16/2023.

2. Drawing title: Site Plan, Project No: 22215, drawing no: da01, issue no: b, dated 16/08/2023.

3. Drawing title: Tree Management Plan, Dwg. No. 4661-G201 C, Sheet No. 2.1, dated 16/06/2023 and the Tree Protection notes listed on this plan.

Please Note:

A Canopy Contribution Agreement (CCA) is required to remove a protected tree. If a tree is approved for removal, the applicant is required to enter an agreement with the Decision-Maker.

Environment, Planning, and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) has obligation to notify the Tree Protection Unit when approval to remove a protected tree is granted under planning process, so a Canopy Contribution Agreement can be prepared and issued to the applicant of the Development Application.

I provide this advice as a delegate of the Conservator of Flora and Fauna | TPO NAME | Tree Protection Officer (PN 01001) | Urban Treescapes

5.0 Human Rights compatibility

The Human Rights Act guides us as public servants in how to take human rights into account in the decision that we make. The Urban Forest Act engages the following sections of the Human Rights Act 2004:

- section 9 – Right to Life (promoted)
- section 27 – Cultural and Other Rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Other Minorities (promoted)
- section 27C – Right to a healthy environment (promoted)

- section 21 – Right to a Fair Trial and Hearing (limited)
- section 12 – Right to Privacy and Reputation (limited)
- section 8 – Right to Recognition and Equality before the Law (limited)
- section 17 – Right Take Part in Public Life (limited)

For more information on this engagement visit the compatibility statement on the legislation register at https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/View/es/db_66450/20220803-79329/html/db_66450.html

Appendix A – Domestical Animal Services advice

Advice from session run by Domestic Animal Services (DAS) for the Tree Protection unit on the 15 February 2024.

All dogs are different, and we don't know their background also not all owners are responsible dog owners.

Points to remember when encountering a dog either in a yard or on the street.

Dogs usually only bite out of fear. If a dog appears confident, for example barking at the gate or behaving aggressively, they may bite. A wagging tail doesn't always mean a happy dog – a wiggle soft body is usually happy; a scorpion tail or low wag is bad.

Signs of aggression include seeing the white of the eye, licking their lips, tail tucked under, growling (not barking), ears back and showing their teeth. When a dog licks its lips or is constantly yawning it means it is uncomfortable.

Triggers for dogs can be hi-vis, sunglasses and hats. Screaming and/or a high voice can escalate a dog's aggressive behaviour.

If you are unsure and don't feel safe – **DON'T GO IN**. Back away slowly and maintain sight with the dog, but do not make direct eye contact. Never turn your back on them. Present side on body language and don't stare at them.

Baggy clothes and uniform pants and long-sleeved shirts can help as the dog may latch onto these and not skin.

Talk calmly –do not raise the itch of your voice or scream. If dogs haven't been listened to their whole lives, they will skip signs of friendliness and go straight to a bite.

If a dog attacks or you think they may attack, put anything you can between you and the dog as they do not like barriers. This may include clipboards, sunglasses, tape measure etc. It is rare for dogs to latch and hold, they usually only nip. If they latch and hold, a chock hold is the best thing to do – you can use a rope or a lead or tape measure around their throat to stop the airway so they let go.

You have the right to protect yourself, however it is best to assess the dog before entering - if you decided to enter the property that may be an issue in an investigation if the dog attacks or you injure the dog protecting yourself.

If you are bitten, report it immediately to Access Canberra after you have applied first aid. DAS will attend within 1 hour if a bite occurs.

If you come across a roaming dog or dogs call Access Canberra to report them so the DAS officers can attend.

In Summary

1. If you don't feel safe, don't go in
2. I the job is urgent, call Access Canberra and DAS can deal with the dog while you assess the tree – but only if it is urgent.
3. If you are bitten, report it, especially if it is a stray dog as they may bite again.
4. Report all stay dogs to Access Canberra.

VALID Tree Benefit-Risk Management Operations Guide

Urban Treescapes, City Services

Background

Urban Treescapes, City Services is responsible for the management of over 809,000 trees on public (unleased) land across Canberra. Our trees are located throughout the city on residential streets, major road verges, urban parks and other open space areas. Maintenance undertaken by City Services includes planting, pruning and removal of urban trees.

The *Urban Forest Act 2023 (previously Tree Protection Act 2005)* provides a framework for managing our urban trees, primarily those on leased land but also those in our public unleased spaces.

The VALID tree benefit-risk management strategy provides a framework for how and why the ACT Government manages risk from our trees. This strategy and assessment methodology has been designed to assist our operations staff in delivering reasonable, proportionate and reasonably practical risk management practices when working with our urban trees.

Validators, members of the Urban Treescapes crew who have completed the Validator Training, are responsible for undertaking assessments under the VALID framework. This framework has been adopted to suit the management of Canberra's urban forest, ensuring we are providing consistent and defensible decision making when assessing our trees for risk.

About this Guide

This guide has been adopted from the VALID Government Tree Risk-Benefit Management Strategy, and was developed in conjunction with the Tree Benefit-Risk Management Policy, to assist the Urban Treescapes team in implementing the VALID framework into daily work practices. The guide provides instruction on why and how Urban Treescapes will manage the risk from our trees and branches falling.

Scripts will be made available to assist team members when speaking to members of the public regarding assessment practices and decision making.

Contents

1. Our tree benefit-risk management strategy

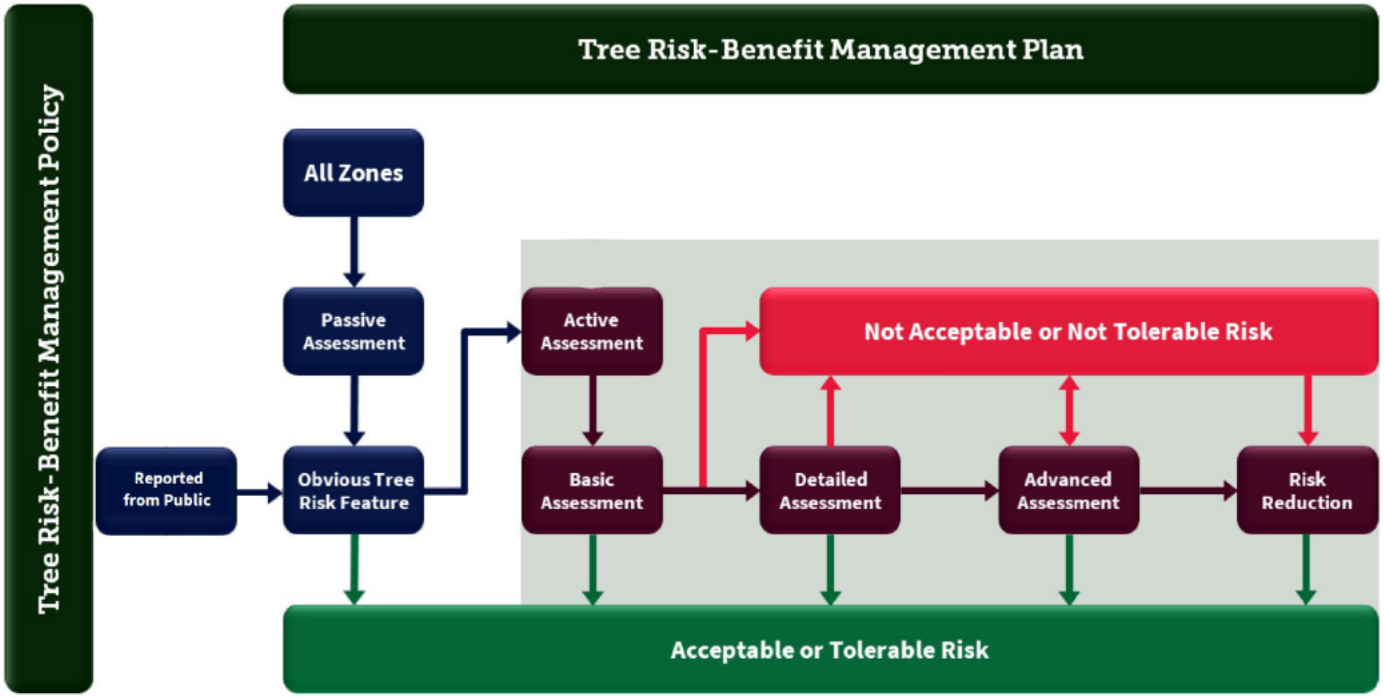
At a glance:
Why and how we're going to manage the risk from our trees and branches falling

The structure of our Tree Benefit-Risk Management approach is illustrated in the flowchart below. Everything follows from the **Policy**, which sets out our position on trees, their benefits, and the risks. In brief, our Policy says;

- Trees give us many benefits that we need
- The overall risk from trees and branches falling is extremely low
- We can't entirely remove the risk, and trees are living structures that sometimes shed branches or fall over; usually because of severe weather
- We have a duty of care to be reasonable, proportionate, and reasonably practicable when managing the risk
- We're going to manage the risk to an Acceptable or Tolerable level.

The **Guide (Plan)** explains how we'll carry out the Policy. We're going to manage the risk by **Passive Assessment** in all zones of use. And **Active Assessment** in response to Passive Assessment and other reporting mechanisms.

The Guide at a glance



Passive Assessment

Picking up on Obvious Tree Risk Features you can't help but notice

Passive Assessment is simply picking up on **Obvious Tree Risk Features** you can't help but notice as you go about your daily routine. We carry it out in all zones of use. Passive Assessment is our most valuable risk management asset because it can be done by anyone and it's going on day in day out.

Trained assessors looking to find risks that might not be Acceptable or Tolerable

Active Assessment | Basic > Detailed > Advanced

Active Assessment is where we have trained assessors looking for risks that might not be Acceptable or Tolerable, or where Passive Assessment has picked up an Obvious Tree Risk Feature that needs a closer look. Active Assessment has three levels to it that increase in depth of investigation from Basic, to Detailed, up to Advanced.

2. What is the tree benefit-risk management guide?

This is why and how we're going to manage the risk from our trees and branches falling

Trees give us many benefits that we need. However, trees are natural structures that sometimes fall over or shed branches; usually because of severe weather. This Tree Benefit-Risk Management Operations Guide explains why and how we're going to manage the risk from our trees and branches falling and causing property damage, injury or death.

The Policy sets out our position

It begins with the Policy. This is the key document from which everything else follows. The Policy is a position statement that lays out the 'why' and 'what' of the strategy. It explains why we're going to manage the risk of trees and branches falling to an Acceptable or Tolerable level.

The Guide explains how we're going to carry out the Policy

The Guide is the 'how'. It describes how we're going to carry out the Policy. All the other sections that come after the Guide are further details about this, making it clear what we're going to do when managing the risk.

3. Approach

Passive Assessment & Active Assessment

Passive Assessment in all zones of use

We're going to manage the risk with Passive Assessment in all zones of use, day in day out.

Active Assessments in response to Passive reports

We're going to manage the risk with Active Assessment when raised through Passive Assessment channels. Given the overall extremely low level of risk, carrying out Active Assessment every year on a certain tree, or every few years, is not reasonable, proportionate or reasonably practicable.

We'll increase the frequency of Active Assessment when necessary

We'll assess trees more frequently when a Detailed Assessment has recommended it, and when an outbreak of a disease, or a general decline in vitality, is affecting a population of trees.

Risk rating limitations

Risk ratings are limited by the level of assessment

Risk ratings have limitations that depend on the level of assessment at which they're made. For instance, when we carry out a Passive or Active Assessment at a Basic level, if there are no Obvious Tree Risk Features then the risk is Acceptable at that level of assessment. A Detailed or Advanced Assessment is an increase in depth of evaluation, which might find features that weren't apparent at a Passive or Basic level, and could mean a higher risk. However, carrying out a higher level of assessment, with the additional costs, when there is no feature to trigger it is not reasonable, proportionate, or reasonably practicable. These risk limitations make sense in the same way as your doctor not sending you to a hospital for further tests, at more cost, unless you have symptoms to trigger a higher level of examination.

Severe Weather

We'll be vigilant after storms as part of Passive Assessment

Once the severe weather has passed, all our staff will keep an eye out for Obvious Tree Risk Features as part of Passive Assessment. Following severe weather events, intentional Passive Assessments may be conducted by auditors. The need for auditor assessments will be determined by the Senior Director, Urban Treescapes.

You can take some responsibility for your own risk

Most deaths and injuries from tree failure happen during or just after severe weather. When a severe weather warning is forecast, you can manage your exposure to the higher risk by not going out, and by being watchful just after.

4. What is Passive Assessment?

Picking up on Obvious Tree Risk Features you can't help but notice

When a tree has a risk that might not be Acceptable or Tolerable it'll usually have Obvious Tree Risk Features which we can't help but notice. Passive Assessment is simply picking up on these obvious features when we pass by trees whilst going about our day-to-day routine.

Passive Assessment is carried out by our trained assessors, contractors, staff, and the public.

Passive Assessment is our most valuable risk management asset

Passive Assessment is a multi-layered approach to managing the risk that gives us defence in depth. It's our most valuable asset because:

- Trees with the highest risk are the easiest to find;
- Anyone can do it, from trained assessors to members of the public;
- It's happening in all zones of use, day in day out, at no additional cost;
- High-use zones are being assessed more frequently than lower use zones because they're visited more often;
- We're doing it after storms when trees that have been damaged might now have a risk that's not Acceptable or Tolerable

Trees with the highest risk are the easiest to find

Here are a few examples of how Passive Assessment works at the frontline of managing tree risk:
Driving to a site visit along a high-use road, a Tree Officer can't help but notice a tree that now has a lean it previously didn't have.
Whilst going to inspect playground equipment in a park where events are held, a Ranger can't help but notice a broken hanging branch over a high use footpath, after an overnight storm.
On the way to the shops, a member of the public can't help but notice a split that's recently appeared in the trunk of a tree on their street.

Staff & Contractors

Our staff passively assess thousands of trees every week

To manage the risk at all levels of our organisation, in line with ISO 31000 guidelines and principles, we use Passive Assessment. The highest level of Passive Assessment quality comes from Validators (GSO7 and above) because they have the highest level of training. They'll be passively assessing trees when they're driving around, whilst carrying out Active Assessments, and during other site visits.

Then our internally trained basic validators, who have been trained to keep an eye out for Obvious Tree Risk Features as they go about their daily duties. Finally, the highest level of Passive Assessment quantity comes from the rest of our staff and the public. They have a copy (or access to) of the Obvious Tree Risk Features Guide and are encouraged to let us know about trees they come across that concern them. Between them, our staff and contractors pass thousands of trees that we manage every week. All these trees are being passively assessed day in and day out.

Trees of concern will be put through Active Assessment

Trees picked up by Passive Assessment will be logged. Those that need a closer look will be put through the **Active Assessment** process.

5. What is Active Assessment?

Trained assessors looking at trees with three levels of assessment

Active Assessment is where we have a Validator looking for risks that:

- Might not be Acceptable or Tolerable in high traffic areas;
- A Passive Assessment has picked up a tree that needs a closer look; or
- We have an application to fell a protected tree.

Active Assessment has three levels to it that increase in depth of evaluation from Basic, to Detailed, and up to Advanced.

Basic Assessment

Finding the few trees where the risk might not be Acceptable or Tolerable

At a Basic level of assessment, we're looking for trees with obvious features where the risk might not be Acceptable or Tolerable. We're also keeping an eye out for features that might significantly increase the likelihood of failure. We can evaluate these features with VALID's Tree Risk App, and carry out a Detailed Assessment when it's necessary. It's at this Basic level where we decide if we need to take a closer look at any tree alerts raised by Passive Assessment. Rarely, we may need to organise emergency work.

We'll assess the trees from easily accessible ground

We'll assess the trees from easily accessible ground, by foot, bike, or in a vehicle with a drive-by.

We won't remove vegetation unless there's an Obvious Tree Risk Feature

We won't remove climbing plants, undergrowth, basal epicormic growth, or cut hedgerows to get a closer look unless there's an Obvious Tree Risk Feature. It's only if we find any of these features the costs of removing vegetation, and losing habitat benefits, are justified.

The trees or what they could fall on and the type of assessment will be recorded

Trees, or what they could fall on, and the type of assessment are recorded. For example, in a park, individual or groups of trees are plotted and recorded as having been assessed on foot. Whereas, if there are many trees beside a road, the road will be recorded as having been assessed.

No Obvious Tree Risk Features = the risk is Acceptable

If a tree doesn't have a feature to trigger carrying out a Detailed Assessment, the risk is Acceptable at this Basic level of assessment.

Detailed Assessment

We do a Detailed Assessment when a tree needs a closer look

A Detailed Assessment is carried out on trees that have been picked up:

- during a Basic Assessment as needing a closer look;
- because a tree has been highlighted by Passive Assessment; or
- because we have an application to do some tree work to a protected tree.

The risk is assessed with the App

The assessment is done from ground level using the VALID Tree Risk App.

We'll produce a report Any risk reduction work will be recorded

The App generates a short (PDF) report, which includes the risk rating, risk review year, risk reduction work options (if it's necessary), and any general management advice. When risk reduction work is carried out, it'll be recorded when it's been completed.

Advanced Assessment

Large and important trees might be worthy of more effort and cost

If we need more information about the likelihood of failure, an Advanced Assessment can be carried out. Most commonly, this is because we suspect extensive decay with significant strength loss and want to find out whether the tree is strong enough, we might need an aerial inspection to take a closer look at the upper stem and branches, or to get access to steep slopes.

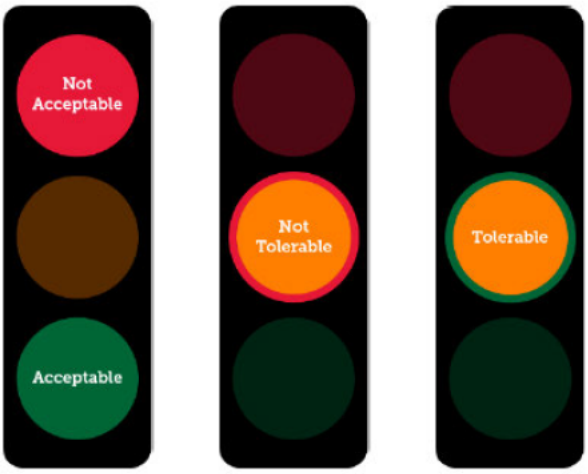
What we do depends on the tree

There are several options to find out whether a tree is strong enough. They range in thoroughness and cost. If the costs of an Advanced Assessment are substantial, we'll need to decide whether the tree has enough value and future benefits to justify the expense. If we carry out an Advanced Assessment, we'll produce a report with the risk rating, risk review year, risk reduction work options (if it's necessary), and any general management advice. When risk reduction work is carried out, it'll be recorded when it's been completed.

6. Risk ratings & risk reduction priorities

We'll prioritise risk reduction work and be practical about it

Risk reduction work will be given the highest priority where it's an emergency. Outside of that, we'll deal with the highest risks first and carry out the work in a sensible order.



Red Not Acceptable risks will be reduced to an Acceptable level

Amber Not Tolerable risks will be reduced to an Acceptable level, but with a lower priority than red Not Acceptable risks

Amber Tolerable risks will not be reduced but may require an increased frequency of assessment than green Acceptable risks

Green Acceptable risks will not be reduced

Emergency Work

Emergency work will be given the highest priority

If a tree has a very high likelihood of failure and it's in a high-use zone, then these Not Acceptable risks are 'emergency work'. We'll get a tree crew there as soon as we can to deal with any emergency work. There may be times when different ACT Government business units undertake these works, such as if a tree has fallen on a road and Roads ACT crews attend site to remove it.

What we're going to do

First, we'll take stock so we can be cost effective

Outside of emergencies, where we can, we'll not start risk reduction work until all the planned Active Assessments have been carried out. That way, we'll know how much risk reduction work there is, where it is, and how much of our tree management budget we need to spend on it. This will help us prioritise the work, and coordinate it with other tree maintenance so we can plan it in a practical and cost-effective way.

Not Acceptable risks

Risks that are Not Acceptable will be dealt with first

Our crews will make Not Acceptable risk reduction work the priority. However, this will be done pragmatically. For example, we'll avoid sending a tree crew from one side of our operating area to another to carry out two different jobs where more time is spent travelling than doing the work. We also have to deal with other risks from trees, such as low branches, obscured road signs, and sightlines. If it means we can get more done with our time, we're going to coordinate this kind of risk reduction work with tree failure risk reduction work.

Not Tolerable risks

Other risk reduction will be coordinated with routine work

Where possible, risk reduction work for risks that are Not Tolerable will be organised alongside other tree maintenance works. If there's not enough budget to carry out both the risk reduction and other maintenance works, priority will be given to the risk reduction work.

Budget limitations

If we have budget limitations we'll explain them

If we don't have enough budget or resources to carry out all the risk reduction work, we'll record why. Any remaining work will be rolled over to the next budget.

Review

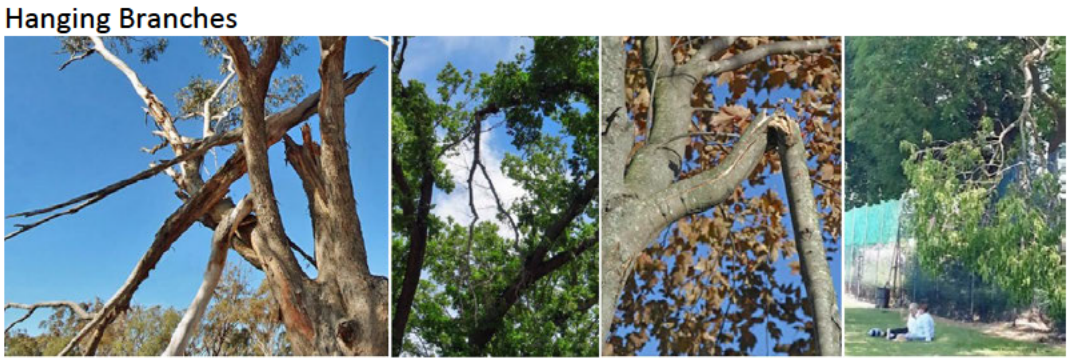
Meetings will be held every month to monitor works

We will meet every month (through Supervisor meetings) and monitor how risk reduction work priorities are being carried out. If we can make any improvements in our work priorities, they will be made here.

Annexure A - Obvious Tree Risk Features

Compared to everyday risks we readily accept, our risk of being killed or injured from trees or branches falling is extremely low. The risk over a year is less than a 400km drive (one in a million).

When might a tree be dangerous?

Trees with the highest risk are the easiest to spot	When a tree has a risk that might not be Acceptable or Tolerable, it'll usually have an obvious tree risk feature you can't help but notice. If you come across a tree with anything like these obvious features, it should be looked at by an Arborist (tree expert) who's been trained in tree risk assessment.
Be watchful after storms. Storms can break tree roots without blowing them over Signs to look out for are: - Change in angle of the trunk - Large cracks in the soil - Hump in the ground on one side	Root failure 
Don't forget to look up Branches can break during storms and still hang on Sometimes they can get stuck up there for quite a while	Hanging Branches 
When trees bend and twist in storms the wood can split and crack Vertical cracks in the bark are just the tree growing, there's no need to worry	A crack or split into the wood, beyond the bark vs Growth cracks (not of concern): 
To stay healthy and strong trees need 'solar panel leaves' to make food When trees are stressed they often have much less leaf cover and many dead branches Standing dead trees have great habitat benefits but need checking	Decline and death 
To decay fungi these 'fruits' are like apples to an apple tree Decay fungi and trees mostly live happily together creating essential habitat for wildlife Fungi can sometimes 'eat' too much wood and weaken the tree	Decay fungi fruiting bodies 
Tree roots are surprisingly shallow Trees can't repair wounds Digging or building near trees makes them very vulnerable to damage	Construction damage 

ACT Government

Tree Benefit-Risk Management Policy

TRANSPORT CANBERRA AND
CITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE

JULY 2023

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Approved by: (*optional*)

28 June 2023

Daniel Iglesias
Executive Branch Manager
City Presentation
Transport Canberra and City Services

Date

Contents

1.0 Policy Objectives and Scope

1.1 Purpose

Trees are an integral part of Canberra's landscape and design. Transport Canberra and City Services manages over 809,000 trees as part of Canberra's urban forest, the majority of these managed by Urban Treescapes, Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS). Most of these trees are on public unleased land including; nature strips, road medians, parks and town squares. In law, 'public unleased land' is defined as 'unleased territory land that the public is entitled to use; or is open to, or used by, the public' (Public Unleased Land Bill 2011, clause 8). Maintenance undertaken by Urban Treescapes includes planting, pruning and removal of urban trees.

This document identifies the guiding principles TCCS applies, in managing the balance of benefits and risks associated with Canberra's diverse urban forest. The policy aims to underpin the delivery of reasonable, proportionate and reasonably practical risk management when working with our urban trees.

1.2 Scope

The policy will guide TCCS in the management of tree benefit-risk in our urban forest. This policy covers land located within the built-up urban area of the ACT and does not cover nature reserves and national parks (Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Canberra Nature Parks and urban reserves across Canberra) managed by Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD).

The policy impacts upon TCCS employees who are responsible for:

- Assessing protected trees on private (leased) land under applied work permits from leaseholders;
- Assessing public trees and conducting maintenance on our public urban forest (unleased land) trees;
- Assessing our public urban forest for required removals, new plantings and end of life cycle renewals.

The policy is supported by the VALID Tree Benefit-Risk Management Operations Guide, which was designed to guide the implementation of the policy.

1.3 Objectives

Major objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure a consistent approach in the management of urban trees;
- Provide technical guidance for the benefit-risk assessment of urban trees;
- Prevent unnecessary and unwarranted tree removal;

- Provide greater level of confidence in our tree risk assessment processes, for employees and community, through best practice procedures that can be transferred across all ACT agencies when assessing tree risk.

2.0 Policy Application

2.1 Policy Guidance

The policy guidance provided in this document can be used for the majority of decisions. Further instruction on the policy implementation is available in the VALID Tree Benefit-Risk Management Operations Guide. If the policy guidance can be applied, then the policy principles are considered met.

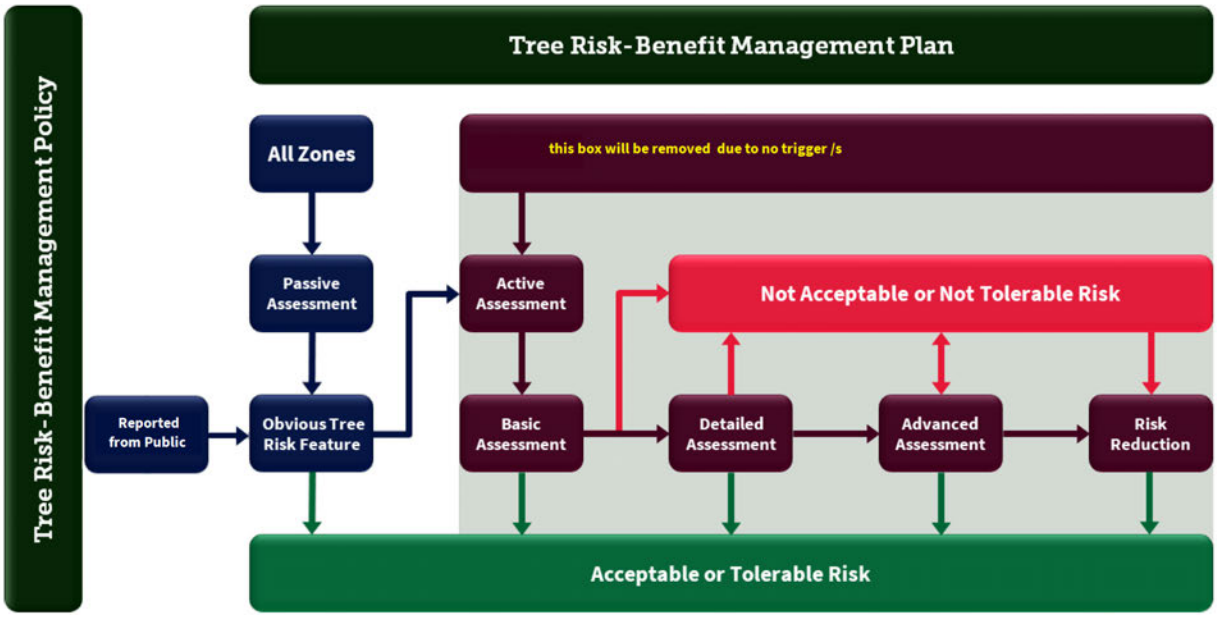
These guidelines accompany the ACT Urban Forest Strategy 2021-2045 and relate to the following legislation:

- Urban Forest Act 2023
- Public Unleased Land Act 2013
- Nature Conservation ACT 2014

2.2 Policy application

These guidelines will be used in conjunction with the Urban Forest Strategy and Urban Forest Act objectives to protect and enhance the ACT's urban forest, with a focus on increasing tree canopy cover to 30% by 2045.
These guidelines will be used by in house employees in tree operations, tree protection and senior management positions [in conjunction with the operations manual] as the ACT Government's approach to tree benefit-risk assessments on urban trees.

Tree Benefit-Risk Assessments are undertaken as directed by:



2.3 Policy Principles

Where the policy guidelines may not be appropriate and it is necessary to deviate from the policy guidance, then a principle-based decision needs to be made. All the policy principles need to be addressed.

The policy is founded on the following Principles:

- To provide and maintain a liveable and sustainable urban forest. This includes recognising the risks associated with the urban forest and the safety of people and property within it.
- To underpin efficient maintenance practices through the targeted use of government resources.
- To communicate the management of a liveable and sustainable urban forest. Including educative and transparent public communication and community engagement.
- To protect the urban forest and take an ecological approach, supporting biodiversity and contributing to the Urban Forest Strategy target of 30% canopy cover by 2045 through the prevention of unnecessary tree removal.

3.0 Tree Benefit-Risk Assessment

TCCS Urban Treescapes employees must conduct appropriate benefit-risk assessments when assessing reported tree issues on private (leased) and public (unleased) land.

When assessing trees, the aim is to ensure tree health and benefits, safety and co-existence with existing infrastructure are appropriately considered and weighted.

3.1 Responsibility and Implementation

3.1.1 Training and Qualifications – who is a VALIDator?

Tree Operations employees: GSO5/6* GSO7, GSO9, SOGC
Tree Protection Unit employees: TO3, TO4, SOGC, SOGB
Tree Management employees: TO3, TO4

* select GSO 5/6 employees will be qualified VALIDators to ensure continuity of assessments during periods of acting in GSO7 roles. Training will be at manager discretion.

3.1.1.1 VALID Training for new staff

Newly engaged employees working in Tree Operations or Tree Protection at GSO7 or TO3 level and above are to be enrolled in VALIDator training within 6 months of commencement. Training should be completed no later than 12 months following onboarding. If training sessions are not available within this period, staff should be enrolled in the next available session. Training schedules can be accessed on the Valid website.

Training exemptions may include: temporary (12 months or less) contract staff, or staff not expected to undertake any tree benefit-risk assessments within their role.

Exemptions are to be determined by SOGC or above of the employee's business unit.

3.1.1.2 Inhouse Training for new staff

Inhouse basic VALIDator training is to be provided to all new Urban Treescapes employees. Inhouse training should provide new employees with an overview of the system including where to find the Obvious Tree Risks Features document. Operations employees (GSO3/4 and GSO5/6) are provided additional training and a copy of the Operations Guide to assist them in developing their basic Passive Assessment skills.

The relevant supervisor (SOGC Tree Operations or SOGC Tree Protection Unit) is responsible for assigning a new VALIDator responsible for employee training, at the appointment of each new employee.

3.1.1.3 Refresher training

Training is valid for 5 years from the date of course completion. An internal training report is to be maintained with training dates recorded to ensure VALIDators are undertaking necessary renewal training at 5 yearly intervals.

Training records are kept in Objective under file path *Urban Treescapes-> 0.9 Personnel -> Training -> VALID.*

3.1.2 Staff Responsibility

TCCS have approximately 30 Urban Treescapes staff who are trained VALIDators, trained to carry out Passive and Active Assessments. The remainder of TCCS Urban Treescapes operations teams, who spend a lot of time working outside, are internally trained in carrying out basic Passive Assessments and carry out these assessments as part of their daily roles. All remaining Urban Treescapes staff have a copy of the Obvious Tree Risk Features Guide and carry out basic Passive Assessments.

Responsibility Matrix

	(Basic) Passive Assessments	Passive Assessments	Active Assessments
Operations Crew (GSO3/4)	X		
Operations Crew Leaders (GSO5/6)	X	X	
Operations Team Leaders (GSO7)		X	X
Operations Depot Supervisor (GSO9)		X	X
Tree Protection Officers (TO3&4)		X	X
Operations Assistant Director (SOGC)		X	X
Tree Protection Assistant Director (SOGC)		X	X
Design & Development Coordinators (TO4) & Technical Officers Claims (TO3)		X	X
All Urban Treescapes Staff	X		

3.1.3 Escalation Process for Assessment Disputes

If a tree benefit-risk assessment outcome is refuted by a member of the public (MOP), whether it be regarding a private (leased) or public (unleased) land tree, the VALIDator who undertook the assessment should be the first point of contact for the refutation. If the MOP remains unsatisfied and is continues to rebut the assessment outcome, the VALIDator should raise the matter to their supervisor. The escalation process should continue until resolved or the process reaches the *Assistant Director, Operations* for action.

If at any point a MOP is aggressive towards a member of the Operations team, a report should be raised in Riskman to document the situation; and the *Assistant Director, Operations* advised.

3.2 Decision Making Framework

The decision-making framework that underpins the Urban Treescapes VALID Tree Risk-benefit assessments comprises of the following.

3.2.1 Benefits of trees

The most obvious benefit that trees provide are visual beauty in the landscape. Further values include wildlife habitat, pollution filtering, and reducing the harmful effects of both weather and climate change. Trees also have important social value as part of our culture, history, or because they commemorate an important event. In addition to these benefits, there is an ever-increasing body of scientific evidence verifying that trees are essential for our physical health, mental wellbeing, and quality of life. Further information on tree benefits can be found on the City Services webpage.

3.2.2 Low overall risk of falling trees

Compared to everyday risks in the workplace, the overall risk to the Canberra community from branches or trees falling is extremely low. The annual risk of being killed or seriously injured by a tree is less than one in a million. Given the number of trees in the Canberra's urban forest, being killed or injured by a tree is an extremely rare event; and one that usually only happens during severe weather.

3.2.3 Risk is unavoidable

Trees are living structures that, sometimes, shed branches or fall over; usually because of severe weather. As the custodian of land that hosts many urban trees, the ACT Government cannot be an insurer of nature. Though trees can shed branches and sometimes fall over, this usually happens because of severe weather or because of an obvious risk feature. As the many benefits from urban trees are required to meet the Urban Forest Strategy and Urban Forest Act objectives, the ACT Government [as the managers of the urban forest] must accept some risk. Trees also drop leaves, bark, cones, nuts, and fruits, but the risk from this natural debris falling is so low it is Acceptable.

3.2.4 Duty of care in managing risk

The ACT Government has a duty of care to manage the risk from urban trees, as government assets. When managing the risk, ACT Government employees must be reasonable, proportionate, and reasonably practicable. There is a balance between the many benefits trees provide, the risk, and the costs of managing this risk. In approaching the risk with this balance, resources are not wasted in attempted risk reduction and benefit losses on trees that have Acceptable or Tolerable risk levels.

3.2.5 Managing risk to an acceptable or tolerable level

TCCS employees are all expected to act reasonably and responsibly. When severe weather is forecast, employees can manage exposure to the higher risk from tree failure by not going out on site.

3.2.5.1 Risk ratings

VALID has applied ISO 31000 - Risk Management and the Tolerability of Risk Framework (ToR) to tree benefit-risk management and assessment, which has been adopted in this policy. TCCS will manage the risk from Canberra's urban trees and branches falling using four (4) easy-to-understand risk ratings.

Not Acceptable risks will be reduced to an Acceptable level

Not Tolerable risks will be reduced to an Acceptable level, but with a lower priority than red Not Acceptable risks

Tolerable risks will not be reduced but may require an increased frequency of assessment than green Acceptable risks

Acceptable risks will not be reduced

3.2.5.2 Risk tolerance

The ToR is an internationally recognised approach to making risk management decisions. It's used by duty holders where they manage a risk that's imposed on the public. ToR defines Broadly Acceptable and Unacceptable levels of risk. Between them is a region where the risk is Tolerable if it's 'as low as reasonably practicable' (ALARP). Put simply, ALARP means the risk is Tolerable if the costs of the risk reduction are much greater than the value of the risk reduction.

Urban Treescapes will not undertake pruning or removal work on trees that have been assessed as Acceptable or Tolerable and therefore fit within the ALARP risk category. Undertaking work on trees that are already rated in this risk category creates unnecessary workloads and subsequently exposes Urban Treescapes staff to unnecessary hazards.

3.3 Urban Treescapes will not approve pruning or removal work on private trees that have been assessed as Acceptable or Tolerable unless the application meets alternative assessment criteria under the legislation.

Each VALIDator is responsible for undertaking appropriate and defensible inspections in their VALID benefit-risk assessment app. The Senior Director, Urban Treescapes is responsible for ensuring consistent, complete and defensible reporting is being completed by staff members.

The Senior Director, Urban Treescapes may delegate their responsibility to team leaders.

3.3.1 Record keeping and reporting

Reports generated in the VALID app are to be attached to the relevant Salesforce job for each assessment and to the ArcGIS Online (AGOL) data point in Field Maps if tree removal is programmed following a tree risk assessment being carried out.

VALIDators are required to export their PDF VALID reports from the app and attach to the relevant Salesforce job.

In future, the auto sweep (when functional) from Salesforce → Field Maps will then capture the data in the Field Maps system also.

As Field Maps (ArcGIS) is a recognised, but not formal, record management tool it is recommended that the collective reports from the VALID app are to be stored in Objective (into one centralised location). Each team should assign a relevant storage location and a day of the fortnight, or at an interval agreed to with the relevant Manager, that all exported reports are to be uploaded into Objective, to prevent unnecessary duplication of work.

Undertaking this process will be at manager direction, as it is understood duplicating workflows creates additional work for employees.

3.4 Updates and Reviews

3.4.1 System Updates

The VALID app will have system updates from time to time. Staff members are individually responsible for ensuring they have an up-to-date app at 3 monthly intervals.

This policy and the Operations Guide should be checked against any App changes bi-annually.

3.4.2 Review

The implementation of the VALID benefit-risk assessment process, associated policies and procedures, should be reviewed every two (2) years. Any review may happen at a shorter interval if directed by the Senior Director, Urban Treescapes.

3.4.2.1 Annual KPIs

Reviews will be assessed against the following implementation and management KPIs:

- Staff training up to date
- Enquiry numbers received through Fix My Street, versus number of VALID assessments undertaken
- All programmed tree removals include a VALID assessment or an explanation why this is not required (for example, infrastructure conflicts)
- Accurate and complete record keeping of all VALID assessments.

4.0 Resources

4.1 Definition of terms

Term	Definition
ACTPS	ACT Public Service
Employee	A person employed by the ACTPS to undertake duties within the TCCS. Contractors and consultants engaged to represent the TCCS are also employees.
VALIDator	A person (employee) who has completed the Tree Risk-Benefit Assessment training through the VALID program
TCCS	Transport Canberra and City Services

4.2 Relevant legislation and internal policy

Legislation
Public Sector Management Act 1994
Urban Forest Act 2023
Public Unleased Land Act 2013
Nature Conservation ACT 2014
Loss of Mature Native Trees Key Threatening Process Action Plan
Canberra's Living Infrastructure Policy
Urban Forest Strategy

4.3 Relevant resources

Policy/Document	Location
ACTPS Integrity Policy 2010	www.cmtd.act.gov.au
TCCS Risk Management Framework	http://intccs