



Attention of: The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

18 July 2024

Re: Joining together to Grow Green and Blue Infrastructure in the Draft National Urban Policy

Dear Minister,

We are a collaborative group of key peak bodies and industry associations that advocate for the inclusion of high quality Australian Urban Green Infrastructure. We collectively represent Infrastructure professionals, researchers and policy makers across each state and territory in Australia. As a collective Australian Urban Green Infrastructure (UGI) sector group we represent 25,000 growers, over 3,000 Landscape Architects, 2,500 Parks and Leisure professionals, over 1,500 horticulturists, tree professionals and emerging Green Infrastructure technical specialists. National annual sales (*HIA 2022-2023) of living growing infrastructure grown for this sector is valued at \$3.542bn, making a highly significant contribution to the Australian economy.

We are providing a submission to the welcomed National Urban Policy and seek an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the Commonwealth Government around critical issues relating to Urban Green Infrastructure.

As stakeholders committed to sustainable urban development, we were pleased to see that green and blue infrastructure networks were highlighted in the draft National Urban Policy as sustainable, liveable and resilient solutions to the problems faced in urban areas. We also welcome the highlighting of Singapore as an exemplar for urban policy, in particular their success in 'greening as they grow'. We urge the greater expansion of robust green and blue infrastructure provisions in the draft Policy from beyond green, open spaces to all forms and scales of UGI: elements (e.g. trees, green roofs, walls, facades, rain gardens, bio-swales), precinct (e.g. riparian corridors, nature and recreation reserves), and system level (e.g. greenfield developments, green corridors, active transport links, networks of parks and reserves).



Green Infrastructure is nature-based infrastructure that uses natural capital assets like plants, soil and water, managed in a way that provides ecosystem services to people and wildlife. By using green infrastructure as a nature-based solution to a problem, we harness the services nature provides. Green infrastructure can be used to address many issues in urban life including stormwater flooding, heat islands effects, pollution, visual amenity, climate change adaptation and mitigation and importantly, access to nature for wellbeing (physical and mental) benefits. One of green infrastructure's most fundamental ecosystem services is to provide habitat connection at a landscape scale by enabling the traversing of urban spaces.

Good quality UGI is designed to be multi-functional, providing ecosystem service benefits to both people and nature. With the current focus federally on reversing biodiversity loss, including the recently released Nature Positive Plan, we consider the significant role that urban areas can play in achieving a nature-positive Australia and believe this is an important gap waiting to be realised.

There are many challenges that we face working to protect and bring nature back into our cities. These include the absence of legislative requirements for UGI implementation, national construction guidance and standards, planning requirements, the perception of green and blue infrastructure as a luxury rather than a necessity in the current economic climate, limited awareness of its benefits and the absence of comprehensive data, benchmarking, metrics, and targets to measure progress and impact.

To help address these challenges we believe the National Urban Policy can be modified to include a greater focus on blue and green infrastructure actions to address these issues by:

- 1. Developing a UGI specific National Framework/Strategy** that supports this National Urban Policy priority and develops a national strategic approach to increasing good quality Green and Blue Infrastructure. The framework could facilitate collaboration among government, researchers, designers, and the construction industry to break down the traditional silos that often hinder progress. The key to achieving this lies in quality research, which informs sound policy development, then promoting these policies and standards at a national level. This will drive the green and blue infrastructure movement forward through industry and markets.
- 2. Formal recognition and development of UGI Standards.** Formally acknowledge the Standards Australia [UGI Handbook SA HB 214:2023](#) as a foundational tool for developing essential national performance-based standards and technical guidelines for UGI. This acknowledgment should be accompanied by a strategic plan to evolve these initial guidelines into comprehensive national standards and legislative requirements that ensures its inclusion in the broader scope of UGI components.



- 3. Providing financial and research support** to develop nationally accepted standards/technical guidelines for contemporary forms of UGI such as Green Walls, Roofs and Facades (GWRF). The need for national level consistency and shared principles has been identified in CSIRO National UGI Research workshops (undertaken in 2015-16) and is also key recommendation of the 'Roadmap for green roofs, walls and facades in Australia's Urban Landscapes 2020-2030' (Hort Frontiers strategic partnership initiative - Green Cities Fund, University NSW, UTS, University of Melbourne, City of Melbourne).
- 4. Asset class recognition for UGI** (within the public and private sectors) including potential incorporation into nationally accepted benefit/cost analysis tools (e.g. [Framework for Valuing Green Infrastructure and Public Spaces](#) October 2023, accepted by NSW Treasury) used by Commonwealth, Territory and State agencies in determining project investment prioritisation for public funding of infrastructure. Such recognition will not only underscore the value of UGI but also ensure its inclusion in financial planning, funding allocation and promoting broader implementation.
- 5. Establish national metrics and benchmarks.** Develop and implement a set of national metrics and benchmarks for assessing UGI performance and impact. These should include indicators for canopy cover, green cover, biodiversity, connectivity, and the health and quality of vegetation. This data-driven approach will facilitate targeted interventions and strategic priorities, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of UGI projects across Australia. These UGI related benchmarks and metrics should also be carried over to the Federal Government's 'State of the Cities' reporting frameworks.
- 6. Education and training.** Connect individuals and organisations with the knowledge and skills to develop capability. This includes capacity building across all sectors involved in the policy setting, design, installation, management and maintenance of UGI and includes providing greater access to quality UGI training, research, case studies and best practice guidance.

We look forward to your positive response and support to take UGI from a “nice to have, to must have”. We are at a critical point in history where actions to address the significant challenges of our time; biodiversity loss, climate change and human health and well-being are needed now, and without delay.

By aligning our collective effort to developing Australia-wide data sets, policy, standards, and practices, we not only fulfill our collective organisation’s objectives but also instigate meaningful changes nation-wide. We are ready to partner with the Government to create healthier liveable climate resilient communities through Urban Green and Blue Infrastructure across Australia. We are open to how we can partner and seek involvement in development of policy, expert advisory groups and any related dialogue.



The points of contact for this submission are: Gail Hall, President Australasian Green Infrastructure Network (AGIN). She can be contacted via email: gail@agin.org.au and Tel: 0416 178 249 and Ben Stockwin, CEO, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA). He can be contacted via email at ben.stockwin@aila.org.au and Tel:0400 887 022. We look forward to continuing discussions on how we can work together to progress this.

Regards,

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