

### **3.2. Bushcare Community Nursery Update**

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**ATTACHMENTS:** Nil

**PURPOSE:**

This report provides an update on the operations and achievements of Council's Bushcare Community Nursery during 2021.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Council's Bushland Management Team coordinates and delivers a range of community engagement and education programs aimed at increasing community awareness of urban ecology and the importance of natural area conservation.

Commencing in the mid 1990's, Council's Bushcare Program is the primary vehicle for community participation in bushland conservation. There are currently 12 Bushcare Groups, working within eleven different reserves around the North Sydney LGA. Formed in 2011, the Bushcare Community Nursery Group is unique, in that the fruits of their labour – local provenance tubestock plants – are grown to support the work of all other Bushcare Groups, as well as Council's Bush Regeneration Team; bushland contractors and Native Havens program participants.

Whilst the past two years have seen significant disruption to Council's volunteer programs, plant production in the Bushcare Community Nursery has been maintained through the combined efforts of volunteers (when permitted to attend) and the dedicated work of Council's Bushcare Community Nursery Supervisor Clare McElroy.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Nil

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**1. THAT** the Community Nursery report be received.

## **LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

### **1. Our Living Environment**

1.1 Protected and enhanced natural environment and biodiversity

1.2 North Sydney is sustainable and resilient

## **BACKGROUND**

In the context of North Sydney Council, “Bushcare” is a catch-all phrase that encapsulates most of our community education and engagement activities focussing on biodiversity conservation. Bushcare incorporates 12x active Bushcare groups working across 16x bushland sites within eleven reserves. The Bushcare Community Nursery produces the vast majority of Council’s native plant needs for both on-ground rehabilitation works, as well as community plant give-aways at markets; Citizenship Ceremonies; Schools Tree Day and the popular Native Havens home habitat gardening program. In addition to the above, Bushcare includes an annual program of workshops, events and activities provided for the general community, pre-school to primary school aged children and for volunteers. The Bushland Team also delivers other, related programs including Adopt-a-Plot; Native Havens and Wildlife Watch.

## **CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS**

Community engagement is not required.

## **DETAIL**

Since March 2020, the global COVID pandemic has seen unprecedented disruption and adjustment to Council’s Bushcare volunteer programs. Lockdowns, COVID-safe protocols, limits on volunteer numbers and seemingly continual changes to these requirements has resulted in frustration and ultimately, some reductions in program participation.

In spite of the challenges, plant propagation and general nursery business continued – albeit with fewer volunteer work sessions and more hours spent at the propagation bench by Council’s Bushcare Nursery Supervisor.

The result was the cancellation or scaling down of most community and volunteer events, such as citizenship ceremonies, National Tree Day, Trees for Mum, Nursery Open Day and community markets/giveaways. National Tree Day used 1,794 plants in 2019, but the event was cancelled outright in 2021 and only 124 plants were planted in 2020.

The Native Havens program provided 2,309 plants to program participants during 2021, a significant reduction compared to both 2019 (3,365) and 2020 (2,975) due mainly to the extended lockdown that prevented staff from visiting residential properties and suspended engagement with new participants. Conversely, Council’s Bush Regeneration Team and contract bush regenerators nearly doubled the number of plants used in 2021 (4,676) compared to 2020 (2,661). This was achievement was aided by highly favourable rainfall throughout the year.

The total number of plants used in 2021 (11,957) is notably more than 2020 (8,603). Of these, 7,028 (82%) were grown in the Bushcare Nursery and 1,575 (18%) were supplied by other nurseries to be used in the Native Havens program and for community events and giveaways.

**Figure 1.** Comparative plant supply 2013-2021

<b>Year</b>	<b>Plants supplied by Bushcare Nursery</b>
2013	9,513
2014	11,107
2015	9,170
2016	11,767
2017	12,382
2018	11,382
2019	11,209
2020	8,603
2021	11,957
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>10,787</b>

**Figure 2.** Plant supply by Program, 2021

<b>Council Program</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Native Havens	2,309
Bushland Rehabilitation	4,676
Other (i.e. Community Events)	2,095
Streets Alive/Parks & Gardens	1,847
Adopt-a-Plot	215
National Tree Day	0
NSC Tree Planting Team	29
Dead stock	460
Unaccounted stock (i.e. theft)	139
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>11,957</b>

Historically, we use delivered (D) plants for non-bushland destinations such as Native Havens (NH), Streets Alive (SA), Parks and Gardens and “Other” programs (community events, markets and giveaways). This ensures that our bushland provenance plants, which come from a finite local source, are available for bushland projects where we can achieve the best conservation outcomes. In 2020, the nursery grew 58% of plants used for Native Havens.

However, in 2021, this percentage grew to 74% of Native Havens plants originating from the Bushcare Nursery. These plants were not necessarily bushland stock - many of the popular species were propagated in bulk from non-provenance or nursery stock plants, representing a saving to council with fewer plants bought from external suppliers.

**Figure 3.** Percentage of plants grown at the Bushcare Community Nursery (NSC) or delivered from external nurseries (D) across all programs during 2021.

Origin	Quantity	Percentage
NSC Bushcare Nursery	9,705	81%
External Nurseries (D)	2,253	19%

**Figure 4.** Percentage of plants grown at the Bushcare Community Nursery (NSC) or delivered from external nurseries (D) for the Native Havens program.

Program	Origin	Quantity	Percentage
Native Havens	NSC Bushcare Nursery	1,704	74%
	External Nursery (D)	605	26%

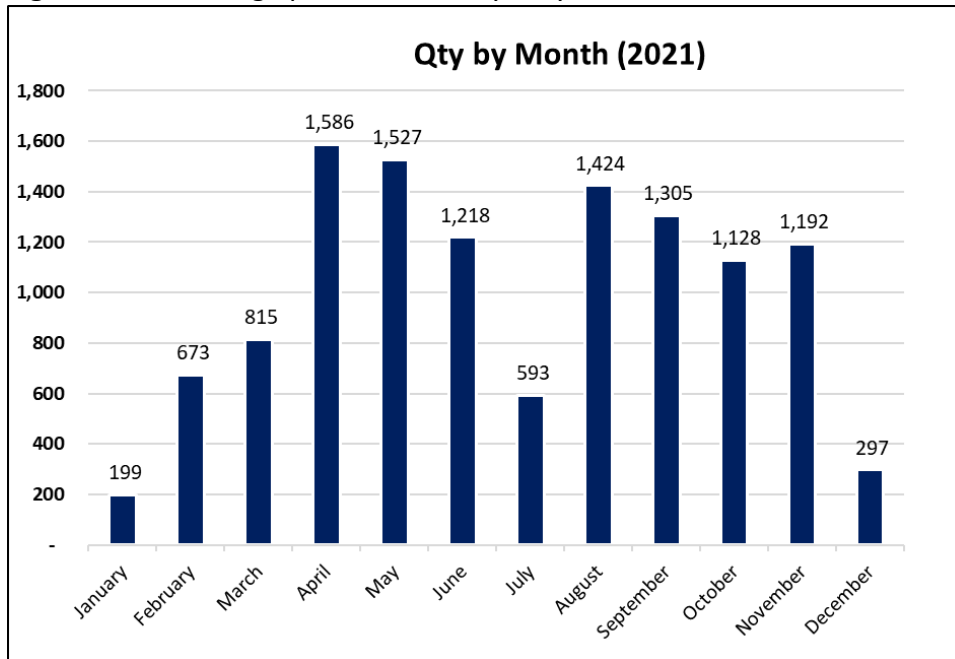
Across both delivered and home-grown stock, 168 different native plant species were supplied by the nursery in 2021, which is comparable to previous years and slightly higher (+8) to 2020.

Excluding (D) delivered plants, the estimated value of outgoing NSC stock grown by volunteers and staff was over \$33,000 (28% increase over 2020). Most plants comprised tubestock (8,428 @ \$3.00) with the remainder being larger pots and trays. The value of plants has been estimated and averaged from prices charged at equivalent wholesale/retail suppliers. Most of these nurseries have a sliding scale of prices depending on species and quantity ordered, so the prices below can only be considered an estimate. Trays and flats have not been assigned a value as there is no comparable commercial product.

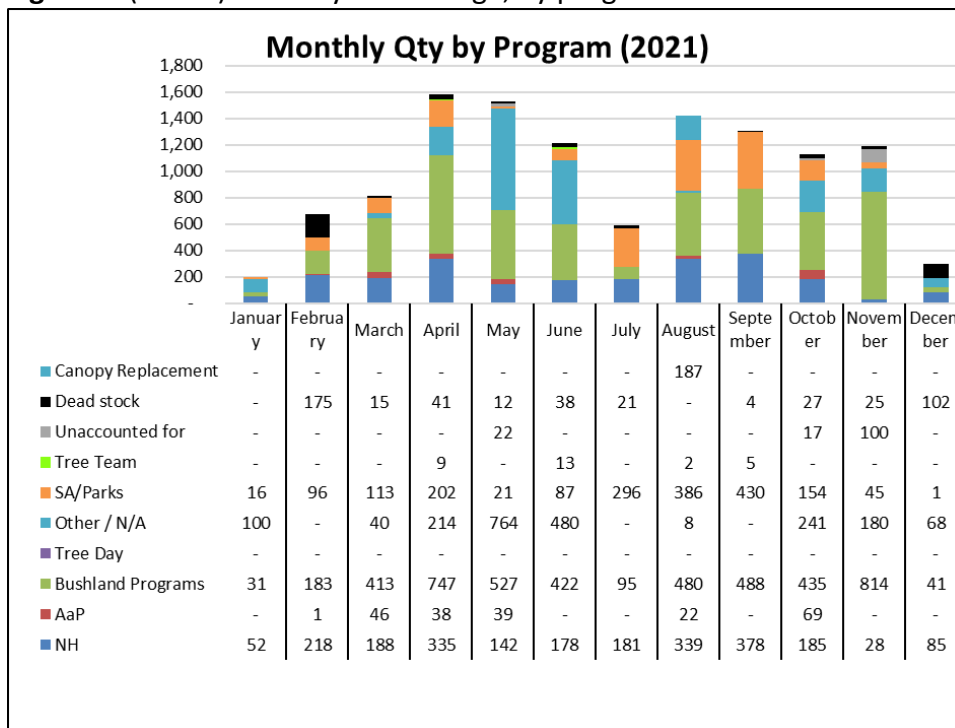
**Figure 5.** Estimated value of plants grown in the Bushcare Community Nursery in 2021.

Size	Quantity	\$ Each	\$ Total
Forestry Tube	8,428	\$3-	\$25,284-
Mega Tube	158	\$8-	\$1,264-
Round Tube	764	\$6-	\$4,584-
4" Square Pot	94	\$6-	\$564-
6-8" Pot	31	\$15-	\$465-
Hiko	167	\$2-	\$334-
Rocket Pot	27	\$25-	\$675-
Tray/Flat	36		
			<b>\$33,170 (ex GST)</b>

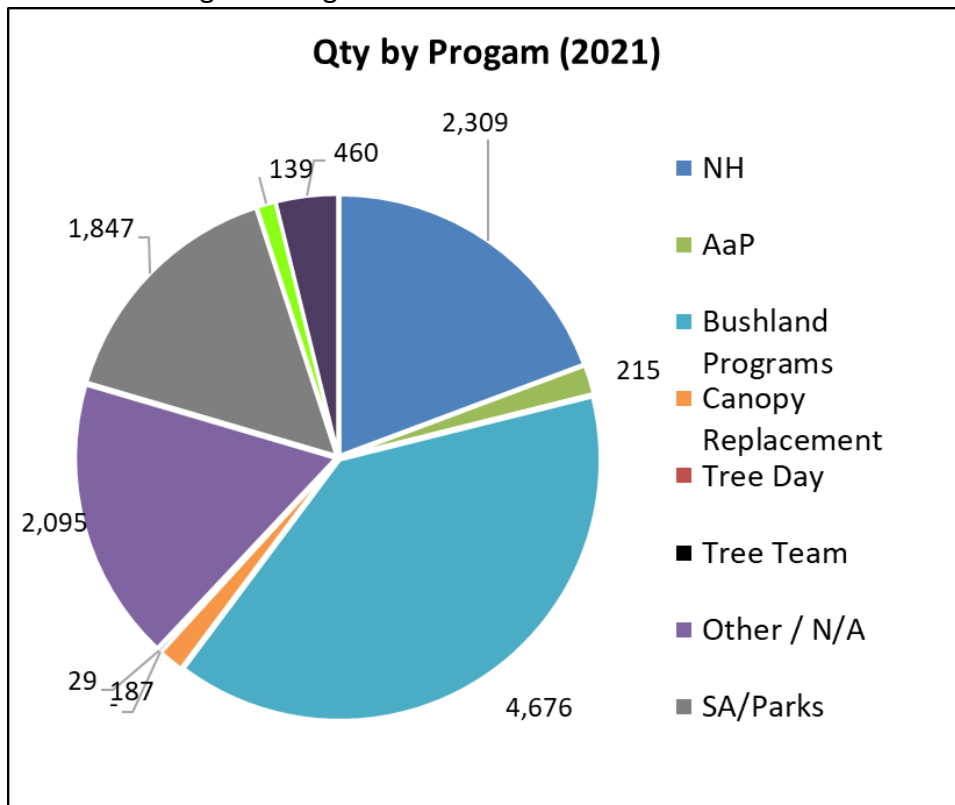
**Figure 6. Stock usage per month and yearly total**



**Figure 7. (above) Monthly stock usage, by program.**



**Figure 8.** (below) Annual Stock usage by program, showing Bushland Programs and Native Havens with highest usage.



### Bushcare Community Nursery Volunteers

The Bushcare Community Nursery Group meets fortnightly on the second and fourth Thursday morning of the month, from February to November inclusive.

Due to the pandemic lockdown, there were no volunteer meetings from June to December 2021. A special Christmas gathering was arranged in December, and the group enjoyed lunch and each other’s company at the Coal Loader Café. Meetings resumed in January 2022 with COVID-safe protocols in place, including no shared morning tea, strict sanitising procedures and a rostering system whereby volunteers attend on alternate fortnights to keep numbers within manageable limits for physical distancing. Group numbers remain steady with around 5-8 regulars.

With the current trend of relaxing COVID health regulations and very high vaccination rates in the community, it is anticipated that 2022 will see a return to greater stability in the Bushcare Community Nursery volunteer program and potentially, a further boost in plant production levels.