

3.4. Bushcare Community Nursery Update

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ATTACHMENTS: Nil

PURPOSE:

To provide an annual summary of the operation, activities and achievements of staff and volunteers at the Bushcare Community Nursery during 2022/23.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- Council's Bushland Management Team 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 avenue for community participation in bushland conservation. There are currently 12 Bushcare Groups in North Sydney, including the Bushcare Community Nursery.
- Formed in 2011 and based at the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability, the Bushcare Community Nursery Group grows provenance tubestock plants to support the full breadth of Council's biodiversity conservation and community engagement programs (including Bushcare; Native Havens; Adopt-a-Plot; Citizenship; National / Schools Tree Day etc).
- Emerging from the significant disruption to volunteer programs caused by the COVID pandemic, plant production in the Bushcare Community Nursery has recovered to pre-pandemic levels through the combined efforts of our returning volunteers and the dedicated work of Council's Bushcare Community Nursery Supervisor.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Bushcare Community Nursery operations are fully funded under Council's Environmental Levy and sufficient budget has been allocated.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. THAT** the Bushcare Community Nursery Update 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, enhanced and biodiverse natural environment
 - 1.2 Environmentally sustainable community

5. Our Civic Leadership
 - 5.3 Community is engaged in what Council does

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. The Bushcare Program incorporates twelve volunteer groups working across 16 bushland sites within eleven reserves. The Bushcare Community Nursery supplies most of the 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, 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 delivers other, related programs including Adopt-a-Plot, Native Havens and Wildlife Watch.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement is not required.

DETAIL

Following the disruption to normal operations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, financial year (FY) 22/23 marked a return to business as usual for plant production and volunteer participation in Council’s Bushcare Community Nursery, with plants being produced and supplied for the full suite of bushland programs and community engagement events.

The total number of plants used across all programs during FY 22/23 was 10,591. This is consistent with previous calendar years (see Table 1), except 2020 when COVID-19 caused the cancellation of several key community planting events.

Table 1: Bushcare Community Nursery plant supply 2013 – 2022/23

Year	Plants used from nursery
2013	9,513
2014	11,107
2015	9,170
2016	11,767
2017	12,382
2018	11,382
2019	11,209
2020	8,382*
2021	11,497*
2022	11,142*
<u>FY2022/23</u>	10,591*
*total excludes dead/waste/unaccounted for stock	

Plant usage by Bushland Programs has increased every year since 2020 due to favourable La Nina weather conditions bringing reliable rainfall. Bushland reserve plantings accounted for the highest use of nursery stock, with 3,122 plants being used by the Bushland Operations Team.

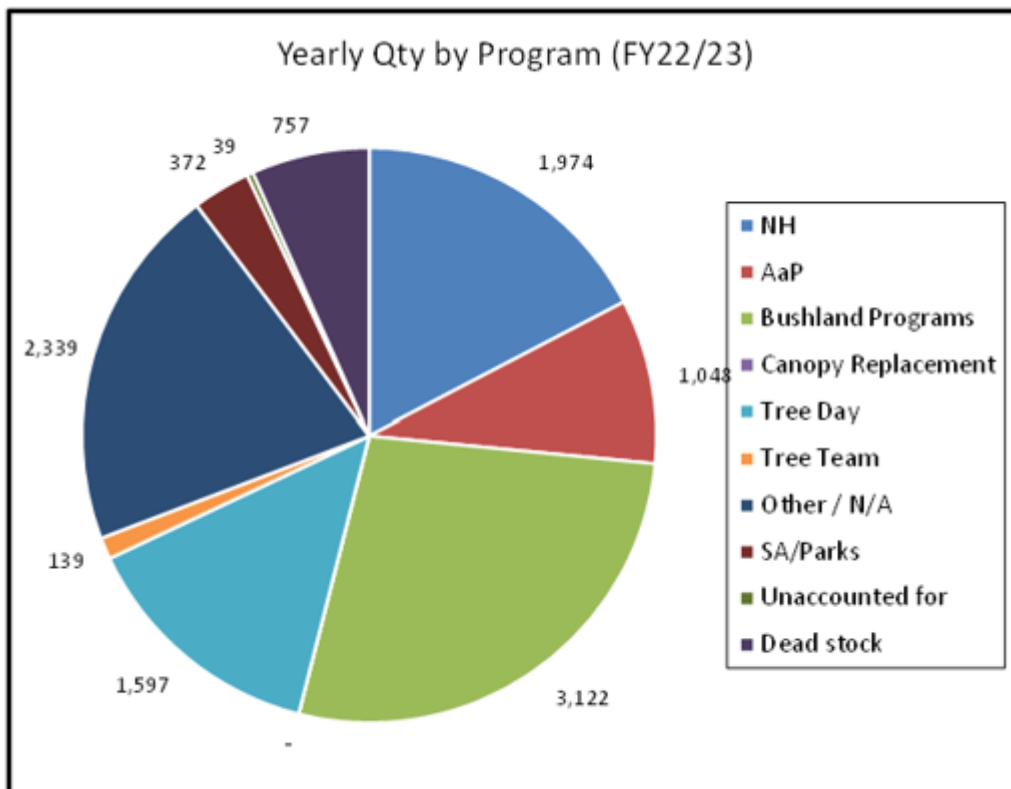


Figure 1: Annual plant usage by bushland program (FY 22/23)

Plant usage for community events and giveaways (included under “Other/NA”) has also increased, with citizenship ceremonies supplying 903 plants to new Australians. Citizenship plants are now exclusively grown at the Bushcare Community Nursery, rather than ordered from external suppliers as was the case previously.

Other community events included Trees for Mum (150 plants), Bushcare Community Nursery Open Day (280), NSC Garden Awards ceremony (237), Bushcare Christmas party (174) and the Wenona School planting at Forsyth Park (293), amongst others. National Tree Day 2022 accounted for 1,597 plants, consistent with years prior to COVID restrictions.

Plants provided to residents through Council's Native Havens (NH) home habitat gardening program steadily increased after the decline in 2020/21 caused by COVID restrictions preventing home visits, as well as a short program hiatus during staffing turnover. Likewise, the Adopt-a-Plot bushland rehabilitation program reached its highest level of plant usage since 2019.

The Bushcare Community Nursery continued to provide occasional plants to other Open Space teams, including a small number of specially propagated advanced trees for the Urban Forest Team and mixed native tubestock supplied to Gardens Teams and Streets Alive.

Dead/waste stock mostly comprised unused surplus or old/rootbound plants deemed undesirable for high value projects. 85% were grown in the Bushcare Community Nursery, with the remaining 15% delivered stock. Where possible, these "waste stock" plants were given away to volunteers (including Streets Alive) or other Council Open Space Teams, for planting sites where potentially low survival rates were not going to be a critical factor.

"Unaccounted for" plants are missing stock, presumed taken by members of the public who are aware of our security vulnerabilities when the nursery is unattended. The number is likely higher, only the obvious has been recorded, but thefts do seem to have abated since their height during COVID lockdowns.

Propagation and provenance

A total of 153 different native plant species were grown by the nursery in FY 22/23, which is consistent with previous years. Propagation success was also achieved with some difficult species using a range of techniques, including Pink Crowea (*Crowea saligna* – from seed rather than the more usual cuttings), Tree Broom Heath (*Monotoca elliptica* – from cuttings) and Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthii* – from fresh seed).

The total number of plants propagated in the nursery by staff and volunteers during the reporting period was 10,218. Most species were grown from locally collected seed, with the remainder propagated vegetatively from division or cuttings.

From a total holding stock of 11,387 plants, including dead/waste and unaccounted for stock, 78% (8,903) of plants were propagated and grown in the Bushcare Nursery and 22% (2,484) were supplied by external nurseries (Figure 2, below). Most externally sourced plants were used in the Native Havens program and for community events / giveaways. This ensures that our North Sydney Council (NSC) bushland provenance plants, collected from small / fragmented bushland reserves, are available for bushland rehabilitation projects that fulfill Council's conservation objectives.

Origin	Qty	%
NSC	8,903	78%
D	2,484	22%
Total	11,387	

Figure 2: Percentage plants grown at the Bushcare Community Nursery (NSC) compared to delivered plants (D) from external nurseries

For bushland programs, a small number of species were also sourced externally to maintain genetic diversity and bolster our local populations, as well as to replace historic species lost from NSC bushland remnants through senescence and a long absence of fire.

In FY 22/23, the Bushcare Community Nursery (NSC) grew 57% of plants used for Native Havens (see Figure 3) comprising a mixture of bushland stock and species propagated from non-provenance or nursery stock plants. This is comparable to 2020 (58%) but lower than calendar years 2021 (74%) and 2022 (76%). The proportion of NSC to delivered (D) stock used by Native Havens (NH), largely depends on which species are requested by the Bushland Project Officer within the context of what species are available at the time.

Program	Origin	Qty	%
NH	NSC	1,129	57%
NH	D	845	43%

Figure 3: Percentage plants grown at the Bushcare Community Nursery (NSC) or delivered (D) from external nurseries for the Native Havens home habitat gardening program.

Excluding (D) delivered plants, the estimated value of outgoing NSC stock grown by volunteers and staff was \$29,152 (Figure 4, below). This represents a saving to council with fewer plants bought from external suppliers. Most plants comprised forestry tubes (8,462 @ \$3.00 equivalent value), with the remainder being a range of larger pots, grow-bags and trays. The value of plants has been estimated and averaged from prices charged at specialist provenance nursery suppliers that service the Sydney-north region.

Origin	Size	Qty	\$ each	Total \$
NSC	Tube	8,462	\$ 3.00	\$ 25,386
NSC	Mega Tube	71	\$ 10.00	\$ 710
NSC	Round Tube	296	\$ 6.00	\$ 1,776
NSC	4" SQ	10	\$ 6.00	\$ 60
NSC	6-8" Pot	30	\$ 15.00	\$ 450
NSC	Rocket	10	\$ 25.00	\$ 250
NSC	Tray/Flat	11	\$ 20.00	\$ 220
NSC	45 Litre	3	\$ 100.00	\$ 300
				\$ 29,152

Figure 4: Estimated value of plants grown in the Bushcare Community Nursery

Volunteers

The Bushcare Community Nursery Group has seven regular members, most of whom have been with the group for many years, some since its inception in 2013. The group meets from 9am-12pm on the second and fourth Thursday of each month (February to November).

In FY 22/23, the Bushcare Community Nursery group contributed 278.4 hours of volunteer labour. This figure is higher than any other Bushcare group, helped by the propagation shelter affording all-weather group meetings. Several volunteers also assisted on Nursery Open Day and with other community events such as the Building Bridges to Boorowa planting weekend in May 2023.

Nursery Events

Bushcare Community Nursery Open Day was held in September 2022 and was well attended by local residents who received free native plants and advice on establishing a fauna habitat garden on their properties. The event also serves to connect locals with Council's Bushcare, Wildlife Watch, Native Havens and Adopt-a-Plot programs.

In October 2022, the Bushcare Nursery Supervisor facilitated a fully booked seed propagation workshop, where participants received hands-on training in propagating native plants from seed. In March 2023, the popular cuttings propagation workshop was delivered, where participants received hands-on training in propagating native plants from stem cuttings.

Trees for Newborns trial program

The Bushcare Community Nursery will be participating in this new Council initiative by providing local native trees in 70mm (mega) tubes. The trees will be planted on private property by residents with newborns.

Planning for 2023/24

As the prevailing weather patterns transition from the wetter La Nina of the past three years toward a drying El Nino, opportunities for planting may become more targeted and at a level that can be sustained by hand-watering during the critical establishment phase. The Bushcare Nursery Supervisor works closely with the Bushland Management Coordinator and Bush Regeneration Team Leader to ensure that nursery production / species selection meet the requirements of our bushland rehabilitation objectives.