

POLICY No

C2:10

POLICY TITLE: **RISK MANAGEMENT – TREE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

VERSION I: Adopted 19 April 2005

Last reviewed: -

INTENT OF POLICY

1. To recognise Councils obligations in regards to the management of trees on Council owned or controlled land
2. To assign risk categories to Council assets as regards their interaction with trees
3. To develop appropriate procedures in terms of tree assessment.

POLICY STATEMENT

Council recognises that it has an obligation to manage trees and their tree roots on road reserves, public reserves and other Council land.

Part One – Risk Categories and Priorities

Trees that are on Council owned or controlled land will fall within the following three risk categories:

High Risk: Passive Recreational Areas, Recreational Reserves and Camping Reserves.

Medium Risk: Urban Streets

Low Risk: Rural Roads, Un-maintained Roads, other Crown reserves vested in Council, Community land and other Operational Land.

Council will implement a system of tree inspections within the high risk category, they being trees situated within Passive Parks, Playgrounds, Sportsgrounds, Recreation and designated Camping Reserves throughout the Shire.

Those facilities within the high risk area will be rated against one another as regards risk exposure to ensure that appropriate inspection and intervention levels can then be assigned.

Due to competing financial demands Councils Tree management system as regards inspection of trees will be on a complaints basis within the Medium to Low risk categories and subject to budgetary limitations.

Part Two – Financial Resources

Council will endeavour to provide an annual budget allocation within its limited financial means to minimise any injury or damage and/or loss that they (trees) may cause.

The level of resources allocated will determine the level of service for this activity of Council.

Part Three – Training of staff and use of personnel with specialist qualifications

Council will provide training to Council staff to ensure that they are competent to undertake an initial assessment of a tree.

In the event that staff cannot adequately determine the health of the tree, Council will engage a qualified contractor to assess the status of the tree. Such assessments will again be limited to within the annual budgetary allocation provided for tree risk assessments.

Such qualified contractor will be required to hold appropriate qualifications that are recognised by the International Society of Arboriculture.

Part Four – Termites/Bees/Pests

Termites, bees and other insects are part of the local environment and the natural processes of the plant and insect community. Termites serve as one of the nutrient recycling processes for the plant community. Council will not carry out inspections or undertake the eradication of termites/bees/pests in tree(s) or tree stumps or any timber on Council owned or controlled land.

It is the responsibility of the property owner to:

- i) Ensure all buildings on the property are protected from termite attack by installation and maintenance of recommended methods of control in accordance with the Australian Standard 3660-1993 'Protection of Building for Subterranean Termites'.
- ii) Abide by and carry out any recommendations or treatment determined by a Timber Pest Control Professional.

Date Policy Adopted	Minute No.	Authority
19 April 2005	32518	Council Resolution

Annexures:

- 1) DSC Tree Management Procedures
- 2) DSC Visual Tree Assessment Complaint Form
- 3) DSC Reserves Risk Assessment Sheet
- 4) Country Energy New Tree Planting guide
- 5) DSC Tree Assessment Form

Dungog Shire Council

Tree Risk Management Procedures

1) STAFF TRAINING

Council staff that will be responsible for undertaking the initial assessment of trees will be required to undertake training. The manager responsible for the staff will also be required to hold a suitable competency set to undertake evaluation of tree hazards in their own capacity. Council will provide funding to enable the training of this employee to undertake the same training course or equivalent.

The training course has been identified through Hunter Councils Training Co-ordinator called "Assessment of Tree Hazards" the course duration is 40 hours. The course is delivered in two stages encompassing face to face delivery in the field and in the workplace. The course content encompasses tree growth patterns, development of structural defects, site considerations and conducting hazard assessments.

2) TREE COMPLAINTS

Receipt of tree complaints by Council result in an action request being generated for the tree to be inspected and a suggested action returned to the Operations Engineer to either act upon or take no further action.

Until such time as staff are trained and deemed competent to assess the tree, staff that are required to inspect trees following complaints are still to utilise their own opinion as determining whether a tree is potentially at risk of causing damage to property or personal injury.

Following assessment the employee's recommendation is to be recorded on the action request form, as regards Council takes no action, pruning of limbs, removal etc. The Operations Engineers' instructions following receipt of the recommendation are also to be recorded on the action request form.

If the complainant rejects Councils opinion, the complainant may seek to obtain an independent assessment undertaken by a qualified arborist at the complainants cost. In the event that the arborist report declares the tree to be dangerous and recommends the removal of the tree, Council, subject to available resources will undertake the removal of the tree.

In the event that Council has funds committed to remove other dangerous trees that in the opinion of Council pose a greater risk to the community and there are no available funds within the Councils budgetary allocation to remove the tree, Council will approve the tree for removal and the complainant may proceed to remove the tree subject to Councils requirements at the complainants cost.

3) COUNCIL OWNED OR CONTROLLED RESERVES

A template has been developed for staff to utilise in the assessment of a tree. The template can also be utilised for the establishment of an inventory of trees.

Councils initial priority assessment areas as regards tree assessments within reserves will be established on the basis of a risk assessment of each reserve as regards levels of public interaction with the natural environment.

Once all the reserves have been assessed as regards levels of risk, employees will undertake the initial assessment of trees and the establishment of the tree inventory for each reserve.

Such information will be collated within a risk database.

The development of a risk management strategy for the trees within Council reserves will be undertaken once the initial data has been assessed.

The basis of the risk management strategy will be formulated along the lines of the Statewide Mutuals Trees Best Practice manual.

4) ROAD RESERVES

A) Urban Areas

Urban areas are defined as areas within the regulated speed limit for a built up area (50kmh in Dungog Shire) urban areas include the township of Dungog and villages of Clarence Town, Gresford, East Gresford, Vacy, Martins Creek and Paterson.

A i) (Complaints)

At this stage Council will only undertake hazard assessment of trees within urban areas upon receipt of a complaint. The procedure as mentioned within tree complaints will also be applied in these instances.

A ii) (Footpaths)

Council at present undertakes an annual inspection of all footpaths within the urban areas, in the event that a footpath hazard is identified as being caused by tree roots (lifting of pavement) or tree limbs (obstruction hazards), the hazard will be assessed by the Operations Engineer and works programmed in accordance with available resources.

A iii) (Sewer Mains)

Council maintains a register of all sewer chokes actioned upon by Council staff. In certain instances Council has undertaken video inspection of the mains to identify deficiencies in the network. Council utilises the services of a contractor to jet blast certain mains as required.

A iv) (Powerlines)

It is recognised that vegetation near powerlines must be managed to maintain the safety of individuals and prevent damage to property. Council and Country Energy will endeavour to work in a co-operative manner as regards vegetation issues around powerlines.

Council will promote the Country Energy's planting guide and will provide further community information as regards trees that are unsuitable for planting under or near powerlines.

The energy supplier is responsible for ensuring compliance with the relevant guidelines as regards Managing of Traffic through works etc when their contractors are engaged in tree trimming and lopping operations.

B) Rural Areas

Rural areas includes all areas outside the urban speed limit restriction zones (50kmh) that exist throughout Dungog Shire.

Councils' rural road network comprises Rural regional sealed roads, rural sealed roads and rural unsealed roads. Council has many roadside areas throughout the Shire that are marked as roadside areas of environmental significance. Such areas and maps are recorded within the Councils Roadside Environmental Management Plan.

Council staff have been trained in the identification of such areas.

B i) (Complaints)

At this stage Council will only undertake hazard assessment of trees within rural roadside areas upon receipt of a complaint. The procedure as mentioned within tree complaints will also be applied in these instances.

B ii) (Roadside Areas of Environmental Significance)

In the development of the Roadside Environmental Management Plan processes were undertaken to identify and assess all roadside areas.

Through the assessment process all roadside reserves were divided into three categories, High, Medium and Low Conservation Areas.

C) High conservation value roadsides

Description

Roadside reserves in this category are typified by one of, or a number of characteristics. The vegetation may be in good health and have good structure; there may be rare or threatened species of flora or fauna present or known to use the area, the area may have particular scenic or cultural heritage values or the roadside reserve may provide linkages with other areas of remnant vegetation. High Conservation Value road reserves within Dungog Shire will be signposted as "Significant Roadside Environment Areas".

D) Medium conservation value roadsides

Description

Medium Conservation Value Roadsides are characterised by vegetation which is relatively intact, retaining good diversity and structure. The impacts of grazing, fire, clearing and fragmentation are usually evident. These areas may not contain rare or threatened flora and fauna, and may not have good linkages to other remnant vegetation. Frequently, these areas have a dominant tree layer, grassy groundcover with a degraded or non-existent understorey layer. This classification is the most common throughout Dungog Shire.

In general, many of the medium Conservation value roadsides have a good chance of retaining their current characteristics, or indeed improving over time provided they are managed appropriately. As specified in the Roadside Environment Assessment table, a common management regime for these areas is to minimise disturbance, and maintain as is.

E) Low conservation value roadsides

Description

Roadside reserves in this category are characterised by their degraded nature, often having had most or all of the original vegetation removed. Grasses and introduced pasture and weed species dominate these areas. In many cases the effects of repeated grazing, stock movement, fire or roadside management techniques are highly evident; often in combination having reduced the roadside to its current state.

Generally, these areas occur in the southern parts of the shire, where clearing for agriculture has been more extensive, resulting in the roadside reserve having little or no linkage to remnant vegetation. However, roadside reserves in this category are also closely associated with current and historical dairy farming, and grazing areas where the road reserve has remained unfenced.

F) Removal of Trees from the Road Reserve

Council recognises the tangible benefits of trees on road reserves, trees are only removed from road reserves where there is a direct connection with public safety (line of sight) or potential impact upon existing infrastructure or infrastructure that is going to be constructed (in particular drainage works).