



# Tree Vandalism Policy

AUTHOR **Bernie Usher**

DEPARTMENT **Recreation, Customer & Community Services**

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## **1. Introduction**

The residents of Waverley are proud of their trees and the many benefits they contribute to the local environment. Apart from providing shade, habitat for native wildlife and aesthetic beauty, trees also instil a sense of community pride and identity.

When a tree dies or is damaged by a selfish act of vandalism it affects the community in many ways including the loss of amenity of the street or park and the expense of removing the vandalised tree and replacing it with an advanced tree.

This policy has been prepared in response to a history of attacks on trees in Waverley.

## **2. Purpose of this policy**

To reduce vandalism of trees by:

- Ensuring appropriate action is taken in response to instances of vandalism of trees
- Involving the community in our response through notification and raising awareness of the problem.

## **3. Scope of this policy**

This policy applies to all trees covered by Council's Tree Preservation Order on public and private land within the Waverley area.

## **4. Background of this policy**

The recently adopted Tree Management Plan highlighted the importance of trees in the local community. One of the major outcomes from a series of meetings and forums was the growing concern of instances of tree vandalism and the subsequent need for Council to adopt a clear policy of response to deter attacks on trees.

Discussion and consultation was held with seven councils in NSW and Queensland over their methods to deter tree vandalism. Each of their responses was assessed and some have been used in the preparation of this policy.

## **5. Policy objectives**

The main objectives of this policy are:

1. To reduce the incidence of tree vandalism
2. To notify and seek the co-operation of the community whenever there are wilful attacks on trees
3. To define our procedures in response to instances of tree vandalism
4. To educate and increase public awareness of the importance of trees

## **6. Policy statement**

Council is committed to the preservation of our public trees and to increasing the urban tree canopy cover in Waverley. We are determined to deter attacks on our trees by:

- Investigating all reports of vandalism of trees
- Assessing and attempting to repair damage to vandalised trees on public land
- Gathering evidence and witness statements and where possible prosecute for breaches
- Notifying residents and the public of what has occurred and ask for their co-operation
- Erecting 'shaming' signage on trees on public land and where necessary shrouding to block an illegally obtained view
- Notifying and publicising serious breaches in the local papers and media
- Replacing severely damaged trees with advanced trees and erecting tree guards and signs for added protection
- Encouraging residents to take pride in the trees in their street and to report any suspicious activities near trees

## **7. Notification of residents and community**

If it is confirmed that vandalism or unauthorised work on a tree has occurred, adjacent residents will be notified in writing and encouraged to contact Council with any information. They will be advised on Council's course of action and asked for assistance. Contact numbers for Council staff and rangers will be included in the letter.

If the tree is large or prominent and badly damaged the local precinct committee and councillors will also be notified. Attacks on trees may also be highlighted in local community papers and Council publications.

## **8. What can the public do to help?**

Residents and the public will be encouraged to become involved by:

- Contacting Council or Council's rangers if they notice any unusual activity around trees; earlier notification provides a better chance of catching those responsible and being able to save a tree
- Volunteering to help nurture a tree back to health or 'adopt a tree' if the vandalised tree needs to be replaced
- Talking to their neighbours to encourage awareness of any tree vandalism

## 9. Response to vandalised trees on public land

### a) Remedial work

If the damage to a public tree is serious, remedial work will be carried out to lessen the stress on the tree and to minimise any potential injury to the public. This work could involve some or all of the following treatments:

- Drenching the surrounding soil with water, using sand bags as a moat to contain large volumes of water;
- Covering exposed branches with shade cloth to minimise sunburn;
- Repairing damaged branches/bark;
- Plugging of drill holes and/or
- Branch pruning/thinning to lessen the danger of damaged/dying branches.

For smaller trees, ie under 3 metres in height, the tree will either be replaced with a similar sized tree or have the damage repaired.

Where possible, a temporary fence with barrier webbing will be erected.

### b) Signage and shrouding

In addition to the initial notification letter, a sign will be attached to the tree or barrier fence. This sign will inform the public of the vandalism of the tree with Council contact numbers displayed if anyone has information regarding the attack.

If the damage is significant and will affect the health and appearance of the tree a large 'shaming' sign of a minimum size of 2400mm x 1800mm will be affixed to the tree or an adjacent post. This sign will have further information and contact numbers for reporting information.



***Vandalism sign erected on a Ficus tree in Ewell St Waverley***

Larger signs will be erected if more than one tree has been damaged.

Shrouding or the erection of a large sail structure will be recommended where practicable and where the attack has been to improve a view or outlook.

A shaming sign or shroud should be on display for a minimum of 12 months subject to any decision or review by Council.



**An 8 metre wide banner erected by Mosman Council on Balmoral foreshore**



**Shroud and banner erected at Grant Reserve Coogee by Randwick Council (Note the air vents to reduce wind impact. The structure is 6 metres in height and the shroud is attached with stainless steel buckles and wire to 100mm galvanised steel posts.)**

**c) Replacement of vandalised trees**

- If removal of a vandalised tree becomes necessary an advanced tree will be planted as close as possible to the site of the original tree. Where possible, if there is sufficient space, two replacement trees will be planted for every damaged tree. The siting of replacement trees will be governed by the same criteria for planting new trees. These include location of underground services, sightline difficulties, proximity to built structures and remaining tree roots that may inhibit planting space.
- Tree replacement will be in accordance with Council's Tree Management Plan and Street Tree Masterplan
- Replacement trees will be planted in the months between April and September. The trees will be a minimum of a 45 litre pot size for damaged trees over 4 metres in height. For trees of significant size or in prominent locations, larger tree specimens will be planted.

**d) Protection of replacement trees**

- Additional protective measures will include installing solid tree guards and/or attaching high density shade cloth to tree stakes.
- A 12-month to two year maintenance and after-care program will be assigned for each tree.
- A sign similar to the one below will be placed alongside the replacement tree detailing the reasons why the new tree was planted and encouraging residents to contact Council if they become aware of any further attacks.



***Tree sign placed adjacent to a replacement tree in King Street Bondi***

## **10. Response to vandalised trees on private land**

Council will investigate any reports of damage to trees covered by Council's Tree Preservation Order on private property. A letter requesting information regarding the offence will be circulated to adjacent residents.

If sufficient evidence is received, prosecution will be considered. Actions that could follow include:

- a warning letter;
- a recommendation for prosecution;
- an order to replant replacement trees of advanced size; or
- both prosecution and replacement of trees.

Signage or the shrouding of a tree on private land is a prerogative of the owners; however, Council can assist with advice.

If the damage or vandalism has occurred on a development site in breach of current development conditions the following penalties are recommended:

- fines or loss of bond;
- remedial tree work and/or advanced replacement planting; or
- both of the above

## **11. Policy review date**

This policy should be reviewed every two years from the date of adoption or at any such time that there are changes to any relevant legislation or policy of the Council.

## **12. Definitions**

*Tree vandalism* is the unauthorised work or damage to any native or exotic tree covered by Council's Tree Preservation Order, on public or private land.

The *Tree Preservation Order (TPO)* is an order made by Council in Clause 39 of the Waverley Local Environment Plan 1996 and backed by state legislation (Clause 8 of the Environment Planning and Assessment Model Provisions 1980) is designed to protect trees from unregulated pruning, lopping or removal.

*Shrouding* is the erection of a large sail structure in a tree or attached to upright posts or adjacent trees. Its purpose is to provide a temporary visual barrier to replace the effect of a vandalised tree.

## **13. Related documents**

Waverley Tree Management Plan (adopted October 2006)