



Local government plant trial

A local council is trialling different vegetation for public open spaces to help adapt to drier conditions thanks to management options identified in a climate change strategy for the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority region.

The strategy

The West Gippsland Regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) Climate Change Strategy was developed by the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) with partner organisations to help better understand and prepare for the impacts of climate change on the natural environment.

The strategy was funded by the Australian Government and identifies climate change adaption and mitigation management options to protect vegetation in the local region.

These options include building connectivity between patches of remnant vegetation; removing or minimising existing stressors; and adjusting species mixes for revegetation activities to suit changed conditions (e.g. drier, hotter).

Some of these options are now being trialled in a project being run by Wellington Shire Council.

People value open spaces

Local government provides a significant number of services to the community including providing public open space on council managed land. This space is used for health, recreation and leisure activities and also provides the opportunity for people living in built up areas to connect with nature.

Wellington Shire Council recognises that public open space is essential for healthy communities. It wants to ensure that the parks, gardens and reserves are functional, easily maintained and aesthetically pleasing.

The challenge

The latest climate projections from the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO indicate the WGCMA region will be subject to a warmer, drier and more variable climate in the future. Climate change will not only have an impact on plants located in natural environments but in urban areas as well.

Wellington Shire Council wants to ensure that the plants used in their urban landscapes reflect current and future environmental conditions. The plants need to be appropriate, functional and resilient.

The range of plant species suitable for urban landscapes is currently limited. This is a problem for a changing climate for two reasons.

1. Some of the tree species chosen today are expected to live for many decades, and the species selection will need to be resilient for current and future climatic conditions.
2. If a specific plant species for a public landscape fails then the outcome is poor both from a social and financial perspective.



The solution

Wellington Shire Council has developed an ongoing plant trial to determine suitable species for widespread planting in their urban landscapes. This will diversify the current limited range of species that can be used into the future.

The trial has two plant beds – one irrigated (three plants of same species) and one non-irrigated (three plants of same species) and currently 22 different plant species.

Every month each plant species is photographed, measured, and assessed for health and vigour, and the results recorded on a database. There is a regular update on progress of the plant trial to staff who are encouraged to recommend new plants for inclusion in the plant trial on an ongoing basis.

Current plants in the trial will remain on site for 12 months and then will be reviewed to determine:

- if the plant needs longer time to assess performance
- if the plant has been deemed suitable for inclusion in public landscapes into the future,
- or if the plant has been deemed unsuitable.

Plants in the trial that are deemed suitable, resilient and functional may be used in widespread urban landscape plantings throughout the Wellington Shire Council municipality.



Irrigated plant bed



Non-irrigated plant bed