

ITEM NO.

FILE NO: #

## REGIONAL TREE VANDALISM POLICY

REPORT OF: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES MANAGER

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### RECOMMENDATION IS THAT COUNCIL:

- 1) Resolve to place the Draft Regional Tree Vandalism Policy on Public Exhibition for a period of 28 days.
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### BACKGROUND

**The purpose of this report is seek Council's support to allow the regional tree vandalism policy to go on public exhibition for 28 days in order to facilitate a more consistent and strategic approach to dealing with tree vandalism.**

This policy has been developed by a regional working group facilitated by Hunter Councils in light of increasing tree/vegetation vandalism being experienced by councils across the region. This is particularly apparent in the coastal zone where development pressure and conflicts between water views and vegetation has seen an increase in the vandalism of trees and vegetation on public land under the care, control and management of councils.

There are many reasons that motivate vandalism of trees and vegetation. Some acts are random and without purpose, while others occur through ignorance or are motivated by personal self-interest or gain (eg increased property values, better access to the waterfront, or unimpeded views). Where possible, the response to acts of vandalism should be adapted to suit the perceived motivation.

The physical nature of tree and vegetation vandalism can occur in a variety of forms, including poisoning, pruning, removal and destruction, and mowing of native understorey. This kind of vandalism has a significant and cumulative impact on the environment. Particular impacts include reduced visual and community amenity, loss of environmental services such as wind-breaks and erosion control, and loss of wildlife habitat.

Such vandalism can have substantial financial and human resource costs for councils. These include the direct loss of the asset value of the trees or vegetation, the cost of the investigation, rehabilitation and repair costs, and the cost of implementing potential punitive / deterrence measures.

The clandestine nature of tree/vegetation vandalism on public land frequently makes the identification of perpetrators difficult. Even where it is possible to identify the most likely offender, it can be difficult to collect sufficient evidence to prove responsibility. This is frequently exacerbated by a general unwillingness among the community to provide testimony, even where an offence may have been witnessed.

Recognition of the common tree/vegetation vandalism issues being experienced by councils has resulted in the HCCREMS Steering Committee resolving to prepare a regional policy. This approach, supported by increased sharing of resources and expertise between councils,

will provide a greater level of organisational capacity and commitment to address this issue consistently throughout the region.

## **LINKS TO CORPORATE PLANS**

The links to the 2007-2011 Council Plan are:-

**SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY** – *Council will preserve and strengthen the fabric of the community, building on community strengths.*

**CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY** – *Council will assist to inspire a sense of pride and place as well as enhancing quality of life and defining local identity.*

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY** – *Council will protect and enhance the environment while considering the social and economic ramifications of decisions.*

**BUSINESS EXCELLENCE** – *Council will use the Business Excellence Framework to innovate and demonstrate continuous improvement leading to long-term sustainability across operational and governance areas in a Business Excellence Journey*

## **FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

The policy details the resources needed to implement this policy and includes such things as educational materials, signage, databases, rehabilitation plans and trained staff. Although this may seem extensive initial piloting of the policies principles has shown that by having a consistent and planned approach less time and resources are used when responding to individual events. This is a result of staff being trained in the approach and having a clear direction and parameters in which to undertake their duties along with an approved set of tools.

As this is a regional approach there will also be the opportunity for Councils to share resources.

## **LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

There is suite of legislation that applies to tree vandalism, these have been included as a table in attachment 2 of the policy.

### **Business Excellence Framework**

Port Stephens Council is a quality driven organisation. We use the Business Excellence Framework as a basis for driving organisational excellence. The Framework is an integrated leadership and management system that describes elements essential to organisational excellence. It is based on eight (8) principles.

These outcomes align with the following Business Excellence principles:-

- 1) **LEADERSHIP** – *Lead by example, provide clear direction, build organisational alignment and focus on sustainable achievement of goals.*

- 2) **CUSTOMERS** – *Understand what makes markets and customers value, now and into the future, and use this to drive organisational design, strategy, products and services.*
- 3) **SYSTEMS THINKING** – *Continuously improve the system.*
- 4) **PEOPLE** – *Develop and value people's capability and release their skills, resourcefulness and creativity to change and improve the organisation.*
- 5) **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT** – *Develop agility, adaptability and responsiveness based on a cultural of continual improvement, innovation and learning.*
- 6) **INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE** – *Improve performance through the use of data, information and knowledge to understand variability and to improve strategic and operational decision making.*
- 7) **CORPORATE AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY** – *Behave in an ethically, socially and environmentally responsible manner.*
- 8) **SUSTAINABLE RESULTS** – *Focus on sustainable results, value and outcomes.*

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

### **SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The community has an expectation that Council respond to tree vandalism incidences and the majority of the community is supportive of Council taking a strong consistent approach.

Tree vandalism on public land also means the loss of a valuable community asset that in most cases is worth several thousands of dollars. Most noted are the reduced visual and community amenity of an area, leafy areas are usually seen as more established and generally have a higher real estate value.

### **ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

Having a consistent and strategic approach to tree vandalism will be more cost effective in the long term than creating new approaches to each new event. Replacing mature trees can be costly, it is hoped that by having a consistent approach to tree vandalism that incidences will decrease resulting in reduced budget expenditure.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

In many cases tree vandalism occurs on coastal areas that are already under threat of being over loved and are very fragile. The loss of any vegetation along foreshores is usually followed by severe erosion which in turn creates further environmental and asset management issues. Coastal vegetation also acts as important wind-breaks and valuable wildlife corridors. In addition to decreasing the incidences of environmental damage this policy will assist council to remediate after tree vandalism events and restore environmental values.

## **CONSULTATION**

It is proposed to put the plan on exhibition for 28 days after which all submissions will be analysed and the policy modified if required.

Discussions will be held with the Community Engagement Panel to devise a consultation plan to ensure adequate community consultation.

The issue has also been debated on the 'Bang the Table' website under the heading of the Foreshore Management Plan. This has shown an overwhelming majority of the community (near 90%) are supportive of Council taking a proactive stand against tree vandalism.

After consultation has been undertaken and the policy has been modified it will come back to Council for adoption. The report will also include a summary of the submissions and details on how the policy has been amended.

## **OPTIONS**

- 1) Adopt, reject or amend the recommendation

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- 1) Regional Tree and Vandalism Policy

## **COUNCILLORS ROOM**

- 1) Nil

## **TABLED DOCUMENTS**

Nil