



## Council Policy

### NATURE STRIP PLANTING POLICY

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to create a framework for residents to plant nature strips adjoining properties in city and township areas within Colac Otway Shire and enable and empower them to contribute to urban greening, urban biodiversity and climate resilience. This is in recognition of the environmental, social and amenity values of nature strips and the benefits of diverse nature strip plantings that replace the traditional exotic lawn treatment. This policy also affirms Council's commitment to best practice management of land under its authority and commitment to environmental sustainability.

#### SCOPE

This policy applies to nature strips within the road reserve in city and township boundaries of Colac Otway Shire where Council is the managing authority. This policy must be read in conjunction with the requirements applying to a particular use or activity under Colac Otway Shire Local Law no. 1 – General Local Law 2023.

This policy does not apply to, nor does it permit works to be carried out in:

- Nature strips outside township boundaries (e.g. on arterial roads, including high-capacity roads or main roads, and roadsides in rural areas)
- Areas covered by a heritage planning overlay;
- The median or other areas of the road reserve;
- Nature strips containing existing native vegetation; and
- Areas in which, because of the local conditions (e.g. terrain), it is not safe or feasible to modify the nature strip.

Council acknowledges that in some instances it may not be possible for the policy objectives and associated guidelines to be implemented due to factors such as specific streetscaping or nature strips incorporating principles of water sensitive urban design that are required to be maintained in accordance with the design intent (e.g. rain gardens).

#### DEFINITIONS

**Biodiversity** - The variety of all life forms: the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form. It is a concept that emphasises the inter-relatedness of the biological world. It is often considered at three levels: genetic diversity, species diversity and ecosystem diversity.

**Environmental sustainability** - Acting in a way that ensures future generations have the natural resources available to live an equal, if not better, way of life as current generations.

**Nature strip** - The nature strip is the area of public land between the property boundary and the road kerb. It does not include the footpath, kerb or driveway.

**Street tree** - Trees situated within, or selected and planted by Council within, the road reserve. Street trees are under the management of Council.



**Water Sensitive Urban Design** - A land planning approach based on scientific analysis and engineering design which integrates the urban water cycle (including the management of stormwater, groundwater, wastewater and drinking (potable) water supply into urban design to minimise environmental degradation and improve aesthetic and recreational appeal.

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## REFERENCES

- Colac Otway Shire Local Law no. 1 – General Local Law 2023
- Colac Otway Shire Council Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2023-2033
- Colac Otway Shire Council Climate Change Action Plan
- Colac Otway Shire Council Climate Adaptation Plan 2017-2027

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## STATEMENT OF POLICY

Council is committed to demonstrating environmental and socially beneficial best practice, and is highly supportive of appropriate nature strip planting that adheres to the requirements of this policy and its associated guidelines. The policy and guidelines are an instrument to facilitate the safe, consistent and orderly greening of nature strips that balances positive biodiversity outcomes with other important functions of the road reserve (e.g. pedestrian and road safety, accessibility and asset protection).

### POLICY PRINCIPLES

The following policy principles are endorsed by Council:

- Nature strips relevant to this policy are Council-managed public space that contribute to a sense of place and community;
- It is essential that nature strips are safe and accessible spaces;
- Nature strips contribute to a healthy environment for people, plants and animals;
- Nature strips play an active role in supporting Council's response to climate change, including the minimisation of risk to community and infrastructure.
- Nature strips perform a role in housing essential services to the community, including water mains, gas and power.

### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Nature Strip Planting Policy are:

- To provide a framework for implementation of Council's Nature Strip Planting Guidelines;
- To provide clear process and direction to the community on what can and cannot be planted in nature strips;
- To support improvement measures and targets identified in Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2023-2033 and Climate Change Action Plan;
- To demonstrate Council's commitment to establishing, promoting and maintaining a culture of sustainability and environmental responsibility;
- To protect and enhance the amenity and aesthetic values of streetscapes within Colac Otway Shire;
- To foster the protection and enhancement of the environment, biodiversity, the conservation of water resources, and to contribute to reducing our greenhouse footprint; and
- To raise awareness of environmental sustainability and increase community participation.



## **OUTCOMES**

The expected outcomes of the implementation of the associated guidelines under this policy are:

- An empowered community actively contributing to urban greening and climate resilience;
- Increased biodiversity in streets within city and township boundaries in Colac Otway Shire;
- Improved amenity and aesthetic character of streets;
- Safe, consistent and orderly greening of nature strips that balances positive biodiversity outcomes with other important functions of the road reserve; and
- Increased community participation, collaboration and understanding of environmental practice.

## **NATURE STRIP GUIDELINES**

Council has developed this policy as an instrument to implement the Colac Otway Shire Nature Strip Guidelines. The guidelines will give practical effect to these policy principles and Colac Otway Shire Local Law no. 1 – General Local Law 2023.

The guidelines provide clear guidance for property owners and residents by outlining what landscaping works may be undertaken and what acceptable standard treatments may be applied to nature strips within the shire.

If a property owner wishes to undertake works on a nature strip that varies from the acceptable standard works and/or treatments outlined within the guidelines, a permit under the Local Law will need to be obtained. As part of this permit application process, officers will need to individually assess any proposed works against the guidelines, these policy principles and any other requirements of Council.

## **STREET TREES**

Planting and maintaining street trees is solely the responsibility of Council. Property owners or residents are not permitted to remove or prune existing trees or plant new trees. Property owners and residents are not permitted to undertake any form of alteration to street trees, including boxing around the tree base or placing a planter box, as this can have a detrimental effect on the health of the tree.

## **NATURE STRIP MAINTENANCE**

Council does not carry out maintenance or renovation of modified nature strips. Property owners and residents who undertake nature strip planting must maintain the nature strip abutting their property. This includes regular weeding, edging, removal of potential trip hazards, and litter collection to the standards specified in the associated guidelines.

## **ESSENTIAL SERVICES WITH NATURE STRIPS**

Council and service authorities that supply gas, water, electricity and telecommunications may require access to nature strips to undertake maintenance work. These service authorities are required to reinstate the nature strip following maintenance work, but are not required to reinstate nature strips that have been modified or landscaped in any treatment other than grass. Land owners and residents must consider possible impact of works by service authorities when planning nature strip landscaping works, as outlined in the associated guidelines.

## **RISK**

Property owners and residents are responsible for the cost of maintaining and carrying out works in nature strips, including all materials, labour, watering and any incidental damage to public infrastructure. Property owners and



residents entering the nature strip to carry out maintenance and other works must take reasonable care for their own safety and for the safety of other persons in the immediate vicinity.

When planning works, property owners and residents must check the location of underground services using “Before You Dig” and Council should be notified of any hazards in the nature strip.

**CHANGE OF PROPERTY OWNERSHIP**

In the event that the nature strip adjoining a property changes ownership, it is the responsibility of the previous property owner to share and communicate the requirements of the nature strip garden guidelines to the new owner. It then becomes the new landowner’s responsibility to maintain the nature strip in line with the guidelines.

The owners have two options:

- The new owner takes on the nature strip garden as part of the change of ownership; or
- The previous owner needs to remove the garden and reinstate the standard grassed nature strip.

If the property is rented, it becomes the responsibility of the tenant to maintain the nature strip. It is the landowner or rental agent’s responsibility to communicate this to the tenants.

**RESPONSIBILITIES**

These management positions are responsible for the implementation, communication and compliance monitoring of the policy in their work areas:

Party / Parties	Roles and Responsibilities
Chief Executive	Ensure overall corporate compliance with the policy.
Manager Assets & Engineering	Overall responsibility for the policy implementation.
Managers	Ensure compliance with the policy by all Council Officers under their supervision.
Coordinator Local Laws	Compliance with guidelines and the issuing of permits.
Coordinator Environment	Responsible for reviewing, updating and implementing policy and associated guidelines.

**POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

All Council staff are required to consider environment, economic and social outcomes and impacts in their work. It is the responsibility of all Councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers to understand the objectives outlined in this policy and to assist community members with their implementation of the associated guidelines.

**RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- Colac Otway Shire Local Law no. 1 – General Local Law 2023
- Colac Otway Shire Council Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2023-2033
- Colac Otway Shire Council Climate Change Action Plan
- Colac Otway Shire Council Climate Adaptation Plan 2017-2027



DOCUMENT CONTROL

Policy owner	Manager Assets & Engineering	Division	Executive
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