



## **SUBMISSION TO BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY COUNCIL**

## **BLUE MOUNTAINS WEEDS STRATEGY 2025-2030**

**NOVEMBER 2025**

### **Who we are**

The Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group is an environmental conservation planning and advocacy body consisting of local residents and Bushcare volunteers who take an interest in the natural areas of Leura Falls Creek catchment. Bushcare groups currently active within the catchment are:

- Banksia Park Bushcare Group
- Leura Park/Cascades Bushcare Group
- Vale Street Bushcare Group
- Govett Street Bushcare Group
- Gordon Falls Bushcare Group
- Everglades Bushcare Group
- Everglades Landcare Group
- Sublime Point Bushcare Group
- Prince Henry Cliff Walk Bushcare Group (NPWS)
- Gun Gun Bushcare Group (NPWS)

The Catchment Group works closely with Blue Mountains City Council, and with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, who participate in all our meetings. Our meetings give us the opportunity for regular engagement and dialogue with staff from different areas of council, and external agencies, about issues relating to weed control and management.

### **Introduction and overview of submission**

The Catchment Group commends council for its continued commitment to weed management in the Blue Mountains, and for this updated draft Weed Management Strategy. The draft strategy does an excellent job in setting out the national and state legal and policy frameworks, and how council responsibilities and activities relate to these.

In this brief submission, we will make a number of suggestions for changes to the broad strategy, and a couple of more detailed suggestions in relation to Bushcare, catchment groups, and the community engagement aspects of the Action Plan.

### **Blue Mountains Strategic Weed Management Working Group**

We strongly support establishment of the proposed Blue Mountains Strategic Weed Management Working Group (3.1 of the Action Plan), on condition that it includes community representation, and that it meets at least quarterly rather than annually. Meetings that only happen annually tend to be largely symbolic; if it is to be a real “working” group, it needs to meet more often to deal with issues as they arise, and to follow up on implementation of agreed actions. Catchment groups have

demonstrated over time that they are natural allies of council on these issues. We believe that community representation – through catchment groups – will support and bolster council’s key role as Local Control Authority on this proposed working group.

### **Transport corridors**

The ongoing serious weed problems along the highway and railway line demonstrate that new approaches are needed. Our Weed Hotspot reports have consistently highlighted the serious weed infestations along the highway and rail corridor through the Leura Falls Creek catchment, and these issues have been on the agendas of all our meetings. These will be key issues which may be better addressed through the proposed Strategic Weeds Management Working Group.

### **Local Priority Weeds**

The issue of New Zealand Flax has appeared on our Catchment Group’s agenda for a number of recent meetings without clear resolution. This has highlighted the lack of clarity about the criteria and process for listing local priority weeds. This is another issue where the Working Group might help to provide some direction.

### **Resourcing**

As part of the strategy, council should commit to maintaining – and where possible increasing - the real levels of funding and resourcing to weed management.

### **Bushcare and community engagement**

The performance measures for the Bushcare and community engagement aspects of the Action Plan are notably lacking in ambition.

For example (at 4.1(b)):

- one performance measure is that “64 Bushcare/Landcare groups are supported in monthly workdays” [The current number of Bushcare/Landcare groups is 64]
- The performance measure for Bushcare/Landcare volunteers is >600 [the current number is 627]
- The performance measure for Bush Backyards members is >50 [the current number is 83].

Likewise, the targets of one annual weed-related “Connect to Nature” event, and one annual event/workshop engaging the community, are too low.

It is suggested that much higher targets can be achieved in all these areas – even within existing budgets – by more innovative and effective deployment of council staff, in particular Bushcare Officers. Council’s longstanding staffing model is that each Bushcare Group is assigned one Bushcare Officer who attends every meeting of every group, transporting tools and supplies, providing orientation and training to new members, and ongoing technical guidance. However many – probably most – Bushcare Groups do not need the physical presence of a Bushcare Officer every month. As can be seen at every Bushcare Picnic, many volunteers are very experienced, have been working on the sites for many years, and are intimately familiar with the issues and priorities for their sites. It is suggested that Bushcare Officers focus on planning, monitoring, technical support and training of new volunteers, rather than spending their time labouring alongside the volunteers every month. For most groups, it would only be necessary for Bushcare Officers to be physically present three or four times a year. Many of the members of the Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group participate in Gun Gun Bushcare, which has operated on this model quite successfully since its inception.

Working in this way would free up staff time to work on other priorities, for example facilitating establishment of new groups in under-served areas, actively recruiting and training new volunteers, providing weed education and community outreach, and supporting the necessary growth of the Bush Backyards program and resident weed support. Targets can be much more ambitious.

## **Catchment Groups**

At page 54 of the draft strategy, there is some discussion of the role and value of Catchment Groups. However there is no mention of the fact that there are only three catchment groups currently active in the Blue Mountains, and that the majority of catchments do not have a catchment group. It is stated that “volunteers are encouraged to adopt a ... landscape-scale focus by working together in catchment or landscape groups.” This is expressed in the passive voice, so it is not spelled out who is doing the encouraging! Neither here nor in the Action Plan is any responsibility allocated for this, nor is there any performance measure related to it.

It might be imagined that a council staffer could be given the responsibility for actively encouraging and facilitating new catchment groups, but this raises a philosophical question: is this an appropriate role for council, or is it more appropriate to respond to community activism that arises organically from the volunteer community? This doesn't need to be included in the text of the strategy document, but this is a fertile question for discussion between council and the existing catchment groups, as well as in the proposed Blue Mountains Strategic Weed Management Working Group.

We are very happy to see the proposed performance measure (at 4.3): “Respond to Community Catchment Group Weed Hotspot Reports”. As discussed in our catchment group meetings, it will be most important for us to get feedback about the format and types of information included in our Weed Hotspot Reports, to improve compatibility with council management systems and to maximise practical usefulness to council.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input in relation to this important strategy. Members of the Catchment Group will of course be very happy to discuss any of these issues and suggestions with you or members of your team.

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