

Fenner Conference on the Environment



Urban Sustainability and Conservation

Wednesday 4 – Friday 6 April 2018  
The Shine Dome, Canberra ACT

## Conference Statement

3 May 2018

***Inclusive conversations involving multiple perspectives are critical for finding meaningful and lasting ways of achieving urban sustainability and conservation. This conference was the start of such a conversation. Our task now is to use inclusive conversations to deliver collaborative concrete actions that create more sustainable, biodiverse cities. This statement summarises the conference findings and calls for a shift in Business as Usual.***

The Fenner Conference on the Environment: Urban Sustainability and Conservation was held on 4-6 April at the Shine Dome, Canberra ACT. The conference brought together participants with a range of perspectives, skills, experience, knowledge and backgrounds to discuss how we can improve the way we create and manage Australia's urban landscapes. Over a period of three days, we used three key challenges facing cities to create conversations around the limitations to current practice, to identify the barriers and opportunities for stronger links between research and implementation, and to assess how we can capture the value and opportunities generated by a greater diversity of voices in the urban realm.

### Our challenges:

#### **Biodiversity Conservation in Cities**

The importance of conserving biodiversity in cities is gaining recognition around the world, and there is growing evidence to support and inform our actions in this space. The current challenges are 1) to ensure that different knowledges and perspectives are brought together to create better ways of sharing our urban landscapes with other species and 2) that these respectful collaborations lead to changes in practice that have tangible and lasting benefits for urban biodiversity.

#### **Attaining Urban Sustainability**

Sustainable urban development that can support our growing human population without compromising the livelihood of future generations is a global challenge which also plays out in cities and towns throughout Australia. How can we bring a new approach to urban development that shifts the emphasis from damage to care? The ideas, curiosity, resources and drive needed for innovation are all present. The challenge is to overcome the limitations of our current system with its emphasis on protecting boundaries (legal, commercial, proprietary, disciplinary) towards an approach where there is a stronger emphasis on collaborative relationships, particularly those which can begin to work through all three levels of government (local, state and federal). In regard to this last point, the City Deals initiative provides a fertile testing ground for new approaches to collaborative governance.

---

The Fenner Conference on the Environment: Urban Sustainability and Conservation was sponsored by:



This statement was produced by the conference delegates and does not necessarily represent the views or endorsement of the sponsors.

## Mitigating Urban Impacts

While we have a strong evidence base to support action for both urban sustainability and biodiversity conservation in cities, there are some urban impacts that are just beginning to be identified and understood. Examples include the increasing disconnection of people from nature, changes to the ecology of diseases in urban environments, and the potential for increasing human-wildlife conflict. The impacts of anthropogenic pollutants such as heat, noise, light, nanoparticles and micro-plastics, and a lack of environmental justice in cities. Countering these urgent problems will require both significant investment and collaboration; we must seize the opportunity to bring research and implementation together to learn through practical actions, rather than seeing this as a two-stage approach.

### Moving forward:

Today we are standing at a cross-road. If we proceed with Business as Usual, we will continue to lose species, erode human connections to nature, and compromise our access to future resources as well as the health of future populations. Finding alternatives requires broad, robust conversations that bring together multiple perspectives (e.g. Indigenous, ecological, design, engineering, management and artistic perspectives). While some solutions to the challenges of urban sustainability, conservation and emerging urban impacts are likely to be place-based and context dependent, others will have broader applicability across cities and national boundaries. Therefore, we need to change the emphasis from a policy response, towards implementing more responsive policies that allow for effective solutions.

How do we ensure these multi-perspective conversations are meaningful and effective? Over the course of the conference we held a series of workshops that explored how voices from different disciplines, knowledges and experiences can be brought together to work towards a common goal. The key lessons for progress we captured were:

**Generosity** - Kate Auty encouraged us to be generous with our knowledge and experience, by being willing to share even with people who may not be willing to share in return.

**Boundaries** - Jirra Harvey and Cathy Oke gave a timely reminder of how boundaries can cause painful legacies – and the loss of valuable knowledge – when they exclude certain people or voices. We need be cognizant of any intentional or unconscious boundaries that may hinder collaborations in the urban realm. When they are encountered, there is an opportunity to question why they are there and look for ways to overcome them.

**Innovation 3.0** - Lars Coenen emphasised that Innovation 3.0 is motivated by purposes beyond research commercialisation and translation, economic growth and competition. It includes a stronger emphasis on process and collaboration and works best in environments where the conversations focus on trust and relationships, rather than legal definitions of proprietary knowledge or jurisdictional boundaries. For this reason, a shift in focus to open conversations and responsive policies becomes even more important.

**Time & Connections** - Fostering effective conversations that include multiple perspectives requires prioritising time and connections. Different sectors work to different time lines, and these need to be navigated to find where the opportunities are to turn this potential negative into something that adds value to the conversation. Connections between people are essential for establishing trust, so setting aside time to focus on nurturing connections will be critical for ensuring timely responses to future opportunities when they emerge.

**Language** - Conversations that involve multiple voices may use the same words, but bring a different understanding of their meaning. Beginning collaborations by discussing the meaning behind key terms can help to reduce potential miscommunication later. The use of specialist terms can also be a barrier to communication, so we need to take care to frame our communication using the language that is appropriate for that audience.

---

The Fenner Conference on the Environment: Urban Sustainability and Conservation was sponsored by:



This statement was produced by the conference delegates and does not necessarily represent the views or endorsement of the sponsors.

**Case Studies** - In exploring place-based solutions and sharing lessons learnt, case studies are a critical and valuable resource. We need to find and share case studies more effectively, and online knowledge hubs have been identified as a productive home for this information. Case studies not only capture what was done and the lessons learned, they also help to provide a source of inspiration for others who may try or adapt an idea, and also to remind ourselves of what we have achieved – this can be particularly important when we are feeling gloomy or overwhelmed by the scale of the task.

**Reciprocity** - The best relationships are based on a foundation of give and take. We need to start any new conversation with a willingness to listen as well as share, and any new relationship with a willingness to explore what we can offer as well as what we might be requesting.

### Next steps:

During the conference several avenues were identified which could help promote the crossing of disciplinary boundaries and effective practical actions for urban sustainability and conservation. The conference participants identified the following as particular priorities for the future.

1. Collaboration is essential to Innovation 3.0, but it is not rewarded in our current systems. Wherever possible, we need to push to change the incentives and rewards so that they also recognise collaborative approaches and real-world impact.
2. While there are deep and extensive knowledges held within individuals, disciplines and sectors, the means for identifying and connecting these different knowledge sources can present a real challenge. Knowledge-brokers play a valuable role in acting as both a starting point for a new conversation, as well as actively creating conversations that bring together many different voices. Investment in more knowledge-exchange specialist positions will be increasingly important if we are to develop new pathways for moving forward in a timely manner.
3. Connections and new collaborations can also emerge and be strengthened by more interactions in informal settings. Actions that help foster these inter-personal connections include social events around a theme (e.g., Green Drinks or discussion groups), and other ways of sharing information with a wider network of people (e.g., mailing lists). Currently there are many examples of such groups, but they don't always cross disciplinary or sector boundaries. To be most effective, we need to establish a means for strengthening the interactions between these outlets, without contributing to information overload.
4. Innovation and creative responses often develop more quickly when they are given a challenge to address. Addressing the ecological challenges of urbanisation involves new ways of thinking, and collaboration with professionals from non-ecological fields. Running an ideas or design competition offers an exciting opportunity to invite new voices to the conversation and opens a raft of new potential solutions for consideration.
5. Leadership is pivotal to creating change. However, leadership can take many forms and act within different spheres of influence. We need to recognise and support people who have been effective in enabling change and work to ensure they are given the opportunity to continue in leadership roles, especially when they use processes that are respectful and inclusive. We also need to invest in mentoring and developing leaders of the future to ensure that future generations have the skills and capacity to continue effective leadership for change.

The Fenner Conference on the Environment: Urban Sustainability and Conservation was the start of a conversation. To help facilitate future conversations we have also compiled many of the collective insights gained during the conference into a collection of resources that are available on our website: [www.fennerconference2018urban.com.au/](http://www.fennerconference2018urban.com.au/)

---

The Fenner Conference on the Environment: Urban Sustainability and Conservation was sponsored by:



This statement was produced by the conference delegates and does not necessarily represent the views or endorsement of the sponsors.

## Fenner Conference on the Environment: Urban Sustainability and Conservation | 4-6 April 2018 | Canberra ACT

The Fenner Conferences on the Environment are a series of annual conferences on the environment and conservation issues in Australia and its environs sponsored by the Australian Academy of Sciences through the generous support of the late Professor Frank Fenner FAA FRS and the late Mrs Bobbie Fenner. The purpose of these conferences is to bring together those with relevant scientific, administrative and policy expertise to consider current environmental and conservation problems in Australia, thereby contributing to the formation of policies that can alleviate some of these problems. You can read more about the Fenner Conference on the Environment: Urban Sustainability and Conservation at: [www.fennerconference2018urban.com.au/](http://www.fennerconference2018urban.com.au/)

---

The Fenner Conference on the Environment: Urban Sustainability and Conservation was sponsored by:



This statement was produced by the conference delegates and does not necessarily represent the views or endorsement of the sponsors.