

Melbourne Nature Network

Setting up the network

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Recommendations

Based on the responses to the survey detailed below (and conversations with interested people), we suggest the Network should be set up as follows:

- With a (draft) vision to ‘connect diverse professionals working with urban nature in Melbourne and beyond to improve biodiversity and connect people to nature [*or engage the community?*]
- The diverse roles and locations of participants provides a broad base for the network, which should be inclusive and not focus on a narrow subset of the professional urban nature world.
- The scope of the group will initially be on public landscapes, plants and people – with an open question about attracting more interest from professionals working on private landscapes, blue ecosystems and animals.
- The draft goals of the Network are to:
 - Connect people working with urban nature across institutional (e.g. policy, programs, design, maintenance, research/practice), cultural (traditional owners) and jurisdictional (e.g. LGAs, botanic gardens, public/private, levels of government) silos
 - Share current research and policy frameworks on the ecological and socio-cultural dimensions of urban nature with network members
 - Share experiences and outcomes (successes and failures) of urban nature projects, programs and policies (biodiversity, climate adaptation, connectivity, community engagement)
 - Support the professional development of network members by providing opportunities to learn and contribute to network activities
- Using the following loose structure:
 - Meet every 2-3 months (suggest May, July, September, November, late-January, March)
 - Alternate between:
 - a late-afternoon/evening event with discussions and a social event maybe Thursdays
 - an afternoon of site visits/presentations maybe Tuesdays

Background

The Urban Nature: Urban Myths symposium organised by the City of Melbourne and the University of Melbourne's Centre for Cities was held in May 2023. There was a huge turnout of practitioners from across Melbourne (and beyond) working across all aspects of the care of urban nature.

After the first day of the symposium, an informal networking event was held at Glamp Bar attended by over 60 people, with over 80 people expressing an interest in participating in a network of urban nature professionals.

Survey

After the symposium, an invitation to participate in a short survey was sent to those people who had expressed an interest in participating in a network to identify 1) the interests of participants in urban nature and 2) views on the operation of a network.

Participants were asked about their role in caring for nature, the location where they worked, the components of urban nature they worked with, the outcomes they sought from their work, the activities they were involved in, terminology they were comfortable using, activities they would like to see from the network, and schedule of meetings.

There were 30 responses to the survey (26 that were mostly complete).

Roles and locations

The majority of participants (Table 1) worked for local government, state government and agencies (botanic gardens, water authorities), development and consulting. The roles of participants spanned nature practitioners in biodiversity, horticulture and urban forestry, as well as projects and programs, research planning and environmental management. Participants were located across Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Table 1 – The industry, role and job location of respondents

INDUSTRY	#	ROLE	#	LOCATION	#
Local Government	12	Horticulture	5	Melbourne-Central	8
Development	3	Biodiversity	4	Melbourne-Greater	8
Education	3	Research	3	Melbourne-NorthWest	2
Botanic Gardens	2	Urban Forestry	2	Melbourne-SouthEast	2
Consulting	2	Projects and Programs	4	Vic-Regional	5
State Government	2	Environment	2		
Water	1	Planning	2		
		Other	7		

Professional interests

The components of urban nature that participants had a professional interest in (

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Figure 1) were also diverse spanning broad conceptions of urban nature (e.g. urban forests), social aspects (people/community) and a range of specific landscapes (conservation reserves, streetscapes, waterways, public gardens, etc). There was an emphasis on public landscapes and on plants rather than private/commercial landscapes and animals.

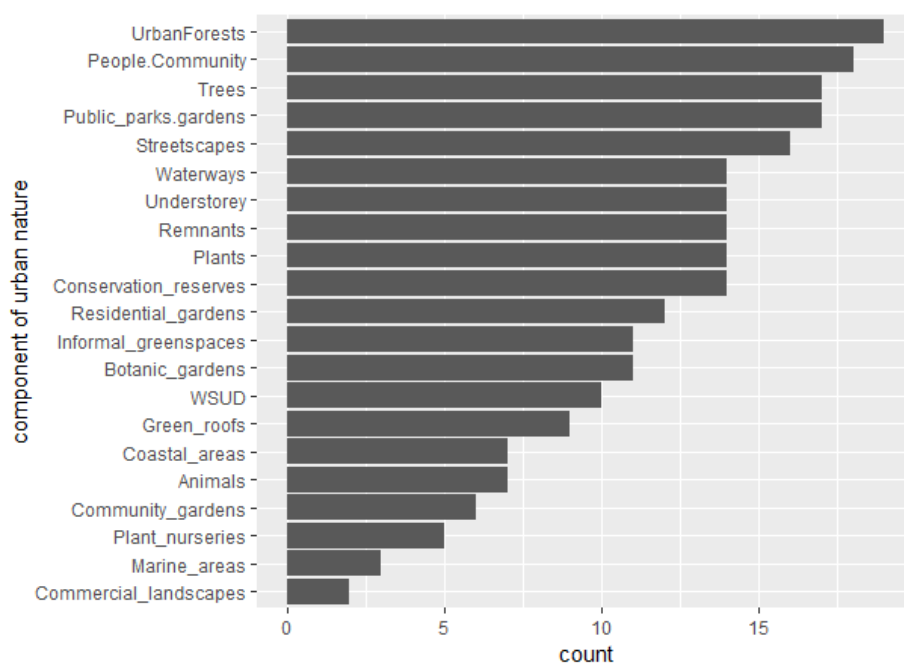


Figure 1 – Components of urban nature that respondents had a professional interest in

The outcomes sought by participants in their professional work involving urban nature (

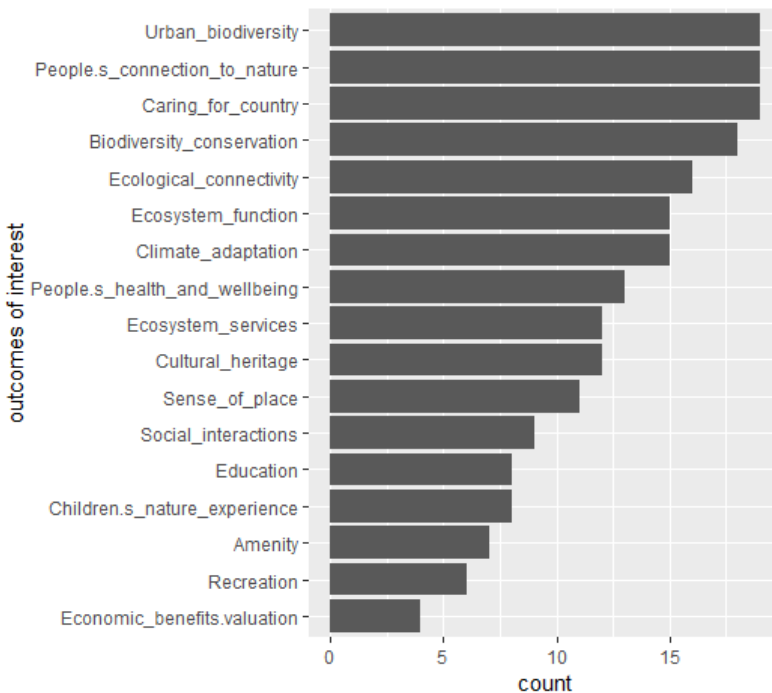


Figure 2) were overwhelmingly related to biodiversity and some social outcomes related to biodiversity (connection to nature, caring for country). Explicitly human-centred outcomes (health and wellbeing, ecosystem services, cultural heritage) were also moderately important. Traditional public open space outcomes (amenity, recreation) were not ranked highly by participants.

Figure 2 – Outcomes sought by respondents from their work on urban nature

Urban nature issues (

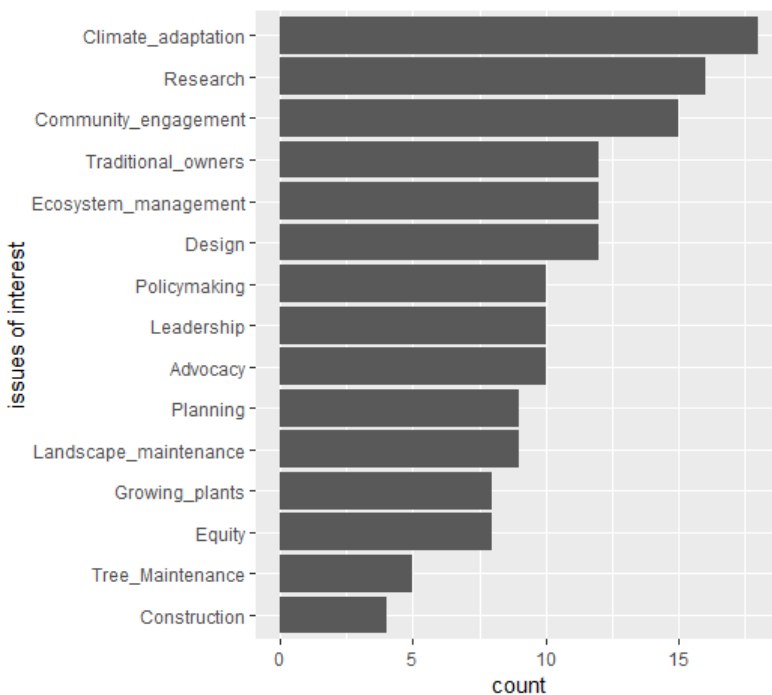
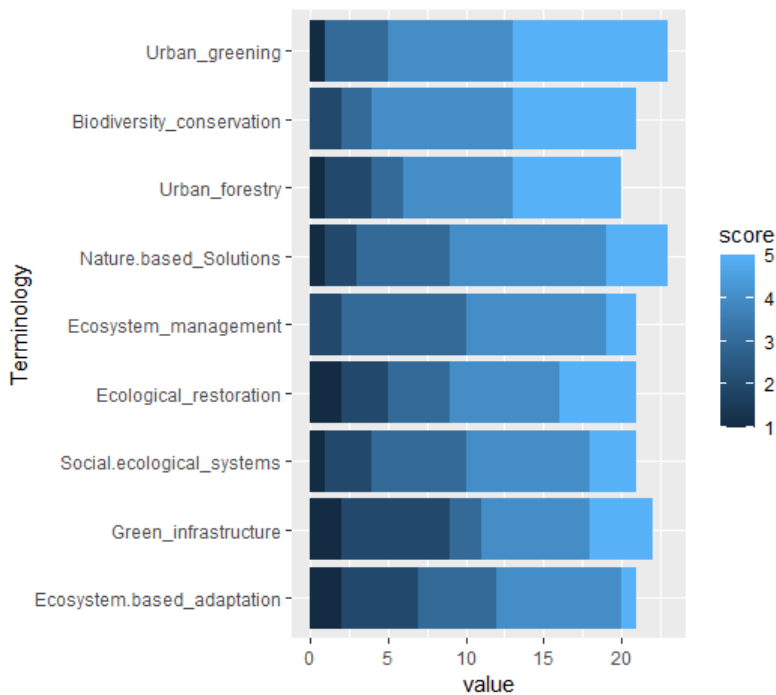


Figure 3) that were most commonly raised by participants were climate change, research and community engagement. A broad range of other issues were also regularly raised, including traditional owners, ecosystem management and design, as well as policymaking, leadership, advocacy, planning and maintenance.

[Type here]

Figure 3 – Issues of interest to respondents in their work on urban nature

Terminology that participants mostly felt comfortable using (Figure 4) included urban greening, biodiversity conservation, urban forestry, and nature-based solutions. Ecosystem management was considered fairly neutral. A larger number of participants were uncomfortable using terms such as ecological restoration, social-ecological systems, green infrastructure, and ecosystem-based adaptation.



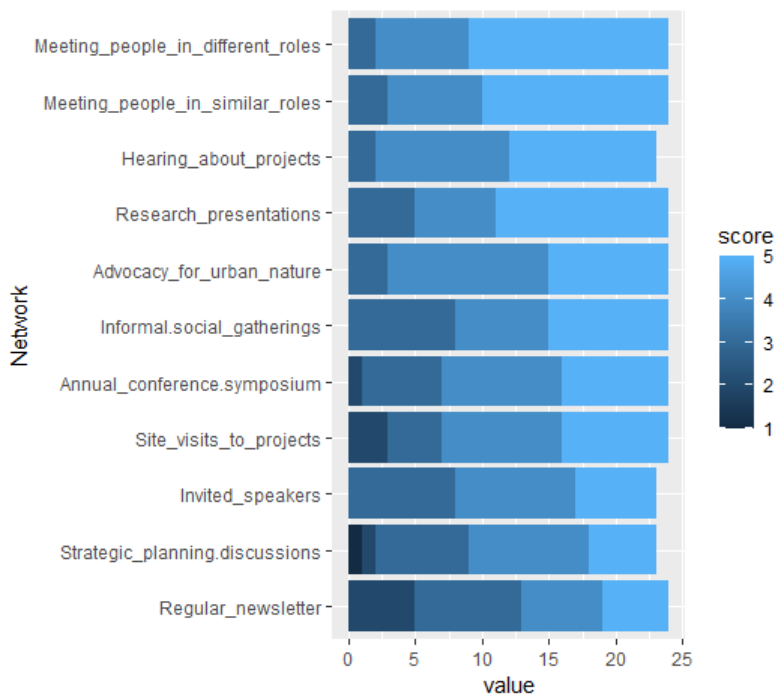
Ecological restoration, social-ecological systems, green infrastructure, and ecosystem-based adaptation.

Figure 4 – Terminology respondents are comfortable using to describe their work on urban nature. Lighter colours show more positive responses and darker colours show more negative responses.

Other written comments on interests in urban nature included the need to integrate biodiversity into traditional public open space, improved planning to achieve biodiversity outcomes in new open space planning, integrating private real initiatives e.g. Gardens for Wildlife, and connecting with volunteering groups.

Network activities and logistics

Participants were most positive about participating in the network (Figure 5) to meet people in other roles, meet people in the same role in other organisations, hear about projects and research



presentations. Some participants were also interested in advocacy, social gatherings, having an annual symposium, site visits to projects and invited speakers. There was less interest in strategic discussions or a newsletter.

Figure 5 – Activities respondents would be interested in as part of the network

The most popular network meeting frequency was quarterly (13 respondents) or every months (8 respondents).

Meeting on weekdays (19 respondents) was preferred over weekends (4 respondents), and meeting in the evening (16 respondents) or afternoons (14 responses) was preferred over mornings (6 responses).

Other written comments on the operation of the network included the benefits of having staff interact with other roles (e.g. maintenance and planning), and the opportunity for cross LGAs interactions to foster ecological connectivity across municipal boundaries. There were comments on the need to start more informally to create a safe and inclusive space and to build momentum within the group. Some respondents suggested alternating days and avoiding school holidays to make the group more inclusive. Another suggestion was to have a core organising group to share the organising load ensure continuity.

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