

Exceptional Trees

Trees make remarkable contribution to our region's social, cultural, economic and environmental vitality. A tree is determined as exceptional through a range of factors – including their character, size, age, botanic, commemorative, cultural heritage, habitat or legislative. Exceptional trees often carry a high level of community interest and concern.

Public Trees

The term Public Tree applies to all trees on Council owned or controlled land. Public trees are the responsibility of Council regardless of who planted the tree. Council aims to protect and enhance the network of public trees and ensure a balance between risks and benefits without compromising safety.

Council places great importance upon retaining and protecting all trees. Residents and property owners are not permitted to modify, prune or remove Public Trees or vegetation without obtaining a permit from Council.

More information on Public Trees and Council's approach is contained in our [General Policy, Management of Trees on Council Controlled Land](#).

Private Trees

A high percentage of trees within the Cairns region are located on private land. A Development Permit for Operational Works (Vegetation Clearing) may be required if a property owner wishes to damage any vegetation on their property. Refer to the [Operational Works Vegetation Clearing webpage](#) for more information.

Planning Scheme definitions

Vegetation damage (clearing)

The CairnsPlan 2016 Planning Scheme defines vegetation damage (clearing) as:

Remove, cut down, ring bark, push over, poison or destroy in any way including by burning, flooding, or draining.

Significant Tree

The CairnsPlan 2016 Planning Scheme defines a Significant Tree as

A tree greater than 7.5m in height when measured from the natural ground level to the top of the crown.

Tree maintenance

Council recommends that any tree management on private property is undertaken by an arborist who is qualified to at least AQF Level 3. All routine pruning and tree maintenance must comply within the guidelines set out in the Australian Standards AS4373: *Pruning of amenity trees*.

Without Council's approval you can undertake the following tree management at your property in accordance with Australian Standards AS4373: *Pruning of amenity trees*:

- Removal of dead wood
- Removal of hazardous limbs
- Crown lifting and thinning
- Formative and selective pruning
- Remedial or restorative pruning
- Pruning to avoid or prevent damage to above-ground services



Image 1: Example of Exceptional Tree



Tree assessment

Proposed removal of a significant tree or an exceptional tree on Council Controlled Land may be assessable development under Council's Planning Scheme. In these cases, a Tree Audit and a Retention Value Report, demonstrating an assessment that is in accordance with an industry accepted methodology, is required to be submitted as part of an Operational Works Vegetation Clearing application or Alteration to Local Government Controlled Roads – Vegetation Clearing application.

Tree Assessment Audit and Retention Value Report

This report must be prepared by a qualified consultant with a minimum AQF Level 5 Diploma in Horticulture/Arboriculture (Arb). It provides technical information about the individual significant tree and recommendations for the removal or retention.

Tree Audit

The Tree Audit provides information to assist with determining the sustainability of a significant tree within the landscape. It includes:

- i. Introduction;
- ii. Key objectives;
- iii. Description of subject site including existing services on and adjacent land, neighbouring properties, and roads;
- iv. Site plan (including proposed lot boundaries, roads, open space), with tree locations and tree root zones, any existing services, neighbouring properties, and roads where applicable to the assessment.

Tree data specific for each significant tree shall include:

- Origin
- Maturity/age class
- Tree height and average canopy spread
- Tree Protection Zone (TPZ) and Structural Root Zone (SRZ) calculations
- Vitality
- Structure/form
- Condition/health

Any other additional information to assist with the assessment of the application such as Sonic Tomography Resistograph Testing, Geotechnical recommendations and certification.

Retention Value Report

The Retention Value Report demonstrates an assessment that is in accordance with an industry-accepted methodology. It is important to identify and assess key factors that need to be considered in balance with the sustainability of the significant tree. These factors include the environmental, amenity and heritage values of trees using a systematic, logical and defensible approach.

The following table includes attributes to be considered within a Retention Value Assessment:



Table 1. Attributes to be considered within a Retention Value

Category	Description
1. Visual / Aesthetic / Character	A tree or group of trees with outstanding visual, aesthetic and character value, provides a sense of 'place' or serves as a landmark.
2. Size	Any tree of outstanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Height ● Canopy spread ● Diameter at breast height (DBH)
3. Age/ Estimated Life Expectancy	Any tree of an age that makes it old for its species.
4. Botanic/Scientific	Any tree that is an outstanding example of the species at an international/ national / state / regional / local level Meets categories under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) or 'Read List' framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scientific ● A rare specimen in the region
5. Commemorative	These trees are not necessarily old but serve to commemorate a particular occasion, individual or important historical event.
6. Cultural Heritage	The tree has been identified by traditional owners or cultures to be culturally significant.
7. Ecological/Habitat Value	The level of benefits that the tree and space created surrounding from a significant tree provides i.e. minerals, biota, support to natural life forms.
8. Climate	Contribution to climate change and heat reduction.
9. Legislative	A tree or group of trees are protected via State or Commonwealth Law such as the <i>Queensland Heritage Act 1992</i> or <i>Fisheries Act 1994</i> .

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