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Horticulture
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MEDIA RELEASE

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\$10M initiative to change the way we green public spaces

A future where landscapers, local councils and developers can quickly determine the best long-term plant species to establish, in the face of climate change and other challenges, is not too far away.

Today, two of the nation's leading universities, the NSW Government and Horticulture Innovation Australia announced a \$10 million dollar research consortium that is working to make this a reality.

Developed through Horticulture Innovation Australia's Green Cities fund, and being delivered through a partnership with Macquarie University, Western Sydney University and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, the extensive project is expected to be complete in 2021. It will deliver a host of outputs including new research on plant water efficiency and heat stress, case-study demonstration sites and a website which makes it easier to select plant species across the country based on future climate predictions.

Macquarie University project lead Professor Michelle Leishman said given that 90 per cent of Australians live in cities and towns, urban researchers and plant ecologists have a key role to play in better understanding which, where and how urban plants can best provide health, wellbeing and liveability outcomes both now and in the future.

"Increasing urban greenspace is not just a matter of more trees and more plants, we must be strategic in what we plant, and where we plant," she said. "This research will ensure that urban plantings take into account the aesthetic value of different plants, their performance in urban environments, their suitability for different types of environment in cities, and their capacity to cope with climatic changes in the future."

Professor David Ellsworth from Western Sydney University's Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment said the new consortium will increase the industry's ability to deliver resilient urban greenspaces in conditions of greater rainfall variability, heatwave frequency and drought conditions predicted in coming decades.

"This research will inform the choice of plants for greening cities by considering their climate tolerance and their value as urban plants, so that we can ensure that the plantings of today are sustainable, resilient, attractive and durable under even the toughest of climates tomorrow."

Horticulture Innovation Australia Chief Executive John Lloyd said the organisation's recently established Green Cities strategic co-investment fund will play a key role in boosting urban green space by investing in research which will help to overcome the current barriers.

"This is an exciting project as it will not only help the nursery industry to identify 'future-proof' native and exotic species for enhancing urban greening, it also has the capacity to benefit Australian urban environments for years to come."

This project is being delivered in line with the 2020Vision – a collaborative initiative that is working to make urban areas 20 per cent greener for the benefit of all Australians.

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