

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 WEDNESDAY 29 MAY 2024**

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## **Canopy of Life Tree Festival Launch – Wednesday 29 May 2024**

**Speech given by Willoughby City Council Mayor Tanya Taylor**

### **CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

On behalf of Willoughby City Council I'd like to welcome you to this afternoon's launch of our Canopy of Life Tree festival. This event means a lot to me personally so I am delighted to see so many of you here.

I grew up amongst the ancient forests of Tasmania, so trees are very much in my DNA. Whether it was enjoying time in the bush with friends and family, or camping amongst the trees with my local Girl Guide group, I grew up in awe of our nation's trees and the biodiversity they support.

Perhaps then it was fate that led to me becoming Mayor of Willoughby City Council. We are blessed with a lush and dense urban tree canopy, with 35% of the local government area under cover. It's just one of many considerable assets that make our community both unique and special, and safeguarding it for future generations is a considerable Council priority.

But to do so successfully, we need every Willoughby resident to understand and appreciate the hugely important role that trees play in sustaining the planet and human life.

6,000 years ago the region's trees were vital to the Gammeraygal people, original owners of these lands. They provided shade, controlled erosion, and acted as spiritual landmarks for birthing sites and burial grounds. Fast forward to today and very little has changed. If anything, the community's reliance on trees has expanded, given the ever-increasing need for their role in cleaning the air we breathe, and providing habitat and food for many endangered native species.

At Willoughby we are determined to protect and promote the benefits of our thriving urban tree canopy. In the coming financial year we will be investing more than ever in this mission, with a new staff resource and an additional \$2 million towards public area maintenance and urban canopy management, made possible thanks to our community's support for a special rate increase recently approved by IPART, the rates regulator.

But if we are to successfully take residents with us on this mission, education will be an equally important piece of the puzzle. Our Environment Education team is continually

working hard to connect with the public through the Love Your Trees campaign, and this year, for the first time, have curated a fantastic festival, which I am proud to launch today. Over the next few weeks residents are invited to enjoy a packed programme of free workshops, walks, and talks – that we hope will bring some of the theory to life.

From the restorative potential of forest bathing, to practical advice on managing trees in your back yard; workshops on native tree identification, and bushwalks for young families, there truly is something for everyone. To inspire the community's young minds in particular, we are running a photography competition with prizes worth up to \$100 to be won.

The undoubted highlight is our Conversations on Trees Symposium, taking place on 5 June at Chatswood Library. The Symposium features a day-long line-up of talks from expert speakers, culminating with a keynote address from Greg Mullins, the charismatic former fire and rescue chief and now climate activist.

Council has also worked with staff and students from the Environment Club at Willoughby Girls High School to develop two new walking 'Tree Trails' around the City. Information about various trees along each route will be accessible to passers-by on 'Tree Tags', which we hope will help residents understand more about our tree canopy in an engaging and immediate way. Students from the club took a hands-on role in the creation of the trails by selecting trees and collecting data to quantify their positive environmental impact, and I'm pleased to be joined in the room by some of them this afternoon.

On behalf of the Council I want to formally thank the students for all the energy they have put into this project, and I'd like to invite them up here now to receive a Willoughby City Council certificate of achievement.

### **BREAK TO PRESENT CERTIFICATES**

We have brochures with more information on the Tree Trails available here today so please do pick one up this afternoon.

Also in the room this afternoon are representatives from the Tree Veneration Society, a Sydney-based art collective that focuses on trees, their ecosystems and human interactions with them. The Society does lots of really important work and some of you may know that they had been working on an art exhibition especially for our festival which has been postponed. I want to thank the Society for being so understanding about the postponement, and I look forward to attending the exhibition at a later date.

I'm really hopeful that all of this activity will inspire residents to love trees as much as I did growing up, and in time, feel as passionately about the environment as I do today. If we are to succeed in our mission to protect and enhance our tree canopy, we need them on our side. Each and every resident has a civic responsibility to think about the greater good.

As a united local community, we can preserve Willoughby's environment for future generations to enjoy, and play our part in tackling the global climate emergency. Nothing is more valuable than that.

Thank you very much for listening; please enjoy this afternoon, and the rest of the programme.

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