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Nature and culture in the backyard

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INTRODUCTION

Talking about backyards provides something of a lightning rod for a set of broader discussions about the sorts of cities and suburbs we want in the future. Backyards are important components of urban environments, both materially and conceptually. The creation of new backyards contributes to land clearing, increased runoff, quarrying for various garden materials, and provides places for animals that in other contexts would be considered feral. On the other hand, backyards provide opportunities for revegetation, recycling, subsistence agriculture and young children's engagement with the outdoor world. They are the place with which most Australians have their most intimate, and arguably affectionate, interactions with the outdoor environment. Here we draw on examples from our wider study of Australian backyards to inform debate on three themes:

- urban consolidation vs urban expansion
- the ecologies of urban areas
- the importance of ethnographic and qualitative research methods in studying human/environment interactions in urban areas.

The existing literature on Australian backyards has documented a series of changes from the early decades of the twentieth century when they were predominantly functional spaces, through to today when they play important roles in household leisure and entertainment (Dovey 1994, Seddon 1997, Johnson 2000, Mullins and Kynaston 2000). This is not to argue that contemporary backyards have no functional or utilitarian roles, but to emphasise the changes that have occurred. These changes are also characterised broadly as a shift from production to consumption in the backyard (Gaynor 1999). They go along with decreases in the block size of subdivisions, increasing house size and changing house configurations such that there is greater interaction between inside and outside spaces (e.g. Dovey 1994).

In the broader project we build on previous work by analysing Australian backyards and gardens as places where everyday engagements between people and their environments take place. Oral, written and artefactual evidence of attitudes, practices and activities provides a basis for exploring important themes in human relations to nature. The suburban backyard is usually conceptualised as a cultural landscape, in

contrast to natural environments that are seen as remote and 'out there'. However, backyards, like all urban areas, are teeming with diverse combinations of plant and animal life that both shape and are shaped by human activity. It is precisely this hybrid and marginal status that makes it such an interesting space in which to examine the complex interpenetrations of nature and culture (Head and Muir in prep a, b, c). We are using historical documents held by the National Museum of Australia, and our own study of over 250 contemporary backyards in Wollongong, Sydney and Alice Springs.

In this paper we focus on three case study areas that allow a comparison of traditional (relatively large) and new (relatively small) backyards. These are northern suburbs of Sydney (the so-called leafy North Shore), the Hills District north-west of Sydney, including new subdivisions such as Kellyville, and Shell Cove, a new coastally-themed subdivision in Shellharbour, south of Wollongong. Residences were primarily detached houses, with only four semi-detached villa or townhouses (N = 37). All homes were privately owned. We address debates over urban consolidation vs urban expansion by examining the choices people have made about backyards, and the values they attach to these spaces. We discuss this theme in terms of *backyard spaces*. The ecologies of urban areas are clearly extremely complex, and deservedly receiving increasing research attention. Backyards are relevant to such debates for a range of reasons. These include their role in both the production of various environmental goods (e.g. biodiversity, habitat, food, water, absorptive surfaces), and the consumption of materials whose harvesting elsewhere has a significant ecological footprint (e.g. paving, gravels, soils, water). We focus here on the question of *trees*, and the interplay between physical and attitudinal factors. Human/environment interactions have long been the focus of cultural geographic and anthropological research in rural areas. Our approach demonstrates how ethnographic and qualitative research methods can usefully be applied in environments that many Western researchers take for granted – cities and suburbs.

METHODS

Our sampling strategy was designed to encompass the socioeconomic and ecological variability in each of the main study areas. Although we were not attempting to select a statistically representative sample we did try to encompass

socioeconomic, ethnic, age, gender and tenure variability in our participants. Study participants were sought using a combination of techniques that included snowballing from friends and acquaintances, letter-boxing of selected areas, local media appeals and community organisations such as schools and playgroups. When our initial approaches yielded few participants of non-English speaking background, we worked through the Macedonian Welfare Association in Wollongong and the Vietnamese Personal Support Group at the Fairfield Community Centre to recruit NESB participants who were interviewed with interpreters.

Each backyard was visited and a semi-structured interview undertaken onsite with the participant by one of the authors. An initial set of questions related to the activities of different members of the household, changes that had occurred over time, people's feelings about the space and what sorts of plants and animals belong there, wider environmental attitudes and practices, and major influences. The interviews were conversational in style, with the interviewers following up issues of particular interest to the participants. The backyard was mapped and photographed, and checklists on the demography of the household, the structures in the backyard and the biogeography were completed.

The interviews were transcribed and imported into the qualitative data analysis program, N6. Each interview was read through and indexed at nodes generated by the text. New nodes were created as new ideas emerged and coding at multiple nodes became established practice where content, context and emerging theory overlapped. Hence there were descriptive nodes, for example, recording how people's backyards had changed over time; emotive and attitudinal nodes exploring how participants felt, and conceptual nodes examining emerging discourses, for example, participants' perceptions of agency within broader environmental issues. Specific demographic information was imported as base data so that comparative analysis could be done using variables of age, gender and ethnicity as well as detailed biogeographical and structural information.

THE CASE STUDIES

Our sample demonstrates a strong relationship between the age of house and the size of backyard (table 1). The older subdivisions of the north shore contrast strongly with the much smaller block sizes in the newer subdivisions of Kellyville and

Shellcove. As discussed below, our Hills District sample includes both new ('kelly') and older ('hills') backyards.

When house built	Size of backyard, excluding structures (m ²)				
	20-99	100-199	200-299	300-500	>500
1-2 years ago	kelly 1	shell 2 kelly 4			north 1
3-4 years ago		shell 1 kelly 1	shell 1		
5-6 years ago		shell 1 kelly 1	shell 1		
1995-1996			kelly 1		
1990-1994	north 1				north 2
1980-1989			hills 1	hills 1	north 2
1970-1979		north 1		north 1 hills 1	north 2 hills 1
1960-1969			north 2	north 2	
1880-1959		north 1	north 1	north 2	north 3
	2	12	7	8	8

Table 1: Case study suburbs by age of house and size of backyard. shell = Shellcove, north = North Shore, kelly = Kellyville, hills = Hills District excluding Kellyville. N = 37

The leafy North Shore of Sydney

The northern suburbs interviews included the suburbs of Wahroonga, Warrawee, Turramurra, St Ives, and Thornleigh (N = 17). An indication of tenure variability is cited from The Real Estate Australia website which states that around 54% of houses in Wahroonga (population 22, 477) were fully owned, with 24% purchasing and 17% rented. In 2003, the average house price for Wahroonga was \$786,579 and the Upper North Shore was \$683,830, up 5% and 11% over the last 12 months (www.realestate.com.au). Table 2 shows the type of houses participants in the northern suburbs owned. Sixty-five percent of these backyards were over 300 square metres in area.

Type	Single storey	Double storey	Split level	Total
House	11	1	3	15
Townhouse	0	1	1	2
	11	2	4	17

Table 2: Northern suburbs house type (N=17)

The household structure in the northern suburbs was the most diverse of the three areas and comprised six single people, six couples, three nuclear families, one sole parent family and one shared household. Nine of the participants were retirees, with children having grown up and left the family home. Two of the single people were under 35 with no children. Of the four families, three had children in high school and one family had a younger child in primary school.

Eight of the participants were employed, one household was double income and two households were one and a half incomes. Six participants had a tertiary level of education and were employed in professional positions in private industry such as electronic manufacturing or IT, or in the public sector such as nursing and teaching. Three of the eight, all women, worked part-time, with one of these women also undertaking post-doctoral study.

Participants in the northern suburbs of Sydney were most likely to cite the leafiness, tree cover or proximity to the bush as the reason for moving to these suburbs (N = 9) and then the convenience to either local shopping areas and the city, with good transport infrastructure (N=7). The majority of houses were bounded by other houses, but there were seven houses which had bushland, easement or a reserve close by with one other participant located on a corner position with a wide nature strip. A long time resident of Turramurra, Angus' enthusiasm was for the nature strip adjoining his garden, where he has been regenerating local native species. In this area he has replanted local tree species, mulched heavily, and laid a woodchip path where the footpath might otherwise be. He says that a number of native herbs and understory species have colonised this area voluntarily and that the area 'provides a real connection to the natural environment' (figure1).

This connection to the natural environment was echoed by two other participants who are both active in weed eradication in the adjoining bush. Coralie walks often in the National Park at the end of her street. In this space she actively pulls out weeds with friends and agitates council on adverse growth on disturbed ground in the park. Don, the youngest of the northern suburbs participants, describes his motivation to be active in the bush.

Just living so close and learning about the different plants that are growing around there; because I took a walk from the end of my street maybe five

kilometres down into the Lane Cove River and I enjoyed it so much that I thought I'll belong to it and a leaflet was sent to me by National Parks and Wildlife... I sort of look after the end of my street which is part of the Thornleigh bush park area. It covers a number of streets including Pennant Hills and I do that once a month for about three hours. That involves weeding and identifying the plants and getting a lot of things done; trying to get the natives back to what it was before. (Don, Thornleigh)

In conjunction with an appreciation for the surrounding bushland was a concern expressed by nine of the participants that urban consolidation would have a negative impact on their suburb. Two elderly male participants commented on the new developments of Kellyville and along West Pennant Hills Road, bemoaning the 'cookie cutter' nature of these suburbs. Two other men, both aged in their fifties, were actively opposed to what they perceived as the over-development of property space. Angus links this issue with an increasing pressure to remove trees and a subsequent loss of more exposed, individual trees to disease. He has been working on the committee of Friends of Kuringai Environment to draw attention to such issues. Tony of Warrawee is particularly scathing of the State Government's actions.

Well, the State Government for the last decade or so has been embarking on a policy of increasing population density within the urban areas and people don't like that so they have been forcibly doing it whether the communities like it or not. And I suppose I have an instinctive feel that increasing population density does reduce one's quality of life. I don't think that people should be divorced from nature and made to live in little boxes and be divorced from human scale and ornamentation. I think these are sort of qualities that people are attracted to naturally and I don't think it's good to deprive of these things. (Tony, Warrawee)

The close proximity of bushland or National Park has impacted on what participants grow or choose to nurture with regard to the tree layer of these northern backyards, with local native trees recorded in seven backyards, including two self-seeded native understorey rainforest trees, Bleeding Heart (*Omalanthus populifolius*.) and Kangaroo Apple (*Solanum aviculare*) and one backyard with 100% *Angophora costata* tree layer. There were remnant Turpentines (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) and Sydney Blue Gum (*E. saligna*). Other native trees were recorded in eleven backyards. These included several large eucalypt trees (*E. scopara*, *E.*

haemastoma), Red Cedar (*Toona australis*), Watergum (*Tristania laurina*), as well as casuarinas.

Participants discussed local council's protection orders on trees. There was an acknowledgement that the preservation of trees in individual backyards was important to participants, with 14 out of the 17 participants discussing their own tree layer with enthusiasm. Disaster stories from the past, in relation to bushfires or falling trees (or limbs), were rarely accompanied by negative remarks. More often the remarks were about luck in escaping injury or damage to property. Patrick and his wife, from St Ives are an exception, expressing a sense of frustration with council's tree preservation order. 'It's over the top. I mean you look at the front and see how much we've got growing and then you think, why can't you take one out'. Mathew describes a sense of resolved guilt over the removal of trees to allow more sun in his backyard.

I'm not happy about cutting down the trees but the fact that it was an oak tree and some other awful looking thing, um, lessened the guilt.

When it comes to enjoyment of, you know, like we had to get rid of the tree to build the pool really, to make the pool worthwhile. (Mathew, Wahroonga)

Twelve backyards in the northern suburbs had non-native trees such as Norfolk Island Pines, Magnolia, Datura and Cotoneaster. Deciduous trees were popular with Liquidambar, Elder, Japanese maple and Chinese elms noted by researchers. Fruit trees were recorded in eight backyards, with participants often having more than one, usually citrus, fruit tree. Tree ferns were present in seven backyards.

The Hills District

In the Hills District there is a contrast between the older suburbs of Baulkham Hills and Cherrybrook, and the newer subdivisions of Kellyville and Glenwood. Our sample included backyards from each of these areas, and eight interviews conducted in houses that were under 2 years old in the Kellyville area. Forty-one percent of Kellyville (population 18,771) fully own their own home, with 31% purchasing and 24% renting. In 2003 the average house price for Kellyville was \$509,806, an increase of 23% over the last 12 months (www.realestate.com.au). Table 3 shows the type of houses participants in the hills district owned.

Type	Single storey	Double storey	Split level	Total
House	3	7	1	11
Villa	2	0	0	2
	5	7	1	13

Twelve of the thirteen couples were working, with one couple retired. There were four families on one and a half incomes, with women working part time. There were eight single income households of which seven of these were families. While in the northern suburbs participants were either retired or working, in the Hills district six women were at home with their young families and one other studying by distance education.

Levels of education and occupation were more varied than in the northern suburbs with a mix of tertiary educated participants working in professions such as engineering and teaching to tradespeople and clerical and service workers such as electricians, bookkeepers and waitpersons. There were also three self-employed participants.

Kellyville does not have the same green corridors and parkland that Shell Cove (discussed below) has, and there is a sense, from many of the participants, that the infrastructure of the suburb has lagged behind the rapid residential development. Regardless of this, many of the families with young children talk about not needing large amounts of space in the backyard when they have, or will have, access to some recreational spaces close by. Joe and Kristine, parents of three children under the age of four, cite proximity to bushland with walking tracks as a major incentive to buy a particular block of land. Linda, mother of two children under the age of two and resident of less than a year, is hopeful for the future development of the suburb.

We read local papers and we read what's coming up and there are meant to be what they call "open spaces", it's not necessarily a park as what we remember as kids as parks with swings and slippery dips and things like that, but "open spaces" they call them. So I think they have bike tracks and things on them.
(Linda, Kellyville)

Linda's low maintenance backyard consists of a back paved area and a side grassed area, a common arrangement of space in Kellyville, where the double storey house
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often leaves an area from the back of the house to the fence line of only five metres. Linda explains that a small, low maintenance backyard of paved and grass surface is ideal in her view (figure 2).

I don't want to be a slave to my backyard like my parents were and my husband's parents, like a couple of hours to mow some grass down the side is enough but not to spend a whole weekend doing lawns....I like to go on picnics and see friends and spend time, family time. (Linda, Kellyville)

Focus on family was an important aspect of the Hills district interviews, unsurprising considering that eleven of the participants had children and the majority were primary school age with younger siblings. The newer suburbs of Kellyville and Glenwood, where families with young children are choosing to live, are attractive in their terms of price, people and future infrastructure.

We can't think of anywhere better as a place to raise a family in this phase of life. We've moved into an area where we've got people in exactly the same situation as us. Next door they've got two kids, we've got three; over there they've got four next to us. Across the road they've got five...And we are all people who are wanting to do the best that we can for our families. And that's important to us to live in a place where you can have that sense of community and the kids can play together and share each other's backyards and front yards too. (Joe and Kristine, Kellyville)

Five of the eight new residents of Kellyville spoke about affordability and the investment value of the suburb. Brian, who recently completed his house, explains; 'Well in all honesty, it's a question of finance and economics to be very, very honest'. Mary, who also moved into her new house in the past year, talked about the availability of land to build a new house in this suburb.

Participants were very conscious of the rawness of Kellyville, with several people commenting on their memories of the suburb as past farming land or small acreage. Brian as well as Joe and Kristine talk about the developer's practice of levelling the block of all vegetation. Brian talks about the family's anguish at the displacement of the local rabbits and his sense of shock at the clearing.

When we came here we knew yes there is going to be land clearing. We know there's going to be house but it is still a shock to the system. It is still a shock to

the system because on this block of land next to us, rabbits run. They come from the creek and they run across. (Brian, Kellyville)

While Brian does acknowledge the feral nature of the rabbits, he makes no reference to other native animals that would also have suffered the same displacement. He mentioned being excited to see a butterfly recently, which he had missed with all the building process. There is also a sense of the land as a blank slate, as expressed in his quote; “I’m going to introduce worms in there. I’ve done that before because this is virgin land, so I’m going to bring worms in here into my garden. If I don’t have worms then it’s not going to work”. Joe’s comment is about the destruction of the local native tree layer, with a sense of resignation that such practices are unfortunate but unavoidable for the end purpose of creating residential houses.

So the original vegetation hasn’t completely disappeared, um, it’s just that we are not in the midst of it here where these houses are. They did raze the land when they were building these houses which I thought was unfortunate, but there was quite an impressive tree actually right in the middle of where our kitchen is at the moment. (Joe and Kristine, Kellyville)

Joe and Kristine’s decision to nurture the two ‘weedy’ angophora saplings left on the block is the only evidence of any local native vegetation in these new suburban backyards (figure 3), although Julie, with a backyard of more than 500 m² in an older area of Baulkham Hills has two Lillipillies (*Acmena smithii*).

The only remaining trees from the original vegetation were those two eucalypts there. They were quite weedy, when we saw them they would have been maybe two and a half metres at most, with a diameter of maybe ten centimetres. But it has doubled that right now in the two and a half years that we have been here and yeah, that’s all that remains. (Joe and Kristine, Kellyville)

Ann from Kellyville, with a backyard between 200-299 m², is passionate about growing native trees and her backyard had extensive plantings of acacias, eucalypts, (*E.parramattensis*, *E.curtish*) hakea and melaleuca. Ann’s priorities were space and privacy.

Space, I mean the reason we bought the house is because it’s a battle axe block and we actually have a backyard and we’ve got space for our vegie

garden and we've got our little pool and we've got space for the kids to run around and have their play equipment. And we have space for some big trees, I like having the shade and the look of the larger trees...and we needed a bit of privacy and we wanted the shade. (Ann Kellyville)

Tree layer data for the remaining new Kellyville backyards indicates one family had a single apple tree and another a row of six cypress pines in a formally designed backyard. Three backyards had no tree layer, one had primarily tree ferns and a single palm. The wider Hills District tree layer consisted of a single local native eucalypt and a Lillypilly (*Acmena smithii*) as well as several melaleucas. Non-native trees consisted of flowering cherry, Chinese elm and liquidambar as well as three citrus trees, a single bangalow and several cocos palms.

Shell Cove

Shell Cove is a new development on subdivided farmland on a narrow coastal strip between highway and the sea, south of Wollongong. In an area of rapid growth, with a (controversial) proposed marina and shopping complex, it is at the upper end of the market, selling itself as a 'lifestyle choice' and 'home by the sea'. This planned estate is surrounded by a high wooden fence to screen traffic noise, and has landscaped green corridors to the beach, with walking tracks. Design elements such as rendered surfaces are encouraged to give a sense of cohesion to the houses. Real estate agent Craig Purdy talks about financial incentives to adhere to the 'coastal theme' in the form of rebates.

The first two stages probably set the scene for the rest of the development ...we encouraged them by way of bagged bricks, rendering, grainsize finishes, more of a seaside theme to it. Because of our location we wanted something different for the estate and we encourage people by way of rebates of \$1500 to comply. (Craig Purdy, Shell Cove Real Estate)

Seven interviews were recorded in Shell Cove, which has between 450 and 500 houses. Demographic information available for Shellharbour (N = 17,208) indicates that 43% of the population fully own their homes, 29% are purchasing and 24% are renting. In 2003 the average price of a house in Shellharbour was \$346,341, up 28% in the last 12 months but this does not reflect house prices in Shell Cove, with its close proximity to the beach and where the first houses built on the estate are only

six years old (www.realestate.com.au). It would be difficult to purchase a block of land for this price in 2003.

Most of the houses were single storey, with only two double storey houses. The houses ranged in age from six years old to less than a year old. Five of the backyards in Shell Cove were between 100-199 m² and two were between 200-299 m²). Household structure comprised four families and three couples where the children had left home. Each family had children of different age groups, from a new baby to primary, high school and tertiary aged children. Twenty eight percent of the population of Shellharbour is aged between the ages of 20-39 and 25% between 40-59 (realestate.com.au) but demographic information relating specifically to Shell Cove, provided by Real Estate Agent Craig Purdy, indicates a range of ages.

...we do get first home buyers but primarily it's our second or third home buyers that buy in Shell Cove obviously due to price and our main group is probably young families or mature families would probably account for in-excess of 50% of our purchaser demographics. And then you're getting our empty nesters where they've lived elsewhere because kids are off their hands and they buy in here. They would probably be closer I suppose to 15% and we're getting more and more empty nesters.

Details of employment type in Shell Cove are not as comprehensive as for the northern and hills district interviews but we do know that two couples were retirees, two families were double income, one couple was one and a half income and two women were at home with young children while their husbands worked full time.

Participants in the newer areas have made what is commonly referred to as 'lifestyle' choices, moving to an area because of a desire for, usually, a smaller space, and a low maintenance, less demanding backyard. Other participants cite affordability and a particular style of neighbourhood with similar values and lifestyle to their own. While these factors all relate to Shell Cove, situated as it is with views over the beach and the escarpment, comments about location are foregrounded to a greater extent than the other two areas.

In Shell Cove, one male participant from a double income family with older children commutes daily to the southern suburbs of Sydney. For Jim, the lifestyle, natural beauty and managed outdoor space of Shell Cove are worth the daily drive.

I work in Sydney so I get a Sydney sort of wage and a South Coast lifestyle, which to me is the best of both worlds ... and I suppose in Sydney it's a good example, it's built out, you know, there's a few little gardens and bits of grass and trees but there's nothing, whereas down here you can stand on the golf course and you look back and you can see the escarpment and it's brilliant, the space and all... But what I find over here is that because you are in the middle of like a big garden, there's no need to sort of create your own lawn.

For all the Shell Cove participants having access to managed communal spaces was perceived as a major attraction of the suburb, along with its beachside location. Four houses had open space across or behind them and the other three were not far from generous green corridors, structured parks or walkways, which participants used regularly.

We use more of the natural environment, you know, using the bike, the cycle ways, um, the beach, even simple things like sitting on the boat ramp at the beach and just putting a hand line in. (Emma, two primary aged children, Shell Cove)

We noticed down here compared with the place where we lived in Sydney ...they seem to have allowed much, much greater areas, like the park behind us and there are several and they have preserved really old fig trees and things like that over in the more hilly areas there and it's really quite good and over across the main road there, the whole centre of the estate is a big stormwater drainage system but it's done as a park as well. So it really makes the place look good. (John and Beverly, retired couple, Shell Cove)

Evan and Sonia, a couple in their early thirties with a three-month-old baby, talk about what they like about Shell Cove and the sense of community they have experienced.

The ocean views, um, it's a young area therefore you don't get a lot of groups, clique groups, you know like if you moved into an already established area people have known each other for a long time. We've found that it's a mixture of

older retired couples as well as like younger couples that are coming to the area like ourselves...Yeah definitely, it's very friendly, all the neighbours around seems to walk, you just start walking out the front and people just say hello and stop and talk and ask what you're doing and really takes an interest because like I said I think everybody has got the common interest here where they're all starting from a bare piece of dirt and going for it and everybody has got their own ideas. (Sonia and Evan, Shell Cove)

Most of the participants who had purchased in Shell Cove were happy with the size of their backyard, having made a conscious decision to downsize and reduce the amount of time and effort needed to maintain a larger sized yard. This was particularly true of participants with older children or couples where the children had left home prior to the move to the suburb. Marilyn, in her 40s and a resident of less than one year, says 'the main thing, the block wasn't too big because now that we haven't got kids we don't really need a big backyard'. Norma and Eric, a retired couple, moved from their higher maintenance backyard in a neighbouring suburb so that they would 'have more time to dance and do other things'. Evan and Sonia are from a different generation with different needs. With a new baby and also residents of less than one year they consider their smallish backyard (100-199m²) a place where everything will fit in. Their extensive plans included a small artificial hill built in the centre of the L shaped yard, a free standing pergola, a Japanese garden, water feature, rainforest area, shed and utility area screened by hand-made gates and a covered paved area adjoining the house. Many of the plans were yet to be realised, with Evan producing elaborate drawings of the backyard (figure 4).

Evan and Sonia's backyard also contained four, ornamental, established trees purchased from a large hardware store. This was unusual in Shell Cove, where most existing trees were found in the communal spaces and the double entrance drive to the suburb, which was lined with Norfolk Island Pines. Trees above three metres totalled 14, of which one Lillypilly (*Acmena Smithii*) was native to the local area and two native Hakeas. Ornamental trees included Evan's Chinese elms and Himalayan ash as well as ficus and conifers, with only one citrus fruit tree present. There were two backyards where the tree layer was predominantly palms, either Bangalow or Cocos and one backyard with no other vegetation layer apart from Sir Walter Buffalo grass. Tree ferns totalled seven and were found in three backyards.

Given the low numbers of trees present in Shell Cove it is not surprising that participants did not talk at length about them. Evan talks about purchasing his deciduous trees at a clearance sale and being unable to resist the deal. John's backyard had two trees in the yard, one of which was a Lillypilly (*Acmena smithii*) and a native to the area. The trees were planted before purchase, and the owners are thinking of removing this tree as they feel it will become too large. There are guidelines set out for all new residents, summarised here by Craig Purdy to advise residents of what trees would be suitable but only one resident has actively planted native trees.

...with our building guidelines that we've put out with purchases within Shell Cove we do encourage them to utilise natives as opposed to gum trees and stuff like that. Low gum trees are native obviously but be a little bit more mindful of the size and the types of plants that they plant. Obviously over the years people have been probably more educated now as opposed to doing structural damage to their homes by planting the incorrect trees within their yards. (Craig Purdy, Shell Cove Real Estate Realty)

A series of discussion points will be raised in the conference presentation, to be developed more fully in the revised written paper.

BACKYARD SPACES

- From the three areas profiled above particular themes emerge around the idea of space; space in the backyard and accessible space in the surrounding environment.
- Attitudes to personal and communal space can be divided into two demographic sets – those people who have lived in an area for many years and those that are relatively new to the area.
- In the northern suburbs and some areas of the Hills district the suburbs are well established and some of the participants have been at the same address for more than thirty years. There is a continuity of living for these participants that allows particular insights into the domestic and suburban environment.
- This differs from those participants moving into a newly established area such as Kellyville or Shell Cove. Concerns about issues in the surrounding environment are higher for the more established suburbs.

Trees

- Trees are only one component of habitat and biodiversity considerations in backyards, but they are a topic that arouses much more passion – both for and against – than ground cover or shrubs.
- Across all the interviews (N = 226) there has emerged a particular set of attitudes that often reflect a sense of distrust with regard to the planting of trees in suburban backyards. This can be linked to a need for security, for people to feel safe in their backyards (NSW NPWS 2002).
- This need is evident in both new housing estates and established suburbs, where stories of falling tree limbs abound, yet often sits uneasily with the recognition that a lack of trees means a lack of birdlife.

...since we've had the trees up it's been attracting the birds. Because they've got nowhere to go around here and as soon as we had the trees up it was like all these birds and then I was thinking, well there's no other trees really around here for them to fly into, well, tall trees anyway. (Evan and Sonia, Shell Cove)

- The distinction between planting native or non-native trees is often not a consideration to new home-owners who regulate all aspects of their new space and consider what tree to plant as a purely aesthetic choice. Brian of Kellyville, father of two primary-school aged children and a resident of less than one year, explains his thinking.

We'd like to have a bit of a tropical feel over there, the pool there, you've got the palms, lush greenery. Natives really don't fit in. But I'm exploring the idea of, because we face north, we get the westerly sun in summer. So we are exploring putting deciduous trees outside those windows, and on the back over there, for screening purposes, putting conifers. So we're looking at that. It is council land but I'm sure they'll love it if you grow a few trees over there. (Brian, Kellyville)

- In many ways Mathew in Wahroonga, Joe in Kellyville and John and Beverley in Shell Cove express the same emotions; an expression of regret or guilt that the tree layer has had to be removed to allow for human pursuits; sometimes residential building or, in Mathew's case a recreational need.

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