



REMEMBER THOSE TREES?

If you were at last's year's conference you were part of something special. Whether you knew about it or not, the organisers of the PLA National Conference in Townsville (2007) made a decision to offset the carbon generated by the delegates – the travel, air-conditioning, lighting, catering – and they did it by planting trees.



Above: Ron Degenhart and Katrina Cullen both from Parks Services, Townsville City Council standing where there will soon be shade. Top: press gathering. L to R Steve Mason, National President of Parks and Leisure Australia, Dr Graeme Pearman (Monash Sustainability Institute) representing Greenfleet, and former Townsville Mayor Tony Mooney.

Since then, twelve months have whipped past and we've gathered again in Melbourne. And if you could see those tiny tube stock trees now, you'd think it had been two years or more. Ron Degenhart* tells the tale and explains the secret behind the success of this planting.

"While we were organising the conference, we decided to take a proportion of the delegates' fees and dedicate them to a project which would offset the carbon emitted by the activities associated with the conference." As an added bonus, the project would form a lasting legacy for the conference for the Townsville community.

Through an agreement struck between Greenfleet, Townsville City Council, and Parks and Leisure Australia, more than 400 trees made it into the ground just prior to the conference.

The site, now known as the Ross River Bio-sequestration Project, was carefully chosen to gain some add-on benefits. "It was a degraded urban riverbank setting, sitting adjacent to a newly constructed dirt jump park. Obviously we wanted to improve, clean up and create a setting that would add to the jump park where there is no shade. In future we'd hope that the kids will retreat into the planting as the canopy forms and there's even the possibility we'd add further understorey plantings and furniture."

A fair amount of work took place before Conservation Volunteers Australia were able to plant the site. "The bank has been an unofficial tipping zone for fill that wasn't all that clean.

We removed car bodies and regraded the artificially steep river bank which had been built up by the tipping." A collection of local provenance, riparian species was planted into the prepared and mulched site, each and every plant with its recommended dose of TerraCottem.

Delegates visited the site - on a hot day when it was obvious how welcome the future shade would be - and watched former Mayor Tony Mooney wield the silver spade with help from Dr Graeme Pearman (Monash Sustainability Institute) representing Greenfleet, and Steve Mason National President of Parks and Leisure Australia.

Visiting the site 12 months later it's obvious that the growth has been phenomenal. "We believe TerraCottem does make a difference which is why we use it on lots of sites around Townsville particularly where there is poor soil and ongoing maintenance is going to be minimal - and we've been doing it now for a number of years. It is a factor in the success. Of course we may have been able to replicate the same results if we'd pumped on a lot of water and fertiliser, but when we walk away from these trees at the Ross River site, they will be strong and have fewer problems in the future."

*Ron wears two hats - he's Landscape Projects Officer, Parks Services, Townsville City Council as well as being the Parks and Leisure Australia's National Director for Queensland.



BIO-SEQUESTRATION

An interpretive sign stands at the site of the Ross River planting, explaining why these trees have been planted. Based on Greenfleet's calculations of the conference's carbon footprint, the 400 trees must be guaranteed to be left undisturbed (apart from ongoing maintenance) for at least 70 years. There's some serious science behind these numbers. It's the time frame necessary for the biomass produced by these 400 trees to capture and store – as they grow – the equivalent amount of carbon as was generated by the 2007 conference.

WHY TERRACOTTEM GOT AN INVITE...

... because they've been working with the Townsville City Council since 2002. As TerraCottem's Colin Wise remembers it, "At some point prior to the conference we agreed with the Council to apply TerraCottem when planting the bio-sequestration project – a good idea given the results we'd been having with Townsville plantings for a number of years now."

And the growth that's been achieved bears it out as a good decision. "I went to have a look in June – at roughly the nine month mark – and the survival rate was what I expected (around 95%). What did surprise me was the growth rate, how good it looked, especially since it has only been watered using a water truck outside the wet season."

WHO WILL GET THE PRIZE?

This is the first year of the TerraCottem Annual Scholarship, where good practice is being given recognition and reward. This scholarship recognises the work of people working in the arena of public open space; those who are experimenting with new ideas, and who're successful at creating sustainable green spaces.

And by making the award, not only does the recipient benefit, but so do we all as we identify who these up-and-coming talented people are. So take a look at this year's nominees and be sure to seek them out during the conference for a chat...

We've mentioned Helen Paulsen in a previous issue of Synergy, for her work in creating Queensland's Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens. Then there's the revegetation work of John Erwin of the City of Knox in Victoria. The City of South Perth's John Murray has a street tree program worth copying, and Nic Pagnamenta's revegetation of the Nepean River Foreshore (Penrith City Council) is worth a look. And finally there's John McNamara's Springsure Zamia Gardens in Queensland.

The winner will be announced during the conference (at the PLA TurfFactory 10th Birthday Gala Dinner on the last night of the Conference). Better still, those that don't make it this year can be nominated again next year. For more information, contact Russell James – info@terracottem.com.au

WHY SPONSOR THE PLA?

"It's obvious. Local government is the major stakeholder when it comes to community here in Australia. They shape the environment we all live in – literally.

"It's these same people who are members of PLA – parks managers. A lot of what we all take for granted we have because of them; our trees, open spaces, sports facilities. All this falls under the auspices of the parks managers and their teams. Managing the green asset is a massive responsibility, and they make it happen on the ground.

"So we support what they do. We support their association by being a major sponsor. We also support what they do day-to-day with a product that wins its fans through results; healthy plant growth for the long haul." – Russell James

WHAT IS TERRACOTTEM?

TerraCottem is a tough one to understand, probably because it works on various fronts at the same time. So let's keep things simple...

To start with, TerraCottem uses two main mechanisms to encourage substantial root development – polymers and root growth precursors.

The polymers are a little like water-holding crystals except that TerraCottem's hydroabsorbent co-polymers have been carefully selected and well researched. This means that instead of just one polymer with a narrow water-holding and water-releasing ability, there is a group of them providing the same function over a wide range, for years. To put it crudely, more water can be stored and released under a broader variety of conditions.

Now, let's talk about the root growth precursors. By definition, a precursor is a chemical compound which leads to another. The precursors found in TerraCottem do exactly this, and for a very good reason. If you put growth hormones into soil, they rapidly biodegrade. But if you put precursors into the root zone, the plants get a kick-start by synthesising their own growth hormones. And this conducive environment – for optimum cell division and elongation – stays like this for 12 months.

Then there is a nicely varied collection of plant nutrients – soluble mineral fertilisers, in a format suited to the early growth phase of a plant; slow-release fertilisers, designed to offer a constant source of food over many months; and synthesised organic fertilisers which focus on the soil, stimulating microbiological activity and general soil health.

Add this all together and the result is fast and furious root establishment. This means greater accessibility to water, fewer losses, and, given the reciprocal dynamic between roots and canopy, noticeably vigorous growth. In the longer term, the soil conditioning power of TerraCottem means that plantings are buffered from stress. It's great stuff.



TC Advantage Pty. Ltd.
FREECALL 1800 658 281.
Email:
info@terracottem.com.au
Web:
www.terracottem.com.au