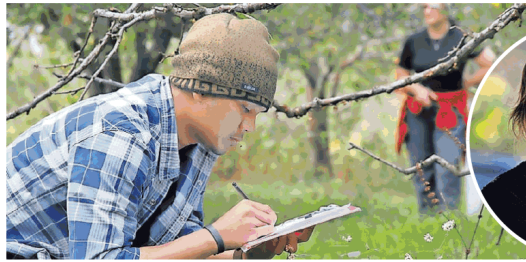


ADVERTISING FEATURE

Protecting the environment



Fiona Sutton Wilson (above) is CEO of Earthwatch Australia, which is driving the Tiny Forests movement for business and volunteers to "restore and regenerate nature" in urban environments. PHOTOS: Tiny Forests Europe

Tiny forests arrive for big green impact

Almost half of global GDP in cities is estimated to be at risk of disruption because of the loss of nature.

The World Economic Forum's report *BiodiverCities by 2030: Transforming Cities' Insights* calls on businesses to be crucial players in reversing nature loss and climate change by enhancing biodiversity by the end of 2030.

It reveals that cities account for 80 per cent of global GDP and will host 75 per cent of the world's population by 2050, so urban leaders and decision makers have a leading role to play in shaping a sustainable, resilient and prosperous future for the world.

"Business as usual is no longer an option – 44 per cent of global GDP in cities is estimated to be at risk of disruption from nature loss," the report states.

"With the majority of future urban expansion forecast in the world's most biodiverse regions, cities must act now to rebalance their relationship with nature."

Earthwatch Australia chief executive Fiona Sutton Wilson says Australian cities, in particular, face severe biodiversity and urban heating challenges.

"Research published last week shows climate change threatens up to 100 per cent of trees in Australian cities," she says. "Since 2013, our urban green canopy has shrunk, despite efforts at policy and community levels to reverse this trend."

"We need to increase the number of urban forests urgently so that we can benefit from critical ecosystem services like carbon sequestration, storm water capture and urban cooling."

"Corporate Australia can be a vital partner in

this effort. There is a strong need to invest in robust solutions for climate adaptation which benefit business, people and nature."

Wilson says nature-based solutions (NbS) for infrastructure – such as wetlands or urban forests – provide a path forward, as they make cities more climate-resilient and lessen the built environment's effect on nature.

The World Economic Forum report cites NbS are 50 per cent more cost-effective than hard-surfaced infrastructure alternatives, and bring 28 per cent greater value.

Integrating nature-positive solutions also can help protect cities from risks associated with extreme weather, such as heat stress and flooding, while also driving sustainable economic growth.

"Business is uniquely positioned to create thriving urban environments," Wilson says. "Investing in NbS simultaneously addresses environmental, governance and social targets (ESG) and creates resilient ecosystems for a nature-positive economy."

ESG targets increasingly are being used alongside traditional economic measures to assess organisational performance, and are also a key consideration for global investors.

Earthwatch Australia is a pioneer in engaging businesses and their people in nature-based solutions.

It works with companies to upskill their teams and clients in environmental impacts and dependencies on nature, and the risks and opportunities presented.

"We take staff into the field to experience first-hand the environmental issues we face and get

"There is a strong need to invest in robust solutions for climate adaptation which benefit business, people and nature."

Fiona Sutton Wilson

involved in the solutions we investigate, all so we can deepen knowledge and accelerate change across organisations," Wilson says.

"In Australia, our NbS work is focused on wetlands and Tiny Forests – a public-private-community cross-sector initiative that is proving to be highly successful in the UK and Europe."

Earthwatch is looking for businesses to partner with and invest in Tiny Forests, championing the Australian movement.

"Bringing together purpose-led volunteering, employee wellbeing, and nature-positive action, tiny forests are a highly visible way to restore and regenerate nature within our urban environments," Wilson says.

Planted on a tennis court-sized parcel of land, these green spaces are 30 times denser and grow about 10 times faster than a traditional forest.

Wilson says the mix of plants such as ground cover, shrubs and grasses combined with trees provides structural complexity and a complete natural ecosystem.

"With over 50 years of citizen science experience, Earthwatch turns these tiny forests into biodiversity and engagement hubs. We bring the community, schools and employees to monitor forests with us," she says.

"Participants become 'Scientists for a Day'; they measure the ecosystem services that these forests bring, so we get to know – even more deeply – why nature is important."

"Beyond the on-ground impact, the Tiny Forests movement has global significance. Partners of Earthwatch Tiny Forests align themselves with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including climate action, life on land, sustainable cities and communities, and partnerships for goals."

Tiny forests are easily planted in cities and towns where a small parcel of land, about 200 square metres, is available. Each is planted with species native to that particular area, ensuring ecosystems are protected.

Other co-benefits include capturing carbon emissions, improving soil, reducing surface water run-off damage and flood proofing, and creating green havens for pollinators, soil dwellers and birds.

"Nature is facing multiple tipping points," Wilson adds. "With loss of habitat, species are becoming threatened or extinct, and there are hundreds of threatened species that call the city home here in Australia. Tiny forests create opportunities for us to regenerate and create patches of nature-rich habitat to support biodiversity in our urban spaces."



We work with corporates for nature based solutions.



Let us help you tackle your ESG goals

Contact Earthwatch Australia | earthwatch.org.au/tinyforest



AFR161 A041