



CONSERVATION COUNCIL

ACT REGION

Dr Maxine Cooper
The Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
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Investigation into Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves) (CNP), the Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores

The Conservation Council ACT Region Inc. (CONSACT) congratulates the Commissioner for conducting this timely investigation, and appreciates the offer of additional time in which to make this submission. I am pleased to provide the submission below which builds upon the preliminary submission made to you on where we provided comments upon the scope of the Terms of Reference for the Investigation. Our submission will not reiterate the full detail contained within each of our members' individual submissions, but we have attempted to compile those recommendations which we believe to be of paramount importance in securing the long-term viability and integrity of Canberra's conservation reserve system.

The Conservation Council ACT Region Inc. is the peak non-government environment and conservation organization in the ACT with over 30 member groups. Many of the submissions made by our member organisations (in particular those made by the Canberra Ornithologists Group, the Limestone Plains Group, the National Parks Association, the Molonglo Catchment Group, the Southern ACT Catchment Group, and Friends of Aranda Bushland, amongst others), provide information, commentary and recommendations relating to specific components of the ACT's conservation reserve system. We commend these views and recommendations to you.

We are aware that there is a separate Investigation by the Commissioner relating to trees and the urban forest renewal programme. Clearly, there are connections between the urban forest (individual trees, parks, gardens etc) and the system of reserves which form green strips through, and around, the Canberra urban area. These in turn are linked to the rural lands of woodland, forest and riverine communities beyond urban Canberra. We strongly urge the Commissioner to ensure that full cognisance and recognition is made within both investigations of the intricate linkages between each of them.

As an over-riding ecological principle, the ACT's natural landscape needs to be examined, monitored and managed as a whole. Connections are particularly important for a range of species which move in and out, and around, Canberra, especially in response to the seasons and weather conditions (e.g. drought).

As a general comment regarding CNP, we believe that our reserves are in danger of (a) being incrementally nibbled away by inappropriate developments, and (b) by being over-used by people. With the Canberra population still growing, more and more Canberrans are seeking recreational opportunities within natural areas and green strips, and there has been a noticeable increase in numbers of people using some reserves. This Council believes that urban design in Canberra is not providing a sense of community, or providing sufficient recreational opportunities at the local neighbourhood level. People are, therefore, looking to the parks, reserves, and green linkages for walking, jogging, cycling, dog

recreation etc and in some instances more active (and damaging) recreational pursuits like mountain biking and motorised trail biking.

The Conservation Council therefore wishes to draw your attention to some key findings and recommendations drawn from the submissions of our members, viz:

1. *The need for improved management of the existing nature reserves, including:*

- More financial resourcing for PCL plus employment of an increased number of field rangers;
- Greater science-based annual monitoring and compliance (including of recreation/visitor use), including greater use of on-the-spot fines;
- Improved public education about nature reserve values and Regulations;
- Improved informational signage;
- More active management, with restoration of multi-layer habitat in appropriate areas;
- Improved collection of baseline data, and provision of such data in a publicly accessible format;
- The production, including public participation, of individual reserve (or groups of reserves) management plans;
- Inception of, and resourcing for, of a dedicated bushland management team within PCL; and,
- Basic financial administrative support for *Parkcare*, *Bushcare* and *Bush on the Boundary* groups to maximise their voluntary contribution to conservation reserve and natural area management (with consequential value-adding to ACT Government expenditure).

2. *Improved design of future nature reserves*

- Creation of larger reserves to offset edge effects (e.g. Throsby ‘neck’);
- Establish better connectivity between conservation reserves, including through the identification of suitable lands of all tenures where restoration/rehabilitation activities can strengthen connectivity across the landscape;
- Where leasehold land is involved, consideration of a mix of reserve and leasehold to achieve the most optimum/best outcomes for biodiversity;
- Acceptance of, and moves towards, the creation of an additional national park in the ACT (see NPA submission); and,
- Review of all ACT LMAs to improve conservation outcomes (given the valuable contribution LMAs make to the ACT’s natural landscapes).

3. *Improved design of future suburbs to minimise impacts upon adjacent/nearby conservation reserves, to provide wider buffers at the urban interface, and to incorporate more community recreational facilities/recreational functionality within the urban area and thus relieving human pressure on conservation areas:*

- The management principles developed by the *Bush on the Boundary* Reference Group to be adopted by ACT Government as a prior requisite for all subdivisions with an urban-natural area interface;
- Incorporation of fire buffers/and/or the outer asset protection zone to be totally incorporated within the boundaries of any new urban areas/suburbs as a standard design practice (i.e. conservation reserve areas should not be sacrificed in order to maximise urban blocks and thence to protect those assets);
- All major infrastructure works to be contained within the existing urban envelope, and not within conservation reserves (reserves have for too long been seen as ‘waste land’ suitable for all types of infrastructure activities);
- Improved provision of space for bike related recreation and off-road cycleways within the boundaries of future suburbs or within clearly designated areas which are appropriate, such as pine forest estate;
- Improved provision of longer dog walking areas, improved provision of fenced dog exercise parks (such as those provided in Forde and proposed in Casey), and improved recreation walks within future suburbs;

- Provision of cat containment zones in all new greenfield developments as mandatory, and phased in for the rest of Canberra over time, with a priority for all suburbs abutting nature reserves or sensitive conservation areas; and,
 - Urban design in northern Canberra (and in Molongo) to incorporate functional green corridors and retention of mature trees with hollows for mobile species or species with large ranges (such as Superb Parrots and raptors).
4. The ongoing implementation of the ACT Government's Kangaroo Management Plan with adequate resourcing, as this is an important initiative to maintain good ecological balance.
 5. Creation of an integrated biodiversity/spatial planning system as described in the NPA submission, including resourcing for public access to ACT Government biodiversity data currently held by a range of agencies, through a publicly accessible GIS system such as ACTMapI.

The Conservation Council is very keen to engage in any further opportunities to elaborate on this submission, and to participate in any fora, panels, reference groups or public sessions on the management of Canberra Nature Park and associated reserves.

Yours sincerely,

John Hibberd

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