



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
Ms Tara Cheyne MLA (Chair), Miss Candice Burch MLA (Deputy Chair), Mr James Milligan

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the supply of water to the Tharwa Community

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Minister for Advanced Technology and Space Industries
Minister for the Environment and Heritage
Minister for Planning and Land Management
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Manager of Government Business

Member for Brindabella

Obj # 19/34872

Ms Tara Cheyne MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services
Legislative Assembly of the ACT
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Cheyne

I am writing in response to the Committee's current inquiry on the supply of water to the Tharwa community. Please find below for your consideration, the ACT Government's submission to this inquiry and the matters referred to in the terms of reference.

The Tharwa Village is located alongside the Murrumbidgee River and considered by many as 'the gateway to Namadgi National Park'. The village is the oldest officially recognised European settlement in the ACT, with the historic Cuppacumbalong Homestead a key focal point. With a population of approximately 80 (2016 Census), the village continues to provide services for farming and rural leaseholders in the area that contributes to the region's economic potential. Tharwa is also a significant place for Ngunnawal Aboriginal community and for neighbouring nations as a travelling route between the plain and the mountains, as an ideal place to cross the Murrumbidgee River.

The Tharwa Village Plan

In September 2018, the ACT Government finalised the Tharwa Village Plan (the Village Plan) following extensive collaboration with the Tharwa residents and surrounding communities. Preparation of the Village Plan focused on the examination of locally based economic, tourism, recreation and community opportunities for Tharwa's long-term viability and the protection of its historic village character. In particular, the Village Plan responds to actions outlined in the 2012 ACT Planning Strategy which aimed to:

- a. *retain the function and identity of regional villages and towns as distinct places, rather than a continuation of the Canberra urban area, and*
- b. *support lifestyle opportunities afforded by the region to live in an urban or suburban environment, rural village, the 'bush' or on a farm.*

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The Village Plan addresses key issues and opportunities identified during community engagement and through background analysis, including infrastructure and heritage significance studies. In doing so, the Village Plan secures the preservation and enhancement of Tharwa's special character by providing a vision, planning principles and planning strategies to guide its sustainable growth into the future. It makes recommendations to build upon the value the village contributes to the local community, tourism and recreational opportunities for Canberra. The recommendations aim to retain and enhance the existing rural village character and identity; provide locally-based economic, tourism and recreational opportunities for the benefit of the community; that Tharwa is accessible and well connected; protect and conserve the environmental value of Tharwa's natural heritage; and promote sustainability in the built and natural environments.

Growth of Tharwa Village

The Village Plan sets guidelines to retain the character of Tharwa while allowing for limited growth and recommends a moderate increase in the local population through the release of five existing vacant residential blocks within the village core for limited residential development. In accordance with the Territory Plan Variation No 359 (Tharwa Precinct Map and Code) that implements the planning policy recommendations made by the Village Plan, any future development of these blocks is restricted to one residential building per block. This variation commenced on 1 March 2019. Design guidelines that were developed in close collaboration with the local community are included within the Village Plan that define the desired character for new and redeveloped buildings that can be built in the Tharwa Village.

Supply of potable and non-potable water

The Tharwa village is not connected to Canberra's urban potable water supply network. It currently extracts non-potable water supply from the Murrumbidgee River for fire-fighting purposes and some domestic use. The existing non-potable water supply infrastructure is considered to be aged, unreliable and does not meet the minimum standards required in the ACT for fire-fighting. Tharwa is a small village with 33 immediate dwellings and the estimated cost of upgrading to a reticulated town water supply system is considered prohibitive given the small scale of the village.

The non-potable water supply is extracted from the river via two pump and pipe networks for domestic use and firefighting purposes. The system is owned and managed by two separate entities – a local resident and by the ACT Government.

The privately owned system which services the northern part of the village was constructed in the 1950s and is managed by a local Tharwa resident. This system supplies the general store, the community hall and some residences in the northern part of the village. In the past, the infrastructure has been unreliable, difficult to maintain and has not allowed for the monitoring of water usage or water quality.

The second system that is owned by the ACT Government and managed by ACT Parks and Conservation Service (ACTPS), services the Tharwa School and public toilet with non-potable water. The existing extraction points for both systems are poorly located on the western side of the Murrumbidgee River and the result is an unreliable water supply during a dry year.

At the time of the development of the Tharwa Village Plan, the ACT Government commissioned investigations into the existing village infrastructure including potable and non-potable water,

electricity, sewerage, stormwater, gas and telecommunications. The study was considered in the development of the Tharwa Village Plan.

The *Tharwa Infrastructure Capacity Study – Calibre Consulting* (formerly Brown Consulting, December 2013) identified numerous deficiencies in both existing pumping systems. These include storage tanks located on privately leased land, pump systems and tanks have reached the end of their useful life, inadequate monitoring system of water usage, the systems do not provide adequate fire-fighting water supplies, is interrupted from time to time when the river is too high, too low or too silty to pump, unknown underground network and connection to low voltage power supply with no backup.

Given the village is within a bushfire prone area and the existing non-potable water supply is aged and considered unreliable the ACT Government commissioned Calibre Consulting in 2015 to undertake a non-potable water supply options study to meet fire-fighting and/or domestic demands for the Tharwa Village (including Cuppacumbalong). The outcomes of this report were considered by the ACT Government, which subsequently agreed on the establishment of a new non-potable water supply for the purpose of fire-fighting in the Tharwa Village. An allocation of \$1.42 million was made in the 2017-18 ACT Budget for the provision of this infrastructure including a new pump, a new rising main and new tanks, to deliver a static non-potable water supply for firefighting purposes.

Project progress: Non-Potable Water Supply at Tharwa for Fire-fighting project

The non-potable water supply project is being implemented by the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate (TCCS). The project includes the construction of a new water supply bore, pump house with diesel back-up power supply and the installation of two concrete tanks, a hydrant booster, fire hydrants and associated pipework. Once completed, this new infrastructure will be owned and maintained by the ACT Government.

In 2018 the project provided two 15,000 litre tanks to the Tharwa community to upgrade and replace the community owned 1950s metal water storage tank. This infrastructure increased the non-potable water storage tank capacity from 20,000 to 30,000 litres to provide a gravity fed supply of non-potable water to residents along North Street, Union Street, Tharwa Street and Clarrie Lane.

Since that time community and key stakeholder engagement occurred to determine the best location for a new bore that was constructed in July 2018. Engagement on preliminary plans for the remainder of the non-potable water infrastructure was also undertaken in late 2018 with ACT Fire and Rescue (F&R) and the Rural Fire Service (RFS). Both provided support for the preliminary plans. Subsequently a Development Application (DA) was lodged with the Planning and Land Authority for consideration in November 2018. Public notification on the DA received representation from the Tharwa community opposing the location of the infrastructure that was proposed adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River on Naas Road, Tharwa.

In April 2019, a community information session was hosted by TCCS to give the Tharwa community an opportunity to provide further comment on the non-potable infrastructure proposed for Naas Road. At that time the proposal had been refined to be better aligned with the provisions of the Tharwa Village Plan, specifically in relation to design guidance for new buildings in the Tharwa

Village. The community supported and welcomed the proposed infrastructure, however objected to the proposed location adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River and requested that further options be explored. The community's key concerns included the potential traffic conflict by locating the infrastructure on Naas Road and specific objection to constructing the new infrastructure within the existing Murrumbidgee River corridor and the potential impact on the environment, existing landscape character and the Village green space.

A review of the design and the location of the proposed infrastructure was then undertaken by TCCS in response to community concern. Two new locations within the Tharwa Village were investigated. These included one location adjacent to the existing fire-fighting infrastructure behind the existing General Store as suggested by representatives of the Tharwa community, and an alternate location on North Street south of the existing tennis courts. The proposed site on North Street is located within the existing Strategic Fire Fighting Advantage Zone (as indicated by the ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan) and is considered to provide for a safer access and egress for fire-fighting vehicles than the other locations. Consultation with ACT F&R and the RFS on the revised designs received support for the North Street location.

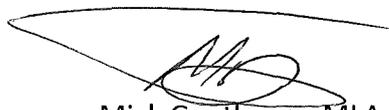
In August 2019, an additional community information session was hosted by TCCS to discuss the findings from the review of the two new locations and to advise on the project's preferred location on North Street, Tharwa. At the information session the Tharwa community did not support this preferred location due to perceived safety issues of the proposed location of the infrastructure in proximity to the existing school crossing and the visual impact on the existing amenity and rural character of the main street.

Refinement of the proposed infrastructure to be located on North Street is currently underway to address concerns raised by the community in regards to visual impact and safety. This includes providing advanced hedge planting and a perimeter fence to restrict pedestrian access from nearby school children and residents. An alternate single tank solution is also being considered that would further reduce the potential visual impact on North Street and the neighbouring property. Given the new proposal will differ from the previous proposal for which a DA was submitted, the existing DA will be withdrawn and a new one submitted. The new DA will be required to undergo public notification. If development approval is granted, construction of the new fire-fighting infrastructure is anticipated to be completed in 2020.

The provision of non-potable water supply infrastructure for the purposes of fire-fighting for Tharwa is an important step in securing the future of the village. This, together with the directions provided in the Tharwa Village Plan ensure that Tharwa will retain its place as an attractive, social, recreational and creative hub for the local community while also attracting visitors that wish to experience the qualities of a rural village.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Mick Gentleman MLA
21/2/19