

GFA Talk to Assembly Planning Committee

GFA is concerned with not only Ginninderra Falls, but the Murrumbidgee corridor generally, and urban biodiversity and sustainability. Many species, such as the Pink-tailed worm lizard, occur mainly on the edges of cities, and are threatened by urban expansion. The Murrumbidgee is an important wildlife corridor on Canberra's edge, but could be compromised by the Western Edge Development. Providing space for urban biodiversity helps to reduce runoff, helps protect homes from summer heat, and enables people to have closer contact with nature.

Ecologically sustainable development is defined in section 9 of the bill, but should also imply development that blends in with the environment as far as possible, rather than bulldozing it and starting afresh.

There are some good ideas in the new Planning Bill. Rules to specify tree canopy and planting and permeable areas are an improvement. However, the focus on outcomes without or with minimal specific binding rules will enable developers to maximize profit and probably not lead to good planning outcomes.

Landscape Design for connected native wildlife habitat and WSUD systems, as part of development proposals, would also be an improvement, but they seem to be optional: perhaps these should be a requirement in some cases.

The stated Principles of Good Planning include subjective terms; but measurable goals need to be set and used as development criteria.

Principles of Good Consultation: to prove its legitimacy, the community's views expressed in the consultation should be summarized quantitatively, regardless of the consultation criteria, so the public can see the extent to which they are adopted.

Declaring Light Rail and its infrastructure a territory priority project suggests that we are destined to blindly follow light rail development, without consideration of any alternative technologies or planning strategies which could reduce overall car dependence more economically, and in the time frame demanded by climate action.

Cost/benefit analysis of a project and its alternatives should be required before the minister can declare a Territory Priority Project.

With a minimum planting area of 10% for multi-unit developments, and 20% minimum permeable area for sites > 2000 sq. m, it seems unlikely that targets of 30% tree canopy cover (or equivalent) and 30% permeable surfaces in urban areas can be achieved by 2045. And green walls and roofs are useful but not a substitute for tree canopy.

Offsets should be used only as a last resort, and not as a matter of course to allow any development to proceed. This should be specified in the minister's rules.

Environmental Significance Opinion and Significant adverse environmental impact are subjective: an appeal process is needed if an agency determines them. Some information may have been omitted from the review, or relevant experts may disagree. Conditions may have changed since previous studies used to justify the lack of an EIS.

Environmental assessment should consider not just EPBC listed species but the biodiversity, scenic and recreational values of a site. Bluett's Block and Ginninderra Falls are areas of high biodiversity, worth protecting regardless of whether EPBC listed species exist.

In short, the technical specifications in the territory plan are a good starting point, but if they are generally optional under the new planning bill, the outcome of planning is uncertain. A limited trial of the new system is probably advisable.

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