

Government Response to OCSE Report - the Heroic and the Dammed - Lower Cotter Catchment Restoration Evaluation

Talking Points

General information:

- The Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment's report evaluating the restoration of the Lower Cotter Catchment responded to recommendation 12 of the Auditor General's performance audit of the restoration of the Lower Cotter Catchment. With the development of a statutory management plan for the LCC, the Commissioner has evaluated restoration against management objectives in the new reserve management plan for the LCC.
- The Lower Cotter Catchment Reserve Management Plan was approved in 2018 and outlines how the government and stakeholders will protect water resources and other natural and cultural values in the area over the next ten years. The focus of the plan is the ongoing restoration of what is a water catchment in recovery following its complete destruction in the 2003 Canberra bushfires. A progress report on implementation of this plan will be provided to my Office in 2023.
- The Commissioner has made 14 recommendations including one recommendation that updates three previous recommendations made by the Auditor General. The Commissioner's recommendation is that a Code of Sustainable Land Management Practices be completed by 30 June 2019. The government agrees with this recommendation and completion of the Code will also finalise all recommendations made by the Auditor General.
- The Government Response to the Commissioner's report agrees, or agrees in principle, to 13 of the 14 recommendations. One recommendation is 'noted' as it relates to allocation of funding from the Water Abstraction Charge directly to catchment management for the life of the Reserve Management Plan in addition to existing recurrent funding.
- The intent of the recommendation for additional funding will be managed through existing budget processes rather than directly through the Water Abstraction Charge.

Notes on 'Agreed in Principle' and 'Noted' recommendations (if asked):

- **Recommendation 1.1 – Monitoring and Evaluation Implementation –**

The Commissioner has developed a staged monitoring and evaluation framework for the LCC and has recommended that it be implemented immediately and reviewed every five years. This is only agreed in principle because the monitoring framework is broader than required to inform management practices and would require additional funding to implement. Monitoring needs to be cost effective and resources will be directed to restoration works.

- **Recommendation 1.3 – Improve consistency and coordination of monitoring, mapping and modelling resources across government.**

Much of this recommendation is already being implemented. The requirement to collect LiDAR data every two years is not considered to be the most cost effective means of monitoring as other remote sensing options are more suitable for informing management.

- **Recommendation 2.1 – Allocate discrete funding from the Water Abstraction Charge in addition to existing funding**

The Directorate will bring forward funding initiatives through the established Treasury budget process and I note that the LCC already benefits from approximately \$2.3 million per year in government funding.

- **Recommendation 2.3 – Allocate funding specifically for the ongoing costs of implementing the monitoring and evaluation framework**

Substantial monitoring is already underway by relevant parties and will be apportioned according to management responsibilities and annual priorities.

- **Recommendation 3.2 – Review and update the LCC Risk Treatment Plan quarterly and include risk management as an agenda item on the LCC Implementation Coordination Group meeting.**

An annual review of the risk treatment plan is considered sufficient for managing risk in the LCC as most of the risks were clearly identified in the current risk plan and many will not change over time. Risk Management will be included as an agenda item in quarterly Implementation Coordination Group meetings and any new risks identified and treated as required.

- **Recommendation 4.1 – Review the Terms of Reference for the LCC Implementation Coordination Group until all high and medium priority management actions in the reserve management plan are complete.**

The intent of this recommendation will be implemented and an amendment to the terms of reference is proposed.

- **Recommendation 5.1 Amend the Road Transport Act to allow for immediate removal of abandoned vehicles**

JACS is convening a working group to address the requirements of this recommendation which may include operational and legislative changes. All relevant agencies will be included on this working group.