



COOMA-MONARO SHIRE COUNCIL

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Our Ref EP/CAT/6

Your Ref:

12 November 2010

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Secretary

Subject: Submission on the Inquiry into the Ecological Carrying Capacity of the ACT and Region

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on the inquiry into the Ecological Carrying Capacity of the ACT and Region. As a Council sharing borders with the ACT, the future growth of Canberra and the region is of vital importance to the future of our Shire.

This submission will provide comment on only some of the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry.

The resources available to the ACT in terms of water, energy, and food sourced from within the Territory and outside it.

In examining the Ecological Capacity of the ACT and Region, the availability of water for human consumption is probably one of the highest priority items.

The outcomes of the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan may have major implications in relation to water allocations for the ACT and surrounding NSW areas, so until those details are finalised, any suggestion on carrying capacity might be premature.

The Murrumbidgee River flows through Cooma-Monaro Shire immediately upstream of the ACT. The Murrumbidgee provides water for potable consumption for reticulated supplies for Cooma (direct extraction from the river), and Bredbo (extraction from bores within the river corridor). The Murrumbidgee also provides water to numerous property owners for stock and domestic purposes, and irrigation for agriculture for a limited number of landholders along the river corridor.

An increasing population for Canberra and the surrounding region will require provision of secure water for potable purposes, as well as any commercial and industrial applications that may accompany an increased population base.

While there are probably a number of measures that could be put in place to improve the efficiency of water treatment and delivery within the various cities and towns in the area, a much larger population base may require a much larger water allocation, either from ground or surface sources or from increased stormwater harvesting.

The Murray Darling Basin is said to account for 39% of Australia's agricultural production and provides for the critical water supplies for over 3 million people (Guide to the Murray Darling Basin Plan – Executive Summary – page xv).

Clearly, any decisions made from the Murray Darling Basin Plan on water allocations will have an effect on agricultural production at a National level, let alone the regional or localised impacts. This will potentially have a major effect in determining the carrying capacity for the ACT and surrounds.

From Cooma-Monaro's perspective, it is important that the specific needs of Canberra and the ACT should not be satisfied at the expense of surrounding areas.

Any required increase for extraction of water from the Murrumbidgee to service the needs of an increasing Canberra population should not impact on the current or future water extraction rights or needs of Cooma or other centres.

Approximately two-thirds of the Googong Catchment lies within Cooma-Monaro Shire. Council is the determining authority for the majority of land use issues in the Shire, including in the Googong Catchment. The area is predominantly agricultural with little pressure for rural/residential development. It is imperative to this Council to be able to maintain agricultural activities in such catchments without external governance issues from other jurisdictions.

Maintaining a base of agricultural production is essential in servicing the needs of a growing population.

Council has been actively working with the ACT (ActewAGL/ACTEW) in relation to cross-border issues, including catchment and source water protection issues. We greatly appreciate the willingness of the ACT to keep Council informed and involved in these issues.

Council is also responsible for the provision and maintenance of other essential infrastructure including rural roads. It is acknowledged that unsealed roads can be problematic in contributing to increased sedimentation and turbidity in river systems, especially following severe storm events. However, as it is simply unrealistic to consider sealing all gravel roads, it must be recognised and accepted that gravel roads are a part of living in a rural area. There should not be any unrealistic expectations placed on roads authorities such as Councils in relation to the management of unsealed roads.

The role of the ACT in the region in relation to population and resource use.

The population of the ACT has a very broad influence on landuse planning in parts of surrounding areas. There is continual pressure for the provision of "lifestyle" type landholdings within commuter distance to the ACT.

It is likely that an increased population for Canberra will also increase pressure on areas such as Michelago and Bredbo for provision of this style of land holding.

While there certainly are benefits to rural communities of a broader population base, there is a delicate balance of ensuring this occurs in a way that is not at the expense of productive agricultural land.

The NSW Department of Planning has produced a State Environmental Planning Policy for Rural Lands, with one of the main aims being to prevent the fragmentation of rural land. It would appear that the pressures of a growing population and the demand for lifestyle blocks will create planning issues not only for parts of the ACR in NSW, but also for the ACT.

Finding the right balance between servicing a demand for lifestyle blocks and protecting agriculture and agricultural activities will be a challenge.

It may be worthwhile considering cross-border landuse planning issues as part of any discussions centred on expanding the population of the ACT and region.

The Murrumbidgee catchment also provides extractive products such as hard rock, blue metals, sand and gravels, to service the demands from markets including the ACT. It is clear that the demand for such products will increase with an expanding population, especially with the need for increased infrastructure such as roads and housing.

Transport of such materials from extractive sites in Cooma-Monaro Shire will place additional pressures on road systems and traffic, not only in our Shire but also within the ACT.

Cooma-Monaro Shire Council is happy to engage with the ACT in a collaborative way to ensure future population and resource use is managed in a competent and sustainable manner.

I would be happy to provide further information to the Committee if required. Please contact me on 64551900 if you would like to discuss any aspects of this submission.

Yours faithfully



Peter Smith
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for
JOHN VUCIC
GENERAL MANAGER