

2012

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING,
PUBLIC WORKS AND TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES REPORT NO 13
OF 2012: INQUIRY INTO THE TIDBINBILLA REVISED DRAFT PLAN OF
MANAGEMENT 2011**

TABLING STATEMENT

**PRESENTED BY
MR SIMON CORBELL
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

24.08.2012

Mr Speaker, I table the Government response to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services Report No 13 of 2012: *Inquiry into the Tidbinbilla Revised Draft Plan of Management 2011*.

In accordance with the *Planning and Development Act 2007*, on 4 April 2011, then Minister for Planning, Mr Andrew Barr MLA, referred the Tidbinbilla Revised Draft Plan of Management to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services.

The Standing Committee conducted an inquiry into the plan and handed down its report on 4 April 2012 making nine recommendations. The Government agrees with six of the recommendations, agrees in principle with two of the recommendations and agrees in part with one recommendation.

The recommendations made by the Standing Committee have been invaluable in finalising the Tidbinbilla Plan of Management 2012 which has also been tabled here today.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Government, I would like to thank the Standing Committee for its contribution to this important document and to the planning process.

Following the devastating impact of the 2003 fire, the Government made a decision to manage Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Birrigai Outdoor School and the Jedbinbilla former pine plantation, as one entity and the Tidbinbilla Plan of Management 2012 addresses all of these areas. In addition, the former

Gibraltar Creek pine plantation has been added to Tidbinbilla and is included in the plan of management.

The plan of management recognises that Tidbinbilla is valued for a number of reasons. It protects a diversity of ecosystems that provide refugia for plants and animals - surveys have recorded almost 500 plant species, 30 reptile species, 34 mammals and more than 160 bird species. Tidbinbilla also has rich heritage of human history with evidence of Aboriginal occupation going back approximately 21 000 years and remnants of European pastoral landuse including Rock Valley Homestead.

Tidbinbilla is adjacent to Namadgi National Park and together they form a significant part of the heritage listed Australian Alps National Parks and Reserves, an important component of Australia's conservation reserve network.

Tidbinbilla houses a wildlife collection where captive animals can be seen in natural surroundings. A number of research programs are associated with some of these animals, including breeding programs for the critically endangered Southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby and the endangered Northern Corroboree Frog. Most recently, bettongs which are part of an ACT reintroduction program, have been brought to Tidbinbilla from Tasmania.

In recognition of Tidbinbilla's values, the Government has invested over \$15 million in post-fire rebuilding and enhancement. This has included construction of the Sanctuary (\$ 7.8 million), rebuilding of Birrigai Outdoor School (\$4.2 million) and restoration and enhancement of a wide range of visitor and

wildlife management facilities (\$3 million). Recent investment has included \$630 000 to construct the Gibraltar Peak Trail, which was opened in April 2012.

More than 200 000 people visited Tidbinbilla in the past 12 months. Tidbinbilla visitor numbers are now higher than they were before the devastating 2003 bushfire and almost double the visitor numbers in the years immediately after the fire.

The Standing Committee for Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services, in their report on Tidbinbilla, has also highlighted the importance the community places on Tidbinbilla and recognised the community's need for further involvement in the future of Tidbinbilla.

Three of the Committee's recommendations relate to the preparation of a Tidbinbilla master plan which is proposed in the plan of management. The preparation of a master plan will provide more detailed site planning and guide future development of Tidbinbilla. The Committee recommendations relate to early public engagement in the development of the master plan, making information available on the Tidbinbilla website and including an expanded and better integrated education role for Birrigai at Tidbinbilla.

The Government also agrees with a recommendation to explore ways in which to enhance the experience for people with disabilities when they visit Tidbinbilla. Tidbinbilla already provides two walking trails which are accessible for people with a range of abilities and further access to both new and existing facilities will be considered as part of preparing a master plan.

Two recommendations related to commercial tour operations at Tidbinbilla. The Government agrees with the recommendation on processes to adopt for future contracting arrangements and agrees in principle that guidelines be developed to determine how applications for tourism products will be assessed and monitored. I note the Tidbinbilla Plan of Management 2012 includes criteria that commercial tour operators must address for the issue of a licence, and a commitment to undertake monitoring programs to assess visitor impacts, especially in areas with significant natural or cultural heritage values.

The Government has also agreed in principle to broadening the range of accountability indicators for Tidbinbilla. The current key indicators relate to customer satisfaction which is based on a regular visitor survey undertaken on the conservation estate.

The Government agrees in part to the recommendation that implementation/operational plans for the management of Tidbinbilla be published. A number of comprehensive annual reports are prepared for key management activities at Tidbinbilla, including reports on bushfire prevention, pest animal management and weed control activities. These reports will be made available on the Tidbinbilla website, however, operational plans that are regularly modified and updated depending on weather, access, resource availability and other factors will not be published.

Mr Speaker, in relation to the Tidbinbilla Strategic Board, the Government has agreed to the recommendation to make available the names of the Board members and their representation on the TAMS Directorate website. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Board for their

valuable contribution in the development of the Tidbinbilla Plan of Management. In particular, I would like to thank the community and business representatives, as participating on Government advisory committees can take a good deal of personal time and commitment.

Mr Speaker, significant work is undertaken in the preparation of conservation estate plans of management and I am pleased that the Assembly Committee report notes that the Tidbinbilla Plan of Management provides a sound framework that balances the competing demands of conservation and recreation at Tidbinbilla.

The large numbers of visitors, the facilities that support them, and the beautiful landscape that forms Tidbinbilla must be carefully managed and the plan of management sets out objectives, policies and actions which aim to provide protection for Tidbinbilla's values.

It should be noted that the final Tidbinbilla Plan of Management, also tabled here today, will be available on the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate website.

Tidbinbilla contributes to the wonderful scenic backdrop that Canberra enjoys, and we are privileged to have such easy access to a biodiverse, scenic and beautiful place.

I commend this response to the Assembly.

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**PRESENTED BY
MR SIMON CORBELL, MLA
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT
AUGUST 2012**

Tabled 24. 8. 2012

**ACT Government Response to Recommendations of the Standing
Committee on Planning, Public works and Territory and Municipal Services
Inquiry into the Tidbinbilla Revised Draft Plan of Management 2011**

	Recommendation	Government response
1.	The Committee recommends that a consultative approach, which ensures early engagement with the community and other stakeholders, be adopted for the development of the Tidbinbilla precinct master plan.	Recommendation is agreed. Additional information has been provided in the plan of management in s. 11.8. Discussion: Public consultation will be part of the development of a master plan for Tidbinbilla, as indicated in s. 11.8 of the plan of management. The preparation of a master plan will require that a consultation plan be drafted at the commencement of the task to outline a timeline for consultation activities, the community stakeholders and volunteer groups to be engaged, government agencies to be consulted and the methods that will be used to draw in the wider community. A draft master plan will be released for public comment. Similar early consultation has been successfully followed in the recent development of a master plan for Jerrabomberra Wetlands.
2.	The Committee recommends that once finalised, the Tidbinbilla Master Plan be made publicly available, including on the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate website.	Recommendation is agreed. Additional information has been provided in the plan of management in s. 11.8. (see comments above for Recommendation 1.)
3.	The Committee recommends that following their appointment, the list of members of the Tidbinbilla Board of Management, which includes whether they are community, business or government representatives, be placed on the Tidbinbilla website.	Recommendation is agreed. Discussion: The Tidbinbilla Strategic Board membership list has been placed on the Territories and Municipal Services Directorate website. The Board consists of five community/business representatives and six Government representatives.
4.	The Committee recommends that the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate publish its implementation/operational plans for the management of the Tidbinbilla precinct.	Recommendation is agreed in part. Discussion: Comprehensive annual reports are prepared which outline the implementation of activities undertaken at Tidbinbilla on bushfire prevention, pest animal and weed control activities as required under the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan for the ACT 2009, the Pest Animal Management Plan 2012-2022 and ACT Weeds Strategy 2009-2019. A link to these public reports will be provided on the TAMSD/Tidbinbilla website. In addition, an annual summary of the Tidbinbilla visitor data will be prepared and provided on the Tidbinbilla website. Together these

	Recommendation	Government response
		four areas provide an overview of the implementation of key management activities which aim to protect and conserve natural heritage at Tidbinbilla. It would, however, be inappropriate to publish Tidbinbilla operational plans as they are significantly influenced by budget and other resource availability, and regularly modified and updated based on issues such as weather, access, available resources, changes in Government priorities, external influences and other factors. Also publishing of Tidbinbilla operational plans would be inconsistent with the approach taken for other areas of the ACT conservation estate. Note: A new bushfire shed has been constructed at Tidbinbilla (located at Birrigai) which has the capability of being used as a front line service in managing bushfires in the immediate area, and for providing back-up for other regional Rural Fire Service brigades. The facility also provides an area of refuge during bushfire with standalone services and on site water harvesting. The shed will provide greater protection capability to high value facilities including Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Birrigai.
5.	The Committee recommends that the key indicators relating to the management of Tidbinbilla, not just customer-satisfaction, are introduced into the strategic and accountability indicators in the Budget Papers.	Recommendation is agreed in principle. Discussion: The existing performance indicator of customer satisfaction is based on regular surveys and provides feedback on the visitor experience to the ACT reserve system including Tidbinbilla. Other potential indicators which link on-reserve action, such as weed and feral animal control or the breeding of threatened species for release, with actual outcomes, such as a reduction in weed or feral animals or an increase in the numbers of a particular threatened species, are difficult to identify and measure for the conservation estate. The value of such indicators also varies according to the scale upon which they are measured, for example, vegetation condition at a local Tidbinbilla scale may not reflect the situation in the broader landscape. The ACT Government is currently exploring a range of options across the ACT for putting outcome indicators in place through the Australian Native Vegetation Framework and the proposed new Nature Conservation Strategy. Some of these indicators could be useful in monitoring at the local scale such as for Tidbinbilla.

6.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore ways in which to enhance the visitor experience at Tidbinbilla for people with disabilities.	Recommendation is agreed. Discussion: TAMS is supportive of providing an enhanced experience for Tidbinbilla visitors who have disabilities, and the plan of management promotes the provision of recreational facilities to support access for people with disabilities at Tidbinbilla. For example: • policies in the plan include: - visitor facilities will be designed, built and maintained to relevant standards and guidelines, including those for access by people with disabilities (s. 8.5) - walks in Tidbinbilla will provide for a range of abilities and some tracks will be suitable for wheelchairs and strollers (s. 8.8) - as far as practicable, facilities at picnic areas will provide access for people with disabilities (s. 8.8) - where practicable, access and facilities will be designed for visitors with limited mobility or disabilities, and for young children (i.e. stroller friendly) (s. 8.9) • Table 5.2 notes that facilities in Zone 3 are generally suitable for people with disabilities and for stroller access; and that there are two existing tracks (Sanctuary Track and Koala Track) which are wheelchair and stroller friendly (s. 5.3). • An action in the plan commits to undertake a program of works to provide a network of walking tracks in Tidbinbilla that provide walking opportunities for people with a range of abilities (s. 8.8). In addition, the plan has been amended to note that access for people with a disability will be considered as part of preparing a master plan.
7.	The Committee recommends that (a) guidelines, which include communication protocols especially with the public, should be developed to determine how applications for tourism products will be assessed and monitored (b) a strategy for monitoring and managing cumulative impacts of tours also be developed	Recommendation is agreed in principle. Discussion: (a) <u>Guidelines</u>: The plan of management includes criteria that commercial tour operators must address for the issue of a licence. These are: • size of commercial groups in relation to areas proposed to be visited and the activities to be undertaken • frequency of visits • the potential for impacts taking into account current usage and impacts on the area(s) to be visited • potential impacts on other visitors, including exclusion of

	(c) that the guidelines and strategy be made public.	visitors as the result of commercial tours • level of knowledge, professional training and indemnity of the operator • accreditation of the operator e.g. Ecotourism Australia Accreditation • submission of trip plans and emergency evacuation procedures in case of emergency • safety of participants and other visitors • concordance of the proposed operation with the objectives and policies of this management plan. (s. 8.7) 'Protocols for communication with the public' have been added to the guidelines in the plan of management. (b) <u>Monitoring</u>: The plan includes an action which supports development of monitoring programs to assess visitor impacts, especially in areas with significant natural and/or cultural heritage values (s. 8.4). (c) <u>Publication of Monitoring Strategy</u>: Commercial tour activity is currently very limited. If there is an increase in the level of activity, TAMS will consider publishing a monitoring strategy. Note: The written consent of the Conservator of Flora and Fauna is required under s. 67 of the <i>Nature Conservation Act 1980</i> before vehicle access is permitted to defined management trails.
8.	The Committee Recommends that the ACT Government re-assess whether a single select tender is still the best process to adopt.	Recommendation is agreed. Discussion: ACT Government procurement circulars (or guidelines) are followed for all procurement activities. These are governed by the <i>Government Procurement Act 2001</i> and the <i>Government Procurement Regulation 2007</i>. It is also ACT Government policy that the assistance of the Shared Services Procurement Unit is required for procurement activities on all major projects.
9.	The Committee recommends that the proposed expansion of the education role for Birrigai at Tidbinbilla be part of the development of the Tidbinbilla Master Plan.	Recommendation is agreed. Additional information has been provided in the plan of management in s. 9.5 and s. 11.8. Discussion: Birrigai at Tidbinbilla will be considered in the development of a Tidbinbilla master plan. The plan of management applies to the whole Tidbinbilla precinct, including Birrigai and s. 9.4 and s. 9.5 outline approaches to integrating Birrigai's outdoor education, environmental education and heritage studies programs into the education programs for Tidbinbilla as a whole.

