

**Submission to
ACT Planning and Land Authority
on Variation to the Territory Plan No. 231
by RSPCA (ACT) Inc**

The final draft of No. 231 is a good comprehensive document.

However there are several points I would like to comment on.

1.5.6 d) Wildlife

- Five of the six listed threatened species of birds in the ACT are found in the Throsby area. These are all small to medium sized birds which suffer greatly from cat predation throughout the ACT.
- Each year RSPCA Wildlife takes in about 100 confirmed cat attacked birds, most are pee wee size and smaller and nearly all microbats that are brought into care are caught by cats. Every summer when blue tongue lizards are emerging cats attack them.
- I am sure that the numbers we see are just the tip of the iceberg. Most cats would not bring their catches home and only a small proportion of people would be concerned enough to bring the injured animals to the RSPCA. The most commonly cat caught bird species are superb fairy wrens, pardelotes and silvereyes.
- The Common Dunnart would be very quickly eradicated from Mulligans Flat if cats were not contained.
- Striped legless lizard
Translocation of the striped legless lizard – where to? Are there any areas that are protected from development in the long term?

1.5.7 Urban Edge Interface

- Cat containment and Native Wildlife

Cat containment should apply to all new suburbs as they invariably interface with grasslands or conservation areas. Does the article in Canberra Times on Friday 1st July, 2005 mean that this has already occurred?

See Appendix 1. para. 4

2.3.2 Nature Conservation

To ensure land uses adjacent to conservation areas do not have significant adverse impacts on threatened species.

- This will only be achieved with cat containment laws for ALL new suburbs bordering onto Nature Reserves.

2.3.10 Conservation

Provision is made for the conservation of threatened species and ecological communities through preserving land for nature conservation purposes. The main principles are:

- *Establish conservation areas which are adequate in area, with a sufficient buffer from development areas.*

What parameters are being used for an adequate area for conservation – does it depend on the largest species or the most mobile species? Surely not the smallest species ie, small birds or legless lizards.

- *Ensure land uses adjacent to conservation areas do not have significant impact on reserve.*

As long as there are people in an area there is a significant impact on reserves.

- *Where appropriate edge roads are to be used to provide and interface between development and significant conservation areas*

Is a road a sufficient buffer? More than half of the birds and animals received by RSPCA Wildlife are as a result of car strikes. See below.

2.3.12 Urban Open Spaces

The urban open space system is based on principles that:

- *Ensure that the open space network is designed to provide opportunities for wildlife movement corridors, etc.*

The conservation areas of Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarroo are divided by the suburb of Throsby. Where are the wildlife corridors that do not cross roads and houses?

The “*Proposal for the Protection of Sensitive Fauna in Nature Reserves from the Impacts of Domestic Cats*” (2003) by the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra, et al. stresses the need for “Unusual and urgent measures” needed to ensure the survival of threatened and declining birds and to maintain a sustainable community in the Mulligans Flat/Gooroo complex. Not only are endangered / threatened bird species at risk but numerous other species including skinks, amphibians, small mammals and invertebrates. Placing new suburbs between the two reserves is a real backward step.

2.4.3 Kenny – General Policies

2.4.4 Throsby – General Policies

- *Edge roads to be utilized wherever possible as a buffer between residential development, urban open space and nature reserves*

17% of animals we receive are picked up as a result of a vehicle strike.

40% of animals received as orphans are as a result of vehicles killing parents, primarily ducklings.

CONCLUSION

The RSPCA recommends that the suburbs of Harrison and Kenny become areas with compulsory cat containment and that the suburb of Throsby be abolished from the plan because of its intrusion into the nature reserve areas.

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Appendix 1

Good news from today's Canberra times

By Ben Doherty Assembly Reporter

Friday, 1 July 2005

Cats who stray in two of Canberra's newest suburbs will be stretching their owners' friendship a whisker and their budgets.

Residents in the as-yet-unbuilt suburbs of Bonner and Forde will be required to keep cats indoors or in secure cat runs at all times, to protect native wildlife, under legislation introduced into the Legislative Assembly yesterday.

Cats will also have to be micro- chipped. Those who stray will be seized and returned to their owners, who can face fines of up to \$1000.

Environment Minister Jon Stanhope tabled the proposed laws yesterday, saying cats in the new Gungahlin suburbs would need to be contained at all times to protect wildlife in the nearby Mulligans Flat and Goorooyaroo reserves.

Owners will not even be able to walk cats on a lead under the new regime.

Similar laws have been either enacted or proposed for limited areas in South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania.

The legislation is supported by the RSPCA and environment groups, but cat groups - while agreeing cats should be kept inside - claim laws mandating their containment were unnecessary.

But secretary of the Canberra Cat Fanciers Association Nikki White described the legislation as "dictatorial" and said she feared the laws could be the "thin end of the wedge" of restrictions on cat owners.

"We do think it's a good idea that cats are kept inside, but we don't think people should be dictated to," she said.

"And where will this end? Is this the start of a move to ban cats altogether from some areas?"

A ban was actually where the legislation started. When these laws were first mooted last year, several environment groups such as the ACT Conservation Council advocated an outright ban on cats in the suburbs.

Ms White said cats were not the only, nor the worst, predators, and were being unfairly singled out.

"If these areas they are looking to protect is so sensitive ecologically, why are they building a suburb there? Humans are a far more damaging species than cats."

Tabling the legislation yesterday, Mr Stanhope said his Government was committed to promoting responsible cat ownership. "A containment policy not only protects native fauna but reduces the risk to cats themselves from cars and other animals."

He said a 1998 study of domestic cat behaviour in Canberra found that 75 per cent of domestic cats hunted wildlife, of an estimated 480,000 animals killed in urban areas each year.

ACT Greens MLA Deb Foskey lent her support to the legislation, saying cat predation had a significant impact on native wildlife.

The ACT Conservation Council oversaw a submission to Government from environment groups, Environment ACT and ACT Planning and Land Management Authority, outlining several cat containment options. Council director Trish Harrup said while an outright ban was ultimately rejected, the proposed legislation could work.