

NATURE IN OUR CITY

Hearing 27 March 2019

Molonglo notes

The Molonglo Conservation Group (MCG) welcomes the opportunity to meet with you today and thanks you very much for the invitation. The group's aim is basically to have a healthy, resilient and productive area around the Molonglo and Queanbeyan rivers with their diverse interconnections to the tableland landscapes and communities.

MCG's networks traditionally focussed largely on Landcare and ParkCare Groups (rural, peri-urban and urban). However, community groups other than environmental, and individuals from the general community are focusing on environmental outcomes and are coming to MCG for membership, leadership and guidance and we are working with them.

We see critical issues affecting nature in our city. The Development bias of Government and the resident's (the community) need for and interest in strong connection/reconnection to retaining and increasing nature in the city.

The middle of the city plays an important role. Consequently, there needs to be ongoing support for engagement of community with nature in the city for:

So how can we achieve strategic management of biodiversity and connectivity across the urban landscape, linking public and private lands across tenures and borders? This includes priority on conservation in reserves and ensuring ecological sustainability. For example: MCG supports citizen science and community groups undertaking vegetation surveys (Vegwatch, Landkeepers' Trust) and water surveys (Waterwatch); and there is strong interest in ecological sustainability in strategic bush fire management and operations plans.

The Molonglo River connects Canberra to other places. Lake Burley Griffin is in the middle of a complex multi-jurisdictional zone of the Molonglo with little or no strategic plan of management.

Maintaining cross-border connections to the central Canberra is equally as important as connections within the city.

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Connectivity of flora and fauna across the city reserves and open spaces provides stepping stones, linking one side of the territory to the other. Remnant and regenerated nature in open spaces and reserves are valuable spaces for the wellbeing of the community and help to create links between ACT and NSW; remembering that NSW ecology surrounds the ACT entirely; and that rivers, birds, fish, animals and plants are poor respecters of government boundaries.

Another question is how can we achieve strategic management of nature in the city outside of the reserves? For example, the Lake Burley Griffin has important roles. Do we want clean water, clean waterways feeding the lake, do we want healthy ecology? It has a functional role in water quality. The lake also plays a part in providing connectivity and habitat, for example, wetlands and soft edges with a majority presence of nature are important to have in the central part of a densely urbanised city.

It is attractive and highly appreciated feature. How do we ensure the serenity and water quality of the lake?

Accessibility equity for people and nature is important for promotion of exercise and enjoy the proximity of water. Support continuation of policies and regulations to ensure that recreation is family oriented and not intrusive. However, some of the natural areas are being threatened by development of lake edges and that spreads onto the water from the lake's edge.

Do we want to copy the mistakes of the past? No, we should not be copying the mistakes of other cities in the past, which has meant that the governments are now buying back public spaces for the health and wellbeing of people and nature.

People are drawn to developed areas along the waterway. Nature Play is key to a healthy community. As the city is infilled it is important to create scope for nature play close to where people live. Planning should ensure a quality nature-scape is included within dense development. We need to continue to question the scale of density in relation to the views of the natural 'bush' backdrop it conceals and the reserves it isolates. Why are the height of buildings blocking this? Excessive density is not healthy for people or for nature.

Ensuring green space for nature-play and recreation, along with connectivity of habitats are essential.

Another question is how do we achieve strategic management of recreation in reserves with a priority for conservation? This would recognise the key role that of reserves as stepping stones for connectivity within and around the urban footprint. There needs to be resources to educate about and enforce compliance with policies, regulations, plans, guidelines, and Conservator's activity statements.

How can we improve policies and resources to support invasive species management? For example, African love grass which has been spread by mowing. Steps are being taken.

Also, some ongoing debates are not resolved, such as consideration of aspects about Kangaroos in reserves, grasslands, and woodlands, rural and urban areas - culling versus ethics, business potential, road kill, hunting, overgrazing of public lands with detrimental impact on biodiversity.

How can we achieve climate sensitive urban design? MCG welcomes the ACT Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, 2016, the announcement by Minister Shane Rattenbury in February 2018 with release of the Living Infrastructure Information Paper, and the CSIRO report on Mapping Surface Urban Heat in Canberra (2017). MCG Strongly supports the government ensuring and enforcing appropriate policies, regulations, management plans and guidelines to achieve green (nature) and blue (water) spaces in all residential and commercial areas so that people have such spaces close to where they live and work.

Green spaces need to include tall, mature native trees, especially, hollow trees. Eucalypt trees need a minimum of 150 years to form hollows. 150 years is a long wait for a replacement tree to grow. Cutting hollow trees is an endangering activity. A mature hollow tree will be conserved under one Act, but cut down under regulations exercised in the name of development that encroaches on the pre-existing tree.

How can we strategically manage and implement sensitive urban design in relation to the environment and natural landscape? For example, hills and mountains are the backdrop for the city, why build so high their visibility is blocked. Sullivan's Creek is another example; a natural creek, converted to storm water drain. The importance of managing for water quality is now starting to be recognised for biodiversity and social benefits; having soft creek edges, wetlands. There is increasing community interest in and appreciation of this. It needs to go further up to the headwaters so that they are not destroyed by buildings.

Sullivan's Creek is a creek that feeds the lake, not just a stormwater drain. View the landscape from Mitchell. It's part of a natural system that existed before the city was built. Like the Lake, Sullivan's Creek catchment illustrates multiple layers of complexity:

- the ridges, parks and reserves on either side of the creek are natural and Aboriginal places, with remnants of early settlement history.
- The streets and buildings of the inner city cover historical floodplains and ancient lake beds.
- The aquifers under the surface are hidden resources still to be properly understood.
- Limestone caves along Sullivan's Creek and the Molonglo River, now under Lake Burley Griffin, were once galleries of Aboriginal art and culture.
- We can't return those caves to their former condition, but we can do something about Sullivan's Creek. We can continue to restore the creek bed, its banks and the wetlands to help care for nature, both in the creek and the lake.

How can we ensure resources and support for working with and researching local traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices in the present-day context, through meaningful dialogue and cooperative management between community and government? For example, Bullan Mura nature reserve in Yarralumla.

How can we have fire management in reserves and open spaces to ensure that it is ecologically sustainable? Fire management of reserves and open spaces must be ecologically sustainable - appropriate techniques, research, monitoring must be a core capability of the government. Bush fire management strategies and emergency services must consider conservation requirements for ecological sustainability.

Continuity in MCG community engagement is important to maintain and build on the achievements already made otherwise we are likely to go backwards environmentally with nature in the City being adversely affected. MCG has been sought out to provide leadership and guidance on community engagement to continue biodiversity programs that have been started in new urban development projects.

All of these needs require a sound balance through equity of people and nature. We need to focus on access and impact. Nature must not be misused or abused, but enhanced.

Linda Beveridge