



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES  
Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Chair), Miss Candice Burch MLA (Deputy Chair)  
Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Nature in Our City

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*Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.*



All correspondence to:



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To the Committee Secretary, Standing Committee on Environment and Transport  
and City Services,

Legislative Assembly for the ACT, GPO BOX 1020, CANBERRA ACT 2601

**NATURE IN OUR CITY**

**Responses to the ACT Legislative Assembly's STANDING COMMITTEE on  
Environment and Transport and City Services invitation for SUBMISSIONS into  
the value of the natural environment to an urbanising Canberra.**

**Representing the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra Inc.**

The Field Naturalists have been actively involved in appreciating, studying, protecting  
and reporting on the flora, fauna, habitats and natural history of the Canberra region for  
over thirty years.

In that time, and previously for individuals, we and members of kindred organisations,  
have enhanced our own understanding of the unique scenic and natural setting of  
Canberra as the hub of the National capital region.

It is disturbing to hear that pressures are being applied to legitimise motorised activities  
on the lakes and in reserves and to increasingly allow more active recreation in  
conservation-status and Urban Open Space reserves in the ACT.

The implications for people's place in nature are profound. Those who regularly spend  
time outdoors know that their special, natural places are busy yet quiet, multi-use  
spaces for community members' enjoyment, exercise, dog-walking, contemplation,  
socialising, cycling on formed tracks, jogging and landcaring.

The terms of reference for the inquiry use words such as development, proposed  
infrastructure, functional requirements, economic development. The application of  
these terms increase naturalists' concern for the nature that sustains the ACT's current  
human population.

Formalising spaces into city parks with more concrete than space for plants misses the  
point about Canberra and the naturalness that sets it apart from cities around the world:  
the place's naturalness and close-to-home nature creates a difference that's sought after,  
valued and of enormous community health benefits.

In responding to the Standing Committee's Inquiry we would emphasise that all Urban Open Space areas, local parks, reserves, component reserves of Canberra Nature Park, Namadgi National Park, the Alpine region, river & creek corridors & wetlands have significance for & beneficial influence on people provided that:

- People have been introduced to the natural world in a way that fosters respect for other species, their habitats & other people.
- People understand the age-old concepts of stewardship & custodianship; seeing themselves as part of enduring, holistic, awe-inspiring systems larger than their own lifecycles & lifestyles.
- Each of these areas has interpretive signage and accessible information material that offers natural and cultural histories.

**The Field Naturalists do not welcome proposals for 'infrastructure' and 'development' in the ACT's reserves and Urban Open Space areas unless the changes are based on genuine consultation to enhance access and improve visitors' safety.**

**For our members it is far more important that funds for natural and outdoor places are spent on community-initiated projects. Projects that are imposed on communities without relevant consultation breed resentment and destroy trust in the 'public service'.**

**For decades, community groups such as the Field Naturalists, Landcare & ParkCare volunteers, have lead Guided Walks through their LOCAL reserves and for student groups. We've followed the examples provided by Rangers by interpreting the landscape, sharing information and anecdotes about species and habitats seen and stories based on cultural heritage.**

**These LOCAL interactions alert newcomers to Nature in our City. Interdependent relationships are explained. Bush etiquette considerations are explored. The values of outdoor play and experiences are discussed. As a result participants begin their journeys as observant, curious, naturalists and understand the value of nature.**

**If nature, special places, other species are valued, new cohorts of protectors and citizen scientists emerge from communities to care for and protect biodiversity.**

**Members of the Field Naturalists and kindred organisations such as Friends of Grasslands, have, voluntarily, made significant contributions to the surveying, assessment and recording of the ACT region's flora and fauna and the state of these species' habitats. Data collected, like that from Frogwatch and Waterwatch volunteers, directly inform scientists at the universities and in government departments. Artists and photographers voluntarily contribute images that record geology, weather, ecosystems and species.**

Examination of data, statistics and reports from a range of government departments and non-government agencies would clearly show that existing **natural environment areas in Canberra** provide:

- **Conservation** benefits through opportunities for the study of and research into the conservation requirements of habitats and species. Remediation projects can be tested. More importantly thousands of Canberrans can experience and enjoy seeing natural systems typical of southern Australia year-round.
- A range of opportunities exists in and near Canberra for professional and citizen science research into **biodiversity** and threats to native habitats, species and their communities.
- **Climate resilience** is enhanced through the ACT's thousands of hectares of native vegetation and diverse riverine systems. However attention needs to be paid to the significant effects of suburban heat islands, stormwater management, pollution, loss of urban trees on natural resilience processes.
- **Economic development** through special reserves such Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Mulligans Flat & Goorooyaroo Reserves, Tidbinbilla, Namadgi National Park and the Alpine areas generates income for the ACT. However extreme caution and thorough, independent assessments are needed before **economic development** is permitted into natural areas.

[and] **particularly in urban areas**

- **Amenity benefits** through local parks', reserves' and open spaces' provision of spaciousness, fresh air, space for reflection, relaxation & peacefulness, exercise space, dog-walking space, natural, varied playgrounds and closeness to nature. There are quantifiable benefits of the **natural environment** for health, wellbeing, fitness and children's development.
- **Social amenity** by bringing people together informally as they enjoy the **natural environment** in their diverse ways. Daily conversations and contact with others are essential to personal wellbeing and mental health. Communities evolve when individuals share time in nature, the ambience and seasonal changes of natural areas. Most landcaring volunteers cite the importance of socialising as the best reward from giving their time to working in nature reserves.

**Before exploiting Canberra's nature by imposing income-generating ventures on reserves; before permitting high impact recreational pursuits in nature reserves, before advertising Canberra's natural history internationally perspectives should be applied:**

- **The reserves and open spaces around Canberra continue to contribute significant financial benefits to the ACT.**
- **For much of each year newcomers see Canberra's climate extremes of heat and cold, see the dry sclerophyll forests as dead and unappealing, see natural areas as dangerous from snakes and spiders and fail to see our region's appealing wildlife.**

**If groups such as the Field Naturalists join Rangers and Indigenous leaders in presenting Canberra's nature to locals:**

- **More people will come to understand and appreciate the nuances of the different seasons' effects**
- **Participants in guided walks will feel part of communities passionate about flora, fauna and habitats**
- **Will understand and seek to preserve what exists in neighbourhoods seen as special and the territory's special reserves.**

**The Field Naturalists look forward to contributing to the appreciation, interpreting and recording of the conservation and biodiversity values of the National Capital region in the years ahead.**

**This will be achieved by engaging through local networks with communities and individuals keen to learn more about the nature and natural processes around them.**

**[Redacted Signature]**

**On behalf of the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra Inc.**

**Rosemary Blemings, President**

**[Redacted Address]**