



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Nature in Our City

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Ginninderra Catchment Group

The Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services  
Legislative Assembly for the ACT  
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### **Submission to the Nature In Our City Inquiry**

Dear Members of the Standing Committee,

Ginninderra Catchment Group (GCG) welcome this inquiry into matters affecting the value of the natural environment to an urbanising Canberra.

GCG is both a community-based natural resource management organisation and a Landcare network, operating primarily in the north-west ACT Region. GCG's mission is to 'connect, support and lead local communities to maintain and improve the health of the Ginninderra Catchment and surrounding environments'. GCG is an independent community-driven association based on a solid governance framework and underpinned by a strategic approach. It operates across land-tenures with land managers and the community to achieve a whole of landscape result. GCG supports 17 Landcare Groups (including Parkcare, urban, rural, junior, and Aboriginal Landcare Groups) and coordinates numerous community engagement and landscape-scale restoration programs.

GCG canvassed our members and the feedback in this submission is drawn from 12 member groups, including: Friends of Mt Painter, Hall Village Landcare Group, North Belconnen Landcare Group, Umbagog Landcare Group, Mt Rogers Landcare Group, Friends of Aranda Bushland, Friends of Mulligans Flat, Mulanggang Aboriginal Landcare Group, Friends of the Pinnacle, Macgregor Landcare Group, Jarramlee Landcare Group, Ginninderra Grasslands Restoration Group.

Comments were provided by group conveners both via email and during a session in our regular GCG General Members meeting, with further input from the GCG Executive Committee. The following points were made with reference to the terms for this inquiry.

**1. The level of public support for and satisfaction with amount and quality nature and natural environment areas in Canberra, particularly in urban areas.**

Canberra, our bush capital, has a high level of volunteering per capita and derives significant benefits from its natural environment. With the growing densification and development of ACT's urban areas, programs that improve environmental literacy and engage ACT citizens in caring for the public estate are essential. Coordination and support is required to leverage the community contribution to environmental management.

GCG, together with Southern ACT Catchment Group (SACTCG), has leveraged in-kind contributions from the community valued at \$1.5million per annum. They have also successfully brought into the ACT an average of \$250,000 per year of competitive project funding to facilitate biodiversity conservation outcomes, integrated with community engagement. Hence, Catchment Groups are a low cost, high return investment option for environmental management in the ACT, which require more sustainable funding to continue.

GCG members consider that increased attention needs to be focussed on community education to increase respect, appreciation and value placed on nature by the community. As such community resilience is one of GCG's program priority areas. GCG provide community education to over 3,500 people annually regarding local environmental and Aboriginal cultural heritage issues and solutions. Over the last five years, 130 field days and workshops and 750 educational activities have been undertaken by GCG and SACTCG combined. These activities increase behaviour change among the broad community including children, migrants, seniors, environmental volunteers, businesses and general public to generate positive environmental outcomes. There is also potential for increased engagement with these stakeholders, particularly schools and education about Aboriginal cultural heritage to meet high community demand. Continued funding for Catchment Groups is required to enable these outcomes to continue.

GCG also explained that there is an increased need for community education to increase public appreciation of nature and potentially increase in-kind contribution that the community provides in improving and maintaining natural areas. Increased interpretive signs and online information accessible from smart phones add to visitors' experience of nature. Increased education, including brochures and information targeted at active recreation users of nature would also be useful. Grassland restoration is another key area requiring further work, as natural temperate grasslands are the most endangered ecological community in Australia. GCG is leading grassland restoration programs in off-reserve areas of the ACT and the GCG Deputy Convenor has authored a relevant CSIRO report to Canberra Urban Parks and Places on grassland management (CSIRO: 2015). Engaging community based organisations with relationships of trust and respect with the community to deliver these services will provide the most cost-effective methods.

## **2. The types of nature and natural environmental areas within Canberra e.g. urban open spaces or bushland reserves and the existing or potential benefits and challenges they bring to Canberra's:**

Nature is critical for humans to survive and thrive and brings multiple benefits for social amenity, economic development, biodiversity and climate resilience. GCG members raised the following issues:

- There is increasing recognition of the health benefits of human connection with nature, particularly mental health benefits. Friends of Mt Painter, a GCG member group described that “contact with nature is calming, uplifting and inspirational”. In some places of the world doctors are “prescribing” connection with nature to address health issues. Participation in on-ground landcare activity is a positive example of human connection with nature and *further research into social and economic benefits of Landcare is recommended.*
- Being in the natural world provides the opportunity to better understand biological and ecosystem processes, and people’s own place in the web of life.
- Walking and cycling promote better physical and mental health.
- Nature stimulates creative impulses among artists, photographers and cubby-building children, among others.
- Abundant vegetation provides a heat sink, cooling the surrounding built environment
- Planning processes are critical to increasing community engagement with the environment
- Green infrastructure represents a carbon sink and a potential source of income as carbon markets are established
- Natural areas have high value for water infiltration into the ground. This is important:
  - for the catchment water budget which gets highly altered when you change a catchment from natural ground to paving and buildings, and
  - for maintaining street trees even though they may get watered by truck, i.e. to help maintain tree benefits - shade and biodiversity habitats (insects etc) and carbon capture, and
  - for the cleaning and slowing of stormwater when it moves through the soil to the creeks, rather than through drains, which is the premise behind the basin priority project.

Climate change is a concern for GCG members and the ACT and Region Frogwatch Program (hosted by GCG) has established a program to monitor the impacts of climate change by comparing current trends in frog call behaviour to historical data across the ACT. Frogs are widely recognised as indicators of environmental health and leading scientists predict that frogs will be one of the animal groups most negatively affected by rising global temperature and climate change. The earlier onset of breeding events as a phenological response to climate change is widely recognized (While and Uller 2014), however despite long-term monitoring, changes to frogs behavioural patterns in the ACT was unknown. To address this knowledge gap in 2015 Frogwatch started a weekly monitoring program at designated sites across the ACT in 2015, funded by Climate Change Policy section of the ACT Environment and Planning Directorate. This project will keep providing important knowledge on the timing of breeding of frogs in the ACT region, and how this timing may have changed since the early 1980s.

### **3. Opportunities for Blue (water) and or Green (natural) Infrastructure in Canberra including;**

The ACT is has considerable blue and green infrastructure, leading to its status as the ‘bush capital’. However more funds are required to maintain this existing infrastructure, most notably weed control and community environmental stewardship, which the Catchment Groups have a role.

Planning and design of this infrastructure in newer suburbs is also critical. Ginninderra Catchment Group established the first Bush on the Boundary Reference Group in the ACT, a forum for

knowledge exchange to assist biodiversity conservation in close proximity to the areas of urban development. There are now a number of such reference groups operating, including the Ginninderry Bush on the Boundary Reference Group, which GCG chairs. These groups enable an opportunity for the conservation community to engage with developers to address issues related to biodiversity conservation and other natural values before they arise.

There are strong opportunities for maintaining the blue and green infrastructure in the ACT through the use of the Water Abstraction Charge. Rather than this fee that all householders in the ACT pay being directed towards consolidated revenue, it could potentially be used towards directly funding Catchment and Environmental management in the ACT.

#### **4. Managing the interface between the natural environment and urban areas particularly in regards to conserved environmental areas.**

Community have a considerable role to play in managing the interface between the natural environment and urban areas, in the ACT there are over 1,500 volunteers actively engaged in improving and maintaining the natural environment. Urban open space areas, providing connectivity between conserved environmental areas as well as increasing community value, appreciation and involvement in conservation.

#### **5. Current policy or regulatory settings that impede the integration of the natural environment within optimal urban development and design.**

There is a lack of comprehensive plan or strategy for environmental in the ACT, which examines the role of community and government working together for improving and maintaining natural resources.

There is also the need to revise governance structures for environmental management in the ACT. While there are a number of structures, including the ACT NRM Council, these are not currently adequate. GCG like Landcare ACT consider the need to establish a fully independent ACT Natural Resource Management regional body that advises government and Ministers, considers community-driven initiatives and government priorities, determines expenditure of Australian government funding, and reports annually (see Landcare ACT Agenda Paper).

Greater planning is required to options for integrated environmental management is required. GCG operates across various land tenures and an effective nature corridor exists in the Lower Ginninderra Catchment, with a number of priority sites managed by community Landcarers. There is a need for further integration between various stakeholders involved in land management in the ACT, who are working in various land tenures. GCG see considerable potential to detail the existing and potential relationships in a broader planning framework. This issue was explored in the Landcare ACT peri-urban forum see <https://landcareact.org.au/position-statement-peri-urban-lands-in-the-act/>.

#### **In conclusion**

GCG is working with Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate and other Catchment Groups to examine sustainable operating models for the future over the next 12 months. This

process is focussed on maintaining and improving local natural areas in the ACT through supporting community to deliver environmental services with numerous social and economic spin-off benefits.

We would welcome participation in a public hearing as part of this inquiry in August/September. If there are any questions about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact myself on the details below, or Karissa Preuss, Executive Officer, Ginninderra Catchment Group on (02) 6278 3309; [landcare@ginninderralandcare.org.au](mailto:landcare@ginninderralandcare.org.au).

Yours sincerely,



Sandy Lolicato

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