



Dr. Chris Watson  
79 Denny Street  
Latham ACT 2605  
Ph. 02 6278 3079

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Mr. Brian Lloyd  
Secretary  
ACT Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Regional Development  
brian.lloyd@parliament.act.gov.au

**Submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Select Committee  
on Regional Development**


The Ginninderra Falls Association (hereinafter termed the Association) was formed with the aim of promoting and encouraging the development of the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park in the southern region of Yass Valley Shire where it borders the Australian Capital Territory.

Please find attached a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Regional Development that the Association believes will significantly advance the development of regional economic activity generally and improve recreational and ecotourist facilities within the natural environment for present and future generations.

Members of the Association committee would welcome an opportunity to speak directly to the Select Committee on Regional Development on matters related to this submission. You may contact me by phone to propose a suitable time and place or else email Dr. Doug Finlayson (Association Treasurer) at [doug.finlayson@netspeed.com.au](mailto:doug.finlayson@netspeed.com.au)

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Chris Watson  
President  
Ginninderra Falls Association

	A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE
SUBMISSION NUMBER	4
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## **SUBMISSION TO THE ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

by the

### **Ginninderra Falls Association**

(The Ginninderra Falls Association is hereinafter termed the Association)

### **Summary**

This submission addresses issues surrounding Sections 5(a), 5(c) and 5(d) of the Select Committee's terms of reference, with particular attention to the proposed establishment of the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park in NSW just across the northern border of the ACT within the Canberra – Murrumbateman – Yass Valley land corridor.

The Ginninderra Falls Association contends that there are compelling arguments for strong cooperation between the ACT and NSW Governments, together with the Yass Valley Council, to create a regional national park that will preserve an area of outstanding natural beauty along part of the Ginninderra Creek – Murrumbidgee River corridor and greatly enhancing the region's tourist potential. This will create commercial opportunities that will significantly improve the value of the surrounding area as a focus for cross-border enterprises with links to existing vineyards and broad acre developments.

The Association urges both the ACT and NSW Governments to work cooperatively to achieve public access to the land outlined for the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park and set aside budget appropriations for collaborative procurement, land acquisition and infrastructure development that will greatly benefit present and future generations of Australians.

There are national park business models in other parts of Australia that may be used to ensure viability of a future Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park. These models include ongoing management at a sustainable level by State and Local Governments.

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### Select Committee's terms of reference

The Association notes the Terms of Reference for the ACT Legislative Assembly Select Committee set out in the Resolution of Appointment (28 February, 2013), in particular Section 5:

“The select committee shall inquire and report into the ACT’s relationship with the surrounding region, including, but not limited to:

- (a) the identification of opportunities and supporting governance structures to coordinate economic development, including tourism and transport across the region;
- (b) the coordination of service planning and service delivery, particularly in the areas of health and education;
- (c) the opportunities for collaborative procurement by ACT Government with surrounding local governments;
- (d) further cooperation at the local government level on environmental and conservation matters and building community resilience to deal with natural disasters, extreme weather events and climate change; and
- (e) any other relevant matter; “

In this submission the Association will focus in particular on **Section 5(a) – tourism, Section 5(c) – collaborative procurement, and Section 5(d) – environmental and conservation matters.**

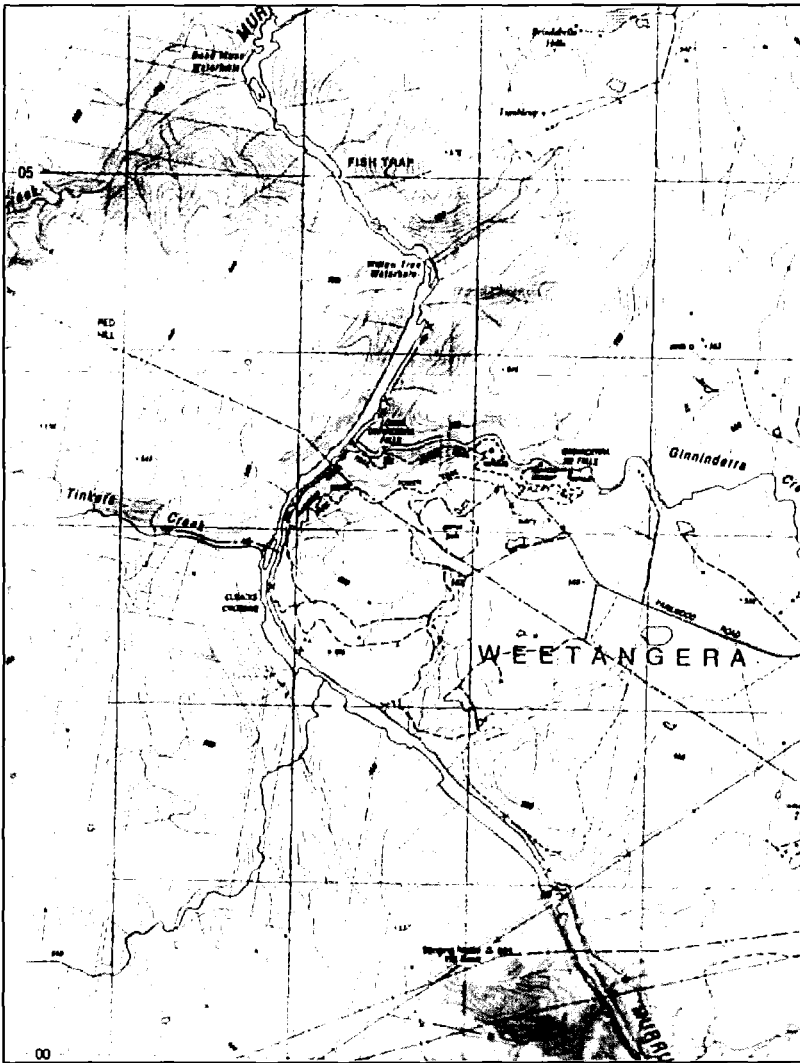
### Background information – population pressures

The area around the confluence of Ginninderra Creek with the Murrumbidgee River is an area of outstanding natural beauty. It has a number of attractive waterfalls and gorges that make it natural area for public recreation and education. It is located in the Yass Valley Council Shire just to the north of the ACT border and is close to a large Canberra/Queanbeyan population centre.

It is thought that by 2020 the population of Belconnen and Gungahlin together will be over 150,000 people and the population of the ACT and surrounding region as a whole is likely to be approaching 500,000. There are currently significant population pressures on the northern ACT boundary with NSW. This is evident in current proposals for suburban developments and broad acre developments. Continuing population growth across the whole region is likely for the foreseeable future.



*Upper Ginninderra Falls, February 2013*



*Extract from the 1:25,000 scale topographic map around the confluence of Ginninderra Creek with the Murrumbidgee River.*

The Ginninderra and Murrumbidgee gorges have probably been used by aboriginal populations over many millennia. Since the arrival of Europeans in the region about 190 years ago, generations of other

Australians have also been coming to this part of NSW to admire the spectacular river systems, rapids and waterfalls. In that time the land area has been developed by the rural industries that have included sheep farming, cattle farming, vineyards, sand and gravel quarrying, horse breeding and rural living “hobby” farms. The area is currently wholly under private freehold ownership and within the Yass Valley local government area.

*Surveyor Robert Hoodle’s 1835 sketch of upper Ginninderra Falls*

There were a few years when a portion of the Ginninderra Falls area and adjacent Murrumbidgee River corridor were opened to the public as a privately operated recreational park with animal enclosures and with an entrance fee. Unfortunately, since 2004, public access has been denied because of the prohibitive increases in the cost of public liability insurance. Some accident victim cases are still before the courts seeking damages for events that happened about ten years ago.



## The proposal for a national park

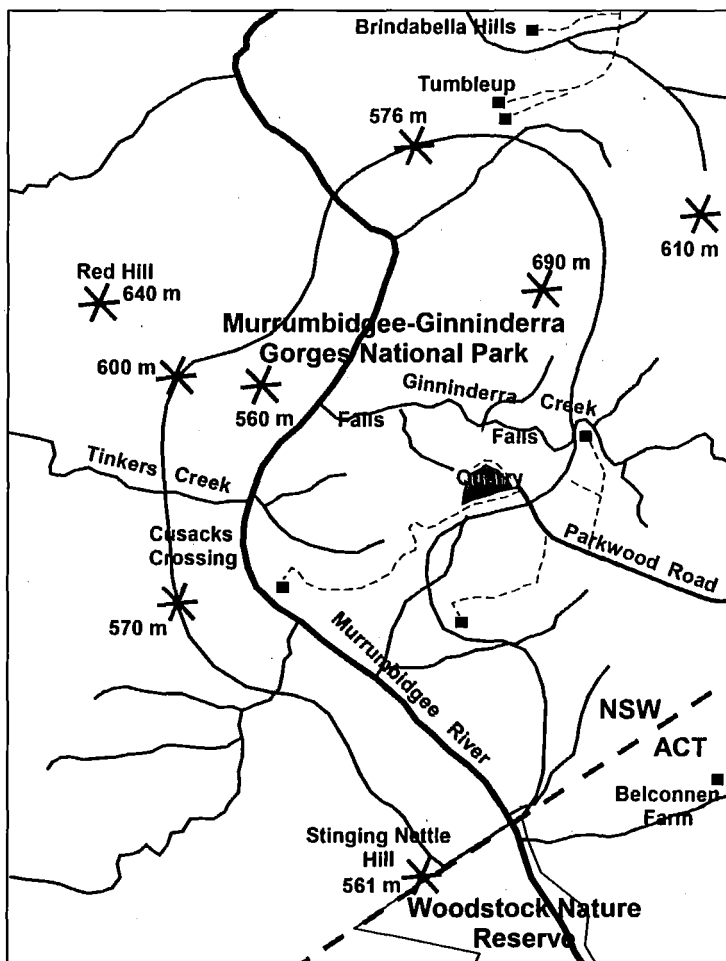
The Association believes that it is now long overdue to re-establish long-term public access to the lower Ginninderra Creek – Murrumbidgee River corridor area for the benefit of present and future generations of Australians. The Association believes that case for the ACT Government, NSW Government and Yass Valley Council to promote and advance their tourist and regional recreation assets to the maximum extent is overwhelming.

If nothing is done now the Association believes there are present and future pressures on the area for subdivision and private development that will forever compromise the area for public use. The Association strongly contends that the area should be returned to public ownership in the form of a park that will forever be open to the public – **the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park**.

The ever-increasing population within the borders of the Australian Capital Territory and in the surrounding regions of New South Wales greatly enhances the viability of a fee-paying national park, the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park, operated by the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Association contends that the area of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park is *the premier development that has potential to add considerably to tourism in the Yass Valley Council area*, catering for the needs of a very large nearby population. West Belconnen suburbs are, literally, five minutes drive away along Parkwood Road. There is easy access from the Barton Highway that traverses the Canberra-Murrumbateman-Yass land corridor.

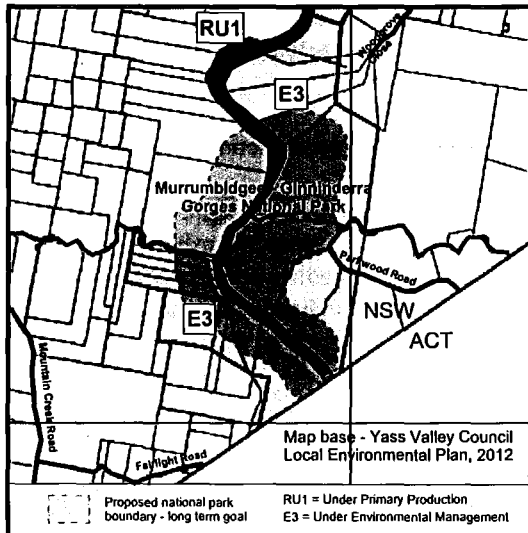
Further details of the proposal are on the Association web site – [www.ginninderra.org.au](http://www.ginninderra.org.au)



*Long-term aims for the boundaries of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park.*

## Land holdings

The land area of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park is all in private freehold ownership. The subdivisions are shown on the map below. There are eleven landowners that may be affected by the establishment of a national park. The land area is about 700 hectares. When linked to the adjacent Woodstock Nature Reserve across the border in the ACT the total area is about 1000 hectares.

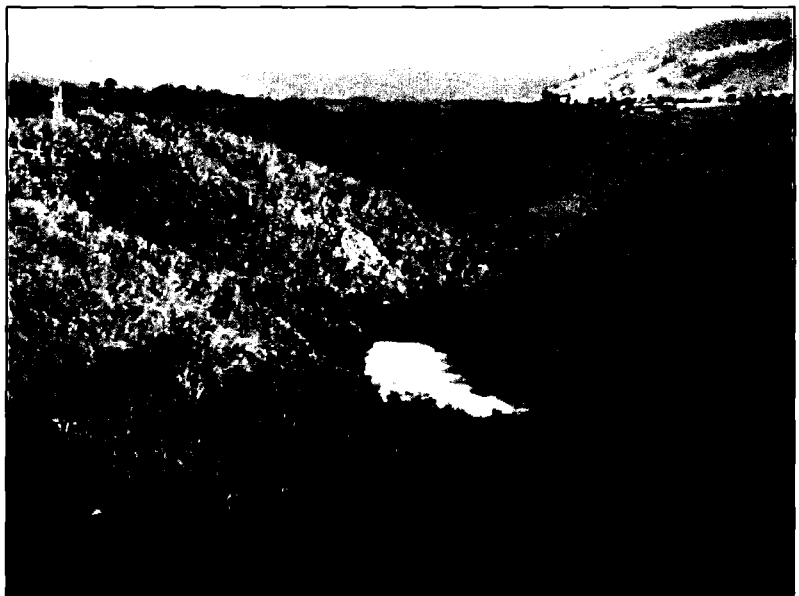


*Land sub-divisions within the Yass Valley Council area with an overlay outline of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park long-term boundary goals.*

The NSW Government has made it abundantly clear that there will be no compulsory land acquisitions associated with the development of any national park. Thus there needs to be landowners willing to relinquish some freehold land areas for sale to the NSW Government that can be incorporated in the national park. It is also possible that some land owners would agree to conservation covenants on land purchased by conservation trusts.

## Regional tourism – national parks - ecotourism

Within the Australian Capital Region there are a large number of Government and non-Government organisations involved in tourism associated with the natural environment, sometimes termed “ecotourism”. At a State/Territory Government level these would include the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service and the ACT Parks and Wildlife Service. Local Government agencies manage public lands within the shire boundaries. In the non-Government sector, ski field proprietors manage significant land areas within national parks under strict guidelines and contribute to the public interest in national parks and wilderness areas.



*Murrumbidgee River corridor looking south*

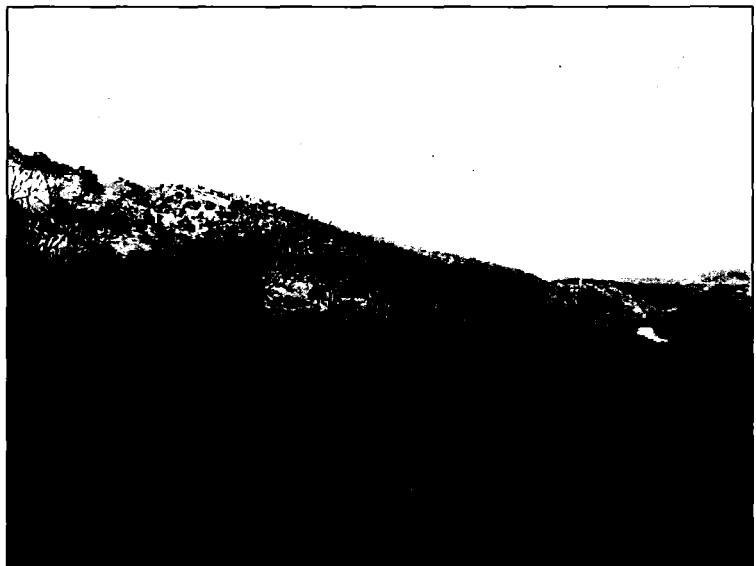
The Association wishes to draw attention the findings of the **2012 ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water - Inquiry into Current and Potential Ecotourism in the ACT and Region** to which the Association and Yass Valley Council made submissions.

*“Report 8 August 2012; Recommendation 4 5.60 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider creating a new nature park to preserve, maintain and make accessible Ginninderra Falls with sufficient surrounding land to constitute a sustainable nature park asset.”*

The Association hopes that the present ACT Government will act on the above recommendation.

The Association contends that grassroots community-based groups contribute to the very significant public interest in ecotourism. Groups such as the National Parks Association, Friends of Aranda Bushland, and many other such organisations, including our own Association, are instrumental in spreading community interest in the natural environment and the pleasures and satisfaction that are derived from visiting well-managed public parklands.

***Murrumbidgee River corridor looking south from a property near Woodgrove Close***



Organisations such as the National Parks Association, both within the ACT and in NSW, contribute very significantly towards the reservation and development of public lands as areas that are valuable ecotourism destinations. One only has to consider the community push over many years to develop the Namadgi National Park and the neighbouring Australian Alps National Park stretching from Victoria to the ACT ( the 655 km long Australian Alps Walking Track, etc). Recreational fishing groups plays a significant part in the maintenance of healthy river systems and the monitoring of discharges from sewage and industrial sites into creeks and rivers.

### **Tourism - a competitive business**

One only has to consider the attractions of Australia’s coastlines and reefs to the domestic and international traveller to realise that the National Capital Region cannot take the tourist revenue for granted. Tourist destinations must be attractive and be promoted widely within the wider Australian communities. Even within the National Capital Region the attractions of the NSW South Coast are a magnet not just for ecotourists and local residents but also for lifestyle changes on retirement. Nearer to Canberra the major inland tourist destination for interstate visitors is the Snowy Mountains for summer and winter recreation.

**The lesser well-known tourist destinations must, to a significant extent, depend significantly on the Region’s own population centres for patrons.**

Intra-Regional ecotourism should be promoted and encouraged. The Region must make the effort to develop and promote its own tourist destinations and this includes wilderness areas, national parks and public lands of various types. Activities of different types and special events must be encouraged and promoted. There are niche markets out there like canoeing, bike riding and orienteering that bring in dollars.

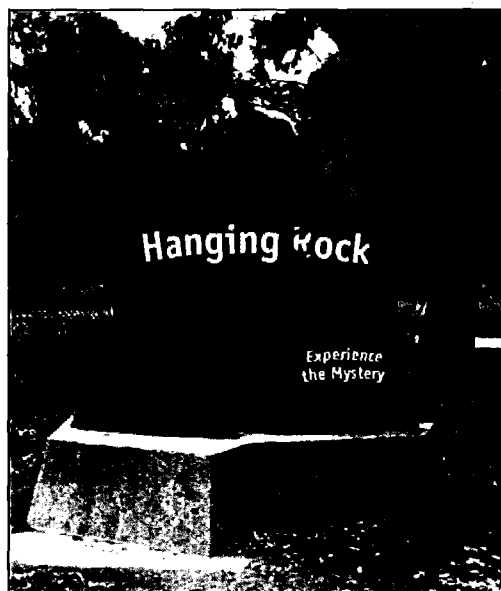
This Association contends that a recreational and educational facility such as the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park can be a focus of significant tourist potential and economic development. It has the nearby major population centre of Canberra – Queanbeyan. The area of the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park is certainly an area of outstanding natural beauty that is currently rarely seen by the public.

**Such areas need to be under public ownership to be a success and not under constant threat from encroaching private developments.**

### **National park models**

There are examples elsewhere around Australia of relatively small national parks that are very attractive for visitors. In Victoria the Shire Council around the Hanging Rock National Park operates the park successfully with an entrance fee and gated car access. Elsewhere in Victoria the Victorian parks service operates the Tower Hill National Park in a similar manner. The Queensland Government parks service operates at the internationally promoted Carnarvon Gorge National Park. And there are many other examples.

***Entrance to the Hanging Rock National Park, Victoria.  
The park is about one hour's drive from  
Greater Melbourne.***



A visit to New Zealand provides many examples of industries associated with wilderness and national park areas and the significant value of the international visitor and backpacker dollar.

It should be emphasised that the primary value of a national park (as an IUCN category II reserve) is for biodiversity conservation. However, such international guidelines do not exclude economic development. Well-managed ecotourism, if compatible with protecting high conservation value areas and sensitive species, can generate significant revenue which will benefit society and can contribute to protecting and maintaining the natural values of the reserve, as well as providing opportunities for people to enjoy and gain appreciation of beautiful natural areas.”

**Ecotourism is an aspect of the general tourist industry that requires a sustained effort by National, State/Territory and Local Governments to create environments and landscapes that visitors will spend significant sums of money to experience.**

**This Association believes the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park stands out as a potential popular intra-Region tourist destination with high conservation values that will greatly encourage associated private enterprises.**

Governments at the National, State/Territory and Local levels are ultimately responsible for all land use. By its very nature ecotourism requires natural landscapes to be well managed and is difficult to imagine this happening when land is in private ownership. If this requires the buyback of private lands for the long term sustainability of national parks then the ways and means must be found to do this. Governments can greatly

help the promotion of ecotourist destinations nationally and internationally with the provision of appropriate infrastructure.

**Public education and promotion are vital elements of any long term management of landscapes and parks for future generations of Australians. All levels of Government and the tourist industry itself must promote a product that is attractive and sustainable in the long term.**

**The management of public lands must be robust over the budget cycles of governments. Community organisations and ecotourism enterprises under strict guidelines should be encouraged and supported.**



*Murrumbidgee River lagoon  
looking northward*



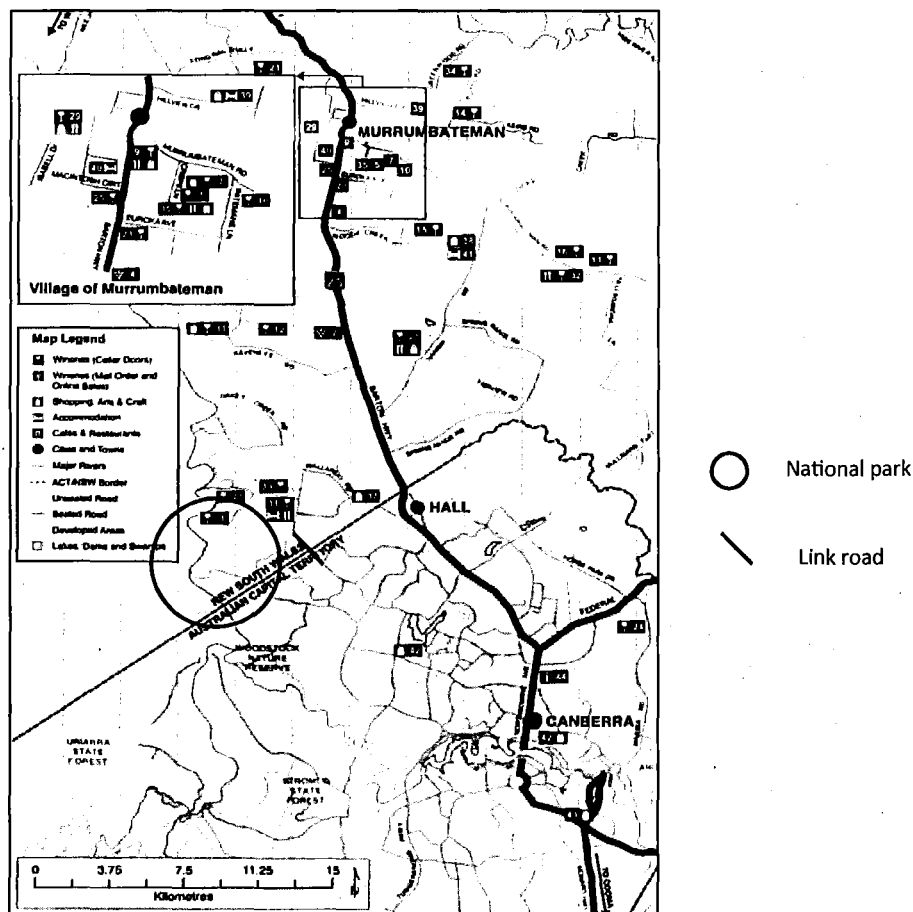
*Lower Ginninderra Falls*

### National parks as a commercial magnet

With the outstanding natural features such as exist at the confluence of the Ginninderra Creek with the Murrumbidgee River system there is huge potential for nearby viable commercial developments. Taken together with the large Canberra region population centre to the south and the well-developed wine growing region to the north around Murrumbateman, the proposed park should become the “jewel-in-the-crown” of commercial opportunities that will greatly enhance the perceived values of the whole region within NSW and the ACT.

Overwhelmingly the beneficiaries of a proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park will be large populations in North Canberra, Belconnen and Gungahlin. However, with promotion and regional advertising the national park will undoubtedly become attractive to those living within the wider National Capital Region.

Combined with the attractions of other rural enterprises such as vineyards and broad acre developments there is a potential for visitors from the much larger population centres on Sydney and elsewhere. Infrastructure must be developed to handle increasing patronage. That may include farm-stays, high-end caravan parks development, and boutique food outlets.



***A tourist and commercial magnet:  
Vineyards north of ACT within Yass Valley Shire and location of  
the proposed Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park***

**THINK BIG** – Thing about the proximity of the Adelaide Hills, McLaren Vale and Barossa Valley wine growing districts to the major population centre of Adelaide City and the tourist dollars they create.

## **Cross-border issues – funding, procurement and development**

No proposal for a national park development can ignore the costs involved. These are likely to be spread over a number of years because land acquisition will inevitably involve landowners willing to sell land required, all of which is currently under freehold arrangements within NSW. The NSW Government will not consider compulsory acquisition.

There are also compelling arguments for improving link road infrastructure across the area. One obvious improvement that should be considered is the construction of a link road from NW end of Ginninderra Drive in ACT to Southwell Road in NSW with its connection to Wallaroo Road, across the Gooromon Creek water catchment. This would significantly improve road access from a large population centre and increase the land values within this part of Yass Valley shire.

Bearing in mind that major beneficiaries of the national park will be residents and taxpayers living in the ACT, there must be negotiation between the ACT and NSW Governments over the budgeting for land acquisition, probably over several years. There are already precedents for ACT budgeting for infrastructure within NSW, e.g. the Googong Dam and water catchment area, the Murrumbidgee pipeline infrastructure, and road infrastructure along the Brindabella Ranges.

Depending on the management model adopted for the national park, there will also have to be cross-border Government agreement on revenue management and ongoing annual development and maintenance cost items.

## **Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park proposal – project status, April 2013**

The twin goals of the Association are -

- *To restore public access to the Ginninderra Creek & Murrumbidgee River corridors.*
- *To create a sustainable public park for recreational, educational and ecological purposes.*

Towards these goals the project has made significant progress in the following areas:

### *Formation of the Ginninderra Falls Association*

In 2011 there were a series of informal meetings by a community group seeking to develop a national park around the confluence of Ginninderra Creek and the Murrumbidgee River. Subsequently a more formal community association was established. The inaugural meeting of the Ginninderra Falls Association was held on 14 February 2012 at which the draft constitution was approved and a committee elected. The Association holds regular committee meetings at the Southern Cross Club, Jamison.

***WIN TV News filming at the Upper Ginninderra Falls, 27 February, 2013***



*Community consultation*

During 2012-13 the Association took the opportunity to make the case for the establishment of a national park at various public and association meetings. Public presentations were held at Belconnen Library in February and September 2012 and February, 2013, public displays and presentations were held at CSIRO Discovery Centre during March 2012, and a presentation was made at the annual Canberra Region Heritage Symposium held at Australian National University during July, 2012.

Also during 2012 the Association joined the ACT Region Conservation Council and benefits from networking within numerous other community groups. The NSW National Parks Association based in Sydney has lent support to the park proposal. Landowners on the south side of Ginninderra Creek have facilitated inspections of Ginninderra Falls by NSW NPA and others.



*Crowea exalata* "Ginninderra Falls"

*Landowner consultation*

On 29 November 2012 the Ginninderra Falls Association held a landowners lunchtime forum at the Southern Cross Club, Jamison Centre. Landowners from eight significant properties were represented. Presentations were made by the Association and by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Office, Queanbeyan. There followed open discussion, principally about the nature of process by which NSW Government may acquire land. It was emphasised that there would be no compulsory land acquisitions. Landowners would have to be willing sellers, and go through a process of land valuation by NSW Government officers. Four landowners have initiated the land evaluation process with NSW Government officers for parts of their property.

*NSW Government consultation*

In September 2012 the Association wrote to the NSW Minister for the Environment, Hon Robyn Parker MP, regarding the proposal to establish the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park and a response from the Office of Environment and Heritage was received outlining the constraints on NSW Government regarding land acquisitions. Very useful talks were held at the NSW Government offices, Queanbeyan, with officers of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. That office is now evaluating four core landholder offers for part of their lands to be included in the park. The NSW Member for Burrinjuck, Katrina Hodgkinson MP, has been kept informed of national park proposals.

*ACT Government consultation*

At the Association's request, in 2012 the ACT Chief Minister contacted the NSW Government and Minister Parker replied outlining the NSW Government constraints on developing such a national park. The Association has corresponded with the ACT Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher, to put its case for a national park and how it would be of considerable benefit to the ACT residents and visitors. The Association has also exchanged letters with the Chief Minister to have the ACT Government involve itself in the formation of a working party of representatives from governments look at all the ramifications of the park proposal. The Association made a submission to the ACT Government Canberra Region Ecotourism enquiry. The Association is currently seeking discussions with ACT MLAs for the Ginninderra electorate

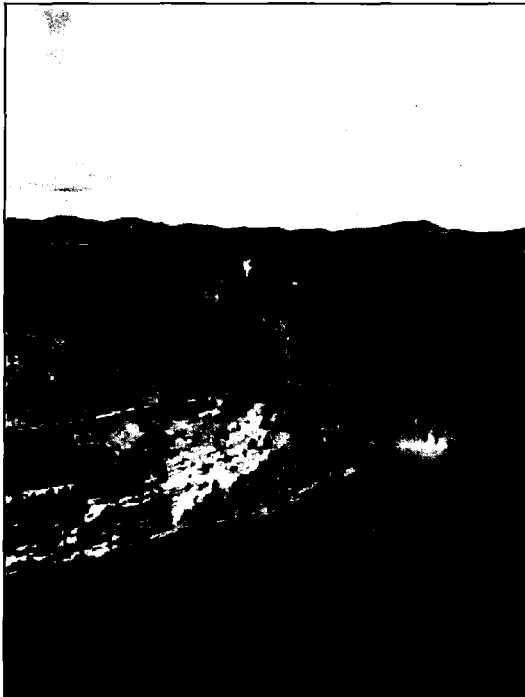
*Yass Valley Council consultation*

In 2012 the Association made a submission to the Yass Valley Council Draft Environmental Plan 2012 regarding the land use of areas within the proposed boundaries of the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park. The Association followed this submission with a presentation in Yass to the newly-elected Yass Valley Council in February 2013. Following that presentation the Yass Valley Council has indicated that on **“27 February 2013 (the Council) resolved to provide in principal support to the establishment of the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park.”**

It should be noted that, under the Yass Valley Environmental Plan, the proposed national park largely falls within land areas designated as “E3 – environmental management”. Because of the rugged terrain the lands involved are largely unsuitable for “primary production (RU1)”. The Association has also noted the encouraging Council’s 30 April 2012 submission to the ACT Government enquiry into Canberra Region Ecotourism.

*Australian Government links*

The Association has informal links with the Australian Government “Caring for Our Country Program” through the Ginninderra Catchment Group. This group has been funded for several years and employs professionals to restore and improve environmental systems within the Murray-Darling water catchment area. The Federal Member for Fraser, Andrew Leigh MP, has indicated in-principle support for the national park concept.



***Murrumbidgee River corridor and Woodstock Nature Reserve looking north from Shepherds Lookout***

*Cross-Border Working Group – the way ahead*

In 2013 the Association aims to get together a cross-border working group of government, landowner and community representatives to develop ways and means of achieving the Association goals.

Towards this end the Association is currently seeking the appointment of appropriate spokespersons from all levels of government, landholders and community groups who can work together to develop the way ahead for the project to establish the Murrumbidgee – Ginninderra Gorges National Park.