



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2024-2025

Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by: Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

Addressed to: Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management

Redirection: N/A

Reference: Environment

Hearing Date: 31/07/2024

In relation to: Cuppacumbalong concern on Lombardy poplar trees poisoning

Question Lodgement Date: 01/08/2024

Date Answer Due: 08/08/2024

- (1) How does the staged removal of poplars along the river at Tharwa align with the broader Murrumbidgee River Corridor Management Plan, particularly concerning invasive weed control from Tharwa Bridge Reserve to Angle Crossing? What is the current status of this plan, and how do these actions fit within it?
- (2) How will these historical changes inform current management practices? What impact does the absence of grazing have on the establishment of suckers and poplars in the River Corridor?
- (3) How does the government ensure that its own staff and contractors are held to the same standards and accountability as the public (where individuals who poison trees on public land face significant fines) when undertaking such actions?
- (4) With the Murrumbidgee River Corridor Management Plan still being finalised, how does the current work on poplar removal integrate with the plan's objectives? What assurances can you provide that the final plan will comprehensively address these concerns?

Rebecca Vassarotti MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

- (1) The Murrumbidgee River Corridor is managed pursuant to the 1998 Murrumbidgee River Corridor (MRC) Plan of Management (MRC Plan). The MRC Plan was reviewed in 2021 and work has begun on the development of a new reserve management plan for the MRC.

The management objectives in the MRC Plan for the control of pest plants and animals are to:

- minimise the adverse impacts of existing introduced species;
- co-operate with Corridor lessees and adjacent landholders in carrying out joint control programs in conjunction with Landcare groups;
- minimise both the introduction of new species and the spread of established species;

- use control measures which are appropriate to an area receiving high visitor usage; and
- increase staff and public awareness of the pest plants and animals and their impacts.

Lombardy poplars are recognised as pest plants in the ACT under the *Pest Plants Declaration 2015* and their removal in the Murrumbidgee River Corridor is consistent with the MRC Plan.

- (2) Current management practices are informed by legislation and management plans. The MRC Plan notes that protection of the visual surrounds of a cultural site, where appropriate, may involve the retention of exotic vegetation associated with the cultural development of the site. In addition to the MRC Plan, the 2018 Tharwa Village Plan describes retaining and protecting existing vegetation and trees along the western edge of the MRC in Tharwa Village. Treating and removing invasive plants, including new and old poplar suckers, has enhanced the line of mature poplars on the western edge of the river and is in accordance with the 2018 Tharwa Village Plan.

Poplar suckers can be managed by stock when they are small however once over a certain height, they need to be managed by other means such as poisoning and/or felling.

Additional work has been done on older poplars in Tharwa to enhance their health, character, and ensure they are made safe for the public in accordance with the 2018 Tharwa Village Plan.

- (3) Staff within the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, including rangers and field officers, are Conservation Officers under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* and authorised under the *Pest Plants and Animals Act 2005* to perform several activities the public are not permitted to perform. These laws allow government officers to undertake their work in accordance with these laws and associated plans to ensure the protection of a range of environmental and heritage values.
- (4) The draft MRC Plan will comprehensively address the management of the natural and cultural values of the corridor, and threats to those values. Weed management will have similar objectives to the current MRC Plan, with weeds to be excluded, eradicated or controlled to minimise and mitigate adverse effects on river corridor values. Weed control will be undertaken in alignment with the *ACT Invasive Plants Implementation Plan 2020-25*.

Historic sites will be managed in a way that is consistent with conservation objectives in the ACT Heritage Register listing and any cultural heritage management plans in place, including maintaining exotic vegetation where it is considered to contribute to the heritage value of the site.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025

Signature:



Date: 7/8/2024

By the Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management, Rebecca Vassarotti MLA