

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

***DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE
MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER CORRIDOR***

**REPORT NO.29
OF THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT**

AUGUST 1997

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

Resolution of appointment of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment:

[that] a Standing Committee on Planning and Environment [be established] to examine matters related to planning, land management, transport, commercial development, industrial and residential development, infrastructure and capital works, science and technology, the environment, conservation, heritage, energy and resources...

[And that the committee] inquire into and report on matters referred to [it] by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community.

[Further, that] if the Assembly is not sitting when the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment has completed consideration of a report on draft Plan variations referred pursuant to Section 25 of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991* or draft Plans of Management referred pursuant to Section 203 of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*, the Committee may send its report to the Speaker or, in the absence of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker, who is authorised to give directions for its printing and circulation.

Minutes of Proceedings (Third Assembly) No.1 Thursday 9 March 1995,
amended 22 June 1995

Committee Membership

Mr Michael Moore MLA (Chair)
Ms Roberta McRae, OAM MLA (Deputy Chair)
Ms Lucy Horodny MLA
Mrs Louise Littlewood MLA

Secretary: Mr Rod Power

Background

1. Under Section 203 of the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991* the Minister is required to refer draft plans of Management for areas identified as Public Land in the Territory Plan to an appropriate Assembly committee.
2. On 30 June 1997 the Minister for the Environment, Land and Planning referred the final *Draft Management Plan for the Murrumbidgee River Corridor* to the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment for its consideration.
3. On 25 July 1997 the committee held a public hearing on the *Draft Management Plan*. Representatives of the National Parks Association in the A.C.T. and the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra appeared before the committee, along with Government officials.
4. The committee carefully considered the matters raised in the public hearing at deliberative meetings on 1 August and 8 August 1997.

Consideration by the committee

5. Basically, the committee endorses the thrust of the *Draft Management Plan*.
6. But, in doing so, the committee highlights several issues which it considers important.
7. **First**, the committee is disappointed at the slow progress made by successive governments in finalising Plans of Management for the Territory's Public Land, especially such significant areas of Public Land as the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and Tidbinbilla. (The committee was told there has been only one Management Plan finalised since self-government, that for the Jerrabomberra Wetlands.¹) The committee shares the sense of disappointment expressed by a Government official:

Despite a lot of resources within Parks and Conservation Service, and consultation with other agencies and a lot of public discussion and forums and workshops, there seems to have been - for whatever reason - an inability to complete Management Plans. Which I think is a sad state of affairs [given that] there is a legal requirement for Management Plans to be produced for public lands...²

8. The committee is extremely pleased that at least one Management Plan has got to the point of coming before the Minister and then to this committee. Members share the view of the National Parks Association which is:

If there is a matter of choice of having this as a Management Plan or no Management Plan, we would be very happy to accept this as the Management Plan. We certainly do not want to reach a point where this is pushed out.³

¹ Dr Adrian (Executive Director, Environment A.C.T.) *Unedited transcript 25/7/97 p8*

² *ibid*

³ Mrs Stodart (President of the National Parks Association of the A.C.T.) *ibid p1*

9. **Second**, the committee notes that - under Section 196 of the Land Act - all Plans of Management must include (at least) two items. They must describe the area of public land to which they apply. And they must outline ‘the manner in which the relevant management objectives... are to be implemented or promoted in that area.’

10. The *Draft Management Plan* clearly describes the areas of land to which the Plan applies, though the committee was told that the maps in the document ‘do not actually [show] where the edge of the nature reserve is and when you are getting into leasehold’.⁴

11. The Draft Plan also outlines the relevant management objectives. But - as was pointed out by the National Parks Association - some of these objectives are too general, in that they do not allow for specific measurement of how well the objectives are being met over time:

Objectives should be written in terms that they could fail, in that you could actually measure an achievement rather than the sort of general terms that are in [the Draft plan].⁵

12. The committee recognises that the issue of how to adequately define performance objectives is a general one affecting all of the public service. Like the National Parks Association, members of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment would like to see a management system which encourages officials, firstly, to set meaningful targets (or objectives) and secondly, to admit when they have not been met and to give clear reasons why this happened. This enables members of the Assembly to focus on the key issues and, of course, such a management system accords with the recent emphasis in Government budgeting on task-oriented outcomes.

13. On this basis, the committee does not favour management objectives that are expressed in overly general or imprecise terminology.

14. Further, the Draft Plan does not adequately outline the manner in which the management objectives are to be implemented or promoted in particular areas.

15. The committee, in short, would have preferred to see more detail.

16. However, members note that when this was pointed out to Government officials at the public hearing, they undertook to provide that greater detail within twelve months by way of Implementation Plans for specific areas of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor.⁶

⁴ *ibid* p3

⁵ *Ibid* p16 (also see p4)

⁶ Dr Adrian *ibid* p11

17. While the committee would prefer that this level of detail was provided in a Plan of Management for Public Land, it accepts that - in the present case - the officials have undertaken to do the necessary work within a reasonable timeframe; and (as stated above) the committee does not want to unduly delay the adoption of the Management Plan. However, the committee wishes to emphasise the need for these Implementation Plans to be prepared in full consultation with the community and not be imposed 'from above' (that is, by officials acting without liaising with affected groups and individuals).

18. **Third**, the committee would like to see the final Management Plan for the Murrumbidgee River Corridor contain more information about the manner in which the A.C.T.'s activities in the Corridor inter-link with the activities of other political jurisdictions and organisations along the River (beyond the boundaries of the Territory). Some information of this kind is already in the Draft Plan - but members would like to see it expanded and made more explicit in the document.

19. Also, the committee would like to see some reference to how the management authorities intend to deal with Land Uses and land users that abut the Corridor. This is another type of inter-relationship which will affect the success, or otherwise, of the final Plan of Management. (It might be the case, for example, that the Management Plan states that annual liaison meetings will be scheduled with adjacent land users.⁷)

20. **Fourth**, the committee considers that the language of the draft document could be clarified, simplified and edited to improve the document's legibility.

21. One aspect of improving the clarity of the document is to incorporate some sort of chart which sets out, in summary form, the principal aspects of the various strategies referred to in the document - such as the weeds strategy, the nature conservation strategy, the tourism strategy, the fire control strategy and so on. This will enable readers to quickly remind themselves of what is actually being talked about. The committee notes that this suggestion was accepted by Government officials.⁸

22. **Fifth**, the committee considers that the final Management Plan should make some reference to the manner in which the management authorities are intending to handle the cases of conflicting management strategies for a particular area. For example, if heritage strategies conflict with strategies for visitor use or for environmental protection or for weed control: how is the issue to be resolved?

23. The committee recognises this is a very difficult area. Members agree with the comment in the Draft Plan that 'a Management Plan cannot anticipate all possible uses and activities'.⁹ Also, members agree that the Plan 'must provide policies and procedures for making decisions about impacts'.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid* p6

⁸ *Ibid* p19

⁹ Paragraph 3.3 on p16

¹⁰ *Ibid*

24. But the committee suggests it is not enough to simply say: ‘The most basic considerations for assessing whether potential impacts are acceptable are whether they are consistent with the Territory Plan, whether they are based on the specific resources and values of the Corridor, and whether they conflict with other appropriate users and users’.¹¹

25. The committee makes the obvious point that the relationship between the many values of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor will be dynamic, meaning that the management authorities will always have to deal with questions about priorities - such as, should the tourism strategy be rated as higher priority than a nature conservation strategy for a particular area, and if so, why?

26. The committee considers that it is reasonable to provide, in a Management Plan, some indications of how these inevitable cases of conflict will be handled.

Conclusion

27. The committee appreciates the great deal of work that has gone into framing the draft Plan and considers that, when amended in the ways set out in this report (and when the Implementation Plans are available), the Territory will have a suitable Management Plan for the Murrumbidgee River Corridor.

28. On this basis, the committee recommends that:

the Government, before it approves a final Management Plan for the Murrumbidgee River Corridor, carefully consider the issues raised by the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment and, in particular, pay attention to:

- ***improving the relevance of some of the management objectives;***
- ***providing more detail about the manner in which the A.C.T.’s activities in the Corridor inter-link with the activities of other bodies along the River (including other States and catchment groups);***
- ***providing more detail about how the management authorities intend to deal with land uses, and land users, that about the Murrumbidgee River Corridor;***
- ***clarify, simplify and edit the language of the document so as to improve legibility (including incorporating some type of chart that summarises the main features of the various strategies referred to in the Plan); and***
- ***outline the manner in which management authorities intend to handle the situations where management strategies are in conflict.***

¹¹ *Ibid*

In addition, the committee considers that the Government should give a commitment to finalising Implementation Plans for specific areas of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor within twelve months of the date of this report and via a process of full community consultation.

Michael Moore MLA
Chair

8 August 1997