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Standing Committee on Planning and the Environment
ACT Legislative Assembly
G.P.O. Box 1020
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**Inquiry into Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 281 –
Molonglo and North Weston**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.
Whilst I welcome the decision to place a “moratorium” on development in the Central Molonglo area for 20 years the April 2008 publication *Draft plan variation submitted to the Minister under s69 of the Planning and Development Act 2007* fails to offer any reassurances about the government’s and planners’ attitude towards this area of the ACT .

The Central Molonglo areas must be excluded from the Draft Variation and from being earmarked for residential development in perpetuity.

I was among those who submitted objections to development in the Central Molonglo Valley and the construction of a lake on the lower Molonglo River in November 2007 after studying the DV 281, the associated PA and DA 63. I have also spoken to numerous members of the public, including local Belconnen residents and fellow members of environmental groups about the proposed developments.

The DV 281 revision does not allay concerns:

- That the significance of the ecological values of the Central Molonglo Valley, the Molonglo river corridor and the inter-connections these areas maintain between The Pinnacle Nature Reserve, The Brindabella ranges and the ACT’s rural hinterland have been largely ignored or grossly underestimated by planners.
- That the significance of the Molonglo Valley as an iconic example of the landscape that, **uniquely**, sustains the essence of **Australia’s “bush capital”** is brushed aside before adequate consideration of the aesthetic, social and health effects of destroying more open space and such expansive vistas has been evaluated.
- That the Molonglo’s riverine corridor will only be altered for human ‘benefit’. Any riverside habitat that has miraculously survived exploitation since ‘European settlement’ will no longer be suitable or safe for native species. Planning to construct a new lake shows how out of touch proponents are with all related aspects of natural drainage, water management, riverine restoration, rainfall expectations and even the ecological requirements of nationally endangered species such as the Pink Tailed Worm lizard.
- That even the amended plans for the **nationally** significant Yellow Box Red Gum Grassy Woodlands miss the frequently-submitted point that it would be illegal to clear more of this habitat and that fragmentation is, long-term, just as destructive as wholesale land-clearing. Another example shows that ACTPLA planners have

no conception of the vastness of the foraging-range raptors require. Extending 'buffer-zones' around their known nesting sites is no solution to the birds' requirements.

- That the realities of ensuring Canberra has a reliable **water supply** have not yet been addressed for the **long term**. Building more houses exacerbates this problem and shows that the issue of a sustainable size for an inland city like Canberra has not been adequately debated let alone planned-for.
- That the vulnerability of the Central Molonglo Valley to bushfires has been dismissed in a facile manner. Bushfire circumstances similar to those which eventuated in January 2003 cannot be solved by building infrastructure or houses in the path of fires, having fire-exclusion zones, creating a lake as a water-supply or having fire-fighters 'prepared'.
- That environmental-impact assessments relevant to the valley need to be made by **independent** experts. That recommendations from such assessments will then acted-upon rather than 'shelved' or ignored. I note that a significant proportion of the earlier DV 281 submissions from members of the community, amateur and professional naturalists and ecologists **raised issues on environmental matters and yet the Draft Variation is unchanged**.
- The response " Note: In April 2008 the Environment Minister, decided that the Preliminary Assessment adequately addressed the environmental issues surrounding Draft variation No 281 (Molonglo and North Weston) and that no further (environmental) assessment of the plan variation is required. Notwithstanding, comprehensive environmental assessments are required for major infrastructure items and in advance of any urban development in central Molonglo)" is often repeated in the **PUBLIC CONSULTATION – ISSUES RAISED** document. Does this show that the Minister considers that the PA has adequately responded to environmental and ecological issues of the Central Molonglo valley when professional and amateur ecologists and naturalists and the community emphatically state the opposite?
- It is a major failing that no one at ACTPLA is interested in tendering or able to promote an environmental perspective.

As intimated the above concerns are held by many members of the community regardless of whether they are able to submit their views. The vulnerability of The Molonglo Valley is also seen as symptomatic of the over-reaching problem of Canberra's future as we face a period of unprecedented change and global threats to survival

Rosemary Blemings