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Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
[A.C.T.](#) Legislative Assembly
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Inquiry into urban vegetation and wildlife corridors and the integration of biodiversity conservation in land use planning in the ACT and its sub-regions.

Thank you for the opportunity to send submissions to the above inquiry.
Following are comments on issues relating to the relationship between the ACT's unique natural environment, urban activities and planning for the future.

In recent decades there has been an overall improvement in the condition of areas generalised as "The Bush" within and around the ACT and its suburbs. Perhaps this has been a response to governments' perceptions of responsibilities towards the natural backdrop to Canberra. It has definitely been a result of residents' increased interest in the restoration, rehabilitation and preservation of the reserves and open spaces they value near their homes.

Improvements have been achieved through the professionalism of personnel from Canberra Nature Park, Canberra Urban Parks and Places, agencies such as the ACT Weeds group and volunteers from Park Care and Landcare Groups.

Policies and programs are required to carry this work forward with all governments, councils, agencies, interest groups, organisations working together in a co-ordinated manner:

- 1 so that Canberra's uniqueness rests firmly on its reputation as The Bush Capital
- 2 so that the surrounding environment is enhanced and protected
- 3 so that ***all species*** are fairly included in a multi-decade vision for preserving the ACT's biodiversity

Biodiversity conservation for our region in general together with policies and programs for promoting urban wildlife habitat in the ACT will be effective if the following issues are addressed.

- 1 Reform of the planning system includes understanding of the need for long-term vision that provides for the maximum retention of natural areas, reserves and urban open space.

There is a need for an impartial body to assess ANY proposal for habitat reduction, modification as the "death of a thousand cuts" allows gradual but continual loss of habitat and consequent species and biodiversity loss throughout the ACT.

Ecological assessments, development approval, planning and consultations are the responsibility of impartial, separate and suitably qualified agencies, organisations or individuals and are not under the 'umbrella' of one organisation such as PALM.

The destruction of East O'Malley appears to have been a result of this previous system of PALM's

2. Establish and maintain a database detailing assessments of the size and biodiversity status of any non-built-up areas regardless of their conservation quality. Liaise with locals, volunteers for this and for on-going monitoring. ***ACT biodiversity is therefore mapped and accounted-for.*** Biodiversity is

therefore treated as an invaluable, accounted-for asset and not an exploitable, limitless resource.

3. With the size of remnants established issues of connectivity are related to the concepts of wildlife corridors and the understanding of species-migration or the animals' use of intra and inter-suburban space and suburban gardens. ***Destruction of habitat causes biodiversity loss obviously. Planting new trees and shrubs does not compensate for the removal of centuries-old trees with their vital hollows. Most displaced species cannot survive in others' territories.***
4. *Protect Nature Reserves and areas of Urban open space in perpetuity giving them all the status of valued natural heritage.* These areas become natural assets, part of the ACT vision for The Bush Capital's future and do not remain a "landbank for infrastructure" in response to political or developmental whims or short-term planning policy. Negate the attitudes that "It's only the bush" or "there's plenty more".
5. *Provide funding so all reserve and remnant areas are primarily managed for conservation.* This involves treating 'bush' as the essence of Canberra and not just a problem we're stuck with. Support the years of work of CNP and CUPPS personnel and volunteers by increasing funding so environmental degradation is gradually reduced. Now that fire-hazard removal has been "achieved" in many areas ensure that revegetation to restore vegetation species numbers is implemented to re-establish animals' habitat and biodiversity.
6. *Implement action plans that relate to species conservation and biodiversity maintenance.*
Governments, especially the current Labour one, are to be congratulated on the development of the series of action plans and strategic plans for aspects of management of the local environment. Unfortunately these excellent, painstakingly researched plans often prove too costly or difficult to implement.
7. ***Increase programs that enhance public awareness of the values of reserved, open space and smaller 'green' areas. Ensure all infrastructure managers, contractors and service personnel are governed by environmental impact guidelines on care of vegetation and for machinery use.***

Thousands of Canberrans value their local areas of 'bush' highly as a backdrop to their own outdoor lives, as places to exercise themselves &/or their dogs, as peaceful places where fresh air, time and space are shared with, natural phenomenon, plants, animals, friends and family.

Others have not reached that maturity of appreciation and understanding. They see the bush as a convenient dumping-place, a source of firewood, kindling, rocks for landscaping, reptiles for 'pets', they have invasive weeds in their gardens and have cats that hunt birds, reptiles.

Even on my local 64ha open space contractors have driven over young trees and shrubs, scooped up soil when upgrading tracks, dumped weedy soil on apparently bare areas of native grasses, dumped weed-seed infested tan-bark 'in the bush' rather than remove it from the site. Mowing constantly disperses weed-seeds between sites

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References: Michael Mulvaney's Draft submission to the Standing Committee

22.07.05.

Some of the comments relate specifically to Mt Rogers, approximately 65 hectares of Urban Open Space above the Belconnen suburbs of Flynn, Fraser, Spence and Melba.

Mt Rogers' summit is cited as 704m although this is part of a short ridge that forms a watershed between Ginninderra Creek catchment and Gooromon Ponds catchment whose waters flow to the Murrumbidgee River in NSW.

Once temperate grassy woodland or grassland the area has remnants of these threatened ecosystems, additional native trees and shrubs planted in the early seventies and areas of introduced grasses and other weeds.

The Mt Rogers area is not part of Canberra Nature Park (CNP) but is managed as Urban Open Space by Canberra Urban Parks and Places (CUPPS). Apart from three reservoirs, powerlines and a mobile phone tower facility the area has not been developed because of the building constraints its slight elevation would cause.