



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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## Submission Cover Sheet

### Nature in Our City

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### **Nature In Our City – submission from the Animal Justice Party**

The Animal Justice Party welcomes the opportunity to submit comments to the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services' inquiry into the value of the natural environment to an urbanising Canberra.

#### **The level of public support for and satisfaction with the amount and quality nature and natural environment areas in Canberra, particularly in urban areas.**

The AJP is keenly aware of a groundswell of horror among ACT residents at the current unremitting development of our green space, and the ongoing massacre (by guns, motor vehicles, barbed wire and loss of habitat) of our wildlife.

We strongly support a fundamental re-thinking of urban development in the ACT. We do not oppose development *per se*, but we strongly oppose development which kills animals, takes yet more habitat away from wildlife, or robs human residents of the “bush capital” beauty which is was what attracted many residents to settle here.

Ideally we would wish development in the ACT to focus on improving services and amenity to a stable, ongoing human population, rather than cater for ever more human residents at the expense of non-human residents. If the ACT population must continue to increase, we support more efficient use of the land that is already developed rather than the development of yet more green space and wildlife habitat.

As a matter of urgency, we recommend the removal of all barbed wire from all ACT reserves and green spaces. This barbed wire was originally erected when this land was sheep and cattle pasture. It is lethal to wildlife. Additionally, the distress caused to ACT residents walking in reserves who find kangaroos, flying foxes and other native animals crucified on barbed wire should also warrant the committee's consideration in the context of this inquiry. To a lesser extent, the aesthetic and psychological impacts on residents and tourists of seeing what is essentially a weapon of war surrounding wildlife reserves should be considered.

A second matter of urgency is the terrible toll of ACT roads on native wildlife. This could be addressed in the short-term by simply lowering maximum speeds on roads that run between reserves, and enforcing those speed limits with speed cameras.

As a longer term solution, we strongly recommend the establishment of wildlife corridors to connect all ACT reserves and green spaces, allowing wild animals, particularly kangaroos, to move around their ranges and maintain their own natural stable populations, without having to cross deadly roads.

Additionally, while such corridors are being put in place, we recommend replacement of all the fencing currently surrounding reserves and green spaces with fencing of an adequate height (and without any barbed wire) to prevent kangaroos from crossing roads. Fencing could be designed to be aesthetically pleasing; it does not have to look like a prison or a battlefield. In any remaining places where wildlife cannot be prevented from crossing roads, motor vehicle speed limits should be reduced, ideally to no more than 40 KPH, in accordance with the maximum speed animals can be expected to perceive vehicles approaching.

The other great, development-driven threat to wildlife in the ACT is the government's annual kangaroo cull. It is now abundantly clear that this annual slaughter has never had anything to do with protecting the environment but is entirely about permanently reducing the kangaroo population in order to accommodate further urban development. The recent CSIRO report ([http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/1115452/17\\_11169-DOCUMENTS-1-4.pdf](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1115452/17_11169-DOCUMENTS-1-4.pdf)) showed that three kangaroos per hectare are just as beneficial for the ACT's reserve ecosystems as one per hectare (the government's arbitrary preference), and that few ACT reserves seem to have more than three per hectare. The slaughter of kangaroos by both farmers and government 'managers' must stop.

Finally, we recommend an end to the lethal measures used against naturalised (non-native) wild animals in the ACT such as foxes, rabbits, wild dogs, wild pigs and non-native birds. Not only are the current measures extremely cruel and unconscionable in a civilised society; it is a matter of biological fact that the use of lethal measures (even if they were pain-free) against fast-breeding animals is counterproductive. It maintains in perpetuity a higher population of the unwanted species than would exist if no killing were undertaken. This is because total extermination of fast-breeding species is virtually impossible, while random 'culling' ensures the unwanted population remains perpetually young, fertile and much more numerous than a natural, stable, established, older uncultured population.

If the ACT government considers these animals to be undesirable it should take measures to actually get rid of them (ie by the only effective means: fertility control) rather than knowingly maintaining them at unnaturally high populations. Additionally, the nature reserves of the Territory would be far more appealing to both residents and tourists if they were not spiked with lethal poisons and laced with the wafting stench of animals corpses.

### **Social amenity (Amenity benefits)**

In our view, the most urgent requirements of ACT residents and tourists for the social amenity of natural assets are:

- knowing our own homes and urban services are being provided without stealing homes and environmental services from the other sentient beings who share the landscape;
- being able to drive on ACT roads without seeing, or adding to a litter of animal corpses along the verges;
- being able to visit and enjoy ACT nature reserves and green spaces without seeing or smelling animals that have died on barbed wire fences or been poisoned with 1080 or other excruciating poisons;



- being able to enjoy the presence of urban kangaroos without the dread that animals you have learned to recognise and befriended will be wiped out in the next annual massacre.

### **Economic development**

The urban reserves of the ACT have the potential to be an enormous drawcard for tourists, with all the economic benefits tourism brings. Elimination of barbed wire would improve the ACT's image as an aesthetically pleasing tourist destination; innovative design of urban development and redevelopment to accommodate (rather than eradicate) green space and its other sentient inhabitants, could also bring huge economic benefits to the Territory. (The new northern suburbs of the ACT are gruesome examples for exactly how urban development should **never** be allowed to occur again.)

A return to the 'bush capital' which existed before the government began its annual slaughter of kangaroos would bring great benefits to the Territory in terms of its image. Additionally, it would save a great deal of public money currently expended on this cruel and environmentally destructive slaughter program.

Developing wildlife corridors and other wildlife friendly initiatives would bring business into the ACT as well as opportunities for selling ideas and expertise to other jurisdictions. It would also provide economic benefits to residents by reducing car insurance claims.

### **Biodiversity (Conservation and biodiversity benefits)**

As well as benefitting animals who, as individual sentient beings, are inherently entitled to consideration, just as humans are, and as well as creating a much pleasanter environment for human residents, all of the AJP's suggestion would have significant benefits for biodiversity:

- ending the development-driven slaughter of kangaroos who, as a keystone species, are essential to the survival of many of components of ACT ecosystems;
- dramatically reducing the number of native animals killed by motor vehicles;
- eliminating barbed wire as a cause of native animal deaths;
- reducing populations of unwanted naturalised wild animals by:
  - (a) desisting from culling process which necessarily maintain them at higher than natural populations; and
  - (b) if these stable and much reduced populations are still considered undesirable, introducing fertility control measures to eliminate these populations altogether.

### **Climate resilience**

Given the changes in climate that are already occurring in the ACT (longer, more frequent and increasingly severe droughts), measures to protect and enhance natural surface and ground water aquifers are urgently needed.

Additionally, areas that are currently preserved as 'grasslands' even though they were originally open woodland which was cleared for pasture in the early days of European



settlement, should be gradually restored as open woodland (improved capacity for photosynthesis, addressing the causes of climate change). Replanting needs to be undertaken intelligently, selecting vegetative species that are increasingly drought-hardy.

The ACT government should also consider resuming all cleared pastures currently under lease to farmers and restoring them as open woodland and wildlife habitat.

### **Infrastructure**

As mentioned above, critical infrastructure includes wildlife corridors, appropriate fencing of green space, urban development that does not absorb any further green space or wildlife habitat, and government programs to protect the natural environment and its inhabitants.

### **Managing the interface between the natural environment and urban areas particularly in regards to conserved environmental areas.**

The government needs to protect conserved environmental areas and their inhabitants from:

- further habitat loss;
- all shooting (by either government employees or farmers);
- collisions with motor vehicles;
- death on barbed wire fences;
- unnaturally high populations of fast-breeding naturalised species that are an inevitable result of lethal 'culling' programs;
- increased frequency and severity of wildfires, droughts, floods and other disasters resulting from anthropogenic climate change; and
- any lesser impacts on wildlife or vegetation resulting from humans living in close proximity to wild animals in a restored bush capital.



### **Current policy or regulatory settings that impede the integration of the natural environment within optimal urban development and design**

At this point, it needs to be noted (again) that the government's current policy of killing kangaroos on ACT reserves (and allowing farmers to kill kangaroos on farms) must end. As explained above, it is clear that the kangaroo killing program has never been about anything except development. It is a cruel obscenity which history will condemn and mourn.

Similarly the government's counterproductive war on naturalised animals needs to be rethought.

Another government impediment to the integration of the natural environment within optimal urban design, is the apparent inability of the bureaucrats responsible for the environment to communicate with or influence the decisions of bureaucrats responsible for deciding the positions of roads or the designation of speed limits.

### **Any other relevant matters**

The ACT government has, over the last decade gone to a lot of trouble and expense to misinform the ACT public that kangaroos need to be "culled".

As well as ending the slaughter, undoing the damage done by this misinformation campaign must be a priority for the government.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to this enquiry.

Frankie Seymour  
(on behalf of the Animal Justice Party)  
23 July 2018