

Minister's Cabinet Brief

Cabinet Meeting Date: 28 May 2019
Title of Submission: Government Response to OCSE Report - the Heroic and the Dammed - Lower Cotter Catchment Restoration Evaluation
Minister: Environment and Heritage, Mick Gentleman, MLA

Submission recommendations

The submission recommends Cabinet endorse the Government Response to the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment Report – ‘the Heroic and the Dammed: Lower Cotter Catchment Restoration Evaluation’.

The Government Response includes agreement for the development of an implementation plan for the Lower Cotter Catchment Reserve Management Plan 2018; restriction of public vehicle access from remote/sensitive sites; agreement in-principle to implementation of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework; agreement to a quarterly review of the risk treatment plan and amendment of legislation to immediately remove abandoned vehicles that pose a fire risk to the Catchment.

Issues/comment

The government agrees or agrees in principle to 13 of the 14 recommendations. The majority of these recommendations will require significant additional funding, which the Report recommends be directed from the Water Abstraction Charge (Recommendation 2.1). ACT Treasury has advised that this would not be suitable and that additional funding should instead be sourced through established annual budget processes. Accordingly, Government notes Recommendation 2.1 and the Directorate will bring forward a business case for consideration in the 2020-21 budget build process.

Without additional funding, remedial works will proceed at a substantially slower rate. In the event of a major fire or flood, the catchment, without restorative works, is unlikely to be able to provide potable water for a longer period than it would if it were a more ecologically resilient system such as is the case in the Upper Cotter Catchment.

Context and consultation

The Cotter Dam contains 25% of the ACT's potable water supply and land management in the catchment has, as its primary aim, the protection of existing and future water supply. Continued investment in rehabilitation of the Lower Cotter Catchment (LCC) is necessary in recognition of the fundamental role water security plays in the economic prosperity of the Territory.

Tabling of the Government Response as proposed is likely to attract considerable media attention. In particular, Government not agreeing to identify funding for the LCC directly through the Water Abstraction Charge could generate significant media interest.

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, Justice and Community Safety Directorate and ACT Treasury were consulted in the development of this cabinet paper. The cabinet submission undertook full Cabinet circulation: all comments received were considered and incorporated. There was no specific engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body.

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