

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

Dear Committee Secretary

Inquiry into ecological carrying capacity of the ACT and region

Thank you for the invitation allowing me to make this submission to the inquiry into the ecological capacity of the ACT and region. In recognition of the broad terms of reference, I offer specific comments with respect to the following two matters:

1. Effective measures for assessing ecological footprint
2. Effective measures for reducing the ACT's ecological footprint

Effective measures for assessing ecological footprint

I ask that the Committee note that there have been several attempts to determine the ecological units that collectively form the ACT however there is no definitive set of measures that have yet to be accepted and applied by the ACT Government. Some of the important references include:

- Fallding, M (2002). *Planning Framework for Natural Ecosystems of the ACT and NSW Southern Tablelands*. Natural Heritage Trust, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Land & Environment Planning.
- Keith, D A (2004). *Ocean Shores to Desert Dunes – The Native Vegetation of New South Wales and the ACT*. Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW), Hurstville.
- Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, ACT State of the Environment Report 2007/08, accessed 31 August 2010,
<<http://www.environmentcommissioner.act.gov.au/publications/soe/2007actreport> >

As a result, I ask that the Committee agree that there still remains a need to identify and categorise the terrestrial and aquatic ecological units of the ACT and thereby establish a baseline from which measurements can be taken to assess whether these ecological units are being lost or gained. For instance, if the ACT is considered to comprise 235,000 hectares, what is the breakdown of this in terms of ecological units? Once this is known, then effective monitoring can be undertaken to determine if change is taking place and if terrestrial ecological units in the form of grasslands and woodlands are being lost to urban development and that new aquatic ecological units such as lakes and ponds are being created as a result of Water Sensitive Urban Design. I also ask the Committee to note that the *Planning and Development Regulation 2008* currently requires that an environmental impact statement include a description of the effects on ecological systems but does not specify that this is to be measured.

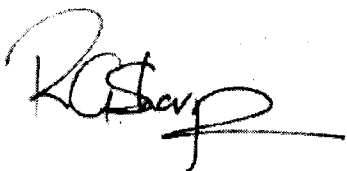
Effective measures for reducing the ACT's ecological footprint

Within the ACT there are series of environment protection policies which provide a framework for reducing ACT's ecological footprint. For example, the water quality environment protection policy requires the retention of naturalised drainage lines during land development however it does not put this requirement into a measureable context. I therefore ask the Committee to accept that what is needed is to reduce to the ACT's ecological footprint is to have an environmental protection policy for both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. If such environmental protection policies were established then the following would apply:

- Environmental protection agreements could be formalised between the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and businesses to encourage businesses to reduce their ecological footprint.
- Environmental authorisations could be issued by the EPA setting out ecological footprint reduction conditions under which the scheduled activities could be conducted.
- Environmental improvement plans could be accredited by the EPA which minimise or reduce the ACT's ecological footprint.
- The EPA could require environmental audit to be conducted on developments or activities which focus on examining whether or not the required reduction in the ecological footprint is being achieved.

In addition to the above, I also ask the Committee to accept that a another possible effective measure for reducing the ACT's ecological footprint is to offset the loss of all or part of an ecological unit by purchasing ecological credits. Such credits could be generated by the remaining rural landowners in the ACT who would commit to enhancing the ecological values on their land through an agreement similar to what is already set up in NSW under the BioBanking Scheme.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Sharp', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard Sharp *FEIANZ, CEnvP*

31 August 2010