



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Chair), Miss Candice Burch MLA (Deputy Chair)

Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Nature in Our City

**Submission Number: 10**

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The Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services  
Legislative Assembly for the ACT  
GP Box 1020  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

## **HUGHES RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION TO THE NATURE IN OUR CITY INQUIRY**

Dear Sir or Madam,

Hughes Residents' Association thanks you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services' Inquiry into the value of the natural environment to an urbanising Canberra (the Nature in our City Inquiry).

### Protecting our natural environment and maintaining biodiversity

Hughes Residents' Association, and many individual Hughes residents, have worked for many years with the Red Hill Regeneration Group, the Hughes Garran Woodland Group and the Friends of Hughes Buffer Area Open Space to protect and care for our local woodland, wildlife and green spaces.

With increasing destruction of the natural environment and wildlife habitat worldwide, we are proud that Canberra has been able to protect so much of its precious natural heritage.

Many hundreds of Hughes local residents enjoy Red Hill Nature Reserve and local public open space areas daily, walking, cycling, birdwatching and enjoying the rich biodiversity of our woodland and wildlife.

Here we regularly come across wildlife rarely found in city suburbs, such as kangaroos, wallabies, echidnas, more than eight types of parrot, birds of prey, nocturnal birds, uncommon small birds, large lizards and a profusion of moths, butterflies and wildflowers in season. We have the rare privilege of seeing Vulnerable, Threatened and Protected species just a few minutes' walk from our homes.

Living so close to Red Hill and its irreplaceable endangered yellow box red gum woodland, we have the joy of having wildlife in our own backyards and

visible through our windows at home, which would be the envy of people in any other city in the world.

For people who may be largely confined to home due to disability, illness or caring responsibilities, this proximity of nature to their homes is especially important.

Residents take pride in photographing and documenting local wildlife and wildflowers for their own use and for public resources such as the Canberra Nature Map, which currently has over 350 recent sightings for the suburb of Hughes alone.

<https://canberra.naturemapr.org/Community/Location/868>

### Keeping children and adults physically and mentally healthy and active

Many people move to Canberra and stay here precisely because they want to live amongst green spaces and woodland, because they want to be close to nature and want their children to grow up healthy and active, with green spaces to play in and a safe and natural environment to roam and explore.

As Hughes is a mature suburb, many residents and their now adult children can testify to the value access to nearby Nature Reserves and Public Open Space to explore, play freely and safely, build cubbies and grow up with wildlife at first hand. It is scarcely less important for adults to have access to nature on their doorstep.

With both childhood and adult obesity and associated health problems so rapidly on the rise, and with growing evidence of the importance of access to green spaces on physical and mental health, it is vital that Canberra keeps and treasures its greatest asset, our green space in the suburbs and our local woodland and wildlife.

### Sustainability

Proximity to green spaces, particularly our nature reserves and the Public Open Space belts between our suburbs, combines with Canberra's garden suburb design to provide opportunities for nature climate control and sustainability that would be the envy of most cities. Solar access and room for trees and grass around our houses allows for natural heating in our cool alpine climate and natural cooling in the heat of summer.

While we appreciate that more provision is needed for smaller, disability-access homes for older people and people with disabilities, we believe that these homes need to share the same leafy outlook and solar access as larger single dwellings,

and that it is reckless of our future sustainability and our threatened natural environment to allow larger building footprints and multi-storey development at the cost of solar access, trees and green space, whether on individual blocks or across whole suburbs.

### Protecting our natural heritage for the future

Along with four other local community organisations (the Deakin Residents Association, the Red Hill Regeneration Group, the Garran and Hughes Residents' Action Group and the Hughes Garran Woodland Group), the Hughes Residents' Association last year supported a petition to the ACT Legislative Assembly, asking it to call for the ACT Government to:

- protect the iconic Red Hill natural environment;
- retain existing green space in Hughes, Deakin and Garran; and
- ensure that the integrated plan for Red Hill, which has been called for by the (ACT Legislative) Assembly, genuinely protects the Red Hill Nature Reserve and the Federal Golf Course lease area, together with the adjacent open space blocks of land and Section 66 Deakin (Kent Street).

Indicating the breadth of support for protecting our precious woodland, wildlife and green spaces, this petition was signed by over 3,100 local residents and was submitted to the Assembly in November 2017, being the largest petition of that session. The petition was not limited to residential development or development requiring a Territory Plan variation.

Hughes Residents' Association was pleased to attend a very positive first meeting with ACT Government officials to begin development of the Integrated Plan for Red Hill Nature Reserve and surrounds on 7 May 2018.

### Current Policy and Regulatory Settings

The Terms of Reference of this Inquiry include current policy and regulatory settings as they affect the interface between the natural environment and urban areas.

We believe that the Integrated Plan approach may potentially provide a policy model for a collaborative, consultative and community-focused approach to future development and environmental protection in Canberra.

However, like other community organisations and many thousands of local residents, we were deeply concerned to discover that a developer has since put in a Development Application to build multi-storey storage facilities on Section

66 Deakin (Kent Street), a site specified for protection in last year's Red Hill Nature Reserve and Surrounds petition.

This developer is seeking a 41-fold increase in the building footprint permissible under the current lease, in an apparent attempt to avoid the requirements of this Integrated Plan.

We believe that this highlights some key problems with current policy and regulatory settings.

We are dismayed that the developer can lodge this Development Application under current regulatory settings and that the Government is apparently powerless to reject it outright or put it on hold, according to advice from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

We are further dismayed that, also based on EPSDD advice, decisions can apparently be made as to whether the Development Application would have a significant environmental impact, based only on evidence provided by the developer.

Also of great concern is that developer-provided documentation is apparently circulated to other agencies for comment, so that agencies may comment on a Development Application without access to fair and balanced documentation, particularly on the critical issue of environmental impact, where it is clearly in the developer's interest to understate or ignore any adverse impact.

In addition, we are appalled to discover that "consultation" in the context of the development process, rather than being a clear responsibility of Government, apparently consists of developer-led information sessions, not even attended by Government officials, where residents are herded past whiteboards containing partial and misleading information and only the developer is given the opportunity to address the group or to provide feedback to the Government.

We strongly believe that, both to protect our natural heritage and to maintain the trust and good faith of ACT residents, the ACT Government must ensure that planning and development is led by the Government in genuine consultation with the community, rather than letting developer-led planning and consultation as at present.

Policy settings need to reflect what is important to and valued by Canberra residents, and the regulatory framework for environmental protection, sustainability and development needs to be overhauled to put the initiative and

responsibility for planning and consultation back onto the shoulders of the Government.

The onus of proof of environmental impact, sustainability and other impacts of development needs to be squarely in the court of developers, rather than forcing poorly resourced individuals and community organisations to prove environmental detriment, as currently.

Our natural heritage, the environment more broadly, Canberra's sustainability and the future quality of life of its citizens depend on getting our policy and regulatory settings right.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Cully  
Convener,  
Hughes Residents' Association

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Dr Jacky Fogerty  
Secretary,  
Hughes Residents' Association

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