



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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Submission Cover Sheet

Nature in Our City

Submission Number: 2

Date Authorised for Publication: 8 August 2018

Committee: Standing Committee on Environment & Transport & City Services

Inquiry: The value of the natural environment to an urbanising Canberra

Submission from:

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My comments relate to:

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

and

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

I have had involvement with conservation in the ACT since 2004 as a resident, and a researcher in conservation, sometimes in an advisory role. I am generally impressed at the ACT government's commitment to conservation and the efforts that it takes to meet the demands of the community and the complex task of managing biodiversity in an urban setting. A couple of points need to be made nonetheless.

The first is the management of naturally occurring woodland eucalypts. Great care is taken in the ACT to map, identify and protect significant trees when new developments occur. This is important as many of them form critical habitat for fauna, providing food, breeding sites and connectivity through the city. However, it more often than not effort wasted, as the ongoing management of these trees is counter to, and unsympathetic to their requirements. The main issues are:

- Providing buffers around the trees that are too small, setting up a situation of future risk to buildings etc when trees grow and limbs fall. A tree's root extend significantly beyond their canopy, so the health of the tree can be compromised when inappropriate surfaces and uses occur in the root zone.
- The sowing of fertilized exotic lawns around them, and planting inappropriate trees (e.g. ornamental *Prunus*) around them. This does not always happen, but it often is the case. Fertilizer is particularly damaging to the trees in a number of ways: it encourages defoliating insects, destroys their mycorrhizal associations and prevents any regeneration.

These factors exacerbate crown dieback and limbs falling, creating a downward spiral of lopping, dieback and ultimately tree removal. Limbs will fall from even a healthy tree, so the management of the under-tree area is important. The standard response to a fallen limb is

to cut back the tree to sound wood. This interferes with hollow formation. With continuing limb loss, and repeated pruning, the tree is whittled back, looks ugly and is eventually taken out. Falling limbs and rotting hollows in eucalypts are critical ecological processes in woodlands and forests. If areas under canopies are perceived as a possible hazard, the solution is to keep people out of the danger zone, not to remove the tree. Examples of roped-off trees on the ANU campus provide a clue to possible solutions that could save people and trees.

The mapping and planning for the protection of significant trees in the ACT are significant steps towards their conservation. But without the following additional critical steps, these first actions are only wasteful of resources and fail to achieve a vital conservation goal, namely the protection of habitat for hollow-dependent fauna:

- 1) Sufficient space under and around significant trees, that is managed sympathetically to their health;
- 2) Sympathetic management includes no hard surfaces, soil excavation and no nutrient additions and sowing of exotic grasses;
- 3) Practical recognition that limb shedding is a natural process of a maturing tree that is developing hollows
- 4) Discouraging human activities under the crowns of mature eucalypts, bearing in mind that some of this limb falling risk to humans is tolerated in nature reserves, but that more intensively used areas may require simple barriers around tree crowns.

Without the above additional critical actions, the first steps of mapping and identifying trees to be protected, are simply wasteful of resources and fail to achieve a vital conservation goal, namely the protection of habitat for hollow-dependent fauna.

Literature relating to eucalypt growth, health and management can be provided if required.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Dr Sue McIntyre.

Dr Sue McIntyre
29th May 2018