



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism in the ACT

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ACT Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity
Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism

Background

I have been an active volunteer for the Friends of Mount Majura (FoMM) for more than 20 years. Since retiring I now work every week for FoMM, mostly in conservation activities including weed control and planting, but also in community engagement, in my role as FoMM Secretary, particularly through communication to the recipients of FoMM's monthly newsletter.

I endorse the submission made by FoMM's Convenor, Emeritus Professor Jochen Zeil. I also wish to make comments as an individual Parkcare volunteer relating to the Committee's term of reference: *Managing relationships between volunteers, their organisations, the ACT government and the public.*

The commitment of FoMM volunteers to nature conservation in the ACT is substantial. In CY 2021, we logged an incredible 5559 hours of activity weeding, watering, spreading mulch, planting tube stock, sowing grass seeds and mapping. That is equivalent to more than three years of a single ranger's work. We would have done more, except Covid meant there were three months when it was not possible to run organised events such as weeding groups.

The renaming of Parkcare volunteering to Parkcare "Patch" Assist

Some years ago Parks & Conservation Service renamed our activities to describe them as ParkCare "Patch" <https://app.betterimpact.com/PublicOrganization/7baf50be-3b65-4dd3-bc53-04307685cfdb/Gvi/f179b743-bd36-41b9-a2fd-31c653a68db0/1> and to refer to "Patch Assist" as one of the volunteering programs. There was no consultation with volunteers about this unilateral change of nomenclature and it is universally loathed by volunteers. "Patch" is trivialising, demeaning and an infantile description of our work. Many Parkcare volunteers have long experience as senior scientists, public servants and educators. The term Patch makes us sound like Cabbage "Patch" dolls. We hate the term, and we hope the Committee will recommend a reversion to the name Parkcare volunteers or some other description which volunteers agree is acceptable.

Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment report on Environmental Volunteers

The ParkCare "Patch" nomenclature is an example of an issue highlighted in the Commissioner's recent report on Environmental Volunteers recommending more transparency around decisions that affect volunteers and early and genuine consultation with volunteers.

Other recommendations in that report which I strongly support are the need for more meaningful recognition of volunteer contributions and appropriate resourcing of staff support positions.

Meaningful recognition

It is worth noting that the most recent annual report of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate comprises 338 pages. It devotes just two paragraphs of text, one glossy photo and two tables to volunteer Parkcare activities.

Ranger resources

As the FoMM Submission points out, the provision of ranger resources to support Parkcare activities is so minimal as to be totally inadequate. To give one example: at the last Parkcare meeting with Parks & Conservation Service and the convenors of the multiple Parkcare groups in North Canberra, it was proposed by P&CS staff that due to resource constraints the annual planning meeting between P&CS staff and Parkcare volunteers should comprise a 3-4 hour (online) forum style meeting with all convenors at which P&CS senior managers and 'experts' would be in the room, to outline their plans and answer questions. It was proposed this would be followed up with a 30 minute meeting with each individual ParkCare group.

The Mount Majura nature reserve comprises 502 hectares. It includes a large area of critically endangered Yellow Box–Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and is an important breeding habitat for the rare Rosenberg's Monitor as well as many threatened and regionally declining woodland birds, including the Gang-gang cockatoo, the ACT's faunal emblem, which has been recently reclassified as endangered. Areas of Mount Majura are rich with rare and endangered flora, including critically endangered Spider orchids.

To propose that an annual half hour individual follow-up meeting concerning the FoMM annual plan is adequate would be laughable, if it were not so tragic. If this is all that the current ranger resources can support, there are serious questions to be answered about how on-ground resources are allocated and managed within the Parks & Conservation Service.

We appreciate the work of individual rangers who do their utmost to support Parkcare volunteers in practical and positive ways under what are clearly very taxing circumstances. It seems clear however that their capacity for meaningful on-ground support is extremely limited and frustrates rangers, as well as volunteers. While an additional ranger position to support Parkcare activities is currently being recruited, we remain doubtful as to how this will translate to increased practical on-ground support, as there is a lack of transparency in sharing with volunteers any metrics about the quantum of staff resource allocated to on-ground Parkcare.

Recommendations

- 1. Cease using the name ParkCare Patch and revert to Parkcare volunteers or another more respectful descriptor approved by volunteers**
- 2. Give more meaningful recognition of the immense contribution made by Parkcare volunteers**
- 3. Increase the resourcing of on-ground staff to support Parkcare volunteers and the reporting of data showing how that resource is allocated**

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