

Standing Committee on Conservation,
Heritage and Environment

REPORT NO. 5

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND HERITAGE ASPECTS OF RURAL LEASES IN THE A.C.T.



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DECEMBER 1991

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

On 10 May 1991 the committee resolved to inquire into and report on:

1. the environmental and heritage implications for rural areas of the ACT of
 - (a) lease allocations,
 - (b) leasing conditions and tenure provisions,
 - (c) land use controls exercised by the ACT Administration, and
 - (d) provisions for the resumption of land by the Administration.
2. the extent to which the standard of maintenance of rural leaseholds and homesteads is affected by lease conditions.
3. any related matters which may arise.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE INQUIRY

1.1 The rural surroundings of Canberra are widely appreciated as a landscape setting for the National Capital and as a visible link with the city's rural past. This is a modified landscape which is derivative of Canberra's past history of grazing and agriculture pioneered by predominantly Scottish graziers on the Limestone Plains last century. The limestone Plains were named in 1820 and other properties were taken up at Canberry and Tuggeranong in 1824 and Duntroon in 1825. By 1830, settlers had occupied areas in the Naas, Orroral and Boboyan Valleys as well as at Lanyon. Gudgenby was established in the 1840's.¹

1.2 The common feature of the rural areas is that they represent the traditional culture associated with Canberra's past, when the dominant value of the ACT rural lands lay principally in sheep and cattle grazing. It should be noted that the Limestone and Isabella Plains were, in fact, naturally treeless.²

1.3 The rural landscape is not natural in that the density of the predominantly eucalypt woodland has been reduced by selective clearing. The shrub understory has been cleared and the original native grasses have been largely replaced by exotic species which generally produce a better fodder yield for stock. The rural landscape is commonly described as open savannah woodland, although within it pockets of vegetation more similar to the original woodland remain. At its perimeter, the rural land merges into more extensive areas of native forest. Pine plantations interface with open savannah woodland and the native forests as another feature of the extra-urban parts of the ACT.

1.4 A consequence of the planning and management of Canberra is that the rural areas have generally retained their distinctive character, with an absence of the hybrid between urban and rural developments seen on the fringes of most other cities and towns in Australia.³ The view of many ACT residents is typified by a comment to the committee that the existing pleasing rural landscapes should be protected as they provide examples of rural enterprises and a country way of life adjacent to the city. This view sees a continuing historical association with rural activities giving ACT citizens and visitors an appreciation of rural Australia as part of the national capital.⁴

¹ Submission No 16, p3

² Submission No 16, p2

³ Submission No 20, pp1,3

⁴ Submission No 10

1.5 In 1917 most of the ACT rural freehold land was acquired by the Federal authorities. Owners were paid out and the land was either leased back to the existing landholders for continuing rural production until required for the expansion of Canberra or for other non-rural purposes. Another surge in acquisitions took place in the 1950's and others were acquired in the 1960's and 1970's. Lease tenure is subject to ACT planning and development needs and, accordingly, leases have ranged in length from very short term (three month withdrawal notice) to 50 years.

1.6 Rural lessees contributed some \$16.6M to the ACT economy in 1988/89⁵ although this is not a measure of the profitability of ACT rural industry as a whole. The Department of the Environment, Land and Planning (DELP) identified only a limited number of economically viable leases⁶ and another submission indicated uncertainty as to whether the production figures reflected the true costs of rural lands to the greater ACT community⁷.

1.7 From the committee's perspective, the environmental and heritage aspects of rural leases are especially important. It is aware that excessive soil erosion has been occurring since the last century due to overstocking and poor land use practices. In this inquiry it has sought to identify the link between the leasehold system and land use, and to establish a basis for future environmentally responsible maintenance of rural lands.

1.8 In the course of the inquiry the committee received submissions from 23 individuals and organisations, took evidence from 20 people in public hearings and made on-site visits to rural leases and an examination of the Gunghalin development. A list of submissions received is at Appendix 1, and at Appendix 2 is a list of persons who appeared at the public hearings.

⁵ Submission No 16, p5

⁶ Submission No 20, pp5,11

⁷ Submission No 11, p1

2. LEASE ADMINISTRATION AND CONDITIONS

2.1 Responsibility for administering rural leases and licences including issuing and amending leases, rent reviews, transfer of leases, land withdrawal and monitoring the observance of lease conditions falls to the Lease Administration Branch of the Department of the Environment, Land and Planning. The Agriculture and Landcare Section of the Department has day to day responsibility for rural management issues such as stock numbers, soil erosion and monitoring lease covenants.

2.2 The ACT Government's powers in this area at present derive from the Leases Act 1918. Other legislation such as the Soil Conservation Act also provide a basis for the practical management of ACT rural areas. The Leases Act enables the granting of leases for periods and under conditions determined by the Minister. Lease conditions can be used to regulate matters such as the type and location of buildings and the management of the land, including tree cover and the like. The Minister also has the power to prevent the transfer of a lease to a person considered to be unfit to manage a rural property.⁸

2.3 All rural land in the ACT under private control is held under some form of lease, licence or agistment agreement. The tenure for rural leases has ranged from one month for certain areas close to developed areas to up to 50 years. Most of the longer term leases are due for renewal in the year 2005.

2.4 The Government may withdraw from any lease, irrespective of its tenure, the whole or part of the land if it is required at any time for Commonwealth, Territory or other public purpose. Where this happens, compensation is paid for improvements that are owned by the lessee, although compensation varies according to the conditions of the lease. Improvements include buildings, fences, dams, timber treatment and pasture improvements.

2.5 The types of activities which may be undertaken on a particular rural lease are governed by the individual lease purpose clauses. Covenants can specify what stock, and their numbers, to be carried, contain environmental safeguards and require approval prior to the erection of new farm and other buildings.

⁸ Submission No 20, p4

Areas under Lease

2.6 According to DELP there are 224 rural leases in the ACT totalling 47,367 hectares. Of these, 125 are long-term leases totalling 25,340 ha and representing some 53 per cent of leased rural land. The remaining 99 leases are short term of less than 10 years. These leases account for 22,027 ha, or about 46 per cent of leased land. A further 10,295 ha is held under agistment or grazing licence from the ACT Government⁹

2.7 In 1951-52 the area of leased rural land was about 160,000 and comprised some 68 per cent of the ACT. By 1988-89, this had dropped to about 53,000 ha, or 22.5 per cent of the Territory, as a result of the withdrawal of rural land for the rapid urban development of Canberra from the 1960's, nature conservation, pine plantations and other city purposes. A significant component in the reduction has been the addition to Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Canberra Nature Park and the Murrumbidgee River Corridor Reserves.¹⁰

2.8 Allowing for further loss of rural land for urban purposes, nature conservation reserves and other public purposes, DELP forecast that the percentage of rural leased land could decline to less than 17 per cent of the ACT by the end of this century.

2.9 The Department advised the committee that most of the short term leases are under quarterly renewals and that the improvements on these leases are owned by the ACT Government. By their nature, these leases attract relatively lower rents and DELP stated that the Government is not receiving an adequate return for its assets. Further, the Government must bear the maintenance costs of improvements on such leases. The Department acknowledged that with short term leases there is little incentive for lessees to look after and to protect improvements from deterioration.¹¹

2.10 Possibly the most eloquent statement about the effects on land management of uncertain short term tenure was the comment to the committee that inadequate tenure prevented good strategic management of a good property¹². The committee's observations during on-site inspections were that a number of short term and agistment leases do in fact bear out the truth of this comment and the Department's assessment of the position.

⁹ Submission No 20, p5

¹⁰ Submission No 20, p7

¹¹ Submission No 20, p7

¹² Submission No 14

3. VIABILITY OF LEASES

3.1 DELP advised the committee that ACT grazing land has sustained its productive capacity over the past century with, in the main, little general deterioration in the quality of the land. However, excessive soil erosion has been occurring in the ACT over many years. The Department advised that some previously cleared land which could not meet the criteria of productivity had been largely withdrawn for environmental protection. The Department said that in terms of slope, soils and climate, ACT rural land is generally suitable for continuous production under appropriate management. While much of the land has been subject to pasture improvement, there are still several areas where native grasses constitute the main pasture improvement. The committee was informed that where gradients or other factors preclude the use of land for rural production or involve environmental risks such land has been excised from rural leases.¹³

3.2 The Department claimed that with a moderate level of pasture improvement ACT rural leases are typically capable of supporting 3 to 5 dry sheep equivalent per hectare. With this carrying capacity in an average year it would require some 600 hectares to provide an economically viable grazing property. The Department advised that there are only 17 leases capable of meeting these criteria, and only 9 have long term tenure. Many smaller properties are managed successfully because proximity to Canberra allows for off-farm income to be earned¹⁴. The Rural Lessees were less sanguine about the Department's assessment of viability on the basis of 600ha or approximately 2000 sheep, and said this should be researched more thoroughly¹⁵.

3.3 DELP advised the committee that where traditional grazing proves not to be economically viable, lessees may attempt to obtain a short term return by overstocking or horse agistment. Overstocking should, however, be avoided as any sort of solution. For short term economic benefit, such practices can have far reaching and deleterious effects upon the relatively poor soil structures of the ACT and contribute significantly to erosion.

Lease Allocation

3.4 It has been the practice of government to offer resumed freehold ACT land not required for other public use on lease or agistment to the former freeholder, the property manager, an adjoining lessee or to allocate it on some other basis.

¹³ Submission No 20, pp3,4

¹⁴ Submission No 20, pp5,11

¹⁵ Submission No 23, p2

3.5 The committee was advised of concerns about the extent to which rural and forestry areas are used by ACT departmental staff for grazing enterprises. It was put to the committee that leases can be allocated to persons with no claim or connection with the properties so leased¹⁶. The committee notes this concern, and in order to gauge its validity sought from the responsible Minister relevant advice about leases and agistment licences. From the advice given, the committee notes that over the years some departmental employees or their family members have acquired agistment and other leases. These leases have mainly been acquired by purchase on the open market, by approaching the Administration for agistment adjacent to their leases, by responding to Administration invitations for expressions of interest in agistment, or by having the Administration approach them to run stock on an intermittent basis on public land which would otherwise need to be mown. DELP normally offers agistment grazing to those lessees, whether they be departmental employees or not, who have the capacity to transfer their stock from agistment to their main leases at short notice in the event that the grazing agistment is required for other Administrative purposes. The committee understands that where DELP seeks expressions of interest for agistment leases it notifies the Rural Lessees Association and neighbouring leaseholders.

3.6 The Minister informed the committee that as a result of a Senate inquiry and on advice from the Ombudsman, the process of allocating agistment and grazing rights was reviewed and this process is currently undergoing further review to ensure equity of access. It is clear to the committee that efforts have been made to allay the concerns mentioned above. Nevertheless, it considers that, apart from intermittent grazing arrangements where it would be impractical to offer the grazing on a commercial basis, an open market should be established for allocating agistment, grazing rights and new leases. The committee identified three options which would meet the criteria of an open market, namely:—

- . open sale through contracted selling agents
- . sale by tender
- . sale by ballot

With each option, a sale should only be made to a person or persons able to demonstrate a capacity to effectively manage the agistment through possession of, or access to, appropriate technical, financial and other relevant resources.

Lease Amalgamations

3.7 From time to time DELP offers lessees alternative areas of land left over from other leases which have ceased to be viable and have been surrendered. This is sometimes done to allow existing leases to become more viable. The Department said it saw merit in extending this principle to the broader amalgamation and rationalisation of

¹⁶ Submission No 15

rural lease boundaries throughout the ACT by the withdrawal and reissue of leases within the framework of a rational long term plan for lease boundaries.¹⁷

3.8 The committee found broad support for the Department's proposal for amalgamation from within and without the rural community. The rationale is that larger property sizes are more likely to be economically viable and to pose less of a threat to the environment and the ecology of the land as there is greater scope for resting sections of a lease, and less incentive for "flogging" the land.

3.9 Poor land management practices are often associated with declining property sizes, overstocking or "flogging" the land and urban encroachment. Again, the committee noted that the ACT Rural Lessees¹⁸ and the conservation groups,¹⁹ saw the undesirability of creating hobby farms within the ACT. The Rural Lessees advised the committee they were aware of a growing demand for smaller rural holdings for residential purposes, but noted the planning difficulties associated with the provision of urban services to such holdings. Nevertheless, the Rural Lessees held the view that in a number of instances, smaller holdings would be viable provided they were used for intensive production, and consequently could be considered in the category of long term leases.²⁰

3.10 The committee considers it would be premature to exclude the development of smaller holdings from the ACT's rural landscape. Small holdings, often with intensive agricultural or horticultural uses, are a feature of the rural surrounds of the ACT (for example, Murrumbateman) and their existence in the ACT may serve short and long term goals. A policy of excluding the use of small holdings presumes a certain level and nature of agricultural activity, an assumption which may be unwarranted in future years. There is also some indication that smaller holdings provide a valuable conservation service, especially in areas of environmental sensitivity. There appears to be no relationship between the size of a rural holding and the extent of the lease holder's "environmental awareness".

3.11 Little evidence was presented to the committee to support the contention that smaller holdings were environmentally unsound or prejudicial to good land management. A recommendation in relation to this aspect might be appropriate in the future but at this stage it appears to unnecessarily limit options available to the ACT Government.

¹⁷ Submission No 20, p11

¹⁸ Submission No 23, p1

¹⁹ Submission No 11, p3

²⁰ Submission No 16, p8

Intensive Agricultural Use

3.12 Few areas of the ACT have the high suitability for intensive rural use as the alluvial river flats at Pialligo, Symonstown and Dairy Flat. Some of these properties are used for orchards, vegetables and dairying. Others use the property for combined residential and business purposes. Alluvial land is very scarce in the ACT and there is virtually none outside the Pialligo area which provides the same opportunities for market garden-type and dairying activities.

3.13 Land for general business activities does not depend on the natural resource characteristics to the same extent and suitable sites for such activities are to be found elsewhere in the ACT. These activities include egg and poultry production and plant nurseries. They are regarded as partly rural, partly commercial and partly residential and thus can be located in a buffer zone separating industrial areas from rural or residential areas, which is effectively the case at Pialligo.²¹

3.14 It is a concern of the committee that scarce and productive ACT alluvial land can be readily sacrificed to non rural development including the construction of roads and freeways. The committee considers that every effort should be made by the Government and its planners to avoid to the maximum extent possible the expropriation of this land for non rural productive purposes or for infrastructure development.

3.15 The closeness of the Pialligo and Dairy Flat areas to City provides a unique opportunity for retaining these areas and the associated intensive agricultural operations as a tourist attraction most appropriate to the "bush capital" concept. The committee considers that this would not only assist in the maintenance of a viable dairying and small cropping industry, but provide an excellent opportunity for local and interstate school groups to be exposed to rural operations.

Horse Agistment

3.16 Recreational horse riding is particularly popular in Canberra. There are at least 20 riding clubs affiliated with the ACT Equestrian Association with some 3000 family members and more than 4500 horses. Many of these horses are agisted on ACT rural leases.²²

3.17 Increasing pressures are being placed on the agistment available from Government owned and operated paddocks and from rural leases readily accessible to the urban area. Government holding paddocks can accommodate 600 horses and about 2000 are agisted on ACT rural leases. Horse agistment must be managed with great

care. In an equestrian minded city like Canberra, the temptation to carry more horses than the land can be reasonably expected to handle should be discouraged. Horse owners themselves are generally aware that horses are selective grazers and that overstocking will rapidly lead to pastures which are infested with noxious weeds and erosion²³. In many agistment paddocks overstocking has sometimes subjected the land to overgrazing and trampling. In Government paddocks horse numbers are controlled and protection measures instituted to prevent environmental damage.²⁴

3.18 The committee is also aware that a significant problem with horse grazing is that horses can cause major damage by ring-barking certain eucalypt tree species. The only effective preventative is to either fence off tree stands or to wire the trunks of these trees to a level above the reach of the horses.

3.19 A further problem which is not confined to horse agistment alone, but is associated with it, is the importation to rural lands of exotic weeds in bought in fodder during periods of severe drought. Expanding horse agistment on rural leases is no doubt contributing to the noxious weed problem in the ACT.²⁵

3.20 The committee observed that at least one leaseholder on the fringe of the suburbs has adopted a policy of limiting the numbers of horses agisted even though on the face of things there appeared to be ample land available for the purpose. This agistment is combined with stabling. The committee noted that overstocking is of concern to DELP and would urge that it continue to ensure that where this comes under the Department's notice, that it act quickly to maintain the integrity of lease conditions.

3.21 Recommendations

The committee recommends that the Government:-

- 1) allocate all new and transferable agistment and other leases, apart from intermittent grazing, on an open market basis,**
- 2) make it a condition that in the sale of any lease the prospective purchaser provide evidence of appropriate technical, financial and other relevant resources to manage the lease effectively,**
- 3) examine the desirability, in terms of economic viability and potential pressures on the land environment, of amalgamating leases into larger units when areas of land are left over from other leases or as leases are surrendered,**

²¹ Submission No 20, p10

²² Submission No 22

²³ Submission No 22

²⁴ Submission No 20, p9

²⁵ Submission No 1

- 4) ensure that alluvial river flats and other land suitable for intensive agriculture in the ACT be retained for that purpose, and that ACT planning avoid encroachment on these areas for non agricultural and infrastructure purposes to the maximum extent possible,
- 5) monitor all grazing and agistment leases and licences to prevent overstocking and act to control overstocking where it occurs, and
- 6) require all lessees and agistment licensees to protect trees from ring-barking where horses are agisted.

4. SECURITY OF TENURE AND LAND MANAGEMENT

4.1 As mentioned earlier, some 46 per cent of rural leases are short term, and a significant area of land is held on annual or even shorter lease, in some cases three months. In addition, a large area of land is held under agistment or grazing licence. DELP acknowledged to the committee that many lessees are unwilling to commit resources to land management for which they cannot see a guaranteed return.²⁶ Lessees in this situation are likely to maximise their return from the land with the minimum input to management of the land resource. Long term lessees may act similarly as their leases approach termination and where they have no guarantee of future long term tenure. The overall risk is that some properties will run down in terms of pasture quality, tree cover, erosion, standard of fencing and building maintenance.

4.2 The effects of lack of security of tenure can be observed in parts of Tuggeranong and Gunghalin where land was converted to short term lease well in advance of actual need, and where the results of overstocking and land deterioration is particularly evident. In the case of Gunghalin, long term rural leases were withdrawn in the early 1970's when it was anticipated that the area would be developed much sooner than has been the case. DELP advised the committee that while it is anticipated that all of Gunghalin will ultimately be required for urban development, ongoing rural management should be designed to protect the lands and make efficient use of its resources in the meantime. The Department stated that even where rural land is to be developed for suburbs, the costs of that development can be contained where the land has been cared for and soil erosion avoided.²⁷

4.3 From its observations it was apparent to the committee that some leases, especially those of a short term nature, are showing the signs of neglect to fences and insufficient attention to land care through overstocking. As these conditions were readily observable to the committee it is concerned that remedial action has not apparently been taken by the Department in respect of these leases.

4.4 In the committee's view the adverse implications for rural land quality and the environment posed by the urban and other development needs of Canberra and the fact that the longest leases now have barely 15 years to run under existing conditions, make it imperative that the Government review leasing policy to provide safeguards for land management in the context of ensuring sustainable rural land use combined with preservation and restoration of the natural environment.

²⁶ Submission No 20, p11

²⁷ Submission No 20, p8

4.5 In canvassing a new approach to lease management, DELP said that future policies needed to balance flexibility for lessees with ensuring environmental sustainability of soil, water, habitats and vegetation systems. By way of return, lessees might be offered greater security of tenure. The Department saw this as encouraging good management practices more by inducement than by threat of penalty, and thus preventing poor management practices such as overstocking and land clearing which might result in land degradation.²⁸

4.6 The Department put the view that the Government should reserve the right to ensure that a potential lessee had the necessary capability both technically and financially to conduct the lease to the future satisfaction of the Territory and to meet overall rural objectives.²⁹

4.7 The committee agrees with this view. It considers that greater security of tenure should be available but goes further than the Department in that it believes tenure should be conditional upon lessees demonstrating both a commitment to, and the resources to undertake, effective land management, tree preservation and regeneration and maintenance of fences and buildings. The committee does not expect that would necessarily be demonstrated by a lessee having particular academic or other qualifications. Rather, the committee would see the commitment being shown in part by the lessee's execution of his or her obligations under the lease. The commitment should, however, be contractual, subject to supervision by Governmental authorities and with provision for remedial work to be undertaken by the Government at the expense of the lessee where the commitment is breached. Nevertheless, the committee recognises that costs of remedial work on badly eroded land is likely to be beyond the reach of most, if not all, lessees and would support a request put by the Rural Lessees for government assistance by way of low interest loans and the use of (government owned) heavy machinery as is the case in NSW³⁰. The committee considers that the need to prevent the degradation of ACT rural lands is an imperative and lessees must be encouraged and assisted in every reasonable way to repair existing damage and maintain the integrity of the soil.

4.8 In the case of very short tenured leases and agistment licences the committee considers these should be based on similar conditions with rentals geared to reflect the lack of security of tenure. It may well be that some leases in these categories should be allocated to persons who can satisfy the requirements of expertise, appropriate resources and commitment to managing the lease on an environmentally sustainable basis. These areas could be suitable for grants under the Landcare policy.

²⁸ Submission No 20, p17

²⁹ Submission No 20, p20

³⁰ Submission No 16, p11

4.9 The committee noted the view of one lessee typical of those held by most other lessees that it would encourage lessees to develop and care better for their leases if a 20 year plan for the remaining leaseholds could be published and be updated every five years.³¹

4.10 Recommendations

The committee recommends that:—

- 1) where soil erosion is present in exiting leases, the Government arrange with lessees for remedial work, and consider arrangements for the use of government equipment and government expertise for this work,**
- 2) the Government consider low Interest loans, where appropriate, to enable lessees to expedite remedial soil conservation,**
- 3) all future rural leases be subject to the lessee demonstrating a commitment to, and the resources to undertake, effective management of the land on an environmentally sustainable basis,**
- 4) rural leasing guidelines be prepared to assist rural lessees in identifying appropriate rural management standards,**
- 5) all future rural leases be subject to contractual commitment by the lessee to manage the land on an environmentally sustainable basis, contracts to include covenants regarding erosion control, tree preservation and regeneration, and exotic plant control,**
- 6) an environmental audit be made of all existing rural leases, and that such leases then be amended to provide for a contractual commitment requiring the lessee to manage the land on an environmentally sustainable basis, contracts to include covenants regarding erosion control, tree preservation and regeneration, and exotic plant control,**
- 7) contracts provide for the Government to rectify any mismanagement of leases at the expense of the lessee,**
- 8) the Government have particular regard for the conservation and rehabilitation needs of the land in all existing and prospective very short term and agistment leases, and that these considerations should**

³¹ Submission No 1

outweigh the rental return in determining whether leases should continue, be reallocated, allocated or withdrawn from any type of rural use until the land is restored to an acceptable condition, and

- 9) as far as possible, responsibility for the erection and maintenance of fences be transferred to lessees, particularly in the case of longer term leases.

5. PROPOSALS FOR REFORM IN LEASE TENURE

5.1 DELP put to the committee a proposal for security of lease tenure designed to provide an inducement to lessees to maintain the land and improvements in good condition. Under the proposal, lessees would be made responsible for the cost of maintaining buildings and other improvements whether or not they are owned by the lessee.

5.2 The Department's proposal recognises that short term leases will be warranted because of impending development, or where partial development has taken place, but sufficient rural land remains to justify private management. In essence the Department envisaged a system of leases as follows:-

- . Short term leases (less than 5 years) – land programmed for urban and other public purposes
- . Medium term leases (5–15 years) – land required for urban development in the foreseeable future but capable of remaining in full production in the meantime.
- . Long term leases (15–50 years) – land planned to remain in rural use for the foreseeable future.³²

5.3 As a general rule, the Department said it would be safe to issue all future long term leases (including renewals) without a withdrawal clause but that in particular situations a withdrawal clause might be negotiated where this was warranted. In the Department's view such leases would command higher rentals and provide a better return to the Government than the present system³³.

5.4 The committee has already stated its preference for greater security of tenure for rural leaseholders provided this is conditional upon a demonstrated and ongoing commitment to effective land care. To reinforce this commitment, the committee is of the view that the Government in authorising capital works on leases should satisfy itself that such proposals will benefit the total management of the lease including the environment. Care would be needed to prevent capital investments such as the construction of de facto residential communities and other commercial activities not associated with rural production or protection of the environment. Apart from the implications of these types of investment for general ACT planning, the committee notes that under existing terms of lease the Government is liable to compensate the lessee for the value of authorised improvements if the lease is withdrawn³⁴.

³² Submission No 20, p12

³³ Submission No 20, pp12,19

³⁴ Submission No 20, p14

5.5 The committee is mindful of the fact that a number of lessees have resided on their leaseholds over a substantial period of time, and that their leaseholds are as much a home as a business. In these cases, the committee considers there is a particular need to project future lease resumptions as accurately as possible so as to provide for stability and certainty for these leaseholders.

5.6 The committee sees merit in the Department's proposal for a hierarchy of rural leases tied in to nominal periods of tenure, but would want to see this proposal, if adopted, or any other similar proposal enshrine a system of regular oversight of lease management in terms of the environment and the ecology of the leasehold.

5.7 Recommendations

The committee recommends that the Government:-

- 1) introduce a tenure system for all rural leases with the objective of ensuring more certainty of tenure and achieving effective land management by leaseholders,**
- 2) have particular regard to the personal needs of those lessees who have resided on their leaseholds over a substantial period of time when projecting future lease resumptions,**
- 3) in any future rural leasehold system, provide for the allocation of leases to be subject to the contractual conditions recommended in paragraph 4.10 of this report, and**
- 4) maintain regular oversight of lease management in terms of the environment and the ecology of the leasehold, and that it order, or undertake, remedial action where environmental damage has occurred.**

6. LAND CARE AND FARM TREES

6.1 Land clearing and grazing practices since the last century destabilised broad swampy gullies, turning them into incised channels. Protective tree cover and deep rooted native grasses were replaced by introduced pastures, and rabbits reached plague proportions. This has resulted in excessive soil erosion. Overstocked or over-grazed land, particularly by sheep which graze very close to the ground, promote soil erosion by trampling which damages grass cover and compacts the soil. This in turn reduces rain infiltration which increases runoff and gouges the soil.³⁵

6.2 DELP advised the committee that most soil conservation programs tend to be initiated only after a particular problem is evident, that there are some areas of the ACT where such programs are currently needed, and it could be made a condition of new leases that restorative measures be implemented as part of a management plan.³⁶

6.3 The committee supports the need for restorative measures. However, given the limited earning capacity of most rural leases, it doubts whether prospective new lessees would be prepared to fund restorative work as a condition of a lease without substantial rental reductions. In any case, the Department's suggested approach appears to be piecemeal in that apart from the difficulty of attracting new lessees prepared to carry out the necessary restoration work, there would remain the problem of existing lessees occupying land in need of restoration. Delays in finding willing new lessees, combined with the possibility that there could be adjoining leases in need of land restoration but not subject to a restoration condition could mean that the general degradation of the land in the area would continue unchecked. The committee further doubts whether existing lessees generally would possess the expertise or have the resources to fund the expertise and carry out restorative programs on their leases.

6.4 The committee was informed that the ACT Administration used to assist lessees to reduce soil erosion, though never on the scale provided by the NSW Government. This lessee said it would be uneconomic and impracticable for him to tackle some of the bigger problems and that soil erosion and land degradation would continue unchecked³⁷. The committee considers that the Government should assume direct responsibility for restorative work on affected leases, and that the cost of doing this should be a factor for consideration in the leasing terms. Where, for example, a lessee has allowed overstocking to contribute to erosion, this should be a factor in determining the liability of that lessee for bearing some of the cost of restoration.

³⁵ Submission No20, pp15,16

³⁶ Submission No 20, p16

³⁷ Submission No 1

Decline In Farm Trees

6.5 As noted earlier in this report, Canberra's rural landscape is the result of past clearing and pasture improvement. This has been the main form of environmental modification. It has meant the destruction or suppression of the forest understory and the regeneration process. In a normal woodland community, tree damage, dieback and death are natural events which are offset by natural regeneration. As aging trees reach the end of their life spans, young tree stock is growing to replace them. Mature trees are generally capable of producing the seed required to continue the regenerative process, but the establishment of seedlings can be precluded by unfavourable soil conditions resulting from compaction by stock and especially competition from pasture grasses. Where young seedlings are established they are threatened by the pressure of grazing stock. Sheep tend to destroy small seedlings, while goats can cause serious damage by browsing on small well-established trees.³⁸

6.6 DELP advised the committee that tree planting programs are being undertaken in association with Landcare and Greening Australia³⁹. The committee was also encouraged by the efforts of some lessees with tree regeneration, and was pleased to note the visionary approach of the NSW Government Soil Conservation Service which has apparently recognised the cross-border implications of soil erosion and land restoration and has offered assistance to certain ACT lessees on request.

6.7 Apart from soil restoration, the systematic replacement of trees by lessees provides benefits such as stock shelter and reduced soil salinity. The Department informed the committee that longer term leases could require that as part of any approved management plan lessees would be required not only to protect existing timber stands but to regenerate and replant some trees previously felled. It noted that the ACT Decade of Landcare Plan is currently in preparation and will address these matters and provide plans and programs through which sustainable agriculture can be achieved.⁴⁰

6.8 The Department advised that in some areas it may be desirable to integrate tree planting programs and soil conservation but that the long-term approach is to prevent the problem at its source with control of stock numbers so that grazing intensity remains at all times within the current carrying capacity of the pasture. The Department sees responsibility resting primarily with the lessee, to be implemented by those who aim to maximise their productivity in both the medium and long terms.

³⁸ Submission No 20, p15

³⁹ Submission No 20, p15

⁴⁰ Submission No 20, pp15,16

6.9 As with its concerns about land restoration, the committee considers that the threats to the rural environment and the urgent need for regeneration of rural tree cover is too important a matter to be left to individual lessees to decide in the context of economic advantage to themselves. The costs of regeneration can be substantial in terms of additional protective fencing and the removal of planted areas from stock grazing. These costs may well be a significant obstacle for lessees. The committee therefore considers that more substantial efforts are needed by Government to ensure the preservation, and progressive regeneration, of farm trees. The committee would argue that it should be a condition that all lessees be required to undertake tree regeneration programs under expert guidance by Governmental authorities and that the Government should provide financial assistance in the form of reduced rentals and loans to expedite regeneration programs. Where the need for regeneration is particularly urgent the committee considers that the Government should fund this directly.

6.10 Recommendations

The committee recommends that:-

- 1) the Government assume direct responsibility for the prevention of overstocking and, where appropriate, restorative work on leases affected by soil degradation, with appropriate cost recovery mechanisms,
- 2) where a lessee consistently allows overstocking to contribute to soil erosion, this be a factor in determining the liability of the lessee for bearing all or part of the cost of restoration or whether the lease should be withdrawn,
- 3) the cost of soil restoration by the Government be taken into consideration in negotiating lease contracts,
- 4) it be a condition of all leases that lessees undertake tree regeneration programs in consultation with appropriate authorities,
- 5) where appropriate, the Government provide financial assistance in the form of reduced rentals or loans to expedite tree regeneration programs on leaseholds, and
- 6) where regeneration needs are particularly urgent, the Government fund the regeneration program directly.

7 FARM MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

7.1 In assessing future arrangements for the allocation, extension or variation of rural leases DELP proposed that lease changes only be permitted if the applicant or lessee has submitted for agreement by the Government a farm plan for the management and development of the land. The farm plan envisaged by the Department would include statements of farm management proposals and budgets to meet lease conditions and general requirements relating to stock rates, pasture improvements, the provision and maintenance of buildings, land care, the planting and conservation of trees, habitat protection and take full account of relevant legislative requirements including the National Capital and Territory Plans.⁴¹

7.2 It was put to the committee by one lessee that the Department's Agriculture and Land Care Section should make expert staff available to advise on the implementation of mutually agreed farming programs designed to protect and maintain the integrity of the land and its rural atmosphere.⁴²

7.3 The committee is attracted to the farm plan concept as being consistent with its view that lessees should demonstrate technical and financial capacity to effectively manage a lease on an environmentally sustainable basis. As with any business, a rural lease should desirably work to a business plan and a farm plan would achieve that objective from the point of view of the economics of managing and developing the land as the basis for the rural business. Farm plans which focus upon sustainable environmental goals would also establish and reinforce the economic benefit to the lessee of maintaining the capacity of the land to support farm activities.

7.4 Recommendations

The committee recommends that:-

- 1) it be a condition of existing and prospective leases that a farm management plan covering proposals and budgets to meet lease conditions be submitted for agreement between the Government and the lessee,**
- 2) all farm management plans include provision for sustainable environmental goals including land care and tree conservation and regeneration, and**
- 3) the Government and the lessee jointly review farm management plans at least every two years to assess performance against the objectives and, as necessary, vary plans to meet changing circumstances.**

⁴¹ Submission No 20, p19

⁴² Submission No 10

8. LAND USE

8.1 Significant areas of rural land have been withdrawn in recent years to provide for nature reserves, river corridors and pine plantations. In most cases these lands adjoin rural leases. It was put to the committee that there is a gap between government land use decisions and their practical implementation which adversely affect adjacent leaseholders as well as the ecology and conservation of government held lands.⁴³

8.2 The committee was informed that delay in developing the Murrumbidgee River corridor for which rural land had been resumed has resulted in much of the land being neglected, which is exacerbating soil erosion, the growth of noxious weeds, increased bush fire hazards, breakdown of fencing and livestock control.⁴⁴

8.3 There was general concern among those individuals and organisations which contacted the committee on this inquiry about the need to control damage to the rural and bushland environment resulting from human intrusion into those areas. There was broad acceptance of the need to control environmentally damaging activities and practices emanating from trail bike and off-road vehicles, uncontrolled dogs, dumped cats and the planting of rampantly noxious plant species.⁴⁵

Noxious Weeds

8.4 The committee was advised that uncontrolled growth of noxious plants and weeds such as Saffron Thistle, Patterson's Curse, blackberries and wild roses occurs on land which is scheduled to be resumed for public purposes, and that the same problem applies increasingly in ACT pine forests, unleased bush and other government lands. These weeds are increasingly being spread by birds and feral mammals to rural leases and it is becoming uneconomic for leaseholders to control the problem and protect the value of their leases.⁴⁶

8.5 Other factors were put to the committee as either contributing to the spread of noxious weeds or acting against their control and eradication. It was claimed that lease conditions imposed in relation to scrub control are an unnecessary restriction which will lead to eventual re-growth in much of the mountain country⁴⁷. Another view was that controlled grazing in bushland and bushland and river corridors would reduce the bushfire hazard and control weed growth.⁴⁸

⁴³ Submission No 1

⁴⁴ Submission No 1

⁴⁵ Submission Nos 23,p1 and 11, p14

⁴⁶ Submission No 1

⁴⁷ Submission No 9

⁴⁸ Submission No 15

8.6 Conservation groups were opposed to bushland grazing, particularly with regard to the Canberra Nature Park where it was claimed present grazing leases provide expensive management problems and impediments to sound conservation practices. It was also pointed out that stock prefer native grasses in dry seasons and have steadily selected native species in some areas, resulting in greater stress and invasive pressure on those areas.⁴⁹

8.7 As a general view, the Rural Lessees saw the control of noxious plants as the responsibility of the lessees, but that control should be supported by government agencies.⁵⁰

Native Grasses and Woodlands

8.8 A substantial study of ACT woodland and native grassland undertaken by Dr Kevin Frawley on behalf of the National Parks Association of the ACT has identified 42 sites of low altitude native grassland communities within the ACT, of which 25 are on rural lands.⁵¹

8.9 The committee was advised that the present characteristics of remnant cover on the hills and ridges in the ACT are in general the result of regeneration and recolonisation during this century. This is in contrast to the scattered tree cover of adjacent rural lands and native grasslands both of which can be seen in a historical sense as being in gradual decline. In grazing areas, the survival of native grassland is due to factors such as low grazing pressure and lack of pasture improvement, but the grassland communities in many areas have been highly disturbed, especially by the invasion of exotic weed species.⁵²

8.10 It was put to the committee that as exotic grass species supplant indigenous species, some animal species are endangered. Nevertheless, as the committee was informed, the ACT still harbours species which have become extinct over most of their former range. This was said to be due to the fact that the ACT has a relatively low proportion of improved pastures that have been treated with continuous or long term regimes of artificial fertilisation.⁵³

⁴⁹ Submission No 11, p10

⁵⁰ Submission No 16, p11

⁵¹ Submission No 5

⁵² Submission No 5

⁵³ Submission No 11, p11

Feral and Native Animals

8.11 The committee noted a concern that leaseholds adjoining ACT forests and reserves suffer from the depredations of feral pigs, dingoes and eastern grey kangaroos whose numbers on government lands are either protected or not adequately controlled. Wild pigs are known to cause serious damage to pastures and fences. It was put to the committee that government campaigns against feral pigs have been impractical.⁵⁴

8.12 One leaseholder told the committee that the explosive growth in numbers of eastern grey kangaroos based upon government lands, while making cattle production uneconomic in the ACT, is also bringing excessive pressure on the rarer marsupial species such as the wallaroo and swamp wallaby which were formerly quite common in the areas adjacent to the Namadgi reserve. This lessee suggested that if the ACT community wants so many grey kangaroos, then the lessees most affected should be given rent reductions, as had formerly been the case, or be offered agistment fees for feeding them.⁵⁵

8.13 Recommendations

The committee recommends that the Government:—

- 1) examine the feasibility of establishing a native vegetation retention and regeneration scheme,**
- 2) take action to control the growth and eradicate, as far as possible, noxious plants and weeds where they occur on government controlled land,**
- 3) assist in the eradication of noxious plants and weeds where they occur on leaseholds adjacent to government controlled lands,**
- 4) encourage lessees to control and eradicate noxious plants and weeds through publicity programs, provision of expert advice, the loan of equipment and, where appropriate, financial loans,**
- 5) take action to control the numbers of feral animals in ACT nature reserves, bush lands and other government controlled lands and, as far as possible, eradicate feral animals from such areas, and**
- 6) examine whether the habitat and existence of rarer marsupial animal species are being threatened by the numbers of eastern grey kangaroos in the ACT.**

⁵⁴ Submission No 1

⁵⁵ Submission No 1

9. HERITAGE ISSUES

9.1 Much of the heritage and cultural values of the ACT are embodied in its rural areas. The appearance of the cleared rural lands directly reflects the economic imperatives of those who pioneered southern New South Wales and the Limestone plains from the mid 1900's. As one witness said to the committee, the ACT's rural leases maintain values of concern to the well-being of the ACT as a whole and, as such, they need to be actively maintained and carefully managed to sustain the wide range of functions and uses required of them.⁵⁶

9.2 Of necessity rural land has and will continue to be withdrawn for city and urban expansion and for other public purposes. It is inevitable that in this situation the heritage character of the landscape will be affected and, in many cases, disappear. While the committee had no direct evidence of damage or destruction of both identified and unidentified heritage items, it considers that there is a potential for heritage items to be lost through unawareness of the items by planners, developers and leaseholders. Examples of the threat posed to heritage items was evident to the committee in its inspection of the Gunghalin town and urban development sites. These areas contain a number of sites of heritage significance, including historical homestead ruins which are directly in the path of proposed roadways and the town centre. The committee is concerned that appropriate measures should be taken as a matter of urgency to protect and preserve these sites.

9.3 The protection of heritage sites (and objects) was an issue before this committee when it examined the proposed Heritage Bill jointly with the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure in April 1991. The committees noted, inter alia, that unregistered heritage places were not adequately protected by the Bill, and stated that the Bill needed a requirement to assess the environmental impact of all activities that may in some way affect identified as well as unidentified heritage. In paragraph 6.2 of the joint report, the committees recommended that provision be made for appropriate consideration to be given to protection of lesser heritage sites, and that assessment criteria be developed in regard to unidentified heritage.

9.4 In its response, Tabled in the Assembly on 19 September 1991, the Government said inter alia that the environmental assessment processes established under the Bill pick up all heritage places, or potential heritage places, natural and cultural (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). The committee noted that the Land (Planning and Environment) Bill 1991 also presented to the Assembly on 19 September 1991 provides in section 110 for environmental impact to include any premises or land or the surroundings that has heritage significance. The draft Bill considered by the joint committees in April specifically referred to premises, land and surrounds having heritage

⁵⁶ Submission No 11, p2

significance within the meaning of the Heritage Act 1991. In the light of this amendment, the committee is satisfied that the government has met the concerns it expressed in relation to the draft Bill.

9.5 Pointers as to how this could be done were given by the ACT Heritage Committee which said the most desirable situation would be for a rural lessee to enter into an obligation to protect any heritage items explicitly identified in the lease, or later identified under the statutory territory plan and heritage place procedures. The Heritage Committee also suggested that the lessee be required to protect all heritage places on their lease but that leases clearly provide for the maintenance of heritage places, for example, graves, canoe trees, ruins, landforms as distinct from homesteads and farm buildings, by either the lessee or the government.⁵⁷

9.6 The committee noted the observation of one lessee that the ACT was well endowed with a documented rich rural heritage but that many farms have numerous unrecorded historic sites which convey some activity associated with the development of a particular farm or the area. Examples of this are the original settlers' cottage and the railway workers' camp, the home of 300 construction workers in the years about 1886-88 both sites in the Tuggeranong area. This lessee also put a well argued case for the Queanbeyan-Cooma railway line to be transferred to the ACT with a view to its listing as a heritage feature.⁵⁸

9.7 Recommendations

The committee recommends that:-

- 1) leases contain provision for lessees to protect from damage heritage sites identified in the lease, and for leases to be amended to include heritage sites whenever these are identified,**
- 2) lessees be given the opportunity to maintain heritage sites by adjustment to lease rentals where the protection of such sites results in assessable economic loss,**
- 3) the Government oversight the maintenance of heritage sites and accept responsibility for maintenance of those sites which are not maintained by lessees, and**
- 4) the Government examine jointly with the New South Wales Government the feasibility of retaining and protecting the Queanbeyan-Cooma railway line as a heritage item.**

⁵⁷ Submission No 13, pp1,2

⁵⁸ Submission No 6

10. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That the Government:-

- 1) allocate all new and transferable agistment and other leases, apart from intermittent grazing, on an open market basis,**
- 2) make it a condition that in the sale of any lease the prospective purchaser provide evidence of appropriate technical, financial and other relevant resources to manage the lease effectively,**
- 3) examine the desirability, in terms of economic viability and potential pressures on the land environment, of amalgamating leases into larger units when areas of land are left over from other leases or as leases are surrendered,**
- 4) ensure that alluvial river flats and other land suitable for intensive agriculture in the ACT be retained for that purpose, and that ACT planning avoid encroachment on these areas for non agricultural and infrastructure purposes to the maximum extent possible,**
- 5) monitor all grazing and agistment leases and licences to prevent overstocking and act to control overstocking where it occurs, and**
- 6) require all lessees and agistment licensees to protect trees from ring-barking where horses are agisted.**

(paragraph 3.21)

10.2 That:-

- 1) where soil erosion is present in existing leases, the Government arrange with lessees for remedial work, and consider arrangements for the use of government equipment and expertise for this work,**
- 2) the Government consider low interest loans, where appropriate, to enable lessees to expedite remedial soil conservation,**
- 3) all future rural leases be subject to the lessee demonstrating a commitment to, and the resources to undertake, effective management of the land on an environmentally sustainable basis,**
- 4) rural leasing guidelines be prepared to assist rural lessees in identifying appropriate rural management standards,**

- 5) all future rural leases be subject to contractual commitment by the lessee to manage the land on an environmentally sustainable basis, contracts to include covenants regarding erosion control, tree preservation and regeneration, and exotic plant control,
- 6) an environmental audit be made of all existing rural leases, and that such leases then be amended to provide for a contractual commitment requiring the lessee to manage the land on an environmentally sustainable basis, contracts to include covenants regarding erosion control, tree preservation and regeneration, and exotic plant control,
- 7) contracts provide for the Government to rectify any mismanagement of leases at the expense of the lessee,
- 8) the Government have particular regard for the conservation and rehabilitation needs of the land in all existing and prospective very short term and agistment leases, and that these considerations should outweigh the rental return in determining whether leases should continue, be reallocated, allocated or withdrawn from any type of rural use until the land is restored to an acceptable condition, and
- 9) as far as possible, responsibility for the erection and maintenance of fences be transferred to lessees, particularly in the case of longer term leases.

(paragraph 4.10)

10.3 That the Government:-

- 1) introduce a tenure system for all rural leases with the objective of ensuring more certainty of tenure and achieving effective land management by leaseholders,
- 2) have particular regard to the personal needs of those lessees who have resided on their leaseholds over a substantial period of time when projecting future lease resumptions,
- 3) in any future rural leasehold system, provide for the allocation of leases to be subject to the contractual conditions recommended in paragraph 4.10 of this report, and
- 4) maintain regular oversight of lease management in terms of the environment and the ecology of the leasehold, and that it order, or undertake, remedial action where environmental damage has occurred.

(paragraph 5.7)

10.4 That:-

- 1) the Government assume direct responsibility for the prevention of overstocking and, where appropriate, restorative work on leases affected by soil degradation, with appropriate cost recovery mechanisms,
- 2) where a lessee consistently allows overstocking to contribute to soil erosion, this be a factor in determining the liability of the lessee for bearing all or part of the cost of restoration or whether the lease should be withdrawn,
- 3) the cost of soil restoration by the Government be taken into consideration in negotiating lease contracts,
- 4) it be a condition of all leases that lessees undertake tree regeneration programs in consultation with appropriate authorities,
- 5) where appropriate, the Government provide financial assistance in the form of reduced rentals or loans to expedite tree regeneration programs on leaseholds, and
- 6) where regeneration needs are particularly urgent, the Government fund the regeneration program directly.

(paragraph 6.10)

10.5 That:-

- 1) it be a condition of existing and prospective leases that a farm management plan covering proposals and budgets to meet lease conditions be submitted for agreement between the Government and the lessee,
- 2) all farm management plans include provision for sustainable environmental goals including land care and tree conservation and regeneration, and
- 3) the Government and the lessee jointly review farm management plans at least every two years to assess performance against the objectives and, as necessary, vary plans to meet changing circumstances.

(paragraph 7.4)

10.6 That the Government:-

- 1) examine the feasibility of establishing a native vegetation retention and regeneration scheme,
- 2) take action to control the growth and eradicate, as far as possible, noxious plants and weeds where they occur on government controlled land,

- 3) assist in the eradication of noxious plants and weeds where they occur on leaseholds adjacent to government controlled lands,
- 4) encourage lessees to control and eradicate noxious plants and weeds through publicity programs, provision of expert advice, the loan of equipment and, where appropriate, financial loans,
- 5) take action to control the numbers of feral animals in ACT nature reserves, bush lands and other government controlled lands and, as far as possible, eradicate feral animals from such areas, and
- 6) examine whether the habitat and existence of rarer marsupial animal species are being threatened by the numbers of eastern grey kangaroos in the ACT.

(paragraph 8.13)

10.7 That:—

- 1) leases contain provision for lessees to protect from damage heritage sites identified in the lease, and for leases to be amended to include heritage sites whenever these are identified,
- 2) lessees be given the opportunity to maintain heritage sites by adjustment to lease rentals where the protection of such sites results in assessable economic loss,
- 4) the Government oversight the maintenance of heritage sites and accept responsibility for maintenance of those sites which are not maintained by lessees, and
- 5) the Government examine jointly with the New South Wales Government the feasibility of retaining and protecting the Queanbeyan—Cooma railway line as a heritage item.

(paragraph 9.7)

Michael Moore MLA
Presiding Member

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

1. Ronald Wells
2. Sandy Stuart, Goldenholm Dairy Pty Ltd
3. Sylvia Curley
4. Mrs S McDonald, Royalla Pty Ltd
5. L R Pyke, National Parks Association of the ACT
6. Harold Adams
7. Dr David Shorthouse
8. Alan & Helen Anderson
9. Barbara Tong
10. Peter Buckmaster
11. Rodney Falconer, Conservation Council of the S E Region & Canberra
12. Bernard Katz
13. Eric Martin, ACT Heritage Committee
14. Murdoch Geikie
15. Josephine Martin
16. ACT Rural Lessees Association
17. K Rea & C Swan
18. Angela Wydeveld
19. Robert Story
20. Department of the Environment Land and Planning
21. Vivienne Blackman
22. The ACT Equestrian Association
23. ACT Rural Lessees Association (second submission)

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF WITNESSES AT PUBLIC HEARINGS

Peter Hunt, Department of the Environment Land and Planning

Geoff Wells, Department of the Environment Land and Planning

Geoff King, Department of the Environment land and Planning

Kieth Storey, ACT Planning Authority

Peter Buckmaster, ACT Rural Lessees Association

Roy Priest, ACT Rural Lessees Association

Alan Anderson

Helen Anderson

Rodney Falconer, Conservation Council of the SE Region & Canberra

Bruce Lindenmeyer, Canberra Ornithologists Group

Les Pyke, National Parks Association of the ACT

Anne Taylor, National Parks Association of the ACT

Ronald Wells

Harold Adams

Neville Stuart

Murdoch Geickie

Alexander Stuart

Dugald Stuart

Richard Blackman

Vivienne Blackman