



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

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To the Committee Secretary, Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services,

Legislative Assembly for the ACT, GPO BOX 1020, CANBERRA ACT 2601

NATURE IN OUR CITY

Responses to the ACT Legislative Assembly's STANDING COMMITTEE on Environment and Transport and City Services invitation for SUBMISSIONS into the value of the natural environment to an urbanising Canberra.

Rosemary Blemings [REDACTED]
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Noting the importance of the natural environment to Canberra, including the level of public support for nature and the natural environment,

I submit that there is a much higher support for nature & the ACT's natural environment than is overtly expressed by the usually- busy people who live in the ACT. Therefore this support is immeasurable, unquantifiable. Many families move to the ACT region for its spaciousness, naturalness, fresh air rural ambience.

the growing importance of urban open spaces [UOS]

UOS areas are vital to Canberra residents despite their being TCCS-managed and "second-class-citizens" to the Canberra Nature Park (CNP) reserves. Until the last 15 years many UOS areas have been considered only for their value as hosts of infrastructure. For 4-5 decades local communities have valued these places, voluntarily becoming their stewards & custodians whilst restoring biodiversity & managing invasive species infestations in partnership with TAMS – TCCS. Volunteer landcaring in UOS areas importantly & effectively:

- Creates social networks,

- Generates community cohesiveness &
- Saves the ACT Government's budgets thousands of dollars each year.
- The same savings are true of volunteer contributions in CNP reserves.

The importance of UOS increases every time sections of UOS are removed from public access by development projects. Increasing population increases need for these informal places and spaces.

the value of the natural environment to an urbanising Canberra,

including: Many people utilising the region's bush have rarely stopped to consider its value to them, their families, their networks/communities.

Yet those we speak with reiterate, unsolicited, that their special places mean a great deal to them. "We're so lucky to have this [space]". These are people of all appearances, ages and walks of life.

It's often reiterated that special places seem to be shrinking because of the "march of progress" or, more vehemently, "because of development".

Both UOS areas and reserves & CNP reserves need much stronger legislated protection from development & infrastructure incursions into these public places of significant conservation & passive recreational value.

bushland reserves are extremely important for the survival of native species. Fragmentation of bushland & grassland spaces reduces connectivity opportunity for mobile species & restricts species' gene pools. Many 'bushland' reserves remain under-surveyed because the ACT Government's Research & Monitoring units have insufficient resources beyond recording species & abundance in CNP reserves. Volunteers have been recording & monitoring species in UOS reserves and areas for decades. They were the pioneers of the more recent burgeoning of Citizen science that's now achieving additional species lists and abundance

records. All these records need to be systematically, electronically recorded & mapped, sent to TCCS, Canberra Nature Map, EPSDD, the three Catchment Groups & PCS to ensure land-managers & ecologists know the extent of the ACT region's flora and fauna populations. ***And essentially, consistently inform land managers so mowing supervisors & other utilities contractors do not impact populations of sensitive species & damage protected areas.***

the benefits [Urban Open Spaces} bring to Canberra

There is extensive research & related publications available detailing the benefits open spaces, reserves, parks bring to human populations. Using the search term *Ecological Economics* can be a starting point for researching ***valuing nature***.

Is the ACT up to date in applying such research & quantifying benefits of nature reserves & natural areas? Landcaring groups have been "saying for years" that the benefits of the region having natural areas extend into:

- health,
- education,
- social welfare,
- fitness and
- recreation budgets.

Is there evidence that these budget areas contribute to the upkeep of the natural areas they benefit from?

opportunities for development of Blue – through water –

Any alteration to the natural areas beside the territory's water bodies and riverine zones needs to **proceed with extreme caution** [after first assessing whether change is necessary]. The Henry Rolland Park at West Basin was probably planned before the momentum of returning to NATURAL PLAYGROUNDS appealed to more and more people, parents

and children. There is a perception that everything in CBR is returning to concrete...this at a time when it's increasingly obvious that people are sicker due to the lack of connection with natural materials and the soil. CBR's reputation is based on the place being a city planned into a superb natural, woodland and grassland setting.

IT IS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTAND THAT Urban Open Space AREAS & Canberra Nature Park RESERVES ARE NOT AN ENDLESS RESOURCE- OPPORTUNITY FOR THOSE INDIVIDUALS & ORGANISATIONS THAT SEEK TO UTILISE CONSERVATION, PASSIVE & REFLECTIVE PUBLIC SPACES FOR ACTIVE RECREATION & ADVENTURE SPORTS.

Green – through natural form – infrastructure in Canberra

Is there need for the imposition of nature-related artificial INFRASTRUCTURE into reserves and UOS areas? What would be the benefits & **Functional requirements of proposed infrastructure?**

Please would the Standing Committee thoroughly research the universal movement towards **NATURAL PLAYGROUNDS?**

Most ACT child care centres, pre-schools, schools, colleges are close enough to UOS and bush for these places to **RESPECTFULLY become everyday OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS. Having more experiences outdoors, in the NATURE surrounding Canberra would:**

- Bring the curriculum alive & show its relevance to thousands of students.
- Revitalise teachers' roles by transforming learning into a shared & responsive engagement with life & habitats
- Link contemporary students with the lives of Indigenous people being observant of, dependent on nature & natural processes

- Expose students to the natural processes of nature, soil, weather, being curious, problem-solving, experiencing immersion in the diversity of life sciences & concepts larger than themselves.
- Be enhanced by the provision of vandal-proof, interpretive signage that highlights the natural & cultural significance of each special place.

There are abundant research papers & assessments of Finnish/Scandinavian outdoor education, the approach of the Candlebark School, Mt Macedon, Victoria & Nature Play Canberra that show the educational, wellbeing, behavioural & health benefits of contact with & learning to care for the natural world.

There are many environmental & outdoor education initiatives in the Canberra region. The increasing numbers of ACT Natural playgrounds, community gardens & adaptations of neighbourhood parks all illustrate the community's need for **LOCAL natural lifestyles & nature**. This is evidence of **Social amenity & Amenity benefits.**

When students share learning about nature with teachers & mentors; when individuals volunteer in the region's nature reserves, for community gardens & parks; when communities form around shared interests in species, habitats, food production & farmers' markets the underlying understanding of natural processes, nature's rights & caring for soil, land, water & air becomes part of protective, co-operative, caring behaviours.

People protect that which they understand, respect & value.

The environmental showpieces at Australian National Botanic Gardens, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Mulligans Flat, Namadgi, Tidbinbilla, the National Arboretum show the **Functional requirements of [proposed]**

infrastructure. They also illustrate the Cost and Maintenance involved in **formally** presenting nature to locals & visitors.

Since the majority of people need & appreciate opportunities **to connect with nature CLOSE TO THEIR HOMES** it's vital that:

- **The costs of maintaining UOS & Canberra Nature Park reserves are clearly, non-dictatorially, explained to those who pay rates & taxes.**
- **The costs of adequately maintaining close-to-home open spaces & nature reserves are borne consistently by the ACT Government. These costs are a high priority as the benefits flowing from outdoor activities reduce costs to the health, welfare, education & recreation budgets.**

Cost and maintenance considerations

As the ACT's Hills, Buffers & Ridges define the setting & uniqueness of the **NATIONAL CAPITAL** the Federal Government should **CONSISTENTLY CONTRIBUTE** more to the ACT's budget for land management in Canberra.

PLEASE NOTE: BOTH 4 & 5 HAVE the NATURAL ENVIRONMENT INTEGRATING WITH URBAN WHEREAS IT SHOULD BE THE OTHER WAY AROUND. If Canberra is to retain its bush capital image & envied reputation the integrity of ecological systems, habitats & native species must be prioritised over landscape alterations demanded by developers.

4. Managing the interface between the natural environment and urban areas particularly with regard to conserved environmental areas. There are voluminous reports, numerous Action plans & strategies regarding the

interface & management pronouncement gathering dust, unimplemented in departmental archives and offices. **There is no point in having these documents prepared unless there is legislation & funding relevant to their implementation, compliance & enforcement.**

A 2018 ACAT appeal regarding the DA for Ginninderry Stage 1 at Holt, exposed the trend that regulations, strategies, plans for interface situations are not consistently applied or are altered to suit developments to the detriment of the 'environment'.

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

The survival & integrity of natural ecosystems, native species & their habitats must take precedence over developers' plans. **Environmental laws passed to protect nature must not be waived or watered-down for political or developer expediencies.**

Any other relevant matter.

Canberra's nature needs to be fully protected from the assumptions that:

- Those who have no respect for nature, other species, landforms & water quality have the right to use reserves and UOS for their high-impact recreational pursuits.
- High-publicity, extravagant events staged to encourage outdoor activities persuade people to explore nature &/or volunteer as ParkCarers. In reality, busy families & individuals respond more readily to local, inclusive, relevant community initiatives that help them relate to the natural worlds of their neighbourhoods incurring minimal time & travel costs.
- If infrastructure is being built into natural places people will find this enticing & learn about nature from travelling to distant places. Funds are much better spent on Ranger-guided, naturalist guided interpretive walks that share local natural & cultural heritage with those living nearby.
- The ACT region can absorb infinite numbers of new residents
- There are limitless amounts of potable water available for the future
- A National population & settlement policy is not needed. The lack will impact the Canberra region by permitting families to move here regardless of the region's carrying capacity [reputedly for 500 – 600,000 residents]. Nature here would be better protected if other inland cities were revitalised with new, appropriate industries & community enhancement.

Rosemary Blemings,

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