



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

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Canberra Bushwalking Club



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CBC submission to Legislative Assembly 'Nature in our City' Inquiry

Canberra Bushwalking Club (CBC) has been a key organisation for Canberra's bushwalkers since 1961. The Club currently has over 400 members, and organises a wide range of walks for walkers of all ages and abilities (including, most recently, a very popular program for toddlers and their parents). The Club's newsletter records over fifty years of bushwalking within the ACT and beyond. CBC's website (www.canberrabushwalkingclub.org) gives a good overview of current and past activities.

CBC organises and leads a wide range of walks within Canberra's urban areas, so we are well-placed to comment upon the issues that have been raised through the Nature in Our City inquiry. Wednesday walks (co-led with the Brindabella Bushwalking Club and the National Parks Association of the ACT) also focus on Canberra and its near-vicinity. Regular destinations include Tidbinbilla, Aranda Bushland, Black Mountain, Goorooyaroo and Mulligan's Flat; Mt Taylor; Cooleman Ridge and Rob Roy. These walks are particularly popular with beginning walkers, club members who lack the time to undertake longer walks, and those who desire less challenging walks.

Terms of Reference and CBC response

1 Public support for and satisfaction with the amount and quality of nature and natural environment areas in Canberra

CBC considers that overall, Canberra is well-served by its Reserves, Nature Parks and the landscape resources of the National Capital Open Space System. However, the development of this system has not kept pace with the city's expanding population. In particular, residents in

the Gungahlin area lack access to adjacent national parks and well-conserved natural areas for walking. The development of new, higher-density suburbs such as Wright, Coombs and Crace has reduced available recreational land.

2 Existing and potential benefits of nature and natural environmental areas in Canberra

There are many reasons for sustaining and wherever possible, adding to, bushland in and around Canberra. The health benefits of walking in general and bushwalking in particular are well-documented. Bushwalking contributes to overall well-being, physical fitness and stamina, confidence and positive mood. It's also a significant social activity, bringing people together and providing a great introduction to Canberra for those who are new to the city. Experiencing the bush contributes to an understanding of the natural environment and is of increasing importance as Australian cities become more densely populated. Bushland and green space in general assists biodiversity and lessens urban 'heat island' effects.

3 Opportunities for green infrastructure

All new suburbs should contain provision for green infrastructure, supporting ecological health in the built environment. This support should include the eventual requirement for all cats, in both new and existing suburbs, to be contained in cat runs.

4 Managing the interface between the natural environment and urban areas

Canberra's Nature Parks should be given clearer statutory protection to prevent any development encroachment in the future. Such protection needs to be considered holistically. Often, it is the view from the Nature Park which is the main feature of walking there. Vistas (for example those to the south from Mount Painter) are under threat from continuing urban infill.

Statutory protection should be extended to these (and other) areas to prevent Canberra's built form becoming one continuous swathe of housing development. Where existing land-release, planning and development policies encourage the alienation of reserves and green space, these policies should be reconsidered.

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

It is not clear what is meant by 'integrating the natural environment with urban development'. If this connotes chipping away at the natural environment we already enjoy, rather than adding to it, such moves should be strongly resisted.

6 Any other matters: need for improved management to safeguard the rights of walkers

Concern has been expressed that the needs of walkers are not given sufficient priority in many areas, particularly those (such as Mount Taylor) that are very heavily used. While different types of users get along well enough, runners, cyclists and those walking dogs seem to consider that walkers should move out of the way. CBC considers that signs should make it clearer that walkers have priority. More effort should be made by ACT Parks to enforce the 'dogs on leash' rule.

Conclusion

Canberra is known as the 'bush capital' and there is strong support for keeping it that way. We owe it to present and future generations of walkers to retain the wonderful walking environments that make Canberra one of the most pleasant of cities in which to live.

Yours sincerely

Michael de Raadt
President
Canberra Bushwalking Club

7 June 2018