



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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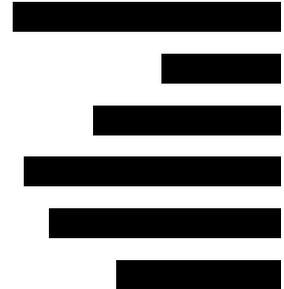
Submission Cover Sheet

Nature in Our City

Submission Number: 62

Date Authorised for Publication: 8 August 2018

Southern ACT Catchment Group



29 June 2018

The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
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Dear Members of the Standing Committee

Submission to the Nature in Our City Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Nature in the City inquiry.

The Southern ACT Catchment Group (SACTCG) was formed 2002 to represent all active environmental groups in the southern areas of the ACT. The SACTCG is one of three community-based catchment groups in the ACT and covers the areas of Woden, Weston Creek, Tuggeranong and Tharwa. The SACTCG provides a network for our member groups, helping in their development and operation, aiding with project ideas, funding opportunities and providing a community forum for ideas and discussion. Our member groups originated from the ranks of Parkcare, Urban and Rural Landcare, Waterwatch and other community groups interested in the environment. We are a foundation member of Landcare ACT.

1. The level of public support for and satisfaction with amount and quality nature and natural environment areas in Canberra, particularly in urban areas.

The environmental volunteer community in urban Canberra is very strong, sustained by the passion many Canberrans feel towards the ‘Bush Capital’ and its natural values. The number (over 60) of active Parkcare and Urban Landcare groups demonstrates this commitment. The

number of urban groups is continuing to grow, particularly in the urban open space environment where people want to look after their local urban parks and return native vegetation and ecosystem function to these patches. Grassland areas are also becoming increasingly valued, and the understanding of the value of the native grassland for habitat and plant biodiversity is growing. Living close to natural environment areas is highly valued, providing easy access for Canberrans to learn and interact with nature, build social cohesion, and enjoy the mental and physical health benefits of spending time in the natural environment.

2. The types of nature and natural environmental areas within Canberra e.g. urban open spaces or bushland reserves and the existing or potential benefits and challenges they bring to Canberra's:

- a. Social amenity;**
- b. Economic development;**
- c. Biodiversity; and/or**
- d. Climate resilience.**

Volunteers feel very strongly about maintaining areas that remain low impact in order to sustain their conservation value. They are often concerned that the growing population and urbanisation of the ACT will encroach on environments currently managed for conservation. There is a growing concern that the pressure of new development and infill will further encroach on urban open space and natural areas, with a need for thoughtful and sensitive design to avoid a loss of green and blue infrastructure through such development.

Ensuring urban open space corridors throughout the city are available to assist wildlife transition to open spaces will help maintain species diversity as well as helping to improve numbers. Volunteers have been instrumental in helping provide assistance to ensure native species (flora and fauna) have a better chance of survival within the urban area through invasive species management as well as native species monitoring, introduction and surveying within many of the existing urban open space corridors.

3. Opportunities for Blue (water) and or Green (natural) Infrastructure in Canberra including;

- a. Functional requirements of proposed infrastructure;**
- b. Cost and Maintenance considerations;**
- c. Amenity benefits; and**
- d. Conservation and biodiversity benefits.**

Using the natural topography of Canberra, more blue and green infrastructure can be added to improve water quality with a system of 'flowing' green (i.e. rain gardens) and blue (i.e. ponds, water courses or buffers) systems. Adding infrastructure like these next major thoroughfares can help buffer runoff from increasing traffic as Canberra grows. These areas will need little maintenance and can reintroduce many native drought-resistant species within the urban areas. Once established, these areas can provide additional habitat areas for wildlife increasing aesthetic appeal. Many areas that have already been added have seen an increase in some species such as frogs, birds, insects, and small mammals. These types of areas can also be used as an educational tool for the public showing how infrastructure can be used to bring natural areas into the urban environment.

With continuing periods of drought in Canberra, green infrastructure is important to help replenish water supplies and alleviate stress on the city's water supply resulting in cost savings. In addition, green infrastructure throughout the urban area can assist with the urban heat island effect reducing cooling costs in hotter months.

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

The urban edge is the primary source of weed incursions that can compete with native species and reduce the value of conservation areas. They are also very costly to control, and this adds to the already unmanageable cost of control by the ACT Government.

New developments can bring in new neighbours who do not always hold good environmental literacy. The planning and funding of environmental education for residents near natural areas is essential to limit impact on the natural environment near urbanised areas. If growing the ACT is inevitable, it has to be partnered with funding organisations such as community based Catchment Groups to provide this ongoing education and community building activities. Currently Canberra has a high level of environmental literacy compared to many centres, and this is well worth maintaining.

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

Current policy settings do not adequately recognise the value of nature in the city, or the amenity and climate benefits of our urban forests and natural spaces. The city lacks a coherent plan for valuing and planning for these attributes city-wide which integrates across government directorates and land tenures.

6. Any other relevant matter.

The value of volunteering to ACT urban open space and reserves is a significant financial saving for government. Social spin offs of volunteering for the environment, while more difficult to measure, are often a strong motivation for volunteering and an unquantified benefit to the city. Social cohesion, a sense of place and belonging, and positive mental health benefits flow are important outcomes for many volunteers. Being amongst nature and making a difference to your neighbourhood environment is part of the 'bush capital' experience.

Thank you considering SACTCG's submission. We would be happy to appear before the Committee to elaborate on any issue.

Yours sincerely



Miranda Gardner

Chair, Southern ACT Catchment Group