



COMMISSIONER  
FOR SUSTAINABILITY  
AND THE  
ENVIRONMENT

The Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services  
Legislative Assembly for the ACT  
GPO Box 1020  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam

### ***Nature in our City***

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on this inquiry.

The value of the natural environment in this city we call the 'bush capital' cannot be overstated. In Canberra, we are very fortunate to live in a city with easy access to urban open space, nature reserves and a substantial area of national park.

However, in order to accommodate a growing population, it is necessary to construct additional residential areas. As the city continues to expand, decisions regarding density such as block size, height of dwelling and provision of open space become more critical. Should we still build suburbs on the outskirts of Canberra or do we need to increase the number of apartment buildings in inner city areas to reduce transport time, cost and emissions? And how will this affect our access to the natural environment.

Recent research in Australia has demonstrated the multiple benefits of urban green space:

- reduced morbidity and improved physical health outcomes,
- improved mental wellbeing,
- increased social cohesion,
- the provision of important ecosystem services such as cooling and air cleaning, and
- maintaining biodiversity and the conservation of native species.<sup>1</sup>

Two issues of relevance that I would like to raise for consideration have arisen from the work my Office recently completed in the [Independent Audit of the Molonglo Valley Strategic Assessment](#). This was the first independent audit completed to assess the implementation of commitments made in the Molonglo Valley Strategic Assessment agreement. The new development in the Molonglo Valley will cover both sides of the Molonglo River and will be surrounded by other suburbs, major roads, nature reserves and

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<sup>1</sup> Kendal, D., Lee, K., Ramalho, C., Bowen, K. and Bush, J. 2016. *Benefits of Urban Green Space in the Australian Context*, Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub, National Environmental Science Programme.

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the National Arboretum. Thus, it is a useful example of a current development being constructed in close proximity to nature.

The issues of relevance identified from this project are:

1. Increased pressure on urban open space in new developments due to construction of higher density residential suburbs.
2. An increase in the number of suburbs adjacent to natural areas has the potential to negatively impact our nature reserves and the species there.

#### *Less Urban Open Space*

The *Molonglo River Park Concept Plan Report, August 2012* outlines the pressure that will be placed on the Molonglo River Park with the increasing population moving into this area:

‘The provision of neighbourhood and urban space (i.e. open space within the residential development area) will be less than one third of the Canberra average at 2.4 hectares/1000 people versus 8.6 hectares/1000 people for the Canberra average. As a result, a significant component of the new residents’ recreation and social needs must be met within the less environmentally sensitive areas of the park.’<sup>2</sup>

#### *Edge effects and connectivity*

This is an issue which affects any area where urban development is adjacent to a natural area, especially an area reserved for the protection of a particular species or ecological community. The potential impact of edge effects include the predation on native species by domestic cats, the spread of weeds, clearing of vegetation for bushfire protection and increase in nutrients entering the stormwater system which can effect aquatic species downstream.

Development also reduces or eliminates habitat connectivity, leading to fragmentation and isolation of wildlife populations.<sup>3</sup>

I urge you to consider these significant issues in relation to future planning of development in Canberra. I look forward to the results of this inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Professor Kate Auty  
Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

19 June 2018

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<sup>2</sup> Hassel, 2012. *Molonglo River Park Concept Plan Report*, prepared for the ACT Government Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate, August 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Gibbons, P. 2018. *Independent Audit of the Molonglo Valley Strategic Assessment April 2018*. ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, 2018.