



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT  
AND CITY SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into nature in our city](#))

**Members:**

**MS S ORR (Chair)**  
**MISS C BURCH (Deputy Chair)**  
**MR J MILLIGAN**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 27 MARCH 2019**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Ms B McGill (Ph: 620 50124)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 3.03 pm.**

**BYRNE, MS SUE**, Australian Garden History Society, ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

**CLAOUE-LONG, MS ANNE**, Australian Garden History Society, ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome. I declare open the second public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into nature in our city. The committee announced this inquiry on 6 December 2017 and has received 71 submissions, which are available on the committee website. This is the second of seven hearings that will be conducted between March and May of this year. On behalf of the committee I thank all witnesses for making the time to appear today. On behalf of the committee I also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Ms Byrne and Ms Claoue-Long, thank you for appearing here today and for the society's written submission to the inquiry. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

**Ms Byrne:** Yes.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we proceed to questions, would either of you like to make any opening remarks?

**Ms Byrne:** Yes, we both would. Thank you for allowing us to appear at the hearing. The Australian Garden History Society aims to promote awareness and conservation of significant gardens and cultural landscapes through engagement, research, advocacy and related educational activities. Our interests cover gardening in the broadest historic, social, artistic and scientific context. In 2020 the Australian Garden History Society will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of its founding in Melbourne.

I am currently the chair of the local branch, covering the ACT, Monaro and Riverina region. The local branch was established in 1986. The national membership of the Australian Garden History Society numbers over 1,700 and there is an active local membership of over 150. Our branch runs a regular program of tours and lectures, often linking with other national institutions including the Botanic Gardens, the Arboretum, the National Gallery and the National Library. This month at our instigation the War Memorial was prompted to examine the landscape history of its grounds.

That is who we are. Anne is going to talk on why we care about nature in the city.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** I am also on the local committee and am the local committee's elected representative on the national management committee of the Garden History Society. Why do we care? We value nature, not only because of evidence showing the

positive effects of natural environment on the physical and mental wellbeing of residents but also because as a historical society we value the heritage and history of landscapes both natural and built.

Canberra is a famous example of a designed landscape that is significant for the way the surrounding mountains and nearby hills, together with the lake, are connected by long vista spaces. Within the national triangle, the cultural institutions are spatially set out in the landscape. Surrounding this core are the celebrated garden suburbs, whose beginnings came from the two urban planning philosophies of the early 20th century, the garden city and city beautiful movements, which campaigned against the industrialised city ugliness and consequent poor physical and social health of a rapidly urbanising population. The interconnection of the historic form of the designed landscape and the presence of nature in Canberra is intimate, and it is not coincidental.

Walter Burley Griffin and Charles Weston may be familiar names to you. They are associated with the early development of Canberra. But the city has been fortunate to have had eminent landscape architects and designers who continued with this philosophy of development. Harry Oakman, Lindsay Pryor, Richard Clough and Robert Boden all made an enormous contribution to the greening of the city, yet their work is barely acknowledged and some of their plantings around the city and lake have been neglected or poorly maintained. For example, in Acton Park, now slated for high-density development, there are trees planted by Charles Weston and a grove of casuarina trees which are part of an official coppice planted by Governor-General Stonehaven. This area has not been actively managed recently and the plantings have been neglected.

Sue will give a brief conclusion and then I have some suggestions.

**THE CHAIR:** We will need to also get to questions.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** We will be quick.

**Ms Byrne:** Nurturing the city requires following an overarching master plan sensitive to the philosophical, historical and cultural basis of the city's original design concept, rather than piecemeal development driven by profit. The value of the interconnecting and open green spaces and trees in the city contributed to a healthy city on many levels, such as regulating the microclimate, filtering dust et cetera. The tree plantings reflected the rhythm of the seasons through spring blossoms, autumn colour and the winter bark framework.

Of concern to our society is that the loss of public green space arising from open set-backs with garden areas and the open internal courtyards of previous low-rise blocks of flats; the reduction of large open public parks, especially at the lake's west basin; and increasing use of paving instead of grass areas under the guise of maintenance all diminish Canberra's landscape city qualities. This cannot be compensated for through provision of pop-up gardens and parklets.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** I have three suggestions as to what the ACT government could do for nature in the city.

Acknowledge that Canberra is a giant garden landscape and that the public spaces of front gardens, set-backs, parks and reserves were deliberately created by former government policy to create a designed landscape for aesthetic and environmental reasons. This is Canberra's urban forest.

Acknowledge that the urban forest is crucial to nature in the city. It provides habitat. You could acknowledge that fact by listing the street trees, park trees and trees in reserves as public assets to be maintained and funded through treasury provision.

Finally, publicly account for any depreciation of Canberra's public asset of the urban forest where it is reduced through tree decline or removal for urban densification or transfer of space from the public to the private sphere.

There is also the matter of intergenerational equity. Once open space is built on, it does not go back to open space. Once trees are cut down, it takes a long time to grow similar-sized trees. A few select specimens do not really compensate and do little for nature in the city for future generations.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I note that we do not have a huge amount of time but because we started a little late, we can run a little over. We might ask one quick question each. I had a question about a landscape plan but you have already answered that in your statement. However, I am interested to know about this issue: it has been raised with the committee that it should also consider the Indigenous landscapes, particularly the Aboriginal peoples and how they would have viewed the landscape. Within the arguments that you have just put forward, I think it is fair to say that there is quite a big focus on Burley Griffin and other landscape architects who have come after him. What role do you see the Indigenous peoples' and the local Aboriginal peoples' landscape history playing within the wider history?

**Ms Claoue-Long:** All of Australia is Aboriginal land and landscape. If you like, it is the geology underpinning everything and then there is the naturally occurring flora and fauna. Then Aboriginal and white people only tinker with the top level. Unfortunately, we do not always tinker with it well. All the surrounding hills have meaning for Aboriginal people. It is very important that the views of all those hills are maintained, the connections between those areas. Even in the densely urbanised areas, there are Aboriginal significant places. Some of them have been listed recently. I think there is one just north of the Manuka shops that has been recently listed, which was one of their camps.

**THE CHAIR:** In the context of the landscape plan for Canberra, this is something that has been put forward by the architects institute. A number of groups, including yourselves, have brought up this proposition. Do you see it being possible for a range of our landscape histories to be incorporated into, I guess, a premise going forward to guide the development of the landscape within Canberra?

**Ms Claoue-Long:** It is a shared history.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** So it should be a shared moving forward.

**MISS C BURCH:** In your submission you talk about planning and the need for private green areas and green space as well. I also touch on what you have just mentioned about celebrating our garden suburbs. Do you think, in terms of planning and development, that that sense of our garden suburbs has been lost and local green spaces have been lost?

**Ms Claoue-Long:** I think in the plot ratios, the densification. You knock down one house and you put in three townhouses. Obviously, all the trees and the garden areas go. You just get a little tiny strip in the front by the letterboxes. Yes, it is being affected. The garden city suburbs are not just the listed precincts. Those principles filter through to the later suburbs as well. Canberra for a long time was a no-front-fences town. All that front garden area was private space, but it was also public.

**MR MILLIGAN:** In your submission you express concern about the ongoing destruction of Lake Burley Griffin and the foreshore. Can you elaborate a little more on that? You referred to the original vision of the lake and the foreshore area. Is that still relevant today in your opinion?

**Ms Byrne:** Relevant in what sense?

**MR MILLIGAN:** The original vision of Lake Burley Griffin, the foreshore and that area; the original vision of that. Do you think that that is still relevant today, given today's needs, our growth and where we are heading?

**Ms Byrne:** Yes, if you are referring to the fact that Burley Griffin did have, supposedly, buildings down on the Commonwealth Avenue area that were low rise.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** Beautiful stone-faced Art Deco buildings were designed.

**Ms Byrne:** Which is different—

**MR MILLIGAN:** During that movement and period, yes.

**Ms Byrne:** to what is predicted to go there now, particularly when it is going right down the lake foreshore with extra infill. That is quite different.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** I direct your attention to the study that was done by the NCA on the heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin. You will find all the answers you want there. I can say that because I was the historian who wrote the history of Lake Burley Griffin, so I am one of the authors of that report. It gives you all the heritage values and why those parklands are important.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like you have a bit of reading, James.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Yes, it does.

**THE CHAIR:** I have one quick supplementary. Miss Burch asked about the block sizes and you talked about plot ratios and so forth. But I also want to go back to some

comments of Ken Taylor, who appeared before the committee when we last had hearings. He said that Burley Griffin's plan actually did allow for an amount of density and that it did include density. It was not excluded from it. Do you have any comments that you want to add to that observation?

**Ms Byrne:** Again, it was not the high rise; it was the lower rise Art Deco, stone-faced with articulated setbacks.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** And also more internal courtyards and—

**Ms Byrne:** green space within their buildings.

**Ms Claoue-Long:** They are still garden city, city beautiful. I hesitate to apply those terms to some of the development today.

**THE CHAIR:** What balance can you see? We are a city that is growing. We are far in excess of the population that Burley Griffin planned for. Certainly, the premise of this committee inquiry is how we can continue to keep nature in our city, given that we do have these pressures that were not there for the original plan. What balance can you see to accommodate the population and still keep the garden, well, it is more the city beautiful; it is not really the garden city, separated land uses?

**Ms Claoue-Long:** More articulation and street frontages where the big blocks go up so that you have areas of landscape and maintained landscape—park areas—so that you do not just get faced with air-conditioning units at ground level. Yes, you probably have to go a bit higher, but then providing internal courtyards might help. It is certainly healthier for people to get real light into their living accommodation.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it fair to say you are not opposed to the idea of higher buildings; you would just like to see them done a bit differently?

**Ms Claoue-Long:** I am opposed to high buildings that block significant views. That includes the relationship between the different hills and things. Also, it depends how high. Some of them seem to be going very high. Then you get the overshadowing. Plants do not like shade. They like sun. It is very hard to balance the landscaping and the plant material for the nature in the city with big buildings that are heat sinks. They generate a lot of heat and they overshadow.

**CHAIR:** Ms Byrne, in the 30 seconds we have left, do you have anything you want to add?

**Ms Byrne:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Given that we are out of time, we will move on. On behalf of the committee, I thank you both for appearing today. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to check and to provide an opportunity to identify any errors in transcription. If witnesses undertook to provide further information, which I do not believe you did, or took questions on notice, we would appreciate those answers within one week of the hearing date. However, I do not believe there was anything.



**COGHLAN, MRS ROBYN**, President, Ginninderra Falls Association

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing and for the association's written submission to the inquiry. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

**Mrs Coghlan:** I do.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we proceed to questions, you are welcome to make a short opening statement.

**Mrs Coghlan:** Very briefly, yes. Everything we have said is probably being repeated by other people. Our main point is that as the city grows it is moving into more and more delicate areas, especially along the lower Molonglo River and the location of Ginninderry at the junction of the Murrumbidgee and Ginninderra Creek.

It seems to us that the current housing rules create concrete jungles because there is not enough space left in them for the growth of any sort of decent-sized shade tree and vegetation in general. It has got to the stage these days where people seem to have lost any kind of comprehension of the need to maintain green lawns and space to help offset the heat island effect and to increase the amount of absorption of rain water so as to minimise the amount of run-off. All of these things are important factors that affect the natural environment.

We believe that the development of Canberra has gotten to the stage now where we really need to start looking very seriously, much more seriously than we do at present, at the need to consider the environment and the preservation of native species as a higher priority than housing people. I do not necessarily mean that in terms of not developing into these spots, but we have to acknowledge that there are much greater needs that have to be provided for species to survive and also that that is going to be more expensive in many different ways.

**MR MILLIGAN:** In your submission you refer to discouraging local residents from planting problem weeds. Could you elaborate a little on what those problem weeds are and what steps you could take to educate society on trying to avoid those problem weeds, those trees and shrubs?

**Mrs Coghlan:** I have to acknowledge that that is not my specialty. The person who was supposed to be presenting this afternoon, who would have been more knowledgeable about that, had another commitment come up. We do believe that it is possible for the community to be educated about what they should and should not plant. But I do not think we can make laws about what they can and cannot plant, unless it is particularly vicious. I think most people are aware of the sorts of plants that just appear in their garden and then take over. It is very difficult to control these. A weed, by its nature, is one that grows prolifically in the particular environment. That can include trees. I know what I am talking about but I cannot think of the name of the particular tree. One of the major tasks of maintaining a garden is to pull these out and keep them under control. Is that an adequate answer?

**MR MILLIGAN:** That is okay, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Coghlan, the landscape architects institute has raised the idea of a landscape strategy or a landscape plan to be prepared for the ACT. Do you have a view on this suggestion?

**Mrs Coghlan:** I have not seen what they are suggesting in terms of the landscape plan but as long as it includes the sorts of vegetation species that will support the native wildlife then that would be a very good thing. And it certainly would help make the city look better.

**MISS C BURCH:** Are there specific initiatives you would like to see implemented in order to preserve native species and to manage weeds better?

**Mrs Coghlan:** Again, there is the education of the community. And providing the space to have the suitable species is the important thing. Also these days the cost of water is a major inhibitor in terms of people even considering grass, for instance. As for naming particular species, as I say, that is not my sphere. I am sorry that I cannot answer that as you would like it to be answered.

**THE CHAIR:** You said in your opening remarks that there is a lot of pressure for the city to move outwards and start to impinge into natural areas. What do you see as being the alternative to prevent that from happening?

**Mrs Coghlan:** That is the quandary, is it not? If we are to have a growing population then we have to have a compromise in some respect. We would suggest that Canberra's population has got the stage where we have to consider which is more important in the future. Areas like the lower Molonglo and Ginninderry have various problems in terms of their proximity to a very important water supply. By creating housing that has mainly hard surfaces, you get a lot of surface run-off into those waterways. The necessary infrastructure that has to be provided, the water sensitive urban design infrastructure, is only as effective as its long-term maintenance, which is a continuing expense to the public purse. We might contemplate, rather than nature in the city, the city in nature, so that we are considering the natural needs in terms of designing the settlement itself.

**THE CHAIR:** Your suggestion of the city within nature as opposed to nature within the city is certainly a theme that has come through the submissions of other presenters.

**Mrs Coghlan:** I am sure.

**THE CHAIR:** The way it has been put to us in some other cases is that you can go out or you can go up if you are building. Do you have any remarks that you would like to make on that?

**Mrs Coghlan:** It seems to me that people in the rest of the world live quite happily in two-storey houses. Australians seem to have an aversion to two-storey houses. But you can have a good-sized house on a small block of land and still have a backyard or another space to plant things if that is required. But the building rules at present, the

set-back rules, do not produce a result where people have enough space to plant anything of a decent size. And the end result is that they have fragmented open spaces that they pave because it is just not worth planting grass and maintaining it in the narrow space. There is a classic example up the road from me, a Mr Fluffy redevelopment, which is just awful. It has no backyard, very little space between the two dwellings and very little space down the sides. So it is impossible that that will ever have a decent garden and vegetation to not only offset the greenhouse effect but also help support the fantastic bird wildlife that we have in our backyard.

**THE CHAIR:** On that note, there is a lot of focus on the private backyard, but do you think that there is more opportunity within the public realm, given that it is not necessarily easy for governments to say the backyard—

**Mrs Coghlan:** Yes, there is a lot of emphasis on parks and the public realm. My attitude is influenced by coming to Canberra on a school excursion many years ago and viewing Canberra from the Red Hill lookout, which was a fantastic place at that time. You could not see a roof. All you could see were trees. To my mind, the trees shade the house. They are much more effective in that respect than just having trees in parks, which requires people to physically go and visit the park. These days it is hard to get them away from their televisions, their Xboxes and their mobile phones.

**THE CHAIR:** I think, on that observation, society is far more complex.

**Mrs Coghlan:** It is.

**THE CHAIR:** We will have to leave it there. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors in transcription.

**MACKENZIE, MR DAVID**, Lake Burley Griffin Guardians

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing today and thank you also for the Guardians' written submission inquiry. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement before you on the table.

**Mr Mackenzie:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like to make a short statement?

**Mr Mackenzie:** Yes. I am a member of the Lake Burley Griffin Guardians. Thank you for your invitation to appear and giving us this opportunity to emphasise or enlarge on the topics we put in our submission. The guardians are primarily concerned with the heritage of the lake. I think that has been covered already today and probably in other sessions, so the emphasis today is on the environment of the lake and its suitability for purposes as the centrepiece of the national capital's formal areas.

The quality of the lake's surrounds and the health of the waterway itself are paramount to a feature that is world renowned and appreciated, and we cannot afford to neglect these matters nor allow them to be depreciated in any way. This emphasis is not to diminish the importance of our remaining topics both in our submission and those from others.

In essence, nature embraces the entire city and its surrounds and ignores political and sectoral boundaries. Already this afternoon in the brief time I have been sitting here I have heard many comments that we support, and I wish to have that recorded.

For Lake Burley Griffin we emphasise a number of points and urge the government to increase their priorities to remedy these concerns. The principal one is water quality, and an awful lot of factors control water quality. The main one is the inflow of nutrients from surrounding catchments and also the entire catchment of the lake, which goes right across into New South Wales.

I want to emphasise the importance of wetlands, whether they are natural or constructed, as pre-treatment for the water that goes into the lake. It is important to get rid of concreted stormwater drains through naturalisation as part of that.

Water-sensitive urban design is being applied in small efforts around Canberra but there is an awfully long way to go. We urge the government to raise the priorities on a number of the issues we mentioned. This is all, of course, in a climate of storm intensity from global warming, and that presents specific problems to be addressed. In passing I want to mention that it is not unknown for sewage to find its way into the lake. That is not intentional but we need to keep a greater watch on that.

What I have been talking about is probably best described as eutrophication—the enrichment of nutrient in the lake—and its subsequent creation of algal blooms. That requires close attention to the inflow, as I have mentioned, but also a decrease in hard edges around the lake. This leads us to water quality in West Basin, which has been

mentioned today.

It is a shallow basin, so water temperature is higher and will aid algal blooms. There are little or no water-sensitive urban design features around it, so this allows things like animal faeces to get into the water quite readily. There is little or no flow in the basin itself, so consequently there cannot be much oxygenation of the water or flushing to get rid of them. There is a potential if this is not addressed for fermentation to produce fetid water, and that is not going to be much use to visitors to the recreational areas or, if there are eventually apartments, to residents.

The edge of the lake is regarded as either riparian or littoral, and the vegetation around the edge of the lake is quite minimal. There is a lot of hard edge, and the paucity of riparian vegetation around the edge gives a great opportunity to raise the lake water quality further by improving it and extending it. Rock walls and stone edges are barriers to establishing a functional and effective riparian zone. So we urge that these be reduced as much as possible progressively and that no further hard edges whatsoever be envisaged.

I say that in particular reference to West Basin because it is proposed to put a hard edge around nearly 100 per cent of its shoreline eventually. This needs to be avoided.

**THE CHAIR:** Noting the time we will move to questions if that is okay, Mr Mackenzie.

**Mr Mackenzie:** I want to mention green open spaces. In light of the growing body of evidence to show a wide range of health benefits, we wonder if ACT Health has made any requests for increases in green open space to reduce the load on their work and particularly reduce mental illness.

We cannot afford to reduce green open space any further. We know that development encroaches on green open space and does not produce much fresh green open space. It is always minimised and we cannot afford that, particularly given the increase in population density that will occur to the north of Lake Burley Griffin. All of the open space around the lake must be kept for green open space and recreational opportunities for that population. Thank you very much for giving me the time.

**MISS C BURCH:** Talking about hard edges around the lake and West Basin particularly, you spoke a lot about how you do not want to see that and the detriment that will cause, on the flip side what would you like to see around West Basin to improve habitat and water quality?

**Mr Mackenzie:** I see a mix of small beaches for swimming and some landing areas for kayaks and other small craft. No hard entry for powered craft, but that is another story. The majority of the edge should be vegetated. Of course, your immediate thought might be that that is going to stop people getting to the water's edge. But no, there are many examples around the world and even in Australia of boardwalks that wander around between the land and the open water and give people a firsthand experience of the vegetation and the wee beasts, fish, et cetera, that it supports. So that will be very educational, too, for young people. They are not going to see much of that on the hard edges such as we have been exposed to at Henry Rolland Park and

which are planned to go further around.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there an example of an area which has a softer edging that you consider to be quite good that you could point the committee to?

**Mr Mackenzie:** There are numerous; it is hard to say which one might be the best. Yarramundi Reach has quite a deal of vegetated edges. It is essential that there be plants that will grow out on the land, that will grow in the sort of wetness of the edge, and then also out into the water. You are required to support aquatic organisms as well as terrestrial organisms and also where these interweave. I would say the Yarramundi peninsula is probably the best area to start looking at.

**MR MILLIGAN:** The hard edges are, in effect, retaining walls, which I built probably for about four or five years when growing up along the Murray River. They are obviously there to try to maintain shoreline as well, particularly when you do not have trees or vegetation along the shoreline to hold it together. Particularly where there is development or construction or a recreation area to be built, would you find it acceptable that there are retaining walls if you could put vegetation in the water to help with water quality? Could we still build a retaining wall to hold that shoreline or do you think it is best not to have anything there at all?

**Mr Mackenzie:** I think the basis behind your question is that hard edges, the stone walls, et cetera, are there to prevent erosion. Erosion, of course, is produced by flow, and in the Murray River there should be more flow than there is in Lake Burley Griffin which, except in flood time, is relatively slow moving. Consequently there is little danger from erosion at that time.

There was extensive hydrological modelling in the planning of the lake, pre-building, and they have a pretty good idea of where the erosion would occur. Aspen Island I believe has been artificially produced to deflect water away from the shore. Clearly, there has to be protection where there is likely to be erosion in flood. We have had major floods on a few occasions since 1964, when the lake was filled for the first time. We cannot envisage the ripping out the wall in the parliamentary triangle, for example, so there has to be give and take.

It is very easy to put in a rock wall because there is little or no maintenance. If you vegetate the riparian zone and make it functional—and effectively functional—then then a certain amount of maintenance is required. You have to keep weeds out for a start. You have to keep the rubbish out, because rubbish occurs. I think that answers that.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Unfortunately, we are out of time. Thank you for appearing today. When available a proof transcript will be forward to you to provide an opportunity to identify any errors. Thank you very much, Mr Mackenzie.

**GRIFFITHS, MR ROD**, National Parks Association of the ACT  
**EMERY, MR CHRIS**, National Parks Association of the ACT

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today and for the association's written submission to the inquiry. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Can you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

**Mr Griffiths:** Yes.

**Mr Emery:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Would either of you like to make a very brief opening statement before we move to questions?

**Mr Griffiths:** Yes. I am the convenor of the environment subcommittee of the National Parks Association of the ACT. The NPA ACT welcomes the ability to make this presentation to you today and to make a submission on this wide-ranging inquiry. The NPA is approaching its 60th year since incorporation and has been spending all those years working to protect the natural environment within the ACT and the region. We saw this inquiry as an opportunity to identify some of the broader pictures that need to be addressed within the ACT.

We have to remember that the Canberra environment probably has the greatest amount of urban and natural environment interface of any city in Australia. It is a huge area. That brings a lot of problems. Because you have these natural areas in spaces between the city you are increasing the impacts of weeds, ferals, recreational pressures and domestic animals, and also the bush fire requirements we have for protection of our urban and natural environments.

They all involve significant planning. That is one of the issues I really want to put to the committee. There is a continuing need to expand our ability to plan for the urban and natural environments. Particularly we need things like a recreation strategy that covers the whole of the ACT and allows us to work out how we are going to recreate across the ACT without destroying the natural environment that we are out there appreciating while we are doing our activities. We are very conscious of the fact that our governments work on a very short time frame. But the environment works on long-term requirements; therefore resourcing and planning need to be over a long term. There need to be long-term commitments to resources to achieve that.

Those are the key things I would like to state from our submission. I am open to questions.

**THE CHAIR:** I have put this question to pretty much everyone who has appeared. The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects recommended that a detailed landscape strategy plan be prepared. Do you have a view on this suggestion?

**Mr Griffiths:** That is probably a good thing but it does need to fully incorporate the

concepts of how the environment is going to be catered for within that. We believe that the development of the ACT needs, before it moves into making development happen, to assess what the environmental values are so that we can plan around those environmental values before we put in place the infrastructure that then restricts how that environment can survive. We have been doing it the other way around for many years. I wholly recommend that we change that practice so that we get the right mechanism in place first.

**MISS C BURCH:** Your submission talks about the need for blue-green infrastructure to be integrated throughout planning, development, and maintenance stages of urban development. Are there any specific initiatives that you would like to see?

**Mr Griffiths:** There are so many. That is the problem. The inquiry referred to blue-green infrastructure quite a lot in its terms of reference, and we have referred to quite a few in there. But it is really about ensuring that the way we plan for our infrastructure covers off the environmental impacts and how we can improve the environment through our infrastructure development not only in the overall picture but also how we can incorporate the community into it, from small areas right across the top of the ACT. The whole of the ACT needs to be looking at ways we can do things that improve the environment and where there are opportunities.

Very recently I was listening to a radio broadcast about the uses of Australian grasses in open spaces. That is an initiative that the ACT government is working with the Fenner School on. That is just a small part of the whole picture of how we can improve things: turning those green swathes of exotic grass into something that is a bit more suited to the Australian environment.

**MR MILLIGAN:** You mention here:

Open areas, many of which could be characterised as “nature” adjoin almost every suburb and are heavily used for a wide variety of recreation activities, to the point that sections are “loved to death” ...

What solutions could you offer to diversify the range of venues to help spread that load?

**Mr Griffiths:** That comes back to the initial point I was making: that we really need to plan for our recreation. We have done some parts of recreation strategies. There is a bicycle recreation strategy and there is a trail strategy. But we need to be looking at how the whole of the ACT can afford to accommodate the growing population we have, and where the opportunities are. How do we best utilise those areas that are not going to be significantly damaged by increased participation within them? The ACT forests, say, are perfect places for mountain biking, riding et cetera. There are so many opportunities we have.

An important thing to remember as well is that within the ACT, right next to our urban areas, we have some of the best lowland grassy woodlands in Australia. We need to be able to work out how to take the pressure off those fantastic Australian resources and ensure that they are there for the long term after we are all well gone.



**THE CHAIR:** Given that green spaces within the urban environment are quite different to the green spaces in the natural area, how do you see us managing the urban and natural interface?

**Mr Griffiths:** That is actually two slightly different questions. With the green spaces, there are opportunities to bring them back slightly, but we do not have to lose all our green space. We do need open green spaces for just normal recreation et cetera, for families to be out there. But even within those sorts of areas there are opportunities to bring back nature, to provide areas that allow the various parts of the ecosystems that comprise the ACT to be brought back within the environment, by putting in native grasses, having no mown areas for those, incorporating an understorey that is useful for small birds et cetera. At the moment our open spaces give a great advantage to some of our larger birds—the currawongs, the Indian mynas, the noisy mynas—and that is to the detriment of our smaller birds.

Talking about the interface, going to that second part, there we have to think about how we can best manage our fire management regimes. We believe that the zones for bushfire management should be incorporated within the suburbs. It is obvious that in the new suburbs that is a really easy way of doing things. It is a bit harder for our older suburbs but there are still ways of doing that. There are some reasonably good examples in the northern part of the ACT of how they have incorporated some of the bushfire management zones to protect both the urban and the natural environment.

**THE CHAIR:** On a slightly different note there is the urban tree canopy. You have raised a lot of points about promoting wildlife and diversity within that. Do you have a view of what types of tree species we should be planting within the urban tree canopy?

**Mr Griffiths:** Again I would be suggesting that that comes down to a real need for us to have a strategy about our urban forest. I am not sure that we are operating under a strategy at the moment. We are seeing a significant decrease in the number of trees within our urban forest. Everyone in this room can probably see and recall a clear space where trees have disappeared within their urban environment. We would like to see suitable natural, endemic species, if possible, put in place where appropriate. There are some native species you just cannot put in urban areas, but we would like to see that. But also, think about the understorey. We are continually thinking about our upper story. Let us think about our understorey as well and whether we can improve that. The urban forest is an area that I think the community is getting very concerned about. We are losing our wonderful asset, that is, the bush capital, because the level of stock in our urban forest is just disappearing.

**THE CHAIR:** We have had quite a few comments made about non-native species being used within the urban forest, and people acknowledging that, given the effects of climate change, non-natives could be the most appropriate. Do you have any views you would like to share on that?

**Mr Griffiths:** I am sure there are some. Again, that comes back to how well you plan the urban forest. Non-native species do not necessarily always provide a suitable habitat for our native animals. We have to think about how those species interact with what we are putting in. There are always exceptions to that but I think my

organisation would lean towards having native species over introduced, noting various heritage requirements as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. That has been very comprehensive. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to you to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors in the transcription.

**COOPER, DR MAXINE**, Chair, Landcare ACT  
**PREUSS, MS KARISSA**, Executive Officer, Ginninderra Catchment Group  
**FRANCO, MS MARTINE**, Executive Officer, Southern ACT Catchment Group  
**BEVERIDGE, MS LINDA**, Molonglo Conservation Group  
**BELL, MR WALLY**, Member, Ginninderra Catchment Group and Ngunawal Elder

**THE CHAIR:** We now move to our panel discussion with Landcare ACT, the Ginninderra Catchment Group, the Molonglo Conservation Group and the Southern ACT Catchment Group. On behalf of the committee, I welcome each of you to the hearing today. Thank you for appearing, as well as for your written submissions to the inquiry. I understand that some of your colleagues are with us in the gallery. If we have a specific question that you feel they would be best placed to answer, you are welcome to invite them up to answer the question, but in order to fit around the table, we had to limit the numbers.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and I draw your attention to the pink-coloured privilege statement before you on the table. I ask you to confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

**Dr Cooper:** Yes, I understand.

**Ms Preuss:** Yes, I understand.

**Ms Franco:** Yes, I understand.

**Ms Beveridge:** Yes, I understand.

**Mr Bell:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Wally, can I ask you to say that you acknowledge the privilege statement?

**Mr Bell:** Yes, I acknowledge it.

**THE CHAIR:** I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Do you have any brief statements that you would like to make before we go to questions?

**Dr Cooper:** Each of us will speak extremely briefly. First of all, I would like to acknowledge on behalf of us all the traditional custodians of the lands that we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal, and their continuing connection to country and community. We pay our respect to these people and their culture and to the elders past, present and future.

We would like to acknowledge very much the importance of this committee inquiry in exploring how to manage a wicked problem of our time, which is how to protect, maintain, and enhance nature and the natural environment in a growing city that is feeling the consequences of that growth environmentally, concurrently with

experiencing the effect of climate change. We acknowledge your task.

Landcare ACT is a non-government community-based entity that is part of the national Landcare governance arrangements. It brings together key groups that cover all parts of the ACT. I think that is an important issue. Member groups of Landcare deliver a range of the on-the-ground activities and programs. They have very important community educational roles. They manage citizen science programs, including the well-known Frogwatch and Waterwatch, and contribute to building healthy communities, both environmentally and, I would like to emphasise, socially.

In the ACT, there are over 60 community groups committed to undertaking Landcare activities. It is estimated that over 12,000 volunteer hours per year are provided for Landcare activities, excluding those hours given to Frogwatch and Waterwatch. This significant community resourcing effort illustrates, I think, your first criterion, the importance of nature and the natural environment to all these people. Their effort not only yields environmental and social benefits but also, I would like us to acknowledge, environmental services that actually have economic benefits.

Landcare groups are, very importantly, enablers that bring community members together. However, this enabling function is facing substantial challenges in the ACT due to changes in national Landcare funding. Although national funding arrangements are currently the subject of consideration across the nation, the unfortunate reality is that there is no current certainty for funding from the Australian government for our catchment groups, Landcare in the ACT.

It is appreciated very much that the ACT government provided funding for this financial year for the catchment groups. This funding covered some policy work. What we think is urgently needed is funding for ACT catchment groups for 2019-2020 for the on-the-ground practical community-based Landcare activities so that they can continue to be run by the community, for the community, in the community, with the community, and in partnership with a whole range of other bodies. They are core; they are out there; they are part of that community, both environmentally and socially.

Continuity in Landcare is important to maintain and build on achievements otherwise, we are likely to go backwards environmentally. We think that will have adverse impacts on nature in the city. It is appreciated that the ACT government officers are currently engaging in conversation with us regarding ongoing funding. But there are no commitments for 2019-20 for our catchment groups. It is also noted that there have been discussions in the media about using the water abstraction charge to fund community-based Landcare activities.

Also noted by us is that the committee's report may not emerge until after June 2019. It is, therefore, humbly requested that the committee give immediate priority to the inquiry's 3(b) term of reference, cost and maintenance. We are actually asking you, please, to consider short-term funding for ACT catchment groups for 2019-2020.

This is critical to allow the catchment groups to continue functioning effectively while we are making every effort in our discussions with the agencies, among ourselves and through our contacts in industry to secure long-term sustainable funding, and while

the commonwealth arrangements are worked through. I will hand over to Karissa.

**Ms Preuss:** The Ginninderra Catchment Group supports local communities to maintain and improve the environment in the Ginninderra catchment. As most of you know, the Ginninderra catchment is in north-west ACT. It operates around the areas of Belconnen and Gungahlin. It is the most urbanised catchment. Forty-two per cent of Canberra's population lives in the Ginninderra catchment. Like the other two catchment groups, we are both a community-based Landcare network and a community-based NRM organisation. As a Landcare network, we have 17 different member groups, including ParkCare, urban Landcare, rural, Aboriginal and a junior Landcare group. We also support rural landholders individually.

Our specialty areas are in native grassland restoration and in citizen science, particularly Frogwatch. We have the ACT and regional Frogwatch program operating out of the Ginninderra Catchment Group. We have a focus on riparian restoration and engaging with developers to improve biodiversity conservation in greenfields developments, being the most urbanised catchment.

Aboriginal land management is also a key focus of ours. Wally is here to talk more about Aboriginal land management. Like the other groups, we take a landscape-scale approach to our work and integrate it across all our priority areas. We operate across all land tenures. Key to our work is partnerships with community, with business, with education institutions and with various government agencies at all levels.

The key point that we really want to make is that in urbanising Canberra, community engagement about the environment is absolutely critical. It is becoming more and more important. These programs increase the community appreciation for nature as well as for the value for nature. That is the first step to engaging ACT citizens in caring for the public estate. That is really what Landcare is very much about. Coordination and support are critical to coordinate and leverage that community contribution to environmental management.

The catchment groups are well placed to do this. We have a long history of engaging the broader community in achieving environmental outcomes. Together, we have leveraged many millions of dollars each year in community contributions. We have also leveraged significant competitive funding—outside of ACT government funding—to biodiversity conservation outcomes within the ACT. The catchment groups are a low cost, high-return investment option for environmental management in the ACT. As Maxine said, we require sustainable funding to continue.

We have recently been working with the other catchment groups to identify sustainable operating models for the future. One of the key recommendations of our draft report is a regional NRM governance model that is community based and independent of government. Finally, since its inception Landcare has always been about partnerships between community and government. We would really like to continue that partnership with the ACT government into the future.

**Ms Beveridge:** The Molonglo Conservation Group welcomes the opportunity to meet with you today and thanks you very much for the invitation. The group's aim is basically to have a healthy, resilient and productive area around the Molonglo and

Queanbeyan rivers with their diverse interconnections to the tableland landscapes and communities.

The Molonglo Conservation Group's networks are traditionally focused largely on Landcare and ParkCare groups, rural, peri-urban and urban. However, community and environmental groups and individuals from the general community are focusing on environmental outcomes increasingly and are coming to MCG for membership, leadership and guidance, and we are working with them.

We see critical issues affecting nature in our city, and it could be summarised as being the appearance of development bias of government and the community need for and interest in strong connection and reconnection to retaining and increasing nature in the city. Consequently there needs to be ongoing support for engagement of community with nature in the city.

So how can we achieve strategic management of biodiversity and connectivity across the urban landscape, linking public and private lands across tenures and borders? This includes priority on conservation in reserves and ensuring ecological sustainability. Like Ginninderra Catchment Group, MCG supports citizen science and community groups undertaking vegetation surveys like VegWatch and Landkeepers Trust and water surveys like the Waterwatch.

Maintaining cross-border connections to central Canberra is as equally important as connections within the city because the Molonglo River connects Canberra to other places. Lake Burley Griffin is in the middle of a complex multi-jurisdictional zone of the Molonglo and we need a better strategic plan of management for that.

Another question is how can we achieve strategic management of nature in the city outside of the reserves? We have mentioned that Lake Burley Griffin has an important functional role, but it also is an attractive and highly appreciated feature, so how do we ensure the serenity of the lake?

Another question is how do we achieve strategic management of recreation in reserves with a priority for conservation? The nature reserves are stepping stones for connectivity within and around the urban footprint. How can we ensure that there are resources for education about and the enforcement of compliance with policies, regulations, plans, guidelines and the conservator's activities statements? How can we ensure resources to support native species management? For example, there are ongoing debates which are not resolved such as the consideration of aspects related to kangaroos in reserves.

How can we improve policies and resources to support invasive species management? For example, African lovegrass is highly topical and it has been increased by mowing. How can we achieve climate sensitive urban design? We welcomed the statements by Minister Shane Rattenbury in February 2018, the ACT climate change adaptation strategy and the living infrastructure information paper about the green and blue spaces.

Another question is how can we strategically manage and implement sensitive urban design in relation to the environment and landscape? For example, hills and

mountains are backdrops to the city, so why build so high that their visibility is blocked? Sullivans Creek is another example. It is a natural creek converted to storm water drain. The importance of managing water quality is starting to be recognised there but it needs to go further up to the headwaters.

Another question is how can we ensure resources and support for working with and researching local, traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices in the present-day context through meaningful dialogue and cooperative management between community and government? For example, the Bullan Mura nature reserve in Yarralumla has been successful.

Another question is how can we have fire management in reserves and open spaces to ensure that it is ecologically sustainable? Appropriate techniques, research and monitoring must be a core capability of the government.

Continuity in MCG's community engagement in these areas is very important to maintain and to build upon. All of these needs require a sound balance through equity of people and nature. For access and impact nature must not be misused or abused but enhanced.

**Ms Franco:** I am with Southern ACT Catchment Group and we support about 27 ParkCare and Landcare groups, as well as landholders in the peri-urban and urban areas of the southern ACT. We have very strong connections with both the peri-urban landholders, rural landholders and the whole southern rural urban community. We support links between the city and the bush and believe that they are really vital for wildlife and for ecosystem services. We also support the pastoral setting for Canberra as our national capital.

The southern reserve system surrounding the Tuggeranong Valley is highly valuable to the community. We hear this all the time from southern residents, and it is often noted as the reason they love living in the city. Volunteers who care for these natural areas are vital in helping maintain these natural areas, and even more so under the growing urbanisation of Canberra and of course a change in climate as well.

For example, in the last week I have been contacted by four of these small ParkCare and Landcare groups to apply for grants on their behalf. Without Southern ACT Catchment Group we would not be able to bring in money for these groups. They would not do it on their own and we would not be able to harness their fantastic volunteering efforts.

We know that an environmentally aware and connected community reduces pressure on these natural areas and builds resilience in the landscapes around us in the city. We support more blue and green infrastructure in the city. The community welcomes the new healthy waterways program but the community are very concerned that they will not be well maintained. We need mechanisms for community stewardship and maintenance. This is a model we have tested over the past 20 years of the catchment groups and we need further investment in this model.

As growing the ACT is inevitable there is an opportunity to partner with organisations such as the catchment groups to provide ongoing education and community building

in our suburbs. Catchment groups are embedded in the community and we are trusted to run community-led activities and programs. Our colleagues have already said that the continuity for Landcare will build over 20 years of investment in these catchment groups' achievements, otherwise nature in our city will deteriorate. We are pretty sure that that is the headways we are going.

**Mr Bell:** I head up the Buru Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation. It is important that these sorts of inquiries understand the fact that traditional ownership or custodianship of this land is important. I would like to acknowledge Landcare ACT and the catchment groups for the fact that they have made that acknowledgement and they work really well with me in bringing a better cultural awareness right across the whole ACT community.

There is a total lack of understanding about Aboriginal cultural heritage and what it means to us especially in relation to our connection with country. It is where all of our custom and our belief comes from. It is a place we have looked after for thousands of years and that has entailed a lot of natural land management skills.

It requires a lot of skill to maintain the country in a pristine condition. To give an example of that, the ACT government at the moment through their parks and conservation service are engaging with us in relation to cultural burns. That is a really good method of maintaining country.

There are a lot of other skills we have and all of it is based on the natural environment. It is our country; it is where we come from. We are here to look after it for a little while. We care for country and then we actually then return to country after our time is up.

It is not just about the physical part of looking after country; there is also the cultural and spiritual side of things that we need to look at as well. A lot of that gets overlooked. I was in here earlier listening to a few of the other guys giving their talks and a lot of it is based on the natural environment, which is really great. But there is a lack of understanding about the Aboriginal cultural connection with country and the spiritual connection that overrides all that sort of thing.

When you look at nature in the city you must remember that we have some beautiful places we can visit here. But they still contain very significant cultural sites for us. Some places have burial sites. There are women's business sites. There are men's business sites. All our culture is out there for people to learn about. Something I am trying to provide at the moment is better cultural awareness through working on the land with all the catchment groups and through Landcare ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Bell, my first question is to you. Building upon what you have just said, I ask this question: how can Aboriginal cultural heritage be incorporated into the way we approach landscape within the ACT? You have given one example, but is there anything else that you could share with us?

**Mr Bell:** Yes, it is being able to develop the understanding of what country means to us. I have given a few talks to, and done things with, rural landholders. They have asked me how they can manage their properties better. One of the things I tell them is



that they need to get out on to the country and just absorb the country itself, because that country will tell you what it needs.

That has actually occurred. I have had a couple of those landowners come back to me. They said, “We have listened to what you said. We have changed a lot of our land management practices now. The country is coming back to be really productive. It is a whole lot better than it used to be.” They have gotten rid of a lot of erosion and stuff on country because they have changed that land management practice they used to have.

**THE CHAIR:** Within the urban area, we have had a number of submissions that raised the Burley Griffin legacy and the design that came from it. From your perspective, are there any considerations that we should be aware of in relation to your cultural heritage in the area that gets discussed around the Burley Griffin plan? I am really looking at that lake that—

**Mr Bell:** Yes, as Linda has already intimated, we have worked on a project over at Stirling Ridge. That place was totally trashed, but I guess that is one of the most significant places within the urban environment. It contains stone arrangements, scar trees, men’s business sites, women’s business sites. There is even what we call a place contact site. It is where Aboriginal people have adapted to new materials that became available—glass, insulated cups and stuff like that—to make tools out of. It is a culturally rich place. Being able to work with people on the ground doing the Landcare sort of work has given us the opportunity to be able to tell the story about that place as well. They have learnt a lot from us from the Aboriginal cultural point of view.

**Ms Preuss:** May I add something to what Wally said?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Preuss:** Basically, Wally has been working with all three catchment groups in this cultural heritage space. Among the three groups, he has run about 100 walks over the past few years that really increase the general community awareness about cultural heritage. It is something that there is a strong community demand for but it is something that is very difficult to get funding for. So that is definitely an area where there is huge scope to increase funding and to focus on.

Landcare ACT, with the three catchment groups, also worked with Wally to run a workshop that focused on Aboriginal values and brought together a whole host of different people, including Bill Gammage and Bruce Pascoe, who are experts in the field. Again, the community demand for that was really strong. It was booked out within the first 24 hours.

Another thing in that space is the Aboriginal Green Army Team. The three catchment groups worked together on that, which you have heard about. Again, it is something that is very difficult to get funding for. I guess these are the areas where the catchment groups really would like to continue working, in that link of natural and cultural.

**MISS C BURCH:** I have a supplementary on that. All of you have mentioned ETCS—27-03-19

education quite a bit. Are there any other education programs that you would like to see in schools or in the community?

**Ms Franco:** I would love to see a junior Landcare program. I think that particularly the primary schools are hungry for information about the local natural environment. Some of our groups, like the Farrer Ridge ParkCare Group, run walks and talks. I think we have the Farrer Ridge convenor in the audience. The interest from those schools is fantastic. They take in that information beautifully. It builds an understanding through their lives of the natural environment around them. Absolutely, a junior Landcare program would be of great benefit.

**Dr Cooper:** I would say from what I see, because I am not with the catchment groups, that they would be well placed as the core of activity to link out through those areas to make it for the community, with the community and, of course, with the kids in the community.

**Ms Franco:** I suppose the other thing to add is that the Green Army Team was actually quite young. They were an 18 to 25-year-old team. We ran that for two years. There were six teams, the last one being the Aboriginal land management team. That really did link young people with multiple groups in the community. We had over 20 of those ParkCare groups receive support through those. That kind of program is fantastic for getting young people engaged in the nature in our city.

**Ms Beveridge:** There is also scope for engaging young people in citizen science-type activities. For example, there is a high level of interest in the Waterwatch program by schools et cetera. There has also been a number of young people who have expressed interest in participating in the vegetation surveys. I think that is really beautiful. They are learning not only about the concepts but also applying them to practical situations with beneficial outcomes. That is providing data that can be used for reports and, one always hopes and it very often happens, for good management decisions in relation to environmental aspects.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I am keen to get a general understanding of where you think we are currently at in relation to access for the public to our wetlands, to our water bodies and to our reserves. Is that access suitable? Is there too much access by the public? Is it having a wider impact on the environment? Could it be increased? Should it be decreased? Are there areas where we should reduce or remove access? If so, can we substitute that area with another area? Is there anywhere in the ACT that you have a particular focus on where we should be spending more time to try to protect, preserve and remove that access? Those are quite a few questions I have put to you but I am open to anyone answering any part.

**Ms Franco:** Yes, you are quite right. There are lots of areas in the Canberra Nature Park systems of reserves particularly. There is variable use across those reserves. Reserves like Mt Taylor, Mt Majura or Mt Ainslie have really high impact use from the public. Whether some of those areas need to be hardened to protect them is a good question. I suppose it needs to be assessed according to the reserves. I think that how we manage the built infrastructure in those reserves helps channel people through the appropriate areas.

I think we need to listen to the community groups that are working on the reserves. They are the experts. They know where they do not want people. For example, if the Mt Taylor group rings me up and says, “There has been damage to this area,” I totally trust that they know that that area is an area that should be protected and we should be listening to them as really being the experts on that. I would say that that is possibly true across all reserves.

**Ms Preuss:** Across the reserve system, I guess that a lot of our work is obviously in the reserves but we also work a lot on urban open space and city services land. In those areas where there are a lot of people coming in, it is actually a real opportunity for environmental education. I know that we have actually chosen some of our grassland restoration sites because they are high use areas. So it is an opportunity to get people engaged in looking after them. I guess that is two sides of that coin.

**Ms Beveridge:** In relation to a number of reserves where ParkCare groups and Landcare groups are members of the Molonglo Conservation Group, there is concern about abuse in the usage of some of the nature reserves. This relates to my question: how can we enforce compliance with the management plans, the policies and the conservator’s activity statements?

There has been considerable evidence of bush destruction, for want of a better term, through some activities because of people not complying with the activity statements and the policies and guidelines that are part of the ACT government’s programs. We would very much like to encourage the very effective use of green and blue spaces actually within residential and city areas so that there are recreational and relaxation spaces very close to where people live and work.

That can be ranging from an area to have a quiet time through to being able to go for a walk in that immediate area with walking lanes and so on built into the development plan, and also through the ability to have cycling between places in the suburbs and the city areas so that they are connected along those particular avenues and roads. The focus on conservation for nature reserves needs to be strongly emphasised, I think. That is critical for the future, not only for the bush capital but also for the health of the city and its people.

**Ms Franco:** You asked particularly about wetlands and whether we should increase access to wetlands. I think the answer is quite clearly yes. People love the wetlands. I think the best way to do that is to create a bit of stewardship from the community around it. Those wetlands do have ParkCare and Landcare groups supporting them. Mostly they are on TCCS land; so they are often urban open space groups. You find that not only do they keep the litter away; they beautify the place by doing ongoing litter removal and plantings. That allows more and more access because people come to them.

We also know that when the community invests, it brings more community on board. They see people working there and they get engaged further. There are 19 new infrastructure projects being built at the moment. In the south particularly, there are a lot of them. People are very interested in them and very much want to engage further in that sort of environment. There is an opportunity there to have little stewardship groups caring for them as well. I image that that will assist in your maintenance costs

too.

**THE CHAIR:** One thing raised by the Institute of Landscape Architects was the idea of a city landscape strategy or plan that could guide the role of nature within the city. Does anyone on the panel have a view about that suggestion?

**Dr Cooper:** I will give my view. I think the essence of a landscape plan is to bring diverse elements together. It is to bring the human, the nature and all the different values. In working through a plan such as that, opposing views would obviously be heard. What is the aesthetic to one may not be the aesthetic to another. So it might actually be very productive in creating the conversation to deal with some of the issues of how to use the reserves.

My experience is that once you have those conversations with people, it is not about a snapshot: “Tell me what you think right now.” It is not that. That exchanging of information in a conversation educates both ways. I think those longer-term ways of developing plans, having that conversation, can be very productive.

**THE CHAIR:** Karissa, I think you mentioned that you had been working with developers, particularly in the Ginninderra Catchment Group area. What are some of the experiences and observations you could share with us from that?

**Ms Preuss:** One of the most positive engagements we have had—this was in both the Gungahlin and Ginninderry developments—is through a bush on the boundary project. Bush on the boundary is basically a reference group that brings together developers and those with an interest in biodiversity conservation at the table to talk about issues before they arise and so to address biodiversity concerns.

There have been various experts in all aspects of biodiversity conservation sitting with the developers, and that worked really well in the Gungahlin area. That stage has now moved on and we are working with Ginninderry developers quite closely. We have also begun conversations with CSIRO about establishing a similar framework with their development.

That is one of the key lessons we have learned. That same model has now been developed in the Molonglo development. So that is probably a key learning. We are working very closely with CSIRO in their emerging development. We have run a number of community planting days and an Aboriginal heritage walk. We are looking at similar things with Ginninderry. Does that answer your question?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, it does to an extent. Have you found in working with the developers that there has been a bit of a knowledge gap that you have been able to fill? Is that a fair?

**Ms Preuss:** Definitely over the period we have been talking there has been a lot of mutual learning going on. We have been lucky in a way that both Ginninderry and CSIRO are attempting to be more environmentally friendly developers and so they are more open to taking on that.

**THE CHAIR:** What are some of the learnings you have taken away from the project?

**Ms Preuss:** I have got more of an insight into planning and how critical planning is in developments and getting in early to have the planning right in the first place. We look at developments that happened previously and how they could have been improved. Some areas of Gungahlin could have been developed slightly differently and better, particularly for water-sensitive urban design. So planning early is one of the keys.

**MISS C BURCH:** Are there any specific initiatives you think could be put in place to make developers take a greener approach to planning and to consider green infrastructure when they are planning?

**Ms Preuss:** The bush on the boundary framework is the key one that comes to mind, and obviously a lot of stakeholder liaison.

**Ms Beveridge:** The point that was made about the importance of a landscaping plan is quite valid in that area too. The other thing that Molonglo Conservation Group have found is that there is the development of the area but that some of the developers are interested in the continuity of the biodiversity aspects that have been put in place and have been seeking guidance and leadership on ensuring that continuity within the community.

My understanding is that developers go in and they get the suburb or the whatever in place and if we have good landscape plans then they will have the green and blue spaces we have been referring to. But then we need the community engagement that has been mentioned by all of us in different aspects to ensure that the biodiversity is protected and conserved by the community on site.

**THE CHAIR:** There is a lot of discussion in your submissions and also from what you have said today about community participation and the importance of that. Noting budgetary restraints I strongly encourage you to participate in the budget estimates committee that is coming up if you are not already. I want to get a sense from you where you see partnerships with the ACT government really supporting community participation in our stewardship of our environment, whether it is in an urban area or a nature park. What opportunities do you see beyond what is already happening?

**Dr Cooper:** The problem we have at the moment is that we do not have the continuity for what I would consider to be some of the key groups, which are our three catchment groups here. That is why we have humbly asked if you could look at that as a priority before the end of June.

There is the infrastructure solidly there to build and build. We could add the junior committee. It can expand. It is a matter of resourcing capacity as that enabler to go broader. It is building on the capacity we have rather than actually adopting something else.

**Ms Franco:** Yes, I very much agree. We have had groups stewarding for 30 years in the ACT area. It is a successful model. Without the catchment groups it will fall over and the question you asked will be irrelevant because there will not be a building of new groups.

I have set up three or four new groups in the past two years. The way to build stewardship is to give it to the community to do. People trust the community groups. People walk in our doors every single day all the time. The community has contact with us and has built relationships with us, and that is the way we get stewardship groups going.

I think that there is capacity within government to try to build stewardship groups, but they generally do not have that sense of connection as easily as they do with community-based not-for-profit charities. To me, devolving it—using the principle of subsidiarity and devolving that responsibility out into the community—is the best way you can do that.

**Ms Preuss:** And fostering that community stewardship has been the core business of the catchment group since our inception. We are at a point where there is a real danger that that could be lost. Even though our organisations have been operating now for 20-plus years we are in a position where, as Maxine said, we do not have any secure funding. That stewardship has been built up over 25 years, so to have that lost just because of a lack of funding is a real concern. We are at that point where there is a danger of that happening.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I clarify for the record: Landcare is funded federally and the ACT government—

**Dr Cooper:** Landcare was federally funding the catchment groups. That funding has ceased in some of their coordination roles, so that has gone. It is still being funded through the NRM model and some of that, and that is within the agency, the department. What the issue is now for the ACT—colleagues, help me out if I go in error here—is that in other jurisdictions like New South Wales, their state government has stepped in to support the groups having continuity.

**THE CHAIR:** This came before budget estimates last year. My understanding was that there was funding but it was for one year and then what happened on that was unclear. Am I right in my assessment that we have got to the end of that one year and now the question is back?

**Dr Cooper:** That funding was for policy work on where you could go in the future. We understand the agency is still working on that. So colleagues have actually produced material for consideration but the probability of its being resolved by the end of June is not looking that optimistic in terms of whether there will be ongoing funding.

**THE CHAIR:** When you say “colleagues”, is this the report, Karissa, that you were referring to earlier?

**Ms Preuss:** That report has been developed, and other work is coming out with the other two catchment groups as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Has that report been made public?

**Ms Preuss:** It is not public yet but it should be public within the next few weeks. We can make sure that it goes to you when it is available.

**THE CHAIR:** Once it is public it would be helpful if you provided a copy. Our reporting date extends beyond your deadline, for lack of a better word, but we have heard what you have said today.

**Dr Cooper:** We of course would very much like budget estimates to consider us.

**THE CHAIR:** You are very lucky, Dr Cooper, in that Ms Preuss and a few of her colleagues are already well-versed in the budget estimates process. There will be a committee that looks into the budget once it is handed down. You can make a submission to that inquiry, particularly to the budgetary requirements for the next 12 months. You can raise it directly with that committee. I highly recommend you do that. I daresay you have already have a head start on the process with some of the committee members present.

**Dr Cooper:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I thank you all for appearing today. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to witnesses to provide an opportunity to check it and identify any errors in transcription.

If witnesses undertook to provide further information or took questions on notice during the course of the hearing, we do not have a set deadline but we would appreciate the additional information as soon as possible, noting that the report still has to come out before you can send it to us.

I thank all the witnesses who have appeared today.

**The committee adjourned at 4.53 pm.**