



ACT
Government



MOLONGLO RIVER RESERVE

DRAFT RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2018

CONSULTATION REPORT

Molonglo River Reserve Management Plan 2018

Report on Consultation

1. Introduction

The Molonglo River Reserve Management Plan (the plan) has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the *Nature Conservation Act 2014*. The Molonglo River Reserve is a 1280 hectare reserve which extends 23 kilometres along the Molonglo River from Scrivener Dam to the intersection with the Murrumbidgee River Corridor Reserve.

The plan is consistent with the ACT Government's policy position for management of the Molonglo River Reserve as established in:

- Molonglo Valley Plan for the Protection of Matters of Environmental Significance, September 2011, (the NES Plan), the agreement between the Australian and the ACT Governments comprising the commitments to protect Matters of National Environmental Significance within the river corridor and new development areas at Molonglo Valley; and
- the Territory Plan 2008 which applies a Public Land overlay to the Molonglo River Reserve which triggered the requirement for a statutory management plan to be prepared.

The plan describes the values of the Molonglo River Reserve and defines objectives, policies and actions to protect the values and guide management and use of the area over a ten year time frame.

2. Consultation Overview

Extensive consultation with a wide range of groups and individuals was undertaken during various stages of development of the Molonglo River Reserve Management Plan.

Stage 1: Issues Papers

The development of the draft reserve management plan commenced with the preparations of Issues Papers in mid July 2013.

An introductory and three issues papers were prepared and distributed to ACT Government stakeholders and a community reference group which was formed to assist with the development of the plan. The issues papers were not made available to the public. The three issues papers were:

- Issues Paper 1 – Natural and Cultural Heritage
- Issues Paper 2 – Interaction with People
- Issues Paper 3 – Governance

Meetings and workshops with ACT Government stakeholders and a Community Reference Group were held to explore the vision, challenges and opportunities that the plan needed to incorporate. Further workshops were held to gather responses to the proposed directions and stakeholders were invited to provide written responses.

The ACT Government stakeholders included staff from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, Economic Development Directorate, Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate, Land Development Agency and Transport and Municipal Services.

The Community Reference Group included representatives from each of the following groups: ACT Bushfire Council, ACT Equestrian Association, ACT Rural Landholders Association, Bush on the Boundary, Canberra Off-road Cyclists, Conservation Council ACT Region, Education Department, Fenner School of Environment and Society – Australian National University, Molonglo Catchment Group.

Stage 2: Preparation and consultation on draft reserve management plan

The drafting of the first version of the reserve management plan commenced in February 2014 and was completed in May 2014. Consultation on the draft plan occurred during June and November 2014 with ACT Government agencies. The draft plan was refined during this time to respond to matters raised. From December 2014 to November 2015 the plan was further refined to allow for the integration of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (v3) requirements into fire management planning for the reserve. There was also the need to consider matters around the buffer for the Kama Nature Reserve, a requirement under the NES Plan.

The draft plan (Version 8) was finalised in November 2015. Consultation on this plan was undertaken between January and June 2016 with a request for written comments from the Community Reference Group and ACT Government agencies. Seventeen written comments were received from the stakeholders and were considered in finalising the next version of the draft plan. Comments were received from the following agencies and organisations: ACT Heritage Council, ACT Equestrian Association, ACT Rural Fire Service, Bush on the Boundary, Canberra Off Road Cyclists, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Conservator of Flora and Fauna Liaison, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development, Commissioner ACT Emergency Services Agency, Environment and Planning Directorate, Friends of Grasslands Geological Society of Australia (ACT Division) and Land Development Agency.

On 24 February 2017 the Conservator of Flora and Fauna (Dr Annie Lane) provided comments on the plan (V8). The letter notes that the draft plan can be supported for release for public consultation but it is recommended that the final plan be more succinct and take into consideration the annotated comments on the draft plan.

Stage 3 - Release of the draft plan for public consultation

The draft plan (V9) was released for public comment on 8 February 2018 and submissions closed on 23 March 2018. Letters and emails requesting comments on the draft plan were sent to the following stakeholders:

ACT Bushfire Council, ACT Commissioner of Sustainability and the Environment, ACT Equestrian Association, ACT Heritage Council, ACT Rural Landholders, Bush on the Boundary, Canberra Off-Road Cyclists, Conservation Council ACT Region, Fenner School of Environment and Society – ANU, Friends of Grasslands, Heart Foundation, Institute of Applied Ecology - University of Canberra, National Parks Association, Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee, Molonglo Catchment Group, Pedal Power

The following ACT and Australian Government agencies were consulted: Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, Education Directorate, National Capital Authority (NCA), Suburban Land Agency and Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS). NCA and TCCS provided comments.

Letters were sent to the ACT Conservator of Flora and Fauna and the Planning and Land Authority requesting their comments. Formal submissions were not received from either the conservator or the planning and land authority during the consultation period however there have been ongoing discussions and consultation with the relevant staff in the finalisation of the draft plan.

The four Representative Aboriginal Organisations and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council were consulted. No responses were received during the consultation period.

A total of twenty one (21) submissions were received. Nineteen (19) submissions were received within the public consultation period and two (2) after the closing date. There is general support for the plan however concerns have been raised about the delays in the finalisation of the plan.

The final draft plan has been reformatted and edited to remove content that provided supporting background information for the purposes of public consultation period however it is not considered necessary in the final plan.

3. Engagement Activities

The following engagement activities occurred during the public consultation period.

Engagement Activity	Date	Participants
Molonglo Mingle 'Sips and Sounds' event, Stromlo Cottage	24 February 2018	Approximately 150 people attended
Public Information Session – Charles Weston School	8 March 2018	20 attendees

Coleman Court Shopping Centre	6 March 2018	100 flyers handed out
Guided Walking Tour	15 March 2018	9 people attended the walking tour.
Social Media interaction	8 Feb, 22 Feb, 1 March, 5 March, 7 March, 12 March	10 000 people reached on social media
Feedback	8 February to 23 March 2018	21 written submissions
Survey	8 February to 23 March 2018	49 individual completed surveys online

4. Summary of Public Consultation

The table below is a summary of the public comments received, many of the issues raised were common to a number of submissions and have been consolidated. Where comments endorsed or agreed with the draft plan, they have not been included as they required no changes to the plan. The importance of the reserve management plan's policies and actions that will conserve and enhance the natural environment whilst addressing key risks and catering for a variety of recreational opportunities was acknowledged in number of the submissions. Where minor editorial comments were received, appropriate changes have been made to the plan and the detailed comments have not been included in this summary.

Summary of key issues raised in public submissions	Response
There is generally strong support for the Molonglo River Reserve Management Plan.	Noted. NFA required.
Provision needs to be made for an ongoing budget to ensure that the objectives of the reserve management plan can be implemented.	The ACT Government has committed capital works funds for reserve establishment and ongoing recurrent funds to manage the Molonglo River Reserve.
The width of the reserve is too narrow to provide adequate protection to threatened species and communities.	<p>The form and width of the Molonglo River Reserve has already been assessed through a number of planning and environmental processes, and is not a matter for consideration in the reserve management plan.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Minister for the Environment approved the Molonglo Valley Plan for the Protection of Matters of National Environmental Significance (NES Plan) on 20 December 2011, and this approval allowed the development of the Molonglo Valley to proceed under certain conditions.</p> <p>The boundary between the river corridor and the development area was determined through this process.</p>
The construction of urban development on either side of the reserve will have detrimental impacts (eg air pollution (dust), water quality and rubbish) on the Molonglo River Reserve.	The ACT Government has in place legislation and guidelines to prevent or minimise environmental harm or environmental nuisance from construction works. Impacts are also monitored by the relevant government agencies. If residents are concerned about particular construction activities, they can contact Access Canberra on 13 22 81 to report their concerns.
<p>The reserve management plan needs to provide adequate information and direction for the land manager (ACT Parks and Conservation Service). It needs to adequately cover the specific risks facing the reserve.</p> <p>The plan does not adequately provide for the management of high conservation value areas such as the Pink-tailed Worm-Lizard habitat.</p> <p>The reserve management plan would be more robust if there was more detail on the strategies for managing specific areas.</p>	The reserve management plan provides sufficient information and direction for the land manager. The intent of a reserve management plan is to provide high level policy and actions. The plan has a life of 10 years and is reviewed at the 5 year mark. Staff from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service (the land managers) have been involved in the development of the draft plan. The plan outlines the necessary actions which provide land managers with the direction

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	<p>required to manage the reserve. These actions often refer to the preparation of other documents such as work plans, guidelines and strategies.</p> <p>Management challenges and principles for such things as biomass management, enhancement of habitat, values invasive plants and animals, fire fuel mitigation and wildfire suppression, visitors and community awareness are identified in the area specific operational plans and the management actions for these challenges are provided.</p> <p>The land managers are using the operational plans to inform their on-ground activities.</p> <p>The reserve management plan outlines the management framework for the reserve. This framework has been established through the requirements set out in the NES Plan. The reserve management plan is a high level policy document and is not intended to provide detail management strategies. These are provided for in Operational Plans. A diagram has been included in the final plan to show the relationships between all of the documents that required to manage the reserve.</p> <p>The management of the PTWL habitat is consistent with the management of Strategic Firefighting Asset Zones. The general approach as outlined in the plan is to select mitigation measures that achieve the required levels of fire protection and that are also compatible with achieving ecological objectives.</p>
<p>The reserve management plan has not been updated with relevant information available in recent studies and strategies.</p>	<p>At any time in the life of the plan, there is going to be new information available from current research and studies. It is not practical to update the plan to reflect new information as it comes to light however Objective 21 of the plan and its supporting policies and actions acknowledges the value and importance of new knowledge, and provides for actions which allow for this information to be used in the management of the reserve.</p> <p>Objective 21 states <i>'Foster the development of new knowledge and its application to management actions for achieving other reserve objectives.'</i></p>
<p>The Adaptive Management Strategy (AMS) was finalised in May 2013 by the ACT Government and approved by the Commonwealth in August 2013. The submitter would like information on the implementation of the AMS as this is not currently available.</p> <p>The Annual Report does not adequately report on biodiversity outcomes and it should include data arising from the Adaptive Management Strategy.</p>	<p>The production of an Annual Report is a requirement of the NES Plan.</p> <p>The ACT Government is in the process of establishing the expert panel as required by the Adaptive Management Strategy to evaluate and review monitoring program established for the Molonglo River Reserve. The expert panel is to prepare a report which will contain advice and recommendations for any amendments necessary to ensure the operational plans are achieving the conservation outcomes and performance targets for the NES.</p>

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	The report will be made publicly available once completed. It is expected that the report will be finalised by the end of 2018.
The finalisation of the reserve management plan as required by the NES Plan is several years overdue and this is unacceptable.	The ACT Government acknowledges that the finalisation of the reserve management plan has been delayed and has committed to providing the final version to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage by November 2018.
There are a number of outstanding actions in relation to the NES Plan that have not been completed.	An Independent Audit of the Molonglo Valley Strategic Assessment was released in June 2018 which identified a number of corrective actions. The ACT Government is committed to the completion of the corrective actions.
The obligations of the NES Plan should be addressed in the reserve management plan. There are actions from the NES Plan that do not appear to have been adequately addressed in the reserve management plan.	<p>The NES Plan has set up a framework whereby a number of documents are to be prepared to address the actions outlined in the NES Plan including the preparation of the reserve management plan.</p> <p>The reserve management plan recognises this in Action 7.1.1 in the final plan (was previous Action 5.1.1 in the draft) which requires that a set of scientifically-based management guidelines be developed that incorporate the NES Plan agreements, bushfire protection, action plans and threat abatement plans and provide integrated guidance to designing the on-ground activities for achieving the goals.</p>
Positive comments were provided on various aspects of the reserve management plan including adaptive management principles.	Noted. No further action required.
Facilities such as toilets, shelters and picnic tables and BBQ should be provided in the reserve.	The intent of the reserve management plan is to generally provide recreation facilities within the two special purpose reserves. The need and location of further facilities such as shaded rest areas, seats and walking trails will be assessed as part of ongoing management and development of the Molonglo River Reserve.
The reserve management plan should provide the details (width) of the buffer outside the Kama Nature Reserve. This is a requirement of the NES Plan (Action 7).	<p>On 8 May 2018 the Minister for Planning and Land Management granted an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) exemption for the Molonglo Valley Stage 3 – Urban Development and Infrastructure proposal. The EIS exemption expires on 31 December 2041. The decision can be viewed EPSDD website.</p> <p>The issue of the Kama Nature Reserve buffer is assessed in the EIS Exemption report. Table 9 details the conditions that apply to the EIS exemption application include the following:</p> <p>Condition 6 states that <i>‘in the preparation of Planning and Design Framework and Estate Development Plans, the treatment and boundary of the Kama Nature</i></p>

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	<p><i>Reserve buffer width within the Future Urban Area must be consistent with the recommendations in the Kama Interface Management Strategy (Capital Ecology, 2016).'</i></p> <p>The NES Plan states that the buffer is to be outside the Kama Nature Reserve and the proposed development area. The reserve management plan only applies to that land within the reserve, and as such is not the appropriate document to detail the buffer width. A note however has been included in the reserve management plan outlining the EIS decision.</p>
<p>The content of Chapter 9 including Figure 9.1 do not adequately articulate what tracks and trails can be utilised by horse riders.</p>	<p>The content of Chapter 9 including Figure 9.1 (now Chapter 8 and Figure 8.1) has been reviewed and changed to clearly reflect the indicative tracks within the reserve that can be used by horse riders. Permitted activities and their locations will be provided for in an Activities Declaration which is the statutory instruments that outlines permitted and prohibited activities within reserves.</p>
<p>Permitting dogs on leashes is not supported in the reserve because of the negative impacts that they will have on the reserve particularly those areas of high conservation.</p>	<p>The reserve management plan permits dog walking on a lead in the reserve except for Kama and selected areas with especially sensitive habitat. It is acknowledged that compliance with this requirement can be problematic but through education and signage people using the reserve will be educated about the damage their dog off lead can have on the reserve. Enforcement of this requirement by the land manager will be important. The level of compliance will be monitored and permission for dog walking in the reserve will be reviewed at the mid-point and end of the life of the plan.</p> <p>The Activities declaration is the statutory instrument that outlines permitted and prohibited activities within reserves. The current Lower Molonglo River Corridor Activities declaration does not permit dogs in the area of what was the Lower Molonglo River Corridor and will continue to apply.</p> <p>The role of the Activities Declaration and conditional permission for dog walking in the Reserve has been clarified in the final Plan.</p>
<p>Rogaining is listed as a prohibited use within the reserve. The reserve management plan is not clear why this activity is not permitted when it has previously been allowed within the reserve. Rogaining should be a permitted activity as measures can be put in place to minimise detrimental impacts on the reserve.</p>	<p>The reserve management plan does not permit rogaining within any part of the reserve and whilst this activity may have previously occurred along the river corridor, the status of the reserve has changed to nature reserve where conservation of natural environment is one of the primarily objectives. Rogaining has a wide sphere of influence where there is a requirement for activity participants to go off trail. The new reserve has a large number of conservation areas, in a narrow corridor with limited width to accommodate a number of</p>

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	pressures, and to protect the conservation values from activities that are likely to have a significant detrimental impact on their conservation.
The bushfire protection and management elements in the draft reserve management plan could be more effectively brought together in the reserve management plan.	Agree. The final plan has been restructured to bring all elements relating to fire and infrastructure into new Chapter 9.
Working with community groups and other interested organisations is important and there are a number of organisations and groups who are interested in continuing their work within the reserve or would like to be part of management activities. Agreements and budgets should be in place to facilitate this.	<p>The reserve management plan recognises that productive and strong working relationships with neighbours and the community are important to maintaining the reserve values and as well as the management of the reserve. (new Chapter 10). The plan also recognises that the appropriate agreements should be put in place with the relevant groups. (Action 21.1.1).</p> <p>A reserve management plan is not the mechanism to include funding requirements however it can be used to assist in the ACT Government in its consideration of funding for organisations and community groups who would like to assist in reserve management activities.</p>