



# Murrumbidgee River Corridor Reserve Management Plan review

**The ACT Government has reviewed the 1998 Murrumbidgee River Corridor Management Plan in preparation for the development of a new plan, commencing in 2022.**

The Murrumbidgee River Corridor (MRC) covers approximately 9,800 hectares and includes five nature reserves, eight recreation reserves and a European heritage zone. The current management plan for the MRC was developed in 1998 to “develop a clear management direction for the Corridor and particularly in terms of management systems and policies”.

Key areas of focus in the 1998 plan were: the maintenance of water quality and integrity of aquatic and riparian ecosystems; the protection of discrete nature conservation areas; management of historic precincts; investigation and conservation of cultural resources; and the maintenance and enhancement of recreational opportunities. The plan incorporates management guidelines for all tenures, including leased land, within the Corridor.

The recent review of the 1998 plan examined the success of the plan’s implementation, including whether management objectives were achieved. It also identified new and emerging issues and opportunities to be considered in developing a new plan. The recommendations in the review are a first step to ensuring that a new plan provides a comprehensive, robust planning framework for the MRC.

## THE CONVERSATION

**The review of the 1998 Murrumbidgee River Corridor Management Plan was released for public comment for 12 weeks, from 5 November 2021 to 31 January 2022. The ACT Government provided the community with an opportunity to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the 1998 plan and to provide feedback on the key issues and recommendations identified in the review.**

The Minister for Planning and Land Management, Mick Gentleman MLA, released a media statement announcing the commencement of public consultation for the review of the 1998 plan. The consultation was promoted on the ACT Government’s social media platforms and the engagement website, YourSay, which included links to the review and the 1998 plan.

## WHAT WE HEARD

**During the public consultation period we received 35 submissions across the ACT community including from individuals, peak organisations and community groups.**

Most submissions included several detailed comments. These have been reviewed and grouped together where similar issues have been raised. Where comments link directly to the management objectives of the 1998 plan, they have been grouped against those objectives in the table below. Where comments did not directly relate to those objectives, topic headings have been provided.

Comments of general support for the review, those addressing issues beyond the scope of the review, and those of an editorial nature have not been included.

Note that this listening report is not intended to provide a response to individual comments received; instead, it summarises what we heard during the public consultation period.



## Comments from the community

### Planning – general comments (7 submissions, 15 comments)

- The development of a new management plan is overdue and the opportunity to provide comments on the review could have been more extensive.
- Immediate, short and long-term actions must be identified, and operational plans developed.
- Direct engagement with community members with varying interests must be prioritised.
- More funding should be provided to effectively manage the MRC.

### Strategic vision and prioritisation (8 submissions, 15 comments)

- The new land management plan must articulate a strategic vision for the MRC and list objectives in order of importance.
- Reservation of adjacent public land with significant values is recommended.
- Protection of natural and cultural values should take priority over providing recreational opportunities.
- Further clarification on how the new plan will be “outcome rather than issues driven” is required.

### Reviewing success and adaptive management (6 submissions, 9 comments)

- A sufficiently funded implementation, monitoring, and evaluation framework, which includes public consultation and reporting, is required.
- Ongoing research and strategies to incorporate research findings into management actions are required.

### Collaborative management (5 submissions, 9 comments)

- Collaboration between the ACT Government, leaseholders, community groups and the NSW Government is necessary to ensure effective management of the MRC.
- Conservation of the MRC should have a regional focus; cross-border agreements and governance structures are encouraged.
- The role of the Ginninderry Conservation Trust in the northern MRC should be acknowledged.

### Community engagement (8 submissions, 20 comments)

- Community conservation groups that undertake activities in the MRC should be resourced.
- Improved and ongoing engagement with community members, leaseholders and community groups is critical.
- There should be extensive engagement with Aboriginal people and greater involvement of Traditional Custodians in implementing the new management plan.

### Development and land planning (9 submissions, 21 comments)

- Proposed urban development, including in the Western Edge Investigation Area, poses risks to the natural and cultural values of the MRC, including risks for water quality and the visual amenity of the landscape.
- Indirect impacts of urban development will likely include increased pressure on recreation areas, changes in fire management and fire risk, increases in despotic birds, changes in runoff volume, and additional impacts of increased habitat fragmentation.



- The natural values of the western MRC must be retained, and strong planning regulations must be implemented for any future development.
- The review of land tenure zoning to improve conservation outcomes is welcome.
- The impacts of Ginninderry need to be monitored and appropriate management must continue.
- Development plans must consider the increased risk to communities from bushfire.

#### Rural leases (5 submissions, 14 comments)

- Land in the MRC has been pivotal in the agricultural output of the Canberra region for over 150 years.
- The livelihoods of farmers should be accommodated, including maintaining existing agreements.
- A 'withdrawal clause' in rural leases is necessary to assist in conservation management and public access.
- Inadequate funding reduces the effectiveness of management issues relevant to local leaseholders.
- Increased public access to areas managed as grazing leases may have significant impacts on farming operations, including the viability of some enterprises, and may increase fire risk. Increased communication with leaseholders on this issue is required.

#### Legislation and relevant strategies (6 submissions, 8 comments)

- Actions identified in existing Action Plans and Strategies should be prioritised and new policy directions (e.g. on food security and water use) should be considered.
- The *Emergencies Act 2004* should be added to the list of legislative changes since the 1998 plan.
- The ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2013–2023, the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* and the *Planning and Development Act 2007* are particularly pertinent to conservation of the MRC.

#### Comments directly linked to the objectives of the 1998 Management Plan

##### Objective 1. *Conserve the endemic aquatic, riparian and riverine ecosystems*

##### Objective 3. *Conserve natural landforms and the valley*

#### Biodiversity and ecosystem conservation (11 submissions, 28 comments)

- The reintroduction of Koalas to the west of the MRC in the Bullen range should be considered.
- Additional and updated detail on the biodiversity values of the MRC is required.
- The new plan must include actions to rehabilitate and enhance key areas (and assess the success of these initiatives), build more resilient ecosystems, assist in reversing the decline of woodland birds, provide species with refuges from extreme climate impacts, and conserve the Snow Gum, Black Sallee, Candlebark and Ribbon Gum Grassy Woodland Ecological Community.
- An assessment of the scenic values and geological features of the MRC is required.

#### Threats (10 submissions, 17 comments)

- Parts of the MRC have been neglected and natural values, including water quality, are at risk.
- There should be well-resourced targets to mitigate key threats, including climate change, urban development, weeds, and pest animals.
- Additional clarity on the future of the former pine plantation estate is required.
- Sustained funding and collaborative management are necessary to control weeds and rehabilitate areas.
- Planting of exotic trees for social and visual amenity within the MRC is not supported.

**Fire management** (4 submissions, 13 comments)

- Updated fire management information is required in the new plan, including the policy framework and how fire management will be coordinated across public and leased land within the MRC.
- The new plan must acknowledge the importance of prescribed burning to protect communities and natural and cultural assets from wildfire.
- Consideration should be given to the potential requirement for additional fire trails.
- There is little recognition of the possibility of reinstatement of cultural fire management practices.

**Objective 2. Provide for recreational activities appropriate to rural and natural river settings.****New opportunities and maintenance** (11 submissions, 24 comments)

- The new plan should outline who has authority to approve the development of new recreational facilities.
- Consideration should be given to:
  - modifying current restrictions on horse riding in the MRC
  - improving maintenance of existing horse-riding trails and establishing new trails
  - upgrading and installing new walking tracks and mountain-bike trails
  - additional recreational facilities, including camping
  - reinstating access to Ginninderra Falls
  - commercial, hospitality and recreational opportunities at the Cotter reserves.
- The reserve needs to be made wider to accommodate various user types while maintaining an adequate buffer from the riverbank.

**Recreational impacts on other values** (5 submissions, 9 comments)

- Increased visitor numbers may compromise the environmental values of the MRC. Consideration should be given to restricted zones where only passive recreational activity is permitted.
- Recreation must be low-impact and respectful.
- Stronger regulation of illegal fishing is required.
- The construction of new mountain-bike trails needs to be restricted to small areas of the river and only where suitable management can be funded. New trails should not be within Stony Creek Nature Reserve.

**Public safety** (3 submissions, 7 comments)

- The new plan must outline public safety issues, including those related to increases in severe weather.
- Public safety could be improved with additional road and track signage, increased mobile coverage, wider roads at key locations, and developing solutions to areas with regular flooding and high visitor traffic.

**Objective 4. Conserve and enhance habitat links through the regional landscape.****Objective 8. Maintain a corridor of open rural and natural land on the western edge of Canberra, and to give clear definition to the transition from the urban landscape to the rugged forested landscape of the mountainous skyline to the west of the city** (6 submissions, 10 comments)

- A well targeted and informed approach to maintaining and improving functional connectivity and corridors for biodiversity is required.
- Management actions outside of the MRC and the reservation of neighbouring land will improve connectivity.
- Any review of 13B Area Specific Policy will require extensive engagement with local stakeholders.
- Connectivity and corridors, particularly the Murrumbidgee River Corridor to Molonglo River, have been identified by the community as critically important in the Western Edge Investigation Area.





#### **Objective 5. *Maintain water quality* (6 submissions, 14 comments)**

- Cross-border decisions impact the health of the Murrumbidgee River in the ACT.
- A water treatment plant upstream of Tharwa Village could have an impact on water quality.
- The 2019 State of the Environment Report recommendation to increase water releases to the upper Murrumbidgee River should be supported.
- The Catchment Use and Water General Code should be updated.
- Stormwater discharge is a direct threat to the MRC and should not be supported.
- The source/s of recurring high bacterial loads needs investigating and mitigating.
- The impacts of water abstraction and dumping of building waste and excess soils must be acknowledged.

#### **Objective 6. *Provide formal and informal educational opportunities.***

#### **Objective 9. *Provide educational and interpretative opportunities associated with water issues relevant to the corridor* (4 submissions, 4 comments)**

- Up-to-date data on vegetation health, mapping, water quality, and invasive species should be publicly available.
- Disseminating information about the management of the MRC is critical to ensure community members can meaningfully participate in decision making.

#### **Objective 7. *Conserve the cultural heritage landscapes, areas and sites* (10 submissions, 15 comments)**

- Some areas with heritage value are being lost through neglect or poor management.
- Engagement with the community to protect cultural values must be prioritised.
- First Nations people have an ongoing connection with the MRC and priority should be given to protecting areas they identify as significant.
- Co-management arrangements and other opportunities to increase the participation of Ngunnawal people in the management of the MRC (e.g. cultural fire management) is supported.

### **THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK**

**1,477**

We reached 1,477 people via YourSay

**23,099**

We reached a social media audience  
of 23,099

**35**

We received 35 items of written  
feedback



## WHAT'S NEXT?

All submissions will be considered and will inform the development of a new draft Murrumbidgee River Corridor Reserve Management Plan, with work commencing in 2022.

Consultation with key stakeholders and the broader community will inform development of the draft plan.

When completed, the draft plan will be released for public consultation. All submissions received during public consultation will be considered and, where appropriate, the draft may be revised in response. A Consultation Report will be prepared on issues raised in submissions.

The *Nature Conservation Act 2014* requires that the revised draft plan and Consultation Report are referred by the Minister to the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services for consideration. At the time of referral, the revised draft plan and Consultation Report will be publicly accessible on the YourSay website.

The Standing Committee has the discretion to undertake an inquiry into the plan, or any aspect of the plan, and must report back to the Minister with any recommendations about the plan within six months of receiving it.

Any recommendations made by the Committee will be considered in preparing the final management plan.

Following government approval processes, the final plan will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

To find out more about reserve management planning and other initiatives, policies and projects in Canberra, visit [www.yoursay.act.gov.au](http://www.yoursay.act.gov.au) or follow the ACT Parks and Conservation Service on <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=act%20parks%20and%20conservation%20service>.