



Draft Caring for Dhawura Ngunnawal; a natural resource plan for the ACT 2022-2042

REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

The ACT Government has the draft *Caring for Dhawura Ngunnawal; a natural resource plan for the ACT 2022-2042*, to guide future management of our region's natural resources.

Input from the Canberra community and key stakeholders has been critical in the development of the draft Natural Resource Management (NRM) plan. An advisory group of community representatives was established from the outset in 2020 to guide the planning process and a comprehensive community consultation followed in 2021.

The draft plan proposes a way forward for the management of natural resources in the ACT over the next 20 years and reflects the priorities that were put forward by the community through stakeholder consultation over the past two years.

The draft plan acknowledges that looking after our natural resources is a shared responsibility of the ACT Government, research institutions, private enterprise, non-government organisations and the community. The collaborative management of natural resources of the ACT is paramount to ensure that people and landscapes are connected, and the ACT is prepared for the challenges of the future in the face of climate change and increasing pressures on our natural assets.

The draft plan gives priority to protection and restoration of the environment within the broader economic, social and political context. Importantly, it recognises the strong connection between people and nature and provides a road map of the key actions identified by consultation with the primary stakeholders in natural resource management in the ACT and Region.

Current and emerging challenges in areas like climate change, pest plants and animals, urban expansion, waterways and bushfire hazards have been addressed within key focus areas around biodiversity conservation, ecosystem and habitation functions, sustainable agriculture and Ngunnawal cultural heritage and traditional knowledge.

There is also an emphasis on the importance of acknowledging Ngunnawal cultural values and traditional ecological knowledge, climate resilience, and the connections between people and nature across the plan.



THE CONVERSATION

Community consultation took place on the draft plan from 6 October 2022 until 15 December 2022.

The draft plan was available for comment through a survey on the ACT Government YourSay Conversation website from early October through to late November. Late submissions were accepted by several key stakeholder groups until 15 December 2022, a four-week extension on the original consultation period.

WHO WE ENGAGED

The consultation received 44 survey submissions and a further 18 written submissions.

The draft plan was launched by the ACT Minister for the Environment, Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, at the Yarramundi Cultural Centre with representatives from key stakeholder groups, including Landcare ACT and Catchment groups, the Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, the Conservation Council and members of the ACT Natural Resource Management Plan Advisory Group.

ABC Canberra and Canberra Times journalists attended and reported on the launch event.

All individuals and groups that provided comment on the 2021 NRM discussion paper and/ or contributed to the draft plan were invited to provide feedback on the new draft plan via email. This included the following peak bodies and community groups: ACT for Bees, ACT Rural Landholders Association, ACT Community Councils, the Conservation Council (ACT Region), the Canberra Ornithologists Group, the Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, Friends of Grasslands, Landcare ACT, Southern ACT Catchment Group, Molonglo Conservation Group, Ginninderra Catchment Group, ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group, Greening Australia, the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, and National Parks Association of the ACT.

In addition, a communications and engagement plan was implemented to reach a broader audience that may not have been engaged during the 2021 consultation phase.



Key insights from the community

Overarching comments

1. Overall, there is strong support for the development of a new natural resource management plan for the ACT with several key community groups strongly welcoming the new draft plan.
2. **Over 95 per cent of those responding to the survey** indicated that the new draft plan met or exceeded their expectations with comments such as; “pleasantly surprised”, “welcomed”, “comprehensive”, “well written”, “high level”, “all key points are there”, and “underpinned by great values and beautiful images”.
3. Community group submissions also expressed support for the new draft with comments “a comprehensive and aspirational approach”; “an important strategic framework for restoring and protecting the natural environments of Ngunnawal country”; “and commendation for the plans recognition and engagement of First Peoples and the emphasis on collaboration with community and other stakeholders”.
4. Less than 5 per cent of survey respondents were of the view that the draft plan did not meet their expectations with feedback suggesting the plan is too long, lacking information about how plan and actions are going to be funded; some key topics not adequately addressed such as fire and kangaroo management and some comments that the document has a lack of consistency across the key focus areas.
5. Some comments suggested that the plan could be strengthened with further consultation with Ngunnawal custodians, greater use of Ngunnawal language within the document and inclusion of a foreword or comment from Ngunnawal community.
6. Some responses sought more clarity on the purpose of the plan and greater effort to address the Australian Government National Landcare Program 5-year outcomes.

The vision

7. The proposed vision was generally accepted however there were several comments about the use of the term “rewilding” in the vision statement which suggested that it is the wrong narrative.
8. Additional comments suggested that the vision statement is too long, contains several visions with overlapping meanings, and should be more concise and easier to understand.

Key focus areas

9. Generally, the key focus areas are broadly supported. However, there were comments that some of the targets and actions in the focus areas are aspirational and vague. There is also a call for greater consistency across pressures on natural resources.
10. A suggestion was made to include actions on community collaboration in all focus areas.

Cultural Landscapes

11. The identification of cultural landscapes as a priority area in the draft plan is well supported, as is the recognition that Ngunnawal land management can be a guide to current land management practice.
12. It was suggested that additional and ongoing consultation is needed with the Ngunnawal people to develop and implement the Draft plans targets and actions.
13. Suggestions to improve this chapter included;
 - a. recognising additional pressures,



- b. the need for a coordinated approach enabling Ngunnawal people to care for cultural sites,
 - c. low levels of cultural knowledge by land managers that could impact cultural heritage, and
 - d. challenging administrative systems that make caring for cultural lands difficult for Ngunnawal people.
14. Some specific suggestions included actions such as cultural awareness training to be extended to all land managers and volunteers, and that the focus on “youth” should be reassessed as it is seen to exclude the many community members that would like increased support to engage in land management activities.
15. Some commented that other Aboriginal people, such as Ngambri, are missing from the plan.

Community connection with nature

16. Identifying the community connection to nature as a priority area is well supported. However, some comments suggested that this should not be valued above nature’s inherent worth.
17. Other suggested improvements to include:
- a. opportunities for cultural and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTQIA+, and all abilities.
 - b. targets towards improving coordination between government and community based programs.
 - c. actions to expand funding for core staffing in volunteer groups, greater support for project coordination of ACT environment grants and longer term or multi-year funding.

Rural Landscapes

18. Support was provided for the targets in this section of the plan and feedback suggesting that it captured key issues raised during the consultation process.
19. There were submissions that suggested there is a need for more rural based initiatives and programs particularly in relation to woodlands.
20. And several submissions noted that the continued expansion of the reserve system is at odds with the rural section and also suggested that the plan should acknowledge the role that farmland can play in conserving biodiversity which could be supported with development of conservation mechanisms.

Natural Landscapes

21. Comments around the title for this chapter and suggestion that this should be “biodiverse landscapes” and that there should be greater consistency within these sections.

Waterways

22. Protection of riparian areas and aquatic ecosystems is recognised as an important feature of the Plan, however comments that this section could be strengthened by explaining the value of integrated catchment management including suggestion to rename this section Waterways and catchments and the vision to include the role that catchment health plays in river health.
23. Additional suggestions on measures to address declining water quality in streams and lakes, through managing autumn leaves, drain design, revegetation and stabilisation of eroding banks, and in alignment with ACT Aquatic Species and Riparian Zone Conservation Strategy, the provision to upgrade fish passage.
24. Other comments suggest that priority should be given within the plan to restore highly degraded Molonglo River and in addition to conserving the Naas, including to support legal protection of the Naas as a free flowing river.



Bogs and Fens

25. General support for this focus area and acknowledgement that these ecosystems are critical for carbon sequestration, water management and biodiversity conservation, could further assess the full range of opportunities to restore bogs and fens in the ACT.

Woodlands and Forests

26. The proposed targets and actions in this section are well supported, noting concern about lack of mention of forests.
27. Should include reference to “Unnatural Fragmentation of Habitats” as a key threatening process and the Loss of Mature Native Trees.

Grasslands

28. Actions could have greater emphasis on control of environmental weeds, putting in place guidelines for balancing planting trees and conserving grassy ecosystems, such as not planting of trees in urban areas within 100 metres of native grassland remnants, best practice habitat restoration that considers understory species including grasses and actions focused on collaborating with community groups to maintain grasslands.
29. Suggestions to include other pressures such as changes to water flows, mowing that facilitate invasion of weeds and inadequate ecological burning to control biomass.
30. Prioritising protecting and managing remnants outside of the reserve system and encourage strategic environmental assessments to identify high conservation ecosystem protection.

Ecosystem function and services

31. Amend the tree canopy goal to ensure that the tree planting is ecologically appropriate to “develop a sustainable and ecologically informed planting program to increase canopy cover equitably across the urban footprint without disturbing remnant grassy ecological communities.”

Governance

32. There is strong support for governance as a key focus area and for the vision of community and government working together.
33. The plan could provide greater detail on the roles and responsibilities of ACT Government Directorates with respect to each other and how their capacities to aid NRM will be enhanced.

What’s missing

34. Australian Government, Regional Land Partnerships 5 year outcomes and Investment priorities for the region.
35. Commonwealth Matters of National Significance - action could be mapping of irreplaceable habitats needed to conserve matters of national environmental significance within the ACT and those identified as threatened under the Nature Conservation ACT.
36. Several comments requesting an implementation plan.
37. Integration of the Territory Plan District Strategies into the plan.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Feedback received on the Draft NRM plan is currently being considered and will inform amendments and further development of the finalised plan. It is anticipated that the final NRM plan – *Caring for Dhawura Ngunnawal; a natural resource plan for the ACT 2022-2042* will be published in May 2023.

To find out more about the ACT NRM plan and other initiatives, policies and projects in Canberra visit www.yoursay.act.gov.au or visit www.environment.act.gov.au.

Key Timings

October 2022-December 2022- Draft plan released for consultation

January 2023 – Listening Report Published
We are here

January 2023-March 2023 – Feedback incorporated into finalised plan

May 2023 – Final plan released

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

1602

YourSay conversations page
received 1602 views

44

The YourSay survey received
44 individual contributions

18

We received 18 items of
written feedback

95%

people responded that the
draft plan met or exceeded
their expectations