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Minor Amendment to the Territory Plan 2024-m (MA2024-m)

Extending nature reserve overlay (Stromlo Block 403 and Denman Prospect part block 12 section 2); and rezoning (Denman Prospect part block 12 section 2) under future urban area.

This planning amendment relates to an area known to the community as Bluetts Block. Community groups, including Canberra Birds (aka Canberra Ornithologists Group), have long campaigned for this area to be declared a nature reserve, and are pleased that progress is being made.

Canberra Birds is a volunteer-based community group with around 350 members whose mission includes the conservation of native birds and their habitats. Canberra Birds plays an active role in advocating for the protection of native vegetation and bird habitats, and for the mitigation of threats to and impacts on native birds.

Summary of Canberra Birds position on the proposed Territory Plan Amendment

1. Canberra Birds supports extending nature reserve overlay for Stromlo block 403 and Denman Prospect part block 12 section 2 as proposed in the Amendment.
2. In addition, extensions of the nature reserve area (nature reserve overlay), are recommended:
 - (a) to include the northern most section/parts of Stromlo Block 403 to the Molonglo River Reserve boundary, as this provides better connectivity from Mt Stromlo through the Molonglo River Reserve to The Pinnacle Nature Reserve, and
 - (b) to include Stromlo Block 402 on the western side of Block 403. The current areas of Block 403 and part of block 12 proposed for reservation do not provide a conservation reserve of sufficient size to be sustainable, ensure ecological integrity and properly protect rare and endangered ecosystems, flora and fauna.

The Proposed Reserve Area

The community puts a high value on ensuring that Bluetts Block as a future nature reserve will be viable in size and width to be ecologically sustainable, and importantly is functionally connected to the Molonglo River Reserve corridor.

Reservation of further northern areas of Stromlo Block 403 is required to give ecological connectivity to the Molonglo River Reserve.

Secondly, the areas of Blocks 403 and 12 proposed for nature reserve under this Amendment are too small and narrow to provide for an effective reserve, because of the resulting large boundary-to-area ratio. This will not be ecologically sustainable for the long term, and particularly as there is a large, growing urban area abutting, including higher density housing. There are minimal buffers to effectively mitigate negative urban edge effects, so a larger conservation area with functional connectivity is paramount.

In particular, the proposed nature reserve is very narrow at its northern end closest to the Molonglo River Reserve corridor, where this becomes a narrow 'neck' at that end. Urban development (Denman Prospect Block 13) is also very close on this area's eastern edge, with minimal buffer.

Additionally, should any land west of Block 403 be approved in the future for urban development (as foreshadowed in the Western Investigation Area study), this would potentially create significant edge effects on multiple edges of the new reserve. This is likely to have negative impacts on the high environmental values, and rare and endangered ecosystems will be in danger of becoming degraded over time, as has occurred in much of the Canberra Nature Park.

- Furthermore, it is imperative for the ecological function of Bluetts Block that its connectivity to other native grassland, woodland and riverine vegetation in the Molonglo River Reserve is not broken by future development.

Given these considerations, a more sustainable outcome would be for reservation of an additional northern component of Stromlo Block 403, and for the whole of the adjacent Stromlo Block 402 (currently zoned 'Hills, Ridges and Buffer'), to be under nature reserve overlay.

- It is understood Block 402 (currently leased to the Australian National University) contains grasslands of high environmental value, as well as breeding habitat and nesting trees for Superb Parrots (a threatened species listed as vulnerable under Commonwealth and ACT legislation).
- With a nature reserve overlay, Block 402 could be protected in perpetuity, and managed appropriately for its conservation values as a closed-to-public reserve, while continuing the use by the lessee. This would be similar to the model used at Kinlyside.

At a minimum, an ecologically based, appropriate part of Stromlo Block 402 at the narrow, northern end of the proposed reserved area (Block 403, part Block 12), should be included in the nature reserve/nature reserve overlay, and an additional northern part of Stromlo Block 403 should be included in the nature reserve, for functional connectivity of the new reserve from Mt Stromlo into the Molonglo River Reserve corridor.

Canberra Birds can be contacted on: cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au.

Yours sincerely



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