

Terms of Reference

Investigation into Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); the Molonglo River Corridor; and Googong Foreshores

Background

An investigation is to be undertaken into the condition of land included in Canberra Nature Park, the Molonglo River Corridor and Googong Foreshores.

Canberra Nature Park, the Molonglo River Corridor and Googong Foreshores are important natural areas for the ACT that contain a diversity of ecosystem services and social values. They provide for, to varying degrees, biodiversity conservation, the maintenance of soil health and water quality, ecological connectivity, visual amenity, low-key recreational activities and education and research.

The Territory Plan defines the public land overlays for the nature reserves of Canberra Nature Park and the Molonglo River Corridor. The strategic objectives for management are provided in the *Planning and Development Act 2007* and in statutory management plans. The management objectives for Public Land Nature Reserve are primarily to conserve the natural environment and, secondarily, to provide for the public use of the area for recreation, education and research.

The Googong Foreshores are situated in NSW and are therefore not covered by ACT statutes. They are, however, subject to lease arrangements between the Commonwealth and the ACT Government.

The nature reserves of Canberra Nature Park, the Molonglo River Corridor and Googong Foreshores are managed by Parks, Conservation and Lands (PCL), an agency within the Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS). The rural areas in the ACT that adjoin nature reserves are generally managed under a rural lease subject to a Land Management Agreement (a mandatory requirement of the lease) or under an agistment licence issued by TAMS.

Canberra Nature Park

Canberra Nature Park is made up of 34 different land management units that occur in the undeveloped hills, ridges and buffer zones throughout Canberra. The management philosophy for Canberra Nature Park seeks to retain the generally undeveloped character of the reserves and to encourage rehabilitation of the natural environment and the protection of biodiversity values. While many units are of high conservation value containing threatened ecological communities and species and rare and unusual species, and providing ecological connectivity across the urban landscape of Canberra, other units are not.

The Molonglo River Corridor

The Molonglo River Corridor is made up of both nature reserves and a special purpose reserve. This investigation will focus on two nature reserves, which have been set aside for protection of the river corridor and its biodiversity values and for low-key recreational use. The reserves are situated at the northernmost and southernmost reaches of the river. The Molonglo Gorge Nature Reserve is situated near the Kowen Escarpment and the other reserve extends through the Lower Molonglo from Coppins Crossing to the junction with the Murrumbidgee River. There are also adjoining areas of leased Public Land Nature Reserve, which are of

high conservation value and are managed by rural lessees in conjunction with the Public Land Nature Reserve through a Land Management Agreement.

Googong Foreshores

Googong Foreshores constitute a 6,000 hectare parcel of land situated in NSW and managed by the ACT Government under a lease arrangement with the Commonwealth. Here the primary objective of land management is to protect and maintain the water supply of Googong Dam. Secondary objectives are to protect biodiversity and provide for low-key recreational use.

Terms of Reference

An investigation will be undertaken into Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores that:

1. assesses the condition of the forests, woodlands and grassy woodlands in these areas, including the effects of grazing by stock and/or kangaroos, vertebrate pests and weeds;
2. identifies actions to protect and enhance these areas, including land use or boundary changes while taking into account their purpose, values and location and the status of indigenous species and communities protected in the nature reserve system;
3. reviews existing land management programs and practices for these areas and areas that adjoin them. This is to include, but will not be limited to, agistment, leasing, culling arrangements, Land Management Agreements or plans of management which may apply;
4. identifies any urgent actions and longer-term changes that are needed to improve the management of these areas. This is to include identifying successful management measures that should be retained;
5. identifies knowledge gaps, research or survey needs, and compliance and monitoring requirements that may be necessary to support improved management programs and practices while taking into account the context of the areas and effects of climate variability;
6. identifies ways for ensuring effective communication and involvement of stakeholders, including Aboriginal people, whose actions potentially, indirectly or directly, affect these areas;
7. identifies potential biodiversity offset management actions or sites; and
8. identifies the evidence justifying the need for managing grazing pressure in the context of sound reserve management practices.

In undertaking the investigation, the Commissioner is to consult with all relevant experts and key stakeholders, including staff in TAMS and in the Department of the Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Water.

Note: The management of grassland nature reserves in Canberra Nature Park was recently reviewed as part of the Commissioner's inquiry into Lowland Grasslands of the ACT and will not be included in this study.