



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Local Government

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Dr Maxine Cooper
Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
PO Box 356
DICKSON ACT 2602

Dear Dr Cooper

Subject: ACT Lowland Native Grasslands Investigation

Thank you for your invitation of 30 November 2007 to provide comment on the investigation into the management of Lowland Native Grasslands in the ACT. I apologise for my delay in responding.

As you would be aware, the threatened ecological community known as Natural Temperate Grasslands (NTG) extends down the Majura Valley onto Canberra International Airport, situated on Commonwealth land. The NTG on the airport site is known to support the Grasslands Earless Dragon and the Golden Sun Moth, both threatened species listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the EPBC Act) and mentioned in the Terms of Reference for this investigation.

Management and conservation of the NTG and threatened species at the airport is guided by Canberra International Airport's (CIA) Airport Environment Strategy (AES), prepared in response to environmental management requirements within the *Airports Act 1996* and the *Airports (Environment Protection) Regulations 1997*. A copy of the AES is available on CIA's website (<http://www.canberraairport.com.au>). The AES is approved by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (the Minister) following the receipt of advice from the Minister for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. It is also common practice for the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) to consult the appropriate environmental bodies established in the relevant State/Territory for comments on each AES. CIA's current AES was approved on 1 June 2005 and has a five year life span.

The NTG and habitats for the above-mentioned threatened species are declared environmentally significant within CIA's AES, meaning that development of those areas cannot be undertaken without an approved Major Development Plan (MDP).

All MDPs received by the Minister are referred to the Minister for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts for advice, who may in turn seek comment from appropriate State/Territory environmental bodies. In addition, consultation guidelines produced by this Department for all Airport-Lessee Companies (including CIA) require that CIA make contact with the ACT Government in relation to MDP's.

If a development (including MDPs) will impact directly on a threatened species or ecological community, the proponent must also apply to the DEWHA for a Permit to Take under Part 13 of the EPBC Act.

All developments proposed by CIA must also be consistent with their Master Plan (MP), a broad scale planning document guiding development of the airport site over time. A new MP is required to be prepared every 5 years and providing a 20 year planning outlook. CIA currently has a proposed new Master Plan out for public comment (see website www.canberraairport.com.au). The public comment period closes on 26 February 2008. Your office may wish to consider submitting a formal comment to CIA.

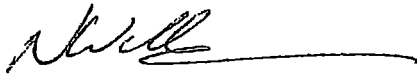
Prior to publicly displaying a new MP, AES or MDP, Canberra Airport is required to formally advise the Minister with responsibility for town planning and land use and the Territory authority with responsibility for town planning and land use of their intent to advertise. These documents are open for public comment for a period of 60 business days in which environmental groups and other interested stakeholders can make comment to CIA. When submitting the documents, CIA is required to demonstrate to the Minister that they have had due regard to the comments.

In approving a MDP for a runway extension in 2004, the then Minister for Transport and Regional Services required CIA, as a condition of approval, to prepare a Grassland Management Plan (GMP) to provide for long term growth and viability of the NTG across the airport site. The GMP was endorsed by the then Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) on 26 November 2004. As the consultations undertaken by CIA in the preparation of their 2004 AES included the then DEH, Environment ACT, Friends of Grasslands, the ACT Environment Commissioner and the Conservation Council for the ACT, many of these submissions supported the finalisation of the GMP. The GMP is available at nominal cost from the CIA management office.

The AES, MP and GMP combine to provide for the overarching management and protection of the NTG and associated threatened species habitats at CIA.

This Department employs an Airport Environment Officer (AEO) for each of the federally owned leased airports across Australia, including Canberra Airport. The AEO for Canberra works three days per week ensuring that the operation and development of the airport site is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Airports (Environment Protection) Regulations 1997 and in accordance with commitments made in CIA's AES.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Williams', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Neil Williams
General Manager
Airports Branch

22 February 2008