



Ginninderra Catchment Group

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

Dear Commissioner

The Ginninderra Catchment Group (GCG) and the Bush on the Boundary Reference Group (BOB) write this submission as a contribution to your inquiry into the management of grasslands in the ACT.

The GCG is the oldest, independent incorporated Catchment Group in the ACT with a strong record of achievement over 12 years. Working with its Landcare groups and the broader community within the Ginninderra Creek Catchment, the GCG has:

- implemented practical on-ground projects to improve the health of our catchment landscapes
- undertaken monitoring and investigations
- engaged and informed the community
- influenced policy making and management decisions

About 18 months ago the GCG was instrumental in establishing the Bush on the Boundary Reference Group (BOB) which brings together a wide range of community, government, research, academic and industry organisations including:

- GCG
- Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra
- TAMS (Wildlife and Research Monitoring)
- ANU (Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies)
- University of Canberra (Institute of Applied Ecology)
- CSIRO
- Greening Australia
- Invasive Animals CRC
- Canberra Ornithologists Group
- Friends of Grasslands
- Forde Development Group

BOB was established to:

- promote the Gungahlin bushland environment as an important part of our “bush capital”
- highlight the potential impacts of development and our urban lifestyles
- facilitate cooperation across a wide range of conservation projects (research, monitoring, education, restoration)
- create innovative opportunities to engage the community in helping to protect their natural heritage

The GCG and BOB gave a strong interest in and commitment to, the sustainable management of the ACT’s grasslands at a number of levels:

- as unique, but highly threatened ecosystems
- as an integral part of sustainable grazing enterprises in our rural areas
- as a possible future source of carbon sequestration
- as a vital element of our rapidly expanding urban landscape

The GCG and BOB understands the principle focus of your inquiry is the management of the grassland within the defense sites at Majura and Lawson. In that context, this submission primarily focuses on the Lawson site, within the Ginninderra Creek Catchment. However, the GCG and BOB believe your inquiry would also benefit from a broader consideration of other grassland management issues beyond these two sites.

By any fair assessment, the Lawson site is not being managed sustainably; particularly in terms of the grazing pressure being exerted by the in-situ kangaroo population. If this level of continual grazing pressure was being applied on any other Crown Land leased for commercial grazing purposes, action would have already been taken by the authorities to ensure de-stocking.

The GCG and BOB recognise that the issue of managing the kangaroo population is an emotive one; attracting passionate and often ill-informed debate within certain sections of the community. In that context government have the dual challenge of managing the debate and managing the kangaroos.

Observations made by a number of local Landcarers and other members of the community indicate that the kangaroos are attempting to graze during the day. This is not a natural habit of kangaroos where feed availability is adequate.

The GCG and BOB understand that the Chief Minister recently met with two key members of what has now become the “Limestone Plains Group” (LPG) to discuss measures to relieve the grazing pressure.

The principles established by the LPG to inform their work and give guidance to the ACT Government are fully supported by the GCG and BOB. Their principles particularly recognise that:

- the grasslands within the Lawson site are a unique and highly valuable ecological asset

- these natural temperature grasslands have been reduced to about 1% of their former area and have been classified as an endangered community
- native grasslands are the primary habitat for a wide range of grassland plants and animals some of which are listed as species threatened with extinction
- the grasslands within the Lawson site contain a range of threatened species including the Golden Sun Moth, the Perunga Grasshopper and the only known population of the Ginninderra Peppercross
- while kangaroos are natural grazers in grassy ecosystems, excessive and/or selective grazing will reduce habitat diversity and structure of the grasslands and further threaten the survival of endangered species and impact on long term ecosystem resilience.

From a broader catchment management perspective, the GCG and BOB are heartened by the fact that there is a gradual community re-awakening to the importance and benefits of well managed native grasslands; even in urban areas. The early settlers certainly recognised their grazing potential. Their historic accounts highlight just how extensive the native grasslands were within the catchment landscape, especially along Ginninderra Creek.

In our rush toward urbanisation and with a well intentioned (but somewhat misguided) focus on “Europeanising” the landscape, we lost sight of the broader ecological importance of our native grasslands.

What is now emerging is a realisation that well managed native grasslands have multiple benefits well beyond those recognised by the settlers. They have the potential to reduce the cost burden of weed control and reduce erosion and sedimentation.

Significantly, they can also reduce the threat posed by major fire events. They are the least fire-prone of any vegetation and will therefore minimise the damage from wildfire. When managed properly, native grasslands pose far less of a fire hazard than many people imagine.

For its part, the GCG is working to further re-awaken community awareness of native grasslands and develop techniques and management approaches which will enable native grasslands to extend well beyond those contained within the current Nature Reserves and the isolated remnants that exist in urban spaces. (Commissioner, you will recall our visit to our grassland restoration trial site at Croke Place, Evatt, during our recent catchment tour).

In that context and particularly recognising the principles outlined earlier, the GCG believes the native grassland assets contained within the defense sites and those within our current Nature Reserves must be managed as “exemplifiers” and promoted to the broader community.

The GCG and BOB therefore support the priority actions proposed by the LPG including in particular that:

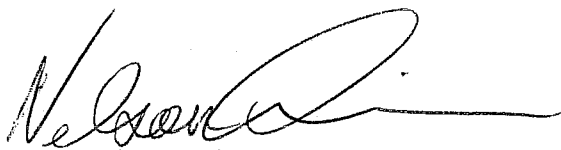
- the Lawson site must be actively managed for all of its ecological and catchment health values including supporting a population of kangaroos into the future
- all humane actions to achieve a stable kangaroo population must be urgently examined including fertility control
- robust monitoring programs must be put in place as part of an adaptive management approach to track the recovery of the grassland habitat and inform on-going management decisions
- monitoring results should be made available to key stakeholders
- the Lawson site should be designated as a Nature Reserve either under Commonwealth or ACT legislation
- action should be taken to establish a "Recovery Team" and a "Recovery Plan" under the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation ACT 1999.

In concluding this submission to your inquiry, the GCG and BOB would like to emphasise the need for governments and their agencies to reflect on their own inaction and/or misguided action as contributory threats to our grasslands, especially in the urban areas of our "bush capital". The current circumstances at Lawson and Majura highlight the need for this.

However, there are wider dimensions to this issue which extend beyond these defense sites; for example:

- inappropriate mowing regimes which suppress native grass development and favour the dominance of exotic species
- inappropriate use of "controlled burns" which have the same affect
- inadequate mower hygiene practices which spread highly invasive weeds like Chilean Needle Grass, African Love Grass and Serrated Tussock
- the removal and transport of "fill" and other related mechanical disturbances during road construction which spread invasive weeds.

The GCG and BOB welcome your inquiry, trust this submission proves a useful, constructive contribution and look forward to the inquiry outcomes.



Nelson Quinn
Convenor
Ginninderra Catchment Group