

REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

CONSULTATION REPORT

February 2012

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THIS PAPER REPORTS ON THE FINDINGS OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR THE NCOSS REVIEW CONDUCTED BETWEEN JULY AND OCTOBER 2011. IT IS PART OF AN INITIATIVE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA TO CONDUCT A SUSTAINED RESEARCH PROJECT INTO THE LANDSCAPE VALUES OF THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY.

The aim of this research project is to undertake a series of reviews that directly impact landscape values in the Australian Capital Territory. Through these reviews, the NCA will develop an understanding of the way in which the National Capital Plan (the Plan) ensures the landscape values of the National Capital are preserved and protected.

The structure of the NCOSS review ensures a rigorous assessment of the purpose of the NCOSS in the Plan. It seeks to determine protections provided within the Plan against community held values-established through the consultation process. The review will assist in determining what, if any, modifications might be made to the extent, management regime and protections of the NCOSS contained within the Plan to reflect contemporary practices and values.

The NCA's Commitment to Community Engagement requires that formal assistance for this review in the form of a reference panel is sought from representatives of key stakeholders. These include residents, community and special interest groups, industry, professional bodies, the ACT Government and the wider public. The reference panel will consider the findings of the consultation report and advise on the appropriate mechanisms for achieving the aspirations of the landscape objectives in the Plan. This consultation report will provide evidence to the reference panel that will inform the next stage of the review.

For more information please contact NCOSS@natcap.gov.au or call the NCA on 62712888.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY

When self-government was introduced in the Australian Capital Territory in 1989, the Federal Government established the National Capital Planning Authority to manage its continuing interest in the planning and development of Canberra as Australia's National Capital. On 1 July 1992 the Authority was given responsibility for managing National Land, and associated assets, required for the special purposes of the National Capital.

The National Capital Authority's (NCA) functions bring together into one agency, responsibility for the full range of functions which impact on the national qualities of the national capital – planning, design, commissioning key works, management and maintenance and the fostering of awareness. This combination of functions facilitates the continuing fulfillment of the Commonwealth's obligations in the capital. Under section 8 of the Act, the Authority has the power to do all things necessary or convenient to be done for or in connection with the performance of its functions.

The NCA is responsible for managing national land, which is used or intended for use for the special purposes of the national capital and the assets associated with the land.

In the Authority's view, urban land in the Territory should continue to be organised as a series of distinct and relatively self-contained towns separated from adjacent towns by hills, ridges and other major open spaces.

The National Capital Plan therefore provides for the continuation of urban development in the Territory as separate and distinct towns set in broad landscaped valleys, with the immediate hills, ridges and other major open space providing separation between towns and the distant mountains providing a natural landscape backdrop (NCP 2010; 84).

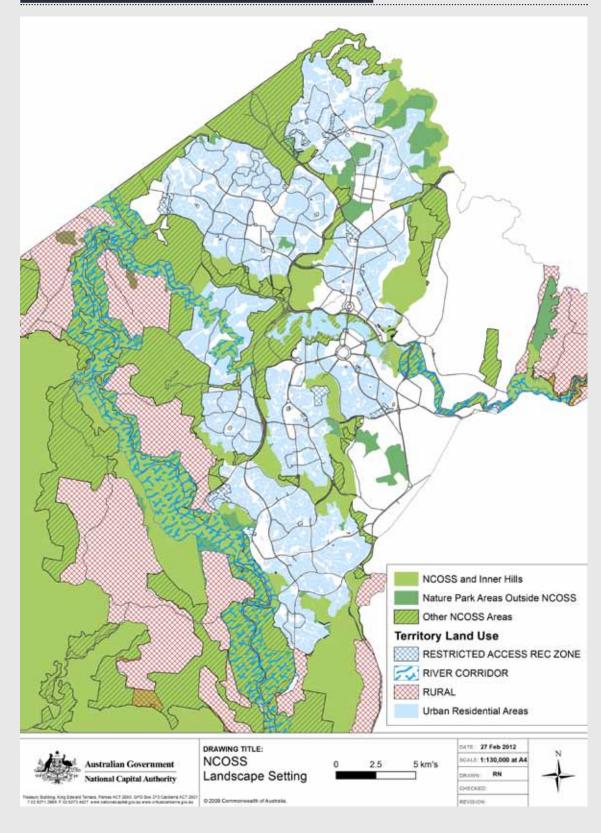
1. ABOUT THE NATIONAL CAPITAL OPEN SPACE SYSTEM (NCOSS)

The National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS) covers over 70 percent of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Its importance in defining the natural setting of Canberra is recognised by the formal adoption of the NCOSS into the National Capital Plan (the Plan).

The NCOSS was formally incorporated into planning regulation through a series of planning and policy reviews undertaken by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) during the 1970s and 80s. These reports identified the NCOSS for its amenity and recreation value for residents and visiting tourists. Today the NCOSS has four main identified functions:

- > Symbolic space: the NCOSS incorporates the key symbolic elements of the gazetted 1925 plan based on the Griffin's design for the city, and provides the settings for the major national cultural institutions in the Central National Area. The larger landscape setting of the 'bush capital' is regarded as an important symbolic element of the city's urban structure, with significance for the people of Australia as well as the local population.
- Living space: landscape amenity for recreation was considered particularly important in the development of the NCOSS following the 1964 Commonwealth recognition of areas of special national concern. At the time, neighbourhood planning included the provision of a minimum area of open space per person in a suburb. This open space provision is still considered an important community amenity, as the recent NCOSS review's survey responses show.
- Linking space: legislation regarding the NCOSS restricts development within it. In doing so, the NCOSS enshrines the cultural view of Canberra as a city in the landscape. In linking 'the city with the country', the fingers of urban open space provide views into and out of the city (if only from particular elevated vantage points) and frame the suburban edge. This provides a clear urban boundary, a good fit with larger strategies of urban infill and consolidation. The concept of linking space relates closely to the notion of 'symbolic space' because it highlights the symbolic value of living in the 'bush capital' rather than capturing ecological values associated with the spatial structure of the open space network.
- Conservation space: this function provides a higher level of protection for specific areas designed to recognise heritage values. Today the landscape setting including the NCOSS offers a resilience buffer to natural and man-made change, and the NCOSS is increasingly understood in ecological terms of adaption, resilience, appropriation and flexibility.

FIGURE 1 NCOSS AREAS IN THE CANBERRA METROPOLITAN AREA.



2. THE REVIEW OF THE NCOSS

On 29 May 2010 the Chief Executive of the NCA, Gary Rake announced a review into the NCOSS at the NCA's second annual public forum. The NCOSS review will determine what role the NCOSS should play and whether the existing delineation of open space is appropriate in terms of efficient land use, meeting national sustainability objectives, and maintaining it's role in providing a landscape setting for the National Capital. The aim of this review is to establish principles for guiding land use and management for the NCOSS.

Amendments to the Plan concerning the NCOSS will have wide reaching impacts on the statutory and strategic planning functions of the NCA. The NCA is strongly committed to engaging with the Australian community. It recognises that inclusion and engagement, particularly at the early and formative stages of projects and proposals, are vital to building and maintaining community trust. This consultation report is the third stage of the NCOSS review. This review is part of a landscape research project undertaken in partnership with the University of Canberra. It examines the landscape values of the National Capital and how they are embodied into the Plan and operations of the NCA. The aim of this report is to identify the emerging themes, ideas and issues raised by the community through the NCOSS review consultation process.

This consultation report identifies the main themes emerging from the community consultation. It documents the comments, ideas and responses from a range of sources including:

- > stakeholder consultation
- > community comments and survey data
- > the major themes emerging from the formal submissions
- > responses to the emerging themes arising from the consultation.

3. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Between April and May 2011, 49 stakeholders (both groups and individuals) who may have an interest in the NCOSS were identified, 33 were able to be contacted and 22 individuals agreed to an hour long interview. Each stakeholder was invited to discuss matters with the NCA they considered relevant to the future of the NCOSS. Stakeholders were from a range of areas and included community organisations, recreational user groups, non government organisations, academics, professionals and other individuals engaged in planning, heritage, land management and conservation.

ORGANISATION* INVITED TO PARTICIPATE

- >> ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- >> ACT AIA
- >> ACT Ecological society
- » ACT PIA
- >> ACTPLA Molonglo development
- >> ACTPLA Urban design
- » AILA ACT
- >> ANBGardens
- >> AILA national
- >> ANU Fenner school
- >> ACT government architect
- >> ANU Fire ecology
- » Canberra Pedestrian Forum
- » CSIRO land and water
- >> CSIRO sustainable cities
- Pinnacle conservation group

- >> Friends of Aranda Bushland
- >> SERROC
- >> Greening Australia
- » ACT heritage council
- >> LDA ACT government
- » Molonglo catchment group
- >> National Arboretum
- >> National Heart Foundation ACT
- National Trust of Australia (ACT)
- >> Pedal Power ACT
- >> Friends of grasslands
- >> Property Council of Australia (ACT Division)
- >> UC Landscape Architecture program
- >> UC Planning program
- >> Adjunct professor UC
- * Individuals are not able to be identified for privacy reasons

The purpose of the interviews was to scope the range of issues to be addressed in a discussion paper intended to inform debate about the future of the NCOSS. The interview questions are at Appendix A.

A number of broad questions were asked to identify themes, ideas and issues that should be addressed in the review. The ideas, suggestions and comments from the interviewees were presented in the discussion paper released on 16 September 2011, as part of the Have Your Say consultation process. The following themes summarise the themes and issues raised.

4. IMPROVING, UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING THE NCOSS

Stakeholders were of the view that:

- There needs to be a better understanding the NCOSS as a complex system containing different landscape types that are managed and used by a number of different organisations and community groups.
- > There needs to be better mechanisms for information sharing in order to improve the management and shared responsibility of the system.
- Sovernance frameworks should be reviewed and modified as necessary to ensure a holistic approach to management of the NCOSS.
- > There is a need to better recognise the interconnectedness of the ecological processes and environmental flows that operate at different scales (regardless of planning and land management jurisdictional boundaries).
- > Mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure practices of different land managers and users don't

undermine specific landscape values such as open space connectivity, accessibility and enhancing biodiversity as well as broader values pertaining to national significance.

5. CLARIFYING THE LANDSCAPE VALUES OF THE NCOSS

Stakeholders provided feedback that the review should ensure that:

- > The community has a better understanding of the NCOSS's landscape values. These include agreed environmental values to do with biological function and ecological service provision but also other community held values to do with amenity, local identity, and recreation.
- > The landscape values are clearly articulated and understood in order to have a community discussion about how the NCOSS values are acknowledged and reflected in the Plan.
- > Historical, environmental and amenity perspectives are clearly identified to ensure that Plan better protects the NCOSS without unduly inhibiting innovative proposals for productive land use and appropriate development.

6. INCORPORATING MATTERS OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE INTO THE NCOSS

Comments from Stakeholders included:

- > The Plan should be clear on what constitutes national significance and what tests can be applied to ensure land managers and users are operating in the spirit of the values prescribed by the Plan.
- > From a management and land use perspective, impacts tend to be highly localised and concerning to the community most affected by proposals. Therefore the NCA's oversight of national significance should operate at different levels depending on the landscape type and its relationship to essential elements of the plan for Canberra.
- > The Plan should provide mechanisms to test what is the acceptable threshold for development impact on the NCOSS. It is important that the community is confident that the Plan can articulate what is achievable and sustainable at a local level.

7. ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY IN THE NCOSS

Stakeholders felt that:

- > It is important for the community to engage in the NCOSS in terms of appreciating its role as an urban design element and as a physical landscape.
- > The Plan should recognise that community access should be encouraged through appropriate development. Accessibility should be promoted so all Australians can appreciate and understand the symbolic, environmental and amenity values.
- > The NCA should promote a sense of stewardship and enable community groups to be more actively involved with the NCOSS land.

8. IMPROVING THE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS IN THE NCOSS

Comments received included:

- > The NCA should consider adopting the principle of subsidiarity to enable land users, the community and the ACT Government to effectively manage their responsibilities in the NCOSS without referring to the Plan on decisions that are not deemed to affect matters of national significance.
 - This approach reduces overlap and confusion as to what governance level is most capable of maintaining the NCOSS values with the resources available. It would also help to communicate more effectively the legislative responsibilities of agencies concerned with the planning and management of the NCOSS.
 - > This would enable the community to provide input into areas of the NCOSS that are of concern to them. This approach requires open dialogue between stakeholders and easily accessible and legible mapping of the NCOSS in order to reduce the risks of knowledge and skill gaps in the way the NCOSS is managed and protected.

9.INCORPORATING CHANGING NCOSS VALUES IN RELATION TO FUTURE CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECTIONS

It was noted that:

> The International Panel on Climate Change projections on global carbon emissions and associated temperature increase presents climate change scenarios that will impact on the landscapes in South Eastern Australia.

These impacts include; increased frequency and intensity of bush fires, threats to biodiversity, and changes in ground water flow associated with localised increases in intense storm events and longer dryer summers.

- > Climate change impacts on landscape structure are still unknown. As modeling and information processing improves, new information and impact scenarios will come to light.
- > From a planning perspective, these changes should be acknowledged as ongoing factors to inform future NCOSS values, management priorities and land use planning.

10. HAVE YOUR SAY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

On 17 September 2011, the discussion paper was released on the NCA's Have Your Say community engagement website. Consultation closed on 28 October 2011.

Given the scale and diversity of the NCOSS respondents were provided a range of opportunities to respond to the discussion paper via a survey (Attachment B) or through a discussion board hosted on the web site. The survey offered stakeholders the opportunity to provide additional comments on the NCOSS through a comments section at the bottom of the survey.

The Have Your Say community engagement website hosted by the NCA provided three ways for individuals and community organisations to provide responses to the NCOSS review. These included a survey (Appendix B) a short answer section at the bottom of the survey (Appendix C) and formal submissions to the discussion paper.

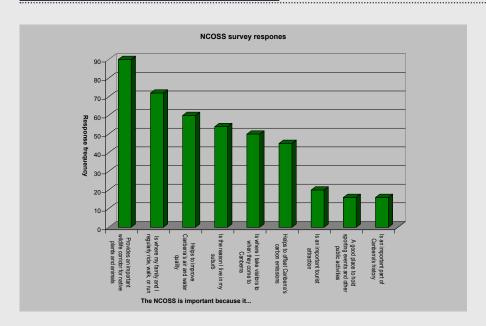
The website divided the NCOSS into 22 separate areas delineated by a colour coded shape and on screen information about each of the sites. This allowed respondents to comment on the part of the NCOSS that most interested or concerned them.

¹ Subsidiarity recognises the individual's or local organisation's ability and responsibility to act at their level of engagement in land management decisions. It de-emphasises the 'top down' approach of government. 25 EPLJ 164 [2008].

11. SURVEY RESULTS

The survey received 122 submissions with 423 votes. The frequency of responses indicated that there was a strong support for the ecological and recreational values of the NCOSS. The symbolic and economic values were not so prevalent. More broadly, the environmental values recorded the highest percentage of votes 46 percent followed by the social values 42 percent and symbolic or economic values 12 percent.

FIGURE 2 DATA FREQUENCY FOR NCOSS SURVEY.



12. SHORT ANSWER RESPONSES

43 short answer responses in addition to the votes were provided. 19 responses were recorded for the NCOSS as a whole and all other areas received three or fewer responses. The dominant themes emerging from the survey short answer responses included:

- > The *visual and symbolic importance* of the NCOSS to the overall look and feel of Canberra; in particular, the role of the NCOSS as a back drop and setting of national importance. The NCOSS reflects the vision of Griffin's original plan and makes Canberra unique. The NCOSS is an important part of our heritage.
- > The **bushland** close to the city centre makes Canberra much more liveable than many other cities. It provides a clear urban edge with easy access to nature and waterways for local residents.
- > The NCOSS makes Canberra a *sustainable environment* that provides many social and health benefits. However the future development of the city must not diminish the NCOSS values, in particular the scenic values. Urban densification may become a threat to visual and physical access to the NCOSS.
- > The NCOSS is an area *rich in biodiversity* and helps provide resilient spaces for plants and animals. It has rare and endangered ecological communities including yellow box –redgum grassy woodlands and temperate grasslands. Plantations and native trees need to be managed and restricted with better fire management plans. The overall environmental values of the NCOSS are at risk of being significantly degraded and need to be conserved and protected. Some important wildlife corridors have been damaged.

13. FORMAL SUBMISSIONS TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER

The NCA received 11 formal submissions from community organisations and individuals (Appendix D). The submissions covered a range of recurring themes. The following section identifies the main themes framed as issues requiring attention as identified by the respondents and a summary of how the NCA may address the statements or clarify the regulatory obligations of the NCA in meeting its responsibilities under the Plan.

13.1. (ISSUE) THAT THE NCA POLICIES IN THE PLAN SHOULD REFLECT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE, SOCIAL, ECOLOGICAL, SYMBOLIC AND SCENIC VALUES OF THE NCOSS.²

(NCA response) The NCA is required to continually review the Plan. The opportunity exists in the future to focus attention on the elements of the Plan that express the landscape values of the NCOSS. The values expressed in the NCOSS should be expressed in terms of national significance. That is, the NCOSS enjoys certain protections because it is, as an open space system, deemed nationally significant.

(NCA response) There is little doubt that the community understands and accepts that the NCOSS has historic, symbolic, social and ecological values that warrant its recognition in statutory instruments. However, in order to fully understand how those values should be analysed and tested, criteria should be established to determine whether a place or landscape setting is nationally significant. Therefore, the test for national significance applied to the Plan generally should apply to the NCOSS.

13.2. (ISSUE) THAT THE PLAN PROVIDES CLEAR MECHANISMS TO IDENTIFY HOW AND WHAT TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT CAN OCCUR IN OR ADJACENT TO THE NCOSS.³

(NCA response) Most of the NCOSS have special characteristics of the National Capital but are not owned or managed by the Australian Government. Providing an effective mechanism for maintaining national interests over the NCOSS while allowing other land users and stakeholders to undertake activity is essential.

13.3. (ISSUE)THAT THE NCOSS VALUES ARE AFFORDED STRONGER PROTECTION THROUGH LEGISLATION. THE NCOSS NEEDS TO BE DEFINED AND PROTECTED BY PRIMARY LEGISLATION. THE PROTECTION OF THE NCOSS IS ONLY GUARANTEED UNTIL THE PLAN IS AMENDED.⁴

(NCA response) The Plan protects the NCOSS to the extent that changes to the Plan require ministerial approval and a public consultation process. Any additional or revised legislation would only be considered if it could be demonstrated that the Plan could not protect those values.

13.4. (ISSUE) THAT THE NCA DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A COMPREHENSIVE LISTING AND INTEGRATED SPATIAL MAPPING OF SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL SITES.⁵

(NCA response) The NCA is currently developing an implementation strategy to fully integrate data into an online platform that is accessible. The key goals of a 3D platform is to improve editing capability, make updating identified sites much easier, and make information more accessible to NCA staff, professionals engaged to consult to the NCA and the public. Such a system would allow for easy importing of 3D information and other data into a parent model, allow for accurate query and feedback for a broader audience. It would also allow for the visualisation and distribution of existing and proposed developments in a virtual environment.

13.5. (ISSUE)THAT THE NCA PROVIDES CLEAR INFORMATION ABOUT GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS, INCLUDING MECHANISMS FOR REVIEW AND OVERSIGHT TO ENSURE THE VALUES OF THE NCOSS ARE KEPT UP TO DATE.⁶

(NCA response) Communications regarding the governance arrangements of the NCOSS could be developed in conjunction with the ACT Government and published by both.

² Submissions 1,2,4,5,6

³ Submissions 2,3,4,5,8,10

⁴ Submissions 4,6,7,11

⁵ Submissions 6,9

⁶ Submissions 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,10

13.6. (ISSUE)THAT THE NCA DEVELOPS A COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SOURCE FOR TOURISTS AND THE COMMUNITY TO UNDERSTAND THE VALUES AND CONTEXT OF THE NCOSS IN THE BROADER PLANNING OF THE CITY.⁷

(NCA response) The review could communicate NCOSS values more broadly as part of the NCA's move to developing a 3D platform mentioned previously. It would be an essential tool as part of the NCA's Commitment to Community Engagement as well as meetings its obligations under the Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988 to promote the significance of the National Capital.

13.7. (ISSUE) THAT THE NCA CLEARLY IDENTIFIES ITS LAND MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR DESIGNATED AND NATIONAL LAND IN THE NCOSS.⁸

(NCA response) Land management responsibility in the National Capital rests with either the Australian or ACT governments.

NCOSS areas under direct management of the NCA include Lake Burley Griffin and foreshore areas such as Yarramundi Reach. Other areas such as the inner hills are designated land managed by the ACT Government.

14. CONCLUSION

This stage of this project is to assess the relationship between the provisions of the Plan against community values. This will assist in determining what, if any, modifications to the extent, management regime or protections of the NCOSS contained within the Plan need to be undertaken to reflect contemporary thinking.

The NCA will appoint a reference group in 2012 to assist review the landscape objectives in the Plan and establish tests for those objectives. This approach is considered national best practice for incorporating landscape objectives into metropolitan planning in Australia⁹. This approach is also consistent with the NCA's Commitment to Community Engagement.

15. APPENDICES

A. Formal questions for stakeholder interviews conducted between April and May 2011.

- What should the NCA consider in a review of the NCOSS?
- > What impacts do you think a review of the NCOSS will have in relation to national significance?
- > What are the risks associated with changing the NCOSS?
- What are the benefits associated with changing the NCOSS?
- > What management tools could achieve a better relationship between future land use and the NCOSS?

B. NCOSS 'Have your say' survey questions. NCOSS area (select) is important to me because it:

- Helps offsets carbon emissions
- > Is an important wildlife habitat for endangered plants and animals
- Helps improve air and water quality
- > Is the reason I live nearby
- > Is where I take visitors when they come to Canberra
- > Is where I regularly ride, walk, or run
- > Is an important tourist attraction

⁷ Submissions 5,6,9,11

⁸ Submissions 2,5,7,8,9,11

⁹ Evans, C., Freestone, R. (2011) Policy Challenges for Metropolitan Greenspace in Sydney. State of Australian Cities Conference 29 November – 2 December Melbourne Australia.

- > Is a good place to hold sporting events and other public activities
- > Is an important part of Canberra's identity as the National Capital.

C. Short answer responses to the NCOSS 'Have your say' survey. The responses are organised into nine broad themes.

Visual

- > ...is important for the overall look and feel of Canberra
- > ...serves it original purpose in urban areas
- > ...provides a backdrop to urban vistas and "relief" from suburbia
- > ...is aesthetically pleasing; makes us different from Sydney
- > ...provides a natural and physical edge and green belt to urban expansion

Symbolic

- > ...provides the landscape backdrop for the National Capital
- > ...setting for the Plan of the National capital particularly the principles and values and vision of the Griffins' competition-winning Plan
- > These areas also help to define the character of living in the city
- > ...provides Canberra with a unique sense of world wide place and presence
- > It is, to my knowledge, almost unique in the world

Access

- ...provides access to a range of waterways
- > It is a social inclusive and accessible space.
- ...medium density living that has access to garden spaces also maintaining the city in the park element
- > Where else can one have easy access to bushland from the suburbs?
- > Open spaces close to everyone make Canberra much more liveable than other major cities
- > Beautiful dense bushland in the centre of Canberra
- > Provides important access to recreational fishing
- > Handy for Canberrans seeking access to wilderness

Amenity

- > Makes for a sustainable and enjoyable urban environment
- > ...has provided many community, social and health benefits
- > ...a delightful area to enjoy from an aesthetics and amenity perspective

Threat

- > ...recent developments ... jeopardise the green spaces that make Canberra what it is
- > Don't you DARE reduce the open spaces in Canberra?
- > This area needs to be managed for bushfires
- > ...need more access to surrounding areas
- > ...pine plantation, gum trees ...need to be managed and reduced with better fire management plans
- > ...it is at risk of being significantly degraded. It needs to be conserved and protected
- > ...important wildlife corridor has been fundamentally damaged

Recreation

- > Molonglo Valley provides huge health, social, recreational and tourism benefits
- > Provides a unique area to walk/run, ride horses, and use a world class MTB park
- > ...as a recreation space and as a way for people to enjoy our natural systems

Ecological

- > Such a rich area should be preserved for all times
- > ...helps to provide resilience for non-human species
- > Provides a significant area of natural vegetation
- > It is also of enormous ecological value
- > Red hill has Yellow-Box Red Gum Grassy Woodland and endangered ecosystem!!!
- > Have important ecological values, including threatened birds, a plant and the endangered Box-Gum woodland
- > Has important ecological values, including the endangered Natural Temperate Grassland

Nature

- > ...it is the bush and the spaces that give the city character
- > I chose Canberra ...to get some closeness to nature whilst still being able to find employment
- > I have a new appreciation for the open spaces in Canberra.... [I] has many fond memories of spending time there with family and friends
- > Heritage
- ...an important part of our heritage.

D. List of organisations and respondents that provided submissions to the NCOSS discussion paper.

1. Jane Hedges

Secretary: Government Paddock User Group

2. Beth Sloane

Secretary: ACT Equestrian Association

3. Sherry McArdle-English

ACT Rural Landholders Association

- 4. Leslie Kelety
- 5. Dr Gary Scott
- 6. Bethany Lance

Research Officer the ACT National Trust

- 7. M.J.Sim
- 8. Gary Kent

Acting Chair Inner South Community Council

- 9. Dr John Gray OAM
- 10. Tony Adams

Senior Director Town Planning

11. Max Kwiatkowski

Committee Member Weston Creek Community Council

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