



# Friends of Grasslands

*supporting native grassy ecosystems*

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## Tidbinbilla New Management Plan Discussion Paper

Friends of Grasslands (FOG) has prepared the attached comments on the *Tidbinbilla, New Management Plan Discussion Paper*.

Generally, FOG supports the developments that have taken place so far to integrate the management of Tidbinbilla, Birrigai and Jedbinbilla. However, it has an open mind regarding whether there should be further integration of Namadji NP and the expanded Tidbinbilla.

FOG considers that the first twelve pages of the discussion paper generally state the framework and principal considerations appropriately. However, it has major concerns about statement made on page 13, on which we would like the following comments:

1. To conservation minded people, the word **balance** is red rag to a bull because it is often trotted out in proposals that propose to destroy natural vegetation and ecological function. FOG believes any developments can be undertaken in such a way so as to maintain ecological function and structure and vegetation and habitat. That is, **we should be posing, the question: how can we undertake certain developments without destroying natural assets**. FOG considers that there can be recreational facilities, children's play areas, etc., but these should not be at the expense of the natural assets.
2. Obviously, there will be occasions where a patch of natural vegetation may need to be cleared. Here the guiding principle is **no net loss**. This principle is well established and its adoption should ensure that at the end of the day, nothing is lost. This principle is likely to be enshrined in the revised *Nature Conservation Act*.
3. The **concept of zoning in such a situation is appalling**. The concept of zoning lowland as urban in Canberra planning has resulted in native grasslands in valley floors being destroyed. Native vegetation in valleys floors is typically natural temperate grasslands, a threatened ecological community, and on the lower slopes box woodlands, also a threatened ecological community. If one wants to meet the other objectives set forth in the discussion paper, then clearly the protection of remnant native vegetation in valley floors is essential.
4. Much of the area in the valley floors likely comprises **natural temperate grasslands**. **Destruction of such areas**, or major works which impinge on such areas, cannot be undertaken without approval **under the *Environmental Protection and***

**Biodiversity Act.** It is disappointing that this is not mentioned in the discussion paper.

5. Finally, if an area is zoned and developed without ensuring that buildings and facilities fit into the landscape, then an appalling design could result.

FOG values the historic role of Tidbinbilla in providing good access to wet and dry sclerophyll forests close to Canberra, and providing families with the opportunity to see a variety of native fauna. One important feature was the number of enjoyable short and longer walks within the Reserve, which have not yet been re-opened. We would like to see them re-opened. In FOG's view any additional developments that might be contemplated should not be at the expense of the traditional uses of Tidbinbilla, nor should they compromise those uses.

Answers to particular questions in the discussion paper are included in the attachment.

FOG is a community group dedicated to the conservation of natural temperate grassy ecosystems in south-eastern Australia. FOG advocates, educates and advises on matters to do with conservation of grassy ecosystems, and carries out surveys and other on-ground work. FOG is based in Canberra and its approx. 200 members include professional scientists, landowners, land managers and interested members of the public.

Faithfully yours

Geoff Robertson  
President  
25 February 2009

## ATTACHMENT

Answers to particular questions:

### **Issues relating to natural values**

*Q. To what degree should natural processes be allowed to determine the future natural environment of Tidbinbilla? Are there special attributes at risk that need to be maintained and require a special management effort?*

A. Generally natural processes should be allowed to take their course, but there is a need to develop threat mitigation plans. FOG is happy to be consulted on the particulars of any approach.

*Q The open grassy areas of the valley floor of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve are largely a legacy of early farming enterprises. They have proven to be a valued landscape element and a suitable place for the development of management infrastructure and visitor services. Over the last thirty years or so, the natural kangaroo population has flourished to excess and the native burgan shrub (*Kunzea ericoides*) is becoming a dominant element of the once open grasslands. What do we want the valley floor of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve to look like in the future? What ecological values are Tidbinbilla threatened by excessive kangaroo numbers and the spread of burgan? Is a special management effort warranted to maintain these values?*

A. Long term, the plan should be to return valley floors to function as natural temperate grasslands. Kangaroo numbers need to be managed appropriately as for any other threats such as excessive burgan.

*Q. Are the management objectives for Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, as set out in the 1999 plan of management, still relevant? Do they need modification or augmentation?*

A. FOG is not particularly familiar with that plan or its operation. Much has been learnt in the last ten years. Overall, the emphasis should be to return areas to function and vegetation as existed before white settlement.

*Q Jedbinbilla was previously a pine plantation and is being returned to native vegetation. What should Jedbinbilla look like in 50 to 100 years time? Are there natural values that should receive special management attention? What risks need to be managed to achieve a preferred long-term outcome?*

A. Should be encouraged to return to previous vegetation which would have been grasslands, woodland and dry forests, etc.

*Q. What is the potential for and value of re-introducing native species to Tidbinbilla that have become locally extinct? Can the considerable investment required be justified?*

A. FOG would support the concept, subject to its feasibility.

*Q. The risks to built assets and public safety associated with wildfire impose certain management obligations in relation to fuel hazard management ranging from maintaining cleared areas around places of public use to a program of fuel reduction burns in mature vegetation. How can we best service these requirements and balance them against an ecologically-based fire regime that is tailored to meet the conservation needs of plant and animal communities?*

A. FOG supports keeping areas cleared around built assets, especially from fire risk. Obviously, built assets should be placed in such a way that the need for vegetation clearance is minimised. FOG has failed to be convinced that fuel reduction programs serve any useful purpose, especially in reducing fire risk.

### **Issues relating to Aboriginal cultural heritage values**

FOG believes that the questions raised need to be addressed by the local indigenous people and FOG has no particular competence to comment on them. However, FOG would like to be given any report on answers given to such questions.

### ***Issues relating to European cultural heritage values***

FOG believes that it has no particular expertise in this matter and defers to the opinions of those who are more expert.

### ***Issues relating to landscape values***

*Q. Should attempts be made to recreate the pre-existing residential landscape precincts of European occupation?*

A. FOG's answer is generally no. However, there may be little difference between early European and pre-European landscapes and so both perspectives could be adopted.

*Q. New developments will permanently change local landscapes and, if in prominent places, the broad acre landscape. To what degree are these impacts acceptable and what is the best way of minimising them?*

A. FOG questions the need for developments that may greatly impact on the landscape and urges that their location and design be undertaken in such a way as to minimise impacts.

### ***Issues relating to educational values***

The education function of Birrigai/Tidbinbilla is very important and valuable. Both day and longer activities should be encouraged. The existing facilities provide a good base for providing such opportunities.

Most of these questions are beyond FOG's competence to answer. However, an observation is that both Birrigai and Tidbinbilla operate successfully and that there are some synergies in an integrated landscape and vegetation management. However, in reality they serve different functions and by road they are some distance apart. Therefore, there is no need to try to push the education functions of the two institutions together. FOG does not believe that additional internal roads linking the two areas would be desirable.

### ***Issues relating to scientific research values***

*Q. Is private sector participation (for example, corporate sponsorship) a useful line of endeavour to pursue? Are there any good examples of collaborative arrangements of this kind that could serve as a benchmark?*

Maybe.

*Q. To what degree could Tidbinbilla become the centre for all ACT Government environmental research? Are there logistical/geographical limitations?*

A. Tidbinbilla should not be the centre of ACT environmental research. Its remote location is one factor. Also certain research should be centred close to lowland grassland and woodland.

*Q. Are there any constraints that should be placed on the scope and type of research undertaken?*

No comment.

*Q. High-speed, high-quality communication links are fundamental to good scientific research (as well as routine administration and management). Telecommunication and internet links from Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Birrigai are poor. What are the best options to pursue to remedy this situation?*

No comment.

### ***Issues related to recreational values***

*Q. Where does Tidbinbilla sit in relation to other areas and facilities within the ACT and surrounding region that provide for recreation? Does it offer special opportunities not available elsewhere?*

A. It provides some special but limited opportunities for environmental related recreation.

*Q. What activities should not be provided for? Are there more suitable and appropriate venues available?*

A. Any new function should be considered carefully, especially in terms of their economic return and environmental impacts and their impact on existing activities.

*Q To what degree can the recreation opportunities along the adjacent Corin Dam Road and at the commercial Corin Forest Mountain Resort supplement or complement those of Tidbinbilla?*

A. Nil.

***Issues relating to tourism values***

FOG would advise cautious exploration of any tourist development. Certainly any development should not impact adversely on the biodiversity and it should provide a genuine economic return (actual government revenue) for any investment.