



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Leanne Castley MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism in the ACT

Submission Number: 3

Date Authorised for Publication: 15 February 2022



Friends of Grasslands

supporting native grassy ecosystems

PO Box 440, Jamison Centre ACT 2614

web: <http://www.fog.org.au>

Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change, and Biodiversity
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Email: LCommitteeECCB@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism

Friends of Grasslands (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 the conservation of grassy ecosystems, and carries out surveys and other on-ground work. FOG is based in Canberra and its members include professional scientists, landowners, land managers and interested members of the public.

Terms of reference 1: type and nature of environmental volunteerism

For almost 30 years FOG's vision has been to protect and conserve our unique native grassy ecosystems (see attachment). We have done so by undertaking a range of volunteer activities which include:

- Advocacy, e.g. by responding to invitations for comment on specific development projects; commenting on strategies, plans and other documents relating to grassy ecosystems; putting our views on legislative issues and how well they protect our biodiversity; providing support for listing of threatened flora and fauna
- On-ground work on a number of high conservation value sites in the ACT, e.g. Blue Gum Point, Hall Cemetery, Budjan Galindji, Yarramundi Reach and Stirling Park (see our website at <http://www.fog.org.au/activities.htm> for more information about these activities)
- Providing help to landowners and grassy ecosystem managers by way of informal assessments of their sites and a small grant program
- Surveys and monitoring of public conservation efforts
- Education programs, including workshops and a high quality newsletter
- Community liaison on all aspects of grassy ecosystem conservation

Terms of reference 2: opportunities to improve environmental volunteerism

FOG would support any program that would "improve environmental volunteerism in the ACT, including encouraging the involvement of young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and improve community stewardship".

However, to achieve this, the government needs to

- raise the profile of nature in our city;
- provide a vision of what could be achieved (such as restoration of our threatened ecosystems and species) on and off reserves;
- plan to convert large areas dominated by feral grasses (with their associated health (allergies), weed and fire risk) using indigenous grasses and wildflower vegetation; and
- resource a program of First Nations land management principles and practices in the management of our vegetation.

All these policies are already practiced in at least some form. However, the government also needs to stress through the media what is occurring, commit to greater resourcing of nature management and stress the joy and ethic of community and individual stewardship. Simply, if government wishes to encourage volunteerism it should, leading by example, make nature management a priority.

Terms of reference 3: managing relationships

Volunteer groups like FOG operate purely on a voluntary basis with mutual sharing of decision making, training and participation. When working with government and other partners, our aims are to choose what tools and herbicides to use (these are normally supplied by the partner); to enter into a proper understanding (or memorandum of understanding) with the partner; to arrange for the partner to supply professional work teams to do the heavy lifting (while FOG provides land management expertise and finely tune on-ground work). This approach works well for us.

Currently in ACT there are a plethora of government units and governance arrangements concerned with land management – Parkcare, Landcare, TCCS groups, Catchment Groups, ACT Cemeteries Trust, and National Capital Authority. In addition FOG has arrangements with the Ginninderry Trust, Bush Heritage Australia and universities for on-ground and training projects. This may or may not be a good thing. However, we have found that differing risk management approaches by different government units, and unnecessary restrictions on what volunteers may or may not do (even volunteers with current and documented training and experience) can lead to inconsistent and/or very restrictive rules which may be inefficient and frustrating in our land-management efforts.

Terms of reference 4: impact of current policy or regulatory settings

FOG has over many years made submissions stressing the need for government to do more on biodiversity and do it better. Examples include creation of a unit with Bush Regeneration skills; creation of seed orchards; community and school education programs on practical (local) biodiversity; better mowing protocols; development and publication of properly formed biodiversity statistics and indicators for monitoring of effort; and integration of biodiversity opportunities in open spaces. However, it is our view that the lack of a simple clear vision of protecting grassland biodiversity has resulted in increments and amendments to programs rather than a clear commitment by government on these matters.

Another issue is that of providing better long term protection to sites of conservation value so that volunteers will feel confident that their on-ground work is of long-term benefit.

FOG would be pleased to elaborate on any of these issues if requested.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Naarilla Hirsch.

Naarilla Hirsch
Advocacy coordinator

5 February 2022

Attachment: FOG's vision

Healthy, biodiverse and connected remnant native grassy ecosystems continue to support life on Earth.

FOG will achieve this vision by:

- Acting to halt the decline of native grassy ecosystems, and their biodiversity and achieve the maximum level of recovery possible.
- Promoting and facilitating protection of the biodiversity of grassy ecosystems within and across the landscape.
- Recognising the need for community stewardship of these ecosystems, thereby continuing the cultural care provided by the Aboriginal peoples for millennia.
- Respecting the views and knowledge of all stakeholders and working with them to achieve our vision.
- Facilitating implementation of best practice management and encourage development of methods to improve conservation through hands-on application, research, education, strategic planning and monitoring.
- Advocating for effective environmental laws, enforcement mechanisms, planning and management underpin protection and conservation of native grassy ecosystems.

Rationale:

Native ecosystems and their biodiversity have intrinsic value.

Resilient native ecosystems are vital to our physical well-being through the provision of ecosystem services.

Human connections and interaction with nature and biodiversity are vital to our mental well-being.

The cultural traditions of Aboriginal peoples underpin our unique native habitats and guide the principles and implementation of sustainable and conservative use of our grassy ecosystems within the broader landscape.

Biodiversity cannot be sustained in isolated remnants.