

Review of the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* – Discussion Paper

It is important, as stated in the Executive Summary and Introduction to the Discussion Paper, that any issues that will be addressed as part of the review of the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* are done so within the broader environmental, social and economic objectives of the Territory. Biodiversity and ecological processes, conservation objectives and nature conservation regulation should not be considered in isolation of the triple bottom line.

Part One: Major Conservation Issues

1. Connectivity and landscape functioning

It is noted that this section of the review focuses on reorienting management objectives from preserving all species in their current locations towards maintaining the provision of ecosystems via well functioning and connected ecosystems, i.e. wildlife corridors linking core nature conservation areas.

It is important, however, that identification of core conservation areas and the connecting corridors is undertaken at a strategic level, considering the regional landscape, and with sufficient scientific rigour to support the recommendations. It is understood from the Discussion Paper that the Territory and the ANU are in the process of identifying such areas of importance; however, it is not clear from the documentation the level of scientific research that has gone into mapping these areas. Also, it is impossible to determine, from the scale of Figure 3, the potential impact that the identified conservation areas and corridors may pose on the urban and future open areas of the ACT.

It will be necessary that the translation of this work into the planning framework is done so with regard to the broader environmental, social and economic issues facing the ACT, i.e. at the strategic planning level. For future urban areas this would most appropriately be considered and agreed to at the structure and concept planning stages where land can be zoned for conservation purposes, whether in formal reserves or appropriate 'low impact urban living' zones with conservation as a primary outcome. In this regard, biocertification, similar to the NSW system, would provide the framework and certainty that is needed. The identification of the strategic corridors and core conservation areas would also provide the context for a biodiversity offsets policy, directing reservation and management priorities to specific locations at the structure and concept planning stages.

It is considered that the identification of core conservation areas and connecting wildlife corridors as a strategic exercise, and incorporated where relevant into the Territory Plan via the structure and concept planning processes, is a sensible approach which should ensure a more strategic approach to conservation outcomes and provide certainty to the development industry.

2. Halting vegetation and habitat decline

This section of the Discussion Paper focuses on whether tighter controls in relation to vegetation clearance are needed. Of equal concern is the management of land once it is in the reserve system to ensure that the quality of the vegetation and habitat does not decline over time. Sufficient resources, both human and financial, need to be directed towards reserves to ensure, at the very least, their conservation value does not deteriorate. In this regard, it is important that in nominating areas of core conservation value and the connecting wildlife corridors, consideration has been given to the sustainability of the patch/corridor and the level of management/intervention that will be needed to ensure the sustainability.

4. Managing the urban bushland edge

It is suggested that the urban bushland interface can be well managed through appropriate urban design measures, including the provision of edge roads/management tracks to open space (no properties sharing a boundary with the bushland); boundary fencing/walls/retaining walls, landscape planting, formalised entry points. Another alternative may be to introduce 'low impact urban living', adjacent to reserved bushland areas. These larger lots, where conservation is a primary outcome of the lease provisions for the block, would engender a sense of responsibility for any adjacent bushland.

In relation to bushfire management at the urban bushland edge, it is important that outer asset protection zones are allowed and responsibly managed in this 'non-urban' land.