



Australian Native Plants Society Canberra Region Inc.

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Chief Executive
National Capital Authority
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Dear Manager

RE: Draft Amendment 95 - Variation to Territory Plan - North Curtin Diplomatic Estate and Urban Area

The ANPS was established in 1962. ANPS is a non-profit, voluntary community organisation dedicated to the growing, conservation, preservation, promotion and appreciation of Australian native plants. ANPS has over 270 members, including many working in a professional capacity in many spheres related to native plants (e.g. ecology, botany, horticulture and entomology) as well as other closely related scientific disciplines. ANPS also has a large number of members that actively participate in society activities.

The ANPS constitution prominently advocates activity in conservation through the promotion of the conservation of Australian plants and their habitats, and observing and support for requirements under State, Territory and National laws related to the preservation of Australian native plants and ecosystems.

ANPS recognises that urban areas and urban open space (in a similar way to dedicated nature reserves) are capable of being utilised and managed for wildlife sustainability purposes, and that any new infill or greenfield developments should be carefully planned and/or have strategic plans in place to maintain existing habitat(s), and re-instate or rebuild habitat over time. The North Curtin Diplomatic Estate and Urban area is a good example of where retention of some current habitat and rebuilding of habitat over time could, and should, apply. Such forward planning will make our cities more sustainable.

We have reviewed Draft Variation 95 (NCA 2020) for the preparation of this correspondence.

Assessment

Block 4 Section 106 and part Block 5 Section 121 Curtin was visited on the 6 June 2020. The intention of the visit was to view the vegetation, particularly the native vegetation on the site, and assess whether it is of a quality that should warrant conservation, and the reasons for conserving it.

Plantations

The greater percentage of the plantations on the site are of exotic origin. There are 5 areas of native plantations, marked in yellow in the image below.



Most of the plantations have not been well maintained and need attention. Some of the exotic species (e.g. various *Populus* species) are on the ACT invasive species schedule, while others (e.g. *Ulmus* and *Pinus radiata*) are known environmental weeds.

In discussion with a colleague from the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG), we have been advised that one of their members who lives closeby has recorded some 169 bird species (including 14 threatened species) associated with this site over some 27 years of observations. This reveals that the plantation vegetation of the area as being a significant movement corridor, somewhat enhanced due to the presence of Yarralumla Creek which joins the Molonglo River to the north, for seasonal migration from the higher country to the west of the ACT to lower elevations in Canberra and to the east. It is therefore important that this seasonal migration activity be a major consideration in the future development of the site, retaining as many existing trees as possible.

Pastures

The areas of pasture are highly degraded. Scattered occurrences of African Love Grass, St John's Wort, Paterson's Curse and Blackberry, amongst numerous other invasive plant species, occur across the area. COG observations have shown many insectivorous bird species utilising the pastures as a food source. Even so, the quality of the pastures have limited to no real value with regard to the presence of local native flora species.

Planning for the site

ANPS would appreciate normal pre-development environmental planning reportage for the site, especially as a number of threatened and declining bird species have been noted over 27 years of regular monitoring.

Every effort should be made to retain mature trees, native and exotic, due to their obvious value as an aerial corridor and the shelter and potential food sources they provide. Permanent retention of the native tree plantations is recommended. Unfortunately, the native trees have been overplanted (i.e. too close together), which has disadvantaged some specimens. All trees need some arboricultural attention, which may include some removals to allow others to develop with less competition.

There were a number of shrubs/small trees planted as an understorey in the native plantations, but under competition and dry conditions most are in severe decline or have died. Most of the acacias have deteriorated and will need replacement, though the Callistemon may recover if simply cut back hard to ground level.

In order to make the city more sustainable over time, all new infill and greenfield developments should examine what opportunity(s) may become available to improve habitat for wildlife. While it may be necessary to retain the exotic trees as part of the aerial corridor for the time being, ANPS recommends that as these trees deteriorate, they should be replaced with scattered (open woodland formation) native trees. This is especially so of those exotic trees that are on the ACT invasive plants schedule. The Yarralumla Creek corridor is an obvious area for such a habitat improvement over time. This corridor is a substantial size, and urban development opportunities are not possible. Gradual conversion to native species will not only provide higher quality habitat, but eliminate potential spread of these exotic invasive species locally and downstream, especially to the Molonglo/Murrumbidgee river system. There is not reason why forward plantings of native trees cannot be undertaken so they have time to develop prior to remove of invasive species.

Opportunity might also be taken to examine some of the "hard" works which currently afflict Yarralumla Creek. ANPS presumes that the creek will be the destination for stormwater from the site, offering opportunity for off-creek sedimentation ponds and potentially re-examining the need for some of the hard wall lining of the creek.

ANPS thanks the NCA for an opportunity to comment on this draft variation. If you wish to discuss any aspect of our submission, we will be happy to do so.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Butler
for
Lucinda Royston
President