



16 May 2025

## **NPA submission on the Review of the Jerrabomberra Wetlands Plan of Management 2024**

### **Introduction**

The National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA) is a community-based conservation organisation with more than 60-years of involvement in the protection of parks and reserves in the ACT and surrounding areas through an active program of walks, work parties, publications, advocacy, and support for scientific research.

In recent years NPA has become more involved in the Jerrabomberra Wetlands (the Wetlands). We have organised popular walks with Aaron Chatfield of Dreamtime Connections to introduce members to native plants and their uses. We have held our Christmas parties on the lawns adjacent to the Education Centre for the last two years, and members have been involved in bird counts and Friends of the Wetlands activities.

NPA has repeatedly raised with the ACT Government and ministers the issue of recognising only the Ngunnawal people as traditional owners. NPA understood that after the 2022 Supreme Court case and the ACT Government's apology to the Ngambri people in April 2023 that there would also be greater recognition of the Ngambri people as traditional owners. There is no evidence of this in the review, and it should be addressed in the revised management plan.

We commend EPSDD for the quality of the review, which addresses many of the changes and challenges of managing the Wetlands. However, some issues are not addressed in sufficient detail, particularly the impact of East Lake Place and the significant nearby population increase, and cycle path and walker access. We address these issues in more detail below.

This submission is based on input from our members and my own knowledge of the Wetlands for more than 20 years as a cyclist, walker and birdwatcher. As an inner-south resident, I have seen the impact of

the Kingston Foreshore developments on visitor numbers and usage of the area. Growing up in the area in the '60s I remember the area as dairy farms and a tip site with a creek running through it. It is gratifying to see how the area is now managed.

### **Management of the wetlands, plans and more**

The management of the Wetlands has challenges, not least from NPA's perspective of who manages them. In the Introduction, PCS is acknowledged as the land custodian and, in the same section, it is stated that the Woodlands and Wetlands Trusts

*works cooperatively with the ACT PCS to support reserve management, focusing on education, outreach and research, and raising funds to help enhance the values of the reserve.*

NPA is concerned about the Trust's role and whether the funding provided to the Trust and its engagement are the most efficient way to manage this significant reserve with internationally recognised values.

It is difficult to understand how effective the Trust's work is when there are no regular staff on site. NPA's liaison over the last couple of years for activities at the site has been with PCS rangers: there has been no Trust staff at the site.

NPA is also concerned that the Trust is likely to have a major role in the proposed visitor centre at the site, and that it will be modelled on Wildbark at Mulligans Flat. When Wildbark opened we naively assumed it would be similar to the Namadgi Visitor Centre, where we had occasional access to facilities as quid pro quo for our support for Parks. When we requested a booking of a room for a Christmas party at Wildbark, we were offered a discounted rate of \$400 for room booking only, if we did our own catering. We used Wildbark only once but not again as that is beyond our budget. It would be a shame if a visitor centre at the Wetlands did not have facilities that would be available at no cost to community and volunteer groups who use the area.

NPA is also concerned whether this arrangement with the Trust has resulted in the ACT Government providing insufficient funds for staff and

resources for PCS to manage the Wetlands. This includes managing the natural and cultural values of the site and undertaking significant works such as vegetation management, is undertaken by PCS. (p. 14). There are significant visitor management issues, particularly on weekends with the mix of cyclists, walkers and dogs on the main through tracks, which could be effectively managed with rangers on site. The Trust's role in managing the cultural heritage values of the site, including Aboriginal, early settler and war history, is unclear. If this is PCS's responsibility, is this work sufficiently funded?

### **Visitor facilities, walking path and cycleway.**

There are currently few visitor facilities other than picnic tables adjacent to the main carpark off Dairy Road. The need for toilets in this area can be clearly seen in the toilet paper left in the reserve close to the main parking area off Dairy Road and near the bird hides.

The housing proposed for East Lake Place is for around 20,000 people, and a similar number of houses will be built in the development proposal for the former Canberra Milk site. An additional 30,000 to 40,000 people living close to the Wetlands will inevitably result in more visitors.

The shared path is a problem. The path is a major cycleway used for commuting and recreation, including those doing a lake circuit. It is also the only paved path for people with mobility impairments, so there is huge conflict of purpose here. The gravel path should be upgraded and paved to allow wheelchair and walker access away from the cycle path. A dedicated cycleway separate from any pedestrian access should be considered. The current cycleway uses narrowing and tight curves to slow cyclists, but often to limited effect.

The increase of more than 50,000 cyclists on the shared park bridge (based on cyclists using it for return journey) from 2022 to 2023 should highlight the need to address the issue of shared walkways/cycleways.

The review makes no mention of the ACT Active Travel Plan, released by the ACT Government in 2023. Why not?

The East Lake Place Plan makes references (pp.56, 66) to the ACT Active Travel Network. These references and the map (p.66) of this plan highlight the cycle path through the Wetlands as an existing principal route.

## **Dogs**

Although the review implies (p.20) that dogs are managed through 'no dogs allowed' signs and an occasional interview by a ranger, this is often not effective. Over the past couple of years, I have regularly asked EPSDD, without success, to improve the 'no dogs allowed' signage after regularly seeing people with dogs on the main pathway. Some of them told me that they were unaware that dogs were not allowed. This is particularly the case if people access the Wetlands directly from the Healthy Waterways area off Eyre Street. There are no signs on walking tracks connecting the two areas that dogs are not permitted in the Wetlands. There needs to be better and more prominent signs at all entrance areas to the Wetlands.

## **Cultural heritage**

The review notes that the wetlands are 'largely a cultural landscape' – and that is Ngunnawal (and should also be Ngambri) people. There are also the stories of the dairy farmers and changing European use and management of the area. There are still Canberra residents who were dairy farmers. As they are ageing it would be opportune to find funding to record and preserve their stories.

The stories of the Aboriginal community and their removal from the area should be part of the interpretation.

Although the focus of the Wetlands management is on the ecosystem, the First Nations and European history and use of the area is very much part of the Wetlands and Canberra story and should be included in any future interpretations plans, and in the proposed visitor centre.

## **East Lake Place Plan**

The review acknowledges this plan and notes there are ongoing discussions with the ACT Government about the plan.

The plan states (p.52) that there will be a landscape buffer between East Lake Place and the Wetlands. Will this be sufficient to protect the Wetlands ecology and migratory birds?

A summary of issues raised by the East Lake Place Plan that are likely to directly or indirectly affect the Wetlands, both on the environmental values and visitor numbers include:

- An increase in the nearby population of up to 20,000 people resulting in increased usage both in and through the Wetlands
- Extended walking and cycling connections aligned with the natural corridors. The cycle route on the map (p.66) has the cycle path designated as an existing principal route, raising the question of whether the existing cycle path will be adequate
- Although the plan states on p.66 that 'Active travel routes can allow for slower bicycles' in the Wetlands, from years of cycling through the Wetlands I would describe this statement as aspirational.
- The plan states (p.56 )that the former landfill area provides a long-term development opportunity including housing. On the same page, however, the landfill is site is described as a green buffer and transition zone between residential development and the natural environment, presumably the Wetlands.

### **To conclude**

We recommend that the following be added to the issues for consideration in a new management plan for the Wetlands – 3.3.2

- assess the effectiveness of the proposed mitigation measures in the East Lake Place Plan for the development that interfaces with the Wetlands
- ensure there is an appropriate buffer between the Wetlands and the proposed developments of the East Lake Place Plan to prevent building debris drifting to the Wetlands

- review and amend the status of the Wetlands so appropriate visitor facilities can be provided for the anticipated increase in visitors –at minimum, toilets should be provided at the Dairy Road car park
- upgrading and possible relocation of the section of the cycle path crossing Jerrabomberra Creek to ensure equitable and safe access for pedestrians, including those with prams and mobility issues
- upgrade and improve visibility of ‘no dogs’ signage at all entrance points, including from the Healthy Waterways area
- prepare and implement a cultural heritage plan on both Aboriginal and European history and use of the area.
- include cultural heritage as a topic for future education and research (3.4).
- include reference to the ACT Active Travel Network
- review the effectiveness of the arrangement with the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust in managing the environmental and cultural values of the Wetlands, and to ensure that there is adequate staffing, resources and support from the ACT Government. \

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