



The Secretariat
Select Committee on Estimates 2014-2015
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
Canberra, ACT 2601

ACT 2014 Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the 2014 ACT Budget. As you may know, the National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) is a community-based conservation organisation with more than fifty years of working to protect our natural environment through an active outings and workparty program; participation in Parkcare activities; an extensive publication program; public meetings and conferences and engagement with government policies and programs.

The NPA ACT and its members recognize that the management of environment issues require a long term outlook and it was therefore with interest that we reviewed the 2014 ACT Budget outcomes. The NPA ACT makes the following comments:

1. The NPA ACT was pleased to see strong funding for feral pest and weed control for the coming 2014-15 financial year. However, there is no commitment in the Budget that this strong support will continue in future years. Such uncertainty has the potential to undermine the good effects of recent support in these areas. As stated previously feral pest and weed control requires long term commitment. For example, pig control in Namadgi National Park is now starting show real results but only after 20 years of concerted effort. A lack of follow up in existing feral pest and weed control measure has the potential significantly reduce their long term effectiveness.

Failure to commit to out-year funding limits Parks, Conservation and Lands' ability to efficiently plan its control measures.

2. The NPA ACT was pleased to note the funding for additions to the ACT's grassland reserves. Grassland ecosystems in south-eastern Australia have been significantly reduced as a result of human settlement and any efforts to protect grasslands are welcome.
3. The NPA ACT also notes the funding for the ACT to meet its Matters of National Environmental Significance that arise through the development of the Molonglo Valley. Protection of the environment in the Molonglo Valley will be a challenge for the ACT. The proposed reserves in the Molonglo Valley face significant future urban pressures, particularly the reserves along the Molonglo River Corridor which will have extensive urban interfaces and are expected to experience high visitation pressures.

While supporting the funding for the environment in the Molonglo Valley the NPA ACT was surprised that no additional funding was identified for the outcomes of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process in Gungahlin. The SEA process has identified a range of extensions to conservation reserves in Gungahlin and it would be expected that, as a minimum, additional planning for these extensions would be required prior to them being added to the ACT's conservation estate.

The extensions proposed will enhance the viability of one of the ACT's most important ecosystems, its lowland grassy woodlands. These ecosystems are of such national importance that the NPA ACT has been consistently calling for this to be recognised through the creation of a new national park based on the ACT's examples of lowland grassy woodlands.

4. The NPA ACT noted reference to 5 new conservation rangers in media releases relating to the Budget's environmental impacts. It is assumed that these are the conservation rangers referred to in the ACT Labor Party and ACT Greens agreement following the last election. The NPA ACT understands that 2 of these conservation rangers were funded in last year's budget. The NPA ACT expresses its regret that the 3 other promised positions have not been funded already.

The NPA ACT noted that the ACT Government was, at least, paying some attention to the needs of the environment, when this has been severely lacking in other jurisdictions. The environment plays a significant role in the health and well being of the ACT. Namadgi National Park's protection of the ACT's water supply saves the ACT significant amounts in reduced water treatment costs. The ACT's citizens reap the physical and mental health benefits of the immediacy of their ability to interact with natural environment of the "bush capital". However, to provide these benefits work needs to continue on safeguarding the ACT's wonderful natural environment.

The NPA ACT would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised within its submission with the Assembly Committee and can be contacted, either by writing to our office address or through email (noting that the NPA ACT office is manned by volunteers and a daily presence is not able to be maintained). Alternatively, I can be contacted on 0410 875 731.

Yours sincerely



Rod Griffiths
President
NPA ACT
9 June 2014