

Towards an Integrated Biodiversity Conservation Service: Principles and Functions to Guide Structure

1) Update

This is an update to our 5 November 2012 briefing paper where we outlined four potential options for an integrated Biodiversity Conservation Service. We did not advocate a preference for any of the options proposed. However we have since developed in more detail some key principles to inform any new administrative arrangement and some key functions which we believe should be located in the revised structure.

The outcome we wish to see is an administrative structure which is stable over time, delivers the best use of resources to protect and enhance our unique biodiversity values and ecosystems in a transparent manner. It must address biodiversity within and outside Canberra Nature Park, including management of hills and ridges, as well ensuring urban land management is consistent with biodiversity protection.

2) Principles

1. Stability

- any new structure needs an ongoing level of stability – i.e. regardless of changes in Ministerial arrangements the Conservation Agency should retain all its key functions over time

2. Policy – international and national developments

- local biodiversity management needs to be informed by national and international scientific evidence and trends in biodiversity policy

3. Legal requirements – Nature Conservation Act (Nature Conservation Strategy, Action Plans)

- legal documents such as the Nature Conservation Act and subsequent instruments such as the Nature Conservation Strategy and Actions Plans for endangered / vulnerable species, habitats and ecological communities need to have appropriate links to compliance and enforcement mechanisms and to developers of such strategies and action plans as well as on-ground staff implementing the plans and strategies.

4. Conservator

- the role of the Conservator needs to be clearly defined. There is a tension between the role as a decision-maker and as an independent advisor to

the Government / Minister. This is possibly most usefully resolved in the context of the forthcoming new Nature Conservation Act. The Price-Waterhouse Report into the roles and functions of the Conservator should be released immediately. The Conservator nonetheless in the first instance needs to be located within the same administrative unit as the Parks and Conservation Service.

5. Practicability / Resourcing

- high level strategic policy as outlined in documents such as the Nature Conservation Strategy need to also reflect a level of practicability including consideration of resourcing implications and commitments.

6. Planning

- need to ensure ACT Government and the wider community's biodiversity 'knowledge expertise' is incorporated early in planning processes –
- early planning should be based around biodiversity knowledge and the precautionary principle, and adequate protection of significant areas rather than reliance on offsetting.

7. Fire Unit

- The Fire Unit must be located within the integrated Biodiversity Conservation Service. Fire is a matter of protection of life, protection of property and protection of environmental assets – and all objectives need to be linked.

8. Operations

- there should be close links between City Rangers and Conservation Rangers, as there is overlap between functions. However Conservation Rangers have specialist skills and broader responsibilities which need to be recognized and respected. City Rangers can not fulfill these roles.
- there should be close links between the integrated Biodiversity Conservation Agency and the Environmental Protection Authority to ensure compliance of biodiversity matters is coordinated.

9. Transparency

- financial budgets to the Biodiversity Conservation Agency need to be transparent. Need to ensure urban land management for amenity is not at the expense of biodiversity management.

10. Monitoring and Reporting

- biodiversity monitoring to track changes in condition of elements of biodiversity has to be a key function with clear and quantitative indicators and subsequent reporting on these including some in Budget papers, and others in high level strategic reporting such as Measuring Our Progress. These indicators should also be included in high level strategy documents

such as the Canberra Plan.

3) Functions

Key functions that should sit within an integrated Conservation Agency include:

- input into international and national policy as appropriate
- international and national biodiversity policy reflected in local strategy and plans
- local on-ground evidence informing day-to-day management
- local on-ground evidence and management informing local high level strategy and plans i.e. Nature Conservation Strategy
- transparent budget allocations
- compliance and enforcement under the Nature Conservation Act and other legislation such as the Domestic Animals Act and Environment Protection Act
- Secretariat to statutory bodies, such as the Flora and Fauna Committee and other advisory bodies such as the NRM Advisory Committee, Weed Advisory Group
- reporting on transparent and consistent indicators in Budget Papers and other key strategic documents such as Measuring Our Progress and the Canberra Plan
- decision-maker on key biodiversity functions (Conservator)
- independent biodiversity advice to Minister (Conservator)
- providing advice to ACT Government planning officials early in planning processes
- delivery of implementation of the Nature Conservation Act including sub-documents such as the Nature Conservation Strategy and Threatened Species Action Plans
- regular review of implementation of key policy, strategy and Actions Plans with appropriate public reporting
- biodiversity programs reflect and deliver on strategic documents such as the Nature Conservation Strategy and national biodiversity policy and directions such as Caring for Country*
- on-ground work such as implementation of national and ACT pest management strategies
- day to day management of ACT's nature conservation estate in accordance with site operational plans
- co-ordination with City Services and provision of advice regarding management of areas of conservation significance in urban Canberra that are outside the designated reserves

- support to Boards of Management for various special areas (e.g. Mulligans Flat, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Namadgi) and the Capital Woodlands and Wetlands Conservation Trust
- implement and provide input into the Strategic Bushfire Operational Plan
- manage ACT offsets sites
- provision of expert advice on biodiversity issues to other Directorates and agencies
- monitoring of biodiversity status and issues.

* in our previous paper we had proposed it was not necessary for Natural Resource Management Programs to be located within an Integrated Conservation Agency. However on reflection it appears this is the appropriate location.

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