



**CONSERVATION  
COUNCIL**  
**ACT REGION**

## **Submission to: National Capital Authority**

# **Block 23 Section 33 Acton (Acton Waterfront) - Phase 2 Boardwalk and Land Reclamation**

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**MAY 2020**

The **Conservation Council ACT Region** is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra region. We have been the community's voice for the environment in the Canberra region since 1981. Our mission is to achieve an ecologically sustainable and zero net carbon society through advocacy, education, research and engagement with the community, the private sector and with government.

We represent more than 45 member groups which in turn represent more than 15,000 supporters. We harness the collective expertise and experience of our member groups and networks and work collaboratively with Government, business and the community to achieve the highest quality environment for Canberra and its region.

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## Introduction

The Conservation Council ACT Region supports urban infill development in the ACT that is appropriately located and conforms to world leading environmental standards.

Development at West Basin holds a special significance both for the city of Canberra and as a location of national significance on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin. The Conservation Council is of the view that any urban development undertaken there should serve as a model for other developments across the city, and result in a precinct that is in keeping with the natural landscape and consistent with the city's role as the National Capital.

Much work has been undertaken prior to this initial stage of West Basin (the boardwalk) proceeding, including the Precinct Code for West Basin, and the West Basin (Precinct) Guidelines (2014). The Precinct Code and Guidelines set an ambitious agenda for West Basin, including integration and connectivity with the city, as well as a vibrant mixed-use area that also contributes to the "experience of Lake Burley Griffin parklands".

Environmental objectives are articulated in the Precinct Code as "*Ensure new development meets leading practice for environmental sustainability including energy efficiency and water sensitive urban design measures*".

Integration of the NCA's Statement of Planning Principles, with consideration of resource consumption and waste management in design principles, setting an objective with regard to water quality (especially given the location of the development on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin), and consideration of how to ensure an urban form that addresses climate resilience, will improve environmental outcomes. The West Basin precinct planning delivers an opportunity for the development to strongly align with ACT Government objectives outlined in the *ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019* and *Living Infrastructure Plan 2019*, and to improve and enhance Canberra's urban forest (and Bush Capital brand). Integrated environmental management systems could be utilised to maximum effect, for waste management, and energy generation and distribution. In short, there is an opportunity for development at West Basin to minimising negative environmental impacts.

**The Conservation Council believes that the West Basin Precinct Code and Guidelines could be reviewed and strengthened to ensure that the urban development that is undertaken is of the highest environmental quality, and demonstrates environmental leadership.**

For examples, to ensure standards and leadership for such a project:

- the urban design protocol, with the principle of "*fosters environmental responsibility*" should be strengthened to say.. '*demonstrating environmental leadership and the highest standards of environmental performance*'
- the standard for design of buildings should be strengthened: a '*Green Star*' rating of 5 or above ...from '*the Green Building Council of Australia* rating

*system*' should be strengthened because it is not clear whether this is a guide, or must be assessed and rated by the GBC (mandatory); and the standard should be 6 stars, to demonstrate real leadership.

## Tree removal, replacement and landscaping

The first stage of the proposal will result in the removal of 104 trees, including two *Eucalyptus manifera* of high amenity value. It is unclear what steps might have been taken to prevent the removal of these trees. Many of the trees that are identified for removal are not of high value and it is likely that later stages of the development at West Basin will require additional tree removal, particularly as streets and residential and commercial buildings proceed. Many of the trees that exist on the West Basin site have not been identified in this DA, but would likely be managed in future proposals. Given the location of the site on the lake shore, and the importance of maintaining mature tree cover, a strategic plan for tree removal and replacement should be considered to ensure that as trees are removed, replacement mature trees have been planted well in advance. In addition, it would be helpful to identify which mature trees will be protected prior to further development proceeding.

While requirements for street trees are outlined in the Concept Plan, it is unclear the expectations for tree replacement in the park area which is ultimately to be located between the boardwalk and the cycle path. It can be assumed that the park will sit on the area of the lake that is being reclaimed under this proposal.

The landscape plans included in the current proposal include trees being planted in "containerised pots", and alludes to some (or perhaps all?) as part of a tree nursery being later in later stages of the development. It is not clear as to whether some trees will remain in the containerised pots and whether this is the extent of the landscape planning for the park area, or if this is the "temporary landscaping" outlined in the proposal. The implication is that permanent tree planting cannot be undertaken until the area has settled, and that the trees in the pots will be utilised in the park once this has occurred.

If this is the case, then the Conservation Council strongly supports the trees being planted as soon as possible into the proposed park area, and that the development of the park is an early high priority to ensure amenity of the area for lake users including walkers and cyclists, improved visual amenity as further development proceeds, and to support urban cooling as additional paths and roads are established.

In addition, landscaping plans for the park should give consideration to species that support local biodiversity, whether these are trees or shrubs. All of the species selected in the current landscaping plan are non-native, deciduous trees which provide good urban tree canopy protection for buildings and people in summer and solar access in winter. However, suitable native trees and shrubs can support different species and pollinators across urban parks, and should be included.

## **Stormwater management**

The proposal identifies that the concrete boardwalk is the edge of the reclamation area, with the land to be filled behind it. There are five stormwater outfalls along the boardwalk, in a simple design with what appear to be mesh filters to stop rubbish entering (and polluting) the lake. Reduced water quality from storm water sources remains an important issue that is affecting ecosystem health and public enjoyment of the lake. Urban drainage tends to be high in soluble phosphate. It is unclear from the proposal what will be constructed behind the outfalls, however, it is recommended that this should include an urban drain, or shallow sedimentation pond or reed beds.

## **Boardwalk and paths**

Public separated paths for the entire length of the foreshore are explicitly required for pedestrians and cyclists. The implementation of dedicated cycle lanes set back from restaurant areas and slow moving pedestrian areas will be important as West Basin forms an integral section of the lake circuit walking and cycling route. This objective was not entirely fulfilled at Kingston Foreshore, where cycle routes were co-located onto roads, which acts as a disincentive for cyclists concerned about safety.

The boardwalk plans identify that there will be pedestrian access points through the park and to the water. While it isn't clear from this map, it would be helpful that these access paths align with the path of the streets that will connect the city to West Basin.

Public access from the water to the boardwalk is also supported, so that recreational boat users have full access to the parks and services, and the boardwalk design should enable access by small craft.

The use of concrete for the boardwalk is consistent with that used in other areas of the lake, and this boardwalk is an extension of the one from Henry Roland Park. (Note the proponent has chosen concrete for its "Canberra legacy"!.) Now would be a good time for the proponent's to consider switching to sourcing low emissions (geopolymer) cements that are suitable for use in non-structural uses such as footpaths.

However, in addition, consideration should be given within the whole of the West Basin development, to minimise hard surfaces and increase porous surfaces where possible. While concrete may be the preferable option for the boardwalk itself, future landscaping should take care to address the 30% permeable surfaces target outlined in the ACT Government's Living Infrastructure Plan.