

Good afternoon
Thank you for your email regarding the Western Edge of Canberra to Minister Steel, as the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development.

The Government has not made a decision to develop the Western Edge Investigation Area (WEIA) but is committed to develop a landscape plan for the ACT which will include proactive protection of areas of environmental value in the Western Edge.

The Planning Strategy has long established that 70% of Canberra’s future urban growth will occur within our existing urban footprint, with a focus on shopping centres and along transport corridors.

This term the ACT Government has brought forward a range of major amendments to the Territory Plan to support more housing and sustainable growth within our existing urban footprint including Transport Oriented Development changes and Missing Middle Housing Reforms. These will provide an alternative source of new housing to greenfield estates, as the city has already reached the edge of some of our existing nature reserves, and there are limited opportunities for further horizontal urban expansion. I encourage you to engage with these changes here if you support the sustainable development of the city.

The Government recognises that Canberra continues to grow, it is important that environmental values are protected and enhanced to achieve the vision of Canberra of a ‘city in a landscape’. To support long[1]term planning, the Planning Strategy identified approximately 9,800 hectares west of Canberra in the Western Edge Investigation Area. The work occurring in this area is seeking to better understand its values, constraints, and potential for urban development and environmental conservation.

In my recent Statement of Planning Priorities 2025-2028, I have outlined the planning actions to protect the environment and enhance the city’s landscape. This will include continued work to progress investigations for future urban and other uses in the Western Edge and Eastern Broadacre areas to inform decisions on how the environmental values of these areas can be recognised, managed and protected.

The ACT Government wants to present the outcomes of the investigations as part of a landscape approach for the city in consultation with the community. At the election ACT Labor committed to develop a landscape plan for the ACT which will be led by a new position of the ACT Chief Landscape Architect. This will be considered with a refresh of the Planning Strategy this term. The environmental and other studies underway will help to inform the strategic spatial planning and later decisions about how to proactively protect, conserve and restore the areas identified in the studies on the city’s urban interface.

Some preliminary background investigations including a Preliminary Bushfire Risk Assessment and ecological studies have been completed and are available on the City and Environment Directorate’s WEIA webpage. A number of these preliminary investigations show the WEIA is home to a substantial array of flora and fauna, and that further assessments are required.

These ongoing studies in the WEIA will contribute to identifying a suitable location for an urban growth boundary. Whilst I appreciate that some political parties and lobby groups may disagree with these studies being undertaken prior to making a decision, I am confident that our landscape approach, and the evidence base that will underpin it, will provide a robust and transparent basis to inform consultation with the community about conserving the environmental values of the Western Edge.

Thank you for raising this important issue and I look forward to updating you as we develop and consult on a landscape plan for the ACT.

Kind regards,
Chris Steel MLA
Labor Member for Murrumbidgee
ACT Treasurer
Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development
Minister for Heritage
Minister for Transport
ACT Government
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**Here’s what we thought
of Minister Steel’s
response to the Save Our
Western Edge campaign**

A thick black arrow pointing to the right, set against a green background.

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The Government has not made a decision to develop the Western Edge Investigation Area (WEIA) but is committed to develop a landscape plan for the ACT which will include proactive protection of areas of environmental value in the Western Edge.

The Planning Strategy has long established that 70% of Canberra's future urban growth will occur within our existing urban footprint, with a focus on shopping centres and along transport corridors.

The Government has not YET made a decision to develop the Western Edge, but they've purchased land and are contracting research to investigate doing so... Plus, they will be making this decision when they set a hard urban boundary for the ACT by mid-2027.

The issue with only protecting "areas of environmental value" is that we get a patchwork of small protected areas dotted across the ACT rather than complete landscapes with enough "breathing room" for nature.

We can do better than 70% urban infill. Canberra's urban footprint spans a distance equivalent to Greater London (population 9 million) or Sydney (population 5.3 million) but with a fraction of the population.

This term the ACT Government has brought forward a range of major amendments to the Territory Plan to support more housing and sustainable growth within our existing urban footprint including **Transport Oriented Development** changes and **Missing Middle Housing Reforms**.

We are pleased with these new policy directions by the ACT Government and advocate for them to go further.



These will provide an alternative source of new housing to greenfield estates, as the city has already reached the edge of some of our existing nature reserves, and there are limited opportunities for further horizontal urban expansion.

The Government recognises that Canberra continues to grow, it is important that environmental values are protected and enhanced to achieve the vision of Canberra of a 'city in a landscape'.

To support long[1]term planning, the Planning Strategy identified approximately 9,800 hectares west of Canberra in the Western Edge Investigation Area.

The work occurring in this area is seeking to better understand its values, constraints, and potential for urban development and environmental conservation.

We already have knowledge from experts, Indigenous owners and the broader community on the significant ecological, cultural and recreational value of these 9,800 hectares, as well as the major risks associated with developing this area. For instance, developing the Western Edge would not only destroy critically endangered ecosystems but would also mean developing in one of the most fire-risk urban interfaces in the world, while simultaneously creating isolated, hard to service, car-dependent urban sprawl that is bad for our climate, public health and the taxpayer.



The ACT Government wants to present the outcomes of the investigations as part of a landscape approach for the city in consultation with the community.

Is there a timeline for consultation? When and how will consultation occur?

At the election ACT Labor committed to develop a landscape plan for the ACT which will be led by a new position of the ACT Chief Landscape Architect. This will be considered with a refresh of the Planning Strategy this term.

The environmental and other studies underway will help to inform the strategic spatial planning and later decisions about how to proactively protect, conserve and restore the areas identified in the studies on the city's urban interface.

When will this plan be available to the public? The Government has been talking about this plan since the 2024 election but they still haven't hired the Chief Landscape Architect to prepare it. We're supportive of landscape planning but this work needs to happen sooner rather than later.

These ongoing studies in the WEIA will contribute to identifying a suitable location for an urban growth boundary.

Whilst I appreciate that some political parties and lobby groups may disagree with these studies being undertaken prior to making a decision, I am confident that our landscape approach, and the evidence base that will underpin it, will provide a robust and transparent basis to inform consultation with the community about conserving the environmental values of the Western Edge.

Thank you for raising this important issue and I look forward to updating you as we develop and consult on a landscape plan for the ACT.

There is no need to spend millions investigating development options when we already know that development should be off the cards because of the significant values and risks of the area.

Let's not destroy something good just to create something bad.

Nature does not need more endless "investigations" it needs protection and restoration now.