



Submission: to the Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal

Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 360 – Molonglo River Reserve: changes to the public land reserve overlay boundaries and minor zone adjustment

MAY 2019

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 1979.

Our mission is to achieve an ecologically sustainable and zero net carbon society through advocacy, education, research and engagement with community, the private sector and with government.

We represent more than 40 member groups who in turn represent over 15,000 supporters. We harness the collective expertise and experience of our member groups and networks. We work collaboratively with Government, business and the community to achieve the highest quality environment for Canberra and its region.

The Conservation Council campaigns on:

- **Climate Change** – a regional, national and global challenge
- **Biodiversity**– protecting our unique ecological communities in the Bush Capital
- **Water** – smart use of a scarce resource
- **Transport** – connecting people and places
- **Waste** – being efficient through closed-loop systems
- **Planning** – the right things in the right places
- **Governance** – for a smarter, sustainable Canberra

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DV360 and the intersection with development of the Coombs “tip”

This submission to the Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal on Draft Variation 360, which seeks to finalise the boundaries of the Molonglo River reserve, focuses on the issues surrounding the management of the northern most area of Coombs (known as the Coombs ‘tip’) and its relationship to the Molonglo River Reserve.

Background

The Conservation Council ACT Region has had a long-standing objection to the proposal to place urban development on the Coombs ‘tip’ – the portion of under-developed land that is north-west of Edgeworth Parade And Annabelle View, and bounded by the Molonglo River.

In 2011, the Conservation Council opposed development on the Coombs tip outlined in PV 281 Notice 2008 N1 2008-352, on the grounds that it impacted on the habitat of the endangered species *Aprasia parapulchella*, the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard, and presents a significant bushfire hazard to residents.

In 2012, the objection was taken to the Administrative Appeals tribunal on the grounds that the development impacted on threatened species and there was inadequate bushfire protection outside the reserve.

A mediation process led to an agreement with the Government that the tip of Coombs would be removed from the development application (27 house blocks at the time) ensuring that the high quality *Aprasia parapulchella* (Pink-tailed Worm-lizard (PTWL)) habitat was outside fire management zones. The outcome of the mediation was to remain in place until the Plan of Management for the Molonglo River Reserve was put in place.

Coombs development and the Molonglo River Reserve

However, we are very concerned about decisions that are being made that override the mediation outcomes, that may affect the ecological integrity of the Reserve as well as endanger residents. The Draft Plan of Management for the Molonglo River reserve was released for consultation in 2018, but Government has not yet released the final plan. The Council has not been consulted about what the Plan will indicate in regards to fire management of this section of the reserve. In addition, the Council notes with some alarm that the [Indicative Land Release Program for Molonglo Valley June 2018](#) suggests that 60 houses could be built on the tip and includes dwellings down to the reserve edge, bordered only by a fire trail at the tip, just above the steep slope down to the river. The PTWL habitat edge is within one metre of the reserve boundary fence, going down a rocky steep slope. Above the fence the area is already bulldozed adjoining the fire trail. It appears, therefore, that the decision has been made to develop this area, even though no information has been given to justify the placement of houses so close to the reserve boundary.

Until this situation is addressed in terms of justifying such a decision by quantifying the ecological impacts of such a development, the Council cannot support placement of the boundaries for the Reserve adjacent to the Coombs tip, as stated in DV360.

The Conservation Council is very concerned that urban development on the Coombs tip puts the habitat of the PTWL at risk, and could result in an untenable risk for bushfire for future residents. The area is rated as ‘bushfire prone’ in version 4 of the Strategic Bushfire

Management Plan 2019-2024 (and has been in previous versions). To render the area safe for residential occupation, a substantial asset protection zone is required, particularly on the north-western aspect and at the tip itself, where fire generated vortices can be expected due to the steep slope and the prevailing wind pattern. This area has been burned out twice already in the past 20 years, in 2001 in a fire coming from Coppins Crossing which reached the edge of the Mint in Canberra, and in the 2003 bushfire. Vegetated creek lines running roughly west-east act as wicks for fire travel originating west of the ACT, and it is expected that climate change will heighten these fire risks in ferocity and frequency.

The expected outcome of the urban development would be that the Outer Asset Zone (in which fuel management is identified as a priority) and Strategic Fire Advantage Zone (in which management in those areas should be compatible with ecological requirements) would be placed within the Reserve, directly on the steep slopes containing high quality PTWL habitat (NES Plan, Figure 4), clearly impacting the species habitat and other Reserve values. The Conservation Council considers that Inner and Outer Asset Protection Zones and a Strategic Fire Advantage Zone **outside** the boundary of the Reserve are required on the Coombs tip to provide fire protection for residents while protecting the Reserve's conservation values from substantial impacts from fire mitigation management.

We draw attention to Objective10 relating to land use, which states that “the assessment and mitigation of bushfire risk through effective land-use policy and planning will reduce the exposure of built and natural environments to bushfire” ([SBMP v4, 2019](#)).

Further, the Conservation Council considers that the inclusion of fire fighting zones within the high quality PTWL habitat fail to meet the Molonglo NES Plan agreement with the Commonwealth (October 2011). We draw your attention to the requirements in the NES Plan to protect and maintain habitat for the PTWL habitat (Action 38 amongst others, p. 32: Implement the management plan for the Molonglo River Park to provide for the maintenance and enhancement of the ecological condition of high and moderate quality PTWL habitat within the park”.

The Coombs tip is not currently mapped as a bushfire abatement zone, though across the river the land is all mapped as this zone. This is a clear defect in the SBMP for the area, as fire is not stopped by a narrow river zone with trees on both sides, and with vegetated steep slopes to the south up to the proposed Reserve boundary. The Council will be preparing a submission to the SMBP on this defect.

As outlined above, the Conservation Council and the Government, via ACAT process of February 2012, agreed that resolution of urban development at Coombs tip and interaction with PTWL habitat should be resolved via the Plan of Management for the river reserve. It is of concern that the final Plan of Management has not been released, with Government responses to public comments on DV360 states that the POM “will be released before the end of 2019”, indicating it might still be some way off being ready. The release of the Plan of Management might go some way to providing an indication of how the Reserve adjacent to the Coombs tip will be managed to maintain and enhance the ecological condition of this area.

The Conservation Council remains committed to retaining the tip of the Coombs Peninsula as open space. While delivering a benefit to residents in terms of amenity, if designated as urban open space, it will also provide enhanced bushfire safety and avoid impacting the ecological integrity of the Reserve from urban impacts as well as fire mitigation

management. However, given the lack of clarity around the Plan of Management with regards to fire mitigation and ecological management, consideration should be given to the reserve boundary being changed to include the Coombs 'tip' inside the reserve.

Recommendation

The Conservation Council urges that in consideration of DV360, the Committee defers the finalisation of the reserve boundary at the Coombs peninsular until consultation with the Conservation Council is undertaken on the proposed future uses of the Coombs tip. Such impacts on the reserve need to be fully canvassed and agreement on those future uses reached that ensures protection of the high quality PTWL habitat.

Such an agreement will take into account:

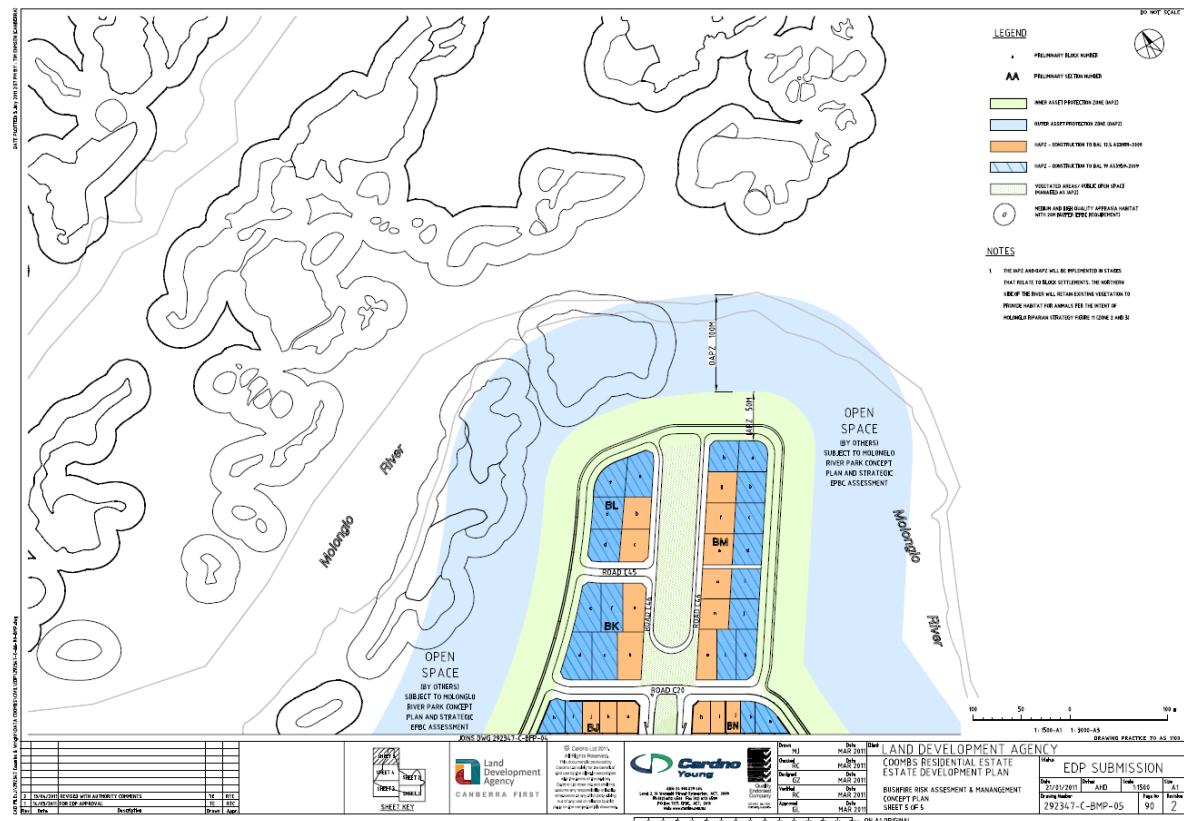
- that there should be no housing development on the Coombs Peninsula, and that the area should be retained as open space;
- that fire management zones (at least inner and outer asset protection zones) need to be outside the river reserve to provide an adequate fire mitigation buffer to the suburb; and
- that all management inside the reserve is based on ecological objectives and outcomes, so that there is no loss of ecological integrity within the Molonglo River Reserve and MNES adjacent to the Coombs Peninsula.

In the absence of this process being undertaken, the Council opposes the placement of the reserve boundaries at Coombs tip proposed in DV360, and recommend that the reserve boundaries be extended south into Coombs tip in order to ensure all fire mitigation actions occur outside the high quality PTWL habitat.

Outer Asset Zones overlay onto Pink Tailed Worm Lizard habitat - Coombs – pre and post ACAT mediation.

Initial Proposal:

Significant overlap of Outer Asset Protection Zone over Pink Tailed Worm Lizard Habitat 2011



Revised Post ACAT hearing February 2012

Minimal overlap of Outer Asset Protection Zone over Pink Tailed Worm Habitat with residential blocks BL, BK and BM removed

