



**CONSERVATION
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

Submission to Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (Planning): DA-202240629

October 2022

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra region. Since 1981, we have spoken up for a healthy environment and a sustainable future for our region. We harness the collective energy, expertise and experience of our more than 40 member groups to promote sound policy and action on the environment.

We campaign for a safe climate, to protect biodiversity in our urban and natural areas, to protect and enhance our waterways, reduce waste, and promote sustainable transport and planning for our city. Working in the ACT and region to influence governments and build widespread support within the community and business, we put forward evidence-based solutions and innovative ideas for how we can live sustainably.

At a time when we need to reimagine a better future, we understand that the changes we need will only happen with the collective support of our community.

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Introduction

The Conservation Council ACT Region welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on [DA 202240629](#). As outlined below, the Council has actively engaged in community consultation regarding the development of the Molonglo for over 15 years. Over this time period, we have argued for the protection of the natural and heritage values of the region, particularly in reference to Kama nature reserve and the surrounding buffer.

The Council is concerned about the impact of the proposed development on the region's natural heritage values associated with Kama Nature reserve and the Kama buffer. It is essential that the buffer between Stage 4 of Whitlam be an appropriate size and managed effectively in order to mitigate direct and indirect impacts on the high quality, threatened ecological communities within the reserve. It is also essential that the sites natural heritage values, as outlined in *Kama Woodland/Grassland*,¹ are respected. The natural values of the site are briefly elaborated on below.

The Council does not support the DA 202240629. It is unclear how the development will conform to the buffer requirements outlined in the *Kama Interface Management Strategy (2016)* (the Strategy) (as ratified in *Nature Conservation (Molonglo River Reserve) Reserve Management Plan 2019*).² Indeed, if it does conform to *the Strategy* then concern remains about whether it is effective in providing for the protection of the site's natural values. Furthermore, the proposal does not respect the conservation of the site's heritage values as outlined in the *Statement of Heritage Effects Kama Woodland/ Grassland*.³

¹ Notifiable Instrument NI2012—541 (ACT) 2012.

² Kama Interface Management Strategy, *Capital Ecology*, 2016; Nature Conservation (Molonglo River Reserve) Reserve Management Plan (ACT) 2019.

³ n 1.

Background

Ecological significance of Kama Nature Reserve (Kama)

As recognised under the heritage listing for *Kama Woodland/Grassland*,⁴ Kama and the surrounding area is ecologically significant for three primary reasons as outlined below:

1. Diversity and richness of flora and fauna

Much of the ecosystem at Kama represents relatively intact remnants of the pre-European ecological communities despite the impact of agriculture since settlement. Native forbs and grasses are present, and there are numerous large, old trees which contain a high density of hollows. Because of this, the area supports various plants and animals as either a place of breeding and residence, or as a foraging and migratory site. Most importantly, a range of vulnerable and declining species of birds have been recorded in the reserve, including many recognised as Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) under national conservation laws.

2. Threatened Ecological Communities

Kama provides for one of the few examples of well-preserved Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) – Blakely's Red Gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) (Box – Gum) Woodland and Derived grassland, and Natural Temperate Grassland (NTG) communities left in the ACT. Both of these communities are listed as critically endangered under national legislation, and endangered under ACT equivalents.⁵

3: Connectivity between the Molonglo River Reserve, Pinnacle Nature Reserve

Kama forms part of a broader ecological landscape in Canberra, directly connecting the Pinnacle Nature Reserve and the rural section of the Molonglo River Reserve. In the broader Canberra landscape, Kama connects Black Mountain and Bruce Ridge to the Belconnen woodlands (the Pinnacle Mount Painter, and Aranda bushland) through the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee River corridors into woodlands in NSW. Most importantly, by connecting the Pinnacle reserve to the Molonglo River, Kama provides many species a necessary connection to a large water source. Kama is the only lowland reserve in the ACT which connects forest, woodland, grasslands and riparian ecosystems.

It should be noted that the area of ecological significance is greater than the boundary of the nature reserve. Indeed, the heritage listed area includes all of the nature reserve and extends into rural blocks to the east and west (see figure 1). Although the areas outside the nature reserve are in lower ecological condition, they are significant as they contain woodland that

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nature Conservation (Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland) Conservation Advice 2020; Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands; White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland National Recovery Plan.

forms part of the natural ecotone between woodland and grassland in this area, and because they protect the natural heritage and biodiversity of the woodlands and grasslands.

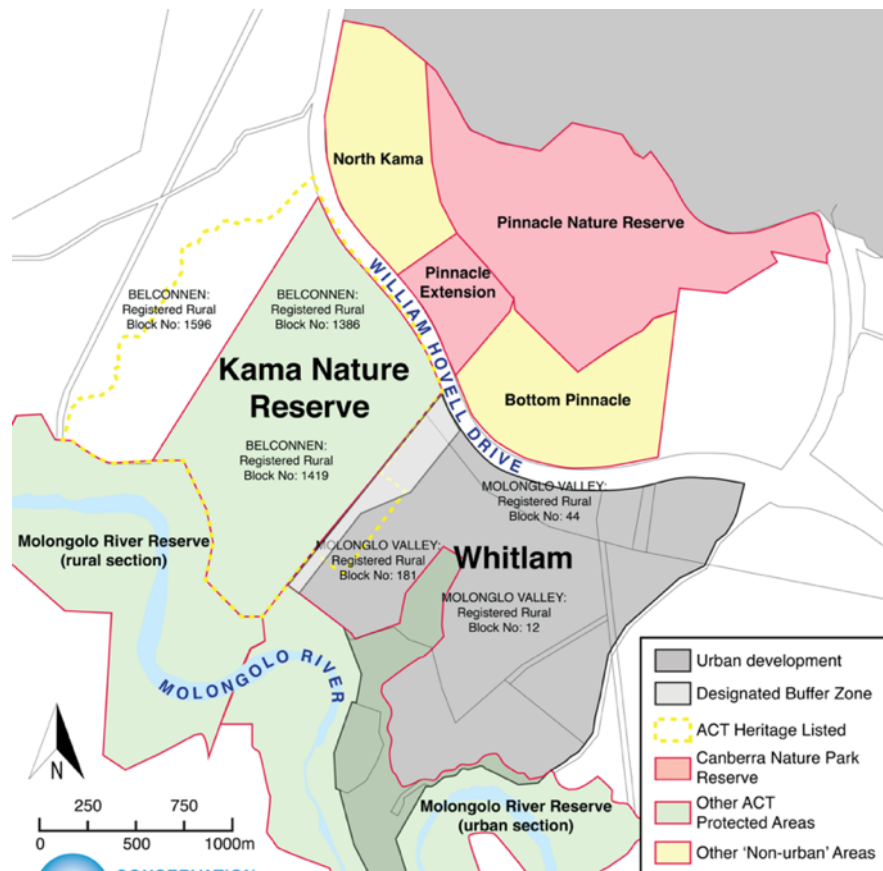


Figure 1: Kama and surrounding region. Adapted from ACT Heritage Council (2012), Capital Ecology (2016), Canberra Nature Draft Plan (2019), and the Molongolo River Reserve Operational Plan (2014)

Prior Engagement

Considering the Council’s ongoing engagement in this issue it should be considered a key stakeholder in this matter. The Council has been involved in consultations with regards to the Strategic Environment Assessment of the Molongle development, and more specifically, in the development of the buffer between Kama and the new suburb of Whitlam to the east. The Council has consistently raised concerns with the ACT Government that the buffer between Kama and Whitlam was not of sufficient size to prevent impacts on species in the Kama Reserve, due to the risk of urban edge effects such as noise, weeds and introduced animals. The Council does not fully support the content of the Kama Interface Management Strategy 2016, however, acknowledges that this is the Strategy that should be fully implemented by the proponent, as referenced in the Molongolo River Reserve - Receive Management Plan 2019.

Compliance with the *Kama Interface Management Strategy (2016)*

A summary of the recommended interface arrangements and their compliance in DA-202240629 is outlined in Table 1 below.

It is evident from the analysis that DA-202240629 fails to meet the requirements set out in the Strategy, particularly with reference to interface establishment, initial restoration, and maintenance. Whilst the application does attach *the Strategy* within the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) it is not clear how it will be implemented. It is recommended that a detailed implementation plan be required by the proponent prior to a decision being made. Furthermore the baseline weed survey and Initial Weed Control Plan required by the Strategy is not included in the application. This should also be made available before the application is considered.

DA-202240629 also provides for the use of exotic plants in the development's landscaping. This is in direct contravention of the strategy which provides for the "utilisation of only native plants in the streetscape".⁶ This oversight must be addressed prior to the development application being considered.

Indeed, even if the application does fulfil the requirements of *the Strategy*, The Council is not convinced that the natural and heritage values of the area will be adequately protected.

Recommendations

- The proponent should provide a detailed implementation plan for the *Kama Interface Management Strategy*, as well as the required baseline weed survey and Initial Weed Control Plan prior to the application being considered.
- Exotic trees must not be used within the development streetscape.

⁶ N 2 (The Strategy) p7.

Table 1:

Kama Interface Management Strategy (2016)		Compliance
Design characteristics (section 6.2)	Buffer width of 200 m along the northern portion of the Kama Interface, tapering back to 70 m along the southern portion. This is the minimum required to provide the 200 m setback to core woodland bird habitat.	Yes, see Land Use Plan 1.
	The establishment of four Interface Management Zones (IMZs): IMZ-1 Kama Nature Reserve, IMZ-2 Interface Buffer – Woodland Regeneration, IMZ-3 Interface Buffer – Inner Asset Protection Zone, and IMZ-4 Urban Development. This allows for targeted management (refer Section 6.2.3) to ensure each IMZ contributes to meeting the overall purpose of the interface.	Yes, although it is unclear from the application how the “Urban Open Space” (Land Use Plan 1) will be maintained and managed as IMZ2 Restored Woodland.
	Retention of native trees, an urban edge road and road verge with walking path, an urban edge retaining wall, a fire trail, public walking trails, types and locations of fences and gates, undergrounding of the 132kV powerline easement, measures to control artificial light and noise, and signage.	Yes, see Tree Impact Plan, Noise Management Plan and Land Use Plan 1. However, there are no provisions for management of light pollution.
Interface establishment and initial restoration (section 6.3)	Initial weed control within the buffer, dictated by a baseline survey and an Initial Weed Control Plan.	Not apparent. While briefly discussed in the EIS a baseline survey and Initial Weed Control Plan is not attached to the application.

Kama Interface Management Strategy (2016)		Compliance
	Restoration planting within the buffer, according to three distinct restoration units: 1 – restored woodland canopy, 2 – restored woodland all strata, and 3 – managed mixed native and exotic grassland.	Not apparent. While briefly discussed in the supplied EIS no detailed restoration plan is attached to the application.
	Utilisation of only native plants in the streetscape of IMZ4.	Does not conform as evidenced by exotic plantings outlined in Landscape Master Plan 1.
	Staging of interface establishment, with the aim to soften the impact of urban development, particularly upon native fauna	Not apparent in the application. See comments above.
Interface management and maintenance (section 6.4)	Ongoing weed monitoring and management within the buffer	Not apparent in the application. See comments above.
	Ongoing control of domestic animals.	Not apparent in the application. See comments above.
	Community education and involvement.	Not apparent in the application. See comments above.
	Control and management of access to reduce human impacts upon the buffer and Kama Nature Reserve	Not apparent in the application. See comments above.

Failure to Protect the Heritage Values

The *Heritage (Decision about Registration of Kama Woodland/Grassland, Belconnen) Notice 2012* (the heritage decision) states that:

“The Kama Woodland/Grassland, Belconnen is significant because it includes examples of two endangered ecological communities (Yellow Box-Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Natural Temperate Grassland) together with the natural boundary (ecotone) between them. The landscape relationship between the two vegetation communities is important because it is considered to be similar to the vegetation patterns that existed prior to European settlement.

This place is also significant because there is a high diversity of native species in the Kama Woodland/Grassland including uncommon native forbs, woodland birds and riparian species. The Kama Woodland/Grassland provides important ecological connectivity between the lower Molonglo River and The Pinnacle (south Belconnen Hills).”

The Council does not see how the current proposal is consistent with the maintenance of these values. Specifically, DA 202240629 proposes to directly destroy a proportion of the heritage listed area, and develop it as suburban and urban open space (Land Use Plan 1). The area that is slated for development was protected by the *heritage decision* because it contains an extension of the Box – Gum Woodlands and contributes to the site's ecotone (a unique and often highly diverse region of transition between two ecological communities). The ecotone is of particular significance to the heritage listing because it is unusually intact and demonstrates the zone of cold air-drainage characteristic of the woodland/grassland transition.⁷

Not only will the direct destruction of this portion of the heritage area irrevocably damage its heritage values, but by extending the development into the heritage area the proponent will indirectly damage the rest of the heritage area. Specifically, the “unusual richness” and “diversity” of the site will be diminished through indirect effects such as, increased edge effects, fragmentation, greater exposure to weeds, and increased disturbance from recreational users and construction, as well as noise and light pollution.

The Council maintains that there is no way for the natural heritage values of the site as outlined in *the heritage decision* to be maintained if the development encroaches within the identified heritage area. It is recommended that the development be redesigned so as to avoid impinging on the heritage area. This should include a buffer zone around the heritage area to ensure that indirect effects from development are minimised.

Recommendation

- Review the application to avoid disturbing the heritage area, including requiring a buffer zone around the heritage area.

⁷ P 5.