

ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

This past year has been difficult in many respects, especially with COVID-19 since early 2020. The main events for the year were the Parkwood Assessment and Approval, the EPBC review and the Bushfire enquiries. Our activities included the following:

July 2019:

Attendance at the Parkwood Planning Forum held by Yass Valley Council for members of the community who had lodged submissions on the Ginninderry-Parkwood proposal to amend the Local Environmental Plan. GFA speakers were:

- Robyn Coghlan on design of the conservation reserve and its shortcomings;
- Dave Kelly on public access to public open space and the threat to biodiversity through proximity of housing.

September:

Meeting with Helen Oakey, CEO of the Conservation Council of the ACT, to discuss our concerns re the design of the conservation corridor.

October:

Media release on the Parkwood proposal was circulated widely, including to other relevant community organisations;

Attendance at the Yass Valley Council meeting that approved the Parkwood proposal. In the absence of four councillors, the vote was four in favour and one against;

Presentation on the new suburb of Whitlam, adjacent to the Kama Nature Reserve in the Molonglo Valley as an example of the current planning regulations that also guide development in Ginninderry.

December:

Letters re firestorm risk at Parkwood were sent to the NSW Premier, President of the Legislative Council of NSW and other relevant NSW members; to the ACT Chief Minister and other relevant MLAs; and to local media.

January 2020:

Responses received from NSW Planning, Industry & Environment, advising that “the issues you have raised will be carefully considered by the Department in its assessment of the proposal and by the Minister prior to making a decision on the LEP”, and from Yvette Berry MLA.

February:

GFA reply to matters raised in Ms Berry’s letter.

March:

Assurance from Ms Berry that our “concern that metropolitan Canberra is subject to bushfire risk and that this is likely to increase as a consequence of climate change”... “has been recognised and considered in planning for the Ginninderra project, both in the ACT and NSW.”

GFA article, "Urban protection – nature conservation: twin goals of good urban planning" published in the March Bulletin of the National Parks Association of the ACT.

April:

Submission to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act review, using the Parkwood development as an example of the inadequacy of the EPBC Act, the main issues being that it:

- Considered only species nationally listed as endangered or vulnerable and not the overall biodiversity of the area. The Little Eagle, for instance, is listed as vulnerable in NSW and the ACT but this is not considered in EPBC assessment;
- Did not assess the cumulative effect of developments around Canberra, which together reduce foraging and breeding opportunities for the Little Eagle and other species;
- Did not assess the importance of connectivity and wildlife corridors and the effect of development on them.

May:

Submissions to the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and to the Senate Bushfire Inquiry. Both submissions outlined the high fire risk of Parkwood's geographical setting and the lack of acknowledgement of this in bushfire planning regulations.

The four main aspects of our continuing concerns are, essentially:

- the lack of any evidence that planning for the corridor and adjacent land constitute scientifically-desirable conservation reserve design;
- the need for a cross-border agreement between the NSW Government/Yass Valley Council and the ACT Government before development can occur;
- the likely neglect of maintenance of WSUD infrastructure needed to ensure water quality in the local river system; and
- the demonstrated reluctance to include sufficient precautionary provisions in fire management plans.

During the year, GFA was given much assistance by the Environmental Defenders Office, specifically from Stephanie Booker, who was generous with her time and advice. We also sought guidance from Graeme Worboys on reserve design and park management. We were saddened by his recent death on 28 September 2020.



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