

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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Paper presented to the
2009 Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand Conference,
Policy to Practice, Canberra, 20-21 October 2009

ACT Biodiversity Conservation Goals

- Conserve in perpetuity viable, wild populations of all flora and fauna species in the ACT and support regional and national efforts towards conservation of these species.
- Conserve in perpetuity native vegetation communities in the ACT as viable and well represented ecological communities.

Adapted from ACT Government Action Plans 27, 28 and 29.

Achievements to date – General

- Extensive system of lowland nature reserves within and adjoining urban area.
- Include representative range of grassland, woodland and forest communities.
- Aquatic and riparian communities in nature reserves along Murrumbidgee and Molonglo Rivers.
- Most medium and high elevation communities within Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.
- Many areas outside reserves subject to sympathetic management for biodiversity values (including Commonwealth land).

Achievements to date – Threatened species and ecological communities

- Action Plans for all listed threatened species and communities completed between 1997 and 2003.
- Most individual Action Plans reviewed in a broader context addressing woodlands, grasslands and aquatic/riparian communities – 2004-2007.
- Large areas of lowland grasslands and grassy woodlands within reserves
 - Much higher proportion than outside ACT
- Threatened species:
 - All known populations within reserves – 6
 - Well represented in reserves – 16
 - Present in some reserves but majority outside reserves – 3
 - In secure area outside reserve – 2
 - No protection – 0

Key Factors Leading to Current Situation

- **Presence of the National Capital**
- **Extensive systematic knowledge base**
- **Proactive planning process with a wide focus**
- **Effective implementation of plans**

ACT Ecological Information

- Gungahlin ecological study (ANU) – 1973
- ‘Ecological Resources of the ACT’ – 1979 (published 1984)
- ‘Sites of Significance’ reports – 1988 to 1990
- ‘Ecological Resources of the ACT’ update and extension – 1990

SELF GOVERNMENT

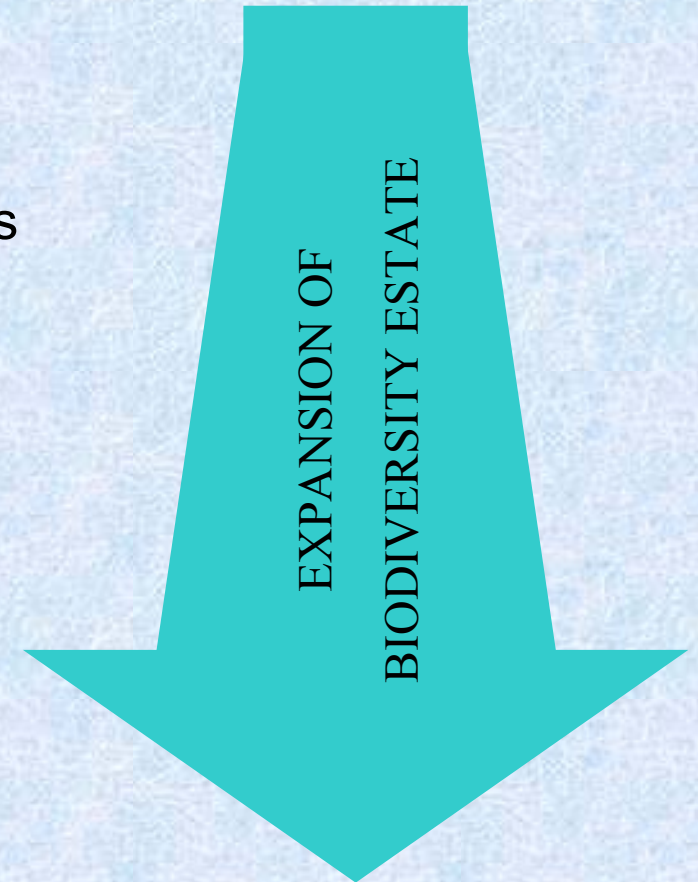
- Ecological studies of Gungahlin suburbs – 1992
- Threatened species surveys – ongoing from mid-1990s
- Action Plans (first series) – 1997 to 2003
- Action Plans (second series) – 2004 to 2007

ACT Planning

- Griffin Plan – protect hills
- NCDC
 - reinforce Griffin ideas
 - hills and ridges between towns
 - river corridors
 - NCOSS

SELF GOVERNMENT -----

- Redesign of Gungahlin to accommodate grassland reserves
- Action Plans
- Potential development land → biodiversity conservation



Implementation

- NCDC – Nature reserves linked to urban development
- ACT Government
 - Nature reserves often preceded development
 - linked to Action Plans/ecological assessments
- Management resources – the ‘Achilles heel’

Some Future Challenges

- Completing grassland reserve system
 - Grassland earless dragon habitat
- Maintaining viable woodland bird populations
- Improving connectivity
- Extending threatened plant populations
- Balancing biodiversity conservation against other national capital planning requirements
- Need to justify specific targets for biodiversity conservation
- Matching planning with management effort

Potential Limitations or Threats

- Loss of information and corporate knowledge
- Limited management resources
- Commonwealth land
- Environmental impact assessment processes
- Offset policies

Limitations of EIA Processes

- Product of the 1970s, not the 21st Century
- Driven by development rather than conservation
- Narrow geographical focus, generally not strategic
- Reactive rather than proactive
- Reflects negative rather than positive thinking
- Excessive demands compete for limited human resources
- Potential negative impact on biodiversity outcomes

Limitations of Offset Policies

- Extension of EIA, with many of the same limitations
- Not designed for comprehensive planning situation
- Penalise rather than reward proactive planning
- Fail to acknowledge 'biodiversity credits'
- 'Like for like' principle sometimes impracticable
- Potential to discourage proactive measures
- Need for lateral thinking in a broader context

Summary: Policy to Practice

- Comprehensive, accessible information base
- Effective planning process from a 'big picture' perspective
- Clear biodiversity conservation objectives
- Implementation of planning decisions
- Environmental policies which reward proactive planning and encourage optimum use of human resources for achieving good biodiversity outcomes
- Adequate management resources focused on quality rather than quantity.

Application to Other Jurisdictions

- Freehold title is a major limitation
 - access for information gathering
 - availability of land for conservation
- Planning is reactive rather than proactive, driven largely by development interests
- Socio-economic equity issues
- Responsible land managers most likely to be penalised

Further Information

An electronic copy of this paper is available on request from David Hogg at the following e-mail address: dhpl@bigpond.com

A more detailed report with the same title is currently being finalised and will also be available from the same e-mail address shortly.