



**FINAL DRAFT Consolidated Report
on Consultation -**

Directions for the next ACT

Natural Resource Management Plan

by

Landcare ACT

May/June 2021

Landcare ACT and its members are privileged to be on Ngunawal land where traditional ways of knowledge sharing and managing lands and water have taken place for thousands of years. We acknowledge and pay respect to Ngunawal Elders, past and present, and recognise their continuing connection to and care of, land, culture and community, and extend respect to all First Nations people.



CONTENTS

CHAIR'S FOREWORD	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
1. BACKGROUND AND PROCESS	7
1.1 Background	7
1.2 Process	7
2. KEY MESSAGES	9
2.1 Plan structure, terminology and communication	9
2.1.1 Plan structure	9
2.1.2 Terminology	9
2.1.3 Communication	10
2.2 Strategic themes and key focus areas	11
2.2.1 Healthy, productive and resilient natural environments theme	12
Key focus area: Climate change and resilience	13
Key focus area: Biodiversity conservation	14
Urban habitats	14
Threatened ecological communities and species	15
Connectivity	15
Key focus area: Ecological function	16
Key focus area: Healthy waterways	16
Key focus area: Sustainable agriculture	17
Insecure lease tenure	17
Agricultural policy and ACT Government Agricultural Minister	18
Food security	18
Key focus area: Urban design and planning	19
2.2.2 Engaged and informed communities theme	20
Key focus area: Ngunawal Caring for Country	21
Cultural landscape awareness for landcarers and the broader community	21
Cultural heritage on rural land	22
Caring for Country off-reserve	22
Aboriginal fire management	22
Key focus area: Stewardship	23
Key focus area: Community education	24
Young people	24



Junior Landcarer/Junior Naturalist	24
School education	25
Behaviour change	25
Community events and workshops	26
Interpretive information	26
Local natural environment information for households	27
Compliance	27
Key focus area: Community delivery	27
Key focus area: Community connection to nature and wellbeing	28
2.2.3 Robust governance theme	29
Key focus area: Community priorities and accountability	30
Key focus area: Integration and coordination	31
Key focus area: Resourcing	33
Key focus area: Monitoring and evaluation	33
2.3 Guiding principles	34

APPENDICES (AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST)

APPENDIX 1 AGENDA – ACT NRM CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

APPENDIX 2 SOUTHERN ACT GROUP CONSULTATION REPORT

APPENDIX 3 GINNINDERRA GROUP CONSULTATION REPORT

APPENDIX 4 MOLONGLO CONSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION REPORT

APPENDIX 5 RURAL LANDHOLDERS & WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE CONSULTATION REPORT



CHAIR'S FOREWORD

Our natural environment is in trouble, as witnessed by the 2019-20 summer fires that raged across our region, with dense bushfire smoke intermittently carpeting our region and perversely reminding us that we are connected to nature. Less dramatic evidence of trouble is evident in those things that are part of our daily lives - invasive weeds and animals insidiously spreading, and many of our native species disappearing. Yet COVID -19 is showing that our community is connecting more with outdoor environments than ever before, gaining physical and emotional benefits by so doing.

This highlights the importance of the plan that will supersede the current ACT Natural Resource Management Plan. Directions from the consultations facilitated by Landcare ACT are that the title and content of the next plan should give priority to protecting and restoring the environment, and recognising the strong connection between people and nature. Furthermore, we need to give highest priority to reducing the adverse effects of the changing climate, and it also is time to fully respect our local Ngunawal¹ peoples' leadership and knowledge to guide how best to care for our environment.

Landcare ACT and the Landcare community welcome the development of a new cross-tenure, community-owned plan for the natural environment, and have appreciated the opportunity of having a community-led consultation process. We are committed to continuing to take action to protect and restore the natural environment, and would welcome on-going engagement including through being a delivery partner for the plan's implementation.

I thank all those who care for our environment with their hearts, heads and hands, and welcome the opportunity to continue this vital work together. And, lets always remember that the future is not somewhere we are going, it is something we are creating.

Dr Maxine Cooper
Chair, Landcare ACT

¹ Landcare ACT uses Ngunawal rather than Ngunnawal, based on feedback from Landcare ACT Board Member, Elder Wally Bell.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Landcare ACT was contracted by ACT Government (Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate) to consult with the Landcare community regarding the development of a new plan to protect and restore the natural environment of the ACT. The *Natural Resource Management Plan – Discussion Paper 2021*² was used to guide consultations.

A wide range of views were canvassed through involving **over 50 individuals, who are affiliated with a very wide range of community** groups or live on rural properties.

The key messages from the consultation sessions related to:

- Plan structure, terminology and communication
- Strategic themes and focus areas; and
- Guiding principles.

The consultation highlighted that the Plan title, vision and overall document, needs to reflect that looking after the environment is about people and human systems in addition to the physical natural environment.

Three strategic themes, which are also desired outcomes, were identified through the consultation sessions. These are:

1. Healthy, productive and resilient natural environments

(Key focus areas: climate change and resilience, biodiversity conservation, ecological function, healthy waterways, sustainable agriculture, urban design and planning).

2. Engaged and informed communities

(Key focus areas: Ngunawal Caring for Country, stewardship, community education, community delivery, citizen science, community connection to nature and wellbeing).

3. Robust governance

² <https://yoursayconversations.act.gov.au/search?query=Natural+Resource+discussion+paper>



(Key focus areas: community priorities and accountability, integration and coordination, resourcing, monitoring and evaluation).

Key performance indicators need to be developed for all themes and focus areas. This is suggested to foster a far greater priority on actions related to 'Engaged and informed communities' and 'Robust governance'.

The Landcare community would like to see ACT NRM play a greater role in integrating and coordinating the various environmentally related plans and activities in the ACT.

It is recognised that there are significant linkages between various key focus areas. Two important over-arching views that cross all themes and key focus areas are:

- all activities are being undertaken on Ngunawal land and it is therefore important that Ngunawal Custodians be invited to guide the title and content of the plan; and
- climate change is a critical issue for the natural environment and building resilience through mitigation, adaptation and repair, needs to underpin all aspects of the plan.

The Landcare community also considers that an implementation plan is critical to prioritise funding and guide actions towards achieving the suggested strategic themes.

There was a strong call for the plan to be written in plain English.

Those consulted welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the development of a new plan for managing the natural environment and called for on-going engagement with greater community leadership on setting priorities to guide local actions.

Karissa Preuss
CEO, Landcare ACT

1. BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

1.1 Background

Landcare ACT (LACT) was engaged by the ACT Government (ACT Natural Resource Management (NRM), Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD)) to consult with LACT member group members, to inform the development of the plan that supersedes the existing ACT NRM Plan.

ACT NRM is fully within ACT Government and is one of 54 regional NRM organisations across Australia. A NRM plan is a requirement under the Australian Government's National Landcare Program that provides significant funds for natural resource management.

Landcare ACT facilitated four community consultation forums with members from the following groups:

- Southern ACT Catchment Group
- Ginninderra Catchment Group
- Molonglo Conservation (Catchment) Group; and
- Rural Landholders Association.

Female rural landholders who attended a Women in Agriculture networking event were also consulted. Additionally, individuals who were not able to attend one of the above forums were offered the opportunity to comment.

Consultation occurred with over 50 people associated with a wide range of groups who undertake landcare activities across the Territory and Region.

1.2 Process

The ACT Government's *Natural Resource Management Plan – Discussion Paper 2021*³ was the main reference document that helped guide the design of the consultation process.

³ <https://yoursayconversations.act.gov.au/search?query=Natural+Resource+discussion+paper>

The agenda for each of the forums was based on that shown in Appendix 1. At each forum:

- the ACT NRM CEO, Frank Garofalow was present for approximately the first 40 minutes. During this time he gave a presentation and outlined the context of NRM and therefore the purpose of the plan. Following his presentation Mr Garofalow invited views and questions; and
- the proposed ACT NRM Vision, Guiding Principles, Focus Areas and Guiding Principles as presented in the *Natural Resource Management Plan – Discussion Paper 2021*, were discussed and views recorded.

The consultation process was designed to provide qualitative information, which was analysed to identify key messages.

For each forum, a draft report was provided to participants to check accuracy and allow for additional comments to be provided. The final reports are appended as:

- Appendix 2 – Southern ACT Catchment Group Consultation Report
- Appendix 3 – Ginninderra Catchment Group Consultation Report
- Appendix 4 – Molonglo Conservation (Catchment) Group Consultation Report
- Appendix 5 – Rural Landholders & Women in Agriculture Consultation Report.

A draft of this report - Landcare ACT's *Consolidated Report on Consultation: Directions for the next ACT Natural Resource Management Plan* - was provided to ACT NRM, EPSDD for comment to ensure contract requirements were met. This final report has respected the Directorate's comments and will be made public on the LACT website, at a time agreed with ACT NRM.

ACT NRM will develop a draft plan for managing the natural environment in the ACT, which will be open for comment.

2. KEY MESSAGES

The key messages from consultations relate to:

- Plan structure, terminology and communication
- Strategic themes and focus areas; and
- Guiding Principles.

2.1 Plan structure, terminology and communication

2.1.1 Plan structure

The consultation highlighted that in addition to the plan having a vision that outlines the desired future, a mission statement is needed which defines the approach to be taken to achieve the vision. The mission could include the potential role of ACT NRM in integrating various environmental plans and activities, as outlined further in the Robust Governance section.

2.1.2 Terminology

In the consultations, the term ‘Natural Resource Management’ came under scrutiny and is considered an inappropriate title for the plan. Concerns were raised that the word ‘resource’ implies exploitation. ‘Environment’ is not mentioned yet this is the central issue and ‘management’ is a process that can be good or bad. It was considered that inherent in the ‘Natural Resource Management’ approach is breaking nature down into its component parts, rather than focussing on and valuing the whole ecosystem and interconnections between the various parts, including people.

The term NRM is not considered a good fit where human-environment connection is a focus, such as Aboriginal Caring for Country or Landcare. A number of participants explained that Aboriginal people refer to the environment as “mother earth” or as “a homeland” and that ‘Natural Resource Management’ does not incorporate this focus on relationship between people and nature.

Some people considered that an approach that recognised humans are part of nature would create a better foundation for caring for nature. It was also noted that the division between people and the environment is what has largely caused the environmental problems that confront us today and there is a need for an approach that recognises people as part of the environment.

There was some discussion that potentially the plan could be named “Caring for Country” as it does not embody the same separation between people and the environment. However, it was recognised that any adoption of this term could not be done without engaging with Ngunawal people. Overall environment was a preferred term, as it is broad, known to most and can encompass people.

The importance of recognising the connection between people and the natural environment was strongly emphasised in consultations, as it was considered that managing people and human systems is critical to protecting the environment, hence community and governance need to be recognised in the plan. A community member explained that one of the key lessons they received from studying Environmental management at ANU was that ‘Managing the environment is about managing people’. This needs to be recognised in the plan by having a strong focus on education to imbue an environmental ethic in future generations and to engagement of the community in environmental activities.

It was recognised that there may be political challenges with a different title given that ‘Natural Resource Management’ is a key term in used by the Australian Government. However, if the plan is to achieve the needed outcomes, its title and overall content needs to focus on the natural environment, protection and restoration, and the importance of the connection between people and the natural environment.

2.1.3 Communication

The plan needs to be written in plain English to reach as wide an audience as possible.

There was a request for a printable document without pictures and gloss to reduce computer storage and if needed to be printed efficiently. While this is the case, there

were also requests for pictures and images to illustrate concepts. These views highlight the challenge and need to accommodate the diversity of likely users of the plan.

There were requests to have on-going engagement through regular forums such as those held for the consultation and for these to be a means for the community to provide leadership on setting priorities to guide local actions and partner with the Government to implement the new plan.

2.2 Strategic themes and key focus areas

Three strategic themes, shown below and in Figure 1, were identified through a process of thematic analysis of the consultation feedback, including clustering key focus areas. These can shape, and underpin, the plan's vision.

Identified themes:

1. Healthy, productive and resilient natural environment

(Key focus areas: climate change and resilience, biodiversity conservation, ecological function, healthy waterways, sustainable agriculture, urban design and planning).

2. Engaged and informed communities

(Key focus areas: Ngunawal Caring for Country, stewardship, community education, community delivery).

3. Robust governance

(Key focus areas: community priorities and accountability, integration and coordination, resourcing, monitoring and evaluation).

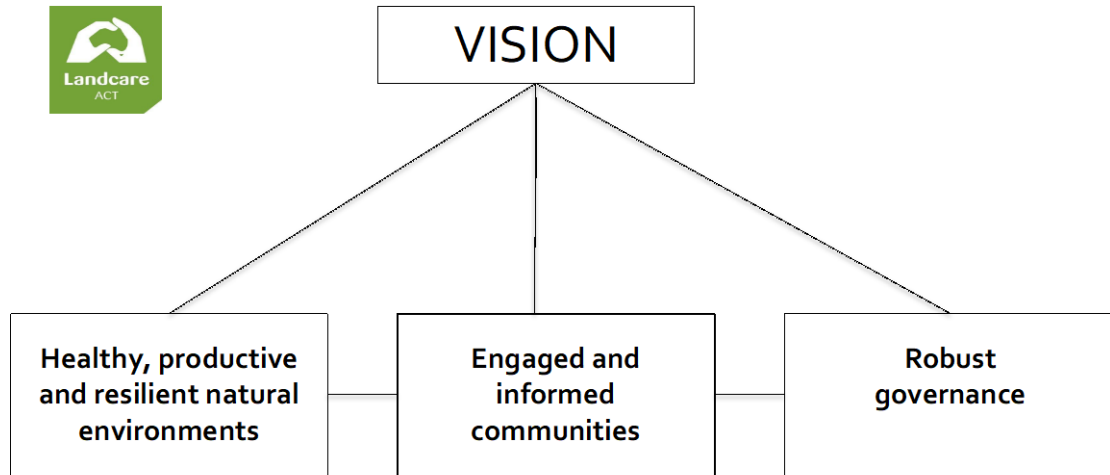


Figure 1: Themes identified to shape the vision

2.2.1 Healthy, productive and resilient natural environments theme

This section presents information gained from the community consultations that relates to the theme of a ‘Healthy, productive and resilient natural environment’.

Figure 2 illustrates this theme’s key focus areas, which are discussed in this section.

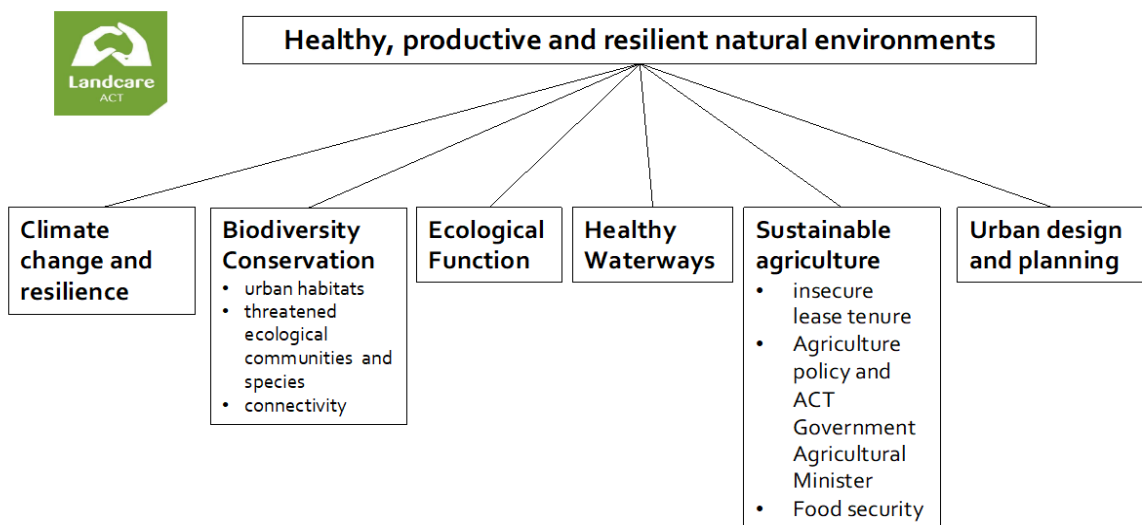


Figure 2: Healthy, productive and resilient natural environment theme and key focus areas

Key focus area: Climate change and resilience

Climate resilience is of critical importance to the Landcare community. It needs to be a focus area and also a key part of other focus areas - biodiversity conservation, ecological function, healthy waterways, sustainable agriculture, and urban design and planning.

Many participants considered that climate change is the number one threat to humanity and climate resilience, including climate adaptation, mitigation and importantly repair of climate related environmental damage is a critical issue. Government policy changes and community education regarding adaptation, mitigation and repair were recognised as essential. It was noted that most of the things we can and need to do to mitigate the effects of climate change will improve our quality of life concurrently with protecting the environment.

The following are some key issues and messages related to climate change:

- Climate ready planting is essential.
- Ecological communities that are resilient to the challenges of climate should be maintained and improved.
- Urban forest strategy is important as unshaded parking area/roads are a challenge. Landcarers have a role to play in the implementation of the urban forest strategy
- Water will be affected, including storm water drainage. There is a need for investment in recycled water and water sensitive urban design.
- We need to educate the community about misconceptions and conflicting views that obstruct coordinated and effective action on climate change and help align environmentally proactive behaviours with community values as they are currently fragmented.
- We need more investment in renewables and retrofitting and incorporate solar into older buildings.
- There is need for a clear goal regarding reversal of damage done by climate change, including bushfires, extreme weather events and ecosystem

changes, as well as goals for adaptation and mitigation. Even if the goal is not reached the community needs something to work towards.

Key focus area: Biodiversity conservation

The importance of biodiversity conservation and enhancement was highlighted. It was noted that 'Biodiversity maintenance and improvement', may be a better than simply 'Biodiversity conservation'. Key areas related to biodiversity conservation included urban habitats, threatened ecological communities and species, particularly grasslands, connectivity and weed control. It was highlighted that people of the ACT have a role in improving and enhancing the natural environment through biodiversity conservation activities and all actions should be managed in partnership with the community, including and especially Ngunawal people.

Urban habitats

While a heavy emphasis was placed on the protection of threatened ecological communities and species, particularly through biodiversity, a strong focus from Landcarers was the importance of improving and maintaining all habitats. There were numerous calls for an increased focus on biodiversity and an ecological approach to be advanced in urban areas, in particular small parks. The importance of having 'green buildings' and 'green neighbourhoods' was also mentioned.

It was highlighted that by caring for habitats broadly, more can be done for both threatened and non-threatened species. Habitat protection is key as otherwise, as participants explained, we will be in a situation of creating other threatened species in the future. Groups wanted to allow for wildlife habitat in suburbs and other built-up areas as well as in reserves.

Numerous habitats or landscape types, beyond threatened ecological communities in the ACT, also require focus, such as forests on Black Mountain. In addition, participants explained that protecting the natural environment it is not just about pretty birds and fluffy animals, but insects, worms and microorganisms also need attention.

The importance and value of stewardship of local urban habitats was strongly emphasised.

Threatened ecological communities and species

Off Maintaining and improving the threatened ecological communities of woodlands and grasslands are recognised as critically important. Grasslands were a key focus area, Ginninderra Catchment Group in particular noted the importance of maintaining and improving off-reserve grasslands. Development was also discussed as a key threat to woodland and grassland ecological communities. Participants explained there was a need to improve biodiversity rather than lowering the bar to allow for development, as outlined in Section 2.1.5 Urban Design and Planning

Off-reserve critically endangered Natural Temperate Grasslands was highlighted as a key environmental asset that landcarers can contribute to maintaining. It was noted that there are remnant patches of grasslands throughout urban areas of the ACT and surrounding rural areas, particularly in the Ginninderra Catchment, which have historically been neglected. Ginninderra Catchment Group members explained that some of these areas are formally listed as Natural Temperate Grasslands (thanks to community efforts) and others that either currently qualify or could be turned into the critically endangered Natural Temperate Grasslands habitat with restoration effort.

Ginninderra Catchment Group members would like to see fragmented patches of off reserve grasslands better managed, through resourcing the community to undertake this work. The importance of this approach was outlined in the ACT NRM Investment Prospectus, however the work has not been resourced. It is still a critical community priority.

An alternative funding resource for off-reserve grassland management was identified - Transport Canberra and City Services to stop mowing native grassland areas and use the savings to undertake environmental protection.

Connectivity

Connectivity is critically important to the community:

- within a local landscape/environment

- between all landscapes/environments
- between people and landscapes/environments.

There was a call for more corridors of forests and plants of different heights and densities through the suburbs to connect urban parks and nature strips and reserves.

There was also a call for well-defined conservation corridors to be protected by being placed in conservation zones e.g. Ginninderra Creek, Sullivan's Creek.

Participants want better connected bush areas and more biodiversity being managed in ways that support biodiversity and reduce weed loads.

Key focus area: Ecological function

Ecological function was seen by many participants as the key theme as all of humanity is dependent on the ecological services provided by our environment, such as water, soil, air. Like climate change, water, while being a focus area itself it cuts across all focus areas. Participants saw a need for the term to encompass soil, air and pollinators. Water, as outlined in Section 2.1.4 Healthy Waterways, is a key focus area.

Landcarers considered that interactions between the different components of ecosystem services, and with biodiversity, and management is critical. These interactions need to be presented in the plan.

Participants called for more cultural/ecological burning especially in grassland reserves as it was considered that this minimises herbicide use that adversely affects insect pollinators, encourages retention of vegetation which holds soil in place, filters water and increases CO₂ capture.

Key focus area: Healthy waterways

It was considered that healthy waterways need to be given a greater prominence. Therefore, it was made a focus area, rather than being included in ecosystem function. Participants considered that a catchment approach to environmental management is ideal as it takes into account the interconnections between various

parts of a catchment system. Some people noted that healthy waterways is a good name for a program and hoped that the Healthy Waterways program will continue.

Water quality, quantity, amenity, hydrology, allocation and amenity were identified as key areas of focus. Participants advised they would like to see an improvement in water quality through having more natural creeks and wetlands. Also, a priority is the retention of vegetation to improving the ability of soil to be held in place and filter water of soil and contaminants.

Water security was highlighted as a critical issue for urban landcarers and rural landholders, noting that this is a cross-border issue. Rural landholders, particularly those who have Murrumbidgee River frontage are concerned about water security. A landholder described seeing platypus walking upstream in a dry Murrumbidgee River in the Tharwa area, seemingly looking for water. There is a desire for more cross-border integration on this issue.

Key focus area: Sustainable agriculture

Sustainable agriculture was a topic raised by participants in all forums, with this being of particular interest to rural landholders. There was some discussion regarding the term sustainable vs regenerative agriculture. While all participants supported the use of sustainable agriculture, it appeared that in general regenerative was preferred. However, some participants were strongly opposed to regenerative.

Key issues raised in relation to sustainable agriculture included insecure lease tenure, need for an agricultural policy, food security, ACT regional planning, farm diversification and succession planning.

Insecure lease tenure

Lack of security of tenure for ACT rural leaseholders in some areas of the ACT is a major issue. Sustainability is social, environmental and economic and farming like any business cannot be sustainable without the social and financial stability provided by certainty of tenure.

Concern was raised about activities being undertaken that are inconsistent with rural ambience. It was noted that this is difficult to address.

Agricultural policy and ACT Government Agricultural Minister

The need for an agricultural policy and an ACT Government Agricultural Minister was emphasised so that the many issues raised in the consultations could be addressed, including:

- planning agriculture for the variable climate in the ACT
- making food and fibre production a permanent land use around Canberra to achieve the many associated multiple co-benefits
- bushfire mitigation
- positioning the ACT within the region for a sustainable and productive future
- ecological grazing
- Carbon farming
- Government incentives to retain ground cover – 100 per cent when possible
- regulation of sustainable agricultural practices
- provide food security
- rural planning informing the new Territory Plan and future food policies.

Food security

Food security was a recurring theme. It was highlighted that ACT rural landholders are in a strong position in terms of proximity to urban populations and that ‘paddock to plate’ ventures may provide niche markets in the future. However, the loss of prime agricultural land to development was a concern.

The importance of using urban land for food production was also highlighted. There is an opportunity for sustainable food production in the peri-urban areas of the ACT and on urban ACT Government land – noting the importance of community gardens.

To build food security having tenure certainty and a clear pathway were considered important. The Food in the Capital Conference was well received. However, questions were asked regarding who will continue to lead this movement.

Key focus area: Urban design and planning

In response to concerns over adverse environmental effects from urban development there was a call to contain urban growth, maintain green spaces, productive agricultural land, pursue high quality 'green' designs and plans that advance protecting the environment concurrently with accommodating the increasing population.

There was also a call to give the environment priority over development by remnant areas of grasslands and woodlands ahead of proposed projects. Bush on the Boundary Reference Groups, initially developed by Ginninderra Catchment Group with the Conservation Council, for a Gungahlin development, is seen as a good model for addressing environmental issues associated developments.

The words 'integration' and 'connectivity' were used multiple times in relation to urban design and planning. Integration is considered important to bring together the natural environment and the urban environment where people live and work. Concerns were raised about planning decisions for urban areas not allowing sufficient space for green infrastructure to support walking, running, cycling and generally being active. Participants would like to see urban design and planning include smart ecological elements.

The need for regional planning was highlighted strongly in the rural landholders sessions. There was general agreement that landholders would like the rural landscape of the ACT retained and rural land to be maintained at 15% of the ACT or higher for feeding the bush capital and other agricultural values, as well as the landscape, view-scape and heritage value it provides to the ACT.

The expansion of urban areas is seen as a threat to the natural environment. There is no limit to population in the ACT and some participants called for a population limit to be considered. Regional growth was also considered an important issue that affects the natural environment.

Participants noted that building design should support the natural environment. This is so the community can focus on the urban environment as a regenerative ecosystem rather than something that consumes nature. It was highlighted that the

urban areas can support the natural environment through green infrastructure such as buildings having living walls and rooftops, greenspaces on balconies, backyards and other spaces. It was suggested that all new developments should be required to factor in water harvesting, pollination, habitat islands and environmental connections. To make this happen it was considered that developers need to initially be incentivised to create environmentally friendly buildings and developments

2.2.2 Engaged and informed communities theme

This section presents information gained from the community consultations that relates to the theme of a ‘Engaged and informed communities’. Figure 3 illustrates this theme’s key focus areas, which are discussed in this section.

In consultations participants emphasised that environmental management is largely about managing people. As such engaging with, educating and supporting the community in stewardship and delivery of environmental outcomes is seen as a core and critical activity.

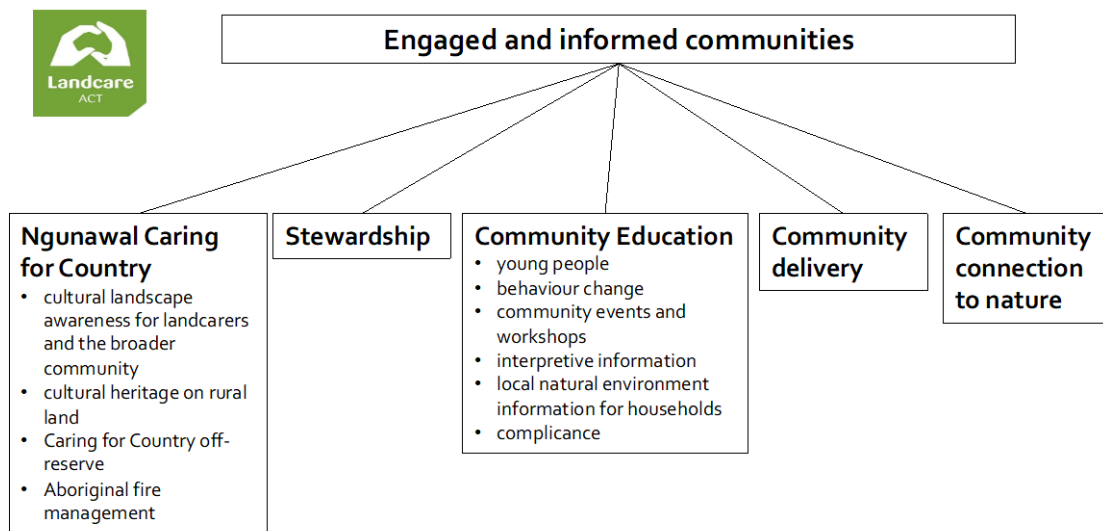


Figure 3: Engaged and informed communities theme and key focus areas

Key focus area: Ngunawal Caring for Country

There were strong views that all environmental management and caring for country activities should be undertaken under the leadership of, and in partnership with traditional custodians. The view was expressed that there needs to be a joint arrangement for managing Namadgi and reserves.

Key themes regarding Ngunawal Caring for Country include: cultural landscape education for Landcarers and the broader community, cultural heritage on rural land, caring for country off reserve and Aboriginal fire management.

Landcarers said there needs to be a focus on how a true partnership between volunteers, Parkcarers, Ngunawal community and government can be forged and this needs to be resourced. It was emphasised that the Plan will need to value Ngunawal Custodian's priorities and explicitly aim to support Ngunawal people in achieving their goals for country.

Cultural landscape awareness for landcarers and the broader community

The importance of Landcarers and the broader community having an understanding of the cultural landscape was highlighted. A lack of understanding presents the risk of inadvertent doing the wrong thing and breaching the ACT Heritage Act (2004).

Community Landcare has attempted to address this in some ways. For example, all three Catchment Groups have coordinated Aboriginal cultural values walks in areas stewarded by local landcare groups, funded by ACT Heritage Grants and other funding sources. These were done for the purpose of community education regarding cultural heritage. Further cultural site assessments are required in areas where Landcarers operate. It was understood that the ACT heritage unit has indicated that grants for further interpretive walks or assessments undertaken by the community are unlikely to be funded in the future.

Participants emphasised the need for Ngunawal people to be supported to interpret the landscape, pass on appropriate knowledge and help Landcarers and the broader community to understand how to read the landscape in the Ngunawal context. A

suggestion was made that there is a need to collate resources for teachers and ParkCarers to help to inform people about Ngunawal culture, but it was noted that this would be expensive.

Cultural heritage on rural land

Rural landholders called for more information about the cultural landscape. Although Landcare ACT in partnership with member groups held a regional workshop and some on-farm workshops focused on Aboriginal land management, funded by a Commonwealth agriculture grant it was considered that more needs to be done. Landcare ACT is exploring options to do progress doing further work on rural cultural landscapes.

Caring for Country off-reserve

Participants raised the issue of a lack of support for activities to restore Aboriginal sites of significance outside the Parks and Conservation system, notably those located on rural lands and on urban open space managed by Transport Canberra and City Services, the National Capital Authority. However, there are examples of activities which can be built on:

- Ginninderra Catchment Group have developed an Aboriginal Landcare Strategy, focussed on cultural sites on Transport Canberra and City Services land. Mulanggang landcare group works to protect and restore cultural sites in the Ginninderra Catchment, however this is dependent on grants.
- Molonglo Catchment Group cares for 'Bullan Mura" in the area of Capital Hill and Stirling Park.
- The ACT Government funds Aboriginal natural resource management partially through the National Landcare Program, however, these funds are used within the Directorate. While these outcomes are critical, additional funding is required to support Aboriginal people to work on country, and particularly on cultural sites in the region.

Aboriginal fire management

There is increasing interest in Aboriginal fire management among rural landholders and the broader Landcare community. Numerous rural landholders both in and outside the ACT have expressed interest in learning more about Aboriginal burning practices. While it is appreciated that the ACT Fire Unit have an Aboriginal fire strategy and team, Landcarers were not aware of recent cultural burns undertaken by this team with the local community. It was noted that various other jurisdictions allow burning for cultural and ecological purposes, for example, Merri Creek in Melbourne. There is potential for similar approaches in the ACT to secure ecological and cultural benefits.

Key focus area: Stewardship

The importance of stewardship, which is the ongoing care and restoration of particular local environments over a long time period, was highlighted again and again through the consultations.

Landcarers in the ACT have, and want to continue to have a role, and ownership in improving and enhancing the natural environment. Their efforts significantly benefit the natural environment through their contribution of over more than \$2m in in-kind hours to maintain and regenerate urban parks, reserves and waterways each year. It was noted in consultations that with 30 years of voluntary restoration work the Landcare community can see changes in the environment. It is important to recognise the contributions and achievements the Landcare community has made to environmental management in the bush capital. Environmental volunteers greatly appreciate the work of the Landcare networks, and Catchment Groups in supporting, coordinating their stewardship activities.

Rural landholders were also vocal about how they are the current custodians, caretakers and stewards of the land. A landholder explained “don’t underestimate the commitment and capability of farmers to improve our land”. Landholders spoke about how they contribute extensive time and money towards land stewardship, which has both environmental and economic benefits.

Participants called for KPIs to be developed which measure and integrate the reporting of stewardship across the entire ACT, rather than being siloed and labelled as Transport Canberra and City Services or Parks and Conservation volunteers.

Stewardship is closely linked with an environmental ethic and is often inspired by an understanding of, and connection with, the environment. Cultivating a love of the volunteering movement within the community to increase volunteer engagement and also raise appreciation of our natural environment were considered as critical components of an ACT NRM Plan. This could be largely achieved through community education activities.

Key focus area: Community education

Community education was seen as vital to the preservation of the natural environment. Landcarers considered that to imbue an environmental ethic and generate positive environmental behaviour change, education needs to include very young children through junior Landcare type programs, school children of all ages and the broader community.

Young people

There is growing evidence that the values instilled into children and young people have an impact on their conservation ethic as they age. To build community environmental management into the future, there is a need for young people to develop a sense of curiosity and appreciation for nature, have greater understanding of the environmental values and be more actively engaged in improving environments. Junior Landcare/junior Naturalist programs and school education were strategies highlighted as a means to achieve this.

Junior Landcarer/Junior Naturalist

Many participants considered Junior Landcare/junior Naturalist programs to be particularly important as these types of programs creates an ethic of environmental stewardship from a young age. Education was considered to be about engagement of younger people in a sustained way in addition to basic transfer of information, so that today's children become future Landcarers.

The importance of young people in caring for nature was highlighted in the ACT's Legislative Inquiry - Nature in the City Enquiry. Furthermore, the ACT Greens Policy Position Statement, recognised the importance of a Junior Landcare type program,

identifying Landcare ACT as playing a key role. Landcare ACT is in the process of developing a Junior Landcare Program across the ACT.

School education

School engagement with the Landcare community and the environment more broadly was highlighted. It is considered that environmental education needs to occur at all ages and that there are considerable opportunities for the ACT NRM, through community delivery partners, to create stronger links with the Australian Environmental Educators Network and ACT Smart Schools. Through these links, the suggestion was made that mandatory excursions, a couple of times a year, should be introduced into the curriculum to get kids out into nature. There was a strong perspective that environmental education should take place in urban as well as conservation areas, so children learn that they are part of the environment.

Education was considered to be needed in various ways with a specific focus on natural, cultural and ecological literacy to build a stewardship ethic. Reference was made to a recent school's education resource produced by the Conservation Council of the ACT Region and the Molonglo Conservation Group's forthcoming schools resource kit.

Need to include changes in the national and ACT education curriculum courses on environment and climate change. These should be specifically taught not only as a cross curriculum issue but be linked to at least one specific curriculum area. This is critical, so students accessing environmental education are not dependent on an individual teacher's interest, knowledge and values.

Behaviour change

The importance of broad community education to bring about behaviour change was highlighted. Community education and provision for the community to deliver these programs was seen as a critical component of any ACT NRM Plan. Priorities for community education and behaviour change were seen to include community events and workshops, interpretive signage, education about local natural environments, education that encompasses stewardship and knowledge sharing with follow up measured behaviour change, more support for community from Parks and

Conservation Service and Transport Canberra and City Services and passionate Government engagement.

Community events and workshops

Landcarers would like to see Catchment Groups continue to be supported to deliver community events, markets and workshops to engage the community in caring for the environment. The view was shared that the majority of Canberrans do not understand or appreciate the ecological value and functional significance of native grasslands and woodlands and other aspects of our environment. Given that this misconception comes down to a lack of education and public knowledge, many Landcarers considered that it will be paramount that the plan provides for educational activities that address common misconceptions to help align public views with ecological values and environmental management priorities.

Community education in this way would encourage broader appreciation and understanding of important aspects of our environment, promote belonging and shared “ownership” with urban parks and natural environments, as well as inspire specific behaviour change.

One example that is considered lacking is dedicated programs on weeds where community priorities can be met.

It is considered that education and outreach programs should aim to include as many different people and groups as possible, including culturally and linguistically diverse populations, those with disabilities etc. The Catchment Groups, with Landcare ACT, are well placed to provide these services.

Interpretive information

Interpretive signs that explain local environmental values are considered a high priority for many Landcarers. These assist individuals in having greater ecological literacy in their own local areas, which often leads to increased stewardship. However, it is recognised that digital information that is available through mobile phones, that can be location specific, may also be valuable.

The importance of showing where individual Landcare Groups are working and the assets they are maintaining was also highlighted as very important to increasing awareness of the work of volunteers and engaging greater participation.

Local natural environment information for households

There was a focus on educational material about the natural environment being provided to local residents. The Queanbeyan Council developed a Bushwise Resource booklet (2006, University of Canberra, Queanbeyan Council), which was delivered to everyone who lives on the margins of bushland. The program is about how to live with the natural environment. Ginninderry Bush on the Boundary group, involving the Conservation Council and Ginninderra Catchment Group have also undertaken similar programs, funded by developers.

Compliance

Issues of compliance and the need to address this through education were raised. It was explained that more on ground rangers will help to educate people on public land as well as follow-up on compliance issues.

Key focus area: Community delivery

A key focus of participants was the important role that the community can play in the delivery of many of the priorities in an ACT NRM Plan. In particular, Catchment Groups have the networks and skills to continue to deliver much of the community education. Catchment groups have been doing community education through the Healthy Waterways Program and there is opportunity to substantially build on this.

The principle of 'subsidiarity' was raised in the Southern ACT Catchment Coordination Group forum. This refers to devolving responsibility to the least centralised level that is appropriate for achieving the outcome. Concerns were raised that there has been a pattern of "centralizing" investment in community support for Landcare within the Government (as opposed to "outsourcing" to community development groups such as the catchment groups). There was a call for a MoU between the Landcare community, Parks and Conservation Service and Transport Canberra and City Services that clearly outline roles and responsibility.

Landcarers asked for the plan to define how the community will be involved in the delivery of activities and for deliverables to be measured. There were calls for a benchmark of approximately 50% community delivery at minimum. It was recognised that the National Landcare Program requires 20% community delivery, however it is understood that this includes the work of the Regional Agricultural Landcare Facilitator, which sits within the ACT Government. It was noted that catchment groups previously received their core funding through NLP1 and changes in Commonwealth funding mean this is no longer possible. Through extensive discussion it was established that members expect ACT NRM to seek this funding as a priority. Following the sessions, ACT Government has committed four-year funding for the Catchment Groups, a move that has been very welcomed.

Key focus area: Community connection to nature and wellbeing

Throughout the consultations there was recognition that involvement in Landcare is both good for the environment and those people who participate. This is aligned with growing international experience and research shows that active participation in nature-based activities is clearly associated with reduced prevalence of depression, anxiety and other health problems and increased social connectedness. A researcher from The University of Sheffield explained "Connection with nature is valuable, sometimes life-saving, for people with mild to severe mental health difficulties" (Birch 2017). The return on investment for nature conservation activities in health has been shown to be over 8:1 (Bagnell et al 2019).

Participants considered that through connecting people to their local natural environments, landcare activities have the opportunity to support individuals with mental health issues and those experiencing social isolation. Landcare is considered a therapeutic nature related activity that also builds social capital, creates informal supports, and enhances a sense of connectedness and belonging. Individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds highlighted how it was landcare in the ACT, the connection with Australian environment and people looking after it, that made them feel truly Australian. Farmers also spoke about the close relationship between the health of the land, and mental and emotional health.

The need for programs that link mental health with Landcare was highlighted. Landcare ACT was recently awarded ACT Government Healthy Canberra Grant to support people with complex mental health and social isolation through nature connection activities. Participants highlighted that it would be useful to include the veteran community in plans to help with mental health issues.

The impact of climate change on mental health, particularly of young people was highlighted. It was explained that there is an opportunity for Landcare to be small part of a local solution to climate change. Some of the individual volunteers who have participated in the Bushfire Recovery Programs in Namadgi (coordinated by Landcare ACT and Southern ACT Catchment Group) have expressed how being part of restoring the country has been emotionally healing following the bushfires, extreme weather events and COVID. The need to continue to provide and support local activities/events that allow mentally stressed citizens to connect with nature and find relief was emphasised.

2.2.3 Robust governance theme

This section presents information gained from the community consultations that relates to the theme of 'Robust governance'. Figure 4 illustrates this theme's key focus areas, which are discussed in this section.

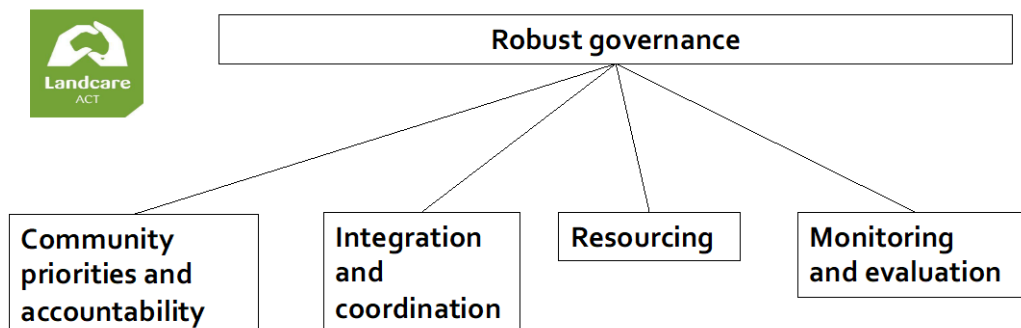


Figure 4: Robust governance theme and key focus areas

The importance of improved governance for natural resource management within the ACT was a key theme that emerged in all consultations. It was requested that components of governance to be reported on in the plan. It was noted that the ACT NRM is the only NRM body within Australia that sits wholly within government. This was considered a problem, which makes having robust and transparent governance particularly important in our jurisdiction. **Governance related themes included: developing structures of accountability related to community priorities being reflected in the design and implementation of the plan, improving collaboration and integration within ACT Government, strong leadership, implementation, regulation, resourcing, communication and monitoring and evaluation.**

Key focus area: Community priorities and accountability

While Landcarers appreciate that ACT NRM is attempting to develop a 'community owned plan' and are investing considerably in the process, it is recognised that there is potential for significant mismatch between community priorities and that of ACT Government. There are very different systems of accountability in the community and in government and the need for developing a system of accountability that includes the community is a very high priority of Landcarers.

The recent history of ACT Government's formalised structures of accountability regarding NRM was considered to be far from ideal. Over the last few years, Landcarers have called for a review the ACT's governance framework for natural resource management to:

- improve clarity and transparency in decision-making on natural resources by government agencies
- recognise Landcare ACT as the peak body for the community on Landcare
- establish a fully independent ACT Natural Resource Management regional body that advises government and Ministers, considers community-driven initiatives and government priorities, determines expenditure of Australian government funding, and reports annually.

Ginninderra Catchment Group wrote a comprehensive report – *Provision of a Framework for a Regional NRM Strategy for the ACT* as part of its ACT Government

funding for 2018-19 financial year. This report included information on various natural resource governance models and analysed the applicability of these to the region. It was provided to the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Directorate as part of the acquittal process for the Group receiving funding. It is understood that Cinnibar was also contracted by the Directorate in 2018-19 to report on natural resource management governance arrangements. This report is not publicly available and there is interest in the report findings.

Throughout these sessions the need for community knowledge, values and priorities to be incorporated into the measurable actions in the Plan was highlighted. There was a call for community members to be included on an equivalent to an ACT NRM Board. It was also explained that there is role for the community to oversee KPIs regarding community priorities and values being incorporated into the design and implementation of the Plan.

A Statement of Partnership between community Landcare and ACT Government that has been discussed between LACT and Ministers would assist and ACT NRM could work with LACT towards the development of this Statement.

Key focus area: Integration and coordination

Participants all agreed that far greater integration and coordination between community and government, within government and across tenure and jurisdictions is absolutely necessary for the plan to succeed. It was highlighted that ACT NRM could play a key role as an integrating and connecting body.

It was frequently mentioned that there was a need to address siloing, and the “lack of a joined-up approach” within the ACT Government. There was an identified need for all to work better together, government, community and industry. A participant explained “I’m seeing the “big picture”, where all such Government plans and policies are congruent with each other and increase the positive outcomes for our environment and for communities living in ACT and region.” It was agreed that greater collaboration would involve the effective application of knowledge and resources and a firm strategy.

There was a desire for the plan to clearly identify how it integrates with other plans and how it will be coordinated and integrated across Government. If this is an

attempt to work together, how this will happen needs to be very clearly articulated. If possible, it would be ideal to influence the Territory Plan, National Capital Plan and other related plans. It is recognised that ACT Government actions have a big effect on the environment and the outcomes need to be measured and publicly reported.

The NRM plan and associated implementation processes were seen as a potential “connector” to coordinate and integrate across government to reduce government silos. The potential to support the different Directorates working more collaboratively together and to address the gaps in community priorities being reflected in existing plans was a key discussion in the Southern ACT Catchment Group forum. However, the challenge of achieving this while the ACT Natural Resource Management Group is wholly within EPSDD was noted.

Strong leadership was called for, with a question raised over who will be the champion of this plan and its goals, given the inherent challenges of the NRM Group sitting wholly within ACT Government. It is considered that the equivalent of NRM Council needs to be re-established with much broader scope. This would need to include representatives from the community, Landcare ACT, and each of the ACT Government teams with an interest in environmental management.

Cross-tenure issues were raised. Catchment Groups take a leading role in working cross-tenure and taking a landscape scale approach. Again, the challenge of the Natural Resource Management Group sitting wholly within ACT Government was noted. The potential of developing an interdepartmental committee as are often developed in Commonwealth Government was raised. Landcare ACT has a role to play in this and has had conversations with the Conservation Council regarding establishing a committee that comprises Ministers and high-level decision makers discussing key issues with the community. It was considered that the Natural Resource Management Group would be part of and provide administrative support for such a committee.

Participants emphasised the difficulty of working with so many ministers across different portfolios. This was a particular issue for rural landholders, who called for an agricultural minister dedicated to focusing on agricultural and rural issues. The development of an agricultural policy is seen as a good step in this direction.

Key focus area: Resourcing

Participants considered that diversification is critical when it comes to funding for the sector. Once again questions were raised about how the plan will interact with other Government plans and strategies in terms of funding and asked that all Departments be involved to avoid siloing. Participants emphasised that accountability mechanisms, reviews, inspiration and leadership were key if the community is to have a hand in deciding where Government money is best invested.

The need for increased and more secure government investment in community environmental management was highlighted. There were calls to double the Environment Grant budget, as this is grossly oversubscribed every year. Ongoing adequate funding for the Catchment Groups to coordinate volunteer activities was highlighted numerous times.

Two innovative ideas for increasing revenue for community environmental activities were raised: Water Abstraction Charge and redirecting mowing funds. Regarding the Water Abstraction Charge Queanbeyan Landcare has long been advocating for use of this charge that is paid as part of our water bill to be directed towards Catchment management, rather than consolidated revenue. It was noted that in many instances mowing is actually having a negative impact on grasslands, and it spreads weeds and hence funding spent on mowing could be redirected.

Key focus area: Monitoring and evaluation

The importance of monitoring and evaluation was emphasised by participants. Recommendations for better monitoring and evaluation of projects, plans and strategies included:

- Rely more on catchment groups to monitor and assess practices as they are well placed at an on-ground level to collaborate with the Government.
- The Government needs to review feedback on previous plans.
- Regulations need to be researched based on biodiversity needs, regulated and enforced.
- Measure outcomes for the greater good with a long-term view, informed by the community.

- Utilise the sustainable development goals and well-being indicators.

2.3 Guiding principles

While the views of all participants were sought on the guiding principles, those provided at the Southern ACT Catchment Group forum were extensive and form the basis of what is reported in this section.

The general feedback is that the proposed guiding principles are too long and wordy. It was considered that each principle could be summarised in one word, with a longer description following.

It was considered that a critical missing principle was that of ‘subsidiarity’ or devolving activities to the least centralised group appropriate to undertake the activity.

Comments on each of the guiding principles follows:

“Identifies the key threatening processes that the regional community is seeking to mitigate”

Participants suggested the key processes and key assets need to be individually identified as well as undertaking a natural resource risk analysis that includes all risks from management to fire. It also needs to include a plan for adaptation.

“Provides an integrated strategic focus for protecting and managing the ACT’s natural resources”

Participants said more is needed on conservation and mitigation, not just managing.

“Understands and encompasses the needs and expectations of environmental volunteers, the Aboriginal community, rural landholders, researchers, Landcare groups and the broader ACT community by including these stakeholders in the development and delivery of the Plan.”

The suggestion was made that the word ‘encompasses’ be removed and that the inclusion of local knowledge and Aboriginal cultural knowledge was essential. It was noted that community partnerships are talked about in the proposed vision statement

but are absent in the Guiding Principles. The suggestion was also made that “*reflects*” replace “expectations”.

“Is based on the best available scientific, economic and social information available and be appropriately scaled and scoped.”

Concerns were expressed about the required understanding of those providing information and whether or not those involved met the basic criteria. It was also said the plan needs to be based on the best social, economic, environmental and cultural information. Participants requested that it include adaptive and flexible management dependent on the available information. Some participant asked that “*economic*” be removed.

“Identifies and prioritises NRM actions based on short- medium-and long-term outcomes.”

As this is all outcome oriented, it was considered that the plan would need to specify *how* these actions would be prioritised. It was emphasised that community priorities must be reflected. Environmental priorities must also be reflected.

“Identifies pathways to accessing and increasing investment in natural resource management from multiple sources” and “Incorporates traditional ecological knowledge, where appropriate, in accordance with agreed protocols and with prior approval of the Ngunnawal custodians of the knowledge.”

Participants raised various issues with wording saying it identified pathways that aren’t well established, that there are multiple custodian groups that hold traditional ecological knowledge and the term ‘prior approval’ might be replaced with something like *learn from traditional custodians*. There was a call for traditional custodians to lead cultural activities and concerns that some of the terminology is not clear.

“Provides ongoing knowledge and education to the next generation to enable future decisions to continue to support the natural resources of the ACT”

Participants stated the ACT should be a place that produces more resources than it imports or exports. Groups said this guiding principle requires ongoing investment.



“Manages for resilience of ecosystems and communities, including climate adaptation.”

It was noted that resilience in a changing climate is about addressing heat mitigation, having water security, managing flood risks and mitigating bushfire risks. All things that affect the natural and built environment, and people.

“Includes monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate effectiveness.”

The point was made that to talk about demonstrating effectiveness before monitoring and evaluation has been undertaken is to put the cart before the horse. Participants asked that the plan adapts to new information emerging with a review every five years.

The intent of the guiding principles could be captured in the suggested mission statement to provide a context and direction for the plan.

APPENDICES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

APPENDIX 1 AGENDA – ACT NRM CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

APPENDIX 2 SOUTHERN ACT GROUP CONSULTATION REPORT

APPENDIX 3 GINNINDERRA GROUP CONSULTATION REPORT

APPENDIX 4 MOLONGLO CONSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION REPORT

APPENDIX 5 RURAL LANDHOLDERS & WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE CONSULTATION REPORT