



**Australian Government**  
**National Capital Authority**

# National Capital Open Space System Review Report

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*February 2014*

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## Foreword to the report

I am pleased to present this report on the National Capital Authority's review of the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS). The report is the culmination of an extensive research project undertaken in conjunction with the University of Canberra and it represents the first comprehensive examination of the NCOSS since the early 1990s.

A key element in the planning of the National Capital has been an emphasis on protection of the open spaces and landscape surrounding the city. This has been particularly important for providing a unique and symbolic landscape and open space setting that permeates and embraces the city. It has also ensured for provision of accessible recreation spaces for its population, and it has protected a substantial range of natural communities and species, and areas with important ecological and cultural heritage qualities subject to the pressures of urban growth.

The open spaces within and surrounding Canberra owe much of their continued existence to the collective and sequential efforts of individuals, community groups, and of those responsible for planning of the National Capital since foundation. From the Griffins' prize winning design for the National Capital, to Thomas Charles Weston and planners in the National Capital Development Commission and the National Capital Authority, landscape has consciously been regarded as a high priority in the planning and design of Canberra.

The concept of a network of open spaces providing multiple values to the local community has stood the test of time, and the value of the NCOSS is increasingly recognized as it continues to play a symbolic role in the National Capital, while providing on-going ecological and social value to the community.

In this review, the community has played a vital role by helping the NCA to understand current perceptions of the value, role and functions of the NCOSS. To varying degrees and in a range of ways, the community recognises the visual and symbolic importance of the NCOSS, the social and recreational benefits of a planned open space system, and its biodiversity values. The NCOSS review also revealed that there is further scope to enrich the understanding of NCOSS values, and to subsequently extend the engagement of the community in protecting these values.

As the NCA continues to work with the ACT Government to clarify and simplify the planning system, and to review the National Capital Plan (the Plan), this report on the NCOSS Review and acknowledgement of its pervasive and unifying character comes at a critical time. Its recommendations will help inform changes to the Plan and will assist in ensuring that the role of the ACT Government in planning the National Capital is better recognised.

The NCOSS is a valuable resource that belongs to all Australians, and one that is enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. Implementation of the review's recommendations has the potential to significantly increase understanding of the NCOSS, and will allow community members to share their knowledge and experiences of the NCOSS with a wider audience. The NCA aims to support the community's appreciation of the landscape and open spaces surrounding and permeating the city, and will encourage involvement in their protection.

Importantly, recommendations of the review also set in place arrangements for ongoing examination of the NCOSS. Periodic review of the NCOSS will ensure continued, focused and meaningful involvement of both government and the community.

On behalf of the National Capital Authority, I would like to thank Dr Dianne Firth for her guidance and leadership in chairing the NCOSS Reference Group, who fulfilled a critical role in bringing independent expertise to the review. The Authority's thanks are extended to all members of the Reference Group for their significant work on the review. The breadth of

knowledge and expertise embodied within this group, and the rigour brought by seeking their involvement has delivered a series of recommendations that will guide the NCA in its work over the coming years.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr Andrew MacKenzie for his dedication to the NCOSS Review. His detailed research, intensive engagement with the community, and his assistance with the work of the Reference Group, was invaluable.

Shelly Penn, Chair

## The NCOSS review

In 2010, the National Capital Authority (NCA) announced a review into the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS). The NCA identified that the review would determine what role the NCOSS should play and whether the existing delineation of open space is appropriate in terms of efficient land use, meeting national sustainability objectives, and maintaining its role in providing a landscape setting for the National Capital.

The review undertook the following areas of investigation:

- The existing role and function of the NCOSS
- Community expectations of the role and function of the NCOSS
- The statutory frameworks affecting land administration in the NCOSS
- How the NCOSS is incorporated into the National Capital Plan.

This report has been prepared following an extensive consultation process. This report describes the process, key findings and recommendations arising from the NCOSS review.

## Executive summary

The NCOSS covers over 70 percent of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). It includes the hills, ridges and buffers between urban areas, the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee River Corridors, Lake Burley Griffin, and extensive areas of mountains and bushland to the south of the city. Its importance in defining the natural setting of Canberra is recognised by the formal adoption of the NCOSS into the National Capital Plan (the Plan).

The landscape setting of the National Capital is understood, valued and appreciated by those with an interest in the expression of ecological, social and symbolic values in city form. For many Australians, the landscape setting of Canberra is embedded in the identity of Canberra as the National Capital. This might manifest itself through descriptions of a ‘bush capital’ or through an understanding and appreciation of the vistas that terminate in landscape which set the character of the city.

In the one hundred years since the founding of the National Capital, the hills surrounding the original inner city and the corridors of green separating the town centres remain largely intact, yet the issues surrounding the NCOSS’s role and function have changed. The review of the NCOSS examined a landscape that is dynamic, and which must respond to changing pressures such as urbanisation and climate uncertainty. As new knowledge about the social, ecological and environmental values contained in the NCOSS come to light, the planning response must respond and change.



**Figure 1: Lake Burley Griffin looking west to the National Museum of Australia on Acton Peninsula (Source: National Capital Authority)**

The review examined the past and present role and function of the NCOSS. It considered the effectiveness of the Plan in expressing community values and reflecting contemporary challenges related to protecting and enhancing the landscape values contained in the NCOSS.

The review was undertaken in three key parts:

- The first part examined community views on the NCOSS. Through a public consultation process the NCA sought to understand community values and attitudes towards the natural environment and in particular, the NCOSS.
- The second part was guided by an expert reference group and identified key issues and influences that impact on the NCOSS today. This part of the review considered the range of approaches available to managing landscapes at a metropolitan scale.
- The third part examined the regulatory framework that governs planning and land management in the ACT.

The NCOSS review sought to determine what role the NCOSS should play and whether the existing policies set out in the Plan are appropriate in terms of efficient land use, meeting national sustainability objectives, and maintaining its role in providing a landscape setting for Canberra.

This report provides recommendations founded on stakeholder and community consultation.



## **Guide to the Report**

Chapter one provides a short background to the importance of landscape in city planning and examines the conscious efforts by city planners and designers to incorporate the landscape in plans for Canberra. This chapter also details the concept of the NCOSS and briefly outlines previous reports into the NCOSS which have been used as background information for the review.

Chapter two examines the existing governance and management arrangements for the NCOSS. It identifies the major environmental protections and regulatory instruments that affect planning, management and development of NCOSS landscapes and outlines the legal instruments and governance arrangements that impact the NCOSS.

Chapter three summarises the community engagement undertaken during the review, including the consultation process and key findings and also provides detailed discussion of relevant issues raised by the public.

Chapter four provides information relating to the NCOSS review reference group, who advised on appropriate mechanisms for achieving the aspirations of the review. This chapter also details the deliberations of the reference group, including the outcomes (recommendations) of these discussions.

Chapter five details other matters that were considered in the course of the review, but were not directly related to the reference group's Terms of Reference. In addition to recommendations arising from the reference group discussion in Chapter four, recommendations also arise from this chapter.

Chapter six examines the next steps to be taken, including the implementation of recommendations.

# Recommendations

The NCOSS review reference group, an independent steering group convened by the NCA has recommended the following.

## NCOSS reference group recommendations

**Term of Reference: What governance frameworks should be in place for ongoing review of the NCOSS in the Plan – timing, procedures, purpose?**

### Recommendation one

That the NCOSS be reviewed at intervals of no greater than seven years, with the intent of:

- a. reassessing community values regarding the role of the NCOSS
- b. assessing whether the Plan and other regulatory instruments have been effective in achieving the objectives of the Plan for the NCOSS
- c. making recommendations for changes and improvement as required, including whether changes to the boundaries of the NCOSS are warranted.

A reference panel comprised of representatives from the Australian Government, ACT Government and community, and convened by the NCA, be established to guide future reviews of the NCOSS.

**Term of Reference: What mechanisms should be in place to regulate/facilitate development and change in the NCOSS?**

### Recommendation two

As part of the seven yearly NCOSS review, the NCA invite community proposals to alter NCOSS boundaries and provide relevant details for doing so.

### Recommendation three

As part of a comprehensive review of the Plan, the NCA review existing policies for Lake Burley Griffin and Foreshores and the Inner Hills with the intent of establishing a more detailed set of development controls that provide greater protection to landscapes.

### Recommendation four

Clarify policies of the Plan to state that:

- management plans may identify future works to be undertaken in parts of the NCOSS within Designated Areas
- management plans may serve for the purposes of granting works approval. The NCA may grant works approval covering a period of 12 months, for works identified in the management plan as being low risk and low impact.

**Term of Reference: How should the NCOSS be promoted as part of the NCA's commitment to recognising national significance and promoting the National Capital?**

### Recommendation five

Incorporate the significance of the landscape values contained in the NCOSS into the NCA communication strategy to inform and educate Australians and visitors about the role and significance of the National Capital, including by:

- improving the presentation and awareness of the NCOSS in the National Capital Exhibition

- promoting the NCOSS to the community through improved mapping and interactive online tools.

**Term of Reference: How should the NCA engage the local community in managing landscape values associated with the NCOSS?**

**Recommendation six**

To reflect a more contemporary expression of the complex relationships between those responsible for planning and managing the landscape, the NCA should:

- consult with the community, experts and other stakeholders to identify the key landscape values that the NCOSS protects and enhances
- provide information on the NCA website to enable others to incorporate their own detailed knowledge of the landscape values, issues and challenges into future review processes.

**Term of Reference: How could the NCA assist the ACT Government and other stakeholders in managing their responsibilities in the NCOSS?**

**Recommendation seven**

As part of improving mapping and interactive online tools the NCA:

- provide educational material directed at stakeholders with management responsibilities in the NCOSS, including information about the importance of land management activities in upholding the values of the NCOSS
- host a 'wiki' page enabling land managers to share information.
- in conjunction with the ACT Government explore opportunities to establish an online platform that details the planning and land management responsibilities of the NCA in relation to the NCOSS.

**Other recommendations of the NCOSS reference group**

**Recommendation eight**

The Plan be amended to:

- consolidate the four NCOSS land use policy areas that separate symbolic, conservation, living and linking spaces into a single category [refer figure below].
- consolidate the principles and policies in chapter eight to reflect National interests in a single land use category called NCOSS.
- change the description of each type of open space as follows:

*Symbolic spaces*

Spaces that embody the national importance of the landscape in a diverse cultural environment and the intrinsic connection between the physical setting and continuing legacy of Canberra as a planned city.

*Conservation spaces*

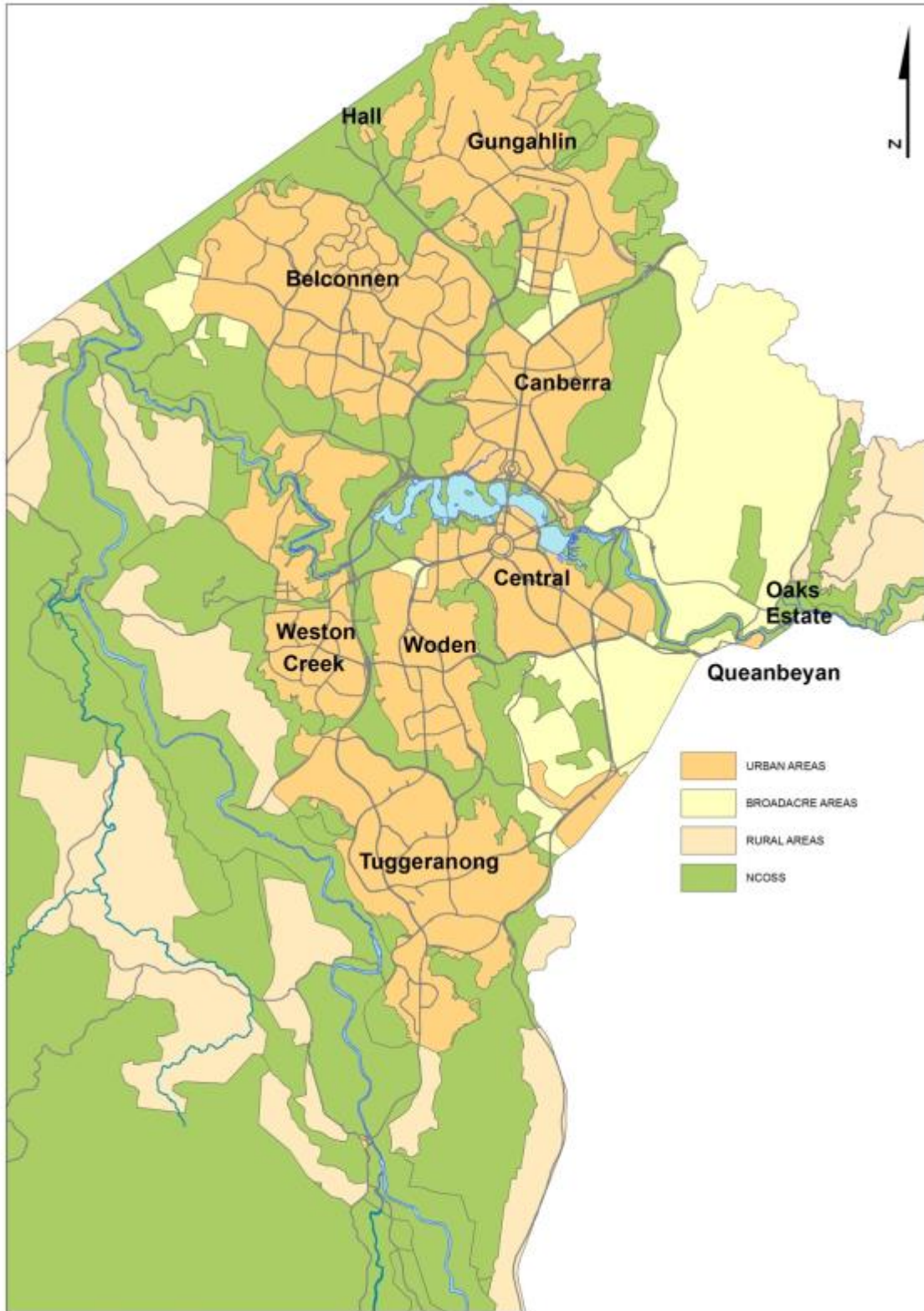
Spaces that protect, conserve and enhance the natural environment, the heritage and cultural values of the ACT, and which provide for ecological connectivity.

*Living spaces*

Spaces that are able to provide direct health and wellbeing benefits to the broad range of users in close proximity to urban areas and which provide appropriate movement afforded to people, fauna and flora.

*Linking spaces*

Spaces that physically join and visually unite the city to its immediate setting and to the region. The values contained in these spaces include the spatial and temporal continuity provided to the setting of the National Capital.



## **Other recommendations arising from the review**

### **Recommendation nine**

Amend the General Policy Plan within the Plan to incorporate:

- a. existing sections of Canberra Nature Park that are adjacent to and/or function as part of NCOSS landscapes, but are currently within Urban Areas, into the NCOSS.
- b. new sections of Canberra Nature Park or areas declared by the Territory Plan to form part of hills, ridges and buffers areas to be part of the NCOSS.

### **Recommendation ten**

The Plan be reviewed with the intent of recognising the need for consideration of environmental concepts such as connectivity, mitigation, plant and animal migration, biodiversity conservation and resilience – particularly in relation to bushfire risk – in the planning and management of the NCOSS.

# 1.0 Landscape in city planning

The incorporation of landscape elements into cities and the value of green spaces in urban areas has been the subject of scholarly enquiry since the late nineteenth century. Ebenezer Howard's 'To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform' (1898) – published again as 'Garden Cities of To-morrow' (1902) – is often cited as the first substantive work that addressed the social benefit of urban landscapes from a spatial planning perspective. Yet interest in urban green spaces for aesthetic and public health reasons dates back many centuries. Central Park in New York is a famous example from an Anglo-European perspective.<sup>1</sup>

In early twentieth century Australia, the site selection and design competition for the new Australian capital focused national attention on the role of landscapes in the modern city. Sensitivity to the Australian landscape setting and a refusal to impose a European urban vernacular over the grassy limestone plains were considered defining elements of the prize winning design of Walter Burley Griffin.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, Canberra has a planning history that is very different to other Australian cities. It was a product of a master plan, or at least a vision resulting from a design competition commissioned by the fathers of Federation. The Australian people embraced the idea of a National Capital that expressed the symbolic union of the states to form the Commonwealth. The new capital was of such importance that the federal senate committee responsible for choosing a site and commissioning an international design competition felt that the city should mirror the ambition and optimism of a nation in its infancy.<sup>3</sup>

The landscape played a central part in this new national identity through the extensive plantings by Thomas Charles Weston, Superintendent of Parks, Gardens and Afforestation, along with the development of the garden suburbs by John Sulman, Chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, and the eventual adoption of the Griffins' plan, gazetted in 1925. While the framework and landscape vernacular of the city was established in the first thirty years, the majority of urban development in Canberra occurred after World War II.

Those responsible for the development of Canberra consciously incorporated landscape objectives in the metropolitan plan. While the spread of low density suburbs in Canberra was informed by the neighbourhood planning principles of the British New Town movement, individual champions ensured that the landscape played a prominent role in the metropolitan plan for the city. National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), landscape architects, namely Richard Clough and Margaret Hendry, planners such as Keith Storey and consultants such as George Seddon and Bruce Mackenzie, were influenced by the concept that landscapes are products of their time and people's perception and understanding of time and space. This applies today.<sup>4</sup>

While parts of the physical layout of the NCOSS reflects the earliest designs for the city, the values, management priorities and community perceptions of the NCOSS have changed.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Law Olmstead's design for Central Park was selected by the first Central Park Commission following a design competition in 1857.

<sup>2</sup> David Headon, *The Symbolic Role of the National Capital: From Colonial Argument to 21st Century Ideals* (Canberra: National Capital Authority, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Freestone, "Planning, Housing, Gardening, Home as a Garden Suburb," in Patrick Troy (ed.) *A History of European Housing in Australia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew MacKenzie *The city in a fragile landscape* proceedings from the Urban history planning history conference Perth Western Australia (UWA 2012).

## 1.1 An open space system for Canberra

For most of the twentieth century, Canberra planners paid significant attention to the landscape setting of the city, yet the formal recognition of landscape elements into the regulatory planning framework did not receive attention until the 1960s. In 1964, the same year that Lake Burley Griffin (the Lake) was completed, the NCDC special report to Cabinet on the planning of the National Capital identified areas of 'special national concern' which included the inner hills and the Lake.<sup>5</sup> The NCDC's report initiated further planning work to recognise and protect the values provided by the landscape. It was another decade before the NCDC formalised the landscape structure of Canberra by recognising the NCOSS. The NCDC emphasised the national importance of Canberra's landscape setting by the creation and formal adoption of the concept of the NCOSS in the metropolitan 'Y-plan'. The hills and ridges within and around the urban area of Canberra were to be kept free of urban development to act as a backdrop and setting for the city as well as providing a means of separating and defining the towns, to protect natural resource areas, and for recreation.<sup>6</sup>

The major concerns about the implementation of the NCOSS into the metropolitan plan were pragmatic issues to do with land ownership, access for recreation, environmental management and planning responsibility.<sup>7</sup> Land management became a priority concern as the NCDC anticipated the division of land tenure and management that would result from the Territory's move to self-government. Because the main beneficiaries of the NCOSS would be the permanent residents of the Territory, the NCDC believed the ACT Government should pay for the cost of land management.<sup>8</sup>

The consultant investigation into the proposal to formalise the NCOSS by Seddon in 1977 raised a number of questions related to landscape value and the purpose of an identified open space system. He emphasised the importance of understanding the NCOSS as more than a land use category and argued that '*land is by its very nature, [is] a non-homogenous commodity, and sites differ greatly in their attractiveness*'.<sup>9</sup> He was most concerned about how the landscape would be valued for recreation and visual amenity. However, managing the visual impact of development remained an integral principle of the NCOSS objectives, in particular, how the visual setting or view from certain points around the ACT would represent the lineage to the original Griffin design.<sup>10</sup> Seddon was also concerned with how the landscape setting invoked meanings of national significance.

During the 1970s, protecting environmental values in Australian cities became politically charged. However, in Canberra the issue of open space was quite the opposite. Seddon was aware of the public criticism of the city's lack of density. He rather prosaically alluded to this when, in the introduction to the 1984 NCDC policy and development plan, he quipped that the problem for Canberra was not finding the landscape among the buildings, but rather,

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<sup>5</sup> NCDC, *The Future Canberra : A Long Range Plan for Land Use and Civic Design* (Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1964).

<sup>6</sup> NCDC, *The Canberra Metropolitan Plan* (NCDC Canberra 1984). p.173, p, 210

<sup>7</sup> George Seddon, *An Open Space System for Canberra* (NCDC, Canberra 1977)

<sup>8</sup> *An Open Space System for Canberra*

<sup>9</sup> *An Open Space System for Canberra*

<sup>10</sup> *The city in a fragile landscape*



finding the buildings between the landscape.<sup>11</sup> This only reinforced his view that the city was planning for the future.

As the city has grown, the division between the urban and non-urban spaces has become more prominent and pressure from users has increased. Seddon argued in 1984 that a future territory government should adopt a 'honey pot' approach to land management and identify a few areas to be intensively used and managed. He believed largely dispersed medium intensity use of the NCOSS would be damaging both ecologically and economically.

## 1.2 About the NCOSS

The NCOSS essentially comprises the inner hills and ridges which surround and frame the urban areas, the Lake and major river corridors, and the distant mountains and bushland to the west of the Murrumbidgee River. Closely associated with the NCOSS are the Territory's rural lands which contribute significantly to the landscape setting. These rural lands, together with the NCOSS, provide a unique and dramatic setting for the National Capital.

Together these open spaces constitute a system which protects the environmental quality of Canberra's present and future water catchments, river systems, and important ecological and heritage areas from the increasing pressure of Canberra's growth. While each part has its own land use and character they are all interrelated as parts of a total open space system. It is important therefore that the system is planned, developed and managed on an integrated basis.

The NCOSS has its antecedence in the political and social aspirations for the development of the National Capital. The founders of Canberra concerned themselves with creating a city of scenic natural beauty, and strongly emphasized the landscape setting in their selection of the site for the National Capital.

The planning framework of the NCOSS was incorporated into the Plan in 1990. In the early 1990s, the National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA) investigated how to promote and make meaningful the NCOSS values to the Australian people. This included an investigation into how the NCOSS areas could be classified to reflect future development potential. The NCPA undertook a review of open space values to determine the level of federal interest in NCOSS areas and a report<sup>12</sup> suggested ideas about how to brand or identify the NCOSS as a tourist attraction. The findings of the NCPA review, nor the report, were formally adopted into the Plan. No formal reviews of the NCOSS have occurred since that time.

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<sup>11</sup> George Seddon, *National Capital Open Space System Policy Plan and Development Plan* (NCDC, Canberra, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> Developing an interpretive strategy for the NCOSS, Carter and Associates, 1992.

### 1.3 Previous reports on the NCOSS

The review draws on the information in previous reviews and reports into the NCOSS, including:

- ‘An Open Space System for Canberra’, technical paper 23 (1977)
- ‘The National Capital Open Space Policy and Development Plan’ (1984)
- ‘Our Bush Capital: Report of the Joint Committee on the National Capital’ (1992).

The information in these reports helped establish the context for understanding the roles and functions of the agencies and stakeholders responsible for land management. Other reviews and reports commissioned since 2000 also provide an overview of the issues related to land management in the NCOSS. These other reports focus on the changing priorities and approaches to land management since the 2003 bushfires. A summary of previous reports concerning the NCOSS is included in **Attachment A**.

## 2.0 Governance and management of the NCOSS

This chapter identifies the major environmental protections and regulatory instruments that affect planning, management and development of NCOSS landscapes. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the legal instruments and governance arrangements that impact the NCOSS. The main legislation affecting planning and management of the NCOSS can be broadly classified as planning legislation and environmental and heritage protection legislation.

### 2.1 Existing mechanisms to regulate development

Existing mechanisms to regulate/facilitate development include:

- The Plan
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwlth) (EPBC Act)
- Territory Plan
- *ACT Nature Conservation Act 1980* (ACT)
- Land management agreements/management plans.

Some of the mechanisms above do not encompass the entirety of the NCOSS. For example, the EPBC Act will only play a role in regulating development where a proposal has an impact on Matters of National Environmental Significance.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the *ACT Nature Conservation Act 1980* will only play a role where a proposal has an impact on particular matters.

The Plan and the Territory Plan are the key mechanisms for regulating development within the NCOSS. The Plan contains planning controls, at varying levels of detail, for all areas of the NCOSS. This ranges from the detailed planning controls for areas of the NCOSS deemed to have the special characteristics of the National Capital and have subsequently been included in the Designated Areas (for example, the Inner Hills), to the general principles and policies applicable to each of the four land use policy areas of the NCOSS. Yet other areas are subject to Special Requirements. For example, Namadgi National Park is subject to Special Requirements in the form of general and specific policies contained within an appendix of the Plan.

### 2.2 The Commonwealth's role

The Commonwealth's interest in the planning and development of the ACT, and in protecting the NCOSS is described through the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988* (the Act) and the Plan.

#### 2.2.1 Land use planning

##### **The National Capital Authority**

The NCA is established under the Act. The statutory functions of the NCA (as set out in section 6 of the Act) establish the Australian Government's continuing interest in the strategic planning, promotion, development and enhancement of Canberra as the National Capital.

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<sup>13</sup> The Matters of National Environmental Significance protected under the EPBC Act include listed threatened species and communities; listed migratory species, Ramsar wetlands of international importance, Commonwealth marine environment; world heritage properties, national heritage places; the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park; and nuclear actions.

Collectively, these functions provide the framework to:

- Secure the planning and development of Canberra as the National Capital.
- Accommodate the Seat of Government and associated national and cultural requirements.
- Provide public places and assets for national purposes and for all Australians to visit and enjoy.
- Enhance the unique character and symbolic meaning of the capital.
- Develop appreciation of Canberra as the National Capital.

The NCA discharges its responsibilities for the planning and development of Canberra primarily through the Plan, the key objective of which is to ensure that Canberra and the Territory are planned and developed in accordance with their national significance.

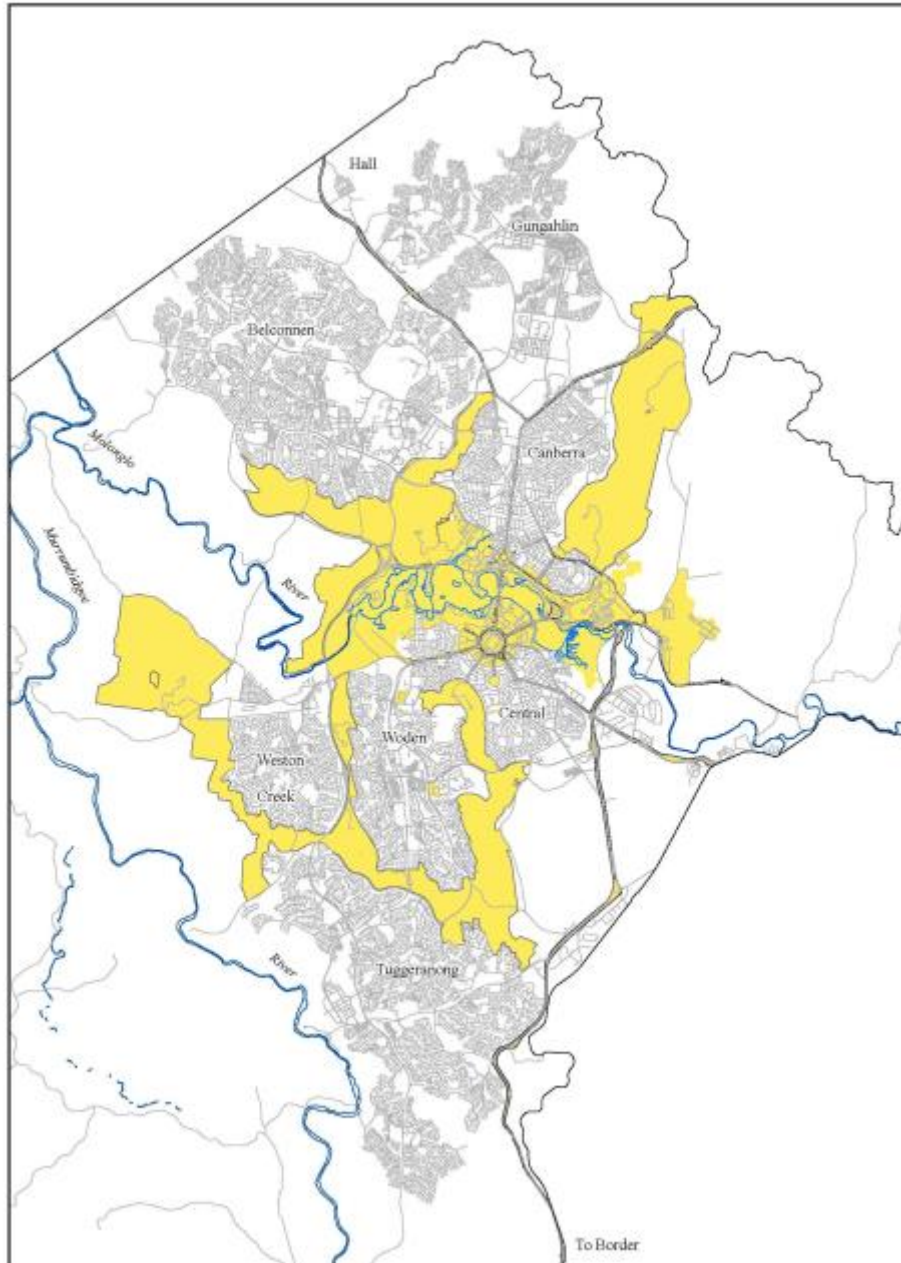
The Plan also sets out:

- the planning principles and policies for giving effect to the object of the Plan
- standards for the maintenance and enhancement of the character of the National Capital
- general standards and aesthetic principles to be adhered to in the development of the National Capital
- general policies for land use, and for the planning of national and arterial road systems throughout the Territory.

Those areas that have been deemed to have the special characteristics of the national capital are known as Designated Areas (refer Figure 2). Within Designated Areas, the Plan sets out detailed conditions of planning, design and development. The NCA is responsible for approving works within Designated Areas.<sup>14</sup> Outside of Designated Areas, the ACT Government has detailed planning responsibility.

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<sup>14</sup> The PALM Act defines 'works' as the construction, alteration, extension or demolition of buildings or structures; landscaping; tree-felling; or excavations; but excludes anything done inside buildings or structures.



**Figure 2: Designated Areas – the NCA has detailed planning control within these areas**

### **The National Capital Plan: Matters of National Significance**

The Plan identifies Matters of National Significance in the planning and development of Canberra and the Territory. A number of these matters focus on preserving and enhancing the landscape and development of a city which respects environmental values. The following Matters of National Significance specifically reference the importance of the landscape and environmental values of the Territory:

- Preservation and enhancement of the landscape features which give the National Capital its character and setting.
- Creation, preservation and enhancement of fitting sites, approaches and backdrops for national institutions and ceremonies as well as National Capital Uses.

- The development of a city which both respects environmental values and reflects national concerns.

Supporting these Matters of National Significance are a series of key objectives of the Plan. Again, a number of the key objectives relate specifically to the landscape character and setting of the National Capital, including:

- Maintain and enhance the landscape character of Canberra and the Territory as the setting for the National Capital.
- Protect the undeveloped hill tops and open spaces which divide and give form to Canberra's urban areas.

### **The NCOSS**

Beyond the overarching Matters of National Significance and objectives, the Plan recognises the importance of the natural setting of the National Capital through the creation of the concept of the NCOSS. The Plan illustrates the extent of the NCOSS spatially and describes the intent and functions of the NCOSS through a series of principles and policies.

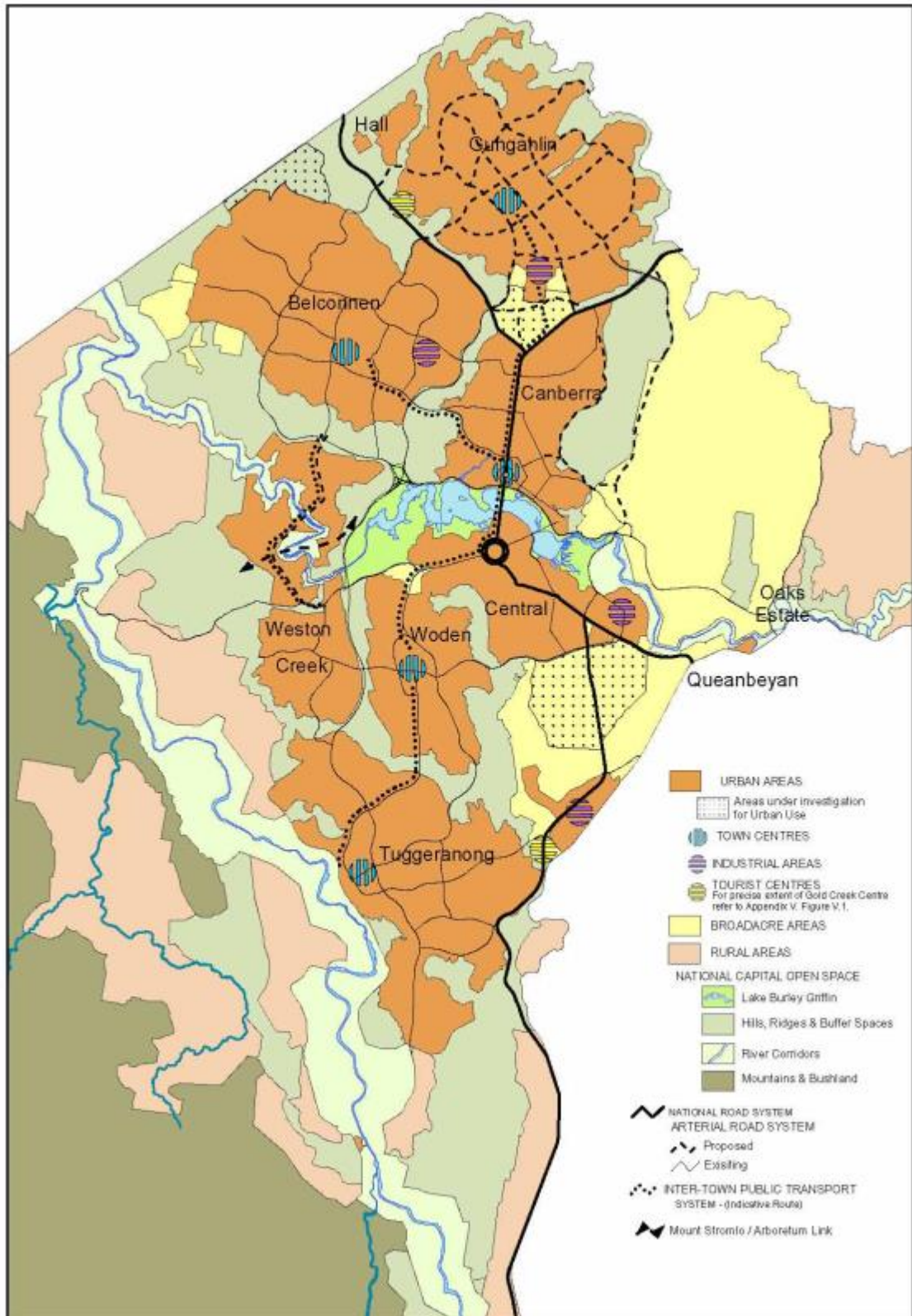
The Plan describes four different types of open space in the NCOSS, each with its own planning and management requirements:

- Symbolic spaces provide the unique and monumental landscapes integral to a National Capital.
- Conservation spaces protect the natural and cultural heritage of the ACT and consist generally of national park, heritage and wilderness areas and nature parks and reserves.
- Living space consists of the network of regional and metropolitan parks which are generally accessible for a broad variety of recreation and tourist uses.
- Linking spaces consist of fingers of urban land and open space that physically join and visually unite the city and the countryside.<sup>15</sup>

These four types of open space are further categorised into four land use policy areas to guide the planning and development of each area. Each of these land use policy areas is depicted in the General Policy Plans (Metropolitan Canberra and the Australian Capital Territory) of the Plan. The General Policy Plan (Metropolitan Canberra) is shown at **Figure 3** and illustrates the extent of the NCOSS across the city and immediate surrounds. Additional areas of mountains and bushland are located to the south and west of the city and are shown in the General Policy Plan (Australian Capital Territory) of the Plan.

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<sup>15</sup> Consolidated National Capital Plan, page 109.



**Figure 3: The General Policy Plan (Metropolitan Canberra) illustrating the extent of the NCOS. Areas of mountains and bushland extend further south-west of ACT and are illustrated in the General Policy Plan (Australian Capital Territory) of the Plan.**

The Plan states the principle for the NCOSS as follows:

*'The National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS) is required to protect the nationally significant open-space framework, visual backdrop and landscape setting for the National Capital. NCOSS will blend city and country in a way that symbolises the character of the National Capital and provides a balanced range of uses which reinforces the natural, cultural, scenic and recreational values of the ACT.'*

Planning and development within each of the four land use policy areas is guided by a series of principles and policies. More detailed provisions for some areas of the NCOSS (for example, Namadgi National Park) are included in appendices to the Plan.

## **2.2.2 The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999**

The EPBC Act provides a legal framework to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places defined in the EPBC Act as Matters of National Environmental Significance.<sup>16</sup>

Matters of National Environmental Significance that affect the NCOSS largely relate to:

- heritage places (including World, National and Commonwealth Heritage places)
- listed threatened species and communities
- listed migratory species
- wetlands of international importance.

The objectives of the EPBC Act are to:

- provide for the protection of the environment, especially Matters of National Environmental Significance
- conserve Australian biodiversity
- provide a streamlined national environmental assessment and approvals process
- enhance the protection and management of importance natural and cultural places
- control the international movement of plants and animals (wildlife), wildlife specimens and products made or derived from wildlife
- promote ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of resources.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the EPBC Act regulates the protection of the environment from proposals involving the Commonwealth, Commonwealth land and agreements involving the Commonwealth. Decisions about managing heritage places are carried out under laws at all levels of government. As well as the EPBC Act, the *Australian Heritage Council Act 2003* (Cwlth) establishes the Australian Heritage Council (AHC). The AHC is a body of heritage experts established as the Australian Government's independent expert advisory body on heritage matters.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/about/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/>

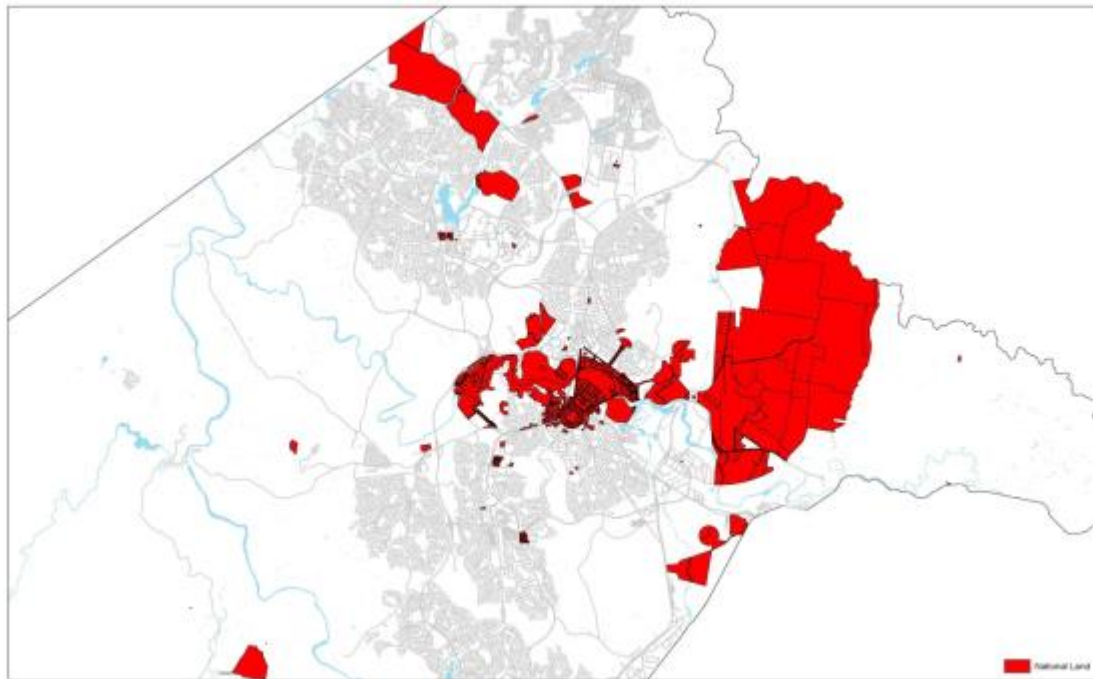


### 2.2.3 Commonwealth land management

The Commonwealth is the owner of all land in the ACT, having originally acquired the land from NSW under legislative arrangements. The Act provides that land used by or on behalf of the Commonwealth may be declared National Land, and managed by the Commonwealth. All other land is Territory Land and the ACT Government is vested by statute with responsibility for the management and control of Territory Land.

The status of land in the ACT, whether it be 'National Land' or 'Territory Land', does not determine planning responsibility the land.

**Figure 4** illustrates the extent of National Land in the ACT. All other land is Territory Land.



**Figure 4: Commonwealth land management responsibility**

### 2.2.4 National Capital Authority land management responsibility

The management of National Land is shared amongst a number of Australian Government agencies, including the NCA. Most of the National Land managed by the NCA (that is, land for the special purposes of Canberra as the National Capital) is in the public domain of the central areas of Canberra.

Land managed by the NCA includes the Parliamentary Zone (excluding the Parliamentary Precincts), Anzac Parade, Commonwealth and Kings Parks, Aspen Island, Acton Peninsula, Yarramundi Reach and the Diplomatic Estates (Yarralumla, Deakin and O'Malley). Associated assets include the Captain Cook Memorial Jet, the National Carillon, fountains, national monuments (including those on Anzac Parade), public artworks and large areas of landscape structure (paths, lighting, signage) and soft plantings.

As the centerpiece of the Griffin plan for Canberra, the Lake is a significant and highly valued national asset. The NCA manages the Lake, as well as Scrivener Dam. It manages the quality of water and the aquatic environment, events and activities (including commercial operations) on the Lake, and water abstraction for irrigation purposes.

A number of sites managed by the NCA contain nationally threatened species and ecological communities (for example, Natural Temperate Grasslands at Yarramundi Reach and Button Wrinklewort on Stirling Ridge) which require protective maintenance measures. Others require particular heritage consideration (the Parliamentary Zone and sites within it such as the Old Parliament House Gardens).

Since the Plan was gazetted in 1990, a number of complementary and subsidiary acts, regulations and management agreements have been put in place to protect and enhance the ecological and heritage values contained in the NCOSS.



Figure 5: Mt Namadgi and Mt Kelly, Namadgi National Park (ACT Parks 2012)

## 2.5 The ACT Government's role

ACT Government legislative instruments set out the requirements for planning, land management and the protection of natural and environmental resources in the ACT. If there is a conflict or inconsistency between a Commonwealth law and Territory legislation, the Commonwealth law prevails.<sup>19</sup> This applies to legislation that affects planning and land management in the NCOSS. This section of the report identifies ACT legislation that provides supplementary protections and regulations for land management in parts of the NCOSS managed by the ACT Government.

### 2.5.1 Land use planning

#### **Australian Capital Territory Planning and Development Act 2007**

The Act requires the establishment of a Territory planning authority to prepare and administer a Territory Plan. The *Planning and Development Act 2007* (ACT) establishes the Territory planning authority (the ACT Planning and Land Authority), the functions of the authority and the establishment and operation of the Territory Plan.

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<sup>19</sup> Environmental Defender's Office ACT (2009), *ACT Environmental Law Handbook*, Canberra

The object of the *Planning and Development Act 2007* (ACT) is to ‘provide a planning and land system that contributes to the orderly and sustainable development of the ACT consistent with the social, environmental and economic aspirations of the people of the ACT and in accordance with sound financial principles’.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Territory Plan**

Both the Act and the *Planning and Development Act 2007* (ACT) define the object of the Territory Plan as follows:

*‘to ensure, in a manner not inconsistent with the National Capital Plan, the planning and development of the Territory provide the people of the Territory with an attractive, safe and efficient environment in which to live and work and have their recreation’.*

The Territory Plan is a key part of the policy framework for administering planning by the ACT Government. It is used to guide development (in particular land use and the built environment) assess development applications and guide the management of public land.

The following elements of the Territory Plan include references to the values ascribed to the NCOSS. While the term NCOSS is not used in the Territory Plan, the intent of the NCOSS is recognised and policies of the Territory Plan indicate that the ACT Government intends to retain and enhance the values as currently prescribed in the Plan.

In particular, the Statement of Strategic Direction contained within the Territory Plan (which sets out the principles for giving effect to the main object of the Territory Plan) references the values ascribed to the NCOSS as follows:

#### *Section 2 –Spatial Planning and Urban Design Principles*

- 2.1 Canberra will continue to develop as a series of discrete urban areas within a landscape setting of hills, ridges and other open spaces...*
- 2.10 Adequate provisions of open space throughout the Territory will remain a high priority...*
- 2.11 Planning policies will protect the landscape and environmental qualities of the hills and ridges surrounding urban areas, the Murrumbidgee and other river corridors, the mountains and forests west of the Murrumbidgee, and productive rural landscapes.*
- 2.14 Policies and procedures to promote high quality, creative design of development, urban spaces and landscape settings will be applied throughout the Territory, and innovation encouraged, in keeping with the spirit of the National Capital as an exemplar of best practice.*
- 2.15 Policies will acknowledge Canberra as the national capital and the symbolic heart of Australia and will seek to preserve the landscape features that give the national capital its character and setting...*
- 2.16 Retention of Canberra’s unique landscape setting, including the integration of natural and cultural elements that create its ‘garden city’ and ‘bush capital’ qualities, will be accorded the highest priority. Special attention will be given to safeguarding visual amenity, protecting vegetation and other important features within*

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<sup>20</sup> *Planning and Development Act 2007* (ACT)

*the established urban landscape, and ensuring the high quality of environmental design in new developments or redevelopment.*

### **ACT planning strategy**

In addition to the Territory Plan, the *Planning and Development Act 2007* (ACT) requires the preparation of a planning strategy for the ACT that sets out long term planning policy and goals to promote the orderly and sustainable development of the ACT, consistent with the social, environmental and economic aspirations of the people of the ACT. The planning strategy may be used to develop the statement of strategic directions which forms part of the Territory Plan, but does not form part of the Territory Plan itself.

The *ACT Planning Strategy, Planning for a sustainable city* (2012) (the planning strategy) is the ACT Government's current long term planning strategy for the ACT. The planning strategy recognises the importance of Canberra's landscape setting and the need for community involvement in upholding the integrity of these spaces. The planning strategy contains five intended outcomes for Canberra, and identifies a series of strategies and actions to achieve these outcomes. Notably:

- outcome 'D' states that *'in 2030 Canberra will be the 'capital in the bush', recognised for the quality of its public places and buildings that reflect its unique climate, character and identity'.*
- outcome 'E' states that *'in 2030 Canberra will be at the centre of a region that demonstrates the benefits of good stewardship of the land, its resources and the beauty of its rivers, mountains and plains'.*
- strategy number six aims to *'invest in design that will ensure urban change creates amenity, diversity and a more sustainable built form, and adds to Canberra's landscape setting'.*

Associated actions involve continued liaison between the NCA and responsible ACT Government Directorates to identify design principles that will retain the character of key areas such as the Inner Hills.

More generally, the planning strategy discusses the intent to create wildlife and vegetation links to improve ecosystem services, the need to balance where greenfield expansion occurs and a vision where everyone can take advantage of the network of open spaces. The planning and management of the NCOSS will play a crucial part in achieving the vision for the city and Territory as described in the planning strategy.

### **2.5.2 Australian Capital Territory *Nature Conservation Act 1980***

The *Nature Conservation Act 1980* (ACT) is the primary piece of ACT legislation for the protection of native plants and animals in the ACT and for the management of the conservation reserve network. The *Nature Conservation Act 1980* (ACT) protects native plants and animals, and provides management authority for conservation lands. It provides the legal underpinning of nature conservation policy, management and action across the Territory.

The *Nature Conservation Act 1980* (ACT) also establishes the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. The function of the Parks and Conservation Service is to protect flora and fauna and the identified conservation areas of the ACT. This includes both public and leasehold land inside the NCOSS. The *Nature Conservation Act 1980* (ACT) allows for the Conservator of Flora and Fauna to direct leaseholders to protect environmental values on their land.

The number of different community, private and public stakeholders involved in protection and conservation of ecological assets is high, resulting in a need for greater consultation and

coordination to effectively manage their responsibilities. A review of the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* (ACT) is being undertaken by the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate on behalf of the ACT Government.<sup>21</sup> The review of the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* (ACT) will provide an opportunity to improve the alignment of landscape values contained in the Plan and this new piece of legislation.

### **2.5.3 ACT land management**

The ACT Government administers a range of land management agreements and is responsible for ensuring management plans are in place for public land. For example, rural land in the ACT provides a distinctive landscape setting for the city, helps to conserve habitats and species and provides for productive and sustainable agricultural use and other compatible use. A lease will only be granted (or extended or varied) if the lessee has entered into a land management agreement with the Territory, which aims to ensure the land is managed appropriately to uphold the landscape and environmental values of that land.

The ACT Government land managers are also responsible for managing public land, including areas such as Canberra Nature Park and Namadgi National Park. Management plans are in place for these areas and are described in more detail below.

#### **Canberra Nature Park**

Canberra Nature Park is made up of 33 separately named places ranging from bushland hills to some of the best examples of lowland native grassland in south-east Australia. The reserves that make up Canberra Nature Park contain some of the best examples of White box-Yellow box-Blakely's red gum grassy woodlands and derived native grasslands left in Australia. This type of woodland is defined under the EPBC Act as a Critically Endangered ecological community. It contains habitat for a number of rare or threatened species such as the Hooded Robin, Striped Legless Lizard and the Button Wrinklewort.<sup>22</sup> The majority of land managed through the Canberra Nature Park falls within the boundaries of the NCOSS.

The ACT Government is responsible for managing Canberra Nature Park. The Canberra Nature Park Management Plan (1999) is the current plan for doing so. The purpose of the management plan is to set the planning context; identify and describe the Canberra Nature Park; identify issues, expectations and constraints; propose direction for management (objectives, policies, actions and priorities); provide a basis for evaluating management success; and provide a basis for the community to understand management intent. Overall objectives for managing the Canberra Nature Park are to:

- conserve and improve native plant and animal communities and maintain biodiversity and ecological process
- conserve features of cultural, geological, geomorphological and landscape significance
- protect Canberra Nature Park and adjacent areas from the damaging effects of fire, erosion, pollution, pest plants and animals or other disturbances
- ensure appropriate practices by other agencies carrying out works in or adjacent to Canberra Nature Park
- provide and promote a range of opportunities for raising awareness, appreciation and understanding

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<sup>21</sup> [Review of the Nature Conservation Act](#), accessed 3 May 2013

<sup>22</sup> [Canberra Nature Park](#)

- provide and promote appropriate recreation and tourism opportunities
- preserve sites and biodiversity elements of scientific significance.<sup>23</sup>

### **Australian Alps National Parks**

Namadgi National Park covers 106,095 hectares in the western half of the ACT and falls entirely within the NCOSS boundaries. It forms part of the Australian Alps National Parks (together with other Nature Reserves and National Parks in the ACT, NSW and Victoria). Namadgi National Park covers 46 percent of the ACT and contains 90 percent of all public land reserved for environmental conservation in the ACT.<sup>24</sup> The park contains a variety of landscapes shaped by natural and cultural influences.

Since 1990, management plans have been in place that provides the necessary oversight to protect the landscape values identified in the Plan. The current *Namadgi National Park Plan of Management* (2010) outlines the ACT Government's objectives for managing the park's values, and includes background information considered in developing policies and actions.

The Ginini Flats Wetlands within Namadgi National Park have a specific management plan – the Ginini Flats Wetlands Ramsar Site Plan of Management (2001) that was prepared as part of an Australian Government commitment to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention). Ginini Flats Wetlands is included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance in recognition of its significant ecological characteristics. Its management plan remains relevant and is supported with additional management actions in the Namadgi National Park Plan of Management to reflect changed circumstances since the 2003 bushfires.<sup>25</sup>

In 1986, with the signing of the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), NSW, Victoria, ACT and Australian Government national park authorities formally agreed that the national parks in the Australian Alps should be managed cooperatively to protect the area's special character. Through this spirit of cooperation the Australian Alps Liaison Committee (AALC) was formed to ensure that the parks and reserves in the Alps are managed as one biogeographical entity to protect them for generations to come.

The AALC undertakes projects that encourage the consistent and co-ordinated management of the Australian Alps national parks. The AALC enhances the ability of member agencies to meet their roles and responsibilities in managing the parks and reserves in alpine and sub-alpine regions of mainland Australia.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Environment ACT (1999), *Canberra Nature Park Management Plan*, Canberra.

<sup>24</sup> ACT Government Department of Territory and Municipal Services (2010), *Namadgi National Park Plan of Management*, Canberra.

<sup>25</sup> Namadgi National Park Draft Management Plan September 2005

<sup>26</sup> The Australian Alps national parks Co-operative Management Program Strategic Plan 2012–2015



**Figure 6: Red Rocks Gorge, Namadgi National Park (ACT Parks 2012)**

## 3.0 Community perceptions of the role and function of the NCOSS

The review was designed around community consultation in order to consider and incorporate a more contemporary community understanding of landscape values into the Plan. Public consultation also assisted the NCA in developing an understanding of the community's perceptions of the values, role and function of the NCOSS.

### 3.1 Summary of consultation process

Community consultation was conducted in two stages:

- targeted stakeholder interviews
- broad public engagement.

The initial stage of stakeholder engagement consisted of a series of interviews with stakeholders identified by the NCA as having an interest in the NCOSS. Stakeholders represented a variety of interest groups and included community organisations, recreational user groups, non-government organisations, academics, professionals and other individuals engaged in planning, heritage, land management and conservation.

Each stakeholder was invited to discuss matters with the NCA that they considered relevant to the future of the NCOSS. Stakeholders were also asked a series of questions to identify themes, ideas and issues that should be addressed in the review. Suggestions and comments from the interviewees helped inform the preparation of the discussion paper that was subsequently released for broader public consultation.

Consultation on the discussion paper commenced in September 2011 and ran for a period of six weeks, concluding on 28 October 2011. Given the scale and diversity of the NCOSS, respondents were provided with a range of opportunities to respond to the discussion paper. This included a survey, interactive online discussion boards and mapping, and the opportunity to provide a written submission to the discussion paper.

The full results of the community consultation and associated discussion paper are available from the [NCA website](#). A summary of the consultation process and key findings are outlined below. A number of matters raised during the consultation process are discussed in more detail.

### 3.2 Summary of findings

The community consultation revealed the values held by the community in regard to the NCOSS, and the community's understanding of what role the NCOSS plays in Canberra and Territory. Notably, the community recognised the importance of the following functions of the NCOSS (to varying degrees):

- the visual and symbolic importance of the NCOSS to the overall look and feel of Canberra
- the contribution of the NCOSS to a sustainable environment that provides many social and health benefits
- the biodiversity values of the NCOSS which help provide resilient spaces for plants and animals
- the NCOSS as a place for recreation (such as walking, riding and running).



Other key themes and suggestions emerged from the community, including the need:

- to improve community understanding of NCOSS values, and subsequently engage the community in protecting these values
- for the Plan to clearly identify what landscapes are of national significance, and what the test or criterion is for determining national significance
- for an appropriate mechanism for the public to propose changes to NCOSS boundaries
- for clarification of governance arrangements
- to better recognise the potential impacts of climate change in planning frameworks
- to develop easily accessible information resources such as integrated spatial mapping of significant sites, information on values of the NCOSS and management arrangements.

Feedback during the consultation process informed the Terms of Reference for the NCOSS review reference group. Therefore many of the above matters are addressed in subsequent chapters of this report, as a result of reference group discussions. Other matters are discussed in detail below.

### **3.3 Detailed consideration of community comments**

#### **3.3.1 Clarification of governance arrangements**

The consultation process revealed a desire to clarify governance arrangements in the NCOSS. The community response to planning and land management responsibilities showed a low level of appreciation of the respective responsibilities of the Australian and ACT Governments in the planning and management of the NCOSS.

The NCOSS review has established that the issues surrounding management of NCOSS land are complex. The benefit of developing an improved community understanding of these issues will improve the capacity of stakeholders to manage their interests and responsibilities in the NCOSS.

The NCA's website already contains information regarding the NCA's planning responsibilities, as well as information outlining the administration of National Land. There is opportunity to build upon this existing resource by more readily identifying those areas where the NCA has planning and land management responsibility (including links to land management documents and other information advising how the NCA is meeting its obligations in regard to land management).

An online platform could also provide other NCOSS resources (refer section 4.2.3 of this report). There may be opportunity to develop an online platform devoted to the NCOSS with the ACT Government. This would allow ACT Government planning and land management information related to the NCOSS to be more readily available. This should be explored by the NCA.

Section 4.2.5 of this report discusses ways of assisting stakeholders to understand their responsibilities in the NCOSS. The recommendation arising from section 4.2.5 includes the opportunity for the NCA to explore an online platform detailing planning and land management responsibilities in relation to the NCOSS.

## 4.0 The NCOSS review reference group

Formal commentary for the NCOSS review was sought from representatives of key community and stakeholder groups. These included ACT community and special interest groups, industry, professional bodies and the ACT Government. The reference group was a key component of the consultative process and brought together a range of expertise to the review of the NCOSS. The reference group reviewed the findings of the consultation report and advised on the appropriate mechanisms for achieving the aspirations of the review.

The reference group met between May and December 2012. Members of the reference group were:

- Adjunct Associate Professor Dianne Firth (NCA appointee)
- Associate Professor Cris Brack (NCA appointed expert)
- Professor Gini Lee (NCA appointed expert)
- Mr Gregor Mews (ACT built environment nominated representative)
- Dr David Shorthouse (ACT community representative)
- Mr Ben Ponton (ACT Government appointed representative)

Short biographies of each reference group member are at *Attachment B*.

### 4.1 Terms of reference

The NCOSS review reference group assisted in preparing recommendations of the review having regard to the aims of the review and the following terms of reference:

1. What governance frameworks should be in place for ongoing review of the NCOSS in the Plan – timing, procedures and purpose?
2. What mechanisms should be in place to regulate/facilitate development and change in the NCOSS?
3. How should the NCOSS be promoted as part of the NCA's commitment to recognising national significance and promoting the National Capital?
4. How should the NCA engage the local community in managing landscape values associated with the NCOSS?
5. How could the NCA assist the ACT Government and other stakeholders in managing their responsibilities in the NCOSS?

## 4.2 Response to terms of reference

This section outlines the NCOSS review references group's discussions in relation to each of the terms of reference. A number of other matters were also considered by the reference group to be pertinent to the review, these are also discussed in this chapter.

### 4.2.1 Governance frameworks for ongoing review of the NCOSS

*Term of reference: What governance frameworks should be in place for ongoing review of the NCOSS in the Plan – timing, procedures, purpose?*

The reference group considers that regular review of the NCOSS will ensure that the Plan continues to reflect changing community values and expectations of the NCOSS, and will ensure that the planning framework is sufficient in protecting the role(s) the NCOSS plays in the ACT.

The review has shown that public participation in major projects is invaluable. Ensuring public participation in any review will allow the NCA to gauge community expectations, values and ideas regarding the role that NCOSS landscapes should play in Canberra and the ACT.

#### Purpose

The PALM Act requires that the NCA keep the Plan under review and to propose amendments to it when necessary. Keeping the Plan under review:

- helps determine how successful the Plan has been in articulating and communicating planning objectives, strategies and policies
- ensures that the policies within the Plan sufficiently help guide land use and development decisions
- ensures that the Plan reflects contemporary planning practice and changes in legislation and other statutory instruments to maintain consistency between various planning and environmental management documents.

The NCOSS is one concept within the Plan, and therefore requires review along with other components of the Plan. In a similar manner to a general Plan review, the main objectives of a review of the NCOSS will be to:

- reassess community values regarding the role of the NCOSS
- assess whether the Plan and other regulatory instruments have been effective in achieving the objectives of the Plan for NCOSS
- make recommendations for changes and improvement as required, including whether changes to the boundaries of the NCOSS are warranted.

#### Timing

Planning schema should respond to the community expectations and understandings. To achieve this, planning frameworks need regular review and updating. The Hawke report into the National Capital Authority alluded to a review of the General Policy Plan of the Plan being undertaken every seven years. The General Policy Plan is supported by written principles and policies, and therefore the time-frame of seven years could be construed to mean a full review of the Plan. This would include a specific focus on the NCOSS.

Having regard to the purpose of the review outlined above, the following recommendation is made.

### **Recommendation one**

That the NCOSS be reviewed at intervals of no greater than seven years, with the intent of:

- d. Reassessing community values regarding the role of the NCOSS
- e. Assessing whether the Plan and other regulatory instruments have been effective in achieving the objectives of the Plan for the NCOSS
- f. Making recommendations for changes and improvement as required, including whether changes to the boundaries of the NCOSS are warranted.

A reference panel comprised of representatives from the Australian Government, ACT Government and community, and convened by the NCA, be established to guide future reviews of the NCOSS.

### **Procedures**

From time to time, the NCA invites experts, community representatives or other interested individuals to chair reference panels or participate on advisory panels or committees to assist in matters that form part of the NCA's business. The NCA's Commitment to Community Engagement (August 2011) requires the establishment of a 'Stakeholder Advisory Group' for key issues dialogues. The NCOSS reference panel was convened in this regard.

Reference/advisory groups provide the NCA with access to expertise not necessarily available within the NCA, and helps ensure a level of independent oversight for a project. The reference panel convened for the NCOSS review is one example of this. A similar group should provide oversight and assistance to future reviews of the NCOSS.

### **4.2.2 Mechanisms to regulate/facilitate development and change**

*What mechanisms should be in place to regulate/facilitate development and change in the NCOSS?*

#### **Changes to the NCOSS, including boundary changes**

During public consultation, a section of the community expressed a desire to be able to present a case to the NCA for changes to the boundaries of the NCOSS. Those involved in these discussions noted that the landscapes in and around the NCOSS are dynamic and changing, and therefore if new information becomes available that may warrant a change to NCOSS boundaries, the NCA should facilitate this.

An example was provided in relation to the Molonglo River Corridor to Barton Highway Woodland Corridor in the Gungahlin District, whereby a citation of the natural heritage values of the corridor was prepared for consideration by the ACT Heritage Council. The corridor comprises a complex mosaic of native vegetation communities and habitats that support a wide diversity of the region's flora and fauna, including threatened species. A better understanding of ecological and landscape conservation values in the Plan would facilitate a better outcome to the planning arrangements in this area and would lessen the impact of urbanisation as Gungahlin extends its footprint to the hills and ridges on its northern edges.

Another example of the need to alter boundaries came from an interview with a stakeholder with expertise in biodiversity conservation:

*'[From a biodiversity perspective] the boundary definition is the protection of biologically significant remnants and conservation of landscape features that have*

*values for connectivity and integrity and restoration values. A boundary could be amended if the change doesn't diminish opportunities to recover habitats.'* (ACT Ecological Society interview.

Yet another example came from the business community:

*'Yes, [a boundary change should be considered] if a proponent comes with a value proposition, everything should be considered in the context of net public benefit – if it is a public good.'* (ACT Business Council interview.)

A further submission presented a specific reference to land on the north-western edge of the ACT:

*'West Belconnen creates an arbitrary buffer between the edge of the urban area and the straight border; because the border does not reflect the landscape conditions the buffer is defined as an artificial construct, rather than, as elsewhere, a response to the landscape. It therefore does not achieve the objective of the [NCOSS] zone.'* (CB Richard Ellis, submission to the NCOSS Discussion Paper.)

Given the diversity of knowledge within the community, a clear procedure should be in place to allow proponents to present a submission for change to the NCOSS. Ideally, such requests for changes to the NCOSS would be considered as part of the holistic (and regular) review of the NCOSS. Any request for a change to NCOSS boundaries would need to be accompanied by supporting information justifying the requested change.

Such a mechanism would not negate the ability for the NCA to consider another proposal on its merits outside a 'formal' NCOSS review.

#### Recommendation two

As part of the seven yearly NCOSS review, the NCA invite community proposals to alter NCOSS boundaries, and provide relevant details for doing so.

#### **Existing regulation**

The Plan and the Territory Plan will continue to be primary instruments in the regulation of development within the NCOSS. Both plans identify the types of uses that are permitted within the NCOSS, as well as defining provisions related to the scale of development, building materials and colours, and landscaping.

However, comments made during the public consultation phase of the NCOSS review suggested that the Plan is not clear on what type of development can occur in or adjacent to the NCOSS.

The reference group understood this to mean that there is a need for clearer planning policies, particularly for those areas of the NCOSS where the NCA exercises detailed planning control, namely Lake Burley Griffin and Foreshores and the Inner Hills portion of hills, ridges and buffer spaces.

There are currently few detailed policies for the Inner Hills, and detailed policies for only a limited number of high use areas around the Lake (for example, Acton Peninsula). This lack of clarity and detailed planning controls should be considered in the context of the comprehensive review of the Plan.

#### Recommendation three

As part of a comprehensive review of the Plan, the NCA review existing policies for Lake Burley Griffin and Foreshores, and the Inner Hills, with the intent of establishing a more detailed set of development controls that provide greater protection to landscapes.

### **Reducing red tape**

The NCA has detailed planning responsibility, including the approval of works, within parts of the NCOSS. This includes the Inner Hills and therefore many sections of Canberra Nature Park. The PALM Act is all-encompassing in regard to works that require approval from the NCA. In addition to major construction works and buildings within Designated Areas, the NCA is also required to grant approval for minor works.

Some of the works undertaken in Canberra Nature Park could be considered to be minor works, including the construction of picnic shelters and seating, new trails and fences, signage, and minor landscape works (including tree-felling). These works are typically low risk and low impact, and do not have any significant impact beyond the immediate area in which they are located.

Presently, the NCA receives works approval applications for all proposals in these areas. This can be a point of contention for land managers/lessees (primarily the ACT Government), who are required to submit applications for every proposal, regardless of the complexity or impact of the proposal. It is also time-consuming for NCA officers who are required to assess each proposal, when their efforts are likely better focussed elsewhere.

In recent years, efforts have been made in other Australian jurisdictions (including the ACT Government) to streamline development assessment processes and reduce red tape. These efforts have been in response to the work of the Development Assessment Forum (DAF), which comprises government, industry, and the professions, and which develops and recommends leading practices for planning systems and development assessment in Australia.

The DAF has developed a leading practice model for development assessment, which outlines simpler and more effective approach to development assessment. The model identifies eleven leading practices that a development assessment system should exhibit, from effective policy formulation to determination on a proposal and appeal rights.

The NCA is currently considering the DAF model for its application and relevance to the National Capital Plan. Of key importance to the NCA is the practice that advocates 'track-based' assessment. Here development applications are streamlined into an assessment 'track' that corresponds with the level of assessment required to make an appropriately informed decision. The relevant 'track' for assessing an application is intended to be directly related to the complexity of the project and its impact on the natural and built environment.

The use of 'tracks' is useful in eliminating the need for an approval authority to give consent for low risk, low impact proposals (such as many of the works proposed in Canberra Nature Park). As an example, the DAF leading practice model states that development that has a low impact beyond the immediate site and does not affect the achievement of any policy objectives should not require development assessment.

The use of 'tracks' could reduce the number of proposals required to be submitted to the NCA for formal approval and facilitate a more streamlined development assessment process. This will be investigated by the NCA as part of its consideration of the application of the DAF model to the National Capital Plan.

### **Management plans to facilitate development**

An alternative to using 'track-based' assessment to streamline development assessment processes for particular NCOSS areas could be to use management plans to facilitate low risk, low impact development within these areas.

Section 2.5.3 of this report outlines the requirements for the ACT Government to prepare and administer management plans in relation to public land, including areas such as

Canberra Nature Park. In addition, background narrative to the NCOSS within the National Capital Plan, and policies for the NCOSS itself:

- note that management plans will be the key to successful implementation of the principles and policies of the National Capital Plan (and the Territory Plan).
- require that management plans be prepared for major NCOSS elements *‘as a means of enabling the NCPA to authorise works in Designated Areas’*<sup>27</sup> and that they be prepared in close consultation with the agency.
- specify that pending the preparation of management plans, maintenance and other works shall be subject of liaison with the Authority, and that the Authority *‘will identify those works or classes of work which require more formal approval’*.

The above could be interpreted to mean that management plans could be a mechanism to identify future works within particular areas subject to a management plan, and provide a mechanism to approve development with less red tape than current processes. The aim of using management plans to reduce red tape would be to reduce the number of applications required to be submitted to the NCA for minor works.

A ‘blanket’ approval could be given by the NCA for a suite of works identified in a management plan as being low impact and low risk. Such an approval could cover a period of 12 months. Works identified in the management plan as being part of the ‘blanket’ approval would not subsequently require a separate works approval. The management plan would effectively serve for the purpose of granting works approval for a set period of time.

Under these arrangements, the following would occur:

1. The land manager would prepare (or update) a management plan for a particular area of the NCOSS within Designated Areas. The management plan would identify likely future works, such as new walking trails, signage, and facilities such as seating.
2. In conjunction with the NCA, minor works would be identified in the management plan that could be covered by a ‘blanket’ works approval covering a period of 12 months.
3. Submission of a management plan would then serve for the purpose of granting works approval.
4. Works identified as minor in the management plan and covered by the ‘blanket’ approval would proceed as required, without further reference to the NCA.
5. Those works not covered by the ‘blanket’ approval would go through the typical works approval process.

The current management plan for Canberra Nature Park identifies management actions required to achieve the management objectives. One such action of the management plan requires the ACT Government to *‘enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Capital Authority regarding works in Designated Areas.’* The NCA has no record of this having occurred, however it would further suggest that mechanisms have been set up to allow a series of works to be endorsed without subsequent need to formally apply for approval for each individual proposal.

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<sup>27</sup> ‘NCPA’ refers to the predecessor of the NCA, the National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA). The name was changed in 1996 to reflect the broader range of functions undertaken by the agency other than planning.

#### Recommendation four

Clarify policies of the National Capital Plan to state that:

- management plans may identify future works to be undertaken in parts of the NCOSS within Designated Areas
- management plans may serve for the purposes of granting works approval. The NCA may grant works approval covering a period of 12 months, for works identified in the management plan as being low risk and low impact.

### 4.2.3 Promotion of the NCOSS

*How should the NCOSS be promoted as part of the NCA's commitment to recognising national significance and promoting the National Capital?*

#### Promotion of the NCOSS

Community consultation revealed little understanding of the NCOSS as a planning and design framework. The reference group considered that as part of the NCA's information and education activities, consideration should be given to how to communicate and promote the NCOSS.

The public consultation survey data showed that the symbolic importance of the NCOSS was not well understood by respondents. Further, many of the respondents did not distinguish between the symbolic landscape of the capital and their individual experience of the NCOSS environment.

Importantly, this was most often couched in terms of visual amenity and urban 'liveability'. It also included a strong concern about urban infill and consolidation, as well as the ecological value of the NCOSS. Primarily, this issue was related to the Inner Hills where national significance was understood in terms of ecological values more than symbolic values. Such responses were usually expressed in terms of threat, or endangerment, of urban development in these areas. For example, Red Hill was described as being of 'enormous ecological value' and as the site of an 'endangered ecosystem'. In this way the symbolic value of the visual setting and the ecological values were deemed to be one and the same.

The symbolic value of the landscape was best understood by the community through the experience of being in, rather than seeing, the landscape from afar or via a vantage point designed to capture a scenic view of the city (for example, Mount Ainslie). This is itself is unproblematic but it does raise the issue of how to represent landscapes of national significance.

The NCA has a statutory role to foster awareness of Canberra as the national capital. This role has never been objectively defined and has, at different times, included operation of the National Capital Exhibition at Regatta Point, management of a Travelling Exhibition and conduct of many popular public events.

Past reviews of the NCA have included the following recommendations:

- the NCA prepare a five-year plan of information and education activities for the Minister's agreement.
- the NCA's role in 'promotion' be clarified to identify the Commonwealth's role as informing and educating Australians and visitors about the significance and role of the National Capital.

The NCA should incorporate the findings of the NCOSS review when designing the five year plan of information and education activities. Initiatives to include in the five year plan could include:



- improving the presentation and awareness of the NCOSS in the National Capital Exhibition
- promoting the NCOSS to the community through improved mapping and interactive online tools.

### **The National Capital Exhibition**

The National Capital Exhibition presents an opportunity to inform the community of the values of the NCOSS. The National Capital Exhibition creates a setting that is designed to inform visitors and locals alike about the history and significance of the National Capital. Information contained in the exhibition could acknowledge the values of the NCOSS deemed important by the local community, but could also define the national significance of the NCOSS in terms of its aesthetic, symbolic and scenic contribution to the city.



**Figure 7: The National Capital Exhibition (NCA 2006)**

### **Improved mapping and interactive online tools**

Many respondents during public consultation reported that they did not know the difference between the NCOSS and other landscapes in the city. For many it wasn't important. It is not necessarily the role of the NCA to ensure that Canberrans distinguish between these landscape types but rather to promote to all Australians the landscape values that are embodied in the NCOSS. For example, the NCOSS is key to preserving biodiversity in the ACT.

This could be achieved for a relatively low cost through the design of a platform similar to the 'Have Your Say' spatial mapping developed for the community consultation. Additional

information and links to management plans, park care and land care groups, mappings and other overlays could be hosted by the NCA website as a one stop information portal for people interested in the NCOSS. This approach may help to improve the community's confidence in the NCA managing its interests in the NCOSS.

#### Recommendation five

Incorporate the significance of the landscape values contained in the NCOSS into the NCA communication strategy to inform and educate Australians and visitors about the role and significance of the National Capital, including by:

- improving the presentation and awareness of the NCOSS in the National Capital Exhibition
- promoting the NCOSS to the community through improved mapping and interactive online tools.

### 4.2.4 Engagement of the local community

*How should the NCA engage the local community in managing landscape values associated with the NCOSS?*

The NCOSS is part of the Canberra residents' inhabited sense of place. The research supporting this report shows residents make very little distinction between the suburban streetscapes and the urban bush when referring to the character of the city. The time to talk survey by the ACT Government asked what Canberrans like about the city. The low density-leafy character was the clear favorite. Their relationship to the landscape is far more nuanced and subjectively constructed in and through interactions, rituals and daily life experiences of walking and driving through the city than can be reflected in the Plan. An example of this is the submission to the NCOSS review discussion paper by the ACT Equestrian Association (ACTEA):

*'Consistent with the policy, the key value for equestrians in the NCOSS is connectivity. The network of equestrian trails, nature reserves, green spaces and horse paddocks is the reason that many people choose to live in Canberra. We are blessed with chains of reserves and open space which enable people on horseback to travel between facilities such as government horse paddocks, private agistment centres, riding schools, pony club grounds and competition areas.'* (ACTEA, submission to the NCOSS review).

Where as a more traditional understanding of connectivity was provided by showcasing the regional approach to management agreements encompassing closely related environmental values and complementary land uses.

*'The successful tri-state regional approach the Alps National Parks outlines how connectivity is better understood at a broader scale and identifies the need for an understanding of why connectivity is important from an ecological perspective'* (Dr David Shorthouse, NCOSS reference group).

For these reasons the NCA should, as part of the review of the Plan, broaden its scope in terms of how the landscape values of the NCOSS are described in the Plan. While it is not the goal of the Plan to dictate to the various stakeholders how to experience or manage the landscape, it is important that the Plan contains the most up to date understanding about the nested relationships and interconnections that the landscape provides. Indeed the ACT government representative on the NCOSS reference group stressed the importance of articulating the NCOSS values.

*'It is as important to document those broad values as it is to map the NCOSS. The NCOSS should represent a range of overarching values that impact on the region.'* (GayWilliamson, NCOSS reference group).

The Plan sets out the detailed planning requirements for national land, designated areas and special requirements in the ACT. The areas defined as inner hills and the lake and surrounds are the NCOSS areas that fall under that designation. Proposals to develop land in the inner hills require development approval from the NCA. Yet the practical work of protecting the landscape values in this area come under the responsibility of many groups and organisations including; the NCA, a number of ACT government departments, non-government organizations, volunteer groups and private leaseholders.

Given the diversity of land managers in the area, it is important to consider the objectives of the different stakeholders and how those goals fit into broader concepts of landscapes of national significance. The Plan should reflect a more contemporary expression of the complex relationships between those responsible for planning and managing the landscape, and related impacts of contemporary effects such as climate change and urban growth.

This can be achieved by:

- consulting with the community, experts and other stakeholders to identify the key landscape values that the NCOSS protects and enhances.
- providing information on the NCA website to enable others to incorporate their own detailed knowledge of the landscape values, issues and challenges into future review processes.

An example might be the community based plan for land management. The landholders in this area include members of the ACT rural landholders association who prepared their own sustainable farming plan in 2011 to 'transform the Majura valley into a model of agricultural sustainability'. Another example is the Friends of Mount Majura, a park care group that is supported by the Molonglo Catchment Group, an umbrella organisation for Landcare and other natural resource management groups within the Molonglo river catchment.

The major plan governing management of landscape values in this area is the Canberra Nature Park Management Plan. The vision for this plan is 'an integrated, connected system of diverse nature reserves throughout urban Canberra, managed to conserve native flora, fauna and habitat, and to provide opportunities for appreciation, recreation, education and research consistent with protecting the natural and cultural heritage, and landscape values of the area'.

Each of these layers of land management and care occur under the umbrella of the Plan. In practice they all operate in a way that meets their responsibilities under the Plan. There is an opportunity for the Authority to recognise both the diversity of interests and aspirations in a way that clarifies the Commonwealth's interest in protecting and enhancing the NCOSS. Dr Shorthouse highlights the importance of this issue.

*'The key thing here is getting an NCOSS statement of values into the operational management plans for each reserve in Canberra Nature Park. These are being written now and will be a lost opportunity if this report does not raise the issue.'* (Dr Shorthouse NCOSS reference group).

### **Recommendation six**

To reflect a more contemporary expression of the complex relationships between those responsible for planning and managing the landscape, the following occur:

- consult with the community, experts and other stakeholders to identify the key landscape values that the NCOSS protects and enhances.
- provide information on the NCA website to enable others to incorporate their own detailed knowledge of the landscape values, issues and challenges into future review processes.

#### 4.2.5 Managing responsibilities

*How could the NCA assist the ACT Government and other stakeholders in managing their responsibilities in the NCOSS?*

There are a number of stakeholders with NCOSS management responsibilities. This includes those with a mandated responsibility such as the NCA (refer section 2.2.4 of this report) and the ACT Government, who has responsibility for the management of Territory Land<sup>28</sup>, but also includes stakeholders who assist in land management activities in a volunteer capacity.

Groups such as ParkCare, which is a partnership between the ACT Government and community volunteer groups who have an interest in the natural environment, play a vital role in protecting natural and cultural sites throughout the ACT. These groups assist in land management by undertaking activities such as weed and litter removal, seed collection, propagation and planting of native species, and soil conservation works. The NCA itself has an ongoing partnership with Friends of Grasslands (FOG), who have focused on reinvigorating ecologically significant grassy ecosystems around Lake Burley Griffin.

Many of the volunteer groups focus on conservation activities – bush regeneration and ecosystem rehabilitation, protection and management and the like. Volunteer activities often take place within NCOSS areas, including those that are of national significance and included within Designated Areas. The ACT Government is a major stakeholder in terms of responsibilities within the NCOSS. The ACT Government is responsible for managing some of the largest NCOSS areas, including the mountains and bushland areas to the south of the city (including Namadgi National Park), and the majority of the Hills, Ridges and Buffer Spaces separating the towns.

It is unclear to what extent volunteer groups understand other values associated with the areas within which they work, such as the symbolic and historic values of the NCOSS. There is merit in ensuring that all stakeholders understand the context and history of the spaces in which they are working. This will ensure that those with a land management role are cognisant of the importance of these spaces to Canberra and the ACT, not just from a nature conservation perspective, but from a more holistic perspective.

Apart from established partnerships with groups such as Friends of Grasslands, the NCA is not responsible for coordination of volunteers involved in ParkCare or other similar programs. There should be no change to these arrangements, however the NCA could assist stakeholders to understand their responsibilities in the NCOSS through education and promotion activities.

Educating stakeholders to ensure that they understand their obligations and responsibilities in the NCOSS is key to upholding the values of the NCOSS. Information sharing (between stakeholders) is also important to ensure that the practices of different land managers don't undermine objectives for the NCOSS. Previous sections of this report have addressed how the NCOSS could be promoted as part of the NCA's commitment to recognising national

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<sup>28</sup> Section 29 (1) states that the (ACT Government) Executive, on behalf of the Commonwealth, has responsibility for the management of Territory Land.

significance and promoting the National Capital, as well as how the NCA can engage to the local community in managing landscape values. Part of the recommendations arising from this discussion included promoting the NCOSS to the community through improved mapping and interactive online tools (refer section 4.2.3 of this report).

An online portal could include information specifically targeted at groups with management responsibilities, such as the importance of land management activities in upholding the values of the NCOSS. The use of a 'wiki' page associated with the web portal would be a useful tool for collaboration between stakeholders and allow users to share information and provide updates.

#### **Recommendation seven**

As part of improving mapping and interactive online tools:

- the NCA provide educational material directed at stakeholders with management responsibilities in the NCOSS, including information about the importance of land management activities in upholding the values of the NCOSS
- the NCA host a 'wiki' page enabling land managers to share information.
- in conjunction with the ACT Government, explore opportunities to establish an online platform that details the planning and land management responsibilities of the NCA in relation to the NCOSS.

### **4.2.6 Landscape functions and values**

The reference group noted that Chapter eight of the Plan classifies four different types of open space:

- symbolic spaces
- conservation spaces
- living spaces
- linking spaces.

The reference group generally supported the current description of each of these types of space in the Plan, however considered that the descriptions could be updated to better describe the role of each space and the value people place on such spaces.

#### **The symbolic value of the NCOSS**

Symbolic spaces are currently described in the Plan as those that *'provide the unique and monumental landscapes necessary in a National Capital.'*

The reference group agreed that the NCOSS currently provides a very high amenity value to the ACT community. The local community understands and accepts that the NCOSS has historic, symbolic, social and ecological values that warrant its recognition in statutory instruments. However, there are opportunities to rethink how the parts of the NCOSS are described to enable all Australians to understand and appreciate its symbolic value.

The reference group considers that the current description of symbolic spaces could be expanded to better describe this role of the NCOSS and reflect the values the community places on this role. The reference group recommends that the description be amended to:

*'Spaces that embody the national importance of the landscape in a diverse cultural environment and the intrinsic connection between the physical setting and continuing legacy of Canberra as a planned city.'*

### **The conservation value of the NCOSS**

Conservation spaces are currently described in the Plan as those that *'protect the natural and cultural heritage of the ACT and consist generally of national park, heritage and wilderness areas, and nature parks and reserves.'*

The location of the ACT in south-east Australia places it within the influence of sub-alpine, coastal, mountain and inland ecological zones. Characteristic species and environments of each zone are conserved in the NCOSS and their national significance is recognised through inter-governmental arrangements covering features such as the Australian Alps, Ramsar wetlands, and regional corridors and flyways.

Within the NCOSS are significant examples of ecological communities that are listed as threatened with extinction under the Nature Conservation Act, notably Yellow Box-Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Natural Temperate Grassland. These two communities have been severely altered, cleared and fragmented across their natural distribution, to such an extent that parts of NCOSS now protect some of the largest or best quality remaining areas of these once common habitats.

Within and around the city, the NCOSS is largely coincident with over 30 nature reserves and other areas that together comprise Canberra Nature Park. Individually each unit of Canberra Nature Park protects local bushland environments, including habitats for threatened species and highly valued examples of endangered ecological communities. The role of the NCOSS in biodiversity conservation and maintaining and building ecological connectivity between the nature reserves, Namadgi National Park and the river corridors will grow in importance as the ACT responds and adapts to climate change and the impacts of urban development.

All parts of the NCOSS (Canberra Nature Park, Namadgi National Park, river corridors, rural lands) have a role in conserving the local environment. Updated and clearly stated principles and policies for each part of the NCOSS can assist the ACT achieve both local and national objectives for conserving natural assets.

The reference group considers that the current description of conservation spaces could be expanded to better describe this role of the NCOSS and reflect the values the community places on this role. The reference group recommends that the description be amended to:

*'Spaces that protect, conserve and enhance the natural environment, the heritage and cultural values of the ACT, and which provide for ecological connectivity.'*

### **The living values of the NCOSS**

Living spaces are currently described in the Plan as the *'network of regional and metropolitan parks which are generally accessible for a broad variety of recreation and tourist uses.'*

Community knowledge and understanding of local issues should be used to assist in the ongoing protection and enhancement of the NCOSS. Effective protection and enhancement of the NCOSS requires a long-term commitment to environmental stewardship, and a commitment by relevant government authorities to ensuring sustainable development in urban areas adjoining the NCOSS.

The reference group considers that the current description of living spaces could be expanded to better describe this role of the NCOSS and reflect the values the community places on this role. The reference group recommends that the description be amended to:

*'Spaces that are able to provide direct health and wellbeing benefits to the broad range of users in close proximity to urban areas and which provide appropriate movement afforded to people, fauna and flora.'*

### **The linking value of the NCOSS**

Linking spaces are currently described in the Plan as those that *'consist of fingers of urban land and open space that physically join and unite the city and the countryside.'*

The NCOSS is part of a connected landscape system that crosses jurisdictional boundaries. There is a risk concerning the loss of open space connectivity to the ACT and the region. The loss of access either through neglect or lack of community engagement and incremental loss of values resulting from climate change over time could undermine the NCOSS.

The reference group considers that the current description of linking spaces could be expanded to better describe this role of the NCOSS and reflect the values the community places on this role. The reference group recommends that the description be amended to:

*'Spaces that physically join and visually unite the city to its immediate setting and to the region. The values contained in these spaces include the spatial and temporal continuity provided to the setting of the National Capital.'*

### **4.2.7 NCOSS as a single category in the General Policy Plan**

The reference group noted that the NCOSS constitutes over 70 percent of the ACT. It contains a variety of landscape typologies: from formal ceremonial spaces (that may be perceived to have few ecological values) such as the parklands adjacent to the central basin of Lake Burley Griffin, to spaces that include endangered endemic vegetation communities. Some parts of the NCOSS, such as Crace Hill, may appear to some people to have little national significance.

The landscapes of the NCOSS are not an undifferentiated mass; they carry differing cultural symbolic and emotional ties to the community and to the nation, and these should be captured by the Plan.

There are four different types of open space in the NCOSS, each with its own planning and management requirements.

- First, there are symbolic spaces that provide the unique and monumental landscapes necessary in a National Capital.
- Conservation spaces protect the natural and cultural heritage of the ACT and consist generally of national park, heritage and wilderness areas, and nature parks and reserves.
- Living space consists of the network of regional and metropolitan parks which are generally accessible for a broad variety of recreation and tourist uses.
- Finally there are linking spaces consisting of fingers of urban land and open space that physically join and visually unite the city and the countryside.

Together these open spaces constitute a system which protects the environmental quality of Canberra's present and future water catchments, river systems, and important ecological and heritage areas from the increasing pressure of Canberra's growth. While each part has its own land use and character they are all interrelated as parts of a total system. It is important therefore that the system is planned, developed and managed on an integrated basis. Consolidating the NCOSS into a single land use category would reflect the fact that the NCOSS is an integrated system.

The reference group considered that there were benefits in consolidating the NCOSS to a single category in the General Policy Plan as:

1. The principles relating to the NCOSS in the Plan can be captured by an overarching statement that ensures land managers are aware of the visual and aesthetic

contribution of the NCOSS to the landscape setting of the city including views out of the city. Consequently, it can be a clear statement of intent that land managers and decision makers can point to when incorporating the NCOSS values into their own management plans.

2. The policies and land use restrictions in the Plan should refer to specific sites of importance such as the Murrumbidgee river corridor, or Tidbinbilla without requiring separate land use categories. Policies should reflect the importance of protecting the values of specific areas without creating artificial boundaries around land use categories that don't capture the interrelationships between the multiple landscape types represented in the NCOSS.
3. The current boundaries between the different land use categories are predominantly designed to delineate landscapes with different environmental values. The river corridors have different permissible uses to the mountains and bushland. However the state and federal legislation mentioned in chapter three that has developed since the first Plan was introduced regulates environmental impact and land use controls. By consolidating the NCOSS into a single category reduces duplication of regulation and reflects the NCA's commitment to clarifying principle strategic planning responsibility between the ACT and the Commonwealth. The Plan should be seen as the instrument of last resort in land use controls in the ACT.
4. Many of the appendices in the Plan refer to detailed land management practices, including metrics for environmental standards. These appendices are out of date and should be embedded in management plans rather than the National Capital Plan. By changing to a single land use category the Plan will complement rather than duplicate the more detailed plans and management agreements for these areas. The opportunity exists to remove reference to municipal functions from the Plan in areas that are the principal responsibility of the ACT Government.

### **Recommendation eight**

The Plan be amended to:

- consolidate the four NCOSS land use policy areas that separate symbolic, conservation, living and linking spaces into a single category [refer figure three].
- consolidate the principles and policies in chapter eight to reflect National interests in a single land use category called NCOSS.
- change the description of each type of open space as follows:

#### *Symbolic spaces*

Spaces that embody the national importance of the landscape in a diverse cultural environment and the intrinsic connection between the physical setting and continuing legacy of Canberra as a planned city.

#### *Conservation spaces*

Spaces that protect, conserve and enhance the natural environment, the heritage and cultural values of the ACT, and which provide for ecological connectivity.

#### *Living spaces*

Spaces that are able to provide direct health and wellbeing benefits to the broad range of users in close proximity to urban areas and which provide appropriate movement afforded to people, fauna and flora.

#### *Linking spaces*



Spaces that physically join and visually unite the city to its immediate setting and to the region. The values contained in these spaces include the spatial and temporal continuity provided to the setting of the National Capital.

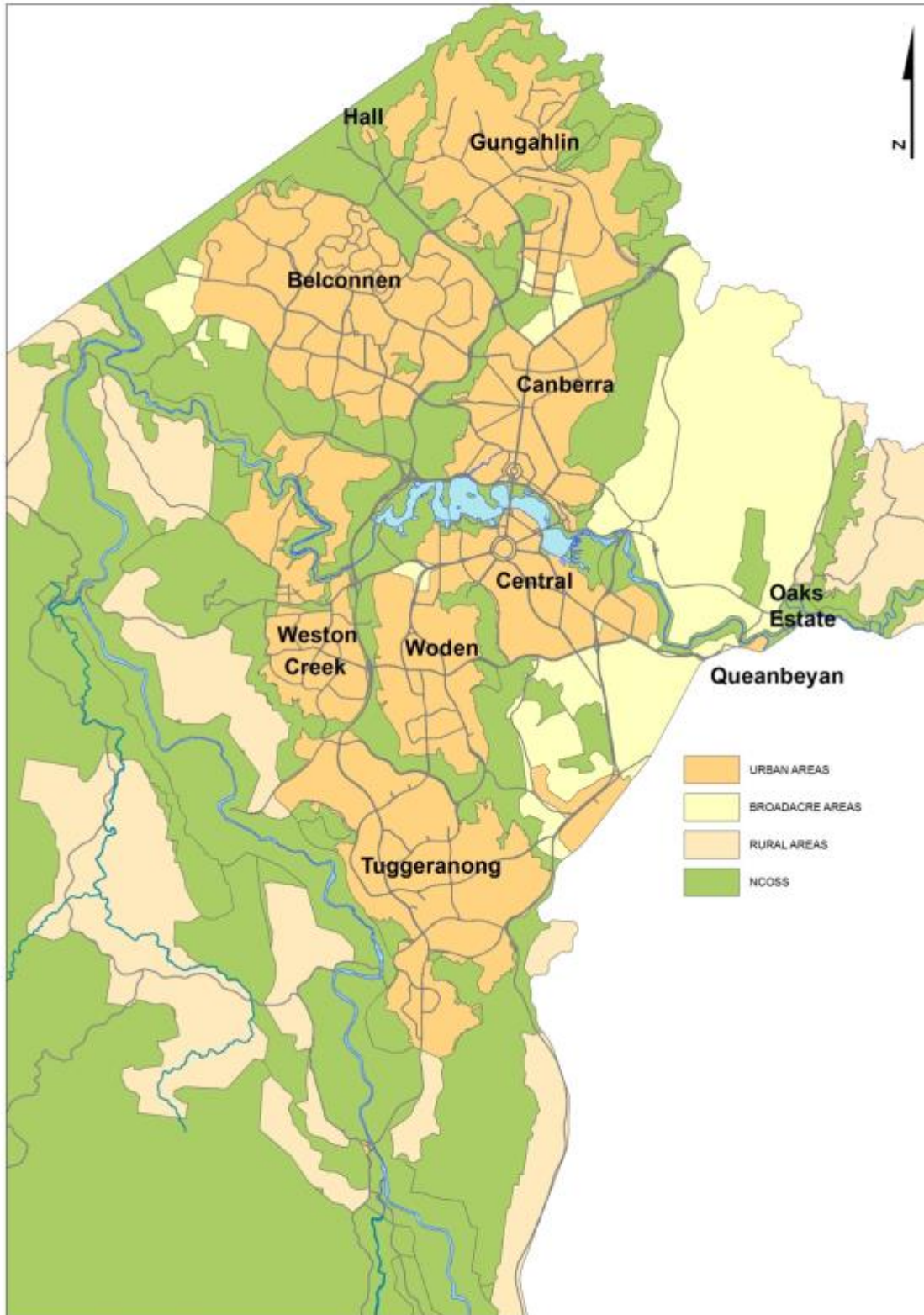


Figure 8: Proposed amendments to the NCOS in the General Policy Plan (NCA 2012)

#### **4.2.8 Consistency of expression of landscape values**

During the past two decades the ACT Government has established new nature reserves in the NCOSS which together are known as the Canberra Nature Park. Other NCOSS areas such as Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park were established by the Commonwealth during the 1970s and 1980s. Since self government, the ACT has built on the significant legacy of the NCDC by taking direct land management responsibility for the majority of NCOSS land. Today the Plan maintains strategic oversight through the General Policy Plan. This review presents the opportunity to explore ways to improve both strategic and statutory decision making in the NCOSS. The goal is align the land management responsibilities with planning responsibility while at the same time protecting the landscape values considered to be of national significance. This is consistent with the Australian Government's National Urban Policy and COAG Agreement on Capital City Strategic Planning Systems.

This can be achieved by:

- consulting with the ACT government and other stakeholders to identify the key landscape values that the NCOSS protects and enhances.
- establishing a consistent review time frame of between five to ten years to ensure the language, mappings, and land uses in the NCOSS are consistent across different plans.

In addition, the 2009 COAG agreement on Capital City Strategic Planning Systems stated the need for 'effective implementation arrangements and supporting mechanisms, including evaluation and review cycles that support the need for balance between flexibility and certainty, including trigger points that identify the need for change in policy settings.' These recommendations seek to improve the consistency in the use of terms in the various Plans and subsidiary agreements without adding a layer of regulatory complexity for those vested with the responsibility of managing NCOSS landscapes.

## **5.0 Other Matters**

This chapter outlines additional matters that were considered in the course of the review, but which fell outside the reference group's terms of reference.

### **5.1 Additional land for inclusion in the NCOSS**

As a result of the ACT Government's assessment of natural heritage values in future urban areas, it is considering amending the Territory Plan to change the land use policy in some locations to recognise their conservation value. This could involve including them in non-urban zoning or declaring them to be Nature Reserves. Included in the areas subject to assessment are areas around Kinleyside, Kenny, Taylor, Jacka and Throsby in the district of Gungahlin.

While such changes to the Territory Plan are likely to be not inconsistent with the Plan, there are benefits in amending the Plan concurrently to provide greater consistency between planning instruments. Amending the Plan to include such areas in the NCOSS would also provide greater certainty as to the intent for these areas (ie. they will not be utilised for broadscale urban development).

Gungahlin is not the only area where nature reserves have been gazetted but do not form part of the NCOSS. Other parcels of land have already been declared Nature Reserves and form part of Canberra Nature Park, but are still identified as being within Urban Areas or other land use policy areas in the Plan. Incorporating such areas into the NCOSS would recognise their conservation status and also recognise that they effectively function as part of NCOSS landscapes.

The ACT Government has indicated their desire to work with the NCA to achieve the above, and to enhance consistency between the Plan and the Territory Plan.

### **Recommendation nine**

Amend the General Policy Plan within the National Capital Plan to incorporate:

- a. existing sections of Canberra Nature Park that are adjacent to and/or function as part of NCOSS landscapes, but are currently within Urban Areas, into the NCOSS.
- b. new sections of Canberra Nature Park or areas declared by the ACT Government to form part of hills, ridges and buffers areas to be part of the NCOSS.

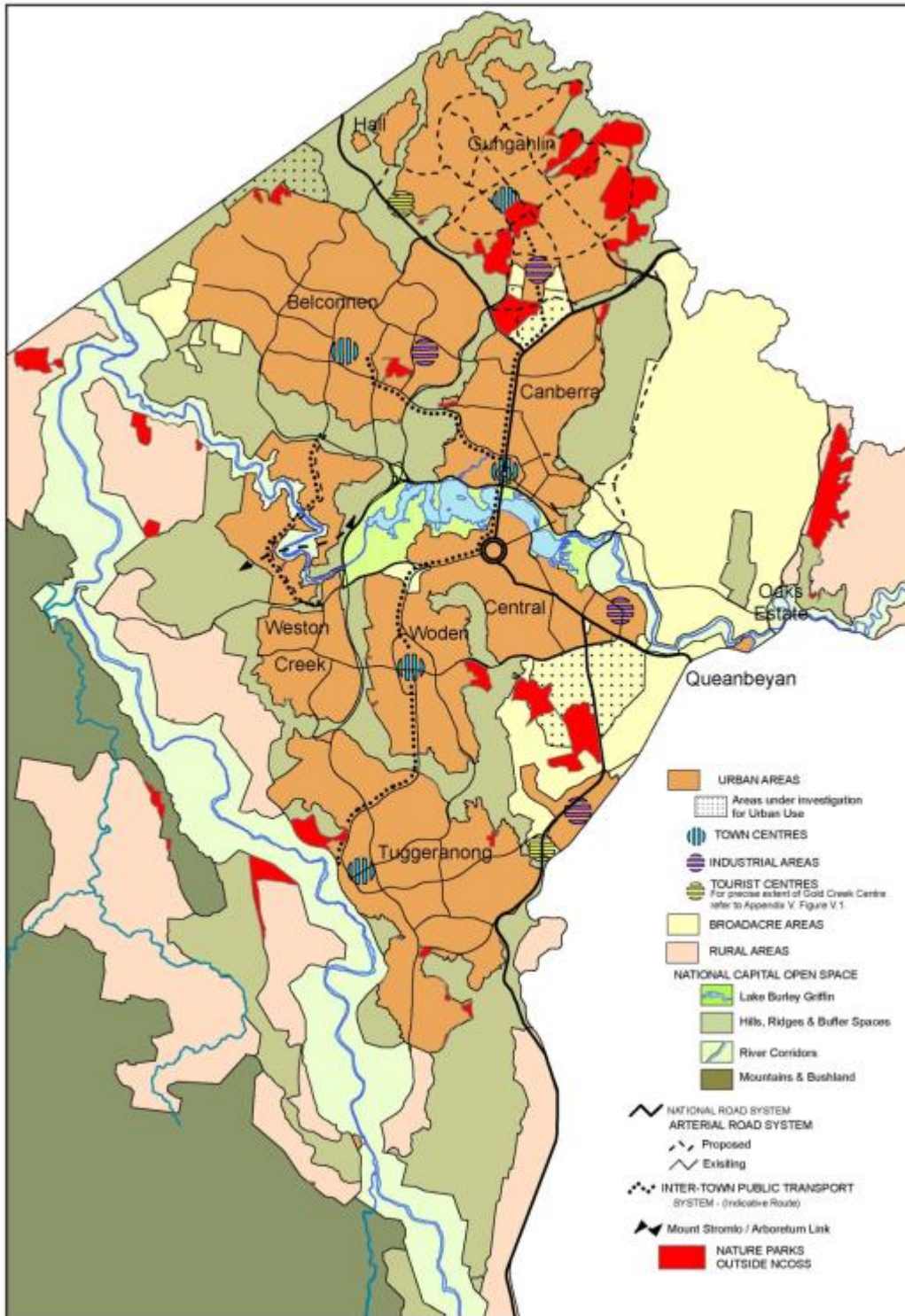


Figure 9: Nature reserves not currently within NCOSS.

## 5.2 Climate change and bushfire risk

The impacts of climate change have considerable potential to directly and indirectly modify landscape structure in the ACT and region and this will have a direct impact on bushfire regimes.<sup>29</sup> Climate change impacts on landscape structure will vary by region, however in southern Australia increased fire danger is expected for most areas and warmer climates are projected to shorten intervals between fires when the direct effects of climate are considered alone.<sup>30</sup>

The impact of climate change on the NCOSS is particularly important because of the proximity of large tracts of bush to urban areas and a very long interface between these landscapes and the residential areas in Canberra. Residential areas contain high-value assets that face significant threat from bushfires. In particular, peri-urban areas are at significant threat given close proximity to remnant native vegetation, a characteristic that also increases their attractiveness as places to live.<sup>31</sup> Future scenarios for regulating the urban/open space interface might range from continued development with little restriction in less fire prone areas, to a highly regulated environment that effectively prohibits any further development.<sup>32</sup>

The NCOSS review recognises the complex and changing nature of bushfire impacts on assets that pose significant challenges to fire managers. There is increasing interest in economic evaluations of fire impacts to guide future fire management responses. In such evaluations there are multiple values and trade-offs to be considered along with the high levels of uncertainty and dynamic processes where the cause and effect is separated across time and space. While this largely remains a matter for the ACT government, it is important for the Commonwealth to be able to provide necessary protections of the landscape assets contained in the NCOSS. This needs to occur without unduly limiting the ability of other stake-holders to protect infrastructure in the face of likely increases in threat from fire resulting from the effects of climate change.

The conservation and management priorities of the NCOSS are 'of their time'. They reflect the conditions and priorities identified in the NCDC and JSCNCET reports of the 1980s and early 1990s. They refer to landscape values and understandings of ecological processes that have substantially changed since the Plan was first gazetted.

Most of the identified landscape values remain relevant today, however incorporating contemporary and emerging community held values are not currently adequately reflected. Global environmental concepts such as connectivity, mitigation, plant and animal migration, biodiversity conservation and resilience – particularly in relation to fire risk – should be incorporated into the Plan.

### Recommendation ten

The National Capital Plan be reviewed with the intent of recognising the need for consideration of environmental concepts such as connectivity, mitigation, plant and animal

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<sup>29</sup> Malcolm Gill. Fire and the Australian flora: a review. *Australian Forestry*, **38**, 4-25 (1975). (see also Williams et al. 2009, Bradstock 2010, Cary et al. 2012)

<sup>30</sup> CRC Bushfire workshop notes June 2011

<sup>31</sup> Eriksen, C., N. Gill & R. A. Bradstock (2011) Trial by Fire: natural hazards, mixed-methods and cultural research. *Australian Geographer*, **42**, 19-40.

<sup>32</sup> Low Choy, D., C. Sutherland, S. Scott, K. Rolley, B. Gleeson, N. Sipe & J. Dodson (2007) Change and continuity in peri-urban Australia: Peri-urban case study south east Queensland. *Monograph 3-Change and Continuity in Peri-urban Australia*. Griffith University Nathan.

migration, biodiversity conservation and resilience – particularly in relation to bushfire risk – in the planning and management of the NCOSS.

## 6.0 Conclusion and next steps

This review has demonstrated that meaningful dialogue about how the landscape is valued can occur when it is seen as more than a scenic framed setting to be preserved in perpetuity or a fragile ecosystem to be locked up and protected from human use. When the landscape is treated as a dynamic living space, rather than a static scenic view, the mix of built and unbuilt structures it accommodates have the latitude to acquire multiple understandings over time, and this flexibility is central to the resilience and longevity of the NCOSS.

The NCOSS is an overarching concept that protects and enhances the values that reflect the national significance of the landscape in the ACT. The review of NCOSS has identified the complex, interrelated nature of the landscape in Canberra's spatial structure. The NCOSS represents landscapes that contain social and environmental values important to the local Canberra community, while also embodying the matters of national significance identified in the Plan. Over time, this landscape has been shaped by these dual interpretations that are both locally and nationally significant. However, the city faces the challenges concerning development adjacent to those parts of the NCOSS that represent the landscape setting considered to be of national significance.

The review of the NCOSS has provided the NCA with a series of recommendations regarding changes to the Plan to ensure policies reflect contemporary issues, improving the extent of information available to stakeholders to allow them to better understand the importance and role of the NCOSS and undertake their responsibilities, and improving governance arrangements both in relation to reviewing the NCOSS and improving the community's understanding of planning and governance arrangements in the NCOSS.

The outcomes of the review will have a bearing on a number of other projects currently being undertaken by the NCA. Notably, this includes the review of the Plan, the first comprehensive review since its inception in 1990. The recommendations of the NCOSS review will help ensure that the Plan responds to contemporary issues such as climate change, and contains material that will ensure planning and management of the NCOSS upholds the values placed on the city landscape by the community.

# Attachments

## Attachment A – Previous reviews and report into the National Capital Open Space System

### The landscape values of the Capital 1912 – 1977

The incorporation of landscape elements into cities and the value of green spaces in urban areas has been the subject of scholarly enquiry since the late nineteenth century. Ebenezer Howard's *Garden cities of tomorrow* 1902 is often cited as the first substantive work that addressed the social benefit of urban landscapes from a spatial planning perspective. Yet interest in urban green spaces for aesthetic and public health reasons dates back to eighteenth century. Frederick Law Olmsted's Central Park in New York is the most famous example from an Anglo-European perspective. In early twentieth century Australia, the site selection and design competition for the new Commonwealth capital focused national attention on the role of landscapes in the modern city. The Griffins' sensitivity to the Australian landscape setting and their refusal to impose a European urban vernacular over the grassy limestone plains were considered the defining elements of their prize winning design.<sup>33</sup>

As a result, Canberra has a particular planning history that is very different to other Australian cities. It was a product of a master plan, or at least a vision resulting from a design competition commissioned by the fathers of federation. Through them, the Australian people embodied the idea of a national capital that expressed the symbolic union of the states to form the Commonwealth. The new capital was of such importance that the federal senate committee for choosing a site and the commissioning of an international design competition felt the city should mirror the ambition and optimism of the nation in its infancy.<sup>34</sup> The landscape played a central part in this new national identity through the extensive plantings by Charles Weston along with the development of the garden suburbs by Sulman and the eventual adoption of the Griffins' plan, gazetted in 1925. While the framework and landscape vernacular of the city was established in the first thirty years, the majority of urban development in Canberra occurred after world war two.

Those responsible for the development of Canberra have consciously incorporated landscape objectives in the metropolitan plan. While the spread of low density suburbs in Canberra was informed by the neighbourhood planning principles of the British New Town movement, individual champions ensured the landscape played a prominent role in the metropolitan plan for the city. Landscape architects and scholars employed by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) namely Richard Clough and George Seddon were largely influenced by concept that landscapes were products of their time and people's perception and understanding time and space and this applies today.<sup>35</sup> While the physical layout of the NCOSS reflects the earliest designs for the city, the values, management

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<sup>33</sup> David Headon, *The Symbolic Role of the National Capital: From Colonial Argument to 21st Century Ideals* (Canberra: National Capital Authority, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Robert Freestone, "Planning, Housing, Gardening, Home as a Garden Suburb," in Patrick Troy (ed.) *A History of European Housing in Australia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Andrew MacKenzie *The city in a fragile landscape* proceedings from the Urban history planning history conference Perth Western Australia (UWA 2012).



priorities and community perceptions of the NCOSS have changed. This review was designed around extensive community consultation to uncover those values in order to consider and incorporate more contemporary understandings and landscape values into the Plan.

## **An Open Space System for Canberra: National Capital Development Commission 1977-1984**

For most of the twentieth century, Canberra planners have paid significant attention to the landscape setting in the city, yet the formal recognition of landscape elements into the regulatory planning framework did not receive attention until the 1960s. In the same year Lake Burley Griffin was completed, the NCDC special report to the cabinet on the planning of the national capital identified areas of 'special national concern' which included the inner hills and Lake Burley Griffin.<sup>36</sup> This report initiated further planning work to recognise and protect the values provided by the landscape. It was another decade before the NCDC formalised the landscape structure of Canberra by recognising the NCOSS. The NCDC emphasised the national importance of Canberra's landscape setting by the creation and formal adoption of the concept of the NCOSS in the metropolitan Y plan. The hills and ridges within and around the urban area of Canberra were to be kept free of urban development, both to act as a backdrop and setting for the city as well as providing a means of separating and defining the towns.<sup>37</sup>

The major concerns about the implementation of the NCOSS into the metropolitan plan were pragmatic issues to do with ownership, access for recreation, environmental management and planning responsibility.<sup>38</sup> Land management became a priority concern as the NCDC anticipated the division of land tenure and management that would result from the Territory's move to self-government. As the main beneficiaries of the NCOSS would be the permanent residents, the NCDC believed the ACT government should pay for the cost of land management.<sup>39</sup>

The investigation into the proposal to formalise the NCOSS by George Seddon in 1977 raised a number of questions related to landscape value and the purpose of an identified open space system. He emphasised the importance of understanding the NCOSS as more than a land use category and argued that "*land is by its very nature, is a non-homogenous commodity, and sites differ greatly in their attractiveness*".<sup>40</sup> He was most concerned about how the landscape would be valued for recreation and visual amenity. However, managing the visual impact of development remained an integral principle of the NCOSS objectives, in particular, how the visual setting or view from certain points around the ACT would represent the lineage to the original Griffin design.<sup>41</sup> Seddon was also concerned how the landscape setting invoked meanings of national significance.

Protecting environmental values in Australian cities during the 1970s became politically charged however, in Canberra the problem of open spaces was quite the opposite. Seddon

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<sup>36</sup> NCDC, *The Future Canberra : A Long Range Plan for Land Use and Civic Design* (Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1964).

<sup>37</sup> NCDC, *The Canberra Metropolitan Plan* (NCDC Canberra 1984).p.173

<sup>38</sup> George Seddon, *An Open Space System for Canberra* (NCDC, Canberra 1977)

<sup>39</sup> *An Open Space System for Canberra*

<sup>40</sup> *An Open Space System for Canberra*

<sup>41</sup> *The city in a fragile landscape*

was aware of the public criticism of the city's lack of density. He rather prosaically alluded to this when, in the introduction to the 1984 policy and development plan, he quipped that the problem for Canberra was not finding the landscape among the buildings, but rather, finding the buildings between the landscape.<sup>42</sup> However this only reinforced his view that the city was planning for the future. As the city has grown, the division between the urban and non-urban spaces has become more prominent and pressure from users has increased. Seddon argued in 1984 that a future territory government should adopt a 'honey pot' approach to land management and identify a few areas to be intensively used and managed. He believed largely dispersed medium intensity use of the NCOSS would be damaging both ecologically and economically.

## **Our Bush Capital - The report of the Joint Committee on the National Capital 1992**

By the early 1990s, the ACT was a self-governing territory and the focus of both the new National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA) and the ACT government revolved around division and transfer of land management responsibilities. At the time, the community was concerned about the apparent mismatch between transport infrastructure planning and the erosion of open space areas containing high value ecological and scenic assets through poor communication between different agencies at Federal and Territory level.<sup>43</sup> The NCPA also continued to investigate how to promote and make meaningful the NCOSS values to the Australian people.<sup>44</sup> This included an investigation how NCOSS areas could be managed and classified to reflect conservation values as well as examining development potential for recreation and tourism.

In December 1991, the Minister for the Arts, Tourism and Territories, the Hon. David Simmons MP, asked the Joint Committee on the National Capital to inquire into and report on nature conservation policies and environmental management practices within the NCOSS areas of national significance.

Report identified a number of inadequacies arising from the separation of planning and land management responsibilities following the Territory's transition to self-government. The committee accepted that National significance concerned the preservation of a special landscape character, but emphasised the need to distinguish between the NCOSS as symbolic of the National Capital and the place where Canberra residents recreate and develop and affinity for the open spaces provided. As a result, the report emphasised the need to identify the parts of the NCOSS that represented a landscape of national significance and the importance of community involvement in the planning and management of those landscapes.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> George Seddon, *National Capital Open Space System Policy Plan and Development Plan* (NCDC, Canberra, 1984).

<sup>43</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia *Our bush Capital: Protecting and Managing the National Capital's Open Spaces*. Report of the Joint Committee on the National Capital. (AGPS Canberra:1992)

<sup>44</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia *Our bush Capital: Protecting and Managing the National Capital's Open Spaces*. Report of the Joint Committee on the National Capital. (AGPS Canberra:1992)

<sup>45</sup> *Our bush Capital: Protecting and Managing the National Capital's Open Spaces*

The committee did however determine very early on in the report that the NCOSS was primarily designed to protect the environmental resources contained in the NCOSS from incremental development decisions. *“The ecological values are the principle reason for its existence”*.<sup>46</sup> The primacy of this statement in the review reflected the emerging awareness of the value of ecological resources at the same time acknowledging that the NCOSS contains subsidiary values to do with amenity and symbolism.

## **Shaping our territory 2003 and the Canberra Spatial Plan 2004**

As land management priorities shifted to address climate uncertainty at the beginning of the twenty first century, the value of the NCOSS remains under the spotlight as other global environmental narratives enter the policy discourse. This section examines shifts in the way the landscape has become embedded in a broader global narrative at a time when uncertainty associated with climate change makes valuing urban landscapes increasingly difficult from a metropolitan policy and planning perspective.

In January 2003, devastating bush fires swept across much of the Australian Capital Territory. The fires destroyed much of the bush backdrop to the national capital, most which was part of the NCOSS. In response to the Canberra bushfires, the ACT Government prepared *‘Shaping our Territory: Options and Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT’*. The report provided the most comprehensive and holistic study of future uses for urban landscapes in the ACT since self-government. It was the first study by the ACT government that substantially focused on development and land use in the NCOSS.

While the territory had management plans in place for Canberra Nature Park, this report presented options for future land use in and around the city’s extensive landscape network. For the first time, environmental narratives to do with mitigation, biodiversity conservation and resilience-particularly in relation to fire risk- emerged as a priority.

A year later, the ACT Government released the Canberra spatial plan which set out principles for the growth of the city over thirty years. This included a key metropolitan planning objective of preserving biodiversity. While this was an important goal of the spatial plan, there was little supporting evidence to show how it could be implemented. More importantly, biodiversity drew the attention of community members wanting to see such global environmental values incorporated into development goals.

The current review into the NCOSS considers the challenge of managing the landscape legacy of the city in the context of climate change. It considers projections on global carbon emissions and associated temperature increase. It considers climate change scenarios that will impact on the landscapes of South Eastern Australia.<sup>47</sup> These impacts on the landscape are still unknown and, as modelling and information processing improves, new information and impact scenarios will come to light. From a planning perspective, these changes should be acknowledged as ongoing factors to inform future NCOSS values, management priorities and land use planning.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Our bush Capital: Protecting and Managing the National Capital’s Open Spaces p.xv.*

<sup>47</sup> The Climate Institute *“Bushfire Weather in Southeast Australia: Recent Trends and Projected Climate Change Impacts”* (CRC Bushfire 2011)

<sup>48</sup> NCA, *Review of the National Capital Open Space System Draft consultation report* (NCA Canberra 2011)

## **Attachment B – NCOSS reference group members**

### **NCA appointed chair**

#### ***Adjunct Associate Professor Dianne Firth***

Dr Firth is the former Head of Landscape Architecture and now Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Canberra. She is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Deputy Chairperson of the ACT Heritage Council and sits on the Design Review Panel for the ACT Land Development Agency. Her research interests include the theory and practice of landscape architecture with a particular focus on Canberra.

### **NCA appointed experts**

#### ***Associate Professor Cris Brack***

Associate Professor Brack is a scholar and lecturer at the Australian National University (ANU) Fenner School. His research contributions have been the development of optimal sampling strategies, modelling tools, and decision-support systems for trees and associated biota at stand, landscape and continental scales. This research has been influential in development of the National Carbon Accounting System for Australia (winner of the Eureka Environmental Science Award), and in catalysing the development and adoption of new approaches by forest and land managers, and policy makers.

#### ***Professor Gini Lee***

Professor Lee is a landscape architect and interior designer and is the Elisabeth Murdoch Chair of Landscape Architecture at the University of Melbourne. Focusing on the arid environments of Australia, her multidisciplinary research into the water landscapes of remote territories contributes to the scientific, cultural and indigenous understanding and management strategies for fragile landscapes.

### **ACT built environment nominated representative**

#### ***Mr Gregor Mews***

Until late 2013, Mr Mews was the Active living coordinator for the Heart Foundation, where he oversees the delivery of the internationally recognised and award winning Active Living Project. He is an Urban Planner/ Designer from Berlin. Over the last decade he has been involved in collective planning and infrastructure design projects around the world. Greg has received several high skilled research scholarships from the German Academic Exchange Service as well as work related awards. He has published a book about sustainable development for cities in Central Asia and has contributed to numerous magazines and papers. Greg held an adjunct position at the Centre for Research and Action in Public Health at the University of Canberra.

### **ACT community representative**

#### ***Dr David Shorthouse***

Dr Shorthouse has extensive experience in Government service, developing and implementing natural resource policy, planning and management of natural resources, heritage protection and conservation of threatened species and communities. He has held leadership roles in ACT Government environment agencies, managing ecological survey and wildlife research projects, developing threatened species conservation strategies, and initiating cooperation with NSW agencies on regional planning for natural ecosystems and threatened species. Since retirement David has been appointed Visiting Fellow, ANU Fenner

School, assisted community groups with natural resource projects and worked under contract with the e-Water Cooperative Research Centre, ACT Heritage Unit and ACT Commissioner for the Environment.

## **ACT Government appointed representative**

### ***Mr Ben Ponton***

Mr Ponton is the Deputy Director-General, Planning with the ACT Government's Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate. Mr Ponton was represented by Ms Gay Williamson.