



Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on  
the National Capital and External Territories.

## Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital.

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May 2023

Joint submission from The [Conservation Council](#) ACT Region and [Friends of Grasslands](#) to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories on its inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital.

Terms of Reference:

1. Requirements for the National Institutions to convey a dynamic, representative national story;
2. Maintaining the currency and vibrancy of Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition;
3. Raising the profile of Australia's national capital and its symbolic importance in reflecting the character, values and identity of Australia;
4. Consider the importance of Australia's national capital in highlighting our sporting, cultural and tourism potential; and
5. The needs of existing infrastructure and identifying future infrastructure needs to facilitate a), b), c) and d) above.

5 May 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to this inquiry. While this is clearly an inquiry oriented towards our national institutions, the focus of our submission is on the value of our natural and Aboriginal heritage - on retention of Canberra as the Bush Capital.

Term of Reference 2 is of specific relevance. However, our submission also applies to ToRs 3 and 4. In relation to ToR 3 - the tall poppy syndrome is rife in Australia and Canberra suffers for it, but those who travel to Canberra are typically pleasantly surprised - the profile of Canberra as Bush Capital supplemented by its national institutions and growing cultural/social options needs to be protected. In relation to ToR4 - ecotourism potential is particularly relevant.

## Recommendations:

- 1) that the Commonwealth recognise the Bush Capital and its natural and Aboriginal heritage in terms of biodiversity protection and management;  
  
and as a corollary,
- 2) that all conservation areas across all tenures be identified and protected - the implementation of other effective area-based conservation measures in Australia (OECMs) provides a vehicle (on Commonwealth land) for maintaining the currency and vibrancy of the Bush Capital as a source of pride and international recognition.

## Introduction

As a planned city and as the Bush Capital, Canberra has for many years attracted tourists and has enjoyed international recognition. However, following population and urban growth way beyond anything envisaged by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin - and despite more than half of the ACT being managed for biodiversity conservation purposes - the development of our national capital has consumed most of the ecosystems comprising lowland grassy woodlands and the natural temperate grasslands - both of which have now been declared as critically endangered. Such ecologically valuable resources continue to be under threat.

We can support our nationally significant ecosystems and species by formally recognising their values, and *protecting* and *managing* them in a way that enhances biodiversity.

The following brief submission is designed to draw readers' attention to already developed concepts which are under serious consideration and serves to further support their adoption for the future wellbeing of the national capital.

## A Biodiversity Network for the ACT

To combat biodiversity loss across the Territory, the Conservation Council ACT Region's Biodiversity Working Group and Friends of Grasslands (FOG) have co-authored a paper that outlines a key part of the solution to protecting and enhancing the ACT's remaining natural places: The [Biodiversity Network](#) (see also <https://conservationcouncil.org.au/publications/>). The Biodiversity Network was launched earlier in 2023 and both Federal and ACT Governments will benefit.

The concept of a biodiversity network was developed because areas with high conservation value that occur on tenures outside of the reserve system are not primarily maintained for their natural values. Such a network could support the protection and enhancement of natural values in the ACT, by designating land uses, consistent with IUCN guidelines, that put conservation values at the forefront whilst allowing for other compatible land uses.

## OECMs

OECMs are described by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as areas that are achieving the long term and effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas. (<https://www.iucn.org>). The term 'other effective area-based conservation measure' describes a geographic site, which is not within a protected area, that delivers long-term biodiversity conservation under equitable governance and management. OECMs can be governed by a variety of rights holders and actors including Indigenous peoples and local communities, government agencies, as well as sectoral actors, private organizations, and individuals.

<https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/oecms-a-new-paradigm-for-area-based-conservation>

The FOG [submission](#) (April 2023) on draft principles to guide recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures in Australia stated "It is understood OECMs will contribute to global and national 30 by 30 protection targets despite the fact OECMs will provide no formal (legal) protection for biodiversity..... we believe legal protection should be applied to OECMs where possible".

The Biodiversity Network proposal was modelled largely on the OECM classification. There is no need to press the issue further. The two concepts referred to in this submission align to provide a framework for ensuring maintenance of the Bush Capital and continuing to raise the profile of Canberra as the national capital.

## About us

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra region. Since 1981, we have spoken up for a healthy environment and a sustainable future for our region. We harness the collective energy, expertise and experience of our more than 40 member groups to promote sound policy and action on the environment. We campaign for a safe climate, to protect biodiversity in our urban and natural areas, to protect and enhance our waterways, reduce waste, and promote sustainable transport and planning for our city. At a time when we need to reimagine a better future, we understand that the changes we need will only happen with the collective support of our community.

Friends of Grasslands ([FOG](#)) is a community group dedicated to the conservation of natural temperate grassy ecosystems in south-eastern Australia. FOG advocates, educates and advises on matters to do with the conservation of native grassy ecosystems, and carries out surveys and other on-ground work. FOG is based in Canberra and its members include professional scientists, landowners, land managers and interested members of the public.

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Yours sincerely

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