

**REPORT**

**of the**

**GRASSLAND FORUM**

**20 May 2010**

Prepared for

The Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

By BEACONHILL Consulting

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

On May 20, 2010, scientists, researchers, government officers, and members of environment, wildlife, and ornithological organisations met at the seminar rooms of the CSIRO Sustainability Ecosystems, Gungahlin Homestead, Crace.

The Friends of Grasslands (FOG), the ACT Natural Resource Management Council (NRM), the Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) and the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (OCSE) co hosted the Grassland Forum. See Attachment A: Participant invitation.

### **Background**

The Report on the ACT Lowland Native Grassland Investigation March 2009, by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Dr Maxine Cooper, included Recommendation 30: Conduct an annual community and stakeholder lowland native grassland forum to, among other things, coordinate research, monitoring and data collection, and raise awareness. This forum is in response to this recommendation.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the Grassland Forum were to:

1. share information, research, monitoring & data collection on lowland native Grassland with other stakeholders;
2. enhance coordination of management, education and awareness between stakeholders and across sites; and
3. identify priorities for further action to progress conservation of lowland native Grassland.

## **2. PROCEEDINGS AND OUTCOMES**

The proceedings for the Grassland Forum followed the Agenda provided to Participants ( Attachment B). Following a welcome by the Chair for the Forum Peter Davey, participants were made aware of changes to the morning's program. Minister Corbell was regrettably unable to attend, one of the scheduled short talk presenters, Isobel Crawford, had sent her apologies so would not be speaking, and an update on the process of the investigation by the Commissioner would be moved to later in the morning.

The Agenda was divided into three key areas:

1. presentations made by experts in the relevant fields who provided updates on current and previous research into grasslands; and
2. open discussion on the implications of the Government's response to the ACT Lowland Native Grassland report
3. small focus group discussions, feedback and general discussion on priorities for the next 12 months

Participants were officially welcomed to the Forum by Shane Mortimer, who provided information on his personal history and link to the land and especially the Grassland. Shane took the opportunity to stress the importance of heritage in the Grassland, and its cultural significance. He spoke of the various language groups and indigenous peoples of the area, and the need to understand the cultural history of Canberra, of both the people and the land.

The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Dr Maxine Cooper, thanked Shane for his insightful history of the area and reinforced that the way to deal with the difficulties of living in a complex world where there are competing interests, is to find a way forward through listening and caring

She invited and encouraged participants to listen to each other, and to share information and ideas about the Grassland. She acknowledged that the conversations need to continue hopefully for decades, and reminded participants that there are currently still two related but separate investigations under way: one into tree management and the other into Canberra Nature Parks.

## **Presentations**

The morning's presentations were designed to provide factual and up to date information on the activities in the Grassland. These included voluntary organisation's findings, research, and government planning activities. PowerPoint presentations will be available on the OCSE website:

<http://www.environmentcommissioner.act.gov.au>

Speaking about the future of Canberra's Grassland, the first of the presenters, **Geoff Robertson** from Friends of Grasslands (FOG) thanked the Limestone Plains Group who had initially alerted people to the issues of the grasslands. He commended the OCSE Grassland Investigation Report for being well thought through.

He then turned to the findings of FOG, which is that almost 60% of the grasslands is in trouble; 20% are in a critical condition and 40% are approaching that condition. This he considers to be a poor reflection on everyone. FOG's concern is that everyone may be proceeding too slowly and cautiously, and therefore the

management that the grasslands require, may not be delivered. One of the underlying issues to this, FOG believes is that land management should be an objective in its own right within policy; not an end in itself.

Geoff noted that in the ACT, many people look at the grasslands, but they are not proud of it. He conceded that they may not understand it, or its' importance. To correct this, he believes there needs to be more community participation; a need to focus on specific areas or issues; a need for indigenous and scientific perspectives; and a need for positives in government responses to requests and situations. He acknowledged that the kangaroo management situation is difficult, and too often communities and organisations "fight the little battles, without getting on with the job."

FOG commended the government on its response to the Report, and particularly acknowledged the positives in the ACT Govt response. These include kangaroo management; addressing immediate weed issues; having Annual Management Plans and an annual land managers' meeting which focuses on a culture of compliance and monitoring on private land. He commended the conservation layer in the Territory Plan, the establishment of an annual grassland forum, increased community awareness, and the development and use of interpretative signage. The items within the report that FOG found disappointing included that there was no commitment made to place all grasslands into the conservation estate, and many issues were deferred. The lack of acknowledgement that the present institutional arrangements may be inadequate and lack of additional funding and resources were considered disappointing.

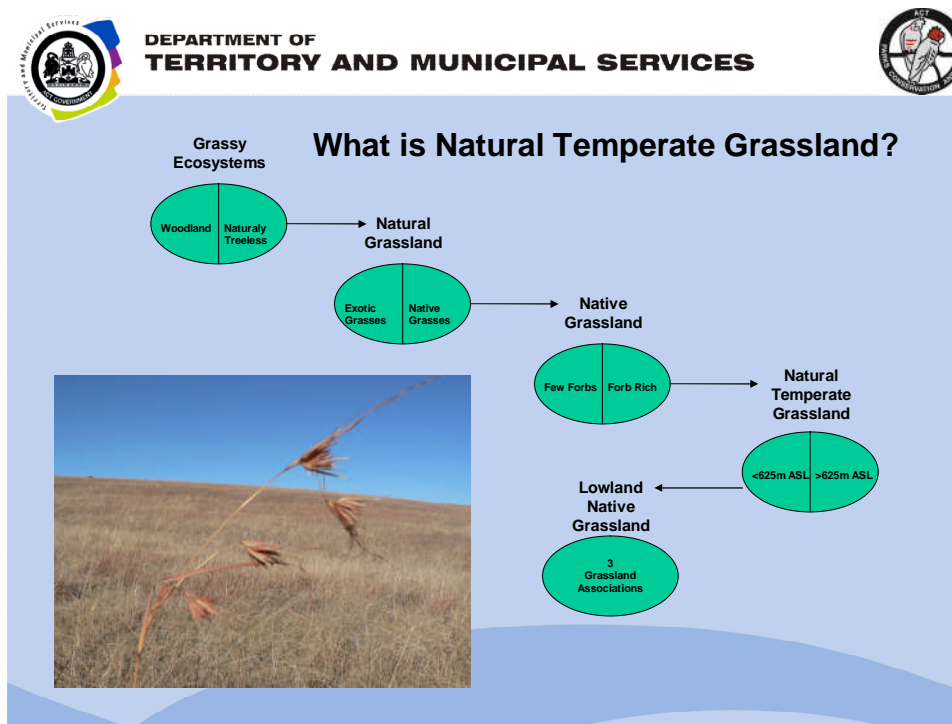
Geoff explained that FOG's strategies are all integrated. For example, they are working on Stirling Ridge and Yarramundi Reach with the NCA, and they also work with the Cooma Council. Geoff spoke of being proud of the FOG label; proud of what they do. As a business it has a good science, and good practices. Training its members and being socially responsible are important components of the organisation. But he acknowledged that so far it has failed to bring indigenous people's perspectives into the grassland management.

Through their work and collaboration, FOG has learnt that managing the grasslands successfully, is achievable. However, some things still require change to be successful. FOG believes that these include every individual and group taking responsibility for the land they hold in custody; that an integrated bushland management approach needs to be adopted; and changes need to be made where land management practices are not succeeding.

The work of FOG has also highlighted the need to promote volunteerism and caring for the environment. Geoff suggested that employers need to consider ways that they can give staff time off to be community volunteers, as part of their business ethic. The issues of needing to be ready for volunteers and to make them productive was discussed; as was the need to have a good offset policy which will make biodiversity

destruction costly. He reminded attendees that as the grasslands continue to be fragmented and destroyed, new solutions need to be sought.

**Greg Baines**, an ecologist with the Parks Conservation and Lands, ACT Department of Territory and Municipal Services (PCL), presented the issues of distribution, condition, and management of the Natural Temperate Grassland (NTG) and the Lowland Native Grassland of the Southern Tablelands. He explained how they are different to other grasslands. Lowland Native Grassland are only one component of the NTG, and in the ACT, the Lowland Native Grassland (LNG) are below 625m in elevation.



*from the presentation of Greg Baines*

Greg spoke of the research into grass species and three models of grasslands showing how they vary largely upon slope and mean annual rainfall. Grassland with more rare species have a higher value than those without. They have found that many types of grasslands are approaching their threshold of decline. Because the scoring focuses on relative species richness, those areas are holding up well. He pointed out the conundrum faced is that before you can adequately conserve biodiversity, you need to recognise it. He referred to the work of Rainer Rehwinkel of the Department of Climate Change, Energy and Water (DECCW), who has identified seven different grasslands in the region associated with the NTG community. The ACT's Lowland Native Grassland contain three of these associations. Greg stressed that more research is required to assess the distributions and conservation status of these associations.

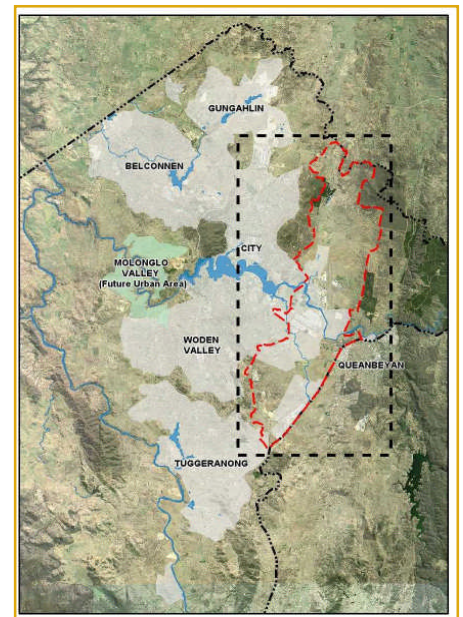
Greg explained the background to PCL current action. PCL has a number of pressures for land development, and is looking at a strategic approach to dealing with this. They acknowledge that there is a

need to balance grasslands with fuel reduction burns. Issues of domestic stock grazing also need to be considered. Research has also shown the detrimental effect of kangaroo grazing on natural grasslands, and weeds remain an ongoing problem in the grasslands.

Current and future ACT Government research include:

- Impacts of kangaroo grazing on grassy ecosystems.
- Feasibility of captive breeding of Grassland Earless Dragon.
- Influence of habitat structure on Grassland Earless Dragon.
- Translocation methods for Golden Sun Moth.
- Habitat restoration for Golden Sun Moth.
- Methods for the introduction of Button Wrinklewort into Nature Reserves.
- Establishing a new population of Ginninderra Peppergrass.
- Mapping the distribution of NTG in Namadgi NP.

**Belinda McNiece**, Planning Services, ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA), updated participants on the Eastern Border Project. This is part of the ongoing Canberra Spatial Plan (2004) and covers an area on the east of the ACT, between Majura, through Hume, Symonston and Jerrabomberra, from Civic and Kowen. (Kowen is a potential long-term development area – after Molonglo).



This approximate 10,000 hectares is a broadacre area, with a landuse needs area outside of the urban city setting: e.g. airport, cemeteries, racecourse, and key roadways. Belinda explained that whilst the Macroplan study was completed in March 2009, there is still a need to undertake further field studies in all areas. The study focused upon Canberra restricted supply and diversity of industrial land. It is considered that Eastern Broadacre will play a critical role in meeting Canberra's industrial needs in the long term. The study found that possible uses include:

- Freight/ transport and logistics
- Industrial and associated office
- Warehousing/ storage
- Education and training facilities
- Tourism/ recreational uses

This area is under the North south flight path of the airport, so there is no residential consideration. Ecological studies have found significant species and habitat, which need to be considered. In addition to the Earless Dragon, the area is home to the Striped Legless Lizard, the Pink Tailed Worm Lizard, the Golden Sun Moth, the Perunga Grasshopper, Button Wrinklewort, is Latham's Snipe Habitat, and is a major bird habitat. Issues of connectivity, rural leases, conservation leases, and nature reserves, are all under investigation, and more research is required. A proposal for further consultation is currently with the

Minister. Belinda explained that the sustainability corridors may have broader considerations, and ACTPLA is keen to explore light industry ecology.

**Don Fletcher** from Research and Planning introduced participants to the recent research studies and findings from within the ACT, especially in relation to the recent report on kangaroo management and the grasslands ecosystem. The report found that the Eastern Grey Kangaroos (EGK) are the dominant herbivore in natural grasslands. Their overgrazing has led to erosion and loss of plant species. They acknowledged however that the biodiversity issues are still under dispute even by researchers.

Research has identified that there is a need to upgrade the standard of mapping. Also discussed was the positive effect of fallen timbers on kangaroo grazing, and revegetation. Whilst the use of mobile exclusion cages has shown a reduction in Crace and Dunlop of EGK grazing consumption, Don offered a word of caution about the population density link to overgrazing, because the sites vary in terms of availability of food.

The research has highlighted the extreme importance of public education about kangaroos and grazing impacts. There is a documentary on people and kangaroos currently being made which will be aired on television in 2011.

**Stuart Jeffrey and Kirsty Gould** presented an overview of PCL activities and plans. They explained that PCL manages a total of 34 individual Lowland Native Grassland sites in the ACT: eight of these are within Nature Reserves, whilst four of these occur on Rural leases. Stuart and Kirsty gave the following examples of PCL activities.

- Using the example of the unleased territory land - Jerramalee Grassland (52 hectares of grasslands in an area located west of McGregor), where they have been developing an operational plan: they have managed domestic grazing for conservation and fuel hazard reduction, and have been spraying Chilean Needle Grass. They consider this to be a potential offset site, and are also working with developers on research into protection of the Golden Sun Moths and their habitat.
- Dunlop Grassland is an area of 82 hectares of natural temperate grassland where they want to reduce the impact of biofuel grazing. Stuart stressed that the best results are achieved when there is a balance between grazing and conservation requirements. They did undertake a hazard reduction ecological burn, and are doing more fencing to manage the reserve, and currently updating their operational plan.



- Majura West- is an area of 133 hectares of grasslands between Majura Road and Capital Offices which has a different management plan. Here there has been no grazing since October 2009. Control measures for rabbits and weeds are in place (especially thistle monitoring), and the area has been identified as Grassland Earless Dragon habitat.
- Jerrabomberra Grassland: This area has an Implementation Works Plan, which includes restoration and revegetation, interpretive signs, trails and access points, a weeds plan monitoring the grazing impacts, and trail ecological burns. The two major expenses of the activity this past year (80K each) has been fencing to keep out most of the EGK, and weed control.
  - Serrated tussock and saffron thistle have been sprayed, but they do not want to kill the diversity of forbs, so they have slashed the area and laid native grass cutting in there. There are many different groups undertaking different types of research in this area. These include: Greening Australia's Revegetation Project, photo monitoring, vertebrate pest monitoring & control, Introduction of Button Wrinklewort, seed collection, sugar trials and blocking vehicle access. Several Monitoring projects cover the Grassland Earless Dragon, other reptiles, vegetation, and grazing pressure.

## Short Talks by Forum Participants

**Dr Sue McIntyre** explained some of the details of the baseline surveys which she has undertaken. The paper will be available next year. She invited participants to email her if they would like a PDF copy. Sue alerted participants to the ideas of translocation, grass eco-communities, carbon capture, species decline, and practical research application in the ACT Grasslands.

One of the problems she believes is the relative lack of attractiveness/appeal of ACT Grasslands. She explained the following:

- the grasslands are not attractive because there are not enough wildflowers in them. Its pastoral history has grazed out the bigger showy plants. It is not always the rare species that people find attractive.
- Suggested grassland species translocation and some native flax seeds – easy to collect – very showy but are in the landscape
- Attractiveness of native grasslands when some growth and change of colours, whilst to some eyes is very beautiful, it is only to those with a more advanced appreciation of grasslands.

- More often than not, people see a European landscape as beautiful - research has shown that we have evolved to like flowers...so one way of getting the public to see, let alone appreciate the grasslands, is to put the native flowers back.

**Shane Mortimer** followed the theme of Sue's talk and suggested that an approach could be to see the grasslands differently, and suggested a grasslands flower photo competition. Another idea was to encourage residents to see how colourful they can make their gardens with Australian grasses. Shane stressed that we need to be looking ten generations ahead and to identify the mistakes of the past, as they will help to correct the future.

Shane spoke of the changes to the landscape and development plans. The Yam daisy, which was once prolific and important to the aboriginal people of the area, is now very hard to find in the ACT – some were in Gungahlin before the new link road was constructed. He believes that the Grasslands need to be marketed with indigenous pride, and spoke of the work of Paul Hodgkinson and potential to promote the Grasslands internationally. He also recommended that investigations and research be undertaken whenever the ACT government wants to develop an area. He suggested that investigations need to be undertaken into those areas, before the grazing (Shane mentioned that the ACT government seemed to put cattle grazing in an area prior to it being developed).

An indigenous plan should be developed, and more research into the recurrence of native grassland species when grazing is stopped. Shane commented that he was “thrilled to see so many people enthusiastic about grasslands.”

**Catherine Keirnan** spoke of the landholder's triple bottom line key components. Catherine described herself as a farmer and private landholder who is passionate about the land, and stressed the need to consider the triple bottom line when farming. For her these are breeding beef cattle, biodiversity and the social and cultural considerations

She stressed the need for adopting a “caring for country” approach whether farming or working in conservation. Based in Tharwa, she stressed that the biggest threat to the land is the African Lovegrass, which needs a change in thinking and methodology in know how to deal with it. She stressed the need to look closely at how we manage our land, as African Lovegrass is far more of a threat than anything else and it needs to be identified to developers also to reduce it being brought into the area.

**Rainer Rehwinkel** informed participants of some of the activities, which have been undertaken addressing grassland issues. The “Communities and Landscape” program delivers extension via other agencies e.g. Greening Australia and government agencies, and builds on previous work. He referred to the development of a field guide, and the Management kit, which Sarah Sharp has developed. He commended the excellent conservation network that exists, and the monitoring work which is being undertaken. By way of example, he spoke of the strong work of the Southern Tableland and Conservation Network who receive funding through the Heritage Trust; and the interconnectivity work of the CMAs, delivering incentives to grasslands throughout the region. He cited the Murrumbidgee CMA grasslands stewardship project as being very successful. Rainer stressed that it is important to continually update the mapping and modeling to keep it current.

He commented that one of the impacts of the drought on species has been fragmentation. There has been successful conversion of grasslands into miniature parks across the region, yet this is still less than 1% of the 1750 natural temperate grassland area.

He acknowledged the work of David Shorthouse, and the need for regional planning for natural ecosystems. He spoke of the existing involvement by many in the Environment Trust funded mapping project of the Great Eastern Ranges from Melbourne to the Atherton Tablelands, which is being handed over to NGOs as a long term project.

Rainer considered the areas of development would include developing tools for identifying all grassland species and boxlands, and biodiversity tools for offsetting. He acknowledged the policy issues including pasture cropping and the potential to roll out across the state, but which may impact on the high diversity grasslands, and the need to try to control that. He also considered that the translocation trials were a “great direction to be heading” and the recognition that there is no listing of natural temperate grasslands in NSW – this challenge is slowly being addressed.

**Sarah Sharp** took the opportunity to address the forum in the absence of Isobel Crawford, to promote the idea of Bushland Management Teams. These are specialised teams of professionals working in regeneration and techniques of weeding. They have strong ecological skills of applying management on the ground, and work with existing groups, doing work on ground and training landholders, community workers, government officers. This is separate from any political process but with a resource base. These teams are currently being successfully implemented by city councils, especially in Victoria.

Sarah spoke of the need for alternate funding sources and suggested a ratepayer levy, and developer levy. She also spoke of the difficulties of regeneration, and the need for a scoping document to see how it can be successfully achieved and how to work out appropriate funding. She informed participants that the

Monitoring manuals she has prepared for community groups are available now, although there will be a proper launch later.

## **Overview: The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment**

Dr Cooper before beginning her overview, chose to respond to Sarah's concern regarding funding, saying that she agrees that funding is a vexed issue. The city's green assets are significant, and there has been consideration given to offsets and levies, but there is a need to recognize that base funding is being stretched thin to deal with it all.

She gave the example of a levy application in Brisbane where communities can see the effect and use of their levies:

1. A Bushland levy – when there is a problem and something must be done. They have a sign saying “Your levy at work.” The community eventually accepted that
2. Environmental Levy: The Bay had no Dugong in it – this created the vision for the community that the Bay was polluted, and therefore need to stop the pollution. When the Bay became clean again, the Dugongs came back.

This highlighted the fact that issues which unite us all will get the most support, and need to be managed quite vigorously. Dr Cooper stated she would like some advice on this important area, and requested participants to contact her to discuss these matters further. She also suggested communities should seek funding through Heritage, and Environment Grants.

She was pleased to see the planning maps of the Majura Valley but commented that it still needs a grassland reserve; which needs to be locked in at the planning stage. She suggested not planning the roads first, but rather allocating the reserve first and then planning around it. Roads were acknowledged as being quite flexible and could be planned around the Grassland. She commented that she was pleased to see that there are quite a few areas going into reserves and she will monitor this.

The Commissioner congratulated everyone for their input and interest in Grasslands, and quoted the words of Professor Ian Lowe: you need discontent before you can have vision (and we have had discontent and now have vision in terms of grasslands), we are now looking at the pathways to that vision, and then we have commitment. She stressed the need to focus as it underpins the good work of the others.

## Open Discussion: Implications of the Government Response

Following the presentations, attendees were invited to comment upon the presentations or to ask questions. The following comments and discussion ensued.

- Why is the ACT still looking at playing down the grasslands, rather than higher density locations for people to live? Shane suggested increasing the higher density urban areas; e.g. building over shopping centres. Why expand Canberra population anyway, given our poor rainfall and water availability.
- Sarah sees an opportunity where Defence has put out their proposal where it intends to develop an area. She suggested that the internal area could be kept as a reserve. She recommended that it be a seven star, bush on boundary high-level environmental and social impacts.
- Jenny asked about what provision has been made for growing our own food in the ACT. This was considered to be an often-neglected area – and it was suggested that we need to incorporate the growing of local food for consumption in the ACT into all planning.
- Nora informed the Forum that a proposal had been submitted for a wildlife park for Kangaroos, and that she disagrees with the finding of the earlier mentioned Kangaroo reports. She considers that it contains false allegations of Kangaroo activities, and stated that there is a need to understand wildlife grasslands, and the natural flora, and fauna. She considers the key Management Plan to be flawed; as the grasslands include all native flora and fauna, and she suggested that all ACT be declared native.
- Tom reminded participants that there are opportunities to protect our grasslands, but it needs more community involvement. He cited the Arboretum taking on a professional approach, which has led to it now having over 500 volunteers and significant funding for conservation outcomes. He believes that our natural areas could be like this if we are prepared to put in the same money and resources. The approach needs to be similar to attract the volunteers and commitment
- Stock Management is a tool but two examples were cited where it is very negative and both are visible to the public and impacting on waterways and biodiversity;
  - 1 leasehold land Jerrabomberra Creek Hindmarsh Dr – every day sheep and cattle are seen eating the aquatics

- Molonglo Gorge recreation – Sutton Rd - the native grass is eaten to the ground.
- Awareness raising and new ways of educating people about the Grasslands was raised by several participants:
  - Geoff promoted the Kosciusko to Coast (K2C) and 10 October Biodiversity and Farming Fair at Bredbo. K2C covers the region and is an opportunity for people to become actively involved in conservation, and the fair provides an opportunity for farmers and others interested in ways of managing land to be involved and learn new skills.
  - Wildflowers – encourage a group called conservation and cultivation – growing indigenous plants in gardens. There are two open Gardens coming up – where people can learn how to re-establish plants.
  - A suggestion was made and discussed widely, to promote Grasslands at Floriade, where there could be an opportunity to plant some native grasses and promote and educate.
  - A suggestion was made to submit grassland photos to the ACT Photo competition as a way of also raising awareness of the grasslands.
  - The ACT Region Catchment and Landcare Association members all have websites and provide community baseline information. Molonglo Catchment Group also provides small amounts of funding for GPS training; weed eradication, feral animal control package, testing conservation assessment tools, and monitoring. There are partnerships with organisations working together for great impact. For example Molonglo and Queanbeyan City Council and Greening Australia have worked together to successfully bring back native grasslands.
  - MCG are also always in the ACTEW “Look and Learn” tent at Floriade, and have an art exhibition each year in June. They suggested that perhaps there could be an environment focus art competition held at Floriade also. They informed the forum that the MCG website provides more information on their activities in grasslands and by streams, and can be used as a source of information for anyone.
  - Need to educate consumers about the fact that the quality of life they enjoy is dependent on ecosystem services.

- Alternate funding was raised as an item for discussion by several participants, and included:
  - Imagine if the Arboretum funding had been spent on Grasslands. It is a great magnet for interest and a great response, but we could have had that for the grasslands. Thinking of new ways of doing things – Shane suggested considering the commercial aspect of the land: for example children could collect seeds for plants (for pocket money), ACT government could have harvesters for grass seed rather than mowing. The management needs to be looked at differently.
  - Peter concluded that the Commissioner had sent a challenge to the group – her office is willing to host discussions about alternate funding.
  - Geoff has been looking at offset policy – need to ensure that land is managed in a way that money could be put into a permanent fund. There is an opportunity to get funding from private industry. There are a number of opportunities in addition to government funding.
  - John reminded participants that many types of grassland are close to urban and proposed urban areas. The Village Building company had provided money to engage the community, to help the appreciate and care for the place they live. He agreed with Shane, that Canberra could be developed in different way. He believes that there is enormous discontent about Canberra’s proposed population and expansion into green areas. He is aware of the constraints and tensions, and would like to set up deliberative democracy approach top get these issues into the general community – so that politicians can react to community pressures.
  - Biobanking with grasslands in Campbelltown is working. It can be developed with the offset required elsewhere. The money put into the Biobank is used to develop the site and maintain into the future. An example of biobanking was given where a developer want to develop 5 hectares of land, then the land offset is up to 75 hectares. The rules do need to be clarified to ensure accurate information.
  - It was also considered important to understand the financial services of ecosystem services and green infrastructure. These need a dollar value before Treasury takes notice.

- Funding mechanisms are a major concern. Diminished funds for managing “Caring for Country” projects in the ACT are considered to be out of step with the needs – which are increasing and becoming more complex. There also appears to be a gap in environmental research in the ACT – and this was considered to be an area which needs attention.
- FOG informed the Forum that they are learning as they go. They consider bush management issues and reflect on their own activities and their impact, and on what other groups and organisations are doing.
- PCL finds itself somewhat constrained in what it can do. It was suggested that it should focus on research and planning to maintain funding for the listed projects, as current resources continue to be a challenge.
- Parks and Reserves – there is ongoing capital works planned into the future, and there has been a proposed budget for the new year, managing threatening species on the ground. They want to start encouraging public appreciation and understanding of their recreation areas. They are also developing a strategic approach to development and offsetting guidelines, to maintain and enhance some of the areas.
- Concern was expressed about a perceived lack of strategic vision of what is happening in conservation, and seeming conflict between ACTPLA and DEWHA. There is currently no conservation of the Eastern Grasslands corridor. Participants asked if the ACT has sufficient linkages and corridors, as at present, they seem to be quite fragmented areas. Concern was voiced that what we may be creating may well just erode over time.
- Regular Forum were considered important, but it was suggested to have them more frequently but for only two hours maximum, each time rather than half a day.

## **Focus Group Sessions**

All participants were allocated to one of three focus groups to discuss conservation of lowland native grasslands, and to identify the key action priorities for the future. Attachment C lists each Focus Group’s discussions.



General discussion then ensued regarding the concerns and recommendations of each group for further action to progress conservation of lowland native grasslands.

- share information, research, monitoring & data collection on lowland native grasslands with other stakeholders;
- enhance coordination of management, education and awareness between stakeholders and across sites; and
- Identify priorities for further action to progress conservation of lowland native grasslands.

Underpinning all three of the above was concern for *adequate and alternative funding sources*. Consumer levies, developer levies, biobanks, and accessing funding through CMAs, network organisations and private industry were some alternative options considered to accessing government funding. Increased involvement of volunteers was also seen as a budgetary consideration. It was agreed that a positive attitude toward Grasslands, their benefits, beauty, history, and conservation was fundamental to increasing awareness of the need for, and commitment to, funding Grassland areas and activities.

*Coordination and collaboration* was identified as a core issue of concern. The need for one vision between Commonwealth and ACT government agencies was seen as one requirement to address the confusion that currently seems to exist in relation to planning. Currently work on Grasslands by a variety of volunteer groups has enabled the grasslands to hold their position, but political interest is required to develop and maintain the grasslands in their own right. The establishment of a “Grasslands Directory” will assist in coordination between and among community organisations and government departments and officers.

The need for *further research, activity monitoring, and access to data* was seen to underpin effective grassland conservation and development activities. Participants agreed that this information should be readily available to assist organisations and their activities, and to be used as information to be shared with the public for education purposes. It was agreed that a central source of government information would be useful... or at least a central point with linkages to all data available from different departments, rather than the separate data sources currently occurring.

*Community education and volunteer engagement* were high priorities across all three focus groups. The need for government departments to understand the nature of the work of the volunteers, and the volunteers to be educated in the requirements of effective grassland management were both key areas of concern of participants. Regular positive media stories, both government and community, were seen as essential to improved education and positive awareness raising of the Grasslands.

## 4. PRIORITY ACTIONS

Following the focus group discussions, a member of each focus group reported back to all participants on the issues their group considered most important, plus their key priorities. Attachment C lists all the points discussed and recorded by each group. The key priorities identified included:

### **Promotion of the Grasslands throughout ACT**

- Increased public awareness rising, and appreciation of the beauty and maintenance of the grasslands through a strategic communication campaign, which could include regular BOB meetings, art exhibitions, targeted campaigns, facebook sites, FOG website, active internet discussions, and topic specific public meetings.
- Improved communication between existing organisations interested in the Grasslands by the production of a Directory of Organisations active in the grasslands in the ACT.
- Increased awareness and development of research projects with interdisciplinary teams

### **Improved public knowledge of the Grasslands**

- Utilising existing medium such as organisations' newsletters, internet, field days, field trips, volunteer training days, using guest speakers at other organisations and schools,
- Encourage the involvement of all users of grasslands to educate others about its heritage, benefits, and reasons for conservation
- Through collaboration of organisations and agencies such as Landcare, CMA, TAMS, NRM, hold practical demonstrations, training sessions and field days

### **Identified Strategic Vision**

- The development of a strategic vision for conservation areas which underpins the activities of Commonwealth agencies, ACTPLA, Land Development Agency, etc
- The vision is needed to underpin development of commonwealth land and the relationship of economic consideration of the environment.
- More liaison between ACT/NSW with the resinating of the NTG recovery Team to assist with strong regional program development

### **Improved Government/resident/organisation relationships**

- Improved information flow is required between government in terms of their planned activities on Grassland areas, and the communities involved in those areas.
- MOUs need to be appropriate, add value and impact on outcomes, and should include data sharing
- Improved advance notification of government intentions through improved use of websites
- Incorporate the planners (ACTPLA) into community meetings to gain holistic understanding of areas being developed and (any) reserves, corridors and protected areas; to ensure corridors rather than disconnected pockets
- Establish Voluntary conservation Agreements in ACT which allow stewardship payments to support/ reward landholders who balance conservation/production ( NSW Conservation agreements attract rate rebates)

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The forum identified four key areas for priority attention:

- Promotion of the grasslands throughout ACT
- Improved public knowledge of the grasslands
- Identified strategic vision
- Improved Government/resident/organisation relationships

The Commissioner thanked the presenters for their energetic and thoughtful presentations, and all present for their active participation and valuable contributions. She particularly thanked the four parties responsible for organising the meeting: NRM Council ACT, FOG, TAMS Research and Planning and OCSE. The meeting highlighted the opportunity for more action, ongoing-targeted research, and positive outcomes in the future.

## **Attachment A: Forum Invitation**



### **GRASSLAND FORUM**

**Thursday 20 May 2010**

**8.30 am to 1.00 pm**

**CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Gungahlin**

On behalf of the Friends of Grasslands, the ACT Natural Resource Management Council, the Department of Territory and Municipal Services and the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment thank you for agreeing to attend a Grassland Forum to be held on Thursday 20 May at the Seminar Room at CSIRO Gungahlin, Bellenden Road off the Barton Highway.

#### **Background to this Forum**

The report on the ACT Lowland Native Grassland Investigation by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Dr Maxine Cooper, included Recommendation 30: conduct an annual community and stakeholder lowland native grassland forum to, among other things, coordinate research, monitoring and data collection, and raise awareness.

#### **The objectives of this Forum are to:**

- share information, research, monitoring & data collection on lowland native grasslands with other stakeholders;
- enhance coordination of management, education and awareness between stakeholders and across sites; and
- identify priorities for further action to progress conservation of lowland native grasslands.

The organisers will prepare a short report on the outcomes of this Forum.

**Attachment B: Forum Agenda***Chair: Peter Davey NRM Council*

8.15am	Tea and coffee on arrival
8.30am	Introductions by Peter Davey
8.35am	Welcome by Shane Mortimer
8.40am	Official Opening by Mr Simon Corbell, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water
8.50am	Overview of the ACT Lowland Native Grassland Investigation by Dr Maxine Cooper
9.00am	Future of Canberra's Grasslands by Geoff Robertson, Friends of Grassland
9.15am	Lowland Native Grasslands in the Southern Tablelands – distribution and condition by Greg Baines
9.30am	Eastern Broadacre Study by Belinda McNeice, ACT Planning and Land Authority
9.45am	Current activities in Parks, Conservation and Lands by Don Fletcher from Research & Planning; Stuart Jeffress and Kirsty Gould from Parks and Reserves.
<b>10.15 - 10.30</b>	<b><i>Morning Tea</i></b>
10.30am	Short talks by forum participants:  Dr Sue McIntyre  Shane Mortimer  Catherine Keirnan  Rainer Rehwinkel  Isobel Crawford
11.00am	Open discussion on implications of the Government's response to the ACT Lowland Native Grassland report - chaired by Peter Davey
11.15am	You or your group's priorities for the next 12 months – chaired by Peter Davey
11.30am	Ideas for on-going collaboration – group sessions
12.15pm	Feedback from groups
12.30am	Identify priorities for collective action - chaired by Peter Davey
12.45pm	Wrap up – Peter Davey
1.00pm	Finish

## **Attachment C: Focus Group Sessions**

The focus groups identified ideas for ongoing collaboration.

### **Group A:**

- Regular forums like this one
- Regular Jerrabomberra cross border site meetings BOB model
- Promoting **image** of grasslands by:
  - Artists exhibition on grasslands
- Campaign and scoping Bush Management Teams focused b volunteering
- Facebook site on Grasslands e.g. Eastern Corridor
- Regular stakeholder conversations , also like the BOB model

### **Group B**

- Incorporate the planners (ACTPLA) top gain holistic understanding of areas being developed and (any) reserves, corridors and protected areas.
  - To ensure corridors rather than disconnected pockets
- Mechanical methods of collaborating
  - Grassland Directory
  - Murrumbidgee CMA – Monaro Messages email system
  - Electronic –
    - FOGs existing website
    - Link with/build on existing relationship
  - Strategic communication campaign
  - Web structure of “talent”: to speak on specific issues
  - Place based campaigns to highlight local specific issues
- Environmental reasons/benefits for collaborating
  - Expanding knowledge and
  - Tapping into specific expertise
- Economic reasons/benefits for collaborating
  - Research projects with interdisciplinary teams
- Practical manifestations of collaboration
  - Field days( Landcare/CMA/TAMS
  - Connections NRM/Landcare/CMAs

### **Group C**

- More liaison between ACT/NSW
  - It was stronger in the past (NTG Recovery Team – management people)
    - Formal meetings
    - Look at funding to reinstate – NTG recovery Team i.e.
      - revive actions
      - Forward planning/actions – regional Education program – tree health - public actions
- How do organisations/individuals plug into what is happening?
  - **Look to Recommendation 31**
    - Concern that Eastern Broadacre Study...not environmental focus
    - hard to hear about it
- CC -Utilise concern and resilience of native grasslands to take advantage of window of opportunity to protect

- Voluntary conservation Agreements in ACT which allow stewardship payments to support reward landholders who balance conservation/production ( NSW Conservation agreements attract rate rebates)
- Commonwealth land – feedback from ACTPLA – best land in Commonwealth land, therefore can clear other areas
  - Don't put an economic value on the environment
  - And lack of ability to do work on defence land – while some areas go to ACT – other areas e.g. Majura are out of reach
- MOUs - concern from commonwealth - do not have impact on outcomes
- Commonwealth – see ACTPLA – Land Development Agency – main impacts
  - No strategic vision – from conservation areas
- More value in regular forum of all stakeholders than MOUs ( Commonwealth)
- More data sharing – result of monitoring
  - I.e. different data collected by different agencies
- MOU on data sharing/data register
- Scoping ion how to improve knowledge management
  - data
  - metadata
  - analyses
  - syntheses products
- Standardisation of methods for monitoring
  - E.g. what is happening at the airport
- Prefer regular contact/communication and website than MOU
  - What people are doing
  - Key contacts
- Thematic workshops
- Grassy Ecosystem database ( E.g. work Rainer is doing)
- Widen threatening process under EPBC – African Lovegrass