



## Mick Gentleman MLA

Minister for Advanced Technology and Space Industries  
Minister for the Environment and Heritage  
Minister for Planning and Land Management  
Minister for Police and Emergency Services  
Manager of Government Business

Member for Brindabella

19/37436

Mr Tom Duncan  
Clerk  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
GPO Box 1020  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 26 November 2019 providing petition No. 31-19 lodged by Mrs Giulia Jones MLA, about future development in Coombs.

I thank Mrs Jones for lodging this petition with the Assembly. The matters raised in the petition have also been raised directly with me, with other members of the Government, with the Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal, and was documented in their Report No. 9 on Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 360 (Molonglo River Reserve).

I appreciate the concerns that have been raised through the petition about the use of the remaining part of the peninsula. The planning for Coombs and the wider Molonglo Valley has always indicated this area is proposed to be developed for residential purposes. This has been the case since Variation to the Territory Plan No. 281 took effect in 2008.

The Government released the *ACT Planning Strategy 2018* (the Strategy) in 2018, which framed how local, regional and global changes and trends affecting the Territory can be best managed for our city. The Strategy provides a clear, robust and contemporary urban planning framework to guide our growth as a sustainable, competitive and equitable Canberra.

Relevant to the matters raised by the petition, the Strategy recognises the importance of carefully weighing up decisions about greenfield planning and development against protecting our natural environment, our green spaces and bushland setting. The Government is committed to supporting future growth in a manner that is sustainable, with appropriate oversight to protect and build upon the qualities that we value about Canberra.

These values inform the Government's decision making around the supply of land to meet the needs of our growing and changing city. The Indicative Land Release Program (ILRP) aims to release enough land every year to cater for Canberra's growth and change.

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### ACT Legislative Assembly

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Canberra's population continues to grow, and over the next 20 years the population is expected to increase by over 40%. A stable supply of new homes, available in a variety of locations and at different price points contributes to the ACT being an attractive place to live and buy a home. The ACT Government has always been clear on the intention for development to occur in the Coombs peninsula. The Molonglo Valley, Coombs and the Coombs peninsula were identified for urban residential development in 2008 through Variation to the Territory Plan No. 281 (Molonglo and North Weston) and Amendment to the National Capital Plan No. 63 (Molonglo). The Variation applied a future urban area (FUA) overlay over the area and an indicative Residential RZ1 Suburban zoning to the Coombs peninsula, both of which were documented on the Territory Plan map. The Variation was approved by the then Legislative Assembly as part of standard statutory practices.

Before any decision is made to identify an area as future urban area, extensive environmental studies are undertaken to determine the ecological value of the land. The environmental values of these areas were explicitly tested and assessed to support robust and informed decision making occurred about land use within these areas. Broadly speaking, the environmental assessments that were undertaken to support this zoning demonstrated that, due to the past use of the area as a commercial pine plantation, the Coombs peninsula had low environmental value and was therefore not suitable for inclusion into the adjacent Molonglo River corridor reserve.

This conclusion was supported by the decision of the Australian Government to approve development of the peninsula under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), which occurred in 2010. In doing so, the Australian Government found that a small portion of land within the Coombs peninsula had habitat potential for the pink-tailed worm-lizard, but as it was of low quality it was unlikely to be re-colonised through rehabilitation. The EPBC Act approval for development of the Coombs peninsula remains valid, providing development occurs consistent with the Australian Government approval.

In relation to concerns about the platypus, it is not an endangered species, however it is an important species in determining the health of our waterways. Waterwatch is currently finalising a report on the most recent platypus survey work, with the closest monitoring sites below Coppins Crossing bridge. The report will be available in early 2020. Generally, the main concerns that have been raised by the Waterwatch team for the platypus are disturbance from dogs, retaining habitat structure (snags etc) and artificial lighting.

It is within this broad context, that the future delivery of residential development in the Coombs peninsula has been openly and publicly communicated by the ACT Government since 2008.

The development of the Coombs peninsula was originally approved in 2011 through an estate development plan development application for the suburb of Coombs. The approval was appealed to the Australian Capital Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT).

ACAT made a consent order in 2012, whereby the Coombs peninsula would be removed from development and that a future development application for the peninsula would not be lodged until such time as a Plan of Management that included the river corridor adjacent to the suburb of Coombs was in place. This was not an agreement that the peninsula would not be developed.



The Plan of Management is now the Molonglo River Reserve Management Plan which formally commenced in July 2019. The Management Plan sets out how the reserve will be managed and restored over time to protect flora and fauna including the pink-tail worm-lizard, provide recreational opportunities and minimise the risk of bushfire.

Now that the Molonglo River Reserve Management Plan is in place, a development application for an estate development plan can be lodged with the independent planning and land authority. It is at this stage of the process that the final zoning of land is determined (and therefore no longer indicative) in accordance with the *Planning and Development Act 2007*.

When a development application is lodged, the application will be determined taking into consideration the requirements of the Territory Plan, the outcomes of environmental and tree surveys, stormwater management measures to protect the Molonglo River and environmental values within the river reserve, the requirements under the EPBC Act, and recommendations of a bushfire risk assessment. The authority will also take into consideration submissions received during the development application's public notification. The public notification process will provide the community with a further opportunity to comment on the proposal.

Thank you for referring the petition to me. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Mick Gentleman MLA  
Minister for Planning and Land Management

3/2/2020

