

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- *Your Local Voice* -

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Information Session 13th August 2003

Meeting on the “Review of Non-Urban ACT”

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) delivered on another request from residents when an information night was held to discuss the draft report entitled "**Shaping our Territory: Options and Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT**" on Wednesday 13th August 2003. The Auditorium at Royals Rugby Club was almost filled to capacity with around 220 people in attendance. Residents who attended the WCCC's regular meeting in June 2003 requested this extra meeting on the Non-Urban Study.

The keynote speaker was Mr George Tomlins who heads the Strategy Group within the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat which has been assisting the Non-Urban Study Steering Committee. Mr Tomlins explained that the draft report had been prepared prior to the release of the McLeod Inquiry report, but that all reasonable efforts had been taken to ensure that this draft report did not conflict with the recommendations contained within the McLeod Inquiry report.

Mr Tomlins said the Non-Urban Study had been a strategic study that had as a basic principle, the sustainability of the non-urban areas of the ACT and the preliminary options and opportunities reflected this principle. A managed buffer zone is proposed which extends from the western fringes of the urban areas of Canberra westwards to the Murrumbidgee River and/or the foothills of the Brindabella Ranges. This buffer zone is in harmony with Mr McLeod's recommendations to reduce the fire hazard to urban Canberra. All rural villages and other strategic infrastructure would also have their own buffer zones.

There are various proposals for recreational areas within the “Stromlo Forest”, as well as proposals for areas of residential development. Forestry options are mainly directed to reforestation of burnt areas to the west of the Murrumbidgee River and Mr Tomlins indicated that the Business Case for ACT Forests might need to be revisited since it was prepared well before the McLeod Inquiry report was released. The Business Case advocates reforestation of large areas to the east of the Murrumbidgee River.

Mr Tomlins said the Government is committed to not building another dam if this is possible, but as a precautionary principle, options for new dams in Tennent and Coree, and an enlarged Cotter Dam will be protected. Consideration is also given to piping water to Corin Dam from Tantangara Reservoir.

Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and the Canberra Nature Park are considered for maintenance as focal points for community recreation. There are options for increasing levels of development at both Tidbinbilla and Cotter including a village, nature-based tourism facilities and wilderness lodge-type accommodation. Rural leases could have farm-stay accommodation as well as a number of alternative agricultural enterprises such as grapes, olives, cherries and pine plantations. Sales from farm gates and cellar doors are contemplated as well as arts and craft activities. Walking trails are proposed across rural land and along river corridors. A 50 kilometre cycle path is suggested to follow Tourist Route 5.

An orderly question and answer session followed

Re-establishment of the Stromlo Forest Settlement was also suggested as well as an expansion of the Uriarra Settlement and a village at Williamsdale with some commercial focus. Rural residential development or "hobby farms" is proposed for Ingledene which is located southeast of Tharwa. These ideas received considerable and often vocal debate in regard to completely altering what is 'non-urban ACT'.

Some residents expressed cynicism about the Government preferring the most profitable options rather than the options preferred by the local community. Rural lessees expressed concern about the enlarged rural villages and the impact that additional dogs would have on their businesses. Another topic of concern to rural lessees was the fact that the managed buffer zone in the north appeared to stop at the eastern bank of the Murrumbidgee River rather than the foothills of the Brindabella Ranges as recommended in the McLeod Inquiry report.

Residents also commented on the appropriateness of the suggested alternative rural enterprises, as well as the negative environmental impacts of some of the suggested "ecological" activities suggested for Tidbinbilla. Concerns were expressed about the adequacy of the water conservation strategies and the fact that there are proposals to put more people into the Canberra region, yet there is no firm commitment to have a commensurate increase the potable water supply.

The most pressing issue is the restoration of the recreational areas around Weston Creek and how residents of Weston Creek have to endure high winds and a bleak vista for the foreseeable future.

A copy of the overview document and a full copy of draft report can be viewed online at <http://www.bushfirerecovery.act.gov.au/inquiries/index.htm> and the ACT Forests' Business Case can be viewed at <http://www.urbanservices.act.gov.au/publications/forestssum.pdf>

Residents are encouraged to submit their concerns and comments on the various options to The Non-Urban Study Steering Committee via email (NonUrbanStudy@act.gov.au), fax 6207 0123, or mail (GPO Box 158, Canberra City, ACT, 2601). Public comments and feed back must be received by 23 September 2003.

WCCC
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