

Griffith-Narrabundah Community Association Inc.

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Mr Stephen Alegria
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Dear Mr Alegria

I am writing to provide comment on the ACT Government's draft Peafowl Management Plan 2018-2023, primarily in response to requests from local residents in both Narrabundah and Griffith.

As a general comment, the draft plan appears to be unnecessarily tendentious. Its focus is the ultimate extermination of the peafowl population. It is best portrayed as a set of potential solutions looking for a problem. Even p. 8 of the document concedes that:

‘overall the population has been maintained at around 30 with peak numbers occurring during the breeding season. It is assumed that to date predation by foxes, dogs and cats has kept the permanent population numbers steady’

The draft plan would also benefit from a more rigorous consideration of a number of other aspects:

- The flyer distributed to local residents claims that the peafowl ‘pose a substantial threat to our native flora and fauna, particularly if the feral peafowl population expands into nearby nature reserves’. The draft plan suggests (pp. 4, 17) that it is the Red Hill Nature Reserve that is under threat. Given that Andrew, the first peacock, arrived in 1995, we submit that it is incumbent on TCCS to demonstrate with evidence why there should be a sudden invasion of Red Hill after almost a quarter of a century. Even nearby La Perouse Park has not been colonised in that time.
- The possibility of a cost-benefit analysis is raised on p. 9. A credible analysis would also examine alternative approaches: for example, the relocation of any St Aidan's residents who are affected by noise during the breeding season.
- In a number of places (e.g. section 4.4), the draft plan misuses hypothetical language in an attempt to bolster its case. For example, use of words such as ‘could’ and ‘can’ are used to imply that identified effects are likely to occur:

‘In 2013, concerns were raised ... they could negatively impact on ...foraging can destroy ...they can introduce weed species ...’ [emphasis added]

It is difficult to reconcile the litany of possible adverse effects with the admission on p. 4 that ‘in areas where peafowl populations are currently established, environmental impacts are likely to be negligible’, subject to appropriate management. Despite this, the overall conclusion is that the population in Narrabundah should ultimately be exterminated.

- St Aidan’s residents are reported in section 4.5 as being concerned with the hoary chestnut of potential slip-hazard due to droppings. It would be useful to know how many slippage incidents have actually occurred. Anecdotal evidence is that the peacocks spend much of their time in the gardens around St Aidan’s and that droppings on paved areas are not a major feature. Ironically, no complaints seem to have been expressed about dog and possum droppings, or droppings from other birds (including non-native Indian Mynahs) in the area. We submit that it is incumbent on a government department to investigate the evidence before formulating policy.

In sum, the draft Feral Peafowl Management Plan 2018-2023 seems to be a set of proposed solutions looking for a problem. The GNCA recommends that there should be no extermination of the peafowl in the Narrabundah area.

In his 14 December 2015 letter to the GNCA, Minister Rattenbury committed to community consultation in the development of a management plan:

‘It is clear that we need a position on the management of peafowl that systematically considers the various issues, and to this end I have requested the Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) Directorate to commence work on the preparation of a Peafowl Management Plan for the ACT. I have also requested the planning process include ample opportunity for community consultation and this should commence in the first half of 2016.’

While a limited number of residents have been advised of the draft plan by hard-copy circulars, the wider Griffith and Narrabundah community has not been informed, beyond media reporting of the issue. Interest in the peafowl issue is hardly localised. Ongoing Facebook chatter is a testament to that.

We would therefore be happy to arrange a public meeting to provide you and your staff an opportunity to canvass the issues involved in managing peafowl in the area. The success of the meeting would depend very much on having independent, objective expertise available to address any queries or concerns of residents, as well as participation by senior policy officers such as yourself.

Might we also suggest that there are higher priority areas that warrant the attention of TCCS, but which do not seem to attract the attention of the Rangers, supposedly because of lack of resources? A key issue in terms of what remains of the urban forest in Griffith and Narrabundah is the damage caused by cars parking on verges, especially builders’ and tradies’ utilities and trucks.

The budgetary implications of illegal parking on verges are just as large, if not larger, than the non-problem of maintaining control of the peafowl population. Indeed, there would be a budgetary ‘double-dividend’: revenue from parking fines would be combined with lower outlays due to replacement of dead or sick street trees.

The GNCA has for many years provided TCCS/TAMS with a twice yearly report on egregious instances of lack of protection of verges and trees in the Griffith and Narrabundah areas. Despite assurances to the contrary, we seldom if ever see any concrete results in response.

We are aware that legislative arrangements make action by Rangers difficult, but it is surely not impossible to make use of parking laws. We would be grateful if we could discuss this possibility with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Leo Dobes
President
7 June 2018
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