

REPORT ON CONSULTATION FOR THE PREPARATION OF TIDBINBILLA DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT May 2010 and REVISED DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT 2011

1. Consultation Overview

Discussion Paper (2008)

A discussion paper on the preparation of a new plan of management for the Tidbinbilla precinct (Birrigai, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Jedbinbilla (former pine plantation, Block 60 Paddys River)) was released for public comment in December 2008. The Discussion Paper outlined the values of Tidbinbilla and invited comment on possible the management approaches to the protection of these values. Three public workshops were held during the consultation period. Twenty two submissions were received on the discussion paper, and a submissions summary was placed on the Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) website.

In general, submissions supported low key, low impact recreation and tourism, based on the natural and cultural values of the area. They also supported the use of the accommodation facilities at Birrigai by the wider community, as well as school groups. The main concern in submissions was for the conservation of the natural and cultural values of Tidbinbilla, especially the potential impact of more visitors on these values.

Separate meetings were also held with Tidbinbilla and Birrigai staff, the Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association, Friends of Tidbinbilla, the Conservation Council Biodiversity Working Group, and some of the Tidbinbilla volunteers from Conservation Volunteers Australia.

Tidbinbilla/Birrigai Board of Management (2008–2010)

Commencing in September 2008, regular briefings and presentations have been provided to the Tidbinbilla/Birrigai Board of Management (the Board) on the discussion paper, issues papers, progress with preparing the draft management plan, content of the draft plan, submissions on the draft plan, responses to those submissions, and amendments to the draft plan in preparing the revised draft plan.

Aboriginal Consultation (2009)

Consultation with Aboriginal people occurred as a separate process from public consultation, at the request of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC). A one-day workshop was held with UNEC members on 5 May 2009, and a one-day workshop with the Representative Aboriginal Organisations (RAOs) on 6 May 2009 at Tidbinbilla.

Steering Committee (2009–2010)

To guide the preparation of the draft plan a Steering Committee was formed comprising representatives of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, the Department of Education and Training and the Tidbinbilla/Birrigai Board of Management.

Community Reference Group (CRG) (2009–2010)

During the public comment period for the discussion paper, several community groups expressed interest in further involvement in development of the draft plan prior to public release. Representatives from key community stakeholder groups with an interest in Tidbinbilla were invited to form a Community Reference Group (CRG) to provide advice and input into the preparation of the draft.

Issues Papers (2009)

As a basis for CRG consideration and discussion, four issues papers were prepared, focussed on the values of Tidbinbilla and proposed management policies. The papers covered:

- Natural heritage (including conservation, landscape, water, natural resource management and fire)
- Cultural heritage (including European and Aboriginal heritage)
- Recreation and tourism
- Education and research.

Following input from the CRG and further development, the issues papers then formed the basis for the core chapters of the draft plan.

Tidbinbilla Draft Plan of Management May 2010

- The Tidbinbilla Draft Plan of Management May 2010 was prepared following the above stakeholder consultation and was available for public comment from 21 May 2010 to 26 July 2010. The public were invited to provide written comments or to make an online submission on the TAMS website by completing a questionnaire.
- The draft plan drew 17 responses. These submissions were assessed and a consultation report was prepared which outlined the response to comments and proposed amendments to the plan.

Revised Tidbinbilla Draft Plan of Management (2010–2011)

- The revised Tidbinbilla Draft Plan has been drafted following assessment of the submissions on the draft plan. The consultation report outlining the proposed changes to the draft plan was sent to the Community Reference Group, UNEC, and discussed with staff of Birrigai and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.
- The Tidbinbilla Board of Management has reviewed the proposed amendments to the draft plan and suggested further changes which have been incorporated into the revised draft plan.

2. Consultation Summaries

- a) **Aboriginal Groups**
- b) **Community Reference Group**
- c) **Submissions on the draft plan**
- d) **Tidbinbilla Board of Management**
- e) **Conservator of Flora and Fauna**
- f) **Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee**
- g) **ACTPLA**

Matters raised by the above during consultation are outlined below, with responses.

2a Aboriginal Groups

United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC)

A workshop was held with UNEC at Tidbinbilla to gain the views of Ngunnawal Elders on managing Aboriginal cultural heritage in the Tidbinbilla precinct and to ensure that Aboriginal cultural values are well reflected in the plan. It was agreed that the plan would provide policies for further interpretation and protection of Aboriginal heritage in the area. Ongoing communication has occurred throughout the development of the draft plan through the UNEC secretariat.

Response: The draft plan incorporated the views of the Ngunnawal elders, in particular regarding protection of sites and artefacts, appropriate interpretation, promotion of Aboriginal culture, and involvement of Aboriginal people in events and management.

Representative Aboriginal Organisations (RAOs)

Representative Aboriginal Organisations are organisations listed under the ACT Heritage Act and have a role in identifying and managing Aboriginal cultural heritage places and objects in the ACT. A meeting at Tidbinbilla with the RAOs provided information on protection of rock shelters, access to Aboriginal sites and their interpretation, and promotion of Aboriginal culture.

Response: The draft plan incorporated these views.

Murumbung Yurung Murra (TAMS Aboriginal staff group)

A meeting was held with this group in December 2008 to discuss Aboriginal consultation during the preparation of the management plan. Another meeting was held in November 2010 to discuss the policies of the cultural heritage chapter in the revised draft plan.

Response: Substantial amendments have been made in the revised draft plan including reference to connection to 'Country', recognition of traditional Aboriginal ecological knowledge, provisions for cultural camps, and a policy that Aboriginal people will undertake Aboriginal cultural heritage interpretation.

2b Community Reference Group

The Community Reference Group (CRG) comprised the following organisations:

Organisations Represented	CRG members/representatives
National Capital Attractions Association	Trish Kirkland
Tourism Industry Council	Joseph Griffiths
ACT Rural Landholders Association	Geoff Hyles, Michael Shanahan, Margaret Whitem
Friends of Tidbinbilla	Fiona Spier
Conservation Volunteers Australia	Cristina Vincente
Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association	Patrick Jeffrey and Helen Jeffrey
Australian Association for Environmental Education	Anna McKenzie
Canberra Bushwalking Club	Quentin Moran
National Trust of Australia (ACT Chapter)	Helen Cooke/Peter Dowling
National Parks Association of the ACT	Rod Griffiths
Institute for Applied Ecology (Univ. of Canberra)	Stephen Sarre
Conservation Council of the South-East Region and Canberra	John Hibberd

The CRG met for two hours weekly over four weeks to discuss the pre-circulated issues papers (see 1. above). The meetings were well attended. Below is a summary of views expressed by participants during these meetings.

General Issues

Strong support for:

- the plan to have a focus on the core values of Tidbinbilla (i.e. natural and cultural heritage).

Concern that:

- the vision 'a unique place to explore our natural world' did not fully encompass the aims of Tidbinbilla (The Board of Management requested that this vision be used to provide consistency with marketing material for Tidbinbilla and the Tidbinbilla/Birrigai Business Plan under preparation at the time)
- the vision was seen by the CRG as more of a marketing slogan rather than a vision as it did not encompass all of the values of Tidbinbilla, particularly the cultural heritage values or its conservation role.

Response: The draft plan strongly focussed on the natural and cultural heritage values of Tidbinbilla and related recreation, tourism and education to these core values.

A revised Vision was proposed and discussed with the Board of Management. The Board advised that the original vision should be used in the draft plan. The original vision is also retained in the revised draft plan at the request of the Board.

Natural Heritage

Support for:

- the objectives and policies on natural heritage
- inclusion of connectivity, climate change and restoration in fauna and vegetation sections.

Response: Connectivity, climate change and restoration were included in the fauna and vegetation sections of the draft plan and are retained in the revised draft plan.

Jedbinbilla (former pine plantation, Block 60 Paddys River)

Support for:

- allowing Jedbinbilla to naturally regenerate and no new initiatives except for a walk/cycle route
- a review of this policy in the next plan of management.

Response: Policies for Jedbinbilla in the draft plan supported natural regeneration and no new initiatives other than a walk/cycle route. These are retained in the revised draft plan.

Aboriginal Heritage

Support for:

- the 'cautious' approach taken with regard to Aboriginal heritage sites in Jedbinbilla
- Tidbinbilla assisting Aboriginal people to reconnect with their land
- further archaeological surveys
- a holistic approach to Aboriginal cultural heritage.

*Response: The draft plan included these matters and as noted in **2a** (above), substantial amendments have been made in the revised draft plan to the section on Aboriginal cultural heritage.*

European Heritage

Support for:

- a higher profile for interpretation of European cultural heritage at Tidbinbilla
- the proposal to have open days at Nil Desperandum
- a central repository at Tidbinbilla for cultural heritage information
- Rock Valley to be a focus for European cultural heritage at Tidbinbilla

Response: These matters were included in the draft plan and are retained in the revised draft.

Tourism

Support for:

- the objectives and policies on recreation and tourism
- opportunities for commercial operators, particularly for tours
- a 'Regional Context' section in the plan that mentions Tourist Route 5 and Tharwa.

Response: These matters were included in the draft plan and are retained in the revised draft.

Cycling

Support for:

- the policies on cycling
- new cycling trails within the Special Purpose Reserve to cater for family cycling.

Concern that:

- cycling within Jedbinbilla should only be allowed on vehicle management trails.

Response: These matters were included in the draft plan and are retained in the revised draft plan. The plan states that cycling is permitted on vehicle management trails (unless otherwise advised) and is not permitted on walking tracks unless they are tracks specifically constructed for both walking and cycling use.

Research and Education

Support for:

- the objectives and policies on research and education
- strategic long-term monitoring and research to be required and emphasised in the plan
- Jedbinbilla providing an opportunity for further research into the rehabilitation of forestry lands
- the directions of the Wildlife Collection Policy.

Concern that:

- Tidbinbilla would turn into a 'zoo'.

Response: Specific objectives were included in the draft plan regarding research and monitoring (and these have been expanded in the revised draft). The policy for captive wildlife in the draft plan refers to the Wildlife Collection Policy (prepared by the former Parks Conservation and Lands in 2009) which prescribes the types of animals that will be held and that Tidbinbilla will not become a zoo.

Birrigai

Support for:

- the proposal to construct an internal walking/cycle path between Birrigai and Tidbinbilla.

Concern that:

- the plan of management would not fully represent nor integrate Birrigai well
- Birrigai was a good venue for conferences, but the facilities need to be improved
- the cost to schools and not-for-profit organisations for the use of Birrigai for both accommodation and catering has been prohibitive and a disincentive for use.

Response: Discussions with Birrigai resulted in more comprehensive information regarding Birrigai in the draft plan, particularly in Chapter 9 Education and Interpretation, and this is further elaborated in the revised draft.

Accommodation (Nil Desperandum, Birrigai, camping area, permanent or semi-permanent types e.g. 'safari' tents, cabins, lodges)

Support for:

- Birrigai having affordable accommodation for walkers, groups and individuals.

Opposition to:

- provision for overnight accommodation (including car camping) in the Tidbinbilla Valley.

Some opposition to:

- Nil Desperandum being used for overnight accommodation.

Response: The draft plan provided for overnight stays at Birrigai and Nil Desperandum. It also contained a policy to investigate other accommodation options. The revised draft plan retains the policy that would permit overnight accommodation in the Tidbinbilla Valley (see 2c and 2d below).

New proposals

New entrance to Birrigai

There was support for a new entrance to Birrigai in a safer location.

New Visitor Centre

It was considered that some form of Visitor Centre needs to remain at the front gate. The CRG could see no logical central place in Tidbinbilla for a combined Visitor/Education Centre.

Response: These matters were included in the draft plan and are retained in the revised draft as matters for consideration in a master plan.

Neighbours

It was considered that the relationship between Tidbinbilla and its neighbours needed more emphasis in the draft plan e.g. pest management, kangaroo management, security, ongoing consultative arrangements.

Response: The draft plan included an expanded section on neighbours (compared with the material in the issues paper prepared for the CRG). The draft plan contained an outline of key principles for the relationship between Tidbinbilla and its neighbours, and a policy for communication mechanisms and liaison arrangements with neighbours to be maintained and further developed. These are retained in the revised draft plan.

2c Submissions on the draft plan

Below is a summary of the issues raised in submissions on the draft plan (released in May 2010), with responses and amendments to the draft plan (now forming the revised draft plan).

Issues raised	Responses (revised draft plan)
<p>1. Birrigai at Tidbinbilla: The education programs of Birrigai are highly valued by those who commented. There was concern that the traditional role of Birrigai in providing environmental and outdoor education for school groups should be maintained and that there appeared to be a shift in focus from school to community groups. It was suggested that the plan should give more detail about Birrigai. The accommodation role of Birrigai gained some support (see 'Overnight stays').</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information added on future directions and discussion on balance between school and wider community focus (s. 1.1). • Intentions for Birrigai added to considerations in s. 9.3. • Action added in s. 9.4 referring to integration of the educational activities of Birrigai and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. • Various other updates made on information about Birrigai.
<p>2. Commercial tourism/Commercial tour vehicle access Zone 1 (Core Conservation): Some submissions expressed concern about the pressures for more commercial tourism activities in protected areas generally, of which Tidbinbilla provided an example. It was suggested that such activities compromise protection of natural and cultural values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revised draft specifies in more detail the conditions for such activities and the criteria to be addressed in issuing licences to commercial operators.
<p>3. Overnight stays: A number of submissions oppose, or have serious reservations about, introducing overnight stays to Tidbinbilla, including their economic viability and infrastructure requirements. Some suggest that if there were to be overnight stays, they should only be at Birrigai.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After detailed discussions with the Board of Management on this issue, the Board advised that options for overnight stays within Tidbinbilla should remain as a policy in the revised draft plan. This provides for a range of low key accommodation options to be considered for the Tidbinbilla Valley (Zone 3 Special Purpose Reserve).
<p>4. Rehabilitation of former pine plantation areas: This was supported, including the addition to Tidbinbilla of areas along the Corin Road. Some concern was raised about adequate resources to carry out the work. It was also suggested that rehabilitation should be part of a scientific project to build knowledge. Community involvement in such work is supported.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy in the draft plan was that rehabilitation be systematic and scientifically based; but it is probably not feasible (or necessary or a high priority) to set up all such work as a 'scientific project'. In the revised draft plan the involvement of community groups has been added to s. 6.11 (Ecological Rehabilitation) with cross reference to s. 4.2 'Community Involvement'.
<p>5. Fire management: Comments mainly relate to the relationship between ecologically based fire regimes and regimes aimed at protecting life and property.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The draft plan stated that it 'briefly outlines key aspects of fire ecology relevant to Tidbinbilla' (s. 6.10) and contains references for more information. • Amendments have been made to the discussion in both these sections related to the comments. • Policies and actions remain unchanged.
<p>6. Aboriginal and European cultural heritage: There was a high level of support for this section of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In response to these comments, substantial amendments have been made to the draft plan,

Issues raised	Responses (revised draft plan)
<p>the draft plan. However, one submission envisages a substantial research role for Tidbinbilla related to Aboriginal cultural heritage. There was also the proposal that Tidbinbilla could play a major role in connecting Aboriginal people to 'Country' and that Aboriginal people would play a much greater role in management, including decisions about interpretation of Aboriginal cultural heritage and undertaking the interpretation of their heritage.</p> <p>Other matters raised include traditional Aboriginal ecological knowledge (which is part of cultural heritage), the need to be prescriptive about cultural camps, the applicability of conservation management plans, decisions about interpretation, dealing with artefact scatters, and the need for cultural awareness training for staff.</p>	<p>which fall into three main groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — More reference is given to the contemporary Aboriginal community (e.g. in s. 4.2 'Community Involvement' and s. 7.3 'Aboriginal Cultural Heritage'). — s. 7.7.1 is amended with more detail regarding conservation management plans, interpretation and traditional ecological knowledge. The revised draft plan contains the policy that interpretation of Aboriginal cultural heritage at Tidbinbilla will be undertaken by Ngunnawal people (s. 7.8). — New objectives, policies, actions and text related to Aboriginal and European cultural heritage research (Chapter 7 and Chapter 10) have been added. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies for 'Aboriginal cultural camps' in Table 5.2 have been made more prescriptive.
<p>7. Nil Desperandum hire: Some concern was expressed about this and commercial use of Nil Desperandum having potential impacts on the values of Zone 1 Core Conservation.</p>	<p>The draft plan provided for appropriate arrangements to be put in place regarding low key use of the area (s. 7.7.2; s. 7.8). However, it did not set an overnight numbers limit or state whether or not tent camping would be permitted in association with the hire.</p> <hr/> <p>The revised draft plan allows car based tent camping at Nil Desperandum (associated with group hire of the house) but does not specify a maximum party size (Table 8.1; s. 8.10).</p> <p>With regard to access to Nil Desperandum (vehicles, cycling, walking), this would be mainly through Jedbinbilla, but because Tidbinbilla is locked at night, night time vehicle access (e.g. in an emergency) would be via Tidbinbilla Lane.</p>
<p>8. Research and monitoring: A range of comments was made including expanding role of research, more specific policies and actions, mention of koalas and inclusion of cultural heritage research.</p>	<p>The Research and Monitoring Chapter (10) in the draft plan focused on environmental research. Additional objectives, policies and actions have been added, related to cultural heritage research and other research that supports professional reserve management.</p>
<p>9. Proposed master plan: Some submissions stated that there should a statement in the final plan that there would be public consultation on a master plan process.</p>	<p>In s. 11.8 of the revised draft plan, reference to a public consultation process for the master plan is now included.</p>
<p>10. Vision statement</p> <p>A submission from a community group with a primary focus on ACT protected areas stated that the vision statement is poor with no indication of an end state intended for Tidbinbilla; and that the use of 'unique' has no real message as all places are unique in their own way. There was also criticism that the statement gave no recognition to cultural values.</p>	<p>The Board has advised that the vision statement in the draft plan will remain and has provided an expanded vision page for the revised draft plan.</p>

2d Tidbinbilla/Birrigai Board of Management

The Tidbinbilla/Birrigai Board of Management has been directly involved in the preparation of the plan and has provided input at all of the key stages. The Board has been particularly interested in the tourism potential of Tidbinbilla. The Board was particularly keen that the potential for overnight stays at Tidbinbilla remain in the revised draft plan. (Sections 8.3 and 8.10 of the revised draft plan are relevant.)

Discussion on overnight stays

This issue has drawn the most discussion and divergence of views. Since its establishment, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve has operated as a day-use area only. In the decisions about Tidbinbilla following the 2003 bushfire, the ACT Government agreed in principle to 'limited accommodation' as part of the recovery and rebuilding of the area. Permitting overnight stays within Tidbinbilla is a significant change in policy from the 1999 Tidbinbilla Management Plan.

The revised draft plan provides for a range of low key accommodation options to be considered for the Tidbinbilla Valley (Special Purpose Reserve – Zone 3) in association with the exploration of further tourism opportunities for Tidbinbilla. Future provision of, and suitable locations for, any low key accommodation facilities, such as 'eco-lodges' eco-cabins and car based camping, will be subject to the outcomes of the proposed master plan. A business case would also be prepared to determine viability.

In relation to the above, the revised draft plan contains the following objectives and actions (see s. 8.10 of the revised draft for a complete list of objectives, policies and actions):

Objectives:

- The desirability and feasibility of establishing other low key overnight stay options in Tidbinbilla (e.g. car based camping, cabins, lodges) is evaluated.
- Opportunities to establish overnight stay options are pursued, if they are determined to be feasible, desirable and are in accordance with the objectives and policies of this management plan.

Actions

- Consider the desirability and feasibility of establishing vehicle-based (tent) camping and 'eco-lodge' and 'eco-cabin' style accommodation at Tidbinbilla (Zone 3) in association with expanded tourism opportunities for Tidbinbilla.
- Pursue opportunities to establish further overnight accommodation, if these are feasible, desirable and in accordance with the other objectives and policies in this management plan and the outcomes of the master plan.

Vision statement

The Board advised that the vision '*Tidbinbilla is a unique place to explore our natural world*' should be retained. This vision has been supplemented with additional statements and quotations in the revised draft plan at the request of the Board (see page 3 of the revised draft plan of management).

2e) Conservator of Flora and Fauna

In accordance with the requirements of the *Planning and Development Act 2007*, Ch 10, Part 10.4, s. 320 (3) the Conservator of Flora and Fauna was consulted on the draft plan and endorsed the draft plan. The Conservator has also been consulted on the revised draft plan and has endorsed it.

2f) Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee (NRMAC)

Regular updates on development of the plan of management have been provided to the NRMAC. The NRMAC provided comments on the draft plan prior to public release and these were incorporated into the draft plan. The report on public consultation and proposed responses to issues raised was provided to the NRMAC for comment prior to revising the draft plan. The revised draft plan was provided to the NRMAC for review and comment.

The Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee has endorsed the revised draft plan.

2g) ACTPLA

In accordance with the *Planning and Development Act 2007*, Ch 10, Part 10.4, s. 320 (3) the ACT Planning and Land Authority was consulted on the draft plan and made no comments.