LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Nature in Our City

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ISCCC submission in response to Inquiry into Nature in our City

The Inner South Canberra Community Council (ISCCC) is pleased to have an opportunity to respond to the terms of reference for the Inquiry into the value of our natural environment to an urbanizing Canberra.

The ISCCC is a voluntary, not for profit, community-based association operating in the inner south area of Canberra. The ISCCC's objective is to preserve and improve the social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being of Inner South Canberra and the Inner South Canberra community.

We are the peak community representative body in Inner South Canberra representing the interests of local residents and communities with representation from:

- Old Narrabundah Community Council
- Griffith Narrabundah Community Association
- Yarralumla Residents Association Inc
- Deakin Residents Association
- Red Hill Residents Group
- Kingston and Barton Residents Group
- Oaks Estate Progress Association
- Forrest Residents Group

The ISCCC would be happy to discuss any matter raised in this submission in more detail.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Marea Fatseas
Chair ISCCC
22 June 2018

RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

1 The level of public support for and satisfaction with amount and quality of nature and natural environment areas in Canberra, particularly in urban areas.

Inner south residents are blessed with easy access to many natural environment areas, and consider such areas, as well as the urban forest, an important contributor to their well-being and amenity. With increasing urbanisation, there is a clear recognition that there is a challenge in balancing the need to accommodate increasing populations with the desire to protect high quality natural environment. In recent years, there have been strong community efforts to protect highly valued natural environments, including the Red Hill nature reserve, Stirling Park, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, and the forest near the Canberra Brickworks. There is also a recognition that even urbanised areas in our suburbs provide habitat for threatened species.

2 The types of nature and natural environmental areas within Canberra e.g. urban open spaces or bushland reserves and the existing or potential benefits and challenges they bring to Canberra's:

a Social amenity;
b Economic development;
c Biodiversity; and/or
d Climate resilience.

In the Inner South, important natural environment areas, with high biodiversity values include:

- Red Hill Nature Reserve – critically endangered Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland, endangered button wrinklewort, vulnerable Pink-Tailed worm lizard and Perunga Grasshopper;
- Stirling Park in Yarralumla – critically endangered Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and endangered button wrinklewort;
- Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Eastlake – over 200 bird species including most of the wetland species occurring in southern Australia visit or live here; and the Latham's snipe, a migratory wader that breeds in Japan and China then flies 8,000 kilometres to spend the summer in Australia, including at the wetlands
- Other areas of endangered golden sun moth, button wrinklewort and natural temperate grasslands habitat, especially in Yarralumla, Deakin, Barton and Griffith.

As the attached maps from the ACT Government's ACTMAPi website indicate, as well as statistics provided by the Atlas of Living Australia, endangered and threatened species can be found not only in the nature reserves, but also in our suburban areas. With climate change, these areas will become even more important as a habitat for wildlife.

Our urban open spaces will also become more important as the density of the inner south continues to increase, by providing social and other amenity to residents who may not have private open space of their own. For example, in Barton and Kingston, already about 90 percent of the housing stock comprises apartments.

Recommendation 1: The ISCCC seeks ongoing ACT Government commitment, including in cooperation with the Commonwealth, to protect and maintain key natural environment areas in the Inner South, especially the Red Hill Nature Reserve, Stirling Park and Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

3 **Opportunities for Blue (water) and or Green (natural) Infrastructure in Canberra including;**
   a **Functional requirements of proposed infrastructure;**
   b **Cost and Maintenance considerations;**
   c **Amenity benefits; and**
   d **Conservation and biodiversity benefits.**

Suburbs bordering Lake Burley Griffin already have access to Blue (water) infrastructure that can have a cooling effect in summer, an important benefit in the context of climate change. The lake as a whole provides high amenity benefits in terms of recreation opportunities to those who come to Weston and Bowen Parks, Yarralumla Bay (rowing/sailing), Lennox Gardens, the Canberra Yacht Club in Lotus Bay (sailing, and lake tours), the Parliamentary Triangle, Kingston Foreshore, Jerrabomberra Wetlands and other lakeside areas. The Commonwealth, through the National Capital Authority, contributes to meeting the maintenance costs of many such areas.

Green infrastructure such as nature reserves, suburban parks, sports ovals/grounds, street trees and trees/vegetation on private open space all play an important role in cooling urban areas in summer, and in providing opportunities for active recreation, social interaction and other amenity.

As the ACT Government's Living Infrastructure Information Paper indicates, a large shady street tree provides:

- Clean air with oxygen for us to breathe by filtering out pollution
- Cooling in summer through evapo-transpiration, humidifying and shading surfaces below it
- Rainfall detention in a storm, slowing the flow into the stormwater system and allowing gradual ground water recharge
- Amenity for people and an increase in property values
- Habitat for wildlife.[1]

There are demonstrated benefits of green infrastructure on mental health, with evidence that vegetation cover is positively associated with a lower prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress.[2]

Recommendation 2: That a stocktake of key existing green (natural) infrastructure be compiled as well as a strategy for maintaining it.

4 **Managing the interface between the natural environment and urban areas particularly in regards to conserved environmental areas.**

The ISCCC and member groups are concerned about the adequacy of funding and other resources to maintain urban open spaces and bushland reserves. With increasing use of these open spaces and bushland reserves as Canberra becomes more densely populated, and as less people have access to private open space, it will become ever more important to allocate funds to maintain these areas.

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[1] ACT Government, "Canberra's Living Infrastructure: Information Paper", February 2018, http://www.environment.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1170965/Canberra-Living-Infrastructure-Information-paper-2018.pdf

[2] **Cox, D.T.C et al,** "Doses of Neighborhood Nature: The Benefits for Mental Health of Living with Nature," in *BioScience*, https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/67/2/147/2900179

There is also a concern that Government funds will be wasted if plans for road and other infrastructure destroy, unnecessarily, endangered habitat while providing questionable infrastructure benefits. For example, proposed ACT Government plans to upgrade Dudley Street in Yarralumla, as currently designed, are likely to be unnecessarily expensive and a threat to endangered species. Cheaper infrastructure solutions are available that would improve transport and active recreation outcomes as well as protect the habitat for endangered species.

To manage the interface between the natural environment and urban areas, it is also important to engage with local residents near those interfaces, and with the relevant residents' groups and community council. There are many examples of success with this strategy, including with the Red Hill Nature Reserve, Stirling Park and Jerrabomberra Wetlands, all of which have active groups of local and other residents who volunteer for work parties.

Lake Burley Griffin is one of the most important environmental amenities in Canberra, and is undergoing high-density development in certain areas. It is critical that up-to-date Conservation Management Plans be in place and adhered to in relation to any such development.

Recommendation 3: That the ACT Government support a long-term strategy, in consultation with the community, for funding the maintenance of Canberra's open spaces and nature reserves.

Recommendation 4: That the ACT Government assist local volunteer groups that help to maintain urban trees and high value open spaces and reserves, for example through support for training, materials and other costs.

Recommendation 5: That up-to-date Conservation Management Plans be in place and adhered to in relation to proposed development on Lake Burley Griffin and foreshores.

5 Current policy or regulatory settings that impede the integration of the natural environment within optimal urban development and design.

Current planning policy is enabling the construction of many dwellings that take up most of their blocks of land, providing little room for planting areas to enable growth of canopy trees and vegetation to reduce the heat island effect in summer and provide habitat for wildlife.

There are models in Canberra and in other jurisdictions for addressing such problems. For example, in its Draft Amendment 89 to the National Capital Plan with respect to the Deakin/Forrest Residential Precinct, the National Capital Authority proposed recently that:

> "Not less than 35% of total site area should be for planting area. Planting area means an area of land within a block covered by trees, grass or lawn (not including synthetic turf), garden bed, shrubs (including hedges) and the like. Planting area does not include any area covered by buildings (including basement), swimming pools, vehicle parking or manoeuvring areas (whether permeable or not), or any other form of impermeable surface."[3]

[3] https://www.nca.gov.au/sites/g/files/net791/f/consultation/National%20Capital%20Plan%20Draft%20Amendment%2089%20-%20DeakinForrest%20Residential%20Precinct%20-%20draft%20amendment%20document.pdf (downloaded 19 June 2018)

The Victorian Government also has a policy on minimum garden area and minimum permeable area in residential areas. Its guidelines for minimum garden area are that for residential lots larger than 650 square metres, there should be at least 35% of minimum garden area; for sites between 500-650 square metres there should be at least 30% garden area, and for sites between 400-500 square metres it should be 25%.[4] There is also a requirement that at least 20 percent of a residential lot should be permeable.

Another regulatory setting that impedes the integration of the natural environment within optimal urban development and design is the absence of suburb-scale planning. In the early 2000s, Neighbourhood Plans were developed in many inner Canberra suburbs in consultation with the community that included strategies for maintaining valued natural environments in those suburbs.[5] However, these have been superseded by Precinct Codes, which provide no protection for natural environments.[6] Yet we see the continued use of suburb-scale neighbourhood plans in other jurisdictions, such as Brisbane, where they include desired environmental outcomes.[7]

The ACT Government agreed in 2013 with a Legislative Assembly Inquiry recommendation that "community consultation on precinct codes should commence as soon as possible".[8] Five years have passed since that commitment was made, and the ISCCC calls on the Government to resource and expedite such consultation.

Poor adherence to protection of street trees and verges during building construction threatens the amenity of our suburbs. We understand that the Building and Siting Guidelines for the new Molonglo Valley residential development of Denman Prospect impose stringent conditions on builders, including bonds on all purchasers of land. The bond is returned after construction completion if all conditions have been met. This is an interesting model that may be worth emulating elsewhere in Canberra.

It is also important to take into account connectivity between high value natural environments when undertaking planning and development. This will ensure the continued existence of biodiversity/wildlife corridors that can enhance mobility and resilience in the face of climate change and increasing urbanization.

Recommendation 6: That the development codes for residential housing be amended so that at least 35-40 per cent of residential lots are covered by permeable surfaces to enable the planting of shade trees and other vegetation and that this Rule be mandatory.

Recommendation 7: That the ACT Government resource community consultation on suburban precinct codes, in particular those suburbs under development pressure.

Recommendation 8: That developers and builders in Canberra be held accountable by government agencies for the protection of verges and street trees, perhaps through on-the-spot fines by rangers, or bonds that are returned after construction completion if there has been compliance with imposed conditions.

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[4] https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/127114/PPN84-Applying-the-minimum-garden-area-requirement.pdf (downloaded 19 June 2018)

[5] https://www.planning.act.gov.au/tools_resources/legislation_plans_registers/plans/neighbourhood_plans

[6] http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/ni/2008-27/current/default.asp

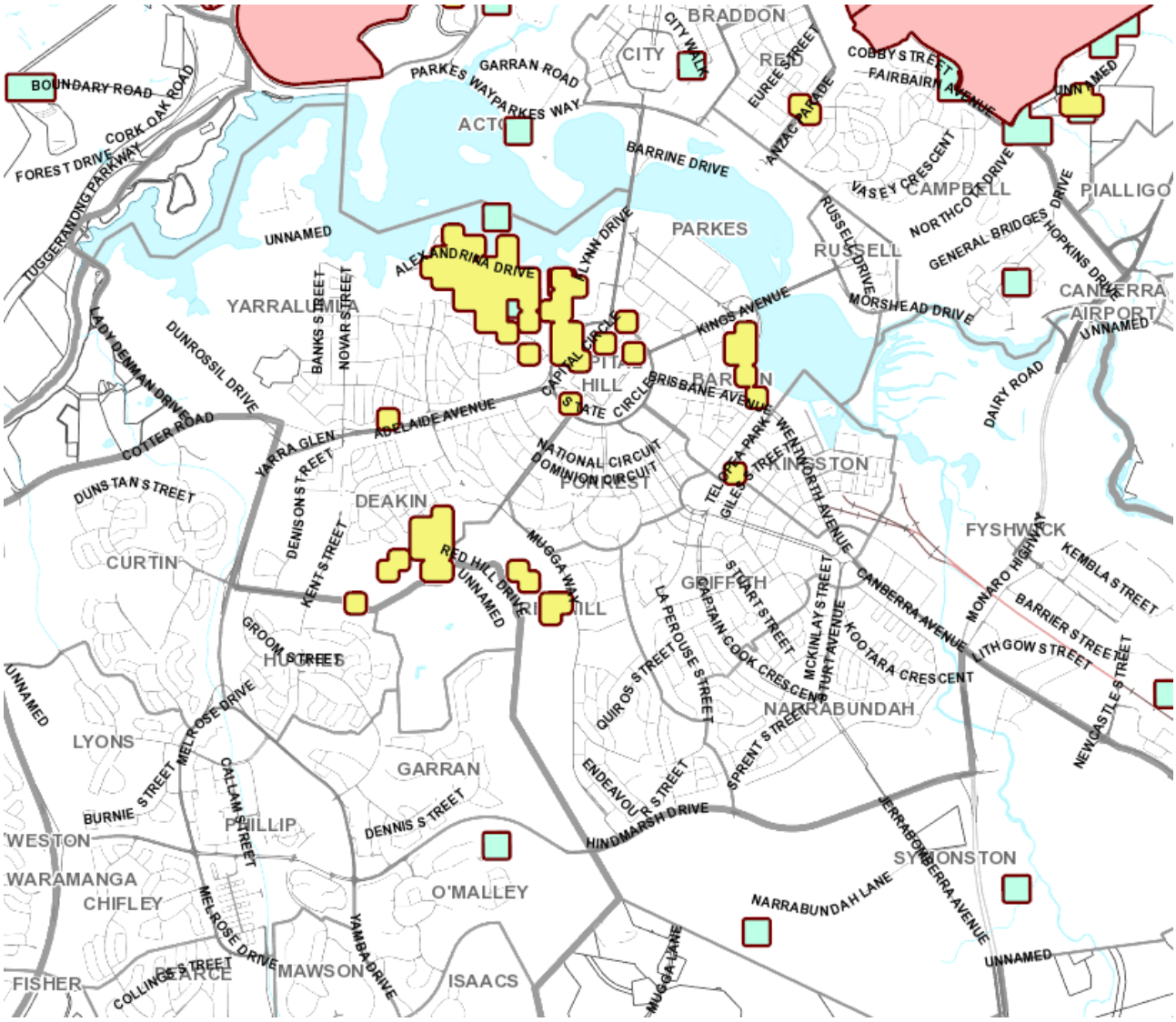
[7] https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/planning-building/planning-guidelines-tools/neighbourhood-planning-urban-renewal

[8] See response to recommendation 11 at http://www.planning.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/895434/306_Govt_Response.pdf (downloaded 19 June 2018)

Recommendation 9: That the ACT Government's review of its Planning Strategy 2012 evaluates the extent to which biodiversity/wildlife corridors are being maintained, and ensures the continuation of such corridors in future.

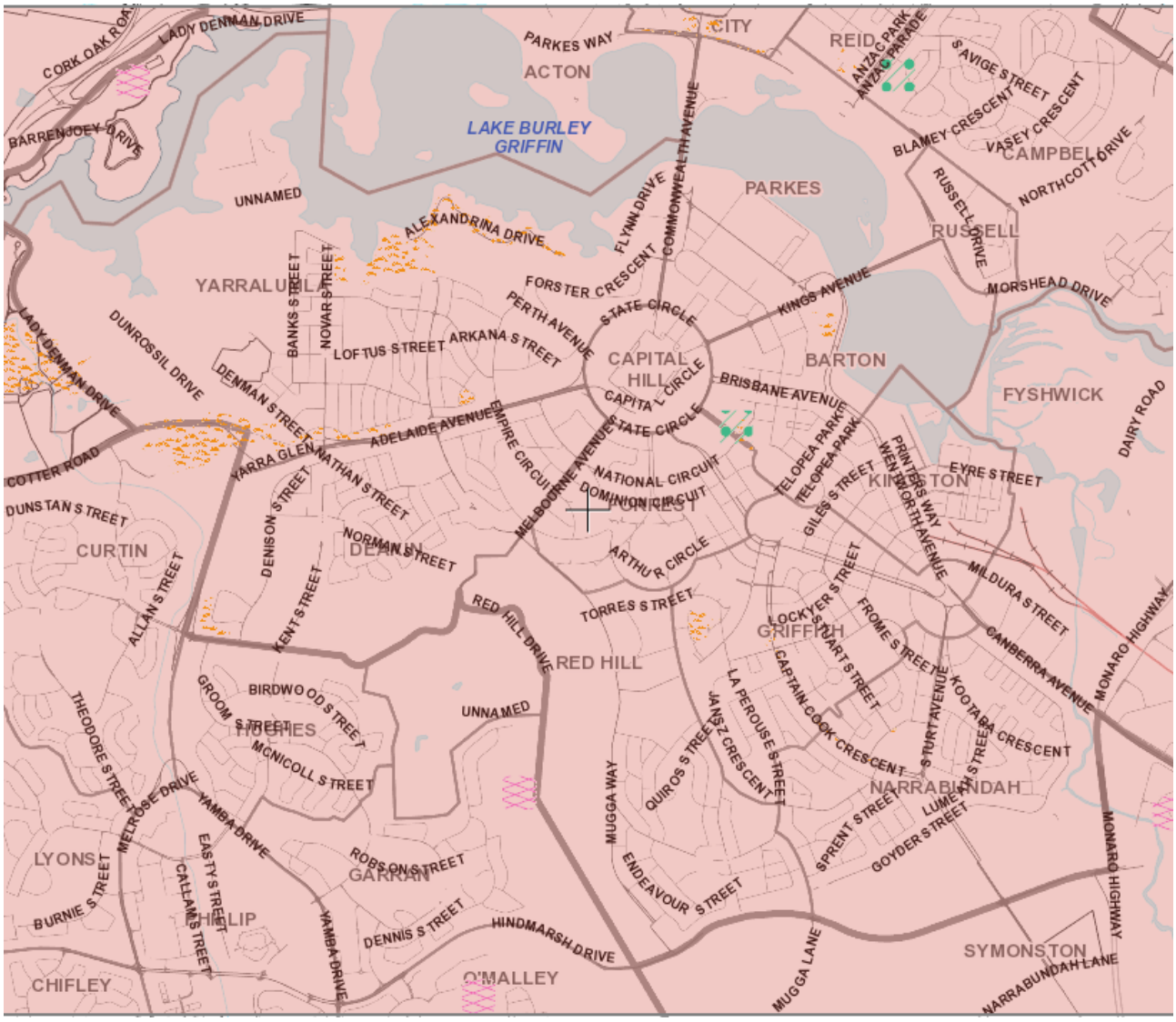
Attachment 1

Fig 1 Distribution of threatened plants in inner south Canberra (in particular Button Wrinklewort)



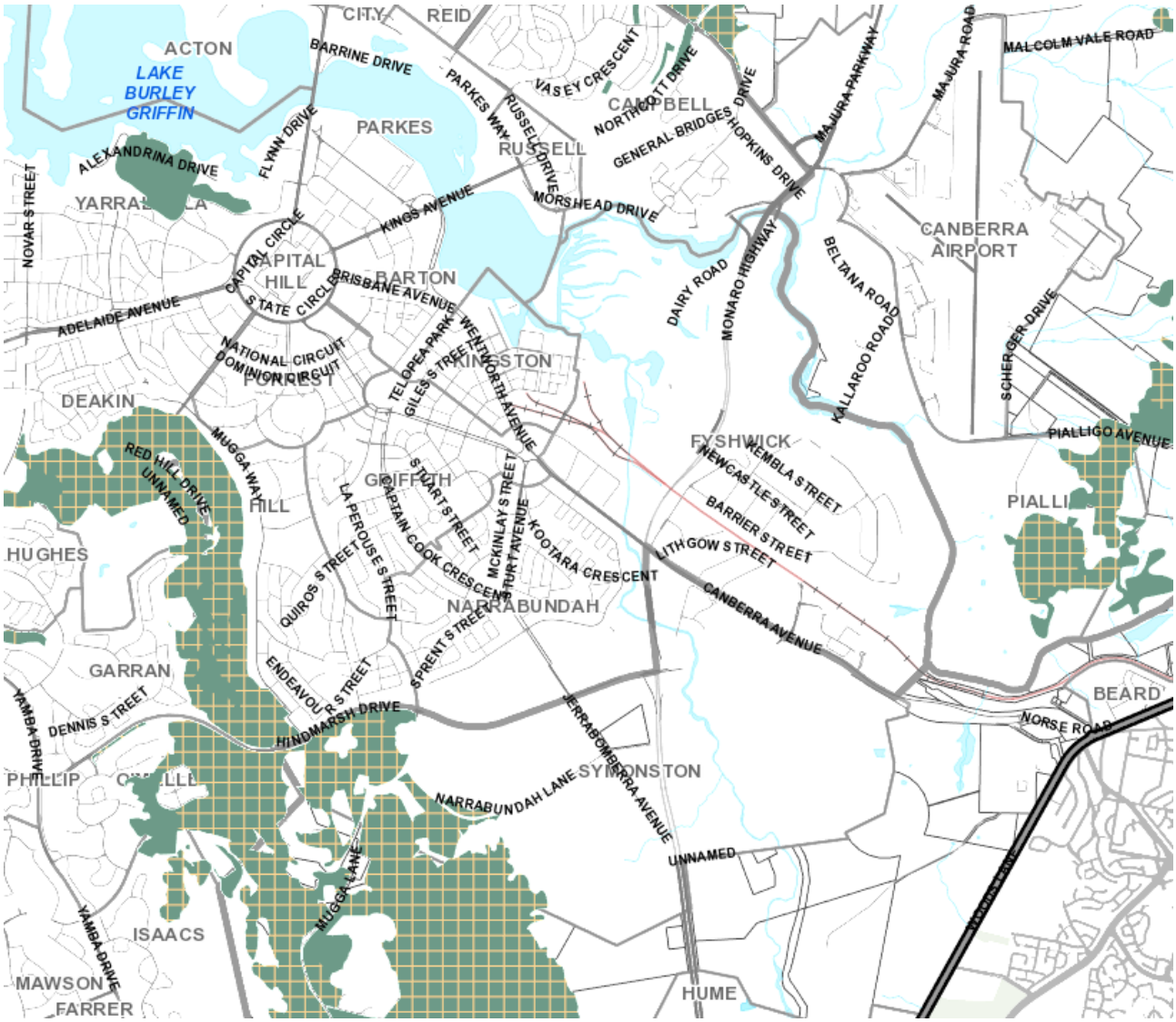
Source: ACTMAPi

Fig 2 Distribution of threatened invertebrates in inner south Canberra (in particular Golden Sunmoth)



Source: ACTMAPi

Fig. 3 Distribution of threatened woodland in inner south Canberra



Source: ACTMAPi

Fig 4 Connectivity for Planning and Development

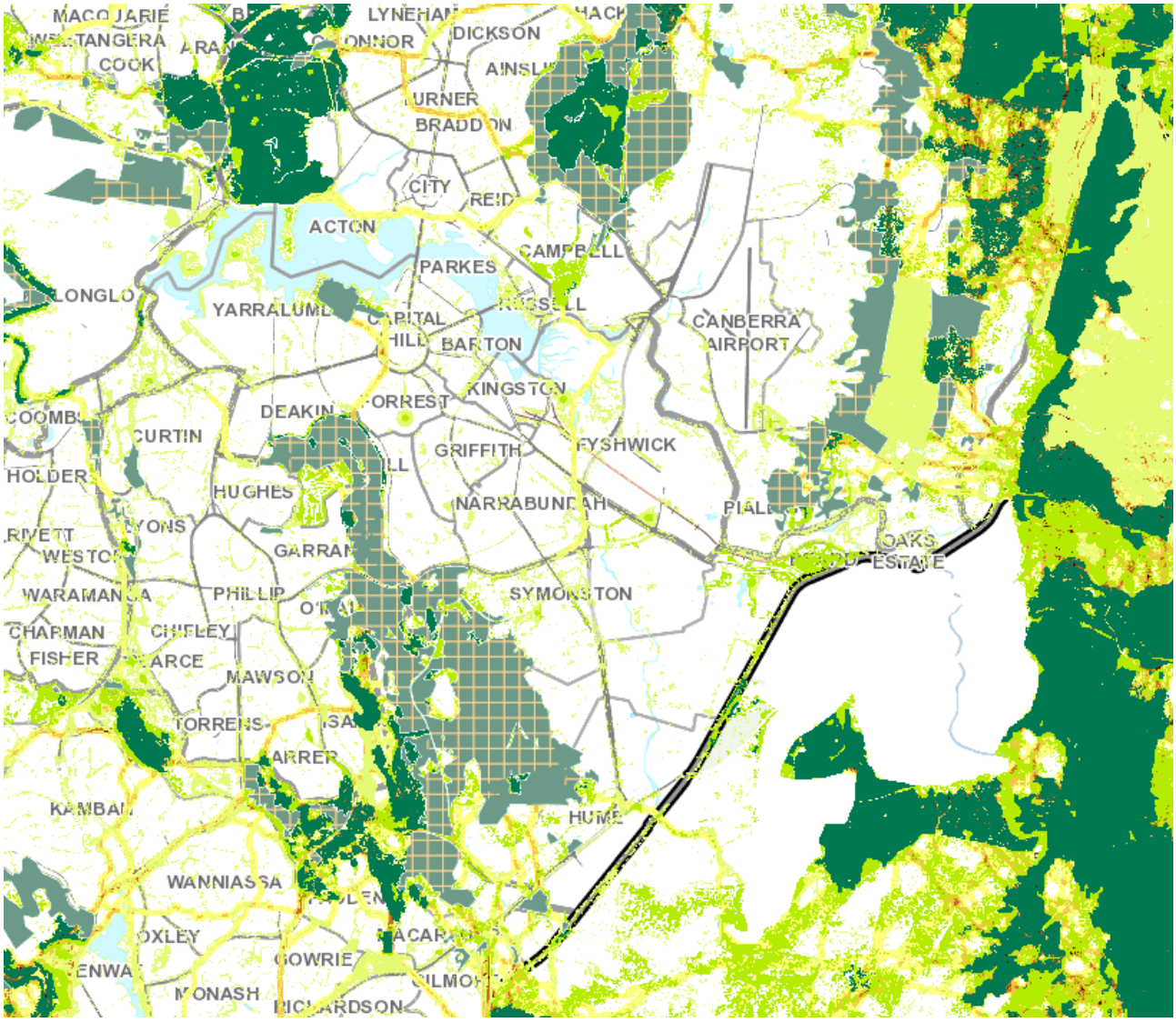


Table 1 Total aggregate sightings of threatened species in inner south Canberra

Barton	**Deakin**	**Forrest**	**Griffith**	**Kingston**	**Narrabundah**	**Oaks Estate**	**Red Hill**	**Yarralumla**
137	108	108	108	158	90	26	196	483

Source: Atlas of Living Australia. Please note that ALA staff indicated that some of the numbers could be an overestimate. They represent sightings reported to the ALA by members of the public. See https://spatial.ala.org.au