



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

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May & June 2026

Activities

Work Parties

Gurubung Dhaura (Stirling Park)

Sat 16 May & Sun 20 June, 9-12:30pm. Register: [Jamie Pittock](#)

Budjan Galindji (Franklin Reserve)

Wed 6 & 27 May, 3 & 24 June
9-11:30am. Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Excursions

Sat 16 May, 9am.

FOG's first visit to Bluetts Block, led by Rainer Rehwinkel (a joint activity with Friends of Bluett's Block).

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Sat 6 June, 9am.

Visit Dacelo on Araluen Rd at Reidsdale (~17km due south of the Braidwood Bakery) to check out the results of goat control of weeds.

Sat 16 May 2-4pm.

Nicki Taws of Greening Australia will show us restoration of grassy groundcover at two 'scrape and sow' sites north of the National Arboretum. Rain and warm weather has meant a number of species are still flowering.

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

New members

Welcome to three new members of FOG - two based in NSW and one in the ACT.

President's report

On April 9th, Friends of Grasslands, Landcare ACT and ACT Government partners gathered to celebrate Sarah Sharp's contributions to conservation of grassy ecosystems in the ACT and region. In the previous newsletter I wrote about how much we in FOG are indebted to Sarah's work in government and the community for restoration and protection of these most threatened ecosystems.

For me the three guest speakers highlighted critical aspects of our mission for grassy ecosystem conservation.

Dr David Shorthouse reminded us that up until the early 1990s, grassy ecosystems were barely recognized and certainly were not a focus of conservation efforts. Indeed in the region, the key reference was Alec Costin's seminal 1954 Monaro vegetation report, *A study of the ecosystems of the Monaro region of New South Wales: with special reference to soil erosion*. This changed with the ACT Government's Grassland Recovery Program that began in 1992 and included the recommendation to establish Friends of Grasslands, implemented in 1994. Notable are the ACT Government's action plans for conservation of temperate grasslands and woodlands, and FOG's *Grassland Flora* and *Woodland Flora* that remain the popular reference books enabling people to engage with grassy ecosystems. David's talk reminded me of how far we have come in a relatively short time, and of the critical collaboration among government and the community for conservation of grassy ecosystems.

Dr Sue McIntyre presented on the lessons she has gained from her work over decades to conserve and restore grassy ecosystems. Her sobering talk based on data from her own property outlined the challenges we face to conserve and restore grassy ecosystems. The messages that I took from Sue's case study include that: exotic species invasions are ongoing, most weeds are not eliminated, and that we need to live with some weed species. She further highlighted that it was possible to control the worst weeds and maintain the integrity of grassy ecosystems but it requires ongoing investment in management. This is a challenge with publicly-owned sites where government budgetary processes and sub-contracting often mean that weed and biomass management are insufficient and inconsistent from year to year.

Dr Brett Howland from the ACT Office of Nature Conservation gave a great presentation on the rapid advances being made in mapping grassy ecosystem remnants and weed infestations quickly and more cheaply. This welcome ACT Government initiative holds out the prospect that limited conservation resources can be focussed on the best opportunities to advance conservation of grassy ecosystems.

I thank the FOG volunteers, speakers, Landcare ACT and ACT City and Environment Directorate for their contributions to the event.

This event, reflecting three decades of conservation of grassy ecosystems, reminds us of the vital role of FOG as a catalyst for key measures, and the importance of our community partnership with government agencies.

See you in our grasslands.

Jamie Pittock
President, FOG

Better protection and management of grassy ecosystems in Canberra – how will we get there?

Matt Whitting

On 27 March 2026, FOG commented ([here](#)) on the draft of the ACT's next nature conservation strategy (the draft Strategy is still available for review, [here](#)). FOG's submission endorsed the comment of the ACT Conservation Council ([here](#)).

Overall, FOG supports the draft Strategy. Reasons include its focus on planning at the landscape level (as opposed to development by development). We have been calling for years for the establishment of a Biodiversity Network - the draft Strategy includes the identification and definition of a Nature Conservation Network which will be in the forthcoming ACT Landscape Plan.

Supplement B of the draft Strategy outlines a process by which the ACT Government will map and identify a new construct, "Priority Conservation Areas" (PCAs), *during 2026* (pp5-6). PCAs will be "the backbone" for nature in the landscape; the intention is that development will be avoided in these areas (p4). Outside the ACT's protected areas, PCAs will be "conserved areas".¹ Some PCAs will be relatively intact areas for nature while others will be important areas in need of repair to bolster and connect the intact areas.

As part of the PCA identification process, staff in the 'Environment sections' of the City and Environment Directorate are understood to be working right now to map, *by July 2026*, the "critical habitat for priority species across the ACT". The process is also intended to make clear the values that are "crucial to ecosystem function, including connectivity needs, hydrological features and climate refugia".

Once these values are mapped, "a strategic decision making process will be undertaken between the Planning and Environment sections ... where currently planned development needs will be overlaid on a map of the critical values (outlined above) and a series of decisions will be made ...

¹ www.dccew.gov.au/environment/land/achieving-30-by-30/conserved-areas
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resulting in mapping of PCAs that are effective and acceptable for both ecological and urban planning purposes" (all Supp B, pp5-6). Both FOG and the Council have asked, in our submissions, to be included in these PCA identification negotiations.

Once mapped, the draft Strategy explains that one way in which PCAs in need of repair will be restored is with "restoration contributions". That is, approval holders will have the option to make restoration contribution *payments* instead of carrying out offset actions themselves.

This is the direction in which environmental offsetting is moving, right across Australia. Following amendments to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)* that will come into effect by no later than 1st December 2026, it is expected that:

- For every development approved after the changes come into effect, "all residual significant impacts on nationally protected matters will be compensated to a net gain";
- Approval holders that proceed with actions approved after the changes come into effect will have an option to acquit their offset compensation liability by (a) delivering their own environmental offset that compensates for the damage they cause (as has happened to date), or (b) paying a "restoration contribution charge" to the Commonwealth, or (c) some combination of (a) and (b).

The new Federal framework involves the establishment of a Restoration Contributions Holder (**RCH**) and a Restoration Contributions "Special Account". If an approval holder elects to pay a restoration contribution charge into the Special Account, the RCH will then be able to use that money to deliver restoration actions and other activities for the benefit of protected matters impacted by the actions of the approval holder at the impact site.

At least five documents are likely to be made, that will ultimately clarify how PCAs in need of repair will be restored in the ACT. Note, however, that only the first two are likely to be made before the new process takes effect:

- New EPBC Regulations are likely to be made in 2026 to (among other things) prescribe how "net gain" requirements will be written into approval conditions. It is also likely that a "national environmental standard" or two will be made in the same timeframe, including an "environmental offset standard";
- *Neither* is essential for the Federal Minister to bring the EPBC Act amendments into effect. Whether the regulations and environmental standard are made or not, the delivery of "restoration actions" by the Australian Government will begin throughout Australia by no later than 1st December 2026.

The other three documents are policies mentioned in the draft Strategy and scheduled to be made by the ACT Government for the ACT, *by 2029*, i.e., a revised offsets policy, a conserved area policy and a restoration contributions policy.

Once made, it is likely that the ACT will seek accreditation of the ACT's development assessment and approval processes. With its own structures to receive and expend restoration contributions locally, the ACT Government will be one step closer to confirming that its processes and standards meet or exceed those in the EPBC Act and National Environmental Standards.

STOP PRESS: We understand that the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment is about to (if she has not already) provide to the ACT Government a report following an investigation into a complaint, lodged by FOG, into the loss of Natural Temperate Grasslands in the ACT, focussing on the effect of this loss on Canberra Grassland Earless Dragons. Look out for the Commissioner's report!

Yarramundi Grassland Update 2

John Fitz Gerald

Some readers may recall the piece which appeared in the May 2025 newsletter, and the update in July, describing the National Capital Authority trial in progress rehabilitating two small plots at Yarramundi. Here dense African Lovegrass needed managing after a controlled burn. Basically, cereal rye was sown into both plots after the herbicided weeds had been slashed. Now we are twelve months down the track but not everything has gone to plan. I'll break my comments into two parts.



First, the cereal rye was badged as “sterile ryecorn”. This turned out to be incorrect though why is not understood. The crop grew well with abundant tall flower stalks. However, late in 2025 it became clear that inflorescences were loaded with chunky, solid seed (image left) and germination tests confirmed these were highly fertile.

There was some chance that the heat of summer and predation by birds would prevent field germination but the effects were not large and new germination proceeded by itself this year once rains came. A trawl around agricultural reports suggests that the crop could have been mown high when it reached what is called the “boot stage”, when flowers just begin to emerge from their enveloping leaf sheaths. The height of remaining stems still protects the underlying surface but seed production is terminated.

Second, while African Lovegrass was controlled reasonably well by the agricultural management, other weeds, like St John’s Wort, Plantain and exotic grasses, were too abundant to press on with the plan to sow native seed in the plots this autumn. Consequently, the rye plants were slashed with chaff removed in a catcher bin. Then a new round of herbicide was applied last month. The two plots were herbicided differently - one was boom sprayed with glyphosate to kill all plants, the other with Starane to manage only broad-leaved weeds but allow the rye and remnant native plants to grow on. The result has been good enough in the glyphosated plot to allow it to be sown with native grass and forb seed in coming days.

In addition, a new plot about 0.3ha in size at the eastern end of Yarramundi, heavily invaded by the tall form of African Lovegrass, has been slashed and herbicided using glyphosate. This is ready to be sown with cereal rye, probably with a boot-stage mow planned for early summer.

In conclusion, much has been learned from the activity. One lesson, of which we probably needed no reminder, is that temperate-native-grassland management is guaranteed to be more complex than anticipated!

Tasmanian Devil, extinct on the mainland, endangered in Tasmania, what about its future?

Michael Bedingfield

The Tasmanian Devil is the world's largest marsupial predator and has a special place in our national identity. Its scientific name is *Sarcophilus harrisii*. The genus name of *Sarcophilus* means 'meat or flesh loving' and refers to its diet of fresh or decaying meat; *harrisii* derives from the name of the person who first described the species back in the early 1800s, George Harris.



This mammal became extinct on mainland Australia about 3000 years ago. The extinction is believed to be the result of a combination of factors, but mainly the arrival of the dingo, and climate change after the last ice age. It survived in Tasmania which the dingo did not reach when rising sea levels separated the island from the mainland.

The main factor contributing to the animal's endangered status is the spread of the Devil facial tumour disease (DFTD), which is a transmissible and fatal cancer. Another lesser factor is frequent road death since it is a carrion feeder and is attracted to road kills of other animals. It thrives in diverse environments and uses various habitats, from dry sclerophyll forest to coastal scrub, including grassy woodlands, grasslands, farmlands and the edges of urban areas.

The size of the Tassie Devil is variable depending on circumstances, but a typical size for males is about 65cm in body length excluding the tail, which is about 25cm long. It is about 30cm in height at the shoulder and weighs in at about 8 kg. The female is smaller. It lives up to six years in the wild. It has a stout body with a large, broad head and very strong jaws and is similar in shape to a small dog. The colour is mostly black but usually with a white patch on the upper chest and rump. This animal is nocturnal, retiring during the day to a den that may be a hollow log, an old wombat burrow or another hidden place such as in dense vegetation. At night it comes out to look for food. It is carnivorous, feeding exclusively on the bodies of other animals, but with a strong preference for carrion.

It will feed on any sort of animal whatever the size, from insect larvae to birds including poultry, as well as mammals bigger than itself. The animals are known to eat all of a carcass, including the bones and hide, wasting nothing and leaving just an untidy stain on the ground. They are not territorial but have a large home range and home ranges overlap. The sharing of food is common particularly if the dead animal is large. There is often some noisy squabbling with lots of snarls, screams and growls, but this is mostly theatrical posturing that does not cause injury.

Tasmanian Devils are solitary animals except during mating season, which is between February and May each year. The gestation period is about twenty-one days and the young are kept in a backward-facing pouch for about four months. The female has four nipples in the pouch and while it is normal for twenty to thirty joeys to be born, only four survive. After leaving the pouch lactation continues and during this time the young are left in the nest while the mother forages. Weaning occurs at about ten months of age. By late summer the young have left the mother and begin independent living. Females are able to breed after two years.

On mainland Australia, Tassie Devils were released within a 400 hectare protected wildlife sanctuary in the Barrington Tops in 2020. The animals are doing well and breeding successfully. This has been done through the Aussie Ark organisation. They believe that in circumstances where the dingo is absent the Devils are an apex predator and thus help control feral cats and foxes and help restore the balance in a natural ecosystem. Since they are scavengers, they also act to clean up an area of carcasses and keep it healthy. It is an example of “rewilding” or “ecological engineering” and a model for restoring lost biodiversity in damaged ecosystems such as our grassy woodlands.

Early European settlers to Tasmania regarded both the Tasmanian Tiger and Devil as serious pests, and a bounty scheme was introduced. The Tiger was exterminated and the Devil continued to be trapped and poisoned. It appeared to be headed for extinction when in 1941 it was protected by law. The population gradually recovered until in 1996 the DFTD was found to be a serious threat.

But now there is strong evidence that the Devil is developing more resilience against the DFTD. Over the many generations that the species has been affected by the disease there has been slow but sure genetic adaptation and there are signs that Devils will eventually be able to coexist with the cancer in the population. This evolutionary response is very encouraging. Examples of individuals fighting off the disease or living longer with it are occurring more and more. Females are more resilient against the disease and able to reproduce before succumbing to it. Another population response is that some females are breeding at a younger age, sometimes as young as only one year old instead of the normal two, and are thus able to produce a litter before yielding to the normally fatal disease.

Through the work of dedicated people the future of the Tasmanian Devil is looking positive. In the absence of the dingo as an apex predator we have a serious problem with foxes and cats in our region. This has numerous side effects on ecology and biodiversity. Some rewilding or ecological engineering would help. Perhaps one day in the distant future we might see Tasmanian Devils introduced to somewhere in the Canberra region. Wouldn't that be something!

Main references:

“The Australian Museum Complete book of Australian Mammals” Edited by Ronald Strahan (Angus & Robertson 1983)

<https://nre.tas.gov.au/wildlife-management/fauna-of-tasmania/mammals/carnivorous-marsupials-and-bandicoots/tasmanian-devil>

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/mammals/tasmanian-devil/>

<https://www.rewild.org/press/first-tasmanian-devil-to-return-to-the-wilds-of-mainland-australia-gives>

Mediterranean Menaces: Close-up

John Fitz Gerald

This edition, it's back to weeds. I've chosen three common species which, I hardly need to add, thrived in the recent cool and damp years in south east NSW. My choice inadvertently threw up its own context for this contribution. I was struck by the similarity in distribution of these species - all are native to countries surrounding the Mediterranean, and all have invaded temperate areas of Australia, mainly across the south east and south west corners, but not elsewhere.



My first plant is *Carthamus lanatus*, Saffron Thistle. Downey considers it, in his 2023 assessment of naturalised alien plants, to be a moderate-priority weed in the ACT. ALA lists over 14,000 records. This daisy species is an annual but reports suggest its seeds can remain viable in soils for up to eight years.

My image of four seeds could show why they last for years - each chunky seed has a rough 'shell' with irregular shape and colour pattern. This shell is hard and thick and I had to use a small vice to crack some open. See the cream-coloured seed exposed in the shell at the base of my image.

This weed is a problem for stock as it grows tall and spiky, is then inedible and disrupts animal movement. You'll certainly know its stopping power if you've ever had to wade any distance through a dry stand of Saffrons.

My second choice is *Chondrilla juncea*, Skeleton Weed. Downey assesses it as a weed of low priority, though many landcarers consider it is more than just a nuisance as it can grow thickly in places and is perennial with quite a long taproot.

ALA shows about 5,400 records. Its native range extends from the Mediterranean to Central Asia and the Arabian Peninsula.

My image shows three achenes, each joined by a longer thin stalk (called a beak) to a striking pappus at its other end.





My final plant is *Trifolium angustifolium*, Narrow-leaved Clover. Downey rates this a moderate-priority weed. ALA shows over 11,000 records. Its native range extends from the Mediterranean to Iran.

While this is an annual weed, I'm afraid that new seedlings present in parts of grasslands right now are ready to grow and set more seed.

Each inflorescence contains many seeds like those shown in my image. Each seed is smooth and shiny, a little egg-like (appropriate just after Easter?), but slightly flattened with a small dimple near one end.

High magnification images were taken using the Nikon microscope at the National Seed Bank in the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Scale bars in all 3 images represent 1mm. Images can be reproduced freely with reference to the Creative Commons licence CC BY.

Information above was gathered from websites including:

Atlas of Living Australia - ala.org.au

PlantNET - plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au

Plants of the World Online - powo.science.kew.org

FOG at Mt Stromlo Woodlands

Margaret Ning and Rainer Rehwinkel

On Sunday 29 March, Rainer Rehwinkel continued his plan of showing FOG members some of his favourite places over the course of 2026. Nine of us assembled on Uriarra Rd at a place referred to as Stromlo Woodlands. Rainer gave us all an introduction to the site, which is part of the Western Edge Investigation area, which is the subject of a campaign by the Conservation Council. It is down the road a bit and across the road from the newly-reserved section of Molonglo River Nature Reserve that's currently still referred to as Bluett's Block

The Stromlo Woodlands have fine samples of the critically-endangered Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands. Rainer had anticipated seeing migrating flocks of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters during the morning. He soon delegated the reporting of birds to young Zebedee whose youthful ears were already picking up a steady stream of birds from the moment we began our walk, including the migrating birds.

As we walked, we noted a mix of native and exotic grasses, but a relatively limited forb layer, perhaps indicating some grazing in the past, though there were some unusually large patches of flowering Yellow Burr-daisies, *Calotis lappulacea*, and non-flowering Yellow Rish-lilies, *Tricoryne elatior*. The site has a variety of eucalypts, including, on the stony ridges, some fine specimens of Mealy Bundy, *E. nortonii*.



Another feature of the site is its scenic qualities – it has beautiful views over the Brindabellas across the Murrumbidgee, and the woodland is pretty, showing the characteristic open structure with some very large old-growth trees. Another highlight was to see a splendid Red-bellied Black Snake that allowed everyone to take pictures before it retired to a large clump of protective blackberry. Margaret was pleased to see four native lovegrass species: *Eragrostis brownii*, *E. trachycarpa*, *E. parviflora* and *E. elongata*.

Left: Most of our select group at the west end of the walk between Mealy Bundy trees and a large patch of Yellow Burr-daisy. Photo and caption: Andrew Zelnik



Flowerhead spikelet of uncommon Clustered Lovegrass (*Eragrostis elongata*). Photo and caption: Andrew Zelnik



Red-bellied Black Snake slinking through a patch of flowering Crumb Weed and clover. Photo and caption: Andrew Zelnik

The site is great for a spring walk, so we'll return later; Rainer promises great shows of Billy-buttons, *Craspedia variabilis* and Pale Sundews, *Drosera hookeri*.



Map of the area walked

Advocacy Report

Matt Whitting

In reverse chronological order:

April

Letter to the Federal Environment Minister seeking a remediation order: Lawson North, 15/4

FOG and the Conservation Council wrote jointly, calling on the Minister to require that Defence Housing Australia remediate natural temperate grassland that is declining in condition around the former Belconnen Naval Transmission Station. Members interested in more detail about this letter can contact me at matt.whitting@fog.org.au. FOG do not publish letters like these; we regard them as private correspondence.

Letters to the NSW Premier and the member of the NSW Parliament for Monaro, 8/4

In each letter, FOG raised our concern regarding ongoing native vegetation clearing across the Monaro region. Cognisant that NSW is considering legislative reform, following a review completed by the NSW Natural Resources in December 2025, we considered it timely to call for stronger protection and management of the Monaro region's grassy ecosystems.

Swallow Tail Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) (EPBC 2026/10416), 8/4

While noting that we are generally supportive of proposals promoting use of renewable energy sources, we recommend that the above proposal be determined a controlled action, as it is likely to result in significant impacts on Box-Gum grassy woodlands (BGW). Looking at [Figure 1](#) to the referral, we argued that the 56ha 'Development footprint' would directly and indirectly impact more than the stated area of impact on BGW (2.56ha), in part because the proposal's footprint is still to be finalised. We noted that little if any avoidance was evident.

March

Draft ACT Nature Conservation Strategy, 27/3

FOG contributed to the preparation, by the Conservation Council, of a comprehensive response addressing all aspects of the [draft Strategy](#) and its [three supplements](#). FOG's submission ([here](#)) emphasises points of greatest importance to FOG and endorses the Council submission (found [here](#)).

Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon Recovery Team meeting, 18/3

This was the second meeting of this Team, which includes representatives of: NSW and ACT governments, Traditional Custodians, land managers, captive breeding program managers, researchers, ecologists and FOG. FOG participate as communicators on relevant matters. The Team meets three times per year to oversee implementation of the species' [Action Plan](#), promote collaboration, and monitor recovery progress. Results of monitoring are publicised [here](#).

At this meeting we looked in detail at activities contributing to Outcome 1, "Extant populations restored and expanded". We heard from Dr Bernd Gruber who led the preparation of a Population Viability Analysis, and Ryan Colley who has been evaluating a variety of Dragon detection methods.

2026-2027 ACT Budget, 2/3 (here)

FOG 2026-27 budget submission urges the ACT Government to support the implementation of the next ACT Nature Conservation Strategy (Strategy), before and after it is made, and to fund additional measures to halt the decline of the ACT's natural temperate grasslands and box gum woodlands. Our submission seeks resourcing to prioritise: completion of various plans and strategies promised in the Strategy (do it now, don't delay to 2029 as scheduled in the Strategy); supplementation of the biosecurity budget, including for weed and biomass control regardless of tenure; and investment in the workforce to enable the Strategy to be implemented, by methods including the continuation of monitoring and research.

February

Meeting with the Conservator, 20/2

Jamie Pittock, Julia Raine and Matt Whitting met with the Conservator and discussed: volunteers' use of chemicals; the potential to have community-group involvement in the reconstituted 'weeds advisory group'; the process for amending the *Nature Conservation Act 2014*; progress of the Eastern Broadacre Strategic Assessment and the deterioration of grasslands at North Lawson.

Nature Conservation Forum meeting, 19/2

The terms of reference, membership and functions of the Nature Conservation Forum, formerly the Biodiversity Conservation Forum, can be viewed [here](#). The same website includes a report on what was discussed in this meeting, and in meetings throughout 2025. A lively discussion examined the threat posed to nature by African Love Grass. The Conservator has undertaken to provide a response to concerns raised by the Conservation Council.

Reconsideration of the Riverside Pavilion, Ginninderry Conservation Corridor, 18/2 (here)

Riverview (ACT) Pty Ltd, the developer establishing infrastructure for Ginninderry in West Belconnen, plans to construct and operate a pavilion for visitors in the West Belconnen Conservation Corridor, beside the Murrumbidgee River. Their development application was first proposed in 2023 and [refused](#). [This application](#) seeks a reconsideration of that earlier decision. FOG has expressed concerns about the direct and indirect impacts of the proposal, the offset proposed, and the species proposed for native plantings in the surrounding landscaping.

Shooting Range Facility Upgrade, Majura ACT, EPBC 2026/10424, 11/2 (here)

FOG submitted that plans to upgrade the shooting facility understate the importance of its vegetation in providing a regional habitat linkage. The proposed plans would exacerbate fragmentation in the connection to large areas of woodland and forest in Kowen escarpment, to the southeast through the rifle range, to Goorooyaroo and Mulligan's Flat nature reserves to the northwest. Specific measures were suggested to reduce that fragmentation. The action was subsequently determined to be 'not a controlled action' meaning, under national environmental law, it needs no additional assessment and approval.

Quarterly meeting with the Conservator, 6/2

Jamie Pittock, Julia Raine and Matt Whitting met with the Conservator and discussed, among other things: weed management, including the use of chemicals by volunteers and the need to get community representation on the new Weeds Advisory Group (to-date this re-constituted group has been internal-to-government, only); how best to engage with the [Nature Conservation Forum](#), formerly the Biodiversity Conservation Forum; and FOG's plans for a grasslands campaign to give better protection to the best grasslands remaining in the northern ACT on Territory Land and National Land.

January

Comment on two draft national environmental standards, 30/1 (here)

FOG (Matt Whitting) commented on the early drafts of two national environmental Standards circulated by the Federal Environment Department over summer, for 'matters of national environmental significance' (MNES) and 'environmental offsets'. These Standards (and others to come) are intended to be the centrepieces of the national environmental law reforms that passed the Australian Parliament in November 2025. FOG expressed concern that neither draft Standard uses clear and unambiguous language, nor do they include SMART objectives sufficient to protect MNES or to sustain 'net gains' via offsets.

Others have expressed similar views, see [here](#). FOG's submission argues that the MNES Standards must recognise *all* pathways to grassy ecosystem loss and treat them all as "actions", where the Act allows. If accepted, then the MNES Standards would make clear that, for example, a failure to act to control biomass would be treated as an "action". It is well-established in case law that a failure to act can be an "action" where it causes or allows a significant impact on a matter protected by (for example) the EPBC Act.

Advocacy group meeting, 28/1

The advocacy group met to consider (1) a new 'save the grasslands' campaign to be led by FOG and the Conservation Council ACT Region, and (2) our other priorities, processes and roles for 2026. The group agreed to propose that FOG ask more questions about developments rather than, as we have done in the past, engage in detail and suggest improvements. This is a way of reducing workload for the year when there are many demands on us with, for example, a new Nature Conservation Strategy in the first half of the year and draft Eastern Broadacre Strategic Assessment (EBSA) paperwork later in the year, that we expect to want to comment on. The latest brief by the ACT Government on the EBSA can be found on the last two pages of [this document](#).

Response to request for comment on 'Key Values Briefs', 26/1

On 18 Dec 2025, the Parks Planning and Policy Team within the ACT Government's City and Environment Directorate asked FOG to comment on seven 'key values briefs', as part of a process of compiling a comprehensive list of current and likely future threats to each set of values. FOG noted that the vegetation descriptions and vegetation information in the briefs are well written, informative and apparently accurate. We provided suggestions for improvement.

Integrity of the Territory Plan and protection of ecological corridors, 15/1

Jamie Pittock and Simon Copland wrote jointly to the Planning Minister emphasising the importance of standing firm behind considered plans that foreshadow the retention and maintenance of intact ecological value. The trigger was two development proposals that both threaten intact grassy ecosystems in the short term, despite commitments to maintain high conservation value in the development footprints; the commitments are made in district strategies and via zoning in the Territory Plan. The letter urges the Government to resist these pressures and asks a series of questions of the Minister about the Government's intentions in these and similar circumstances.

Proposal to add lease purposes to 62.4 hectares of Majura Block 680 (DA202544671), 14/1 ([here](#))

FOG objected to this proposal which involves the addition of every available lease purpose to land recognised in the [East Canberra District Strategy](#) as either "sensitive ecological community" or part of the "urban ACT ecological network". ACTmapi shows that the land includes ACT grasslands and "potential threatened woodland", most likely Southern Tableland Grassy Woodlands (PCT 16.1.1). The woodland is understood to have a high proportion of mature trees with hollows. While the riparian corridor (~5.6ha) would not be subject to these additional purposes, precisely what is planned on the land in question is unclear. If all possible uses are deemed acceptable, it brings into question the integrity of the Territory Plan and protection of ecological corridors.

Construction of a Seed Production Area (SPA) for Grassy Ecosystem species

Natasha Lappin, Senior Land Services Officer, Local Land Services – Murray region, NSW

Introduction by Andrew Zelnik

Natasha's article below relates to the acquittal of a [FOG Grassy Ecosystem Grant](#) awarded in late 2022 and originally intended to be completed by early 2024. As has arisen with other GEG grant projects, particularly those of an on-ground or field-research nature, this project experienced a number of successive and largely unavoidable confounding factors preventing completion of implementation until late 2025. These included a substantial redirection of the grantee's work priorities during and subsequent to the impacts of the very high rainfall (La Niña) years in 2022-2023, a significant change to the original project design, annual planting season timing constraints and issues, and changes in staffing personnel, office location, and availability e.g. extended periods of leave - another salient reminder of the realities of project planning versus the unforeseen ("Black Swan") events that can arise during implementation.

Murray Local Land Services (MLLS) is a regionally focused, NSW Government organisation that provides support and services to farmers, landholders and the wider community in the areas of sustainable agriculture, biosecurity, management of Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs), emergency management and Natural Resource Management (NRM).

The MLLS team runs a restoration seedbank and is involved in native seed collection, storage and revegetation works. Its current native Seed Production Area (SPA) network focuses on shrub species that can be used in direct seeding. For groundcover species (e.g. grasses, forbs, sub-shrubs) the team relies on wild collections and this project has provided the opportunity to get some of these species into an SPA to make them easier to collect.

FOG provided a \$1,500 grant to assist with purchasing material, and as a partial contribution to labour for the construction of a wicking bed (see images below), planted for the purpose of future seed collection of ground cover species found in grassy woodland environments. The original design required intermediate bulk container (IBC) halves to create four wicking bed bases. However, a later consideration of the potential for ultraviolet (UV) light damage of the IBC plastic base walls necessitated a key design change to the current construction.

The function of a wicking bed is to water the plants from underneath, rather than from the top, to prevent water from evaporating and thereby optimise water efficiency and maintain soil moisture levels better. The water is kept in a reservoir, contained by a waterproof lining at the base of the wicking bed, which is then drawn upwards into a soil layer above by capillary action or 'wicking'. In this particular case (see Figure 3) the reservoir is filled (and topped up) with water via the vertical section of the PVC inlet pipe, at one end, which then flows out through holes drilled in the rest of the pipe laid at the bottom along the longest centreline of the wicking bed.

It is important to keep the water in the wicking bed reservoir separate from the soil above, as permanent inundation can kill soil microorganisms and lead to plant root rot. This is typically done using a base of coarse gravel or aggregate of small stones and rocks (scoria) in the water reservoir, which is topped with a water-permeable layer (e.g. geotextile) to keep the soil from collapsing into the water and to allow water to wick up into the soil. To prevent overfilling, an overflow drainage outlet is normally installed at the water/soil interface. Alternatively, a riser pipe, the height of the water reservoir, is installed at the base of the wicking bed – this also has the advantages of allowing finer-scale monitoring of the water level and, if it is a swivel type, can also act as a drain pipe when needed (*).

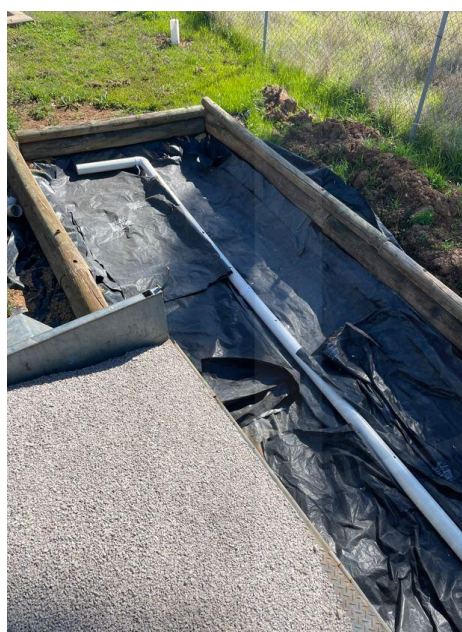
The SPA is focusing on native species that are at risk or challenging to collect from wild populations due to the logistical difficulties of short harvest windows, remote locations, and limited yields. These make it difficult to carry out monitoring and then get back to seed-source sites at the right time to harvest before the seed drops. By establishing the SPA at the MLLS seedbank at Deniliquin, the plants can be maintained and closely monitored so that when seed is ready for collection larger volumes can be collected easily, ultimately increasing efficacy and yields. Trialling a wicking bed set-up will also help develop knowledge around how to maximise seed collection potential in a dry climate in a water-efficient manner.

The two species planted in the wicking bed to date are Mallee Bush-pea (*Eutaxia microphylla*) and Ringed Wallaby Grass (*Rytidosperma caespitosum*) with another two to be planted later this year i.e. Chocolate Lily (*Arthropodium strictum*) and Woolly New Holland Daisy (*Vittadinia gracilis*). The seed for each species is sourced from a minimum of two separate wild populations to ensure a mix of local genetics. The seed harvested from the SPA will be sent to nurseries to be grown out into seedlings for revegetation projects or direct seeding into prepared sites.

(*). References: Barossa Bushgardens - Wicking Beds;
ABC – Gardening Australia – Building a wicking bed;
Rob Phillips, 2017. As simple as IBC: DIY wicking beds. *Renew Issue 138*, pp86-88.



Figure 1: Construction of SPA wicking bed



Figures 2 & 3: Construction of SPA wicking bed

Contributions welcome

Do you have a story from your favourite grassland or grassy woodland that you would like to share? Please contact the Editor: newsletter@fog.org.au

Photo feature

Andrew Zelnik



During FOG's October 2016 northern cemeteries trip in the Cowra area of NSW we were treated to this explosion of Bulbine Lilies (Bulbine bulbosa) at Koorawatha Cemetery. Also scattered amongst them were the white inflorescences of groups of Creamy Candles (Stackhousia monogyna). Of course this wasn't all the floral delights we saw here (see Nov-Dec 2016 FOG Newsletter). This approximately 6ha high quality remnant of Box-Gum Woodland is surrounded by farming properties in an extensively cleared and modified flat to rolling agricultural landscape. However, less than 500m to the south rising steeply out of the surrounding agricultural landscape like an island are the mostly forested slopes of the 1105ha Koorawatha Nature Reserve. Similarly and much further to the south, but still in the local area, are the larger Dananbilla NR and two more smaller nature reserves.

At the time in the cemetery woodland a fading interpretive sign, installed by the former Grassy Box Woodland Conservation Management Network (GBWCMN), attested to the importance of the cemetery woodland's significant and rare native flora both locally and as part of a network of other remnants across NSW. This echoes Geoff Robertson's words, in the Jan-Feb 2001 FOG Newsletter, reporting on the NSW NPWS's results of the Dananbilla Biodiversity Survey in which FOG participated. In it he indicated "... Koorawatha Cemetery proved to be an extremely important remnant containing a rare sample of grassy white box woodland with a ground layer of kangaroo [and snow] grasses and a diversity of wildflower species including many lilies, orchids and daisies. The site contains numerous species considered to be in decline across the region....". It would be interesting to see how this and other important grassy woodland remnants in the former GBWCMN are faring these days?

Photo & caption by Andrew Zelnik.

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