



Friends of Grasslands

supporting native grassy ecosystems

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Re. Draft National Recovery Plan for the Gang-Gang Cockatoo

Friends of Grasslands (**FOG**) is a community group dedicated to the conservation of grassy ecosystems in south-eastern Australia - natural temperate grasslands and grassy woodlands. FOG advocates, educates and advises on matters to do with the conservation of these ecosystems, and carries out surveys and on-ground work. FOG is based in Canberra and its members include professional scientists, landowners, land managers and interested members of the public.

Background

FOG welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Draft National Recovery Plan for the Gang-gang Cockatoo (Draft Plan)*. The grassy woodlands and box-gum woodland/grassland mosaics that FOG works to conserve across the ACT and south-eastern NSW overlap substantially with Gang-gang habitat. Canberra's grassy woodland reserves support some of the largest known concentrations of breeding pairs.

In preparing this submission, FOG has drawn on two detailed submissions on the Draft Plan: one from Gregory Andrews of Lyrebird Dreaming Pty Ltd, a former Australian Threatened Species Commissioner¹; and another from Dr Michael Mulvaney, a FOG member and researcher who has published extensively on Gang-gang nesting ecology and diet. Both submissions support adoption of a national recovery plan but identify substantial weaknesses that need to be addressed before it is finalised. FOG endorses the general thrust of both submissions and summarises the key issues below.

Issues/concerns

FOG shares the view that the Draft Plan is a serious and well-researched document, and a welcome step toward a national recovery plan for this much-loved species. However, we are concerned that its diagnosis of threats is not consistently translated into strong, measurable and funded actions.

In particular, climate change is assessed as a very-high risk but the associated adaptation actions are given a low priority, and the plan does not acknowledge that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is itself part of the species' recovery. Protection of habitat critical to survival is worded too weakly, and there is no national strategy for securing the hollow-bearing trees on which the species entirely depends for nesting. Given that Canberra supports the largest known concentration of breeding pairs, we are also concerned that the plan lacks a dedicated urban conservation strategy. Predation and competition for hollows, particularly by the Common Brushtail Possum, which recent Canberra research identifies as a major cause of nest failure, are not adequately addressed as a key threat. More broadly, the plan's performance criteria are not sufficiently measurable or auditable, it does not adequately integrate First Nations Peoples' science or cultural knowledge and authority, and it lacks the costed, resourced and accountable implementation arrangements needed to ensure the plan is actually delivered.

¹ www.lyrebirddreaming.com/_files/ugd/d3c6c2_e37b73f8a0c541e189463c13ad783598.pdf

Recommendations

FOG recommends that the final recovery plan:

1. is adopted as a national recovery plan, subject to the strengthening recommended below
2. elevates climate change adaptation to a Priority 1, whole-of-plan responsibility, and explicitly recognises that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is essential to the species' long-term recovery
3. strengthens the protection of habitat critical to survival, including all known nest trees and breeding areas, replacing discretionary language with a clear presumption against destruction or significant modification
4. establishes a National Gang-gang Hollow Security Register and Strategy, with measurable retention and recruitment standards for hollow-bearing trees
5. develops a dedicated Urban Gang-gang Conservation Strategy, recognising the importance of Canberra and other urban areas to the species' breeding population
6. recognises predation and hollow competition, particularly from the Common Brushtail Possum, as a key threat, with monitoring and management actions informed by current research
7. replaces performance criteria with measurable, baselined targets and interim milestones, tied to specific, funded and clearly assigned recovery actions
8. integrates First Nations Peoples' science or cultural knowledge, authority and leadership throughout the plan, supported by an appropriate process for sharing knowledge
9. includes costed, resourced and accountable implementation arrangements, including a funded recovery team, clear lead responsibilities and regular public reporting.

Should any clarification be needed, please contact me via the email address advocacy@fog.org.au

Yours sincerely,

SIGNED

Professor Jamie Pittock
President, Friends of Grasslands
28 August 2026