



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

24th September, 2020

To: Steve Hartley,
Executive Director,
Green and Resilient Places
NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Dear Mr Hartley,

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the Draft of the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan.

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is the peak national body for Landscape Architecture. AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities and greater environmental stewardship.

In operation since 1966, AILA represents over 3,500 (and growing) members throughout Australia and overseas. As a not-for-profit professional association, our role is to serve the mutual interests of our members and the wider discipline.

AILA provides our members – in urban and rural Australia, and overseas – with training, recognition and a community of practice to share knowledge, ideas and action. With our members, we anticipate and develop a leading position on issues of concern in landscape architecture. Alongside government and allied professions, we work to improve the design, planning and management of the natural and built environment.

The purpose of this document is to outline the following opportunities and concerns held by the AILA on the Draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. Existing pattern and resilience values of the Cumberland Plain ecological communities.

The Cumberland Plain has been subject to extensive clearing that commenced with European settlement and has accelerated over recent decades. Given the extent of clearing the small remnant areas of Cumberland Plain vegetation that remain are highly valuable and irreplaceable in terms of their ecological and cultural value. The remnant Cumberland Plain vegetation also makes a significant contribution to air quality, urban heat mitigation and recreational resources and forms an essential part of the resilience fabric of Western Sydney.



1.2. Accuracy of Conservation title.

The draft **Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP)** for Western Sydney to 2056 states that the goal is to protect the threatened plants and animals in Western Sydney while facilitating urban development in the four strategic urban development areas designated by State Government as well major transport infrastructure.

1.2.1 Off-sets, Voluntary Stewardship Agreements and inadequate restoration program equate to net loss.

A key outcome of the Plan, which is to be backed by legislation, will be a program of off-sets that can be acquired to allow the clearing of remnant Cumberland Plain vegetation for urban and infrastructure development. The offsets will be achieved by placing biodiversity conservation protection over existing areas of remnant Cumberland Plain vegetation, primarily through Voluntary Stewardship Agreements (VSA). Given that the draft CPCP does not provide for a significant program of ecological restoration to compensate for the cleared vegetation, it appears that the overall result will be a net loss of Cumberland Plain vegetation. It is therefore not accurate to call it a Conservation Plan as it is likely to result in less area of Cumberland Plain vegetation after the Plan is fully implemented.

1.2.2 Funding uncertain due to market variability.

Government has allocated \$84m over 3 years to fund the CPCP with a relatively small amount allocated for acquisition of land for conservation. As future funding is intended to come from Special Infrastructure Contributions from developers, the amount of funding that will be available for new land acquisition and administration of the Plan will be dependent on the fluctuations of the property market.

1.2.3 None of the Draft CPCP target settings are yet achieved, while clearing continues.

A target of 5,475ha of land under conservation protection has been set in the draft CPCP to offset the expected impact of clearing for development. However, it appears from reading the draft CPCP that none of this target has yet been achieved even though vegetation clearing continues.

2. AILA'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

An independent review, Ecological Restoration Management Program, Targets and Resourcing.

It is widely accepted by ecologists that that offsets or restoration programs do not provide equivalent environmental value as the conservation of remnant vegetation communities in situ.

2.1. An independent review.

AILA strongly recommends that an independent review be carried out of the areas of remnant Cumberland Plain Vegetation that are designated for clearing for urban development with the aim of reducing the extent of clearing and the resulting environmental impact.



2.2. An Ecological Restoration Program (E R Program)

In parallel with this review we consider that an Ecological Restoration Program be established with the goal of increasing the extent of healthy Cumberland Plain vegetation under conservation protection in Western Sydney.

2.3. Restoration and protection targets, strategy and allocation for the E R Program

The Ecological Restoration and Management Program needs to have clearly defined annual targets for area of restoration and protection with a strategy that reinforces the pattern of remnant ecological communities throughout the Cumberland Plain region and the ERP retain the option to cease further clearing until said targets are met or exceeded by a specified value (TBD as part of the independent review).

2.4. Adequate Resourcing of the Program: Expertise and funding.

Implementation of the Ecological Restoration and Management Program needs to be adequately resourced both in terms of expertise and funding. An effective on-going monitoring program also needs to be implemented to provide feedback so that the techniques can be refined to improve the effectiveness of the restoration program.

This summary and recommendations outline the position held by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. It is critically important to establish an independent review and the recommended conservation and protection measures, as a matter of urgency, to uphold the conservation intention of the Plan's title.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. We welcome further discussion to incorporate earlier feedback and these recommendations. We may be contacted via Tessa Faucheur, AILA NSW manager, tessa.faucheur@aila.org.au.

Kind regards,

Lee Andrews

AILA NSW President

LEAD SUBMISSION AUTHOR: Noel Corkery, FAILA

SUBMISSION TEAM: Professor Helen Armstrong AM, FAILA



APPENDIX : Table of Responses.

CUMBERLAND PLAIN CONSERVATION PLAN

AILA SUBMISSION 23/09/2020

NAMES	Noel Corkery FAILA Helen Armstrong AM, FAILA	ORGANISATION: AILA (NSW)
Section	Section Title	Responses
	KEY FUNCTION OF THE PLAN IS TO OFFSET CLEARING OF VEGETATION FOR DEVELOPMENT	<p>A key outcome of the Plan, which is to be backed by legislation, will be a program of off-sets that can be acquired to allow the clearing of remnant CP woodland for infrastructure and urban development. The offsets will be achieved by placing biodiversity conservation protection over existing areas of remnant Cumberland Plain vegetation primarily through Voluntary Stewardship Agreements (VSA). Given that the Plan does not provide for a significant program of ecological restoration to replace the cleared vegetation it appears that the overall result will be a <u>net loss of CP vegetation</u>. It is therefore somewhat misleading to call it a Conservation Plan as it is likely to result in less area of CP woodland vegetation when the Plan is fully implemented.</p> <p>Government has allocated \$84m over 3 years to fund the CPCP with a relatively small amount allocated for acquisition of land for conservation. As future funding will come from Special Infrastructure Contributions from developers, the amount of funding</p>



	<p>available for new land acquisition and administration of the Plan will be dependent on the fluctuations of the property market.</p> <p>A target of 5,475ha of land under conservation protection has been set to offset the expected impact of clearing for development. However, it appears from reading the Plan that none of this target has yet been achieved.</p> <p><u>AILA strongly recommends that the aim of the Plan should be to increase the extent of CP vegetation together with conservation protection.</u></p> <p>To achieve this aim, the Plan needs to incorporate an extensive program of ecological restoration to compensate for the areas of CP vegetation that will be cleared for development.</p> <p>The <u>Ecological Restoration Program</u> needs to have <u>clearly defined targets</u> for annual area of restoration and a strategy that reinforces the pattern of remnant ecological communities throughout the Cumberland Plain region. Implementation of the Ecological Restoration Program needs to be adequately resourced both in terms of expertise and funding.</p> <p><u>A sound monitoring program needs to be implemented to provide feedback to refine and improve the effectiveness of the restoration techniques used.</u></p>
INTEGRATION WITH SYDNEY GREEN GRID	<p><u>There is no acknowledgement or integration with GANSW's Sydney Green Grid. Quotes indicate its particular relevance to CPCP.</u></p>



	<p><i>‘Green Grid opportunities in terms of their strategic potential as catalysts for the establishment of a new interconnected high-performance green infrastructure network which will support healthy urban growth.’</i></p> <p>The role of the SYDNEY GREEN GRID is particularly relevant to impacts on S-W Cumberland Plain, namely, <i>‘To protect and connect existing ecological communities and improve the ability to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of heat, noise and air pollution while improving landscape and urban quality.’</i></p>
<p>Introduction</p>	<p>Premier’s Priorities The Plan states two key priorities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greening our city—increase the tree canopy and green cover across Greater Sydney by planting 1 million trees by 2022 <u>We recommend that it is more important to maintain the health of existing trees and their canopy cover than planting new trees where existing trees have been felled as in Queen St, St Mary’s. To encourage this, we recommend revising and strengthen TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS under the EPA Act.</u> 2. Greener public spaces—increase the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes’ walk of quality green, open and public space by 10% by 2023. The Plan will contribute to these by establishing conservation lands such as public reserves and through ecological restoration, increasing canopy cover and providing quality green and open spaces for local communities. <u>Again, we recommend that all existing trees are retained and brought to good health with state-of-art tree management and arboricare</u> <p>Planning Priority W16—protecting and enhancing scenic and cultural landscapes.</p>



		<p>The Plan's vision is to 'support Western Sydney's biodiversity and growth'. 'This means it will support the <u>delivery of infrastructure, housing and jobs</u> for Western Sydney in a planned and strategic way that protects and maintains important biodiversity'. <u>How is infrastructure and housing to be achieved while 'protecting and enhancing cultural landscapes?'</u></p>
	Delivery of Western Parkland City	<p>Planning Priority W13 – 'Create Parkland City urban structure & identity with South Creek as defining spatial element.' <u>This has potential but will need SOPHISTICATED SITE AND VISUAL ANALYSES TO DETERMINE BUILDING HEIGHTS TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES.</u></p>
		<p>Growth and Development Areas Govt. has determined Development Plans for 4 areas with no input from the group preparing the CPCP</p> <p>EXISTING FOREST & HERITAGE TREES IN EXISTING AND PROPOSED GROWTH AREAS NOT INDICATED ON PLAN/MAP. THESE SHOULD BE NOTED AND INCORPORATED INTO MASTER PLANNING</p>
Overview	Strategic Conservation Planning in Western Sydney	<p>Develop Jobs in ARBORICULTURE AND ARBORICARE using Singapore's urban forest management as a model.</p> <p>Independent Assessors reviewed the draft Plan; the company is called 'Open Lines' and we were told that the report will be available with the CPCP documents</p>
	The Cumberland Pain Conservation Plan	<p>It is misleading to call it a Conservation Plan as it is likely to result in less area CP woodland vegetation if fully implemented</p>



	<p>The Plan's Conservation Program</p>	<p>The CPCP will provide land that has conservation values and is accessible to the public</p> <p>The CPCP will form a reference document for the proposed State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP)</p> <p>A small component of funding has been provided for monitoring and managing conservation areas</p> <p>Spatial Viewer has been developed that allows interrogation of data layers</p> <p>Voluntary Stewardship Agreements (VSA) require minimum 20ha lots which means most of Mulgoa area will not qualify</p>
	<p>Commitments to be delivered through the Plan</p>	<p>Total area of land assessed was 28,300ha</p> <p>Off-set Target is 5,475ha but none of this has been secured yet as the Plan has not been adopted</p> <p>Off-sets include some upfront and others to follow until 2056</p> <p>Govt. has allocated \$84m over 3 years to fund the CPCP with future funding from Special Infrastructure Contributions from developers</p>
<p>Collaborating with Community & Stakeholders</p>	<p>People's Panel</p>	<p>Many landholders expressed concern about lack of information and ground-truthing.</p>
	<p>Community Reference Group</p>	<p>CRG noted that the Biodiversity Conservation Trust will not enter into stewardship agreements for properties that are less than 10 ha.</p>



		<p>CRG also presented ideas about bridging across multiple lots of land and the feasibility of the Plan facilitating landholders banding together to manage biodiversity.</p> <p>Govt. has determined Development Plans for 4 areas with no input from the group preparing the CPCP</p>
	<p>Early engagement with Community & Stakeholders</p>	<p>It is important to address the growing ANXIETY ABOUT LARGE TREES in Western Sydney. Education programs about tree care and maintenance including examples from Singapore on best practice arboriculture should begin to address such anxiety.</p> <p>School / community programs like ADOPT A TREE and the UK COMMON GROUND COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECT 'TREE DRESSING DAY' could build community acceptance of large canopy trees needed to address the urban heat issues in Penrith etc.</p> <p>AS WELL THERE IS INCREASING INTEREST IN CITIZEN SCIENTIST PROJECTS RELATED CLIMATE CHANGE URBAN HEAT.</p>
<p>Plan Highlights</p>	<p>Establishing new conservation lands</p>	<p>Areas identified to provide biodiversity off-sets are often located on private land, a key mechanism for implementing the CPCP will be the establishment of Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements (BSA).</p> <p>However, many of the lots of land are too small for biodiversity stewardship sites and so were not included. This is a major issue in some areas where there is significant biodiversity and threat of clearing / development with small lots throughout much of the Penrith and Liverpool areas.</p> <p>Financial assistance available to landowners through the Biodiversity Conservation Trust to carry out biodiversity management works in accordance with an agreed Management Plan to be further discussed.</p>



		The intention and justification of the <u>Confluence Reserve proposal is questioned.</u>
Protecting Koalas in Western Sydney		Existing forest in existing and proposed growth areas not indicated. FOR HABITAT CORRIDORS THESE SHOULD BE NOTED AND INCORPORATED INTO MASTER PLANNING Establishment of the Georges River Koala Reserve is to Secure 1,885 hectares of koala habitat. CPCP will invest \$84 million in the first five years to plant 100,000 trees in the Georges River Koala Reserve to restore koala habitat and install 120 kilometres of koala fencing.
Protecting Flora and Fauna through Planning Measures		CRG members would like to see the Plan consider broader conservation goals beyond the strategic conservation area. Some members also suggested that calling it a “conservation plan” is somewhat misleading when it is really an “offset plan”.
Managing Landscape Threats		Mitigating indirect & prescribed impacts as well as <u>DAMAGE TO MATURE TREES</u> need to strengthen the <u>TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS IN DCPS</u> There is no mention of the Green Grid and its role to <i>‘Protect and enhance the natural resources and biodiversity of the Districts by improving the quality of watercourses, creating green habitat corridors and protecting endangered ecological communities’</i> . <u>NEED TO MANAGE & PROTECT EXISTING ROADSIDE TREES; REVIEW ROAD-WIDENING PROPOSALS – ADDRESS THROUGH PUBLIC TRANSPORT.</u>



		Voluntary Stewardship Agreements (VSA) require minimum 20ha lots which means that most of Mulgoa area will not qualify
	Building Knowledge through Research	
	Partnering with Aboriginal Community	
	Involving Community in Conservation	Citizen Scientist projects that address above and below ground monitoring of existing trees, rather than focussing only on new plantings.