
ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OPINION - Molonglo Gorge NR Restoration (ESO 202600023)

In accordance with section 140 (4) of the *Planning Act 2023* (the Act), I provide the following environmental significance opinion:

APPLICANT

ACT Parks and Conservation Service, as represented by Ren Webb, Ranger in Charge.

APPLICATION and DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The applicant has applied under section 140 (4) of the Act to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for an environmental significance opinion to the effect that the development proposal set out in the submission is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact (the application).

The development proposal is for restoration works in Molonglo Gorge Nature Reserve as described in the submission.

LOCATION

Block 66, Kowen District.

MATTERS TO WHICH THIS OPINION APPLIES

This opinion applies only to the development proposal as described in the application.

OPINION

Provided the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the mitigation measures contained in the supporting application for an ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.

This opinion is granted subject to the following conditions made under s140 (4)(b) of the Act:

1. Conditions of approval including mitigation measures as stated in the application.
2. Access to the site must be granted to Conservation Officers if a random compliance inspection is requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.

Attached is a Statement of Reasons for the decision.



Bren Burkevics
Conservator of Flora and Fauna

22 June 2026

STATEMENT OF REASONS REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The proposed development is a proposal mentioned in Schedule 1 of the *Planning (General) Regulation 2023* — requiring an environmental impact statement, being:

Part 1.2, item 18 — proposal for development in a reserve, unless the proposal is for minor public works to be carried out by or for the Territory in accordance with a minor public works code approved by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna under the Nature Conservation Act 2014, section 318A;

The proposed works are within Molonglo Gorge Nature Reserve.

The proponent is seeking an environmental significance opinion to remove the requirement for an environmental impact statement on the grounds that the proposal is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact, and has applied to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for an opinion to that effect.

Meaning of **significant** adverse environmental impact

An adverse environmental impact is **significant** if—

- (a) the environmental function, system, value or entity that might be adversely impacted by a proposed development is significant; or
- (b) the cumulative or incremental effect of a proposed development might contribute to a substantial adverse impact on an environmental function, system, value or entity.

In deciding whether an adverse environmental impact is **significant**, the following matters must be taken into account:

- (a) the kind, size, frequency, intensity, scope and length of time of the impact; and
- (b) the sensitivity, resilience and rarity of the environmental function, system, value or entity likely to be affected.

In deciding whether a development proposal is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact it does not matter whether the adverse environmental impact is likely to occur on the site of the development or elsewhere.

It has been determined that the proposal is unlikely to have a significant environmental impact, based on the documentation submitted, known values of the site, and provided the works and ongoing management are carried out in accordance with the conditions attached to this ESO.

Project description

The development proposal is for restoration works in Molonglo Gorge Nature Reserve. The reserve is managed by ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS). In 2024, PCS co-developed a Landscape Improvement Plan (LIP) with Environmental Restoration Planning and Design

(Lori Gould) to guide and prioritise environmental restoration activities in the reserve. The LIP's recommendations include weed management, revegetation, stock fence removal, maintenance and new fence installations, erosion control earthworks, dam enhancements, coarse woody debris placement, and changes to sheep grazing regimes. Some of the recommendations were actioned in 2025, and PCS plans to continue implementing recommendations over the next five years as funding and staff capacity allow.

This ESO covers a range of restoration works over the next 18 months (life of the ESO), including:

- Erosion control to manage active head-cuts and eroded gullies. This will be done by constructing a rock flume at the head-cut and another below the culvert upstream where runoff is being concentrated.
- Install fencing to restrict stock access to gullies and select locations along the riparian corridor. Five strands of plain wire will be used to minimise the risk of harm to wildlife.
- Revegetation plantings to stabilise banks and increase groundcover, and mulching bare patches to reduce further soil loss and erosion.
- Restore two old farm dams for watering stock by increasing structural complexity through placing coarse woody debris and rocks around the dams and in the water.

Documentation Submitted

- Vegetation mapping
- Molonglo Gorge Nature Reserve Landscape Improvement Plan
- Explanatory note regarding supporting documentation for the application for an Environmental Significance Opinion
- Letter(s) of Authorisation
- Form 1M

Nature conservation values present

Molonglo Gorge Nature Reserve is a 506 ha protected area covering a 16 km stretch of the Molonglo River, which flows through a series of cascades and deep pools within the gorge. The reserve is part of a significant regional wildlife corridor that follows the geologically uplifted land along the Queanbeyan Fault Scarp. It connects woodland and open forest in the vicinity of Googong Dam with woodlands in the north of the ACT and surrounding NSW, and links to the Southern Flyway — a connection of woodland vegetation across the ACT, southern slopes and central west of NSW. Molonglo Gorge, the major feature of the reserve, is several kilometres long, with cliffs up to 60 m in height, rising to a heavily forested, dissected plateau.

The following species listed under the NC Act have been recorded or are known to occur in the reserve:

- Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*)

- Hoary Sunray (*Leucochrysum albicans* subsp. *tricolor*)
- Varied Sittella (*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*)
- Little Eagle (*Hieraaetus morphnoides*)
- Dusky Woodswallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*)
- Gang-gang Cockatoo (*Callocephalon fimbriatum*)
- Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*)
- Macquarie Perch (*Macquaria australasica*)
- Murray Cod (*Maccullochella peelii*)

Various orchids have been recorded. All orchids are protected under the NC Act.

Areas in the northern portion of the site (between Kowen Road and Gorge Road) support the most intact vegetation, likely meeting criteria for listing under both the NC Act and EPBC Act. The central and southern portions also support some higher quality areas but are generally in poorer condition. The site contains high-value habitat resources, including numerous large remnant hollow-bearing trees.

Areas proposed for revegetation have relatively low vegetation cover across all strata layers. There is evidence of heavy grazing pressure and feral species, mostly rabbits, which is impacting understorey quality. Exotic cover is generally highest along waterways. Notably, the area along the Molonglo River in the southern portion of the site has relatively high exotic cover, mostly St John's Wort, Blackberry and some Serrated Tussock.

Potentially Significant Environmental Impacts

The proposed restoration works are expected to address erosion issues in Molonglo Gorge Nature Reserve. There is erosion evident at activity sites, with large areas of bare ground and limited vegetation supporting banks, and areas proposed for revegetation have relatively low vegetation cover across all strata layers. Plantings, seeding and the addition of logs and rocks within these areas are recommended to improve condition and mitigate erosion, as proposed. The works will significantly improve runoff water quality and the riparian environment, with no direct impact on the aquatic environment.

Weed control has the potential to impact rare or threatened flora; however, the risk of this is relatively low given the quality of areas to be managed. There is potential for Hoary Sunray to occur in areas to be managed; however, this species is conspicuous when active, so it is unlikely to be accidentally sprayed. Removal of woody weeds, such as African Boxthorn, may have a minor impact on habitat for small woodland birds; however, given the proposed works include planting species with a similar structure (for example, *Bursaria spinosa*), the overall impact from removing these weeds would be negligible.

In areas where grazing has ceased, it is recommended that unnecessary fencing within the reserve be removed. Many fences have barbed wire on the top row, which presents a barrier to fauna movement and a potential entanglement risk, so the removal of barbed wire would be the priority. Fences should remain in areas where grazing cannot be avoided.

Areas of the reserve are mapped as Strategic Fire Advantage Zones and, being bushfire prone, are required to be managed for compliance with ACT Bushfire Management Standards. The works, including planting proposed as part of this ESO, are unlikely to impact the current fire management regime. Future plantings will require consultation to ensure fuel management thresholds are not exceeded.

This opinion is granted subject to the following conditions made under s140 (4)(b) of the Act:

1. Conditions of approval including mitigation measures as stated in the application.
2. Access to the site must be granted to Conservation Officers if a random compliance inspection is requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.

It has been determined that if the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the mitigation measures contained in the supporting application for an ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.