

# **DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH**

**August 2022**

## **Petition – Protection of Bluett’s Block-Piney Ridge Start**

As a local member for Murrumbidgee, I am very pleased to support this e-petition from the Conservation Council and residents across Canberra who are invested in the future of Bluett’s Block and Piney Ridge.

The petitioners who signed the ‘Protection of Bluett’s Block-Piney Ridge’ e-petition are calling on the ACT Government to ensure that full ecological assessment is undertaken of Stromlo Blocks 402 and 403.

This e-petition was signed by 732 community members, with signatories outlining that the area “provides important landscape connectivity from the Murrumbidgee River Corridor to Black Mountain” and that “Without connectivity, many animal species cannot find food or shelter, or space to breed.”

The petitioners are asking the ACT Government

1. Ensure that Stromlo Blocks 402/403 undergo full ecological assessment.

2. Ensure that urban development is not pursued on Block 12, Section 1 Denman Prospect until there is sufficient information to decide on the environmental significance of the block.

3. Ensure that the ecological considerations of Stromlo Block 402/403 and Denman Prospect Block 12, Section 1 include the impacts on threatened species, critically endangered Box-Gum Woodland, old-growth trees, landscape connectivity, and consideration of urban edge effects.

4. Following full ecological assessments, ensure areas which have nationally outstanding ecosystems, and species, formed mostly by non-human factors are declared a Nature Reserve.

From those who live in the Molonglo Valley to ecologically minded Canberrans across the territory, the preservation of high-value environmental land is a major issue. The importance placed on environmental factors thus far in the process of the Western Edge Investigation highlights this exactly.

As the blocks colloquially known as Bluett's Block sit within the Western Edge Investigation Area, it is integral that as the investigation proceeds, thorough consideration is given to the environmental realities of the space to the West of Belconnen, Molonglo, Weston Creek, and Kambah.

The 2021 Census showed that Canberra is growing and growing at a faster rate than expected. The nearby Molonglo Valley grew by about 250% between 2016 and 2021. Canberra is growing, and that's why it is so important that we undertake thorough assessments like the Western Edge Investigation.

Several weeks ago, preliminary reports on the Western Edge area were publicly released. These preliminary reports provide an initial informed understanding of the area ranging from water values and landscape character to bushfire risk and ecology.

The reports outline what work should be done as the Investigation proceeds to gain a more detailed understanding of the environment across the entire space, including Bluett's Block. They are a positive start to the thorough and detailed environmental investigations that are planned as part of this process.

The ACT Government's commitment to planning for Canberra's future and investigating the potential future uses for the land such as potential urban areas, environmental protection areas, and nature reserves is both welcome and necessary.

I commend the ACT Government and Minister Gentleman for the attention being placed on the future of Canberra's landscape. With the Western Edge Investigation progressing, it is important that we continue to consider the potential and value of the area.

Signatories of this petition will be eagerly anticipating the next steps of the investigation including the Capability and Sustainability Assessment of the Western Edge that is underway, as well as the further studies that will be conducted.

I am pleased to have sponsored this petition on behalf of 732 community members about the future of Bluett's Block. I would like to thank everyone in our community who took the time to sign this petition.

I look forward to the Minister's response and thank him for the time and consideration that has been put into the Western Edge Investigation thus far and going forward. Additionally, I welcome the consideration of the committee on this matter.

Thank you.

**Ends**