



Newham & District Landcare Group

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Comments on Hanging Rock Environmental Management Plan Update 2021

Newham and District Landcare Group (NDLG) congratulates and thanks Council for the extensive work on updating Hanging Rock's EMP. It is pleasing to note the increasing priority given to protecting and enhancing the site's environmental and Aboriginal cultural heritage values.

We look forward to seeing how both the EMP and Aboriginal Conservation Management Plan will inform the forthcoming Hanging Rock Master Plan. It will be helpful to understand the role of the EMP in the broader plans not only for the Hanging Rock Precinct, but the area surrounding Hanging Rock. In order to protect the precinct's conservation values, it will be important to ensure surrounding land use and overlays provide adequate environmental protection of the Rural Conservation Zones, including the Cobaw biolink as referenced in Council's Biodiversity Strategy.

We note that the potential environmental impacts of current built facilities, or any changes or additions to them, such as entry gates, recreational facilities, the visitor centre and/or café, have not been addressed in the EMP. Whilst they may be addressed in the Master Plan which is yet to commence, it may be helpful to have some principles in place within the EMP to ensure that wherever any built facilities are sited and however they are used, they align with the precinct's conservation values.

Some specific feedback on the EMP is below:

Part 1

- p.44 permitted dog activity – should be directed by existing Council Domestic Animal Management Plan
- p.44 on whether a predator proof fence is likely or appropriate to be installed, the meaning of the comment "PE to discuss with MSC if pp fence is likely" is unclear

Part 2

- Management zones – we appreciate the use of these to prioritise and manage values of the precinct, and in particular the conservation zones
- 1.2.4 management actions – the text (para 3) refers to actions in line with a **10**-year management plan as short-term, but the table below references actions more than **5** years as being *long*-term. Please ensure a consistent timing definition of short- and long-term actions
- 2.1.3 revegetation – this section states the principles of revegetation only where exclusion fencing is installed, and reevaluating revegetation outside of exclusion fencing if browsing pressure is reduced. This is inconsistent with part 1 p37 (para 3) which states that the impact of herbivores on biodiversity is unknown. It would seem apparent that if fencing is a necessity for successful revegetation then herbivores must be having significant impact in all areas, not just grassland. Perhaps the document requires clarification on what is currently known about the impact of herbivores on biodiversity across the precinct

- 3.1 Revegetation and Regeneration – we agree with the recommendation for future efforts to continue to be informed by the Young 2018 Revegetation Plan, which supports a more nuanced approach based on existing on-ground conditions. The ten listed recommendations in this area are excellent
- 3.1.1 Fire for Regeneration – some recommendations would benefit from further detail e.g. Rec 13 is for “cool burns CCZ 3- North of Racetrack, to reduce on-ground fuels” – it may help to clarify whether the “on-ground fuels” refers to weed species only, or all on-ground fuels in this area. Rec 14 “Undertake an experimental burn in CZ 7 Northern Picnic area with the aim of restoring mown areas” is also unclear. We urge the use of best practice evidence in informing the use of fire within the precinct
- 3.1.2 Tree Conservation Areas – we applaud the establishment of these, and support the additional proposed parameters, in particular that the perimeter is to be located at the drip-line of the trees, except for where adjacent to infrastructure. We also support the expansion of these areas, and recognition of their connection to each other, to take into consideration their broader habitat value
- 3.2 Weed Control – we appreciate the simplified approach to weeds across the precinct as a whole. We reiterate the point made on p.26 (para 2) on woody and scrambler weeds as recommended in the 2015 EMP – these could be eliminated in 1-2 years if prioritised and incorporated into day-to-day management. Recent gains demonstrate the impact that can be made with ongoing concerted effort; failing to continue this will lead to greater management costs and impact in the longer term
- p.26 (para 5) supports the Bradley Method, and we believe this could be implemented on a regular basis with appropriate training of Reserve staff and volunteers. Unclear what is meant by applying the method in the precinct “will also require the effect of *grazing* and *browsing*” (italics ours)
- The 3.2 weed management recommendations are excellent and should be adequately funded through the council budget process
- 3.3 Dams and Waterways – we commend the recommendation to increase width in response to prioritisation of ecological and indigenous values in strategic plan
- 3.3.2 Dams – we encourage a review of the current water practices, which preference use water for aesthetic maintenance of lawns over the opportunity for habitat enhancement
- p.34 table 19 (general fauna management) – excellent recommendations. In the wake of the June storm damage and felled trees, there may be further opportunities in terms of enhancing ecosystems
- 3.5.4 Kangaroo Management – perhaps public concerns can be partly addressed through education on the importance of conservation for *all* species, rather than one particular category to the potential detriment of others. We encourage a Kangaroo Management Plan as soon as possible. In the meantime monitoring will be important. Has the new fencing been evaluated for its impact on kangaroo and other wildlife movements?
- 3.6.4 Other Livestock – the reference to llamas makes no mention of their potential impact – how are these risks to be managed, and what are future plans for this activity? Is this considered sustainable and appropriate to the precinct given the increasing emphasis on protecting and enhancing conservation values?
- Is there a need for further comprehensive flora and fauna surveys? Could citizen science be considered to contribute to these?
- 6.4 Major Events – we support the recommendations, particularly 135 no permanent lighting infrastructure. Regarding 132 on restricting music events to the East Paddock – NDLG does not support musical performances on the Rock itself. In the event that these are allowed to continue, might they also require permission from Traditional Owner groups, and from Heritage Victoria, given the Reserve’s state heritage listing?
- Map 12 – we applaud inclusion of the connectivity zones between conservation areas. Should this map include the riparian strip extending west to Coach Road that is public land and officially part of the reserve?

Thank you for considering this submission.

Natasha Gayfer

On behalf of NDLG Committee