



## Simon Corbell MLA

ATTORNEY-GENERAL  
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT  
MINISTER FOR POLICE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES  
MINISTER FOR CAPITAL METRO

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MEMBER FOR MOLONGLO

Mr Tom Duncan  
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly  
GPO Box 1020  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for forwarding me the e-petition No. 11-14 and petition No. 14-14 lodged by Ms Nicole Lawder MLA and received by the Assembly on 5 August 2014. I understand that the petitions relate to the cleaning up of Lake Tuggeranong and were signed by 3,007 people.

As the Minister for the Environment, I well understand the history of Lake Tuggeranong and am aware that the condition of the Lake has led to the number of signatures on the two petitions. The petitions focus on two points. The first point states that *“Lake Tuggeranong has faced annual closures because of outbreaks of blue-green algae, caused by poor quality water. These outbreaks lead to bad smells, health risks for people and animals, and cancelled sporting and community events”*.

Lake Tuggeranong was constructed in 1987 and in addition to providing important aesthetic and recreational benefits was established as a settling pond to trap soils and debris in urban stormwater, to improve the quality of the water flowing into the Murrumbidgee River. Lake Tuggeranong is also in effect part of the ACT drinking water supply catchment, with ACTEW investing in pumping infrastructure downstream at the Cotter River to draw water for treatment at Stromlo.

However, since Lake Tuggeranong’s establishment the lake water quality has declined as a result of the accumulation of urban pollutants from its surrounding catchment. The most immediate impact has been a loss of amenity associated with the lake. Because Lake Tuggeranong is a tributary of the Murrumbidgee River, a failure of the lake to trap pollutants could have negative impacts on downstream water quality.

Lake Tuggeranong is currently open for primary contact (swimming) in three of its five recreational areas and open for secondary contact (boating) for all five recreational areas. The Environment Protection Authority had closed the lake as a precautionary measure on 20 March 2014 after high levels of blue-green algae were detected in multiple areas of the lake. However Lake Tuggeranong has been open for recreational use since 26 June 2014 due to a number of management actions that have taken place.

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### ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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An example of recent management actions include the opportunistic draining of Tuggeranong Weir. The draining of the weir enables a host of chemical, physical and biological processes to occur that will effectively refresh the weir so that it becomes more effective at trapping and binding stormwater pollutants/nutrients.

Immediate issues with the management of Lake Tuggeranong and its surrounding areas are dealt with through the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate, however there are also a number of actions being carried out by the Environment and Planning Directorate as discussed below.

The second point to the petitions state that *“Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the Government to take immediate action to clean up Lake Tuggeranong, and fulfil their election promise to build wetlands in the Tuggeranong Valley, which will help improve the quality of water flowing into the lake.*

As you may be aware the ACT Parliamentary Agreement for the 8th Legislative Assembly for the ACT (2012) states on this issue:

*3.11 Restore the Health of Canberra's lakes and catchments by allocating \$85m of MDBP funds to establish a Water Catchment Management Authority to ensure the following:*  
*a) Construction of four new wetlands to improve water quality at Tuggeranong (2), Yarralumla and Ginninderra by June 2016;*

The ACT Government remains strongly committed to improving water quality in our urban waterways. Following the submission of an ACT Government business case to the Commonwealth Government in late 2013, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, and I, on 26 February 2014 made a joint announcement of \$85 million of Commonwealth funding for an ACT Basin Priority Project. This project is expected to have a significant positive impact on water quality for the ACT and Murray-Darling Basin.

Improving water quality will have benefits not only for the aquatic environment, but also for the community through improving the social and economic contribution of ACT lakes and waterways to our region. The ACT Government will also be contributing a further \$8.5 million in addition to the Commonwealth's funding of the project.

In accordance with the business case agreed with the Commonwealth, the ACT Basin Priority Project has two distinct phases. Phase 1, the water quality monitoring component, is scheduled to be completed by February 2016. Phase 2, the detail design and construction of water quality intervention infrastructure, is due for completion by March 2019.

Phase 1 of the ACT Basin Priority Project consists of implementing both a specific monitoring program for six identified priority sub-catchments (Lake Tuggeranong has been identified as one of the six priority catchments) and a comprehensive ACT-wide water quality monitoring program. The sub-catchment monitoring will provide relevant data to underpin Phase 2 of the Priority Project. There will also be an audit, analysis and investigation of a representative range of current storm water quality assets in the ACT to determine their efficiency and effectiveness and assist in both the choice and development of infrastructure alternatives in Phase 2.

Phase 2 of the ACT Basin Priority Project will be the detailed design and the construction of water quality intervention infrastructure to address the water quality issues identified in Phase 1. Phase 2 will also determine ongoing governance arrangements for long-term monitoring to gauge the effectiveness of the new infrastructure works and the subsequent improvements to water quality in the catchment. The Phase 2 funding component is subject to Commonwealth approval of a supplementary business case on the construction of this infrastructure by February 2016. Subject to agreement to the supplementary business case the expected timeline to complete the work under the project will be 30 June 2019.

Further details on the ACT Basin Priority Project are available online at <http://www.environment.gov.au/resource/water-management-partnership-agreement-commonwealth-australia-and-australian-capital>

While the construction of two wetlands in the Tuggeranong catchment could well be a viable option under Phase 2 of the Project, it would not be appropriate to pre-empt the outcomes of the Phase 1 project monitoring and investigations. The consultancy engaged at looking at the six priority catchments as part of Phase 1 is still in the process of developing an integrated water quality monitoring regime, incorporating detailed monitoring in the identified six priority representative sub-catchments. In conjunction with this, consultancies for the ACT-wide water quality monitoring framework and the strategic review and analysis of ACT urban water infrastructure are also underway.

In order to make the most informed decision on the water quality infrastructure appropriate for the Tuggeranong catchment which considers the social, environmental and economic implications based on sound scientific knowledge, it is important that the activities proposed in Phase 1 are carried out.

I acknowledge that the Tuggeranong catchment does have significant amounts of data collated by scientific experts and also through our much valued Waterwatch community. Nevertheless, the current Phase 1 work will consider if work is required to fill data gaps in order to complete the water quality monitoring framework.

In the past, the Environment and Planning Directorate has investigated whether there was any possibility to negotiate with the Commonwealth to bring forward actual works. The Commonwealth has indicated that it does not agree to this approach in advance of work on the water quality monitoring framework and filling of any data gaps. Departure from the jointly agreed Project Schedule, to investigate the wetland options may have detrimental impacts on the ACT Basin Priority Project. It may delay milestones being met and/or could result in a failure to complete the comprehensive business case to implement Phase 2.

In filling in the data gaps, the ACT Basin Priority Project requires a number of steps to be completed to ensure a rigorous business case for Phase 2. The Project Schedule outlines these steps and the ACT Government has been successful in achieving the milestones set to date. As such, it will necessarily take some time before a confirmation of the most viable water quality infrastructure is determined for the Tuggeranong catchment. This does not mean that the two wetlands are no longer on the agenda. Moreover, the concept will need to go through a proper process before the Commonwealth is prepared to approve and fund the proposals.

The community is fundamental in the journey and success of the ACT Basin Priority Project and the project team will ensure that key stakeholders are engaged as the project progresses. In this regard, a number of Tuggeranong residents are already part of the Project Advisory Group – Community and Peak Stakeholders Group.

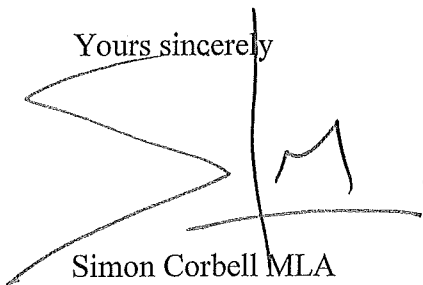
I fully understand the desire of the constituents in the Tuggeranong catchment for immediate action, but I ask for their patience in seeing the ACT Basin Priority Project achieve its project milestones. Appropriate time and analysis will help ensure a business case which is supported with sound scientific evidence that considers the social, environmental and economic objectives.

The ACT government remains committed to restoring the health of Canberra's lakes and catchments. As outlined above, significant steps have been undertaken to improve the water quality in Lake Tuggeranong including short term management actions and the encouraging progress of the ACT Basin Priority Project.

I thank the constituents of the Lake Tuggeranong catchment for their interest in the condition and health of their catchment, and trust that the work to date and proposed under the ACT Basin Priority Project will assist in restoring the health of Canberra's lakes and catchments.

Thank you for bringing the two petitions to my attention.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Simon Corbell', written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and somewhat abstract.

Simon Corbell MLA  
Minister for the Environment

29.10.14