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Written submission to Dumaresq Creeklands Master Plan Consultation ARC17/2184  
By email to: [council@armidale.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@armidale.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Consultants and Council staff,

Following our successful public meeting and launch of our association on Saturday March 24, 2018, and a subsequent meeting of members on March 28, we resolved to make a submission based on input from the membership of our association. Several our members will be making individual submissions as well.

We were encouraged at our public meeting and launch to hear very supportive statements from our local member of State parliament, Mr Adam Marshall MP and the Mayor Simon Murray. We note that Mr Murray acknowledged that the current Master Planning exercise between Markham and Douglas Streets was limited in scope because of budgetary constraints and that, in future, consideration will be given to all other areas of the city's creeklands. This means, of course, that some most important factors – especially those upstream of Markham St and of the city boundary – may not be addressed by the current 'Master Plan' process.

We felt that the constraints of the 255 characters in your online survey were overly restrictive for some considered responses from our association and hence we are submitting a written submission (via email).



## **General comments**

Collectively, those of us who have authored this submission have lived in the Armidale region for many decades; we believe that we have a deep knowledge of the history of the region and its climate and flooding experiences and a genuine concern for the creeklands. We hope that this knowledge and experience will help inform the Master Plan authored by the consultants.

### ***Overall pattern of the creeklands zone***

As the casual viewer can see from the above image, the area of the creeklands is physically 'pinched' in several areas. For example, the construction of the Centro shopping centre with its huge masses of concrete covering the former gas works site, has very much constrained the options for altering any flow of the creek between Areas 1 and 2.

The second notable 'pinching' of the creeklands area is the triangle of land occupied by the small area of lawn fenced to protect people from contaminated soil, the twin cinema, the bowling greens and the Ex-Services building. This building and its parking lot encroaches on the natural lay of the land of the creeklands. We understand that previous Council decisions have allowed such buildings but believe that, in future, no further building applications should be approved where those buildings and their parking areas might be impacted by large flood events.

The third area where the natural creeklands are physically 'pinched' is where the Visitor Information Centre, carpark, Hungry Jacks and the BP service station are located. Ideally, a long-term plan would see all developments located only outside any potential flood zones.

Overall, the dominant use of the creeklands zone under consideration is either for civic purposes in the centre section and for sporting facilities in much of the rest. We feel that linked water features with continuously flowing water should be a feature of all 5 areas. This means that the city needs either to be able to draw on a source of water to allow a continuous flow of water in dry periods and/or the water could possibly be re-cycled from downstream of the city to upstream of the city. We suggest that the better solution is to store sufficient water for this purpose in one or more dams upstream of the city. If these were appropriately designed and equipped to manage water storage and controlled release, they could also serve to help protect the city from future major flood events by capturing some of the water flowing from the catchment, providing a buffering effect.

### ***Need for more information***

We note that we have not been provided with a map showing the physical above- and below-ground constraints such as the location of sewage pipes, water pipes, electricity cables, NBN cables, etc. Also, we have not been provided with a map showing the likely high-water level lines for floods varying in intensity such as 1 in 100 years or 1 in 500 years. We wonder, for example, how rare a rainfall event was that which occurred in Toowoomba recently which led to such devastation – not only in Toowoomba – but downstream in the Lockyer Valley. Our point is that our community needs to be very well informed about flood risks and other constraints when making plans that will have impacts over the long-term.

### ***Notes from walk with the advisory group***

Two of our committee (Jim Scott, President and Graham Wilson, Vice President) were invited to participate in the walk along the creeklands area under consideration as part of the

advisory group on March 16, 2018. We include some suggestions below which were stimulated by discussions on that walk.

The aquatic ecologist, Dr Darren Ryder (from the University of New England), pointed out that the geomorphology of the creek could be modified to change the creek from its 'drain' shape in many places to one with a more gently curved base with sloping sides which would improve many features of the creeklands. We agree that, where the current creek is contained within a stone lined drain, that the shape of the creek banks needs to be changed so that the sides slope more gently to prevent persons falling into the creek. If done well, this could also allow for a better natural appearance of any water features. If the basalt stones lining the creek are removed, perhaps they can be re-used in some other feature to retain some heritage connection with the past?

One of the main overall problems with the creek is the frequent lack of water flow. This results in a lack of water quality due to low oxygen levels leading to poor biological health of the stream at times. As noted by Darren Ryder, Dumaresq Dam is a major intervention in the catchment of Dumaresq Creek which restricts the natural flow of water into the city. In our view, this means that Armidale needs to manage the water flow to ensure its health – and we appreciate that this will mean further management such as providing water storages upstream of the city. We would also support more off-stream water-retaining features such as lagoons or billabongs.

The problem with phragmites reeds is increasing and Armidale needs to come up with feasible solutions to ensure that these weeds do not take over even more of the creeklands. The creeklands used to be relatively clear of these weeds with water holes that used to be used for swimming by children. Yet they are useful in the purification of runoff.

The land tenure situation for much of the creeklands has improved markedly over many decades as Council has managed to secure more of the land as public land. We think this process should continue. As opportunities occur for more water features to be created – both east and west of city – there should not be further developments on private land that might exist within the flood zone of the creeklands.

We support the creation of more and improved facilities to encourage outdoor activities for children and their families.

It is important that the views of the Anaiwan people are considered in the design and location of water features.

We support the possibility of an outdoor performance space somewhere near the centre of the city.

Wherever possible, the creeklands should reflect the beauty of our national parks in the region.

More bridges over the creek would assist with the city's traffic flow in times of floods and allow the removal of pipes which cause water restrictions to flow which can have an upstream effect on erosion of the banks along the creek. If possible, these bridges should be of an attractive design which will add to the beauty of the creeklands environment as well as improve pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle access to and across the creeklands area.

### ***Consultation with the community***

We appreciated the efforts made to consult with the community and engage with the advisory group on several occasions.

Some of us attended the consultation tent during the Autumn Festival and put our coloured dots on the items listed as options by the consultants. We note that this is standard procedure used by consultants to gather opinions on what options the community might like to see.

However, we feel that this type of process is limited by the list of options presented by the consultants which, in our view, was dominated by a limited range of options. Whilst that is not necessarily a bad thing, it does not give equal weight to options that might have been volunteered by thoughtful and knowledgeable visitors – especially ideas for wide walking areas which might form a well utilised, paved, ‘promenade’ of sorts along some of the more intensively utilised parts of the central areas of the creeklands.

Also, during this busy festival, visitors were likely to spend very little time thinking about applying their coloured dots and understanding what is meant by each line item suggested (there were many items under many categories presented). Thus, we fear that what will come out of this process will be quite a shallow understanding of what the community wants and expects in the creeklands and may be overly influenced by biases in the options presented.

## **Comments on 5 specific areas being considered by the consultants.**

### ***Area 1: Albion Park (opposite TAFE)***

*How do you currently use this area?*

Many of us do not use this area much but would like to, if it were more beautiful. We believe that TAFE staff and students use it frequently. The bridge is used by those accessing the pottery facility (in the old entrance to the swimming pool).

*List your favourite things about this area, and why they are your favourite.*

The large poplar trees that provide lovely shade in the warmer months.

It is important to ensure that there is a link with the historical development of this area – that is, its early use as a watering area for moving stock; the historical link between the naming of the park and the link with the owner of the swimming pool (Monckton) and his planting of various trees in this area. It is also important to consider the conservation of the Art Deco building and fence.

*How would you like to see this area improved?*

This could be a lovely recreation and picnic spot. It is close to the skate park and swimming pool and so it should be a natural but well managed area for many to visit for recreation.

*What would you like to do in this area that you can't already do, and why?*

See moving water and riffles with water flowing gently over a beautiful wall of rocks and some deep water without reeds allowing habitat for water birds and a pleasant scene for those having picnics or relaxing under the beautiful trees (including large exotic poplars). More might be done to give credit to the memorial nature of the tree plantings as well.

### ***Area 2: Harris Park***

*How do you currently use this area?*

Its use is dominated by sporting fields which leave little room for any water features, such as a lagoon, to be developed. The bicycle track is squeezed between the Ex Services club and the weed choked creek with no walking track on the northern side of the creek.

*List your favourite things about this area, and why they are your favourite.*

The expansive views of the sporting fields on the northern side of the creek which have a park-like appearance.

*How would you like to see this area improved?*

With beautiful and functional water features. A sizeable lagoon or billabong to be created along with picnic facilities and perhaps some parking area on the north side to allow better access to the area. We appreciate that this could be quite controversial as it may mean that the sporting complex would need to be moved to another purpose-built area – away from the lowest point of the creeklands. Perhaps the Stronger Country Communities Fund currently on offer from the State government may present an opportunity for major funding of some new and/or improved sporting fields located above the flood zone?

In addition, there could be more plantings of shade trees for spectators around the sporting fields.

*What would you like to do in this area that you can't already do, and why?*

Recreation for tourists and residents.

### **Area 3: Civic Park**

*How do you currently use this area?*

This area is sometimes used for community events like pancakes in the park during the autumn festival. Some use the cycleway and footpath. It is generally underutilised. Quite a few relax or have picnics on the northern side of the creek where there is shade and street parking.

*List your favourite things about this area, and why they are your favourite.*

The view looking south from the northern side of the creeklands with the city in the background. The open green space allowing for community gatherings.

*How would you like to see this area improved?*

The little pond needs to be replaced with a sizeable water feature with promenades along well-designed paths to allow users to enjoy views of the water.

We support the concept of an avenue of trees such as those lining Dangar Street near the Ex Services Club that link the creeklands right up to the mall and even as far as Central Park. It would be ideal to have a beautiful walkway from the creeklands south over what is now an ugly car park towards Central Park between Dangar and Faulkner Streets.

If there were to be major re-arrangement of this area, it is possible that a theatre could be constructed on piers to ensure it would not be impacted by floods. However, the space available may be too limiting. If this is the case, then a new Performing Arts Centre needs to be planned somewhere near the heart of the city. Consideration of any such centre needs to take into account the plans put forward over many years by those who have promoted a theatre precinct. We believe that the theatres available in this city (e.g. at The Armidale School, Lazenby Hall at the University and the proposed new hall in the new 'super' high school) are inadequate facilities to attract high quality concerts and theatre productions to the

city. If designed appropriately, a large theatre could also serve as a suitable hub for large conferences in Armidale.

*What would you like to do in this area that you can't already do, and why?*

Enjoy a more beautiful, well maintained central civic area of the creeklands.

#### **Area 4: Curtis Park**

There is a need for urgent attention to the creek bed and reduce the slope of the steep sides with its stonework as well as the amount of silt on the floor of the creek.

We draw your attention to the amount of vegetation in the creek bed and its influence on the visual beauty as well as possible effect on flooding. In a separate recent submission to Council, we have raised this issue as an important maintenance problem that needs to be addressed in an ongoing fashion. If Council could develop an appropriate means of cleaning the creek that is consistent with EPA rules, it could lead to ongoing improvements to the creek.

*How do you currently use this area?*

This area is regularly used for market stalls and at times for visiting fairs and fun park attractions. The playground is used a lot by many locals and visitors, but we suggest that the playground could be made a lot more attractive with a major re-investment.

*List your favourite things about this area, and why they are your favourite.*

The open space, the playground for children and the bicycle path.

*How would you like to see this area improved?*

A better playground combined with a user-friendly, safe pedestrian bridge to facilitate the safe crossing of the creek from the northern to the southern banks. Many people would like to see the playground area concentrated and fenced on the north side of the creek, which would leave room for water pooling on the south side. The footway/cycle way would have to be moved and parking considered.

*What would you like to do in this area that you can't already do, and why?*

Enjoy more beautiful water views.

#### **Area 5: Marsh to Douglas St**

*How do you currently use this area?*

Its use is dominated by sporting fields which leave little room for any water features, such as a lagoon, to be developed.

*List your favourite things about this area, and why they are your favourite.*

The large shade trees along the edges of the creek. The sporting field is well utilised.

We appreciate the efforts of the Armidale Urban Rivercare Group and the Armidale Tree Group and their collaborators that have been instrumental in removing a lot of woody weeds and planting native species along parts of the creeklands and especially between Taylor and Douglas Streets. No doubt this has helped provide for improved corridors of plants for use by wildlife along the creek.

*How would you like to see this area improved?*

More safe and beautiful water features. If these were large in area, they could impact on the area of the sporting fields.

*What would you like to do in this area that you can't already do, and why?*

Enjoy more water views with well maintained separate walking and bicycle paths. An outdoor amphitheatre might be able to be created somewhere in this area?