



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2024-2025

Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked By: Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction

Redirection: N/A

Reference: Budget Statement E page 5 and 12

Hearing Date: 24 July 2024, 10.45am to 12pm

In relation to: Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate
and The Catchment Health Indicator Program (CHIP)

QON lodgement Date: 26 July 2024

Answer Due date: 5 August 2024

1. Is development of the western edge still on the government's agenda and if so what would be done to protect the river corridor?
2. Can you provide the latest results of this monitoring, and what actions are being taken to improve and maintain the health ratings of our catchments, particularly those rated as fair or below? Ref Strategic Indicator 2.2 measures the health of water catchments, monitored through the Catchment Health Indicator Program (CHIP).

Shane Rattenbury MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

1. The ACT Government continues to investigate the Western Edge. The investigations, and associated studies, aim to identify suitable areas for various land uses including potential urban areas, nature reserves and potential environmental offsets, and other uses for example rural and broadacre.

Several studies have been conducted in the Western Edge Investigation area (WEIA) regarding the ecological values in the river corridor. The reports are available at <https://www.planning.act.gov.au/projects-priorities/western-edge-investigation>.

Both the Murrumbidgee River and the Molonglo River run through the WEIA, and the lands within their corridors are zoned as non-urban, limiting various types of land use. The Murrumbidgee River Corridor includes five nature reserves and eight special purpose

reserves, while the Molonglo River is a nature reserve known as the Molonglo River Reserve.

2. The latest results of the Catchment Health Indicator Program (CHIP) monitoring were published in the 2023 CHIP report. The report found the highest number of excellent ratings recorded in the last 10 years. In the ACT, 51.5% of reaches were rated as Excellent or Good while 47% were rated as *Fair*. This has exceeded the target in the *Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate Strategic Plan 2022-2025* of 90% of reaches with ratings of *Fair* to *Excellent*.

Most of the reaches that were rated *Fair* obtained this rating due to high electrical conductivity ratings, low Dissolved Oxygen ratings and low waterbug and riparian condition scores. All of the reaches are part of the urban storm water system which means that they are collecting urban run-off and have limited in-stream and bank vegetation, which is lowering the waterbug and riparian condition scores. Given the urban nature of the catchment, not all reaches can have their in-stream and bank vegetation improved due to competing priorities regarding managing flooding risk and urban amenity. However, at the whole of catchment level a number of programs have been implemented to improve the catchment health.

The *Building Resilience to Drought by Establishing Drought Refuges on ACT Farms through Improved Riparian Management* project ran from 2022-2023. It was funded through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund. It was delivered across seven sites and involved five landholders in the Naas Valley, covering 8 hectares of erosion management, 10 hectares of riparian plantings, installation of off-stream water sources, 3km of fencing to exclude livestock from the river, and eight community events.

This work was then extended with ACT Government funding to the Gudgenby River where seven landholders were engaged in erosion control works, the installation of 1950 meters of fencing, the planting of 1350 seedlings to support erosion control, and the installation of off-stream water infrastructure.

A project in May 2024 to repair the Jeggaline sediment retention dam adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River near Point Hut was co-funded by the Australian and ACT Governments. A government-built dam on private property had failed and storm flows were eroding the downstream floodplain, depositing large amounts of sands in the Murrumbidgee River. The project entailed rebuilding the dam, stabilising the channel through the downstream floodplain, and making various improvements to drainage upstream to encourage the retention of stormflows in the catchment.

Trials have recently been undertaken of various new designs for constructed wetlands and other water quality infrastructure in urban parts of the ACT. The trials will both enhance our understanding of the feasibility and benefits of innovative designs and directly improve water quality. The trial involved the construction of:

- A floating wetland in the north arm of Lake Tuggeranong
- Bioretention swales at Kambah District Playing Fields 1-3
- A floating wetland in Yerrabi Pond near Amaroo
- 45 roadside drain outlets to green space in the upper catchment of Kambah
- Naturalisation of Tuggeranong Creek drain south of Johnson Drive, Calwell
- Wetland added to Belconnen Oval adjacent to Eastern Valley Way

- Stormwater recycling for irrigation of playing fields adjacent to Kett Street, Kambah

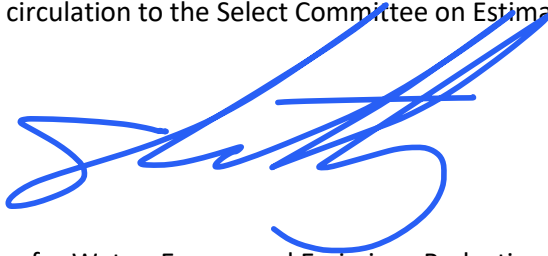
Three programs for improving catchment management practices that improve water quality have recently been piloted:

- A street sweeping experiment was conducted to measure the effects on nutrient levels in stormwater of increasing the frequency of street sweeping in suburbs to fortnightly.
- The *Leaf Collective* program was run to encourage residents to reduce the amount of leaves and grass entering gutters.
- The *Love the Lakes* program was run to motivate the minority of households using excessive amounts of fertiliser to moderate this practice.

Each of these pilot programs are designed to improve water quality while improving our understand of which are the most effective approaches to reducing nutrient pollution.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025

Signature:



Date:

6/8/24

By the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction, Shane Rattenbury MLA