



# Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2024–25

## Answer to question on notice

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Asked by: Ms Fiona Carrick MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

Redirected to: N/A

Reference: Environment Protection Policy

Hearing: 17 November 2025

In relation to: ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION POLICY

Question received: 25 November 2025

Answer Due: 02 December 2025

- 1) How have you assured yourself that biodiversity values are embedded in planning reforms to prevent piecemeal loss of green corridors during urban densification?
- 2) How will the Government operationalise the right to a healthy environment in planning and development decisions, and what resources will be allocated for compliance and education?
- 3) What biodiversity mapping studies have been completed for the ACT and how will these inform future land-use planning?
- 4) Will the completed biodiversity mapping studies be published on the ACT Environment website, and when?
- 5) What funding is allocated for biodiversity mapping and ecological surveys in the 2025–26 Budget?
- 6) What are the key initiatives funded under the Climate Change and Environment portfolio in 2025–26, and how do they address biodiversity decline?

**Suzanne Orr: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:**

- 1) The Planning Act includes sustainable development as an object. Operationalisation of this principle is being delivered through application of the Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design Guide at all relevant stages of development planning and assessment. This is supported by initiatives described in the District Strategies (Blue-Green Network) and a growing body of spatial data and decision-support tools. In addition, in development of the draft Nature Conservation Strategy

(planned for release for public consultation early in 2026), a key consideration has been preventing loss of areas important for connectivity. Ensuring long-term connectivity and conservation of the ACT's ecological values underpins the vision for the Landscape Plan.

- 2) The right to a healthy environment has been a key consideration in the development of the draft Nature Conservation Strategy and will inform the development of the Landscape Plan. Recent work completed in collaboration with the Australian National University has also delivered spatial models which represent communities' relative access to nature across urban areas of the ACT. It is anticipated this work, when published, will help contribute to the identification of key areas for retaining and improving access to nature across the city. The ACT's new right to a healthy environment commenced on 17 March 2025, through an amendment to the Human Rights Act 2004. As a result of the new provision, relevant agencies including the EPA need to consider how decisions would engage the right to a healthy environment and ensure that any limitations on the right are reasonable and proportionate. Work in 24-25 has focused on identifying how the new right can be considered in its processes.

The EPA is a mandatory referral agency under planning legislation. The Environment Protection Act 1997 (the Act) provides a clear obligation on the Authority to protect and enhance the quality of the environment and human health. When planning matters are referred to the EPA, it responds in relation to both the objects and the principles in Act, including principles of the precautionary principle, the inter-generational equity principle, the waste minimisation principle, the polluter pays principle and the principle of ecologically sustainable development.

In response to the new Planning Act 2023, the EPA reviewed its standard responses to the Planning Authority to ensure that EPA comments responding to referrals are fit for purpose and meet the contemporary requirements in the new outcomes focused Planning legislation. Major issues considered by the EPA include erosion risks, contamination impacts and associated remediation to ensure contaminated land is managed in consideration of human health and the environment and pollution impacts to land, air (including noise) and water are addressed to ensure the quality of the ACT environment is protected, restored and enhanced.

This ensures environmental, economic, social and cultural considerations are integrated in decision-making processes which support the management of a sustainable, safe, and liveable city and Territory.

- 3) and 4) Major current/recent products are as follows:
  - a. Habitat and connectivity mapping for the urban area based on expert elicitation and available remotely sensed data (published on ACTMapi);
  - b. Development of the Urban ACT Ecological Network; which identifies an early aspirational vision for a connected urban network of priority conservation areas (published on ACTMapi, the ACT Ecological Network Dashboard, and in District Strategies);

- c. Adaptation of NSW Climate Suitability Mapping for threatened species, to understand shifts in climatic suitability for at-risk species across the ACT and region (available via NSW Government spatial data platforms);
- d. Field-based Plant Community Type and Condition mapping across priority parts of the urban/peri-urban area (complete, published on ACTMapi);
- e. Innovative and bespoke new remote-sensing based mapping of Plant Community Type and Condition across the entirety of the ACT lowlands, providing much larger-scale/cheaper mapping but with a lower confidence level (in final stages);
- f. Modelling of suitable habitat for priority conservation values based on best available data sources, including both a suitability and data confidence score (in development; progress and well underway appropriateness for public release is dependent on sensitive species data policy and has not yet been determined);
- g. Mapping of critical habitat for priority threatened species and communities (early stages; timing and format of release yet to be determined);
- h. Mapping of distribution (across lowlands) and loss/gain (across urban area) of Mature Native Trees (planned to be published on ACTMapi in 2026).

These and other criteria/data sources will inform identification of high conservation value areas outside the current reserve system to be prioritised for protection from adverse impacts and for establishment of conservation management. Mechanisms for protection are subject to the ongoing development of the Nature Conservation Strategy, review of the Nature Conservation Act, and development of the Landscape Plan.

- 5) Two positions focused on biodiversity mapping were funded for a 12 month period in the 2025/2026 budget (Landscape Architect initiative) amounting to \$0.328 million. In addition, base funding dedicated to implementation of threatened species Action Plans contributes to survey and monitoring of species, ecological communities and other conservation values in the field and analysis of spatial data.
- 6) *Landscape Architect initiative*: Contributes to development of a Landscape Plan to spatially integrate and resolve at strategic landscape level the needs of urban development and nature conservation; and carry out key supporting landscape works including climate adaptation, restoration and invasive plant/animal control.

*Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon initiative*: Contributes to bringing this critically endangered species, found only in and around the ACT, back from the brink of extinction, through establishing a genetically robust insurance population to enable reintroduction to the wild over the long term.

*Maintaining the ACT's Biosecurity initiative*: Continues to fund a specialised biosecurity response capability to address biosecurity threats entering or establishing in the Territory and ensure the ACT meets its obligations under the [Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity](#) (IGAB). This initiative builds on recent Government actions in this area including the 2023-24 Budget

initiative *Strengthening our biosecurity and nature conservation programs* and the 2021-22 Budget initiative *Protecting Canberra's unique environment - Better managing invasive species*.

*Delivering offset commitments under the Gungahlin Strategic Assessment initiative:* The Government is undertaking preparation activities to best position itself for future works to meet the offset commitments required under the Gungahlin Strategic Assessment (GSA). Funding in 2025-26 will enable planning for future restoration works required for the ACT Government to remain compliant with its obligations under the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several sweeping, interconnected strokes.

Signature:

Date: 03/12/25

By the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Ms Suzanne Orr MLA