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*Estimates - QON No. E17-473

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2017-18

MR WALL MLA (CHAIR), MS CODY MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), MR COE MLA, MS LE COUTEUR MLA, MR PETERSSON MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Ms Elizabeth Lee: To ask the Minister for the Environment and Heritage

Ref: EPSDD, Strategic Objective 2, Budget paper no E, page number 7

In relation to: Water Management

1. What projects is the ACT Government engaged in to reduce and protect pollutants entering ACT water courses?
2. What are the greatest source of pollutants and what are they?
3. Where are the greatest sources of pollutants and what are they?
4. What is the current per capita target for water consumption?
5. How does this translate to water resources – ie how many years' water reserves does the ACT currently have?

MICK GENTLEMAN: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

1. **What projects is the ACT Government engaged in to reduce and protect pollutants entering ACT water courses?**

The first phase of the ACT Healthy Waterways (formerly Basin Priority) project involved comprehensive investigations into existing water quality data at a catchment level, potential water management options as well as the social expectations around water and the community's understanding of stormwater pollution.

The second phase of the project has now commenced and will see the construction of new water quality infrastructure across six priority catchments; including new wetlands, ponds, rain gardens and creek restoration. In addition to these infrastructure projects, an in-lake water quality research project and a stormwater education campaign (H2OK Keeping our Waterways Healthy) are underway, to raise awareness of water quality issues and how residents, businesses and visitors can help look after and improve our waterways. The ACT Government is also committed to ongoing management of our waterways through targeted monitoring.

The first aspect of the research project is for in-lake research in Lake Tuggeranong that will clarify the major sources and timing of in-lake pollutant release. Research specific management actions will be trialled in spring 2018 and summer of 2018-2019. The second aspect of the research project will investigate the water quality benefits of

wetting and drying regimes focusing on select urban wetlands and ponds and is expected to run over 2017-18 and 2018-19.

2. What are the greatest source of pollutants and what are they?

The targeted pollutants are phosphorus, nitrogen and suspended sediments. Phosphorus and nitrogen are transported in a variety of forms. This includes dissolved in stormwater, as a component of organic material washed into the system and attached to sediment. Sediment is contributed through erosion and is generally sourced from steeper parts of the catchments or where there is poor land cover.

Phosphorus is the critical pollutant for addressing Blue green algae in the ACT, nitrogen also is a significant contributor to the eutrophication of waterways. This is evident in algal outbreaks, excessive plant growth in water bodies and unwanted odours and biofilms. Suspended sediment contributes pollutants, creates turbidity in our waterways and smothers substrate, the habitat for important biota.

3. Where are the greatest sources of pollutants and what are they?

The greatest source of pollutant to ACT waterways is distributed stormwater runoff from our catchments.

In addition to stormwater inputs, in the case of Lake Burley Griffin, the upstream Queanbeyan sewage treatment plant contributes significant nutrient volumes.

4. What is the current per capita target for water consumption?

The water consumption target in the ACT Water Strategy – Striking the balance is a 25% reduction from the 1992 to 2001 average water use, to be achieved by 2023. This equates to approximately 130 kilolitres/person/year.

The current consumption per capita for the ACT including Queanbeyan (as water is supplied to Queanbeyan) is approximately 109 kilolitres/person/year. That is, the target is being comfortably met.

5. How does this translate to water resources – ie how many years' water reserves does the ACT currently have?

The volume of ACT water resources and reserves is based on the volume of water held in storages by Icon Water, which is 278 GL. The current storage level is 84.3 per cent of storage, thus the ACT has 234.3 GL approximately available. The ACT's gross take of water for the last 6 years is on average 48 GL. Thus the ACT's current storage equates to approximately 4 years supply.

This of course assumes that there are no inflows. Icon Water have modelled water demand assuming average future inflows and future demand for an extended period of time and the ACTs requirements are met on all occasions.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2017-18

Signature:



Date:

7/7/17

By the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Mick Gentleman

