



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Annual and Financial Report 2021-2022

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AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

2022-23 Annual Report Hearings

OPENING STATEMENT

**Rebecca Vassarotti MLA
Minister for the Environment
Minister for Heritage**

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting, the Ngunnawal people. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and acknowledge their long connection to this land and their continuing contribution to the life, culture and wellbeing of our city. I also pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are with us today.

Thank you for the opportunity to inform the Committee on environmental matters for this annual report hearing and the significant achievements that were made in 2021-22.

The protection, conservation and enhancement of the ACT's environment, heritage, water and biodiversity remains a key priority for me as the Minister for the Environment, and for this Government.

There are significant pressures facing the ACT from our growing city, climate change, pollution, extreme weather events, and invasive pests, animals and diseases. These pressures risk damaging the environment and potentially cause the extinction of some of our plants, animals and ecosystems.

The Australian State of the Environment report released in July this year highlighted that all aspects of our environment in the ACT and elsewhere are facing an increasing level and number of pressures.

This is why the ACT Government continues to implement measures to protect and enhance the ACT's environment to be resilient in the long-term and in the context of a changing climate.

The Environment, Heritage and Water Division continues to deliver on a diverse workplan, and I want to highlight some of our many achievements over the 2021-22 year.

Firstly, I am pleased to mention that two people in the division were recipients of NAIDOC awards in 2021.

- Dean Freeman was the recipient of the Caring for Country Award, and
- Carly Freeman received the VET Indigenous Student Award.

Another major highlight of 2021 was the opening of the Namarag Special Purpose Reserve adjacent to the Molonglo River. Namarag was awarded Best ACT Government Project between \$10-30 Million at the Annual Civil Contractors Federation (CCF) Awards this year.

Last financial year also marked the 39th Canberra and Region Heritage Festival, which excelled in celebrating the rich, layered heritage of the ACT and region.

Biosecurity has been a challenge under the La Nina conditions of the last few years. Accordingly, to strengthen the ACT's biosecurity, the EPSDD has established the Rapid Response team to target new incursions of invasive species.

EPSDD also has employed new spatial data technology as part of its aerial invasive animal control program, resulting in the culling of over 500 vertebrate pest animals including feral pigs, deer and goats.

Management of over-abundant native species is another focus for us. Following 20 years of ACT Government-supported fertility-control research, the use of a contraceptive vaccine GonaCon is being incorporated into the kangaroo management plan for the first time in 2022.

More broadly with environmental planning, EPSDD released the very comprehensive Canberra Nature Park Management Plan. This plan sets out our vision for managing Canberra Nature Park over the next decade. It will help us ensure that we protect and enhance our significant environmental and recreational values across all of the Park's 39 nature reserves and their remnant native vegetation in and around urban Canberra.

Conserving our threatened species is a critical part of maintaining and protecting our ecosystems. The ACT Government has therefore allocated additional funding for threatened species recovery programs such as the Grassland Earless Dragon, the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard and the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby.

A research directory of over 130 projects has been designed and launched as a searchable compendium of past, present and future scientific work by the EPSDD. This research directory has been developed as part of the EPSDD's Science Plan.

Our lakes and waterways are additional assets for Canberrans. Following the 2019 bushfires, I am pleased to report that Canberra's waterways has bounced back, with 44 reaches showing improvement in the 2021 Waterwatch Catchment Health Indicator Program (CHIP) report.

The protection of human health and the environment remains a key priority for this Government with several key environment protection policy initiatives completed. These include the long overdue review and update to the ACT's Lakes and Ponds Plan of Management and the release of the Bushfire Smoke and Air Quality Strategy 2021-25 to address natural and anthropogenic impacts from smoke on our community.

Strengthening the ACT's water security is another priority for this Government. Key to this is the establishment of a new Office of Water to deliver important reforms and new initiatives, and to facilitate greater collaboration and cooperation on managing our water into the future. I look forward to supporting Minister Rattenbury in this body of work.

I am pleased to provide this update to the Committee on the considerable work that the Environment, Heritage and Water Division continues deliver to protect and enhance the ACT's wonderful environment, our heritage, water and biodiversity, for the benefit of all Canberrans now and into the future.