



QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Portfolio: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

Murray Darling Basin (MDB) Water Reforms Within the ACT

Talking points:

- The ACT entered into a new Federation Funding Agreement ‘Implementing Reforms in the Murray-Darling Basin 2024-25 – 2027-28’ with the Australian Government on 12 September 2024.
 - Contingent on meeting each milestone outlined within the schedule, the agreement provides the ACT with up to \$2,605,000 over four years to continue implementing Murray-Darling Basin reforms in the ACT.
 - Under the schedule, priority actions for the ACT will be:
 - Contributing to activities that will inform reviews of the Basin Plan (2026) and the *Water Act 2007* (2027);
 - Continuing to progress discussions on interstate water trade arrangements consistent with requirements under the Basin Plan;
 - Supporting implementation of Commonwealth initiatives to improve outcomes for First Nations in relation to holding water entitlements; and
 - Progressing long-term environmental watering plans for the ACT and improving the ACT’s water accounting framework.
- On 14 March 2024, the ACT Government entered into an agreement with the Australian Government to provide 6.36 GL of water entitlement to the Commonwealth for supporting environmental outcomes in the Murray Darling Basin.
 - The volume of water will meet the shared reduction amount (4.9 GL) and contribute an additional 1.46 GL towards other water recovery targets.
 - This agreement is made under the Commonwealth’s water purchase framework. The Australian Government provided the ACT Government \$58.83 million in June 2024 after it received a water access entitlement for 6.36 GL.
 - This finalises the ACT’s water recovery commitment under the Basin Plan.
- To recover water equivalent to 6.36 GL/year, the ACT Government provided \$2.425 million to progress the design of various initiatives under a new Water Efficiency Program through the 2024-25 Budget (see QTB 36).
 - This program will be funded through the one-off payment of \$58.830 million from the Commonwealth to the Territory in 2023-24.

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Lead Directorate:	Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development

- The program will strive to improve the ACT's drought and climate resilience and support the ACT's long-term water security.

Key Information

- The entitlement for the Commonwealth is a new water access entitlement specifically for environmental purposes. It will not affect the ACT's urban water supply or existing water access entitlement holders. The water is available downstream of the ACT's urban areas.

Background Information

Previous Federation Funding Agreement

- During 2021-2024, the Australian Government provided approximately \$2.6 million to support the implementation of MDB water reforms within the ACT. Funding provided to the ACT for MDB reforms supported:
 - Long-term environmental water planning;
 - Basin Plan implementation monitoring, evaluation, and reporting;
 - Climate vulnerability and water security planning to build resilience in the environment and community of the ACT and surrounding region, and
 - Investigating options to deliver water for the environment by returning at least 4.9 GL to the basin.

Basin Plan Evaluation and Review

- The Basin Plan must be evaluated every 5 years. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of the Plan, as well evaluating the outcomes of the Plan.
- The next Basin Plan Evaluation will be completed in 2025 and will draw on multiple sources of evidence, including reporting conducted by Basin States and submitted in October 2024. The Evaluation will then inform the Review of the Basin Plan in 2026.

Portfolio: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

Non-potable Water Pricing Review

Talking points:

- As the new Minister for Water, I am seeking a comprehensive briefing from officials to ensure this government can implement a practical, but economically and environmentally prudent, response to the Non-Potable Water review.
- I understand the timeframe to finalise a response to the Non-potable Water Review was protracted and this government will work to resolve the matter as effectively and efficiently as possible, ensuring our stakeholders remain front of mind.
- The Government notes that addressing issues with the Water Abstraction Charge will impact both potable and non-potable water pricing, and as such will carefully consider how to coordinate the Government's responses to resolving both of these issues.

Key Information

- The Review and Government Response is restricted to non-potable water use only and will not affect potable water charges. For example, sportsgrounds that are irrigated 100% by treated drinking water are out of scope.
- Proposed policy is intended to support a nuanced approach to the application of charges for water consumption that seeks to balance the trade-off between affordability and promoting water conservation, and provide equity on policy application.
- Examples of licensed non-potable irrigators that provide community services, and pay the full Water Abstraction Charge:
 - Private schools: St Edmunds College, Canberra Grammar School, Brindabella Christian College, Canberra Rudolph Steiner School, via groundwater
 - Vikings Park sportsground Erindale, via groundwater
 - Royal Botanic Gardens, Commonwealth Park and Floriade, via Lake Burley Griffin.
- Approximately 20 ACT agricultural irrigators receive a 98 per cent discount of the Water Abstraction Charge (Competition Equalisation Payment). This is in recognition of competition with other primary producers in NSW, for providing food and produce such as apples, lucerne and grapes.
- Ten golf clubs receive a 50 per cent discount to the Water Abstraction Charge to recognise competition with interstate clubs (Market Equity Scheme). Golf courses have expressed strong concern about any potential changes that may result in cost increases and are highly protective of maintaining the Market Equity Scheme.

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Background Information

Non-potable Water Review

- The last ACT Government committed through the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement to ensure that clubs continue to support the community while reducing harm from gaming.
- A review by ACT Treasury into water costs for high-intensity club users of non-potable water was published on the YourSay website in December 2021. The aim of the review was to consider the impact of water costs on the operation of clubs while not requiring cross-subsidisation by other ACT water users.
- The Office of Water contacted almost 200 entities, including all non-potable water licensees and significant stakeholders such as Clubs ACT, Canberra Community Clubs, ACT-Monaro District Golf Association and ACT Rural Landholders Association.
- Stakeholder consultation on the policy options for the Government response to the Non-Potable Water Review occurred in June and July 2023.
- The Listening Report from public consultation was sent to stakeholders in December 2023.

National Water Reforms

- Micro economic reforms related to water pricing have been agreed by successive governments under the National Competition Policy, National Water Initiative (NWI, 2004), *Water Act 2007* (Cth) and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (2012).
- The ACT is a signatory to inter-governmental agreements that give effect to these water reforms. Specifically, the ACT has agreed to implement water pricing and institutional arrangements that promote economically efficient and sustainable use of water resources, water infrastructure assets, and government resources devoted to the management of water.
- The NWI pricing principles promotes user-pays and pricing transparency, in respect of water supply systems and cost recovery for water planning and management.

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Portfolio: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

Belconnen oval wetland and other water quality assets

Talking points

- Healthy Waterways completed construction of the \$4.3m Belconnen Oval Wetland in May 2024. Construction fences remain up while the dryland grasses are established.
- If the grassing grows well in November, the wetland will be opened to the public in early December.

Key information

- The wetland's treatment train (sequence of stormwater treatments) comprises, in order:
 - A gross pollutant trap
 - A type of pond called a sediment forebay
 - A traditional wetland with two pools and intervening shallow zones featuring waterplants (e.g. reeds and rushes) growing out of the water.
 - A subsurface wetland element, with waterplants growing in a gravel substrate.
- The wetland should filter around a third of the nutrients that drive algal blooms (nitrogen and phosphorus) and suspended sediments (eroded soils) in the stormwater draining from the Emu Creek catchment.
- Subsurface wetlands are specialised for intercepting dissolved nutrients. They act like a big hydroponic garden, with the nutrients absorbed by the waterplant's roots as the stormwater flows through the gravel substrate.
- 50% of the total phosphorus in stormwater—which drives toxic blue-green algal blooms—exists in dissolved forms and is not easily treated with traditional constructed wetlands.
- This is Australia's first subsurface wetland built for cleaning stormwater, although the technology is used as a tertiary treatment in sewage treatment works.
- Water quality monitoring points have been built into this asset at the outlet of the gross pollutant trap and inlet and outlet of the subsurface wetland, to gauge the performance of the wetland overall as well as the subsurface element.

Background

Other contracted activities related to healthy Waterways assets

- Three water quality assets are still in the two-year plant establishment phase:
 - \$3.7 million naturalisation of the Tuggeranong Creek drain near Calwell
 - \$4.3 million Belconnen Oval wetland
 - \$0.5 million Yerrabi floating wetland.

Another asset for construction

- There are no water quality assets currently under construction.

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- A final Stage 2 project to naturalise an old Tuggeranong Creek anabranch (alternative river channel running alongside a main channel) at the Tuggeranong Homestead is approved.

History of Healthy Waterways infrastructure

- Healthy Waterways is a program to address water quality and quantity problems in Canberra and the ACT through planning and on-ground actions.
- Stage 1 of ACT Healthy Waterways began in 2014 as a \$94 million joint initiative of the Australian and ACT Governments. It was completed in June 2021.
- Most of the Stage 1 funding was used to design and build 19 large water quality assets—raingardens, ponds, wetlands, and channel restorations—according to WSUD principles.
- In 2020, the ACT Government invested a further \$1 million to build a floating wetland in Lake Tuggeranong, to begin planning for the next stage of works, and to extend the research program.
- From February 2021, a total of \$29.66 million in initiative funding was invested in 4 tranches. These ‘Stage 2’ ACT Government investments were provided to fulfil the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th Legislative Assembly commitment to *Expand Healthy Waterways: \$30 million over 4 years*.
- Just over half the Stage 2 funding has been used to design and build six more constructed wetlands and other water quality assets, bringing the total number of assets built so far in Healthy Waterways to 27.
- There is enough funding to build one more wetland in the next 18 months.
- Water quality assets constructed by Healthy Waterways are primarily transferred to Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS). However, depending on the land tenure, some assets are also handed over to the Parks and Conservation Service.
- Assets are handed over to asset owners in three tranches:
 - for civil works (at construction completion),
 - dryland plantings (after 6 months) and
 - water quality plantings (after two years).

Other ACT water quality infrastructure

- There are hundreds of (mainly small) constructed ponds, wetlands and other water quality assets in the ACT.

Portfolio: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

Election Commitment – Water Quality – Lake Tuggeranong

Talking points:

- Over the past seven years, ACT Healthy Waterways (in the Office of Water) has conducted research, monitoring, modelling and other data analyses on understanding the water quality problems in Tuggeranong and solutions to them.
- This work has enabled the drafting of a Healthy Waterways Plan for Lake Tuggeranong. The plan provides Government with costed options for mitigating the pollution and algal bloom problems in Lake Tuggeranong.
- According to water quality models, the initial large assets built are intercepting 13% of the pollution destined for Lake Tuggeranong. Four additional assets have been built in the catchment in the last two years. These assets and pilot pollution prevention programs have reduced pollution levels but their impact has not yet been evaluated.

Background Information

- Water quality in Lake Tuggeranong is poor, resulting in potentially toxic blue-green algal blooms for an average of around three months in summer and closing the lake to primary (e.g. swimming) and secondary (e.g. kayaking) contact due to health risks.
- Excessive levels of faecal coliforms sometimes also occur in the lake, leading to closures.
- The main finding for Lake Tuggeranong research is that contemporary pollution from the catchment is the primary driver of algal blooms in the lake. In-lake interventions (e.g. bubblers) will have little impact until the catchment inputs of pollution can be curbed.
- Water quality modelling of all pollution mitigation options has shown that constructed wetlands and other water quality assets are necessary to intercept unavoidable pollution but are not sufficient to solve the pollution problem.
- The most effective and cost-effective options for mitigating pollution in catchments are ones that prevent the stormwater from getting polluted in the first place. An example is increasing the frequency of street sweeping.
- A second draft of the plan is under review and anticipated to be ready for community feedback in mid-2025.
- Since 2018, Healthy Waterways has invested around \$40 million to build 11 constructed wetlands and other water quality assets in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment to clean polluted stormwater.
- Over the past three years, Healthy Waterways has trialled community partnerships to prevent pollution from resident's blocks and road verges and have worked with TCCS to improve the management of Government-owned green space.
- Since many catchment pollution mitigation options involve changes to the management of blue-green corridors, Healthy Waterways plans consider how options will also affect

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other objectives for blue-green space, e.g. flooding, Ngunnawal values, urban heat, biodiversity, amenity and travel, recreation etc.

- The schedule for release of draft Healthy Waterways plans on YourSay is:
 - Lake Tuggeranong – Mid 2025
 - Yerrabi Pond – Q3r 2025
 - Lake Burley Griffin – Q1 2026
 - Lake Ginninderra – Q4 November 2026
- The aim is for the Healthy Waterways plans, and similar plans to be living documents that are updated as new knowledge comes to hand, e.g. in Lake Tuggeranong about the sources and solutions to high levels of faecal coliforms.

History

- Healthy Waterways is a program to address water quality and quantity problems in Canberra and the ACT through planning and on-ground actions.
- Stage 1 of ACT Healthy Waterways began in 2014 as a \$94 million joint initiative of the Australian and ACT Governments. It was completed in June 2021.
- In 2020, the ACT Government invested a further \$1 million to build a floating wetland in Lake Tuggeranong, to begin planning for the next stage of works, and to extend the research program.
- From February 2021, a total of \$29.66 million in ACT Government initiative funding was invested in 4 tranches. Most of the funding was for activities to June 2025, with recurrent annual funding from the 2025-26 FY for 7 FTE of staff and \$475,000 for waterway research and monitoring.
- Healthy Waterways funding has been used to:
 - Design and build 27 constructed wetlands and other water quality assets, with remaining capital funding to build one more asset.
 - Run pilot community partnership programs targeting leaves on verges and fertiliser use in residential gardens.
 - Work across Government to adopt water sensitive practices.
 - Build an evidence base—research, monitoring, data analysis and modelling—to underpin planning and on-ground actions.
 - Carry out planning and restoration activities in the rural Naas-Gudgenby River catchment.
 - Draft two of five Healthy Waterways plans for solving water quality problems in selected waterbodies. Then remaining plans will be produced over the next two years with existing funding.

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Portfolio: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

ACT Water Strategy and Traditional Custodian engagement

Talking points:

- The refreshed ACT Water Strategy and associated implementation plans will guide the next 20 years of water resource management. As well as providing an opportunity to reflect more contemporary information and emerging priorities, this Strategy is a critical opportunity to reestablish a shared vision for water that embodies the values and aspirations of Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians.
- The government recognises the need to strengthen our approach to engagement with Traditional Custodians, and other Aboriginal people with a connection to the waters across our region. This means moving beyond consultation and towards deeper collaboration.
- With that in mind, the Office of Water has procured an Aboriginal consultant to support relationship building and collaboration across a range of water resource management matters.
- Although the consultation program is supporting the development or review of several programs and documents, the ACT Water Strategy has been identified as foundational water policy and is therefore considered a priority item to progress.

Key Information

- Through the 2023-24 budget (*Safeguarding the Territory's water resources*), the ACT Office of Water has contracted engagement professional and facilitator Paul Knight (Dharawal / Yuin man) to develop and implement a consultation program with Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians and other Aboriginal people with connections to the upper Murrumbidgee River across the region.
- The consultation has been designed to help strengthen relationships between the ACT Government and First Nations communities, enhance the cultural safety and inclusiveness of water management decision-making in the ACT, and promote a greater understanding of First Nations perspectives on water issues.
- This consultation will involve working collaboratively with First Nations communities to identify their priorities, concerns, and desired levels of involvement in decision-making processes, as well as to develop a culturally safe and effective engagement strategy for the project.
- The consultation will inform and support collaboration with Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians in the development and operation of projects under the ACT Water Strategy Implementation Plan, to deliver outcomes for their communities.

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Background Information

- The *ACT Water Strategy 2014-44: Striking the Balance* (Strategy) is the ACT Government's central policy position guiding the direction of water policy within the Territory.
- In June 2022, the Government agreed to establish the Office of Water to implement priority governance reforms, including refreshing the Strategy. Since 2023, the Office of Water has been progressing a project to refresh the Strategy and the associated Implementation Plan.

Public consultation occurred between 15 May and 28 June 2024 and included a community information and feedback session, a targeted stakeholder session as well as a short and long form survey on YourSay.

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Portfolio: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

National Water Agreement

Talking points:

- The ACT, and all other Australian Governments, have committed to work on the revision of the National Water Initiative (NWI) into the National Water Agreement (NWA).
- The ACT Government is continuing to work with the Australian Government and other jurisdictions to ensure that the ACT's views are appropriately captured and addressed prior to progressing the agreement.
- The Australian Government is aiming to seek approval from Ministers to the Agreement in the first quarter of 2025.

Key Information

- It is critical that threats to water security are prepared for and managed effectively to support prosperous communities, productivity, economic growth and environmental sustainability in the context of future conditions.
- The National Water Initiative (NWI) is the shared intergovernmental agreement that underpins the sustainable management of Australia's water resources. It was created in 2004 and agreed by all Australian Governments.
- Through the National Water Initiative (NWI) Australian governments have been able to provide a clear, public narrative to give certainty on water policy for stakeholders, industry, and communities.

Proposed Changes to New Agreement

- Water management to encompass all water sources, for example stormwater and recycled water and groundwater, to support Australia's commitment to implement its international obligations including the Sustainable Development Goals and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- Actively prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' involvement and influence in water planning and management decisions.
- Support the delivery of Closing the Gap targets and support increased access to water for Cultural, spiritual, social, environmental, and economic uses, in line with principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and Closing the Gap targets.

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- An increased focus on water service provision, particularly urban water services including drinking water, stormwater, sewage treatment, reuse, recycling, and demand management.

The case for change

- Since 2004 Australia's water management landscape has changed considerably. Current water planning, management and service delivery arrangements have critical gaps, and do not adequately accommodate a more demanding and drier future, or effectively account for the aspirations and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- We are experiencing the effects of climate change and more water variability across Australia. System stressors, including:
 - longer, hotter droughts and more intense floods and bushfires are damaging the health and cultural heritage of our waterways, and the wellbeing and livelihoods of communities.
 - increased demand, with growing urban and regional populations, expanding agricultural and the need to consider water's role as part of Australia's transition to net zero and climate adaptation strategies.

Productivity Commission Inquiries into National Water Reform

- The Productivity Commission's 2017 and 2020 reports on national water reform found most jurisdictions have largely achieved their commitments under the 2004 agreement and reform has brought sizeable benefits to regional communities and irrigators; the environment; water sector and customers.
- The reports recommended renewal of the 2004 agreement to ensure Australia's primary water management framework is fit for purpose and addresses current and emerging challenges.
- The Commission recommended the following areas as priorities for water reform:
 - planning and service provision in urban water;
 - recognition of the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in water resource management, including economic interests;
 - planning principles based on best practice that account for a changing climate;
 - water accounting principles that provide confidence in water management; and
 - principles to address integrated catchment management and adaptive management.

Portfolio/s: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

Water Efficiency Program

Talking points:

- The Water Efficiency Program (WEP) aims to save 6.36 gigalitres of water per year in the ACT. This amount is equal to that granted by the ACT to the Commonwealth in June 2024.
- The objective of this Program is to improve the ACT's drought and climate resilience and support the ACT's long term water security.
- This will be achieved by improving the water efficiency of ACT schools, businesses, households and Government facilities.
- The WEP will also incorporate:
 - Water audits and irrigation upgrades for ACT sports grounds;
 - A community water efficiency education program; and
 - Measures to increase the use of non-potable water sources.

Key Information

- The Water Efficiency Program was announced in the 2024-25 ACT Budget.
- The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate is undertaking program design during 2024-25.

Background Information

- The key objective of the WEP is to save an amount of water equal to the volume of entitlements granted to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, 6.36 GL/year.
- The ACT Government received \$58.8 million for granting a 6.36 GL/year in water entitlement to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. These funds were provisioned in the Budget to fund the WEP.

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Portfolio/s: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

Water Pricing – Water Abstraction Charge Review

Talking points:

- The Government is aware that revenue collected through the Water Abstraction Charge (WAC) is considerably higher than the expenditure on water planning and management activities.
- The Government acknowledges this issue and is currently considering options to address it.
- This is a complex matter which requires the adoption of a considered and informed approach that is underpinned by a thorough understanding and assessment of the WAC's methodology. Given the wide-reaching impacts associated with any changes to water pricing, the Government will ensure that any changes are framed by an appropriate transition plan to ensure consumers are afforded additional stability.
- The Government is aware that previous stakeholder consultation on potential policy options for the Government's response to the Non-potable Water Review included a review into non-potable water pricing.
- The Government notes that addressing issues with the WAC will impact both potable and non-potable water pricing, and as such will carefully consider how to coordinate the Government's responses to resolving both these issues

Key Information

- The *State of the Lake and Waterways Report (2022)*, which was prepared by the Office for the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, recommended that the ACT Government publish an annual detailed breakdown of how WAC revenue is expended. The Government's response agreed in-principle to this recommendation, noting its support for transparency in the application of charges for cost recovery and relevant expenditure.
- The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has an existing statutory role under the *Water Act 2007 (Cth)* to monitor and report annually on regulated water charges.
 - The report includes Government expenditure and revenue for water planning and management activities within the Murray-Darling Basin.
- The ACT Government is required to collate and report its water management expenses to the ACCC each year. In 2022-23, the cost of water planning and management activities was \$13.4 million while revenue from the WAC was \$32.7 million.
- The ACT's method for calculating water charges has not been updated since the ICRC's 2003 review, with the Territory having since agreed to a number of policy and legislative instruments, including the *Water Act 2007 (Cth)*, 2010 National Water

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Initiative (NWI) Pricing Principles and the Commonwealth Water Charge Rules (WCRs).

Background Information

- The WAC is intended to recover water management costs not included in the provision of water supply, reflect the environmental costs from water abstraction, and the value of water as a natural resource.
- The WAC is separately determined for two categories of water abstracted under the *Water Resources (Fees) Determination 2024 (No 2)*, including:
 - Water taken for the purposes of urban water supply (i.e. potable/drinking water use) – \$0.71 per kilolitre in 2024-25; and
 - surface water or groundwater taken for non-potable use - \$0.344 per kilolitre in 2024-25.
- Revenue from the WAC is currently collected as consolidated revenue and is not hypothecated. Expenditure of consolidated revenue is set out in the ACT Budget.
- The WAC is set and collected by the ACT Government. The Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (ICRC) has no legislative responsibilities for setting or regulating the WAC.
- As the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, you are responsible for determining fees and charges under section 110 of the *Water Resources Act 2007*, which includes the WAC.

National Water Reforms

- Microeconomic reforms related to water pricing have been agreed by successive governments under the National Competition Policy, National Water Initiative (NWI, 2004), *Water Act 2007* (Cth) and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (2012).
- The ACT is a signatory to inter-governmental agreements that give effect to these water reforms. Specifically, the ACT has agreed to implement water pricing and institutional arrangements that promote economically efficient and sustainable use of water resources, water infrastructure assets, and government resources devoted to the management of water.
- The NWI pricing principles promotes user-pays and pricing transparency, in respect of water supply systems and cost recovery for water planning and management.

ACT Water Strategy 2014-44 Striking the Balance

- The ACT Water Strategy aims to achieve ‘an integrated and efficient water supply system that provides for the optimal mix of supply options, encourages efficient use of water, is resilient to climate variability, and secures the social, economic and environmental needs of the ACT community’.

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Portfolio/s: Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

Restoring the Upper Murrumbidgee River

Talking points:

- The ACT community have long advocated for better protections in the upper Murrumbidgee River. This is a great opportunity to deliver tangible on-ground outcomes that will better protect the environmental, cultural, social and critical human water needs that our region relies on.
- In the ACT, the funding provided by the Australian Government is supporting an expansion of current river health science and monitoring programs, involvement in a review of the water management arrangements for Snowy Hydro, on ground river restoration activities and First Nations engagement in program delivery.
- This work has potential to benefit the river well beyond the five-year timeframe of the program. Knowledge gained through research and monitoring of immediate works can help build a more effective, longer-term plan for the whole upper Murrumbidgee catchment.

Key Information

About the upper Murrumbidgee River

- The upper Murrumbidgee River is the 320km stretch of the Murrumbidgee River (a major tributary of the Murray-Darling system) that lies between its headwaters in the Kosciuszko National Park and the Burrinjuck Dam.
- The river is home to several threatened native fish (including natural, self-sustaining populations of Macquarie Perch and Murray Cod). However, only six of the nine native fish that were historically known to occur within the reach continue to be found in the river.
- The upper Murrumbidgee River supports a wide range of values: water supply (domestic, urban and agricultural), critical ecosystem functions (e.g. fish population connectivity, biodiversity, threatened species), and social and cultural (Aboriginal culture, swimming and recreation). Water quality is fundamental to maintaining these values, and this is dependent on maintaining adequate river flow and healthy catchments.

A note on Snowy Hydro

- The ACT understands that the Tantangara dam and in turn Snowy Hydro operations play a critical role in Australia meeting its 82% renewable energy target. While supportive of a renewable energy target, we are conscious that the achievement of this target should not come at a broader ecological cost. This is particularly important when the impacts of climate change are already being felt.

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About the funding agreement

- The ACT entered into a Federation Funding Agreement schedule 'Restoring the Upper Murrumbidgee River 2024-25 – 2028-29' with the Australian Government on 12 September 2024.
- Contingent on meeting each milestone outlined within the schedule, the agreement provides the ACT with up to \$7,580,000 over five years to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee River.
- The Restoring the upper Murrumbidgee River Program schedule was negotiated between the ACT Office of Water, the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.
- In line with the guiding principles in the draft strategy: Improving the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee, the ACT government will endeavour to maximise efficiencies by working closely with NSW on delivery of works and build on existing initiatives such as the ACT Water Strategy and the Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach Action Plan.

Background Information

- In November 2023, the Australian Government committed more than \$50m to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee River. This included:
 - \$15m over 3 years to address river health, water quality and habitat
 - \$5m over 5 years for new science and monitoring
 - \$5.3m over 5 years to support the review of the Snowy Water Deed
 - \$30m for additional river flows during extreme drought conditions
 - Improved annual reporting to improve transparency in Snowy Hydro water management.

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