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**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

**Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity - Report
No 14 - Inquiry into Climate Change and Just Transition**

Government Response

**Presented by
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Introduction

The ACT Government is committed to a fair and equitable transition in achieving net zero by 2045 and adapting to the impacts of climate change. The ACT Government has achieved and will maintain its commitment to 100% renewable electricity. We are recognised for our emissions reduction targets and achieved our legislated greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 40% below 1990 levels by 2020, driven largely by the ACT's investment in renewable electricity. The ACT Government has made significant progress on delivering its ambitious climate action agenda, including key initiatives that will further renewable energy innovation, emissions reduction, and climate adaptation in the ACT.

In December 2023, the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity (the Committee) established an Inquiry into climate change and a just transition. The inquiry commenced on 12 December 2023. The Committee received 15 submissions and held two public hearings on 30 April and 2 July 2024. The Committee heard from experts, peak bodies, advocacy groups, individuals, and the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. The Committee's report makes 15 recommendations. These recommendations cover a range of issues associated with the ACT's climate transition, including matters such as targeting incentives and subsidies, planning considerations, funding for non-government organisations, and children's access to nature. The recommendations are outlined and addressed in this Government Response.

ACT Government Response to the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity
Report No. 14 – Climate Change and Just Transition

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continue to implement policies and programs that are designed to assist with a just transition.

Government Response: EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Inquiry report details that the ACT Government has several active climate change and energy transition policies and programs aimed at ensuring a just transition. These include the *ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019–25* and the *Integrated Energy Plan 2024–2030* (IEP). A guiding priority of the IEP, including subsequent actions is ‘Prioritising those most in need’.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate the role that e-bikes can have in individuals transitioning from a car to a bike.

Government Response: EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICY

The ACT Government will continue to investigate the role of e-bikes in the transition to zero-emissions transport. This will be through exploring incentives to encourage e-bike uptake and exploring the rollout of a shared e-bike scheme, as committed to in the *Zero Emissions Vehicle Strategy 2022-2030* (ZEV Strategy) and the *Active Travel Plan 2024-2030* (Active Travel Plan) respectively. The Household Travel Survey may be a suitable way to understand the potential for the use of e-bikes for longer distance cycling trips.

The ACT Government encourages uptake through the e-bike library (try before you buy) as well as salary sacrificing arrangements for employees. The ACT Government-funded Canberra Electric Bike Library, operated by SEE-Change, offers a wide range of e-bikes and e-cargo bikes for Canberrans to trial for free. The Canberra Electric Bike Library continues to provide insights into the role e-bikes play in encouraging utility cycling and reducing car use. The Active Travel Plan acknowledges the role that e-bikes can play in overcoming barriers of time, distance and fitness. The shared e-scooter program allows people to try micromobility devices without the commitment of purchasing. Since both initiatives commenced, more local retailers are supplying e-bikes. Bicycle Industries Australia reports that e-bikes are the largest growth segment in the retail bike sector.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide more support for options that support low -emissions transport including the purchase of e-bikes.

Government Response: NOTED

The ACT Government will continue exploring alternative incentives to encourage uptake of electric bikes, as outlined in the response to Recommendation 2, and as committed to in the ZEV Strategy. Interest-free loans of up to \$15,000 are already available under the *Sustainable Household Scheme (SHS)* for the purchase of low-emissions transport, including electric vehicles and electric motorbikes. E-bikes are not included in the scheme.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government complete missing cycle lanes and path links in Tuggeranong, Woden, Belconnen and Ginninderry.

Government Response: EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Committee's recommendation is in line with actions within the Active Travel Plan and the government's commitments regarding new and improved footpaths and cycle lanes. An action from the Active Travel Plan is to "progressively build the identified priority missing links using protected cycleways or off-road shared or cycle path infrastructure, reviewing priorities on an annual basis". The Committee's recommendation is in line with actions within the Active Travel Plan and the government's commitments regarding new and improved footpaths and cycle lanes. Local and access path links will continue to be assessed and delivered through maintenance, renewal and missing links programs.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide more funding for cycling education and programs to encourage children and adults to ride.

Government Response: NOTED

The Active Travel Plan states that the ACT "will continue to support children, school communities and families to take up active travel". For example, the current focus for learn to ride programs is through the delivery of *Ride and Walk to School* and *It's Your Move Safe Cycle* programs delivered in primary and secondary schools respectively (as part of the broader *Schools Safety Program*). Learn to ride programs for adults (and pre-school aged children) are delivered from time to time by community groups funded by discrete grants on application (Sport and Recreation and Health Promotion, Zero Emissions). Noting implementation of the recommendation may/would be subject to consideration in future budget processes.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government set targets for active travel and milestone timelines for cycling and walking infrastructure and then set policy to meet those targets.

Government Response: EXISTING GOVERNMENT ACTION

The Active Travel Plan outlines a policy on infrastructure milestones ensuring a continuous program of works on projects from strategic corridors to access links. The aim is to provide for active travel through existing and new strategic corridor projects from planning, design through to construction.

The 2024-25 ACT Budget includes two accountability indicators with associated targets relating to the construction of cycling and walking infrastructure. These targets are set in policy; are annually reported and the results are independently audited by the ACT Audit Office. The targets include:

- a. increase in the length of community paths including cycle lanes;
- b. annual growth of the community path network including separated cycle lanes;
- c. annual active travel renewal coverage across the off-road network;
- d. annual percentage of off-road active travel renewal works undertaken on asphalt routes; and
- e. percentage of customers satisfied with the maintenance of community paths.

Detailed analysis of the Household Travel Survey may assist to understand the opportunity for mode shift (i.e. short trips currently undertaken by car that could be converted to active travel, or slightly longer trips using e-bikes).

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider zoning reforms to increase infill along planned transport corridors as part of its 'missing middle' planning priorities.

Government Response: EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICY

Both the *ACT Planning Strategy* and *District Strategies* identify opportunities for densification and the provision of more dwellings along transport corridors, and in and around our local, group and town centres. The Government is currently working on these opportunities, including as part of the 'missing middle' housing planning priorities.

To support increased housing opportunities, the Minister for Planning has committed to developing a new 'missing middle' design guide to provide guidance on how these types of housing can be delivered in a way that supports good design and community outcomes. This is being supported by a *Missing Middle Suitability Study* that is considering where missing middle could best be adopted across the Territory.

One of the key targets under the *District Strategies* is "Increase the share of all dwellings particularly missing middle and affordable housing options that are within a walkable catchment to a town centre (1,000m), group centre (800m) or local centre (400m)" (*District Strategies*, Volume 1: page 67). The ACT Government is developing the *Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework* (The Framework) to establish an integrated land-use and transport plan for the City to Woden corridor. The Framework has the potential to identify zoning reforms to increase housing density.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that when the ACT Government progresses light rail to Woden, consideration is given to transport oriented development.

Government Response: EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICY

To ensure new development near light rail best serves the Canberra community, the ACT Government has commenced planning work for land adjacent to the Stage 2B alignment. Planning work is also looking at land alongside Athllon Drive from the Woden town centre to the southern extent of Torrens and Farrer to capture ‘change areas’ and ‘key sites’ identified in the 2023 *District Strategies*. This area will be known as the Southern Gateway Corridor (the Corridor). Planning work is considering opportunities for residential, community and recreation facilities, open space, flooding and stormwater, walking and cycling connections, traffic and utility infrastructure i.e. energy, water and sewer. This planning work, along with community engagement, will inform the development of the *Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework* (the Framework – also discussed at Recommendation 7).

The Framework will be an integrated land-use and transport plan which will guide future development in the Corridor. It will reflect key ACT Government policies and priorities for sustainable growth and transport options, urban renewal, housing choice, a healthy community, climate change adaptation, and an enhanced natural environment. The Framework will guide the transformation of Adelaide Avenue into a rail corridor, with new active nodes adjacent to light rail stops. Infrastructure Canberra will continue to work collaboratively with EPSDD on the Light Rail to Woden project and consider transport-oriented development during the design stages, as was considered in the Light Rail to Gungahlin project.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government conduct a review of the thermal comfort and efficiency of current public housing properties with a view to ensuring that all properties meet the minimum required standards without compromising the targets for public housing.

Government Response: EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICY

The ACT Government is committed to improving the energy efficiency and comfort of Housing ACT properties. The *Home Energy Support Program* facilitates the improvement of ceiling insulation to meet the minimum standard and replaces existing gas appliances with efficient electric alternatives at no cost to the tenant. Up to 5,000 households are expected to benefit from the *Home Energy Support Program* by 2026.

There is a further commitment through the IEP to electrify all feasible public housing by 2030.

The *Home Energy Efficiency Program* (HEEP) complements the *Home Energy Support Program* and the minimum energy efficiency standards for rental homes by providing wrap-around support to low-income housing households to further improve thermal comfort and reduce energy bills. Services delivered under HEEP include in-home energy assessments to improve energy literacy, draughtproofing and, for selected eligible households, thermally backed curtains and pelmets. Around 50% of HEEP participants are public housing tenants. The Environment,

Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate has also been successful in securing Commonwealth funding via the Disaster Ready Fund in 2024-25 and 2025-26 to double the number of low-income households that can receive curtains and pelmets to 500/year over this two-year period.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider further financial support specifically targeted to lower-income Canberrans under the SHS.

Government Response: NOTED

The SHS has been set up as a loan scheme where the Unimproved Value (UV) eligibility criteria is used as a proxy for income. By lowering the UV for solar in 2023, the SHS has shifted the focus towards electrification and made solar available only to properties with a lower UV. Loan programs require a financial assessment of applications in line with responsible lending practices and lower income participants may not qualify for loans.

The minimum SHS loan amount is \$2,000, allowing lower-income Canberrans to apply for more affordable products which can be repaid within 10 years. The *Home Energy Support Program* offers rebates to concession card holders for energy efficient upgrades and solar that can be combined with an SHS loan.

The *Access to Electric (AtoE)* pilot program seeks to address the financial barriers to electrification for vulnerable households in the ACT. The Program supports private homeowners experiencing extreme and sustained financial hardship by fully funding electrification and energy efficiency upgrades, including heating and cooling systems, water heaters, cooktops and ceiling insulation. Support is targeted to those households that are unlikely to be able to access other ACT Government supports, including the SHS. Funding of \$5.2 million is available over two years from 2024-25 to fully electrify 350 eligible households. Following the electrification upgrades, participating households will also be disconnected from the gas network. Noting implementation of the recommendation may/would be subject to consideration in future budget processes.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider how access to nature could be increased in early childhood education and care centres, including through piloting dedicated nature pedagogy leaders in selected ACT childhood education and care services centres.

Government Response: NOTED

An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success) included the initiative to partner with Play Groups, Playschools and Nature Play Groups. In 2023 the Education Directorate released *School Community playgroups: guidelines for ACT public schools*, which supports schools, parents and school communities to establish a play group on an ACT public school site.

All early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in the ACT operate under the National Quality Framework and deliver play-based learning aligned to the *Early Years Learning Framework V2.0* (EYLF). The EYLF includes the requirement to provide access to outdoor learning spaces and to, where possible, participate and offer opportunities for children to learn on

Country. Quality early learning environments incorporate nature-based play into everyday experiences, reflective of the unique environmental context of each service.

A decision to pilot dedicated nature pedagogy leaders in selected ACT ECECs would be subject to future government consideration and would require funding to be secured through future Business Case processes.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide more funding to the mental health sector to proactively address the raft of mental health issues facing the community.

Government Response: NOTED

Mental health has been identified as a priority area for the ACT Government and new funding has been allocated for mental health services and responses in the past budgets. ACT has also signed the *National Agreement for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention* including a Bilateral Agreement with the Commonwealth that provides funding to increase mental health service accessibility and availability within the community.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government prepare an appropriate policy response to heatwaves as a major public health issue.

Government:EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICY

The recently published climate projections for the ACT from *NSW and Australian Regional Climate Modelling* (NARClIM2.0) indicate an increasingly hotter climate with an associated higher risk of heatwaves. Using the number of days per year with temperatures of 35°C or higher (hot days) as an indicator of heatwave risk, NARClIM2.0 shows that the ACT's average number of hot days per year is expected to increase. The increase in hot days is projected to be significantly higher over urban Canberra, increasing the exposure of public to heat risks. Most of the increase in hot days will occur in summer, increasing the likelihood of consecutive hot days and heatwaves.

The ACT Government has a range of strategies and policies to support the community in building resilience to effect of heatwaves, acknowledging the need to have a coordinated and comprehensive response to the growing heatwave risk across the region. These include:

- The *Climate Change Strategy 2019-25* that commits to actions that reduce emissions and increase community capacity to deal with climate change;
- The *ACT Preventive Health Plan 2023-25* that addresses climate risks to those with existing health conditions; and
- *Canberra's Living Infrastructure Plan – Cooling the City*, that outlines actions to increase tree canopy cover, surface permeability with a focus on reducing urban heat in a warming climate.

The Government also established a community grants program that focusses on improving climate resilience and reducing urban heat. The *Nature in the City: Cooling Your Suburb* program

provides grants of up to \$50,000 for projects that reduce urban heat islands and increase natural shade or otherwise demonstrate an innovative approach to urban cooling.

Other initiatives underway support positive health outcomes through appliance upgrades that make existing homes more liveable and resilient to heatwaves including:

- Sustainable Household Scheme (SHS) (see response to Recommendation 3).
- Home Energy Efficiency Program (HEEP) (see response to Recommendation 9).
- Access to Electric Pilot (AtoE) (see response to Recommendation 10).
- Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard for Rental Homes.

Community Service Organisations (CSOs) are also recognised as playing a pivotal role during extreme weather events. The ACT Government has leveraged Commonwealth funding through the Disaster Relief Fund to pilot an *Adaptation Toolkit* that provides a template for CSOs to create individualised climate adaptation plans to build resilience and capacity within the organisations so they can continue to support the ACT community with essential services, through heatwaves and natural disasters.

The ACT Government also provides guidance via the *Climate Choices* and Health Directorate websites on the physical impacts of extreme heatwave conditions to various members of the community and guidance on health focussed and community minded behaviours during these events.

To support preparedness activities, the ACT Government has an *ACT Heatwave Plan* designed to protect the community by promoting individual and community resilience and adaptation to extreme heat conditions through delivery of a planned, managed, and effective whole of government response. The Plan's objective is to minimise the heatwave related risk to the ACT community by encouraging resilience in response to and recovery from a heatwave event.

The Emergency Services Agency and ACT Health Directorate work collaboratively to ensure coordinated community advice and response activities. This includes issuing heatwave warnings detailing specific protection actions, health advice and available supports. The ACT Health Directorate also provides NGO stakeholders with messaging to support broader community messaging on heat, through trusted avenues, via distribution of a Stakeholder Toolkit.

The ACT Government has also taken action to:

- a. establish a five-year \$5 million *Building Energy Efficiency Upgrade Fund* (the Community Clubs Program), accessed by community clubs.
- b. Support clubs to become heat and smoke refuges for local communities. This included ensuring appropriate air filtration systems, and financial payments for venues designated as official extreme weather refuge sites. During the registration phase clubs were required to submit an 'Extreme Weather Plan' outlining measures they may be able to undertake to become extreme weather refuge sites. This information assists ACT Government in the development of guidelines for official extreme weather refuge sites.

The ACT Government has commenced work to develop work health and safety guidance materials in the form of a code of practice to assist persons conducting a business or undertaking their work health and safety duties for workers exposed to the risks of smoke and heat. Materials are being developed in consultation with the *ACT's Work Health and Safety Council* which comprises representative members from employer/industry and employee bodies. While work is underway in developing a code of practice, short form guidance on managing the risks of extreme heat was published on the Work Safety Group (WSG) website in December 2023. The ACT's independent safety regulator, Worksafe ACT, has also developed a *Working in Heat* webpage for managing risks of exposure to heat-related illnesses.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate volunteer firefighter attrition and work with the emergency services and volunteer firefighting organisations to improve retention.

Government Response: NOTED

Community interest in volunteering will naturally increase or decrease in line with the severity of the High-Risk Weather Season. The ACT Rural Fire Service (ACTRFS) has a sufficient volunteer workforce to respond to incidents in the ACT and the surrounding regions. The ACTRFS volunteer numbers have remained steady over the past five years. The ACTRFS is working with the volunteer workforce and the other volunteer services in the ACT Emergency Service Agency on maintaining volunteer engagement.

The need for ACT Fire & Rescue Community Fire Units to bridge any perceived gap in bushfire protection has significantly reduced due to improvements in suburb and building design.

ACT Fire & Rescue is focusing its future volunteer recruitment strategy on supporting existing Community Fire Units in older suburbs to obtain/maintain optimal membership levels

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government clarify on the ACTPS Employment Portal website the application of the National Approach in the ACT and the relevant processes to make a claim.

Government Response: AGREED

The ACT Government implemented presumptive-like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) arrangements for eligible first responders from 1 January 2022, and first responder volunteers from 1 November 2023. The extension of the existing presumptive-like administrative arrangements in relation to volunteers was communicated to impacted line agencies and directorates in November 2023. In addition, information detailing the processes to make a claim is available to access, including for workers and accessible by the public, on the ACTPS Employment Portal.

These arrangements for ACT public sector workers' compensation claims are also now formally legislated as part of changes made by the Commonwealth to the *Federal Safety, Rehabilitation*

and Compensation Act 1988 as amended by the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes) Act 2023.

The ACT Government, through the Work Safety Group in the Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy, will review the information available on the ACTPS Employment Portal and associated supporting documentation with a view to further communicating information and awareness about making a presumptive PTSD claim.