

Service Delivery – 2002-03 Budget consultation process

Report No. 2

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment

April 2002



Committee membership

Mrs Vicki Dunne, MLA (Chair)

Ms Katy Gallagher, MLA (Deputy Chair)

Ms Roslyn Dundas

Secretary: Maureen Weeks

Administration: Judy Moutia

Resolution of appointment

- (1) The following general purpose standing committees be established and each committee to inquire into and report on matters referred to it by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community:
 - (f) a Standing Committee on Planning and Environment to examine matters related to planning and land management, conservation and heritage, transport services and planning, environment and ecological sustainability.

Terms of reference

To examine the priority issues for service delivery to be considered in the 2002-2003 Budget in the areas of:

- Planning and land management
- Conservation and heritage
- Transport services and planning
- Environment and ecological sustainability

with particular reference (but not limited) to:

- the adequacy of resources provided to meet current needs
- gaps in services
- any duplication of services and areas identified for re-prioritisation.

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Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

3.2. The committee recommends that the Government investigate the implementation of programs identified by the committee in its consultation program with the community.

Recommendation 2

3.4. The committee therefore recommends that the Government release any budget consultation document with a period of at least six weeks for the committee to consult with the community.

1. Introduction

Background

1.1. On 21 February 2002, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment informed the Assembly that the committee, on 18 January 2002, had agreed to undertake an inquiry into the delivery of services in programs that come within the committee's terms of reference. The committee was responding to the invitation made by the Treasurer in a statement to the Assembly on 13 December 2001 and repeated in a letter to the committee dated 20 December 2001.

1.2. In his statement to the Assembly, the Treasurer clearly accepted that setting the budget agenda for service delivery and service prioritisation was a responsibility for Government. He went on to state that the Government also recognised that Members of the Assembly may wish to be involved in the process. The invitation was then made to committees to take up a reference, which would engage them in a community consultation program on the delivery of services within each committee's responsibilities.

1.3. It was in this context that the committee conducted its inquiry and in which this report is made. The committee did not seek to prioritise expenditure but to report to the Assembly where it was made aware of any gaps in the services provided, duplication of programs and areas where services could be enhanced.

Conduct of inquiry

1.4. The committee, together with a number of other Assembly committees advertised in *The Canberra Times* on Saturday 9 February 2002. It sought both expressions of interest and submissions relating to service delivery in the areas of planning and land management, conservation and heritage, transport services and planning and environment and ecological sustainability. The advertisement clearly stated that the work of the committee's was separate to any consultation program that the Government may undertake.

1.5. In addition to the advertisement the committee wrote to 27 organisations (see Appendix 1) drawing their attention to the advertisement and the committee's inquiry. In response the committee received as evidence 11 submissions and expressions of interest (see Appendix 2) and letters from the ACT Bushfire Council and the Commissioner for the Environment indicating that they would not be contributing to the committee's inquiry. During the inquiry the committee also received and considered a number of papers.

1.6. The committee conducted public hearings on Friday 15 March 2002 and heard evidence from 7 organisations (see Appendix 3).

1.7. The committee is appreciative of the work of those who have participated in the inquiry, particularly given its time scale. The time scale presented problems in

terms of the length of the inquiry¹. Many of those who made submissions commented that the time available was insufficient to properly consider the issues within the community groups. The committee is of the view that the limited time frame also acted as a selection process, discouraging some organisations from participating.

1.8. A further problem for the committee in its deliberations was the delay in the provision of the 2002-2003 Budget Consultation document. The Treasurer in his letter to the committee indicated that the Government, to assist the committee's work would release "an initial Budget Consultation Document in early to mid February to aid the debate on budget issues and priorities"². The Chair of the committee received the document on 28 March 2002 when much of the committee's work had been completed - submissions and evidence had been taken and the committee had already commenced its deliberations. The committee is left wondering if its work will be rendered redundant given that time did not permit it to fully consider the Government's document.

¹ The Treasurer's letter of 20 December 2002 indicated that if the results of the committee's consultation process were to be taken into the Government's budget deliberations then the committee should report by 9 April 2002.

² Letter from Treasurer, dated 20 December 2001.

2. Overview of Evidence

General Comment

2.1. As could be expected the majority of the evidence presented to the committee indicated gaps in the services provided and on occasions offered suggestions for extensions to the programs. There was also some indication of services achieving objectives and that could result in the reprioritisation of programs. Most of the evidence related to environment and conservation matters with some comments provided in relation to planning and land management and transport planning. Appendix 4 provides a summary of funding proposals with costing where such information has been provided.

2.2. During the course of the inquiry the committee also received evidence that did not directly relate to revenue raising or expenditure but issues within its areas of responsibility. These were useful for the committee to consider in the context of the work it conducts on other inquiries and were acknowledged as such.

Funding for Environment and Heritage

2.3. A number of submissions presented the committee with arguments supporting the contention that funding for environment and heritage was largely insufficient to attend to the basic tasks of maintaining the environment let alone develop any additional services.³

2.4. Appropriation for environment and heritage in the Territory's 2001-2002 budget was \$22.8 million, representing 1.1 percent of the total budget. Of this money the largest proportion was earmarked for nature conservation and land management (\$15.5 million), followed by environment management and regulation (\$5.8 million) and the smallest amount devoted to heritage (\$1.5 million.)⁴ This level of funding was not regarded to be commensurate with the task of maintaining and improving 53 percent of the Territory's land (as reserve) and the environmental issues associated with air and water⁵. The Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra (Conservation Council) argued that because current funding is relatively low a small increase in funding could make a significant impact on the current situation⁶ and a dramatic impact on the scenario for future remedial work.

2.5. Without proper management and funding it was argued that opportunities to secure a sustainable future were being passed over.

³ Submission No 10, Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra (Conservation Council), and Submission No 3, Sustainable Population of Australian, Canberra Region and op cit Uncorrected Proof Transcript, pp 32 and 35.

⁴ Budget Paper No 2 – *The 2001-2002 Budget at a Glance*, p 32.

⁵ op cit Submission No 10, p 2.

⁶ op cit Uncorrected Proof Transcript, p 24.

Sustainability

2.6. The community is aware of the Government's commitment to sustainability. While some concern was expressed about the Government's ability to develop and implement the necessary programs⁷ given the requirements of the task, other evidence was provided as to how the problems associated with environmental sustainability might be addressed.

Triple bottom line accounting

2.7. The Conservation Council argued that a commitment to long term sustainability in the Territory required the social and environmental costs of programs as well as the economic ones to be recognised. They recommended that triple bottom line accounting should be adopted by the Government. They acknowledged that the time scale for the 2002-03 budget would prohibit this but it was argued that in future budgets the accounting system should be adopted and that in the up coming budget the social and environmental implications of new policy initiatives should be considered.⁸

Strategic Planning

2.8. The need for strategic plans to provide a blue print for the future was also highlighted in a number of submissions to the committee. Programs could be assessed against these plans to establish their efficacy and this would have implications for future budget process.

Environment, Heritage and Conservation

2.9. The submission by the Friends of Grasslands to the inquiry stressed the need for the budget to address, by appropriate funding, the need to create

a long-term strategic plan for nature conservation in the ACT which would draw together work on threatened species and communities, biodiversity, catchment management, and management of Canberra nature reserves, Canberra Nature Park and Open Spaces.⁹

2.10. In developing such a strategic plan consideration would need to be given to the heritage importance of native flora and fauna. The nexus between species and habitat has been established. Programs to address threatened species should highlight this nexus and in turn link with the development of programs to restore habitats.

2.11. The submission was also critical of the current lack of resources for restoration and the associated problems of inadequate research resulting in the "use of

⁷ op cit Submission No 3, p 1

⁸ op cit Submission No 10, p 1.

⁹ Submission No 4, Friends of Grasslands, p 1.

inappropriate methods, and often use of wrong plants materials and strategies.” in revegetation¹⁰.

Transport

2.12. The North Canberra Community Council (NCCC), in their submission, called for the “preparation of a comprehensive Transport Strategy for ACT”¹¹. The NCCC contended that the current dependence on road-based transport is not sustainable – either economically, socially or environmentally and “effective, efficient and equitable transport options”¹² should be made available.

2.13. The need to move away from road-based transport to a sustainable form of transport was echoed by the Conservation Council. Encouraging such a move would have a significant impact on the Territory’s greenhouse gas emissions. Currently 22 percent of the emission is a result of transport and this is increasing¹³.

2.14. To alter the current focus on private road travel, public transport would need to become viable, investment in public transport should be reviewed and additional funding for alternative infrastructure, such as bike paths, should be provided.¹⁴

2.15. The need for transport planning was reiterated by ACTCOSS. The call was for a public transport system that was not just a commuter system but a public access transport system which could be used by the disadvantaged to access the city¹⁵.

2.16. In this context the committee notes that the Government has commenced work on developing a strategic planning framework for the development of the Territory. The committee encourages the Government to take note of these submissions when developing that framework.

Public Awareness

2.17. The committee was made aware that some programs currently funded were achieving less than optimum results because of the public’s lack of awareness of them.

2.18. The North Canberra Community Council advised the committee that the provisions for individual involvement in the planning process are not utilised because of a lack of understanding about that involvement. As examples the committee was told of the implementation of the neighbourhood planning groups in Turner was not well understood nor was the pre application development process. To rectify this problem it recommended that priority be given within the Planning and Land Management Group of the Department of Urban Services to funding the publication

¹⁰ *ibid*, p 2.

¹¹ *ibid*, p 4.

¹² *ibid*, p 4.

¹³ *op cit*, Submission No 10, p 4.

¹⁴ *ibid* and Submission No 8, North Canberra Community Council Inc, p 3.

¹⁵ *op cit* Uncorrected Proof Transcript, p 8.

of educational material to inform those who may be affected by the process of the avenues open to them to comment.¹⁶

2.19. The submission by the Conservation Council also indicated to the committee that greater community awareness and therefore participation in programs could be achieved by the relevant government authorities devoting resources to publicising the programs. It indicated that private sector organisations “regularly spend around 1/3 of their budget for a project on advertising and outreach”¹⁷. At the public hearing of 15 March the Conservation Council indicated that good programs such as the water tune up program were regarded as failures yet nothing had been done to promote the program¹⁸. Environmental education programs, which could range from advertising to school programs should be included in the funding for Environment ACT.¹⁹

2.20. The Ginninderra Catchment Group informed the committee that the ACT Waterwatch program was achieving success and continued support was required²⁰. The program “educates the community about stormwater quality issues and uses a network of volunteers to monitor water quality in the ACT”²¹.

Enforcement

2.21. During the inquiry, the committee was made aware that some programs could be more successful in achieving the stated objectives if the legislative basis on which they were built were enforced. The suggestion was that the resources were not available to properly police law breaking and the programs and good work were undermined.

2.22. An illustration of this occurring was provided by Friends of the Aranda Bushland – a group of volunteers who work, in conjunction with the Canberra Nature Park Service, to maintain, conserve and restore the Aranda bushland. In speaking of the erosion problems within the area the practice of mountain bike teams spoiling vegetation by creating new paths was described. The committee was informed that the teams further damage the environment by scoring the ground when they apply their brakes going down hills. These marks become collection sites for rain water and form erosion gullies. It is illegal for cyclists to stray from tracks.²² However, the resources to enforce the law are limited and the work of volunteer groups is compromised.

2.23. Funding for an additional eight rangers was suggested by the Friends of the Aranda Bushland and the Conservation Council.²³

¹⁶ *ibid*, pp 18 and 19.

¹⁷ *op cit* Submission No 10, p 5

¹⁸ *op cit* Uncorrected Proof Transcript, pp 27 and 28

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 5.

²⁰ Submission No 11, Ginninderra Catchment Group, p 2.

²¹ *ibid*

²² *op cit* Uncorrected Proof Transcript, p 15.

²³ Submission No 1, Friends of the Aranda Bushland.

2.24. The Conservation Council also recommended that three additional enforcement officer positions be created to ensure that the provisions of the *Environment Protection Act 1997* were adequately monitored and enforced²⁴.

2.25. The environment and conservation land management were not the only areas identified as lacking the resources to implement the law or policy. The North Canberra Community Council also indicated to the committee that PALM lacked the resources required to enforce breach of lease covenants²⁵.

2.26. The committee believes that the issue of enforcement of programs and the powers of officers to do so is critical to their success and that further work should be undertaken on the matter. It is possible, depending on its future workload, that the committee may undertake an inquiry on the matter.

Extensions of Programs

2.27. Evidence was also provide to the committee of some programs that are operating successfully to achieve objectives can be extended to other sectors of the community to further environmental issues.

Eco Business Program

2.28. One such example was the eco business program. The committee learnt that the program is a partnership between Environment ACT, ACT No Waste and the Chamber of Commerce working with the membership of the Chamber to help reduce water energy and waste of businesses. The Conservation Council recommended that the program could be extended to organisations operating in the community sector with not only an associated running cost reduction for the organisation but also environment benefits to be reaped by the whole community.²⁶

Weed Control

2.29. In the course of the inquiry the committee also was made aware of the work of volunteers in assisting in weed control in the Territory. Several witnesses indicated the good working relationship between the government bodies and volunteers in attempting to arrest the invasion of weeds in the native vegetation. Weed control is a particularly labour intensive task and without the work of volunteers the commitment required from Government resources would be prohibitive²⁷.

2.30. These volunteer groups, however, do utilise resources provided by the Government. In some instances the resources made available for their use are limited to technical advice and equipment but what is achieved represents a considerable improvement on the investment. The committee was made aware that funding for

²⁴ op cit Submission No 10, p 3.

²⁵ op cit Submission No 8, p 3.

²⁶ op cit Uncorrected Proof Transcript, p 25.

²⁷ ibid, p 14

community support positions should be considered to “ensure the continuation of these community focused natural resource management programs”²⁸.

Insulation subsidies

2.31. Another example provided in evidence of extending a program to another sector that would result in environmental benefits is the scheme which provides subsidies for home insulation. Currently, the scheme offers incentives to those who are owner occupiers²⁹. However, if the scheme were extended to the government and community housing sector and some incentive to encourage landlords of the lower rent housing to improve the thermal masses of their rental properties then there would be significant environmental impact due to the reduced use in energy.

Recycle Programs

2.32. The committee also was provided with information about programs that should be extended to ensure equality of access. One example the committee was advised of is access of those on low incomes to recycling and other environment activities³⁰.

New Programs

Wood Heater Program

2.33. Much has already been achieved in the Canberra in relation to the environmental impact from the use of solid fuel heaters. However, a new program was proposed to the committee to further the advances already made.

2.34. The Conservation Council expressed concern over the number of non-certified³¹ wood heaters that remain in the Territory and proposed that a wood heater replacement rebate scheme be established. The proposal is based on a scheme operating in Launceston (Tasmania) where a rebate of \$250 is provided on the replacement purchase of a certified heater or an alternative to the wood heater. The rebate would be dependent on the non-certified heater being updated or destroyed and not just sold on³².

Community Advocates - planning

2.35. Planning the ACT Together (PACTTT) argued that the community’s voice was not being heard in planning discussions. While the proposal from the previous Government to establish a community planning liaison officer had merit in principle, it was not going to address the problem of community involvement.

²⁸ op cit, Submission No 10, p 4.

²⁹ op cit Uncorrected Proof Transcript, p 11.

³⁰ ibid, p 10

³¹ a certified heater meets an Australian standard for pollution control – op cit Uncorrected Proof Transcript, p 26.

³² op cit Submission No 10, p 3 and Uncorrected Proof Transcript, p 26

2.36. PACTT believes that the most effective and efficient means of engaging the community in the planning process is at the grass roots level. This could be best achieved by instead of imposing a bureaucrat on the process that the money instead be used as a grant or grants to community organisations to formally act on behalf of communities and advise them in the planning matters³³.

Revenue measures

2.37. As well as suggesting areas where funding was required some organisations also addressed the question of where the money should come from.

2.38. The Conservation Council indicated to the committee that surveys provided evidence that the community was prepared to pay environmental levies if there was an associated and direct link with environmental improvement. The Conservation Council proposed the following as potential revenue options:

- environment levy of for example 5% on land rates
- increase fees for land fill but only by an amount that would not encourage illegal dumping
- redirection of expenditure on roads to public transport initiatives³⁴.

2.39. The North Canberra Community Council, in its submission also suggested that funding could be achieved by redirecting funds and identified the following areas for examination:

- participation in “bidding-down” or “under-bidding” competitive exercises
- expenditure on Government consultancies
- returns on Government expenditure supporting private events³⁵.

³³ op cit Uncorrected Proof Transcript, p 5.

³⁴ op cit Submission No 10, p 2.

³⁵ op cit Submission No 8, p 1

3. Summary and Conclusion

3.1. The committee heard evidence that conservation and environment funding is substantially below the level required to implement the programs necessary to ensure a sustainable future and that some of the programs already being implemented could be more effective with additional resources. Although the picture painted was not over-dramatised there was a clear view that dollars saved in the short term could be at the cost of the long term. The committee therefore encourages the Government to view the spending proposals made to the committee with the Territory's future in view.

Recommendation 1

3.2. The committee recommends that the Government investigate the implementation of programs identified by the committee in its consultation program with the community.

3.3. The committee considered the inquiry to be beneficial as an exercise in engaging the community. With the focus of a budget it was able to discuss the broad issues under its responsibilities with individuals and organisations within the community. The evidence provided during the inquiry has not only been viewed by the committee in the context of this inquiry alone but as a useful measure of concerns which will form a baseline for the committee's future work. It was however, regrettable that the Government's budget consultation document was not available to either the community at large or to committee members to inform their dialogue. The committee is of the view that any future role it may have in any budget consultation process should be informed from the beginning by such documentation.

Recommendation 2

3.4. The committee therefore recommends that the Government release any budget consultation document with a period of at least six weeks for the committee to consult with the community.

Vicki Dunne, MLA
Chair

5 April 2002

Appendix 1 – List of Organisations invited to participate in the Committee’s inquiry

ACT Bushfire Council

Belconnen Community Council

Bruce Business and Community Association Inc

Canberra Property Owners Association

Commissioner for the Environment

Conservation Council of the South-East Region and Canberra

Gungahlin Community Council

Housing Industry Association ACT/Southern NSW Region

Hughes Residents Association

Landcare

Lyneham/O’Connor Residents Association

Master Builders Association of the ACT

Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead

National Parks Association (ACT) Inc

National Trust of Australia (ACT)

Ngunawal ACT and District Aboriginal Council of Elders Association Inc.

Ngunawal ACT and District Indigenous Peoples Association

Ngunawal Elders Council Incorporated

North Canberra Community Council

NRMA Transport Trust

Pedal Power

Planning the ACT Together (PACTT)

Property Council of Australia ACT Division

Reid Residents Association

Rural Leasees (Harold Adams)

Tuggeranong Community Council

Weston Creek Community Council

Appendix 2 – Submissions and Expressions of Interest received by the committee

Submission No.*	Organisation/Individual
1	Friends of the Aranda Bushland
2	Property Owners Association of the ACT Inc
3	Sustainable Population Australia, Canberra Region
4	Friends of Grassland Inc
5	Ian Hay
6	Planning the ACT Together
7	Youth Coalition of the ACT
8	North Canberra Community Council Inc (Expression of Interest and Submission)
9	Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead
10	Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra
11	Ginninderra Catchment Group

*includes expressions of interest

Appendix 3 – List of Witnesses heard at Public Hearings

Organisation	Witness/position
PACTT	Mac Dickins/Convenor and Robin Brown/Yarralumla Residents Association Representative
ACTCOSS	Daniel Stubbs/Director
Friends of the Aranda Bushland	Professor Ian Falconer/Convenor
North Canberra Community Council	Katie Saxby/Secretary and Mac Dickins
Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead	Rebecca Lamb/Secretary
Conservation Council	Nicola Davies/ Director and Jenny Gillies/ Deputy President
Ginninderra Catchment Group	Nelson Quinn/ Convenor and Alex Sticpewich/Co-ordinator

Appendix 4 – Summary of Funding Proposals*

*NOTE: all costings have been provided in Submissions Nos 1 and 10

Planning and Land Management

Additional funding for:

- consultation
- public awareness about implications of planning processes
- information about developments
- enforcement of legislation for:
 - environment and conservation (cost per annum for additional enforcement officers under the Environment Protection Act - \$200,000); and
 - lease breaches

Re-prioritisation

- revenue from sale of community facility land should be channelled back into community
- land bank

Conservation and heritage

overview

Environment and heritage underfunded

Gaps

Increase number of Canberra Nature Parks service (cost per annum for additional rangers –\$5000,000)

Long term strategic plan – restore natural vegetation

Tuggeranang homestead

Transport services and planning

Overview

Transport strategy required with commitment to fund and should include travel to work survey (planning - \$500,000 plus out years for implementation)

Increase accessibility of buses – enhance schedules,
Planning of roads – Gungahlin and Northbourne Ave

Gaps

Trial travel blending programs (\$300,00)

Non-car infrastructure (\$3,000,000)

Removal of zone fares

Environment and ecological sustainability

Additional funding for:

- Environment ACT – water policy (additional \$600,000 per annum to fund staffing and programs)
- Green house emission reduction – maintain programs (\$1,000,000 per annum)
- Energy Advisory Service – improve staffing and opening times (\$250,000)
- Eco business program (\$100,000 should be directed to expand this program)
- Commissioner for Environment – staffing (\$200,000 per annum)
- No waste program (\$1,500,000 and between \$4,000,000 and \$6,000,000 in forward estimates for technologies)

Gaps

Wood heater rebate program (\$400,000 per annum)

Environmental education (\$1,000,000)

Implementation of Sullivan’s creek catchment policy

Control of feral animals, weeds and erosion

Recycling depots – accessibility

Insulation rebate – low cost private rental

Review of EER scheme

