

2023

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

2023-24 Budget Estimates

OPENING STATEMENT

**Rebecca Vassarotti MLA
Minister for the Environment**

I would like to begin by acknowledging and paying my respects to the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today, and to recognize the enduring connection of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the lands of the ACT and the wider region. I extend a warm welcome to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be present with us today. We acknowledge and respect their ongoing culture and the significant contributions they make to the life of this city and its surrounding areas.

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee today and discuss environment matters pertaining to the recently announced budget. This budget represents a continuation of the government's efforts in safeguarding, conserving, and enhancing the natural environment, cultural heritage, and ecological values of the ACT.

Despite being a relatively small jurisdiction, the ACT has consistently demonstrated leadership in various environmental areas. One recent example is our strong advocacy for the protection of the Australian Alps from the detrimental impact of feral horses, ensuring the preservation of our fragile environment and water catchments. Additionally, we have been fighting for better environmental outcomes through our engagement in the Commonwealth's nature laws reform.

The initiatives outlined in the 2023-24 Budget strike a commendable balance between immediate on-ground actions and positioning ourselves to effectively address the medium and long-term challenges posed by urban growth and a changing climate.

The effects of climate change are becoming increasingly evident, with extreme weather events posing threats to our community. Furthermore, the proliferation of invasive pests and animals presents significant risks not only to our environment but also to the economy and the well-being of our residents.

The "*Protecting Canberra's unique environment – Strengthening our biosecurity and nature conservation programs*" initiative forms a cornerstone of this budget, aiming to enhance the ACT's biosecurity and nature conservation response. This will be achieved through targeted activities such as pest control and invasive species management, improved fisheries management, habitat restoration for threatened flora and fauna, and integrating climate adaptation measures into our nature conservation efforts. By undertaking a strategic review of the ACT's biosecurity capability, we will gain valuable insights into existing and future biosecurity risks, enabling informed decisions regarding investment and resource allocation.

Additionally, this comprehensive program will facilitate a review of the *Nature Conservation Strategy*, which guides the ACT Conservator of Flora and Fauna in shaping the future of nature conservation in our region. The review process will foster a collaborative approach with both government and non-government stakeholders, promoting a strategic and prioritised conservation approach.

The budget provisions will also enable the government to undertake the initial phase of critical reforms to enhance the governance and administration of heritage matters within the ACT. This includes developing a strategic business plan to guide future actions and investing in the development of the new heritage database and website. These measures will ensure the effective preservation and management of our rich cultural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

As the Minister for the Environment, I am deeply passionate about the leadership, advocacy, and positive outcomes that the ACT government consistently delivers for our community in the realm of natural environment protection. I am pleased to share with this Committee the ACT government's continued investment in safeguarding and enhancing our local environment for the benefit and well-being of all Canberrans.