

The Select Committee on Estimates 2007 - 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today.

Trish Harrup Director The Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra. The Conservation Council is Canberra's peak non-government environment organisation representing the interests of over 30 community and conservation organisations in the ACT and Region as well as the broader environmental interests of all the citizens of the ACT. The Council's mission is to achieve the highest quality environment for Canberra and the surrounding region.

When I addressed the Select Committee on Estimates last year I expressed concern that the 2006-07 Budget and associated functional review would have significant and adverse impacts on the protection and management of the natural environment of the ACT. With adverse effect environmental policy development and environmental regulation.

The Conservation Council raised several key concerns, I will repeat these here and then discuss whether they have been subsequently addressed.

- No identifiable Minister for the Environment
- No identifiable agency for the environment – merely a branch within a division of Recreation and Land Management
- No identifiable agency head
- A single costing against a single outcome: Output 1.5 Environment, Sustainability, Heritage and Forestry Services for \$41.786m, and
- No identifiable links between accountability indicators and costings.

I am pleased to be able to report that some of those issues have been addressed.

We now have a Minister for Environment, Water and Climate Change.
We now have an identifiable agency – Environment and Recreation, and an identifiable agency head.

However, concerns remain about the lack of information provided within the Budget papers.

Last year: a single costing against a single outcome: Output 1.5 Environment, Sustainability, Heritage and Forestry Services for \$41.786m

This year:
Sustainability \$30.5 m
Land Management \$70.3 m
Environmental Regulation \$9.2 m

Firstly will comment on the size of the total environment budget. \$110.5 million of a \$3 billion dollar budget. About 3.6 per cent

Land Management, \$70 million to manage more than 50% of the land area

There is an incredibly large job to be done with the 3.6% of money, and resources have always been stretched. But the job is growing larger, as they are more people in Canberra their potential to impact on the natural environment grows. There are a number of threats to our natural environment, local national and global, that are having an increasing impact on our natural resources – including, weeds, feral animals, extended drought, scarcity of water, growing consumption, and climate change.

Also awareness and concern for environment and therefore the demands that the populace put on their governments with regard to the environment. They want their leaders to provide a high quality environment for them to enjoy, and to protect and conserve biodiversity for future generations, to deliver programs that enable people to reduce their ecological footprint, and to act on climate change.

More money is required to meet these demands.

The Conservation Council has long advocated a levy be placed on rates to provide additional dollars for environment. A 5% levy on rates and land taxes would provide over \$10m for that purpose.

With regard to our concern about accountability indicators and costing, the 2007-2008 budget has not alleviated that concern.

There are some initiatives mentioned that we welcome, for example: riparian mapping, threatened species surveys and improved management of grassy woodland reserves but there is no indication as to the actual amount of resources that will go to these initiatives.

Climate change

Last Estimates committee we said

“On the issue that is widely acknowledged as posing the greatest threat to our future – human induced climate change – this budget does not deliver a cent towards any new policies, measures or programs to curb emissions”

I am pleased to say that the 2007-2008 Budget goes someway towards redressing this problem

We welcome:

\$1m for an energy efficiency fund

legislation to measure fuel sales

both measures we have been asking gov to implement and are pleased to see they have been adopted.

We welcome:

10% renewable energy target, but are concerned that the 15% by 2020 is too low, 25% by 2020 is achievable and would provide real stimulation to the renewable energy sector in Australia.

We are pleased the government has committed \$1m per annum for four years to implement climate change actions. We look forward to a Climate Change Strategy

containing targets for deep cuts in emissions and support for the community to move away from fossil fuels.

Transport

Eighteen new CNG buses will help address the shortage of buses but the overall sustainable transport budget is not really moving us forward. An additional \$1.25 m will see some increases in bus services but is still less than last year's budget cuts. Similarly the cycle connections to Stromlo Forrest Park and the airport are welcome but there are still opportunities left sitting on the shelf given the benefits that cycling offers in reducing traffic congestion, need for car parks and improving the health of Canberrans.

Important part of the climate change response will be addressing transport, currently transport contributes about 25% of the total greenhouse emissions for the ACT. We recommend that the Act gov put together a package on transport that includes a significant increase in the bus service during peak and off peak times, consideration of how to transition the ACT to a low carbon transport system, and a community education officer based in the Conservation Council to achieve behaviour change.

Water

Spending \$2.2 million in 2007-2008 implementing TAWW

The Estimates Committee report of June 2005 recommended greater consideration be given to additional resources to implement water conservation measures of *Think Water Act Water* (page 38). Funding for this program was cut in the 2004-2005

Budget as part of government savings identified by ACT Treasury.

Expenditure on TAWW in Previous Years

Year Spent Notes

2003-04 \$280K \$280K appropriated and spent

2004-05 \$2,071K \$2,071K appropriated and spent

2005-06 \$2,018K \$2,428K appropriated minus \$410K budget cut

2006-07 \$1,740K \$1,940K appropriated minus \$200K budget cut

TOTAL \$6,109K Spent 2003-04 - 2006-07

During the 2004 election campaign ALP released "Our Environment" in which they claim Labor has invested \$10 m in this important strategy – TAWW. TAWW released 2004, total spend including 2007-2008 will be \$8.3 m

Management of Nature Cons Estate

Resources are very stretched, there are not enough on ground resources particularly rangers. More funding is needed to implement the actions arising from the excellent work done by each on woodlands grasslands and now riparian communities

Office of the Commissioner for Environment – still no increase, still no funding to meet the recommendations of the review of the office undertaken in 2003 – 2004. The Commissioner position should be funded to be full time with at least one more FTE.