

2012

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

**ACT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE
CHANGE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER REPORT 6**

**INQUIRY INTO THE ECOLOGICAL CARRYING CAPACITY OF THE ACT AND
REGION**

**Presented by
Ms Katy Gallagher MLA
Chief Minister**

Tabled 23.8.2012



**ACT Government Response to the
Standing Committee on Climate
Change Environment and Water
Report 6: Inquiry into the Ecological Carrying
Capacity of the ACT and Region**

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Introduction

The ACT Government acknowledges the important contribution that environmental management and regional engagement plays in ensuring the ecological sustainability of the ACT and the broader Australian Capital Region (ACR). The Government manages ecological sustainability through a breadth of environmental initiatives. Through these initiatives the Government seeks to: optimise the use of infrastructure; pursue sustainable urban development; minimise carbon emissions; work collaboratively with adjacent NSW councils; engage with the Commonwealth Government; develop appropriate environmental indicators; and educate the community on managing and using resources sustainably.

The Government provided information and briefings to the Standing Committee over the course of 2010 and 2011, to support its Inquiry into Ecological Carrying Capacity. In particular:

- the government provided a Submission to the Inquiry on 11 December 2010;
- Mr Simon Corbell MLA, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development and senior officials from Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate (ESDD), gave evidence to the Inquiry on 1 July 2011;
- the Chief Minister and senior officials from the Chief Minister and Cabinet Directorate (CMCD) provided information and briefings on 18 September 2011; and
- the Government also responded to various requests for information from the Committee, and provided information on various cross border agreements, and regional engagement arrangements.

Report Findings

The Inquiry Report contains a breadth of recommendations, covering numerous ecological management matters within the Territory, and inter-jurisdictionally. In summary, the Inquiry findings recommend that ACT Government provide for:

- further ecological reporting;
- community support for additional programs on sustainable use of Territory and ACT consumer resources;
- the development of modelling of the ecological amenity impact of urban development;
- reform to water management policies and operation as it pertains to reserves;
- further public accountability on the ACT's Water Strategy, and performance against that Strategy, and monitoring of expert research evidence on water management;
- implementation of integrated water management reform;
- a review of water management conservation obligations, given ACTEW provision of water management services and conservation programs;
- adoption by ACT Government of Transport efficiencies, such as: use of biofuels in transport planning and operations in the Territory and support of electric vehicles infrastructure;
- support for community garden development; and arable land preservation for food production, in Territory, and region, and composting of food waste through a municipal collection of waste, and distribution of composting;
- reform to ACT Government procurement processes, to include whole of Government life cycle environmental costing as a basis for procurement decisions; and

- the development of a TBL assessment policy for procurement, based upon whole of government life cycle costing of Government procurements.

The Report also recommends regional engagement to support reductions in ecological footprints, increases in carrying capacity of the wider region and inter-regional mitigation of the environmental impacts of population growth.

The Government Response

The Applicability of Ecological Footprinting and Carrying Capacity in Policy Dialogue

Much of the body of the Inquiry Report rests on the notion of an identifiable human population size that the ACT can support, relative to ACT's ecological footprint. Carrying capacity defined in this sense is a contested concept both analytically and from a public policy perspective.

The Government, in its submission to the Inquiry in December of 2010, expressed concern at the Committee's possible use of ecological footprinting and carrying capacity given the problems with applying such measures to influence policy. In December 2010, the Government Submission advised that due to the realities of trade and specialisation there is no direct relationship between the size of our ecological footprint and the sustainable use of the resources within our region.

While the Government views an ACT ecological footprint as a useful general indicator for the region, the Government does not view ecological footprinting as a suitable tool for deterministically informing policy making. This is because ecological footprinting cannot provide an adequate diagnostic or insight into the spatial distribution of the impact or cause of environmental pressure. Specific science-based environmental assessments provide a better means to assess such impacts, consider causality and support Government decision making.

The Government notes the various reports developed for the Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment on the ecological footprint of the Territory and the general insights that these studies have provided on the respective drivers of the Territory's footprint, such as energy use, the consumption of food, services and housing. However, the Government does not agree that carrying capacity and environmental footprinting can be applied in the fashion recommended by the Standing Committee, to inform spatial and inter-regional planning. Accordingly, the Government does not support a number of Inquiry recommendations.

A more appropriate course of action is one that uses the existing strategic planning and spatial planning mechanisms – supplemented with targeted environmental assessments, where appropriate – to support the Government in decision making on urban development and rural settlement.

The Inter-regional Relationship

The Inquiry Report suggests the ACT should drive a net reduction in environmental footprint across the wider Australian Capital Region, and engage more broadly with regional councils on a breadth of environmental matters, covering: renewable energy; resource use; water management; food security; transport management; urban development; and rural settlement. The Government is not able to unilaterally determine priorities in environmental management across the border in New South Wales, but will need to work on a collaborative basis with other jurisdictions.

The *ACT-NSW MoU for Regional Collaboration*, signed late last year, looks at opportunities to work across the region on a range of issues. While the initial priorities under the MoU include economic

opportunities, land use planning and infrastructure, as well as cross border service delivery, the issue of cross border coordination of environmental issues will be incorporated. In addition to working closely with the NSW Government, principally through the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the ACT Government has also become a member of the South East Regional Organisations of Councils (SEROC), made up of the 12 councils surrounding the ACT. Understanding the pressures faced by the adjoining councils will be advantageous in responding to the environmental issues in a coordinated way.

A Commonwealth approach to the Development of Environmental and Economic Accounting

The Inquiry Report has suggested that the ACT Government establish published dynamic modelling of the ecological, amenity, and other impacts of proposed urban developments. The Government notes that robust evidence based models that provide insight into the ecological and amenity impact of urban development options are yet to be developed in Australian regions. There are important questions of causality that need to be addressed at a spatial level.

Nevertheless, an important positive step is occurring at the Commonwealth level. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is championing a system of environmental and economic accounting across the Commonwealth. The ACT Government proposes to contribute to this approach for environmental accounting in a spatial sense, and may consider adopting this Commonwealth approach to integrating environmental, economic and social information, to better account for the economic and environmental impact of changes in land use. As this Commonwealth project moves forward the ACT Government will be able to test the feasibility and level of insight that ABS's proposed System of Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA) may provide across jurisdictions. It is likely that this system will provide the means and cross jurisdictional data needed to model the dynamic impact of urban development on the Region's economy and ecology.

Government Response to Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Commissioner for the Environment Act 1993 be amended to incorporate a formal responsibility for biennial reporting on the ACT ecological footprint.

Government Response

Not Agreed. Under the *Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act 1993* (the Act) there is a requirement for a State of the Environment Report to be released every 4 years. Any change in the current reporting timeframes specifically for the purpose of biennial reporting on the ACT ecological footprint is not considered warranted.

The ACT Government is supportive of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (the Commissioner) conducting an assessment of pressures and sustainability trends and amended the Act in May 2012 to be consistent with this approach. The Commissioner currently considers an ecological footprint as part of current reporting.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends that additional funding be provided to the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment and the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate, and community environment organisations and groups to promote a more sustainable use of resources, including reducing food waste and energy inefficiency, to reduce the ACT and ACR ecological footprints.

Government Response

Noted. The ACT Government directly funds three community groups who promote environmental and sustainability issues throughout the ACT. Funding of \$350,000 a year, across the three groups, supports the core administrative functions of the Conservation Council of the ACT, the Canberra Environment and Sustainability Resource Centre and SEE Change Inc.

The ACT Government also provides grants to community organisations and groups to promote sustainable living and more efficient resource use. For example, this year ACT Climate Change grants are funding the following projects:

- SEE-Change 2020 *Vision: A Festival of Young Ideas* - an exhibition and awards ceremony at the culmination of the project's 2011 activities (\$21,054);
- SEE-Change renewable energy consortium (\$77,830); and
- Environment Centre *Step Outside the Greenhouse: Canberra's Carbon Challenge* - a community sustainability challenge delivered via a series of workshops and ongoing feedback on progress (\$60,000).

Funding to implement *Weathering the Change Action Plan 2* and the *ACT Waste Management Strategy 2011-2025* will be sought through the usual Budget process. Future funding will be considered in the context of competing priorities as part of the annual ACT Budget.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government utilise data on demographic and environmental dynamics in published modelling of the ecological, amenity, and other impacts of proposed urban developments.

Government Response

Noted. The Government is monitoring developments in this area.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics is championing a system of environmental economic accounting across state jurisdictions in the Commonwealth. The ACT Government proposes to contribute to this approach for environmental accounting in a spatial sense, and may consider adopting this Commonwealth approach to integrating environmental, economic and social information, to better account for the economic and environmental impact of changes in land use. See: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4655.0.55.001Main%20Features42010?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4655.0.55.001&issue=2010&num=&view=>

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends that ACTEW and the ACT Government consider integrating into their water management relevant recommendations of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's Report on Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores Investigation (2011) (Reserves Report) and the ACT State of the Environment Report 2011 (2012).

Government Response

Agreed. The whole-of-Government responses to both the Commissioner's: *Report on Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores Investigation* and the Commissioner's *State of the Environment 2011 Report*, specifically identifies the Government's considerations for each of the recommendations listed in these reports.

The Government will also need to take into account its Response to the Commissioner's *Report on the Investigation into the State of Watercourses and Catchments for Lake Burley Griffin*.

The new water strategy replacing *Think water act water*, currently being drafted, will incorporate recommendations where appropriate and relevant.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government prioritise in its management of water:
(a) *reporting publicly, at least annually, on the progress of the Think water, act water strategy; and*
(b) *implementing the measures needed to achieve the strategy's target of reducing mains water consumption by 25 per cent per person by the year 2023.*

Government Response

Noted. The issues will be considered in preparation of the new draft strategy building on the success of the *Think water, act water* strategy.

The review of *Think water, act water* found the targets are being met. The draft new water strategy proposes review of programs every two years and review of the strategy against the targeted outcomes every five years.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government and ACTEW continue to monitor Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, and other expert research evidence on water management.

Government Response

Agreed. The output of these expert groups is an important input to monitoring of ACT water supply and environmental flow parameters.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government:

(a) implement, to the extent that it agreed to them, the recommendations of the ACT Auditor General's Report No. 4 of 2010 Water Demand Management: Administration of Selected Initiatives and the ACT Auditor General's Report No. 3 of 2011 The North Weston Pond Project;

(b) factor Recommendation 6 of the ACT Auditor General's Report No. 3 of 2011 The North Weston Pond Project into the Government's forthcoming review of the ACT Environment Protection Act 1997;

(c) incorporate the lessons learnt from those Reports into its integrated water management projects.

Government Response

Agreed. The Government will factor in consideration of Auditor General's recommendation into the forthcoming review of the *Environment Protection Act 1997*. The lessons learnt from these Reports have been used to strengthen project management, governance and risk management arrangements for the Canberra Integrated Urban Waterways Trial.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government examines the current situation whereby ACTEW is responsible for water conservation measures while at the same time being obliged as a Territory Owned Corporation to profit from the sale of water.

Government Response

Noted. The ACT Government (not ACTEW) is currently responsible for water conservation measures. These measures are approved by Government and implemented by ACTEW.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government: (a) monitor and incorporate developments in transport biofuels into its planning and operations; (b) continue its active support of electric vehicle infrastructure planning and roll out in the ACT; (c) continue to implement and evaluate its measures to improve public transport infrastructure and increase public transport patronage within the ACT.

Government Response

(a) Agreed.

The *Transport for Canberra* plan (page 23), identifies that ACTION will be exploring whether biofuels or other alternative fuel sources could be used in the bus fleet.

(b) Agreed.

Action 26, in the *Transport for Canberra* plan provides for a low emission vehicle strategy, including targeted policy to support electric vehicles and other low emission vehicles to be released by June 2013.

(c) Agreed.

Actions 2 to 17 in the *Transport for Canberra* plan highlight the Government's policy intent regarding enhancements to public transport. Action 33 in the plan provides for an annual update report.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Committee recommends that the Government continue to implement and evaluate its measures to increase active travel.

Government Response

Agreed. The Government's active travel policy is set out in *Transport for Canberra*, which also includes a monitoring and reporting framework for all transport modes.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government examine ways that built infrastructure proposals can be subjected to triple bottom line assessments that include robust ecological footprint analyses of the proposals' full life cycles.

Government Response

Not agreed.

The Government has developed a Triple Bottom Line (TBL) assessment framework for consideration of government policy proposals. This TBL framework, while including climate change impact analysis, does not incorporate ecological footprint analyses. The Government supports existing approaches for ecological assessment of major capital or urban development projects, as part of normal development approvals.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continue its efforts to collaborate with ACR governance bodies to develop: (a) rapid, reliable, and environmentally sustainable public transport between the ACT and wider ACR, particularly routes along which there is and/or is forecast to be, the highest amount of private motor vehicle use; (b) cost effective and environmentally sensitive renewable energy generators in suitable locations throughout the ACR.

Government Response

(a) Agreed in principle.

Action 7 in the *Transport for Canberra* plan, addresses regional transport connections. Rapid connections are a focus within the urban area, but with the exception of Queanbeyan, there is not sufficient demand to justify rapid regional transport. The *ACT-NSW MoU for Regional Collaboration* also addresses this issue.

(b) Agreed in principle.

The enabling legislation for the Large-scale Solar Feed-in-Tariff allows for the potential establishment of large-scale renewable energy generation facilities in the Australian Capital Region. While the current Solar Auction process does not provide for the establishment of facilities outside of the ACT, future capacity releases could allow for such outcome. Under such circumstances, the ACT Government would engage with appropriate State jurisdictions and local governments in order that all parties could benefit from renewable energy installations.

RECOMMENDATION 13

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider implementing those recommendations of the ACT State of the Environment Report 2011 that relate to transport and/or stationary energy uses.

Government Response

Agreed. The ACT Government response to the State of the Environment report 2011 was tabled in the Assembly on 5 June 2012 by the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development.

The Government has supported in principle recommendations relevant to stationary energy use, and supported recommendations relating to transport.

With regard to Stationary Energy, the State of the Environment Report made two recommendations:

Recommendation 12: The ACT Government develop and implement a pathway to achieve the legislated climate change emission reduction and renewable energy targets. This should be implemented through the second Action Plan of Weathering the Change...

Recommendation 14: Develop a regional approach to planning for climate change. This needs to be done in partnership with NSW Government, local councils and regional organisations. Key areas of focus should include opportunities for renewable energy development.

With regard to transport, the Government's response to recommendation 17 in the *ACT State of the Environment Report 2011* is relevant:

Recommendation 17: Finalise and implement the draft Sustainable Transport Action Plan to provide an integrated approach to transport and urban planning...

The Government supports recommendation 17 and notes the launch of the *Transport for Canberra* strategy, a plan that provides the foundation for transport planning for the next 20 years and incorporates the Government's policies on improving access and use of sustainable forms of transport. The *Transport for Canberra* strategy references a range of measures for improve sustainable transport, including:

- improving vehicle occupancy rates;
- ensuring appropriate infrastructure is provided; and
- promotion and behaviour change programs ensuring appropriate and efficient pricing of transport to encourage informed decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government maintain its support for well coordinated community gardens in locations that are highly accessible to people who walk or use public transport.

Government Response

Agreed. The ACT Government supports community gardening and recognises that growing food locally can provide broad benefits to building community health and wellbeing.

The discussion paper *Community Gardens in the ACT: draft site selection criteria for future location* identifies the basis for future sites. One important reference point is good access. This paper is currently out for consultation and when this process is completed it is anticipated that Territory and Municipal Services Directorate will produce a guideline for assessing licence applications.

The Government notes that *Transport for Canberra* includes a minimum coverage standard so that by 2021, 95% of households will be within 500m of a bus service of at least 30 minute frequency.

RECOMMENDATION 15

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government play a leadership role in ACR land use planning that preserves arable land suitable for food production throughout the ACR.

Government Response

Noted. The *ACT Planning Strategy* recognises that the issue of food production is one that must be addressed at a regional scale.

The *ACT-NSW MoU for Regional Collaboration* identifies the development of regional approaches and strategy to land use, including the conservation of land highly suitable for food production, as a key issue. The communities of the ACR are key to the decision making process about the best use of land. Any decisions will be made collaboratively through the joint governance provided under the MOU.

It is important to note that the risk of food insecurity in the ACT and Australian Capital Region is extremely low due to national specialisation in agricultural production and well developed national and international food distribution channels. It is also important to understand that regional land use planning can only have a limited impact in ensuring food security, and that many forms of agriculture in the ACT Region and across Australia are becoming increasingly spatially intensive (that is, becoming more land efficient). Accordingly, regional land use planning and the development of priorities for preservation of arable agricultural land should be informed by balanced consideration of the broader economic, social and environmental implications of land use and various regional and urban development options.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government inform its participation in ACR land use planning, by consulting with the: (a) ACR groups interested in the ecological carrying capacity implications of food production, supply, and consumption, in the context of peak oil, climate change, and consumer interest in locally produced food; (b) NSW Government about the NSW Office of Food Security and Agriculture Sustainability and NSW Strategic Regional Land Use Plans that identify the best land for agricultural uses; (c) Commonwealth Government about evidence the National Food Plan process gathered which may underpin financially and environmentally sustainable improvements to ACR food security.

Government Response

(a) Noted.

The new regional land use strategy under the *ACT-NSW MoU for Regional Collaboration* is the appropriate mechanism to consider food consumption, supply and production in a regional setting. Consultations around land use priorities will occur through this MOU process. The study *Food in the ACT*, will be provided to the Government in August. This study will assist in understanding the current circumstances and potential next steps in support of the food sector in the ACR.

(b) Noted.

The NSW office referred to is not yet operational. When the office is operating the ACT Government will consult with NSW to discuss the definition and identification of 'high quality agricultural land', as appropriate.

(c) Noted.

The Commonwealth Government's green paper to inform the *National Food Plan* has been released and a ten week public consultation has commenced. This body of knowledge and relevant Commonwealth policy perspectives will be useful references for State and Territory land use planning.

RECOMMENDATION 17

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government: (a) review the evidence on providing services that collect and compost food waste and distribute the compost to soils that most need conditioning; (b) confer with the NSW Government and the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency about crediting compost on farmlands as greenhouse gas abatement in the Carbon Farming Initiative; (c) collaborate with the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to make food wastes more marketable as per the National Waste Policy: Less Waste, More Resources Implementation Plan (2010); (d) consider implementing those recommendations of the ACT State of the Environment Report 2011 that relate to preventing and recycling food waste.

Government Response

(a) Not agreed.

Green waste collection and composting has been considered by the Government. The business case is not compelling. Organic waste recovery and recycling has been comprehensively addressed in the *ACT Waste Management Strategy 2011-2025*.

(b) Agreed.

The Government will confer with the NSW and Commonwealth Government in the context of identifying opportunities from the Carbon Farming initiative.

(c) Agreed.

The Territory will collaborate.

(d) Agreed.

The Commissioner's recommendations have been responded to in the Government Response to the *ACT State of the Environment Report*. Commentary is available in this response, specifically in relation to recommendation 18 – *Finalise and implement a new ACT Waste Management Strategy*.

The Government has already considered *ACT State of the Environment* relevant recommendations. The Government's response to these recommendation notes that the ACT has:

- made substantial progress in improving the collection and management of organic waste from the commercial sector; and
- developed a handbook for new food waste composters in 2011 and worked with two existing food waste processors to develop site specific environmental management plans.

The *ACT Waste Management Strategy 2011-2025* explicitly rejects Government provision of a domestic organic waste collection system as "a relatively expensive way to address household food waste, which would not divert even half of the organic waste currently going to landfill". Substantial research, public consultation and option evaluation was undertaken before the Government formed this view. For more information see:

http://www.environment.act.gov.au/waste/act_waste_management

RECOMMENDATION 18

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government considers creating an independent body to advise the Government on how to transition the ACT economy into one that reduces natural resources uses and greenhouse gas emissions and makes net reductions to the ACT's ecological carrying capacity.

Government Response

Noted. These matters are being addressed through the *Weathering the Change* action agenda, and do not warrant the establishment of an independent body. The Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment already advises the ACT Government on these matters.

RECOMMENDATION 19

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government sets short and long term targets for a reduction in the size of the ACT ecological footprint.

Government Response

Not agreed. The ACT Government has a range of direct targets relating to environmental impacts including legislated greenhouse gas reduction targets, the *ACT Waste Management Strategy* and ambitious resource recovery targets for waste.

RECOMMENDATION 20

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government conduct a communications campaign to raise community awareness of the impacts of purchasing decisions on the ACT and ACT ecological footprints.

Government Response

Noted. Elements of communications about environmental impacts are already addressed through Government activities, for example the online calculator and a range of Sustainability Education Programs such as ActSmart.

Third party websites that rate the carbon and ecological footprints associated with particular companies and products and services, or provide personal ecological assessments of household ecological footprints, are already available. Examples include: www.myfootprint.org and www.celsias.co.nz.

RECOMMENDATION 21

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government: (a) reviews its response to Recommendation 18 of the Inquiry into ACT Government Procurement: Report 13 (2010) by the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Public Accounts; (b) develops, implements, and reports on, a procurement system that bases its decisions to purchase goods, services and capital works on, among other things, whole of life cycle environmental costing; (c) develops a triple bottom line assessment policy that is predicated on, among other methods, whole of life cycle environmental costing of Government procurements.

Government Response

(a) Not agreed.

The Government has already responded to this recommendation. The response stands, and states that: "ACT Agencies are already required by the *Government Procurement Act 2011* to consider optimisation of whole-of-life-cycle costs in all procurements. This principle ensures that sustainability issues are considered in a way most relevant to the individual procurement activity. By considering all costs associated with a procurement, including the purchase, operating and disposal costs, the most sustainable option overall will be selected."

(b) Not agreed.

This is already considered in point (a) above. Accordingly, existing reporting mechanisms for procurement will suffice.

(c) Not agreed.

The Government is considering the implementation of Triple Bottom Line assessment framework. This will not extend to include whole-of-life-cycle environmental costing of Government procurements. Such matters are addressed through the Government's response to recommendation 21a, above. The Government's response to recommendation 11, above, is also relevant.

RECOMMENDATION 22

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government, engage with the NSW Cross Border Commissioner and ACR organisations and groups, especially Queanbeyan City, Yass Valley and Palerang Councils, to:

(a) reduce the size and the growth rate of the ACT and ACR ecological footprints and effect net gains in ecological carrying capacity; (b) prevent and mitigate the adverse environmental impacts of population growth recorded in ACT and regional state of the environment reports; (c) consider developing settlement strategies on the respective population corridors between Canberra and Yass Valley, Palerang and Queanbeyan City LGAs.

Government Response

(a) Not agreed.

The Government will continue to use Territory ecological footprints and carrying capacity estimates, as general indicators for the ACT Government.

(b) Noted.

The draft *ACT Planning Strategy*, *Weathering the Change Action Plan* and *Transport for Canberra* strategies include objectives to mitigate environmental impacts from transport and stationary energy usage and building activities and urban development. These strategies integrate consideration of transport, economic growth, demographic change, climate change and environmental issues, and incorporate the results of various types of environmental reporting.

The ACT Government will continue to ensure that urban development is managed so that the possible ecological impact of population growth is minimised. This will be pursued through existing strategic planning systems and through the development approval process.

(c) Noted.

The draft *ACT Planning Strategy* takes an integrated approach to addressing the issues associated with urban development and regional and urban settlement. Strategy 7 - Managing growth responsibly and sustainably by taking a regional approach to urban settlement - is a particularly relevant reference point for inter-regional discussion.

The focus proposed under Strategic Objective 7 in the draft *ACT Planning Strategy* balances the conservation of important natural habitats in the ACT and surrounding region, with other spatial planning obligations and touchstones.

Settlement strategies are also being addressed through implementation of the *ACT-NSW Memorandum of Understanding for Regional Collaboration* (December 2011). Under the MOU a regional plan will be developed to address land use and infrastructure issues, in collaboration with the NSW Government and surrounding local councils. Settlement issues will be considered in the context of the work arising from the MOU and the broader strategic planning priorities reflected in the draft *ACT Planning Strategy*.

RECOMMENDATION 23

The Committee recommends that: (a) the ACT Government develop ideas for improving cross ACR collaboration and discuss implementation of them with ACR leaders; (b) the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment address in the 'progressing sustainability' sections of the ACT and regional state of the environment reports the extent to which cross ACR collaboration is enabling net gains to ecological carrying capacity.

Government Response

(a) Noted.

An agenda for wider cross ACR collaboration in the field of ecological management is being defined. As this is confirmed by Government due consideration will be given to including cross ACR collaboration through other land use and environment based agreements, or within the current priorities established with ACR and NSW.

(b) Noted.

This matter is for the Commissioner to consider as part of his reporting and analysis obligations. The Government will refer this recommendation to the Commissioner for his consideration.

