

Incoming government brief

Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water



Index

Directorate Overview

Topic
Purpose
Values
Objectives
Functions and Services

Directorate Financial Overview

Topic
Capital Expenses and Injection

Portfolio Overview

Topic
Climate Change and Policy/Programs
Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience
Emissions Reductions
Environment
Energy
Water
Parks and Conservation Service

Structure

Topic
Organisation Chart
Contact List

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Portfolio Overview:

Water

Portfolio Overview

Water management and policy are critical to the well-being and sustainability of the ACT community.

Effective water management ensures that there is a secure and reliable supply of clean water for drinking, agriculture, and industry, which are all essential for public health and economic stability.

Additionally, effective water management includes river and catchment management, which is vital for maintaining water quality, supporting biodiversity, and providing recreational opportunities. By investing in robust water policies, the government can safeguard natural resources, promote environmental conservation, and support sustainable development.

Water is a fundamental resource that affects every aspect of life. With climate change intensifying water scarcity and variability, clear strategic direction and proactive water policies are crucial for building resilient communities.

Given the ACT's geographical location within New South Wales (NSW), water management is a shared responsibility between the two governments. Rivers such as the Murrumbidgee flow from NSW through the ACT and back into NSW, necessitating coordinated efforts to manage water resources effectively. This interconnectedness means that the ACT cannot operate in isolation; instead, it must collaborate closely with the NSW government to ensure sustainable water management practices that benefit both regions. This makes items such as water trading, and cross border water supply (from the ACT to NSW townships) areas of sensitivity and high interest.

The Office of Water serves as a central point for coordinating water management and policy, unifying key areas of the ACT Government.

Key responsibilities in the water portfolio includes legislation and policy for water and catchment management (administered under multiple pieces of legislation). The portfolio also includes operational delivery of the joint ACT and Commonwealth funded Healthy Waterways program to improve water quality in the ACT urban lakes and reduce urban runoff to improve the health and amenity of Canberra's urban green and blue public spaces.

The water portfolio involves working with and funding from the Commonwealth Government through the Murray–Darling Basin reforms for water projects.

The Directorate's support to you as Minister responsible for Water

The Water portfolio is supported by EPSDD through the following organisational structure

Office of the Deputy Director-General, Environment, Water and Emissions Reduction

Geoffrey Rutledge is the Deputy Director-General.

Climate Change, Energy and Water Division

Fiona Wright is the Executive Group Manager. The group ensures the ACT remains a national leader in addressing climate change, promoting sustainable energy supply and use, and managing water wisely.

Chris Hepplewhite is the Senior Director of the Office of Water.

The Office of Water contains expertise on all aspects of water policy and management such and provides advice to across the ACT public service and the Ministers on a wide variety of water matters, including: water quality, water security, hydrological modelling, data analysis, water sensitive urban design regulation and compliance, pricing, metering, aquatic and riparian ecology and catchment management.

Key initiatives in 2024-25

- Finalise and publish the **ACT Water Strategy** and progress the **ACT and Region Catchment Strategy** refresh.
- Engagement and communication plan for working with **Traditional Custodians** and other First Nations people on water management issues.
- Engagement on review of the **Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed**.
- Assess the **current and future state of the Territory's water resources** through modelling climate impacts on the water resource and establishing an annual water account.
- Improve transparency and accountability for water fees and charges (including the **Water Abstraction Charge**), that they support the relevant policy intent and Government functions.
- Assisting with the negotiation and implementation of **cross border water supply** from the ACT to NSW townships.
- Leading the ACT's participation in national water market reforms and establishing an interstate water trade framework.

Water Policy and Planning

The Office of Water's policy responsibilities include:

- Delivering legislated functions for EPSDD under the *ACT Water Resources Act 2007*
- Urban water security planning, policy and governance in the Territory.
- Interjurisdictional matters including the Murray-Darling Basin water reforms, Closing the Gap (Inland Water Target) and supporting cross-border water management
- Working with the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians and First Nations parties to advance their water interests within the region, associated with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Guiding documents include::

- *ACT Water Strategy 2014-2044*
- *Planning Act 2023*
- *Water Use and Catchment General Code*
- *Environment Protection Regulation 2005*
- *Water Quality Environmental Protection Policy*
- *ACT Water Resource Plan for Surface and Groundwater (2019)(Cth)*

Water Information Services

Data and information underpin the management of the ACT's water resources. The Office of Water (Water Information Services section) provide technical and analytical support to the policy, planning and program functions of the ACT Office of Water, and supports other government functions with information including Territory planning and water compliance.

Monitoring of water resources

EPSDD is responsible under the *Water Resources Act* to monitor the state and condition of the water resources of the ACT. This is achieved through the maintenance of multiple long-term

monitoring programs that measure the volume and quality of water resources in the ACT, including in our rivers, lakes and ponds.

The citizen science programs Waterwatch and Frogwatch are supported by the Water Information Services section

2024-25 budget initiative – Establish a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework and augment existing monitoring activities to meet statutory requirements.

Data and information management and reporting

The Office of Water manages multiple datasets and information sources to inform policy and program requirements, annual reporting (ACT and Commonwealth), ACT Wellbeing Indicator and budget accountability indicators.

2024-25 budget initiative – Planning (discovery) has commenced exploring opportunities to improve data management and accessibility for sharing water information across Government and with community.

Water Resource modelling

The Office of Water manages water resource model development and modelling analysis to inform policy development and planning for the future management of risks to the Territory's water resources.

The Territory's water resource model enables detailed scenario testing of water policy and management scenarios. Scenarios are used to assess the costs and benefits of actions in response to long-term pressures such as growth in water resource use, land use and climate change.

During 2024-25, the Office will be conducting a water resource assessment that models the impact of climate projections. The assessment outcome will inform future water available for take (abstraction), effectiveness of environmental water rules and water target setting under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Catchment Planning & Water Management

Several ACT Government Directorates and external entities play important roles in water planning and management. The Catchment Planning & Water Management section aims to have visibility of activities carried out by all such agencies and to facilitate better coordination as required.

Key agencies include:

- TCCS Directorate – manages the ACT's stormwater system
- Natural Resource Management – delivers programs to improve the health of rural rivers.
- Suburban Land Agency – develops the stormwater systems of new suburbs.
- Environmental Protection Agency – ensures compliance with Territory environmental law and regulations
- Statutory Planning and the Conservator of Flora and Fauna – assesses development applications for compliance with planning provisions including environmental and water sensitive urban design provisions.

ACT Healthy Waterways

The ACT Healthy Waterways program is tackling water pollution in the ACT's waterways the program was formed to protect and improve long-term water quality in the ACT and further downstream in the Murrumbidgee River system.

The current focus of the program is solving specific water quality problems in Canberra's three urban lakes, Yerrabi Pond and the Naas-Gudgenby-Murrumbidgee river system.

Major elements of the Healthy Waterways are:

- Creating plans for solving water quality problems in urban and rural waterways.
- Building wetlands and other water quality infrastructure in urban areas.

- Restoring rural rivers.
- Delivering programs that aim to get residents, businesses and Government to adopt less polluting catchment management practices.
- Developing an evidence base to underpin management through water monitoring, research, analysis and modelling.
- Alignment with other programs that rely heavily on blue-green corridors, relating to flood risks, biodiversity, urban heat, Traditional Custodian values, urban amenity and travel, and recreation.
- Promote coordination and alignment of water management activities (i.e. non-policy) across the ACT.

Water Efficiency Program

The key objective of this Program is to save an amount of water equal to the volume of entitlements granted to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, 6.36 GL/year.

The long-term objective of this Program is to improve the ACT's drought and climate resilience and support the ACT's long term water security. Investing in water efficiency measures will reduce per capita water demand. It will also help to ensure that the ACT's water take remains compliant with its obligation under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan 2012 to reduce take to a long-term Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL).

The program is being designed:

- to assist vulnerable households to reduce their water bills
- to reduce water bills for schools, clubs, businesses, households and ACT Government facilities;
- to reduce costs by limiting the volume of water that needs to be treated to potable standards and/or is heated by water users.

Key Legislation and Existing Intergovernmental Arrangements

ACT

The *Water Resources Act 2007* is the governing legislation for managing water resources in the ACT.

The *Environment Protection Act 1997* provides the regulatory framework to help reduce and eliminate the discharge of pollutants into air, land and water in the ACT.

The *Utilities Act 2000* sets out a range of the licensing requirements and conditions for utilities, including water services, sewerage services and water supply networks. The Act also provides for regulations to set water conservation measures and water restrictions.

The *Utilities (Technical Regulation) Act 2014* establishes the technical standards and regulatory framework for utilities, including electricity, gas, water, and sewerage services.

Commonwealth

- *National Water Initiative 2004/National Water Agreement*
- *Water Act 2007*
- *Basin Plan 2012*

Intergovernmental responsibilities for the ACT are led by EPSDD and delivered through:

- Water Ministerial Council – National water reforms
- Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council
- Basin Officials Committee

Key Stakeholders

Australian Government – The Australian Government is responsible for national water policy reforms, including the *Water Act 2007*, National Water Agreement and water quality guidelines, implementation of the Basin Plan 2012 and management of Lake Burley Griffin.

Key stakeholders:

- National Capital Authority (Cth)
- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (Cth)
- Murray Darling Basin Authority
- Inspector General of Water Compliance (Cth)

NSW Government – The NSW government is responsible for management of the water resources that enter and leave the ACT via the Queanbeyan and Murrumbidgee rivers. The ACT currently provides bulk drinking water supply services to Queanbeyan.

Key stakeholder is the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

Regional and local

- Local Governments – Snowy-Monaro, Yass, Queanbeyan-Palerang.
- Seven ACT Community Councils
- Three ACT Catchment Groups
Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network

Upcoming Cabinet and Assembly Items

ACT Water Trade Policy and Framework

MDB & Upper Murrumbidgee FFAs

National Water Agreement

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope

Out of scope