

2020

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

**Response to the Assembly Resolution of 25 October 2017
- to protect and increase Canberra's Tree Canopy Coverage**

**Mr Chris Steel MLA
Minister for City Services**

Madam Speaker, Canberra's incredible tree canopy is part of what makes our city such a great place to live.

This year its importance has been highlighted as we experienced one of the most significant and prolonged bush fire seasons we have ever seen. Our urban forest is important for more than just its beautiful aesthetics, it contributes to the wellbeing of our community, wildlife and environment.

Since I was last able to update the Assembly on in October 2019, the ACT Government has made further progress in protecting and increasing our canopy coverage.

Following the release of the ACT's Living Infrastructure Plan late last year, we have been focussed on outlining our plan to achieve 30% canopy coverage by 2045.

On 20 July 2020 I released a draft of Canberra's Urban Forest Strategy for public consultation. The Strategy will provide a pathway to achieve our canopy cover target, while also setting out what we will need to do to ensure our urban forest remains resilient to a changing climate and to help cool our city. Doing this will require protection, maintenance, education, conservation, community partnerships and the planting of over 450,000 trees according to recent modelling undertaken by the CSIRO.

We have already started this effort through the planting of close to 25,000 between 2019 and 2023. This is the most significant investment in Canberra's urban forest this century. We are committed to not only planting more trees, but also ensuring they receive the necessary care and maintenance over their lifespan so they can thrive.

That's why this Government has provided more resources and equipment, and hired additional staff, to ensure the urban forest is well maintained.

In 2019 we commenced the review of the *Tree Protection Act 2003* through the release of a discussion paper and a community engagement process. The Tree Protection Act sets out how we manage trees, primarily on leased land, and currently has a focus on protecting individual trees, rather than the broader urban forest. In undertaking this review, we want to develop a framework to manage trees that supports our objective to increase tree canopy cover overall.

To do this we have commenced a serious discussion with the community about creating a no-net-loss offset system. We are also considering a more streamlined processes for decision making under the Tree Protection Act, and an outcomes-focused criteria for the removal of trees.

The motion in 2017 also called for a review of the Territory Plan and Infrastructure Design Standards and I was pleased to report on the Government's progress in this respect in October last year. This included the release of the ACT Planning Strategy in December 2018. The ACT Planning Review is still underway and looks at the *Planning and Development Act 2007* and the Territory Plan and how they form the ACT planning system. As part of this review, relevant government policies such as those in the Living Infrastructure Plan, will be incorporated into the Territory Plan to enable them to be taken into consideration in the development assessment process. New TCCS Infrastructure Design Standards were released in April 2019 as part of this broader piece of work.

Madam Speaker I am confident in the plan our Government has set out to protect and grow our canopy cover over the coming decades and beyond and look forward to working with the Canberra community to achieve this goal.