

Portfolio: Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction**WATER QUALITY (BLUE GREEN ALGAE)****Talking points:**

- The water quality of the ACT's lakes, ponds and waterways is vital to supporting the environmental, biodiversity, amenity, and recreation values of these locations.
- Water quality is dependent on the condition of the catchments and levels of nutrient or other chemical pollution in those catchments.
- The Healthy Waterways Program and water governance reforms are key elements of the Government's strategy to improve the health of our lakes and waterways.
- \$14 million was committed by the ACT Government in April 2022 to expand the Healthy Waterways initiative. This investment will deliver catchment planning and the construction of new water quality assets to target the sources of pollution entering our lakes and ponds.
- The 2022-23 Budget commits \$1.58 million of additional funding across the next two years to establish the new Office of Water. The Office will conduct a refresh of the ACT Water Strategy to support holistic planning and coordination of water management activities.
- The quality of drinking water is managed by Icon Water to Australian standards.

Key Information:Lake and Waterways Closures

- As of 8 September 2022, all sites are open for swimming (primary contact recreation). This includes sites at Lake Ginninderra, Lake Tuggeranong, Murrumbidgee River, Paddy's River and Lake Burley Griffin.
- Lake and river closure information can change rapidly. For up-to-date information on all waterways, we have an online reporting tool:
https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/news/water_quality_in_our_lakes_and_ponds
 - The Environmental Protection Authority monitors lake water quality for blue-green algae.
- For information on Lake Burley Griffin, visit The Swim Guide, press Go to Map and zoom in to the lake. Also see the NCA website for this waterway.
- Blue-green algae outbreaks occur due to a combination of high temperatures, high nutrient levels and calm weather conditions. These conditions commonly occur in several lakes across the ACT; in particular, in Lake Tuggeranong during the warmer months.
- Blue-green algae blooms are naturally occurring, but urban run-off contributes excessive nutrients to the lake which increases the frequency and duration of algal blooms.

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- Bacteria (Enterococci) levels are known to become elevated after rainfall due to run-off from stormwater pipes, grazing land and upstream water bodies. The ACT Health Protection Service conducts water testing for bacteria (Enterococci).

ACT Water Governance:

- The ACT Government committed through the Parliamentary Agreement to consider the best administrative arrangements to manage new water programs and provide a holistic and coordinated approach to water programs and policy.
- The 2022-23 Budget commits \$1.58M of additional funding across the next two years to establish a new Office of Water to deliver governance reforms. The outcomes of these reforms will:
 - establish a pathway to achieve good governance arrangements for providing efficient, effective water management within the ACT and surrounding region;
 - strengthen the treatment of strategic risks associated with future water security and compliance with Murray-Darling Basin reform commitments;
 - enhance long-term planning for water security, water quality and catchment condition for the ACT.
- The governance reforms provide the foundation to strengthen the ACT Government's response to the water and catchment management issues identified in the 2022 State of the Lakes and Waterways report by the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

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Portfolio: Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction**HEALTHY WATERWAYS (BASIN PROJECT)****Talking points:**

- The government continues to invest in new stormwater infrastructure as a means to help improve the quality of stormwater entering Canberras creeks, lakes, and rivers.
- A Planning Phase report was completed earlier this year that includes designs, feasibility assessments and costings for 11 new water quality assets across the ACT.
- Assets with innovative designs were selected to expand the ‘water sensitive urban design’ options to help address the ACT’s water quality.
- The program of up to 11 new water quality assets is progressing through design acceptance and development approval using funding from the \$14 million budget injection in April 2022. Assets that performed best (removed the most pollutant), among those explored within 6 subcatchments were;
 - A subsurface wetland in Belconnen Oval.
 - The naturalisation of three creeks/drains in Calwell, Richardson, and Isabella Plains.
 - Three facilities to intercept, clean and re-use stormwater in Kambah (2) and Wanniasa.
 - Two bioretention swales in Holt and Kambah. The Holt swale accesses stormwater in a new way using a solar pump. The Kambah swale is associated with a larger raingarden that is also being constructed.
 - Four small, ‘pocket’ raingardens are being placed in green space within Fadden.
 - Thirty-eight drain outlets, linking small drains to adjacent green space, to help renaturalise our urban catchments.
- Four bioretention swales have been built to replace existing grass swales draining the Kambah Playing Fields to help address the water quality of Lake Tuggeranong..
- The floating wetland planned for Yerrabi Pond has (after 11 months) received design acceptance. The wetland is now expected to be fully deployed in October.
- The small size of some of these assets allows existing stormwater assets to be ‘retrofitted’ within existing suburbs.
- The Leaf Collective social channels and website are being maintained to keep them current and active in advance of another summer campaign targeting household management of leaf fall and grass clippings in yards and in bordering suburban streets. Griffith University is being procured to run the next Leaf Collective campaign, which marks the start of a rollout of the public education program across Canberra. This summer’s campaign will be limited to two post codes — one in Tuggeranong and one

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in Gungahlin above Yerrabi pond. An evaluation report for last summer's Leaf Collective campaign found it doubled levels of awareness of messaging compared to the previous pilot. The Leaf Collective messaging resulted in 45 per cent of respondents changing their behaviors, compared with 25 per cent of respondents who had not received the messaging.

- A project restoring the rural/conservation catchment of the Naas/Gudgenby River has commenced. Procurements are underway to draft a catchment plan for the area and to undertake riparian restoration activities.

Other Information

- The Office of Water continues to grow with recruitment underway for staff to join the Healthy Waterways team. These include a data engineer, a water quality modeler, a catchment planner and a program support officer.
- The funding announced in April 2022 is also —
 - Enabling the Government to work internally and to engage externally with public and private landowners to reduce fertiliser use in catchments.
 - Extending the research in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment to track down the sources of water pollution so these can be addressed via infrastructure and programs like The Leaf Collective.
 - Helping the Government develop new modelling and reporting tools to better manage water quality.

Background:

- ACT Healthy Waterways aims to reduce sediment and nutrient pollution of ACT lakes and waterways, and the problems that the pollution causes like algal blooms.
 - 'Stage 1' of ACT Healthy Waterways, begun in 2014 as a \$94 million joint initiative of the Australian and ACT Governments. It was completed in June 2021. Stage 1:
 - Designed and built 19 large water quality assets—raingardens, ponds, wetlands, and channel restorations—according to water sensitive urban design principles.
 - Carried out a major riparian restoration.
 - Conducted a public education/behavioral change program, known as *H2OK: Keeping our Waterways Healthy*.
 - Performed research into pollution, blue-green algal blooms, and control methods.

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QUEANBEYAN SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT

Talking points:

- The Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) has proposed the construction of a new sewage treatment plant near Oaks Estate, to serve future population needs and address ageing infrastructure.
- The proposal is nearing the end of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. The EIS submitted by QPRC is now being considered for whether it provides sufficient information on the environmental impacts to proceed to Development Assessment.
- The ACT Environment Protection Authority is in discussion with QPRC to review the licence conditions for the Queanbeyan Sewage Treatment Plant (QSTP). These conditions set limits on operational arrangements to minimise water quality impacts.
- The ACT Conservator reviewed the revised EIS documentation and provided comments in June 2022 about potential impacts from the proposed infrastructure on Lake Burley Griffin's water quality, aquatic biodiversity and public amenity. QPRC are responding to the comments.

Key Information

- The existing QSTP is estimated to have a design capacity for 34,500 Equivalent Persons (EP) but currently services about 52,000 EP.
- The plant is meeting the existing effluent licence conditions, however, to protect the lake's values would require more stringent discharge conditions that are unlikely to be met by the current infrastructure. The existing plant is also unlikely to continue meeting the existing licence conditions under the projected population growth in Queanbeyan.
- The 2022 *State of the Lakes and Waterways in the ACT* report by the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment recommends review of the Environmental Authorisation (licence to pollute) held by QPRC, to ensure the proposed new treatment process results in water discharge quality that matches best practice for a modern urban sewage treatment plant.
- A 2012 report by the OCSE estimated that continued deterioration in the quality and reliability of Lake Burley Griffin as a sporting venue creates an economic cost to the ACT and region of around \$25 million per annum.
- Water quality within Lake Burley Griffin results in regular closures for primary human contact due to blue-green algae and bacterial levels that exceed human health guidelines.

Background Information

Environmental Impact Assessment

- Section 123 of the *Planning and Development Act 2007* identifies assessment of the proposal as Impact Track requiring an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Specifically, the proposal includes activities identified in Schedule 4 of the Act which triggers an EIS: “*construction of a sewage treatment plant that will be less than one kilometre from the boundary of a residential block and will be able to treat each day more than 2,500 equivalent persons*”.
- The ACT Conservator raised concerns on a draft EIS in March 2021. Concerns included impacts to aquatic biodiversity and water quality and noted the socio-economic and cultural significance of Lake Burley Griffin.
- A revised EIS was submitted by QPRC on 26 April 2022 to the Planning and Land Authority. The EIS was subsequently referred to the ACT Conservator for comment on whether the draft EIS adequately addressed previous comments.
- The authority has since undertaken an assessment of the revised EIS and on 30 June 2022, provided notice to the proponent requesting further information in accordance with s224 of the *Planning and Development Act 2007*. The proponent must now provide a revised EIS to address unaddressed matters by 30 March 2023.
- Once the Authority is satisfied, the Minister for Planning and Land Management will need to consider if the EIS provides an acceptable level of information on the environmental impacts of the development. This step is required prior to allowing the QPRC to apply for development application for the proposed QSTP upgrades.

Background on development

- The existing QSTP was built in the mid-1930s and is located within the Jerrabomberra district of the ACT. The plant processes sewage from NSW and Oaks Estate (in the ACT) and discharges treated effluent into the Molonglo River.
- A study commissioned in 2011 recommended a major upgrade to the plant, but those upgrades were not carried out. Since 2011, the condition of the QSTP has continued to deteriorate while the local population has increased. This has resulted in exceedance of the design capacity of the plant.

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Murray Darling Basin Water Reforms

Talking points:

- The Murray-Darling Basin Plan provides a framework to guide the sustainable management of water resources in a way that balances the needs of the environment, communities, and industry.
- Implementing the Basin water reforms is a collaboration between Basin governments. These reforms provide the appropriate scale of management, across State and Territory borders, to respond to our climate emergency and safeguard the long-term security of our water resources.
 - The poor health of the upper Murrumbidgee River is a testament to the importance of cross-border collaboration on water management.
 - We are working with NSW water managers to establish arrangements that protect our native fish populations and avoid future instances, such as in 2019, where the Murrumbidgee River ceases to flow.
- The Australian Government has recently committed to providing approximately \$2.5 million to support the implementation of Murray-Darling Basin water reforms within the ACT during 2021-2024.
- The ACT is also working with the Commonwealth to design bespoke arrangements for the implementation of water efficiency measures. These measures are important for building a water secure city.

Key Information

- Priorities for water management reform within the ACT over the 2021-24 period include:
 - contemporising water governance arrangements to support integrated policy and program delivery
 - advancing the water interests of Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians
 - renewing the ACT's policy for 'Non-urban water metering' to ensure that the metering standards promote sustainable water use and meet commitments under the National Water Initiative and Murray-Darling Basin water reforms.
 - climate vulnerability and water security planning to build resilience in the environment and community of the ACT and surrounding region
 - enabling ACT-NSW water trading to support environmental, cultural, and regional economic development
 - facilitating improved community engagement on the Basin Plan implementation and review within the upper Murrumbidgee region

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- delivering water for the environment by returning at least 4.9 gigalitres to the basin through a suite of water efficiency measures.

Background Information

- The Basin Plan was established in 2012 under the *Water Act 2007* (Cwlth). The key objectives of the Plan (s5.02) are:
 - to give effect to relevant international agreements (environmental) through integrated water management
 - establish a sustainable, long-term adaptive management framework for the Basin water resources
 - optimise social, economic and environmental outcomes in the national interest
 - improve water security for all water users.
- Programs developed to implement the Basin Plan are scheduled to conclude by 2024. This includes measures under the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism.
- The Murray-Darling Basin Authority is required to conduct an evaluation of the Basin Plan implementation by 2024 and a review of the Basin Plan by 2026.

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2021 CATCHMENT HEALTH INDICATOR PROGRAM (CHIP) REPORT

Talking points:

- A key part of the Waterwatch program is the annual Catchment Health Indicator Program report – known affectionately to most as the CHIP report. This provides a “catchment health score” of river reaches in the Upper Murrumbidgee, displayed in individual report cards, using data collected by Waterwatch volunteers.
- The purpose of the CHIP report is to give the community a better understanding of water quality and waterway health issues in the catchment as well as providing a baseline assessment of catchment health to assist natural resource managers and policy-makers.
- The 2021 CHIP report results are impressive:
 - 96 report cards on various river and wetland reaches across the ACT region;
 - 1,779 water quality surveys, 181 waterbug surveys and 219 riverbank condition assessments; and
 - All collected at 229 sites by over 200 Waterwatch volunteers.
- The results show that:
 - 7 report cards received an Excellent (A);
 - 42 got a Good (B) result;
 - 45 scored a Fair (C); and
 - 2 received a Poor (D) result.
- The news has been overwhelmingly positive for the upper Murrumbidgee catchment with 44 of the 96 report cards showing improvement, 34 remaining steady and only 18 showing a decline. It is heartening to see catchments directly and indirectly impacted by the fires, such as Hospital and Bogong creeks in Namadgi National Park all bounce back this year. Some even receiving Excellent report cards.
- I thank the Waterwatch volunteers for their valuable contribution.

Background Information

- Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch supports the community in the monitoring and caring of our local waterways. The program has been running for over 25 years and has sites right at the top of the Murrumbidgee River in Kosciusko National Park, all the way down to Taemas Bridge where the Murrumbidgee enters Burrinjuck Dam near Yass.
- Two primary functions of the Waterwatch program are to facilitate community engagement through the monitoring and care of local waterways, and to use the data

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(water quality, waterbugs and riverbank condition assessments) as an early warning system for aquatic ecosystem health issues.

- There are now over 28,000 Waterwatch water quality surveys on the Atlas of Living Australia database dating back to 1995.
- Waterwatch works in partnership with the three community catchment groups (Molonglo, Southern ACT and Ginninderra) to implement the Waterwatch program. The ACT Government has provided funding through to June 2023 for the coordinator positions which are essential for training and supporting the volunteers.
- An additional coordinator is funded through Icon Water to support volunteers to monitor waterways in the Cooma Monaro region, upstream of the ACT. This allows Waterwatch to work with regional partners and collect water quality data on a truly catchment scale.

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ESTABLISHING A HOLISTIC AND COORDINATED APPROACH TO WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE ACT - OFFICE OF WATER

Talking points:

- A new Office of Water is being established to provide a holistic and coordinated approach to water policy, planning and program delivery.
- The 2022-23 Budget commits \$1.58 million of additional funding across the next two years to establish the Office, implement reforms to strengthen management arrangements and deliver new initiatives.
- Strengthening the coordination of water management activities will enable Canberra to become a more climate resilient and water secure city, and to continue to offer residents of the ACT and surrounding region access to healthy rivers and lakes.
- The Office of Water will provide a single point of contact for community on water management issues and improve the delivery of existing and new policy.
- New initiatives will aim to improve public access to water information and advance the water interests of the Ngunnawal community.
- A long-term plan for securing Canberra's water supply will also be developed to strengthen the ACT's resilience to cope with projected impacts from climate change and support a growing population.
- Establishing the Office delivers on the Government's commitment to consider the best administrative arrangements to manage new water programs and provide a holistic and coordinated approach to water programs and policy.

Key Information

- The 2022-23 Budget commits \$1.58 million of additional funding across the next two years.
- The budget commitment will supplement existing resources drawn from within the EPSDD to support water planning, policy and program delivery.

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- The Office of Water will develop new initiatives that aim to:
 - improve public access to water information
 - advance the water interests of the Ngunnawal community
 - provide a long-term plan for securing Canberra’s water supply.
- The ongoing function of the Office from 2023-24 and implementation of new initiatives developed by the Office will be a matter for further government consideration.

Background Information

- The Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly includes the commitment to *consider the best administrative arrangements to manage new water programs and provide a holistic and coordinated approach to water programs and policy.*
- Establishing the Office of Water was informed following a review of current governance arrangements conducted by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate under the Governance Review Project.
 - All relevant agencies across government and Icon Water participated in the Review.
 - The review identified a package of improvements to water management arrangements.
- The Governance Review Project was conducted with the aim to:
 - review current water governance arrangements and assess strengths and weaknesses in the context of ‘best practice’;
 - identify alternate models and approaches that could be applicable to the ACT, including the preparation of a cost-benefit analyses;
 - prepare an implementation plan to deliver the preferred model.
- Implementing the outcomes of the project will:
 - establish a pathway to achieve good governance arrangements for providing efficient, effective water management within the ACT and surrounding region;
 - strengthen the treatment of strategic risks associated with future water security and compliance with Murray-Darling Basin reform commitments;
 - enhance long-term planning for water security, water quality and catchment condition for the ACT.

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NON-POTABLE WATER PRICING REVIEW

Talking points:

- Golf clubs continue to receive a 50% discount through the Market Equity Scheme on the non-potable Water Abstraction Charge.
- Further discounts applied during the COVID-19 pandemic have now ceased.
- The government is preparing its response to the pricing review and is expecting to consult with Golf Clubs in late 2022. This will give clubs the opportunity to provide feedback on the policy options proposed in response to the Non-potable Water Review.
- The government remains in contact with the ACT and Monaro District Golf Association as peak body for the region and will continue to provide updates on the review process.
- The Government Response to the Review, including feedback from stakeholder consultation, will be considered by the government in early 2023.

Key Information

- The Review and any proposed changes to water pricing is restricted to non-potable water use only and will not effect potable water charges.
- A new pricing structure is proposed that supports cost recovery for water licencing activities and a nuanced approach to the application of charges for water consumption that seeks to balance the trade-off between affordability and promoting water conservation.
- The Review recommends the financial support for clubs under exceptional circumstances. The nature of this financial assistance is being considered as part of a package of policy measures in development.
- Capital Public Golf Club, operated by Liangis Investments P/L, announced 6/9/2022 that the Narrabundah golf course lease would not be renewed, citing water charges as one of the reasons. The announcement attracted media interest and speculation about land re-development ([the-riotact.com 9/9/2022](https://the-riotact.com/2022/09/09/)).

Background Information

Non-potable Water Review

- The ACT Government committed through the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement to ensure that clubs continue to support the community while reducing harm from gaming.
- A review into water costs for high-intensity club users of non-potable water commenced on 1 March 2021 by ACT Treasury. The aim of the review was to

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consider the impact of water costs on the operation of clubs while not requiring cross-subsidisation by other ACT water users.

- The Review was finalised and published on the *Your Say* website in December 2021.
- The scope of the review was limited to non-potable water only. This includes water sourced from rivers, dams and groundwater sources, recycled water from sewage treatment plants and stormwater from the Inner North Reticulation Network. Treated drinking water (potable water) was not part of the Review.

National water reforms

- Micro economic reforms related to water pricing have been agreed by successive governments under the National Competition Policy, National Water Initiative (NWI, 2004), Water Act Cth (2007) and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (2012).
- The ACT is a signatory to inter-governmental agreements that give effect to these water reforms. Specifically, the ACT has agreed to implement water pricing and institutional arrangements that promote economically efficient and sustainable use of water resources, water infrastructure assets, and government resources devoted to the management of water.
- The NWI pricing principles state that recycled water and stormwater should be consistent with pricing policies for potable water, and stimulate efficient water use.
- The pricing principles promotes user-pays and pricing transparency, in respect of water supply systems and cost recovery for water planning and management activities.

ACT Water Strategy 2014-44 Striking the Balance

- The ACT Water Strategy aims to achieve ‘an integrated and efficient water supply system that provides for the optimal mix of supply options, encourages efficient use of water, is resilient to climate variability, and secures the social, economic and environmental needs of the ACT community’.