

# Our Environment Our Future

ACT Election Priorities 2020





# Our Environment Our Future

## **ACT Election Priorities 2020:**

- A safe climate
- Protecting Canberra's nature
- A green and liveable city
- Clean and healthy waterways
- A compact city
- Sustainable transport
- Valuing and cycling resources

## **Conservation Council ACT Region**

The Conservation Council ACT Region works to protect our environment through advocacy, community engagement and campaigning.

We campaign to:

- Cut greenhouse emissions;
- Protect biodiversity in urban and natural areas;
- Protect and enhance waterways;
- Reduce waste and improve urban sustainability; and
- Promote sustainable transport and planning for our city.

As the peak body, we support and advocate on behalf of more than 45 member groups, which have a combined membership of over 20,000 people. We collaborate with governments, business and the community to work towards the highest quality environment for Canberra and the ACT region.

We live and work on the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We also acknowledge all Aboriginal people who have a connection with the lands in the ACT and the surrounding region.

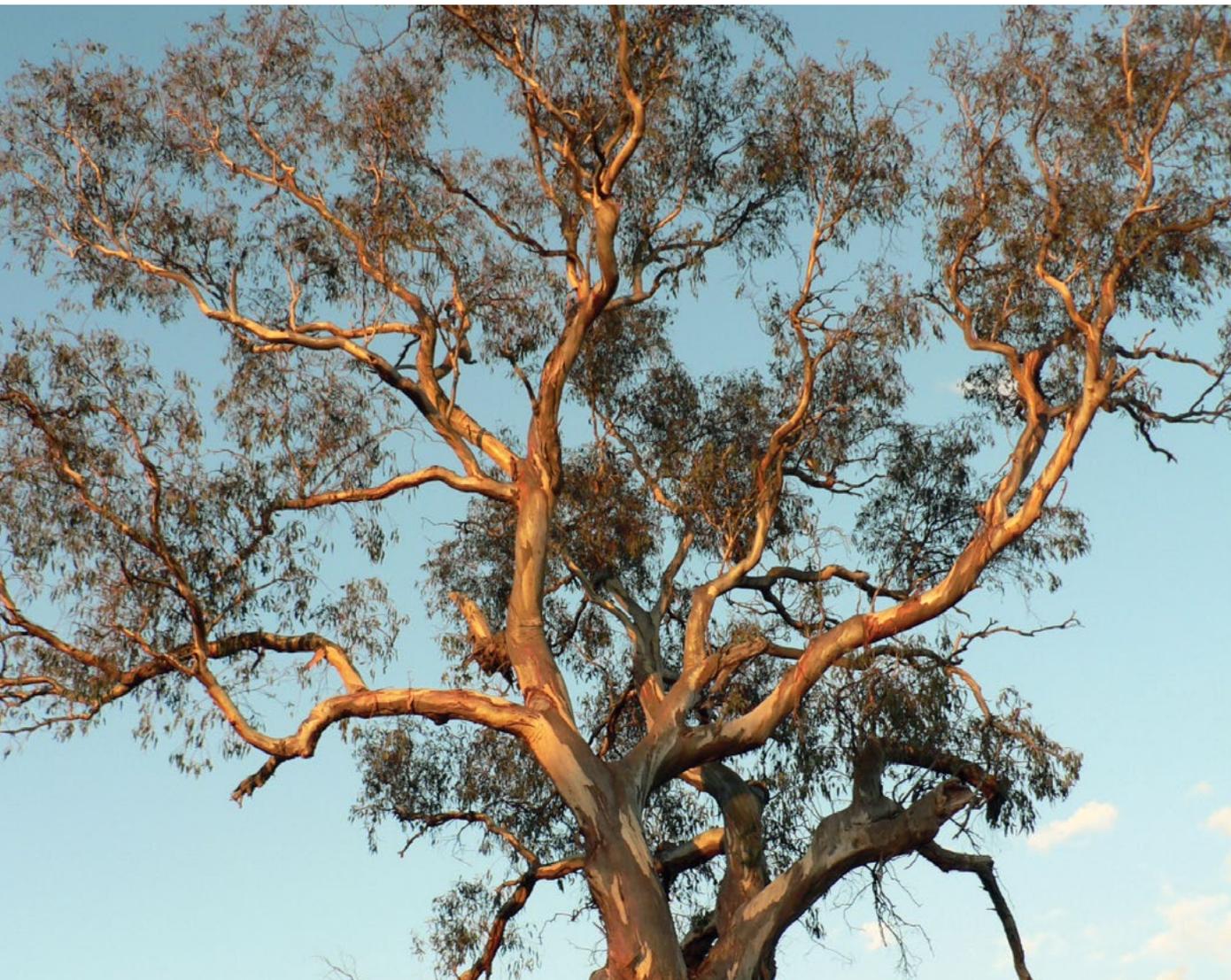
# Our environment, our future

Canberra is a city that sits in a wonderful natural environment. Not only is the ACT home to nationally significant woodlands and grasslands, and the spectacular Namadgi National Park, our urban landscape is embedded in the natural environment, connected by nature parks, corridors and waterways that support biodiversity and enhance wellbeing in our community.

## Our challenges

The ACT, like many other places in Australia, faces significant environmental challenges. The impacts of climate change, including longer hotter summers, increasingly severe bushfire seasons, and extreme weather events, have already had wide ramifications for nature and the community. In addition, our growing city is putting pressure on biodiversity, through loss of habitat, the proliferation of invasive species, noise and pollution. Our consumption of goods and services can not only degrade the local environment, but also have far-reaching impacts nationally and internationally. The ecological footprint of the ACT is massive; our consumption requires an area nine times the size of the ACT to sustain it.<sup>1</sup>

The ACT has made significant progress towards cutting greenhouse gas emissions, but more is required. We must phase out the use of gas, reduce emissions from our transport sector, and reduce indirect emissions, such as those created in the production of goods that we consume.



## Our opportunities

The ACT has the opportunity to become a world leading climate-resilient region that is powered by a circular economy. We have the opportunity to protect our unique natural treasures for current and future generations. But we must be ambitious and we must act now.

Canberra can become more climate-resilient by investing in green infrastructure, managing water effectively, and ensuring new developments are environmentally-sustainable and designed for future climate conditions. Urban greenspace, supported by increased tree canopy and urban gardens, will improve livability and build resilience.

The ACT has an opportunity to build a circular economy that values resources, and drives down waste and pollution. Supporting business and the community to develop innovative solutions is important, as is beginning to put in place accountability measures for the considerable impact we have on our planet through our consumption of goods, services and food.

We can also support our nationally significant grasslands and woodlands by recognising their values, and protecting and managing them in a way that enhances biodiversity. Investing in nature means that we are nurturing the systems on which we depend for food, clean water and resources, and which hold important intrinsic value.



## Our community

The solutions to many of these challenges sit within the ACT community. The ACT Government will benefit from harnessing the ideas, expertise and skills of the community to promote the conservation of our unique environment, and sustainability practices that reduce our impact.

Notwithstanding that Canberra is a small city, our capacity to take strong environmental action to improve outcomes is significant. Time and again the ACT has demonstrated that it can be an innovative leader, and that this leadership can resonate across Australia and even overseas.

**The Conservation Council ACT Region is passionate about shaping a sustainable future for all Canberrans. This document outlines our priority areas for action, for which we are seeking support from all candidates in the 2020 ACT Election.**

# A safe climate

Climate change is the most significant threat to the survival of all life on earth, and requires immediate and significant global action. The impacts of a changing climate are well upon us; increasingly severe fires, storms and droughts are forcing societies and natural ecosystems to transform the way they have function. Responding to climate change requires both adaptation (actions to adjust to changes that have happened and are predicted) and mitigation (actions to avoid and minimise further emissions).

To meet the internationally agreed target of limiting warming to 2°C, globally we must emit no more than another 95 billion tonnes of carbon. At the current rate of 10 billion tonnes of global emissions each year, we will exceed the remaining carbon budget by 2030. As one of the world's wealthiest and highest-emitting countries (per capita), Australia has a clear moral obligation to take strong action to reduce emissions. In 2017–18, the ACT's per capita emissions were 14.2 tonnes, nearly three times the 2014 global average of 4.9 tonnes per capita.

The ACT has demonstrated leadership by setting a target of net-zero emissions by 2045, but this is insufficient – we must do more. The science demands that the ACT should aim for net-zero emissions by 2030 regardless of how politically uncomfortable this might appear. This would bring the ACT in line with other leading cities, such as Bristol, Glasgow and Copenhagen who all have zero emissions targets of 2030 or earlier.

As a small jurisdiction within a national context, the ACT has limits on its capacity to achieve change within its borders and surrounding region. But as an agile and relatively wealthy community, we can continue to show what is possible and implement innovative policies to decarbonise all sectors, particularly transport and buildings. We must build resilience to deal with the changes that are occurring, and ensure a just transition to a low-carbon economy. Government and community responses to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate that we can make rapid and previously unthinkable changes when the need is considered sufficiently dire.

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01. Set a target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions for the ACT by 2030, and commit to reducing greenhouse gases and drawing down atmospheric carbon dioxide as rapidly as possible. Achieving this target requires expediting actions under the ACT Climate Change Strategy.

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  02. Urgently set a timetable to phase out the use of gas in the ACT by 2030, and stop all new gas connections immediately.

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  03. Urgently set a timetable to achieve net-zero emissions from transport by 2030.

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  04. Trial a program of community ownership of solar power such as Solar Gardens,<sup>2</sup> for those who neither have roof space nor capital to invest in solar panels.

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  05. Establish minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties by 2021.

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  06. Extend support to low-income households to reduce energy use through energy efficiency measures, electrification and energy-efficient appliances.

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  07. Increase the minimum energy rating of new residential buildings to 8 stars by 2022.

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  08. Establish a compliance unit with authority and powers to ensure building standards and codes are met.

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  09. Phase-out wood-burning heaters to improve air quality and reduce the removal of firewood from native forests, woodland, and farmland.

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  10. Require all government agencies to prepare, implement and publicly report on progress with climate change adaptation plans.

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  11. Commit to the exclusion of fossil-fuel and emissions-intensive companies under the ACT Government Responsible Investment Policy, and fully divest directly-owned shares in these companies by 2025.

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  12. Revise the ACT Government's Sustainable Procurement Policy to require that an organisation has screened its supply chain and neither it, nor its supply chain, provides essential support (e.g. financial, construction, management or insurance) to fossil fuel developments.

# Protecting Canberra's nature

The 2019 United Nations report on biodiversity identified that up to one million species globally face extinction in coming decades.<sup>3</sup> Australia is not immune, with approximately 100 native species having become extinct since European settlement and a further 1,600 species that are currently threatened.<sup>4</sup> Urban development, invasive species and climate change pose the largest threats to biodiversity, including in the ACT.

The ACT is home to two critically-endangered ecological communities, which include 52 threatened species. The protection of remaining Natural Temperate Grasslands and Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands is especially important given their national significance, as well as their intrinsic value and the amenity they bring to our city. Given the pressure on biodiversity across the ACT, all areas of moderate to high conservation value should now be appropriately protected and managed for effective conservation outcomes.

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01. Establish an investigation by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment to review current biodiversity funding and its effectiveness in achieving biodiversity outcomes, and propose funding models that will ensure biodiversity protection and enhancement.

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02. Fund and fully implement all existing ACT Government action plans and conservation strategies, applying specific timeframes to improve accountability.

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03. Legislate to ensure land of moderate to high conservation value (including Natural Temperate Grasslands and Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands) outside the reserve system are protected in perpetuity through a protected-area network, including introduction of voluntary stewardship/custodianship agreements.

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04. Provide reserve status for the Newline Woodland, Bluetts Block, Piney Creek, Lands End, Woods Lane and Glenloch grasslands to recognise their importance for biodiversity.

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05. Identify areas of the Western Edge Investigation Area for protection and commence conservation management under the stewardship system.

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06. Provide recurring funding of at least \$3 million per year to manage aquatic and terrestrial invasive plant and pest species (\$2.4 million towards invasive plants, \$600,000 towards pest animals).

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07. Provide \$1.2 million over 3 years as a funding boost for post-bushfire invasive species management.

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Image: David Flannery; Eastern Spinebill

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08. Invest \$1.2m over 4 years to support management of native grasslands (such as Umbagog Park, Florey and Isabella Pond, Monash) in off-reserve areas across the ACT.

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09. Invest \$2m over 4 years for Landcare ACT and member Catchment Groups.

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10. Invest \$200k over 4 years to maintain and develop the Canberra Nature Map.

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11. Invest in citizen-science monitoring programs, such as Vegwatch, to complement other biodiversity monitoring programs.

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12. Declare, implement and enforce territory-wide full cat containment commencing no later than 2025.

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3: IPBES (2019), Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Chapter 2.2: Status and Trends - Nature, (p. 52).

4: CSIRO (2014), Science and Solutions for Australia: Biodiversity, (p.44).

# A green and liveable city

High-quality urban greenspace will help build resilience against the impacts of climate change, enhance nature connectivity across the urban landscape, and deliver quality-of-life benefits to the community. Trees and shrubs provide vital refuge for wildlife and pollinators across the urban landscape and cool the urban environment. To meet the ACT's tree canopy targets significant investment will be required to boost overall tree numbers, including compensating for tree losses expected to occur as a result of old age, storms, and drought. In order to meet the target's timeframe, planting will need to occur early with resources allocated to ensure maintenance and care. Consideration should be given to the appropriate siting of native and non-native trees and shrubs, and the impacts of a changing climate on plant suitability.

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01. Implement a comprehensive strategy for Canberra's urban forest that:
    - a. Meets the 30% tree canopy target equitably across suburbs;
    - b. Integrates the tree canopy objectives and the tree protection regime;
    - c. Includes planting a diverse mix of native and non-native trees and shrubs in urban parks to support connectivity and habitat for wildlife and pollinators, optimise solar access in winter and shade in summer, and reduce the need for mowing;
    - d. Ensures suitable species selection for the ACT environment, accounting for future climate projections; and
    - e. Focusses planting efforts in the next decade to ensure 2045 targets are met.
  02. Provide recurrent funding for the planting and maintenance of trees and shrubs to ensure full replacement of ageing trees and expansion of the urban forest to achieve the 30% canopy target by 2045.
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03. Mandate the use of quantitative tree risk assessment for mature trees in the ACT, which only permits tree removal where risk is above internationally accepted levels and where this risk cannot be mitigated by actions such as landscaping and tree management.
  04. Invest \$300,000 per year to continue and expand the Adopt-A-Park community grant program to facilitate the community undertaking planning, maintenance and citizen-science initiatives in urban greenspace.
  05. Utilise precinct planning to maximise shared greenspace in new developments to facilitate space for urban tree plantings in streets, urban open space and on residential blocks.
  06. Mandate that at least 50% of the living infrastructure in the urban open space of new suburbs is pollinator friendly trees, shrubs and groundcover plants for year round flowering.
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# Clean and healthy waterways

The ACT's rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands, as well as the riparian vegetation they facilitate, provide crucial support to local wildlife by providing food, refuge and habitat.<sup>5</sup> They also provide space for residents to socialise and recreate, and enhance health and wellbeing. However, water and riparian assets both regionally and nationally face significant challenges as a result of altered flow regimes, loss of riparian vegetation, pollution and invasive species.<sup>2</sup> Better management of water through our urban landscape, in particular slowing and utilising stormwater, and investment in the management of riparian zones, will improve water quality in our waterways and the catchment.

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01. Invest in a new robust monitoring system to collect long-term data on the ecological health of the ACT's waterways and wetlands, and establish new water assessment sites for data collection by the ACT Government.

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  02. Invest \$1.2m over 4 years to support the Environmental Protection Authority to improve regulation and compliance with sediment and runoff controls on building sites to mitigate stormwater contamination.

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  03. Commit to a schedule and funding to repair, modify and progressively upgrade existing major creeks and stormwater channels including Tuggeranong Creek, Weston Creek, Yarralumla Creek, Jerrabomberra Creek and Sullivan's Creek.

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  04. Develop an incentive scheme to encourage developers and homeowners to install permeable surfaces on residential properties.

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  05. Set a permeable surfaces target for public space that aligns with achieving the city-wide 30% permeable surfaces target.

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  06. Invest \$800k over 4 years to continue the H20K Program to directly engage with householders and businesses to reduce pollutants entering stormwater drains.

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  07. Extend funding for the Frogwatch program until 2024.



# A compact city

In the ACT we are privileged to enjoy both a rich natural landscape and a vibrant city. However, we are challenged by the increasing pressure of a growing population, and the associated demands for housing and services. Canberra is Australia's second least dense city. As our population increases, strengthening our commitment to urban infill will reduce pressure on natural ecosystems outside the current urban footprint. High-quality urban development must be accompanied by diverse medium-density housing to provide better housing choices for more of the community, and precinct planning that facilitates shared urban greenspace.

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01. No further expansion of Canberra's urban boundary after existing identified suburbs in Molonglo, Gungahlin and West Belconnen are completed.

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  02. Set a target of 80% of new residential development within the existing urban footprint.

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  03. Ensure a "green" buffer between the urban edge of the ACT and adjoining areas of NSW which defines the urban edge and protects environmental values.
04. Increase the number of high quality, environmentally-sustainable medium-density residences around commercial centres and along public transport routes, to support diverse housing requirements and to reduce demand for additional greenfield development.

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  05. Fund a community advocate position to support community oversight of planning policy development and implementation.



# Sustainable transport

Canberrans traverse the city daily for social, recreational, household and employment activities. Transport emissions contribute 60% to the ACT's direct greenhouse emissions, primarily through the use of petrol and diesel vehicles. Our transport choices have a significant impact on our environment, the liveability of our city, and our productivity, health and wellbeing. We need to build a strong public transport network and enable active transport as a viable and attractive option for commuters, reduce emissions from use of cars, and transition to an electrified transport system, which can run on 100% renewable energy.

01. Establish a transport strategy for Canberra that drives down emissions while maintaining liveability and equity of access.
02. Legislate targets for all modes of transport that are consistent with emissions reduction targets, and which reflect a strong ambition to decrease car journeys, and increase active travel and public transport journeys.
03. Establish a Ministerial Advisory Council on Transport to advise the government and monitor the implementation of an integrated transport strategy.
04. Fund a network of separated cycleways across the city via an expanded annual capital works budget for new active travel infrastructure of at least \$30m by 2022.
05. Fund an increase in the recurring annual maintenance budget for active travel infrastructure from \$5m to at least \$12m by 2023, with an additional \$14m over 4 years to address the maintenance backlog.
06. Extend funding for the Slower Streets program that implements design changes in consultation with local residents that calm suburban streets.
07. Invest at least \$4m per year towards community engagement programs that support and incentivise people to make sustainable transport choices.
08. Offer incentives to purchase electric bikes.
09. Continue to deliver an integrated light rail and bus network that delivers frequent and reliable service, enabling people to rely on public transport for work and personal travel.
10. Commit to all new buses running on 100% renewable energy, not fossil fuels.
11. Implement a package of incentives to encourage the purchase and use of electric vehicles ahead of petrol and diesel, utilising preferential parking options in residential and commercial / retail areas, road access privileges, and purchase rebates for non-luxury electric vehicles.
12. Provide parking and charging facilities at a neighbourhood level to support access to electric vehicles through carshare and rideshare schemes.
13. Mandate the inclusion of EV charging facilities in all new commercial and residential developments, including strata title developments by 2021.



# Valuing and cycling resources

## Improving waste management

ACT residents have high consuming lifestyles. Our waste is a resource, yet until we successfully manage the waste we generate, it will continue to have significant impacts on wildlife, the environment and human health. Viewing our waste as a resource means we should adopt practices which promote a circular economy, and expand infrastructure that supports responsible waste and resource management.

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01. Establish a Ministerial Waste Advisory Council to provide community and industry perspectives on ACT Government waste policy and guide a review of the ACT Waste Management Strategy.
  02. Improve collection and accessibility of data on waste management in the ACT, including on waste moving in and out of the ACT.
  03. Establish technologies and practices to ensure that material collected in the landfill bin undergoes processing to extract all recoverable resources prior to disposal in landfill.
  04. Ensure all ACT government agencies implement procurement policies by 2022 that require suppliers to have a waste avoidance and minimisation plan.
  05. Review regulatory and legal obstacles for community-based buy-nothing, swap, share, co-operative initiatives.
  06. Establish a Community Circular Economy Grants program to facilitate community borrowing and sharing projects such as tool and/or equipment libraries.
  07. Set mandatory waste separation standards for commercial and building waste.
  08. Provide easy-to-use recycling bins in all public places, including town centres, shopping centres, recreation and sports facilities, and festivals and public events.
  09. Work with states and resource recovery companies to develop recycling solutions for materials that currently cannot be recycled in the ACT (e.g. soft plastics, polystyrene, nappies, rubber, textiles).
  10. Advocate nationally for the implementation of extended producer responsibility (EPR) to reduce the amount of material that enters the ACT and becomes waste.

## Reducing the use of plastic in Canberra

While plastic is a uniquely malleable, cheap, adaptive and variable product, use of plastic contributes to pollution in waterways and landscapes, and poses threats to wildlife, especially through micro-plastic particles that are readily absorbed by plants and animals, and passed down through the food chain. In addition, manufacturing plastic requires petroleum products and releases significant greenhouse emissions. No matter how well plastic can be recycled, the focus must be on avoiding its use in the first place.

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01. Phase-out by 2023 single-use plastic and polystyrene products that are packaged and/or distributed in the ACT.
  02. Require large retail outlets to install water bubblers; and stop the sale and use of bottled water in government facilities and public events.
  03. Establish a takeaway food container scheme similar to the "Green Caffein" returnable coffee cup scheme.
  04. Expand the collection of soft plastics and work with processors to scale up recycling.

## Kitchen waste to organic resource

Food and organic waste sent to landfill contributes to the 4% to the ACT's greenhouse gas emissions and squanders a valuable resource. The most beneficial use of food waste, after recovery and distribution of still-edible food, is as compost. Compost can be used to regenerate soil and nurture new plant life, helping soils and plants to sequester carbon and hold moisture. Improving collection from residential and commercial premises will reduce compost waste going to landfill, and enable us to reuse this valuable resource on both public and private lands.

01. Roll out food and organic waste collection to all Canberra households (prioritising multi-unit residences) accompanied by a strong public education campaign.
02. Provide funding to small-medium enterprise and community groups to undertake localised food waste collection and composting programs.
03. Update planning laws to ensure that new multi-unit residences and commercial buildings are constructed with space and facilities to separate and collect food and organic waste.
04. Require commercial and retail centres and food businesses with large quantities of compostable waste to establish in-house source-separated organic waste collection.
05. Ensure that contracts for organic waste collection enable composted material to be supplied for municipal landscape services (to support urban forest and biodiversity objectives), and for a percentage of material to be made available to community groups.



Image: Capital Scraps Composting

# Take action

## Sign up

Visit our website to subscribe to email updates.

## Give

We rely on the support of our community to help fund our work. Become a regular supporter and connect with thousands of like-minded Canberrans collaborating to shape a sustainable future.

## Volunteer

The Conservation Council welcomes volunteers to support our work. Volunteers can participate in policy development, events and campaigning. Our member groups offer many opportunities to undertake on-ground environmental work.

## Join

Local environment groups can become members of the Conservation Council ACT Region. We represent more than 40 local groups in our work to protect nature and promote sustainable living. The combined expertise, experience and passion of our member groups strengthens our network, and amplifies the collective voice of Canberrans who are passionate about the environment.

## Follow us and share

Find us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for the latest local and national environmental news, including updates on the 2020 ACT Election.

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