



# CONSERVATION COUNCIL

ACT REGION

## Submission: ACT Budget 2020-21

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**OCTOBER 2019**

The **Conservation Council ACT Region** is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra region. We have been the community's voice for the environment in the Canberra region since 1979. Our mission is to achieve an ecologically sustainable and zero net carbon society through advocacy, education, research and engagement with community, the private sector and with government.

We represent more than 40 member groups who in turn represent over 20,000 supporters. We harness the collective expertise and experience of our member groups and networks. We work collaboratively with Government, business and the community to achieve the highest quality environment for Canberra and its region.

**For further inquiries regarding this submission please contact:**

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## Introduction

In May 2019, the ACT Legislative Assembly declared a state of climate emergency noting that “globally, nationally and locally, human induced climate change is contributing to record breaking temperatures, extreme weather events, and a range of negative social, environmental and economic outcomes.”

The motion also acknowledged the need for urgent action across all levels of government. The Conservation Council advocates that this is an imperative for all governments nationally and globally, and that the ACT Government should seek to implement reporting and checking practices that ensure the climate change objectives are established as a priority across all policy setting of Government.

In September 2019 the ACT Government released its *ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-25*. It is paramount that adequate funding is allocated to ensure the actions to 2025 come to fruition, especially when the ACT community has championed and supported this plan and are expecting it to be implemented swiftly and successfully.

Accordingly, the Conservation Council identifies that the policies and programs which reduce the ACT’s emissions, and create a more livable, equitable and community-focused city with a secure climate future, are the highest priority in the 2020/21 Budget process.

**As such, the Conservation Council recommends:**

- that all funding allocation should be considered within the framework of a climate emergency, and that the intent of the climate emergency declaration is considered and embedded into all operations and decisions.
- that the ACT Government commit to a separate annual Budget Paper on the funding of the Climate Change Strategy, and annual budget reporting on its delivery.

## Priority Areas of funding within the Climate Change Strategy for the 20/21 Budget

### 1. Active Travel and Public Transport:

The Conservation Council strongly recommends active travel and increased use of public transport crucially require more funding to best meet the needs of Canberrans. Furthermore, funding this area will make Canberra even more livable due to reduced emissions and more opportunities for increased health and well-being through exercise and community building.

#### **The Conservation Council recommends that the 20/21 Budget funds:**

- Dedicate a greater proportion of road space and public realm space to sustainable transport modes.
- Fund the first car free day for Tuesday 22nd September 2020 in town centres.
- Prioritise improving public transport services and supporting infrastructure, including buses, light rail stage 2 and connecting services.

#### **In addition:**

- Create an Active Travel Commissioner role to oversee the implementation of the ACT's active travel policies, including legislated active travel / public transport targets.
- Redirect funding from major roads programs to a major infrastructure program for walking, cycling and public transport.
- Ensure all new buses purchased by Transport Canberra (including the 84 budgeted for purchase in 2019-20) are zero-emissions electric buses.

### 2. Low emissions and climate-wise energy, buildings and urban developments.

Successful delivery of the *Climate Change Strategy 2019-25* is the priority for creating a more liveable city and better meeting the needs of Canberrans. Areas that require priority funding are climate-wise and low emissions buildings for our public and private sectors which make our city more livable in the face of increasing impacts of extreme weather events. Furthermore, energy efficient buildings reduce energy bills for both households and businesses providing much needed support for low-income Canberrans and the wider community.

**The Conservation Council recommends that the 20/21 Budget funds:**

- Development of a new residential energy assessment tool that adequately assesses the year-round thermal performance of buildings in the Canberra climate.
- Developing and providing information and training tailored to first home buyers, home owners, landlords, and owner-builders to support awareness and uptake of zero emissions climate-wise homes including the benefits of lower running costs. Upgrading to efficient electric appliances in existing public housing properties.
- Ensuring all newly constructed public housing properties are all-electric.
- Increased resources for the solar for low income program including increasing the program's accessibility and awareness.

**In addition:**

- Deeper public engagement around the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme through outreach and educational materials to increase uptake of the scheme.
- Financial support for low income households to shift from gas to high efficiency electrical appliances.
- Targeted expansion of household energy efficiency measures to mid-low income households.
- Investigation of the costs and benefits of decommissioning the gas network.

### **3. Waste**

The ACT Government can reduce emissions from waste by implementing food and green waste collection for households and businesses. This could also provide local employment opportunities, and deliver high quality products that will assist with improving soil quality and regeneration of our urban forest.

**The Conservation Council recommends that the 20/21 Budget funds:**

- Food and garden waste collection for all households (including apartments) and the educational material for this scheme to be successful.
- The establishment of compost waste streams for plastic-free alternative products to be appropriately composted.

#### 4. Living infrastructure

Our resilience to climate change will be impacted by urban heat retained across our suburbs, which can be ameliorated through the development of our urban tree canopy. The ACT Climate Strategy established a 30% by 2045 Canopy target which will not be realised if planting and planning does not commence soon. The Conservation Council acknowledges that funds were allocated in 2018/19 Budget for the planting of 17,000 trees over the next four years is a start in the right direction. However, while this commitment starts to address the replacement of trees that are being lost (approximately 3000 trees per year), it does not go far enough to ensure that tree canopy is expanding. A strong investment in trees now will not only allow the city to reap the benefits of reduced heat and improved livability earlier, the ACT might also meet the 2045 target much sooner.

**The Conservation Council recommends that the 20/21 Budget funds:**

- Increase investment in Canberra urban tree canopy to ensure replacement AND expansion of the tree canopy across the urban footprint of the ACT over the next five years.