

# Conservation Council ACT Region Summary Report

Financial Year 2023/ 2024

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# Conservation Council ACT Region

Our vision is for a healthy planet for humans and all other life, where the natural environment is protected and communities respect and live in harmony with the environment.

## Our work

As the region's leading environmental advocacy organisation and hub for community groups, our mission is to protect nature and create a safe climate future in the ACT and region. Since 1981 we have been at the centre of the region's most important wins for wildlife, bushland and communities.

We run campaigns, promote and upskill local groups, undertake research, advocate passionately, and engage and inform our community.

Climate change and nature destruction are the biggest challenges facing our region. We run a focused set of programs to upskill community led action, reduce emissions from gas and transport and to protect ecosystems in our region from development and deforestation.

# 5 year plan – Strategic objectives

1. Achieve positive environmental outcomes for the ACT and region
2. Speak up for the environment within government and the community
3. Maintain a strong and resilient organisation





# Staff and Operations



**CONSERVATION  
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

**SHAPING A  
SUSTAINABLE  
FUTURE**

# Thank you Elle!





# Our Staff Team

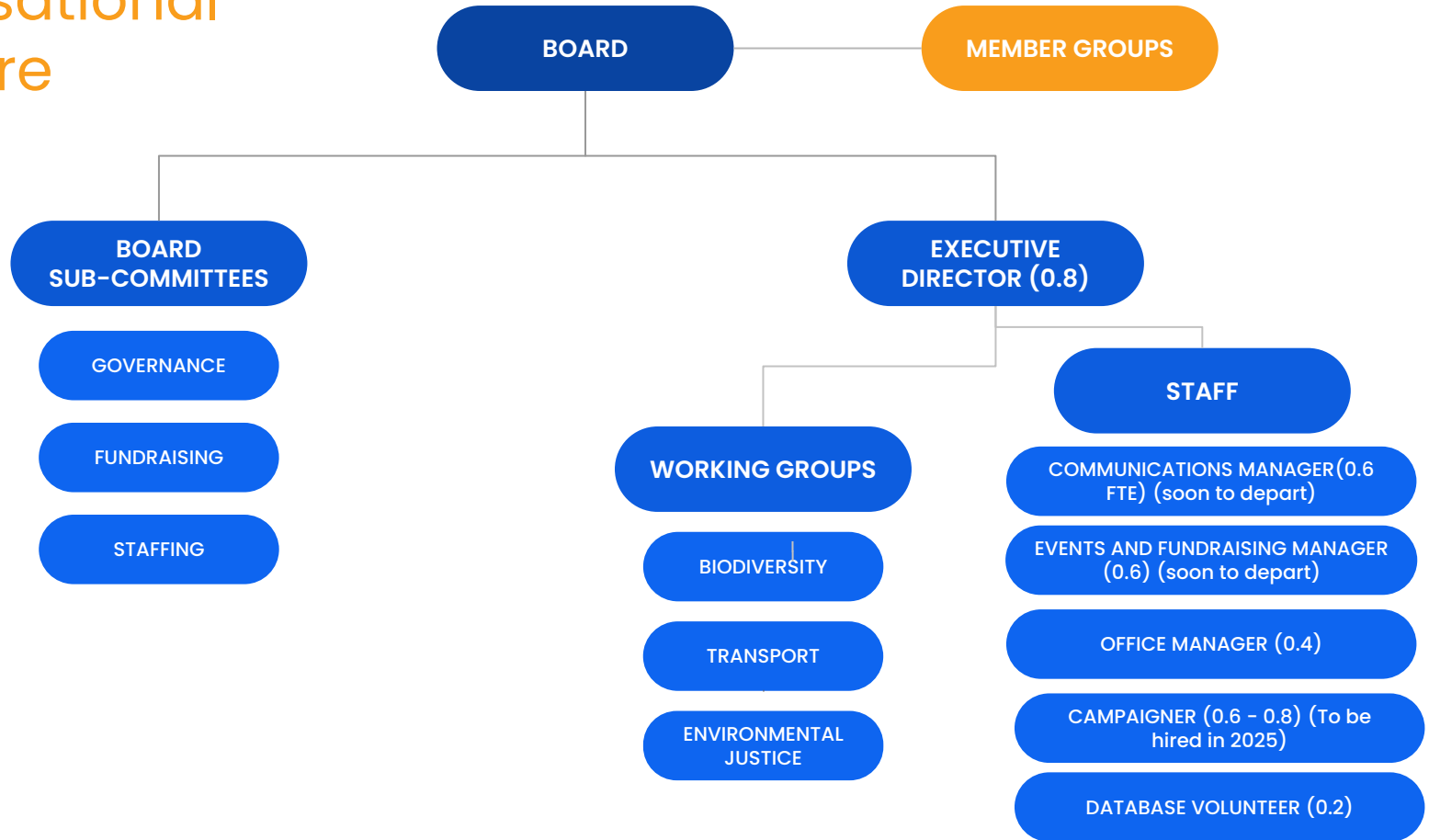
As of November 2024.

## Left to Right:

- Brooke Farr, Events and Fundraising Manager (departing January 2025)
- Robert Hawes, Database Volunteer
- Kirsten Duncan, Climate Campaigner (since departed)
- Matt Whitting, Biodiversity Volunteer
- Simon Copland, Executive Director
- Jahnvi Samprathi, Communications (departing late November)
- Grit Schuster, Office Manager



# Organisational Structure





# Member group representation 2023–2024

350.org Canberra

ACF Community Canberra

ACT for Bees

ACT Herpetological Association

ANUSA Environment Collective

Australian Association of Bush Regenerators

Australian Association for Environmental Education ACT Chapter

Australian Electric Vehicle Association, ACT Branch

Australian Network for Plant Conservation

ASEN Canberra (Australian Student Environment Network)

Canberra Bushwalking Club

Canberra Environment Centre

Canberra Forest Alliance

Canberra Indian Myna Action Group

Canberra Nature Map

Canberra Ornithologists Group

Climate Action Canberra

Coleman Ridge Park Care Group

Extinction Rebellion ACT

Field Naturalists Association of Canberra Inc

Food Cooperative Shop Ltd

Friends of Aranda Bushland

Friends of Black Mountain

Friends of Bluetts Block

Friends of Callum Brae Nature Reserve

Friends of Grasslands

Friends of Jerrabomberra Wetlands

Ginninderra Catchment Group

Ginninderry Conservation Trust

Ginninderra Falls Association

Invasive Species Council Inc

Kosciuszko Huts Association

Living Streets Canberra

Molonglo Conservation Group

National Parks Association of the ACT

Pedal Power

People's Climate Action Coalition (People's Climate Assembly)

Public Transport Association of Canberra

Red Hill Bush Regeneration Group

Rising Tide Canberra

SEE-Change

Southern ACT Catchment Group Inc

Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park Inc

Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network

Woodlands and Wetlands Trust

Zero Waste Revolution

# Operations

Aimed to increase the professional and ethical practices of the organisation as a workplace.

- Significant staff turnover
- New policies developed
  - HR policy
  - Cultural Safety
- New Operational Plan developed
- Strategic Plan to be developed by new board



# Member Group Engagement

- Providing ongoing support for member groups.
- E.g.
  - Media support (i.e. Indian Mynas, Ainslie Volcanics)
  - Supporting campaigns
  - Advocacy to Government
  - Promoting events and providing support where possible (Rising Tide)
- Contact me at [director@conservationcouncil.org.au](mailto:director@conservationcouncil.org.au)



# Communications

We engage in community debates to highlight the importance of environmental protection in the media and on social media.

- 7 blog posts
- 3,178 Facebook Followers year end June 2023 → 3235 Facebook Followers end June 2024
- 1,000 Instagram Followers year end June 2023 → 1,121 Instagram Followers end June 2024
- 21,173 website hits
- 4894 Yellow Box Newsletter Recipients
- 49 media appearances (radio, print, online)





# Fundraising

- A very big thank you to all of our donors and supporters
- \$112,462 raised in one-off donations - our biggest ever year of donation income.
  - Particular thanks to those who donated at our end of financial year appeal.
- \$15,354 in regular donations
  - This number is now increasing, particularly with the release of the Gang-Gang Guardians
- \$3,835 raised from the Canberra Environment Awards
- Ongoing campaign to get ACT Government to increase funding - all Parties committed to this in election campaign.
- Simon now beginning conversations with large philanthropy organisations for potential funding.



# Events

- 18 events across the financial year.

## Some event highlights:

- Four successful Bush Buds walks (now looking for coordinator)
- Environment Awards (moving the World Environment Day this year)
- Stalls at Canberra Show, Sustainable Travel Street Party, Folk Festival etc.
- Make the Switch video launch
- Protect Ngununggula/Bluetts Block Community Forum
- Evening with the Minister (with other Cons Councils)
- ACT Election Forum (held in September)



# Working Groups

Transport Working Group expertly led by Warwick Cathro

Biodiversity Working Group expertly Chaired by Hugh Coppell, now chaired by Matt Whitting

Environmental Justice Working Group, with rotating chair

- All meet monthly with regular strong attendance and representation across Member Groups.
- Environmental Justice Working Group has embedded a range of policies and norms within the organisation.
- Transport Working Group has stopped meeting after developing election platform, but is now setting up again
- Rethinking purpose of each group
- Policy platforms developed for 2024.



Photo: Hedda M.

# Challenges

- Our organisation has a broad scope and many competing demands.
- Expectations from Government and community remains high.
- Constrained financial resources and staff capacity.
- Increased costs and financial pressures due to inflation, an increase in the award wage and super, rising insurance costs, complexity of work, business compliance, operational costs, financial accountability, management of risk, competitiveness in the ACT labour market, and reduced donations.
- The Conservation Council is currently facing serious financial pressures.
- There will be a short period in early 2025 with only two staff. Please be patient with us during this time.



# 2023 – 24 Key Campaigns

# Key Wins

- Right to a Healthy Environment
- Lawson Grasslands - project significantly scaled down
- Ngunungula/Bluetts Block announced as nature reserve
- Review of Nature Conservation Act has begun
- Key election announcements



Photo: Lutgart Uten



# Ngunungula/Bluetts Block

- Held a community forum in October 2023
- Bush Buds walk at the Block
- Continued to conduct pressure with MLAs and EPSDD across the year.
- Government decision to develop 'Stromlo Reach', which we opposed.
- ACT Government declared Blocks 402 and half of 12 will be established as a into nature reserve.
- More work to be done to place Block 403 into reserve, and to ensure strong maintenance of Bluetts.



Photo: Lutgart Uten

# Save Lawson Grasslands

Significant changes across the course of the year

- Undertook regular protests outside DHA office in latter half of 2023.
- Threatened Species Day Protest
- In January 2024, DHA obtained an approval to significantly reduce the area (in hectares) of grasslands they will destroy
- Still more work to be done
  - When the EIS is published, object to the fragmentation of Lawson Grasslands
  - Failing that, ensure strong buffer zones between residences and the intact grassland areas
  - Land to be transferred to ACT Government
  - ACT Government needs to declare it a nature reserve

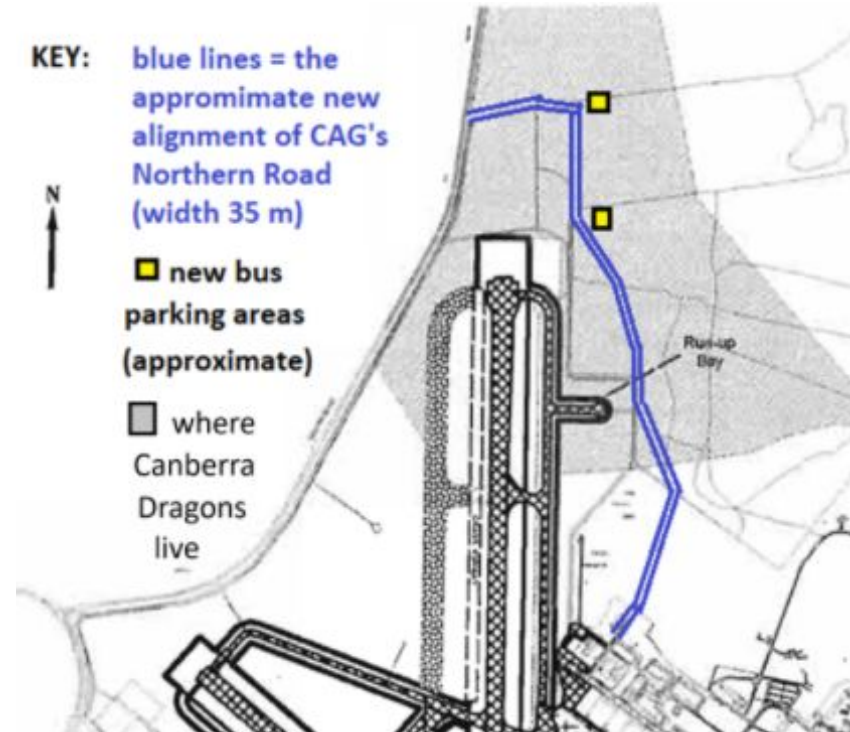




# Save Canberra Dragons

What has happened this year

- Recalling Canberra Grassland Earless Dragons were listed threatened (critically endangered) on 1 June 2023 ...
- Canberra Airport wants a 'Northern Road from Fairbairn north to Majura Road (see the diagram)
- The Council repeated its call, in Sept and Nov 23, for the Minister to refuse the road and thus protect Canberra Dragons
- Letters were clear, bisecting the place where the population lives at Canberra Airport would dramatically increase the species' extinction risk.
- The Department says they are waiting on Canberra Airport to propose a new option(s). The path is clear, stop the road.



# Make the Switch

- Launched a new Make the Switch Video
- Significant community engagement across the year. E.g:
  - Spiral community group Curtin
  - Midweek Matters Council of the Aging, Hughes
  - Capital Region Farmers Market
  - Radford College Dirrum Dirrum
  - Pocock town hall, Tuggeranong
  - Gungahlin Community Market
  - Hawker Primary School Fete
- Project is now winding down



# Bush Buds

- Our “[Bush Buds](#)” program designed to engage and educate politicians and the public on threats to biodiversity continued. Please see the [webpage](#).  
Purpose:
  - To raise public and political awareness of nature loss in the ACT Region.
  - To increase public and political awareness of the relationship between climate change and nature loss
- 4 successful walks held over the financial year, all booked out.
- This is a great tool for community engagement.
- Currently looking for volunteer to coordinate walks.



# Stakeholder and Partnership work

- Biodiversity Conservation Forum
- Renew Australia For All
- Murray Darling Conservation Alliance
- State and Territory Environment Forum (STEF)
- Energy Consumers Reference Council - Evoenergy
- Environment and Planning Forum
- Technical Advisory Group - ACT Planning Reform
- NRM Advisory Council
- EPBC Reform - Places You Love Alliance
- Energy Policy Consortium
- Hands off our Charities Alliance

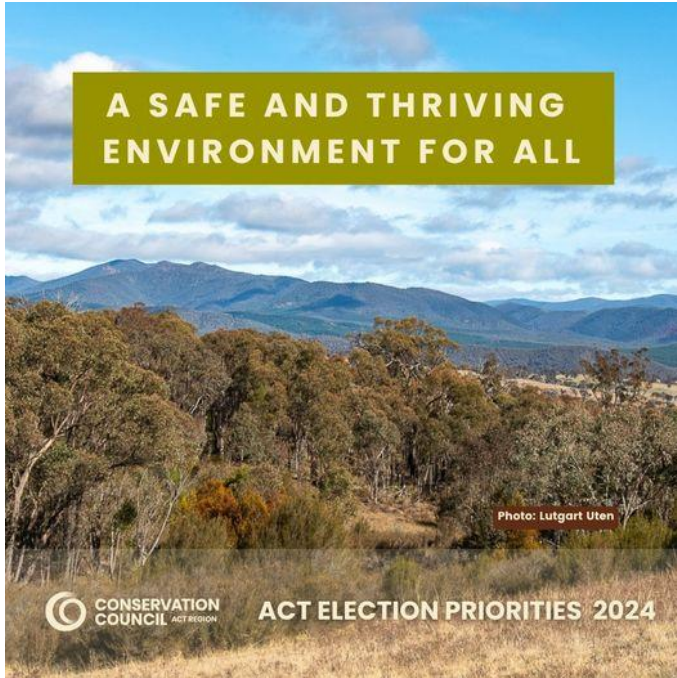




# Formal Submissions FY 23/24

- ACT Preventative Health Action Plan 2023-25
  - Proposal to regulate small electrical products and solar photovoltaic system waste (Federal)
  - ACT electricity pricing 2024-27
  - Proposed development at Denman Prospect Block 12 (Bluetts Block)
  - ACT Integrated energy plan position paper
  - Amending Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan (NSW)
  - Middle arm
  - MRF EIS
  - Duty of Care
  - Future Gas Strategy
  - 24/25 ACT Budget
  - Human Right Healthy Environment
  - Territory Plan Inquiry
  - Petroleum Resource Rent Tax (PRRT) anti-avoidance provisions
  - Development Application 202342438, Ainslie Volcanics site
  - Nature Conservation Act
  - Inquiry into Climate Change and a Just Transition
  - New vehicle efficiency standard, common mynas,
  - Fossil Fuel Advertising
  - Regional Planning
  - Nature Postive Plan
  - Automated vehicle safety reforms
- <https://conservationcouncil.org.au/submissions/>

# Election 2024



1. Released Election Platform
2. Two community forums
3. Key announcements from Government

## Results

4. Returned ALP Government
5. Smaller Green Crossbench
6. First Independents since 1998
7. New Environment Minister

# 2024 - 25 Priorities



# The Role of the Conservation Council

1. Leading Campaigns on Peak Environmental Issues
2. Advocating to Government
3. Supporting Member Groups
4. Engagement on National Issues





# Priorities

1. Nature Laws
  - a. Nature Conservation Act
  - b. EPBC
2. Ngununggula/Bluetts Block and Western Edge
3. Next steps on climate change



Photo: Lutgart Uten

# The Nature Conservation Act



Photo: Lutgart Uten

1. Nature Conservation Act is the ACT's premier environmental legislation.
2. It is failing.
3. More species are being added to our endangered species list, while the Government continues to destroy ecosystems to expand our city.

# What's the problem with The Nature Conservation Act?

The NC Act fails to protect, conserve, enhance biodiversity, because:

The Act focuses on individual species rather than landscapes, resulting in fragmentation of critical habitat.

The legislation lacks primacy over other legislation in nature reserves.

Enforcement and measures to promote compliance are insufficient, including a lack of clearly defined indicators for assessing the efficacy of conservation strategies.

Climate change is not considered as a key threat to our nature

Significant powers are held by planning authorities, favouring development outcomes over nature.

Lack of legal requirements for measuring and reporting on biodiversity outcomes.

# What we think needs to change

- Base new legislation on an **ecosystem approach**, to enable the ACT Government to implement an ACT-wide **biodiversity network** so all valuable areas - whether a national Park or on the roadside - are managed well.
- Key elements of the legislation are **moved away from planning authorities** to the Nature Conservation Act.
- List **climate change** as a **key threat** to nature.
- Recognise **the authority of the region's First Nations peoples** as stewards and include decision making powers in the ACT.
- Decision makers **must refuse developments** with **unacceptable impacts** on threatened species (or their habitat) and threatened ecological communities.
- **Strengthen compliance mechanisms and actually do some enforcement**, including higher penalties for dodgy developers who destroy our nature.
- **Give rangers powers** to enforce the Act in reserves.
- Make the **Conservator of Flora and Fauna independent**, with their powers widened and strengthened.
- Legislate a requirement for a **regular review of measurable qualitative and quantitative targets** with publicly available outcomes.



# Our Campaign



- Raised the profile of the issue as a key ask for the ACT election 2024 - undertaking media, advocating with candidates, hosting candidates forum.
- Run a webinar in December 2024.
- Run a community event in early 2025
- Develop and run a petition calling for fixes to the Act
- Host briefings for key decision makers
- Develop case studies of how our current laws are failing, and highlight these in our social media, newsletter, website etc.
- Run a social media campaign.
- Undertake relevant submissions and encourage others to put in submissions calling for stronger laws.

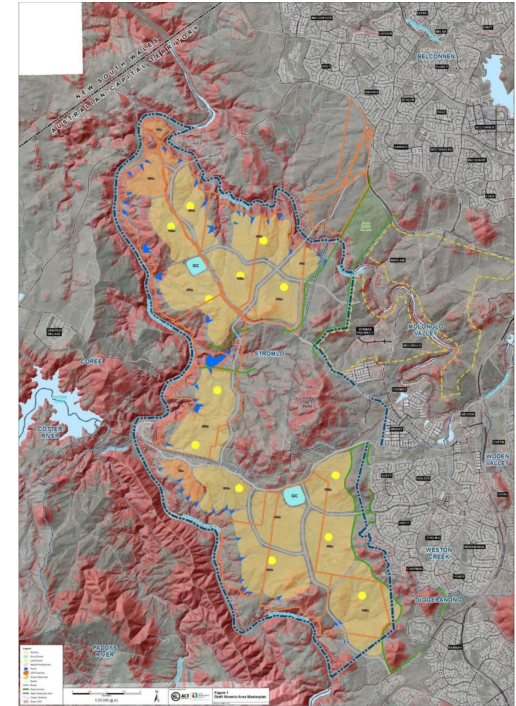
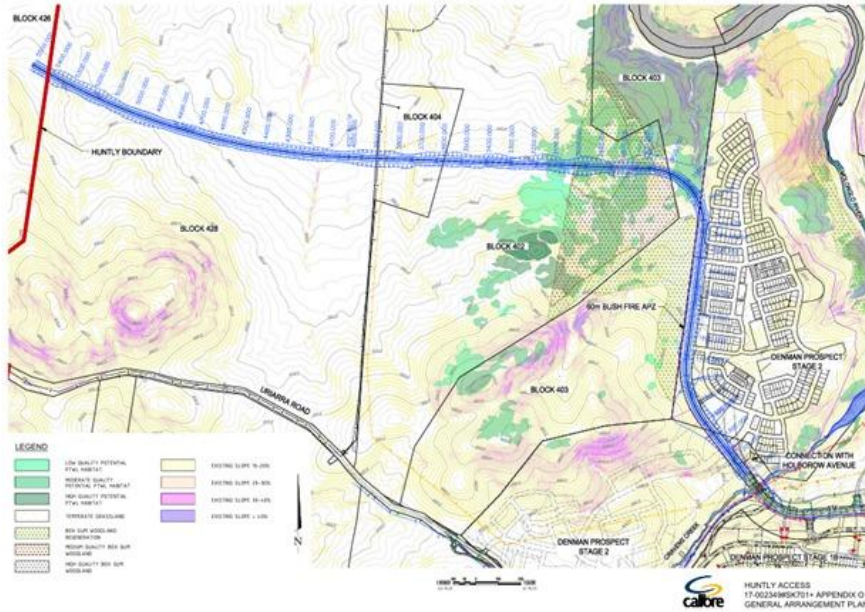
# Ngununggula/Bluetts Block and Western Edge



Photo: Lutgart Uten

1. Parts of Ngununggula/Bluetts Block (403 and half of 12) declared a nature reserve. A win!
2. 402 still needs to be declared.
3. Western Edge a major concern and the next focus of our campaigns.

# Western Edge: Significant Threats





# Our Goal

1. See the Western Edge fully protected as a reserve
2. Set city limits and stop unsustainable sprawl
3. A real conversation about sustainable housing and properly done gentle density



Photo: Lutgart Uten



# Climate – Gas



1. Gas Ban Achieved – can't become complacent.
2. Make The Switch Success
3. Next steps:
  - a. Ban on appliances
  - b. Support for lower incomes
  - c. Helping large organisations, buildings etc.

# Climate – Transport

1. Now over 60% of Canberra's emissions
2. Transition to EVs – but not fast enough
3. Public and Active Transport investment
4. Reinvigorating transport working group



Photo: Hedda Murray





# National Engagement

1. Work with other Conservation Councils
2. EPBC
3. Federal Election 2025
  - a. Election Platform
  - b. Joint Forum





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