



**CONSERVATION
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

Submission to to the Chief Minister, Treasury and
Economic Development Directorate

ACT Budget 2026–2027

15 April 2026

About us

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the peak body for environment and climate groups in the ACT Region. We represent close to 50 member groups, bringing together a united voice on environment and climate issues to Government, business and community.

Since 1981 we have been at the centre of the region's most important wins for wildlife, bushland, climate and communities. As a hub for the ACT Region's environment and climate movement and a not-for-profit, non government organisation, we run campaigns, promote and upskill local groups, undertake research, advocate passionately, and engage and inform our community.

For further information please contact:

Simon Copland, Executive Director, director@conservationcouncil.org.au.

Executive Summary

The Conservation Council of the ACT Region (the Council) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate on the 2026-27 ACT Budget. We acknowledge the investments made in the 2025-26 Budget in electrification, water quality improvement, and threatened species protection measures, and thank the Government for its support. In the face of escalating biodiversity and climate crises, the Council calls for an increase in ongoing, long-term funding for nature in the 2026-27 ACT Budget to protect and restore biodiversity and rapidly reduce emissions.

The Council recommends that the 2026-27 ACT Budget include:

- 1. Funding extensions for terminating programs within the City and Environment Directorate**
- 2. Resourcing to implement the new draft ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2026-2036 and the future ACT Climate Change Strategy 2026-35**
- 3. Long term operational funding certainty for Canberra-based community and environmental organisations**
- 4. Immediate funding to deliver the Government's outstanding 2025 election commitments, including increased funding for weed management and additional ranger positions**

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Extend funding for terminating environmental programs, including the Thermally Assisted Aerial Control Program, Biosecurity Response Team, and Fisheries Conservation Officer position

The Council is increasingly concerned by an imminent funding cliff for several programs operated by the City and Environment Directorate that are critical to invasive species management and environmental protection.

We call on the Government to extend funding for the highly successful Thermally Assisted Aerial Control Program, which employs innovative thermal imaging technology to assist with the aerial culling of feral pigs and deer in the ACT's parks and reserves. The continuation of this program beyond 2026-27 is crucial to protect the integrity of the ACT's ecological communities, including endangered alpine bogs and fens in Namadgi National Park, while mitigating impacts on agricultural production, and reducing risks to community safety by preventing feral deer and pigs from establishing populations in urban areas.

As described by ACT Parks and Conservation staff, the ACT is 'very lucky' to be in the proactive stage of deer control.¹ We can't let this opportunity slip away. Invasive species management programs such as the Thermally Assisted Aerial Control Program rely significantly on reducing the population of feral animals below their natural replacement rates - letting funding for this program terminate would risk losing the hard-won ecological gains of the ACT Parks and

1

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-11/act-deer-control-program-uses-thermal-imaging-aerial-culling/105276610>

Conservation Service, and undermines the efforts of neighbouring NSW feral animal management programs.

In addition, we understand funding for the Rapid Response Biosecurity Team expires this financial year, after a one-year extension in the previous budget. This would leave the ACT highly vulnerable to the risks of major biosecurity incursions, such as H5 Avian Influenza. Meanwhile, the fast-spreading varroa mite has already caused significant damage to the ACT's bee-hives² necessitating ongoing Biosecurity Officer positions to assist our community to respond to the impacts of the mite. The ACT Government must be proactive in resourcing biosecurity roles and extend the funding for the Rapid Response Biosecurity Team in the 2026-27 Budget, to meet legislative obligations under the Biosecurity Act 2023, safeguard the health of our native species, and maintain our region's agricultural productivity.

Funding for a Fisheries Conservation Officer position expired at the last budget, leaving the ACT exposed as the only jurisdiction nationwide with no dedicated fisheries management officer. Fisheries Officers play a critical role in enforcing compliance with the Fisheries Act 2000 and preventing illegal fishing, monitoring waterways, and protecting our many threatened native fish species. The ACT Government must reinstate this position to ensure the ongoing health of our waterways, in alignment with Outcome 1 of the ACT Water Strategy 2025-45.³

Other programs that are due to expire in the 2022-26 financial year include the Restoration Funding Program and the Ngannawal Cultural Advisors Program. Both of these are essential programs that have had a real impact on Canberra's environment. We strongly encourage the Government to maintain these programs, in line with those outlined above.

Recommendation 2 – Resource the implementation of the new draft ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2026-2036 and future ACT Climate Change Strategy 2026-35

The Conservation Council welcomes the development of a new draft ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2026-2036 (NCS), particularly the identification and protection of Priority Conservation Areas within a Nature Conservation Network (NCN).

However, as outlined in our submission to the ACT Government on the draft NCS⁴, to achieve the Strategy's 'Nature Positive' promise, it must be backed by a significant uplift in ongoing funding for nature protection and restoration, including for the Parks and Conservation Service, who will presumably be tasked with managing the NCN (outside areas managed by private leaseholders). We urge the Government to provide funding in the 2026-27 Budget to support the development of the outstanding plans and policies linked to the Strategy, to identify priority conservation values, and to increase Parks and Conservation Service staffing. This includes the Government meeting its commitment to increase ranger numbers within the Territory (see Recommendation Four), although these increased numbers will likely not be sufficient to achieve the outcomes of the NCS.

²

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-08/act-varroa-mite-sees-over-1000-beehives-destroyed/106534718>

³

<https://hdp-au-prod-app-act-yoursay-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/41177128/2160/act-water-strategy-2025-45.pdf>

⁴ <https://conservationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/20260327-Council-submission-on-draft-NCS.pdf>

In addition, we note the NCS includes a number of targets regarding partnering with Ngunnawal community and community groups for conservation management and practice. We welcome these partnerships and urge the ACT Government to also match these commitments with significant resourcing for both Ngunnawal and other community groups in the 2026-27 Budget.

The Conservation Council has previously expressed our concern regarding the ACT Government's lack of action and genuine ambition to address the climate emergency, particularly noting the government's failure to meet its 2025 emissions reduction target of 50–60% below 1990 levels⁵. We call on the Government to make significant investments in emissions reduction measures in the 2026-27 Budget to accompany the new ACT Climate Change Strategy, to be released in 2026. Without concrete investments in electrification, active and public transport, and adaptation measures, the Strategy will remain just words on a page. As outlined in our submission on the Climate Change Strategy Discussion Paper, the Government should invest in emissions reduction measures in the 2026-27 Budget, including:

- Incentives to support the electrification of households and businesses, including to replace gas appliances with electric alternatives and speed up the phase out of wood-fired heaters.
- Funding to design an integrated transport strategy for Canberra that prioritises moving people safely, protects the environment, drives down emissions, and maintains liveability and equitable access.
- Funding to rapidly increase the rate of the ACT's transition to electric buses.
- Long term investment to upgrade and build the missing links in Canberra's active travel network, in addition to low cost measures to incentivise active transport during the fuel crisis, including segregated bike lanes, additional secure bike storage, and support for e-bike loan services (see below recommendation on SEE-Change E-Bike Library).
- Upgrading and re-naturalising existing major creeks and stormwater channels, including reinstating plans to re-naturalise Sullivan's Creek.
- Funding the electrification of all ACT Government assets, including social housing, schools and community centres.

SEE Change E-bike Library Funding Extension

The Conservation Council strongly advocates for an extension of funding for the electric bike (e-bike) library operated by SEE Change, which is due to end on 30 June 2026.⁶ Achieving the ACT's legislated net zero emissions target will require sustained and practical interventions in the transport sector, which remains a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. E-bikes represent a low-emissions, accessible alternative to internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles, particularly for short to medium urban trips. Compared to traditional bicycles, e-bikes reduce physical barriers to uptake by providing battery-assisted mobility, making them suitable for a broader demographic, including older residents and those with limited physical capacity.

5

<https://conservationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CCACT-Submission-on-Developing-the-next-Climate-Strategy-for-the-ACT.pdf>

⁶ [Canberra's Electric Bike Library | energy.gov.au](https://energy.gov.au/canberra/electric-bike-library)

The SEE Change e-bike library is a highly successful program that allows individuals to borrow e-bikes for a 14-day period. This model reduces financial barriers to entry and enables behavioral change by allowing users to trial zero-emissions transport before committing to purchase. Since its launch in 2020, demand has steadily increased, with over 237 e-bikes loaned and more than 1,000 inquiries recorded by 2022.⁷ This indicates strong community interest and growing acceptance of active, low-carbon transport options.

Discontinuing this program would undermine progress toward emissions reduction in the transport sector and risk reversing behavioral shifts away from ICE vehicle dependence. It would also represent a missed opportunity to scale a proven initiative that delivers environmental, health, and social co-benefits in the ACT.

The Conservation Council strongly recommends extending the program's funding in the 2026-27 ACT Budget, including:

- Expanding the number of loan locations beyond the current sites in Downer and Kambah to improve accessibility across Canberra.
- Investing in targeted promotion and community education to maximize participation and ensure equitable access.

Recommendation 3 - Provide long term operational funding for ACT Community and Environmental Organizations.

Canberra-based Environment and Climate community organisations play a crucial role in Government strategies to reduce emissions on the pathway to net zero emissions by 2045, for a circular economy and to restore and conserve natural places in the ACT region. Despite the critical conservation and advocacy work undertaken by our member groups and their many volunteers, they continue to face significant funding constraints and future uncertainty due to a lack of Government support. The Council urges the Government to provide a substantive increase in funding in the 2026-27 Budget for Canberra based environmental organisations to ensure their sustainable and long term operation.

As per our previous submissions with SEE Change and the Canberra Environment Centre, the Council seeks an increase in operational funding of approximately \$150,000–\$180,000 per organization per year from 1 July 2026.⁸ This investment would ensure that Canberra's environmental NGOs can continue providing valuable advocacy, research, and strategic guidance to help the ACT achieve environmental targets, including net zero emissions by 2045. In the 2025/26 budget, the ACT Government provided a 'funding boost' to all community sector organisations over two years, costing \$20 million. If a full increase in funding is not supported, as an interim measure The Council advocates that this funding should be extended or made permanent, and increased. A doubling of this, costing \$20million per financial year, would be a relatively small investment, but which would yield significant positive benefits.

We also support Budget submissions from our member groups, including the National Parks Association of the ACT, for the Government to provide increased funding to support their

⁷ [Canberra Electric Bike Library extended | Bicycle Network](#)

⁸ [74.-SEE-Change,-Canberra-Environment-Centre-and-the-Conservation-Council-ACT.pdf](#)

ongoing operation and in recognition of the critical conservation and land management work they undertake.

Recognizing that environmental and social justice are inherently linked, we also support calls from the ACT Council of Social Services to properly resource the ACT Community sector⁹. We strongly advocate extending funding to at least five years, or ideally ten years to community sector organisations, with appropriate indexation adjustments. This will ensure continuity and prevent abrupt interruptions that could reverse progress. As called for by ACTCOSS the ACT Government should also supplement current indexation for inflation for all Community sector contracts (including environmental organisations by developing a Population Level Adjustment or similar measure that reflects annual increases in community need as a minimum additional annual increase in funding for all community sector contracts, addressing rising need and client complexity - particularly among lower income quintiles. .

The ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) has also highlighted that funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations (ACCOs) has been inconsistent and insufficient, undermining their capacity to assist the government in achieving shared environmental and ecological goals. We strongly advise the Government to involve ACCOs in decision-making processes and provide adequate funding to ensure they can meet both present and future demands. Currently, there is no dedicated ACT strategy to develop a collaborative committee with local Aboriginal communities.¹⁰ Although many emerging ACCOs are achieving their targets, they do not have permanent, secure long-term funding, which impacts workforce retention and ultimately affects outcomes.¹¹

Recommendation 4 - Provide immediate funding to deliver on the Government's outstanding 2025 election commitments

During the 2025 election, the Government committed to increase the number of in-field park rangers by 10, equal to an overall increase in rangers of 33 per cent, to support environmental conservation efforts and invasive species management in the ACT.¹² Yet, a decision to fund this measure has not yet been taken. We urge the Government in the 2026-27 Budget to allocate the funding needed for these new ranger positions, particularly noting that the implementation of the Nature Conservation Strategy 2026-2036, including the ongoing management of a cross-tenure Nature Conservation Network, will likely be the responsibility of the Parks and Conservation Service.

In addition, the Government made an election commitment in 2024 to increase funding for weed management to better tackle invasive species such as St John's Wort, costed at an estimated

9

<https://actcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ACTCOSS-2025-26-Comprehensive-Budget-Submission.pdf>

¹⁰ [*ACTCOSS-2025-26-Comprehensive-Budget-Submission.pdf](#)

¹¹ [09.-ACTCOSS.pdf](#)

¹²

https://www.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2989108/Supply-and-Confidence-Agreement-Update-Report-1.pdf

\$500,000 per annum from 2025–26 to 2027–28¹³. However, it remains unclear whether the Government has allocated this funding, or has achieved any measurable progress towards controlling invasive weed species in the ACT. Beyond this election commitment to reduce the impacts of St John’s Wort, additional invasive weeds, including African Lovegrass and Chilean Needle Grass, are posing a major threat to biodiversity across the ACT and require urgent Government investment in the 2026-27 Budget. We note that \$412,870 was provided in 2025-26 by the Australian Government through the Managing Pest Animals and Weeds Program to ACT’s Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD), as a matched funding opportunity to support the following invasive species management projects. Given the persistent threat invasive species such as St John’s Wort continues to pose to the ACT’s environment, particularly to our critically endangered native grasslands,¹⁴ The Council calls for an extension of the ACT Government portion of this funding beyond 2025-26.

¹³

https://www.treasury.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2588884/LAB098-Protecting-our-unique-environment-Weed-management.pdf

¹⁴ [St John's Wort presents serious threat to ACT ecosystem | CW](#)