

9. THE ENVIRONMENT

Highlights

The 2007-08 Budget supports the Government's environmental agenda, placing a strong emphasis on maintaining the gains made to date, while recognising that new and significant challenges are emerging.

Enhanced integration of environmental policy and service delivery is being achieved through better alignment of functional responsibilities within government agencies. This, combined with developments in intergovernmental collaborative arrangements, will achieve higher efficiencies in investment programs designed to support national environmental goals at a regional scale.

Areas of particular focus in 2007-08 include:

- refining programs for raising awareness of environmental issues in the community, generating commitment to a partnership approach to setting and achieving common goals, and providing support for targeted projects;
- building on successes in implementing the *ACT NOWaste Strategy* through new operational contracts and infrastructure;
- making a concerted whole-of-government approach to the threats posed by climate change through reducing greenhouse gas emissions and developing adaptive responses to potential impacts in accordance with the *ACT Climate Change Strategy*;
- injecting significant resources into the management of trees in parks and reserves;
- working with the Australian Government on the development of new funding arrangements for national natural resource management;
- maintaining active participation in national environment forums and programs through relevant ministerial councils;
- taking forward significant national energy and water reform agendas;
- undertaking a feasibility study of selected storm water systems for modification to resemble natural ponds and wetlands in both form and function;
- undertaking an ecological survey of riparian areas to determine ecological condition and conservation requirements;
- collaborating with research institutions in determining the conservation requirements of threatened species and ecological communities;
- commencing operations at the new Tidbinbilla Nature Discovery Centre; and
- expanding the Sustainable Schools program.

Budget Initiatives for 2007-08

Climate Change

Implementation of the Climate Change Strategy

Support for the Government's commitment to Climate Change and the implementation of the first action plan for the period 2007-2011 including improving the knowledge and awareness of climate change, energy efficiency of government, showcasing and promoting renewable technologies, community and business awareness and education programs and ensuring easy market access to green power.

Energy Efficiency Fund

This initiative supports energy and water savings initiatives in ACT Government buildings, as part of the Government's commitment to addressing climate change in the ACT.

Renewable Energy Showcase

This project involves the establishment of one or more renewable energy sites to showcase renewable energy technologies and to demonstrate their practical applications. These sites will highlight to the community the benefits of innovative solutions.

Additional funding for Tidbinbilla Nature Discovery Centre

This initiative provides for additional staffing for the newly created Tidbinbilla Nature Discovery Centre and support for upgraded interpretive programs. It includes an identified Indigenous Ranger position to assist with animal husbandry services and undertake interpretation of culturally sensitive matters.

Hazardous/dead tree removal and watering of young trees

This initiative provides for urgent tree maintenance works at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Namadgi National Park, and the Murrumbidgee River Corridor, the removal of dead or hazardous trees within urban areas, and to increase watering of new and developing trees using non-potable water.

Capital upgrades and improvements

These programs provide for additional works to be carried out in many of Canberra's urban parks and places. Works include remedial landscaping works, dead scrub and tree removal, plantings for the remaining stages of the tree replacement program, new tree plantings at Uriarra Crossing, Cotter Recreation Area and Gorooyaroo Nature Reserve, clean up of pest willows on the Molonglo River and Ginninderra Creek and the continuation of the weed management program in bushfire affected areas, high conservation and riparian areas.

ENVIRONMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2007-08

An Integrated Approach to the Pursuit of Sustainability Goals

The Government remains committed to embedding sustainability into the culture and systems of government and the community. To this end, resources for water, energy and climate change policy and program delivery have been realigned to improve their capacity to deal with emerging issues, both national and specific to the ACT. These areas have been brought together with natural resource management, animal welfare, and waste management, creating opportunities to establish new synergies for the efficient development and delivery of integrated programs to advance the sustainability agenda.

In the 2007-08 Budget the Government has provided substantial funding for climate change projects that will address energy efficiency, renewable energy and climate adaptation.

Other sustainability initiatives include:

- reviewing the ways in which ACT NOWaste goals can be achieved;
- contributing to the National Packaging Covenant which seeks to improve resource efficiency through the sustainable manufacture, use and recovery of packaging material;
- participating in significant programs of energy market reform and new initiatives in water management in partnership with Federal, State and Territory Governments;
- working with the community and the Australian Government to examine the case for nominating the ACT as a UNESCO biosphere reserve;
- developing agency *Sustainability Action Plans* and sustainability initiatives in schools that include waste, energy and water minimisation projects; and
- an integrated approach to the delivery of community engagement and information programs to foster the principles of sustainability.

As a member of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and other high-level forums, the Government actively contributes to the development and implementation of policy that advances the national environment agenda. These activities are also an important mechanism for maintaining currency with issues that have implications for the Territory and where there are benefits from a strategic national approach.

During 2007-08, the Government will continue its active membership of national intergovernmental forums, including:

- the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council;
- the Environment Protection and Heritage Council;
- the Primary Industries Ministerial Council;
- the National Packaging Covenant Council;
- the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council;
- the COAG Climate Change Group; and
- the Australian Alps Cooperative Management Program.

As a party to the *Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed* and the *Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement*, and as a member of the associated corporations Plant Health Australia and Animal Health Australia, the Government will continue to meet its corporate and operational commitments to a biosecurity contingency capability.

The ACT also participates in the Parks Forum, the representative body for the parks industry.

Climate Change

Compared with other jurisdictions, the ACT is a small contributor to Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing ACT greenhouse gas emissions and managing the seemingly inevitable impact of climate change is nevertheless central to the Government's commitment to the environment, both in an ACT context and nationally. To this end, the Government has reviewed existing greenhouse gas abatement policies and programs in the light of experience, forecast impacts from climate change over the next 30-50 years, and advances in related knowledge and technology.

The *ACT Climate Change Strategy* will be released by the Government shortly. It replaces the *2000 ACT Greenhouse Strategy* and will establish the policy framework for concerted action to address climate change. The Climate Change Strategy will set out the directions Government will pursue between 2007 and 2020 to support the community's response to climate change. Detailed action plans will be released at regular intervals during the life of the Strategy. The first action plan will be for 2007-2011. There are strong synergies between climate change and energy policies that will be pursued to achieve common goals.

The 2007-08 Budget provides funding for the implementation of the Strategy and a number of other initiatives to address climate change.

In 2007-08, the Government will continue the *ACT Energy Wise* program, which provides home energy audits and rebates to encourage changes in energy use patterns and incentives for retrofitting approved energy efficiency measures in existing houses.

The *ACT Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme*, which sets mandatory greenhouse gas benchmarks for ACT electricity retailers, will move into its third year of operation. The 2007 benchmark will remain in line with the legislation governing the scheme.

Water

The overarching issue in water management is the securing of the ACT and Region's water supplies in the face of the worst drought in the region's recorded history.

With combined water storage level falling below 32 per cent for the first time, the Government is considering innovative options for increasing and securing water. It is seeking solutions that go beyond imposing more stringent water restrictions, although these may be inevitable in the shorter term. Options being considered that could potentially reduce reliance on rainfall, and be operational within a few years include:

- in conjunction with ACTEW, investigating the potential for introducing purified water into the drinking supply under the *Water2Water* project. An expert panel has been appointed to advise the Government on the health aspects of the *Water2Water* project. Studies of the environmental impact of the proposal have also been commissioned; and

- a range of options identified under ACTEW's *Future Water Options* paper in 2005. In addition to enlarging the existing Cotter Dam by building a new dam wall on the Cotter River downstream of the existing dam, other options include securing water from Tantangara Dam in New South Wales.

This work will build on existing Government measures designed to increase the security of our supply, including:

- introducing permanent water conservation measures, and staged water restrictions, where necessary;
- implementing the Cotter to Googong Bulk Transfer Scheme, with the Cotter dam being brought back online;
- developing new environmental flow guidelines to better reflect the flows of our waterways and release more water for urban use;
- accessing water directly from the Murrumbidgee River through the extended Cotter to Googong Bulk Transfer Scheme;
- requiring water sensitive urban design to be incorporated into new housing estates and new development and refurbishment projects for urban parks and public places;
- maintaining water incentive programs aimed at reducing water consumption;
- working with the Australian Government on a significant initiative to harvest and utilise storm water from Canberra's inner waterways through retrofitting selected systems to resemble natural ponds and wetlands in both form and function and to allow for urban irrigation; and
- joining with other governments involved with the Murray Darling Basin to ensure critical water supplies are available for urban use.

Water Resources Strategy

The ACT Water Resources Strategy *Think water, act water* sets out a comprehensive approach to the management of the ACT's water resources. Implementation of the strategy commenced in 2004-05, and continues through to 2008-09. The strategy addresses water quality and quantity, as well as promoting the use of the water cycle as a basis for integrating stormwater, water supply and wastewater elements in the management of catchments.

The Government is providing financial support for a range of incentive programs for households and the commercial sector to reduce water consumption, as well as an education and awareness campaign to engage the wider community in the protection of this valuable resource. The emphasis on programs under the strategy is being modified in recognition of the impact of the drought and the possible need to move to higher stages of water restrictions.

The *Water Efficiency (Incentives) Program* has comprised the following programs:

- the GardenSmart Program (a service to provide advice on garden water efficiency and a \$50 rebate on water efficient products);
- the WaterSmart Homes (a service to provide installation of a water efficient showerhead, flow regulators and fix leaking taps and toilets);
- the Rainwater Tank (Internal Connection) Rebate Program;

- the Sustainable Schools Water Audit Program;
- the Commercial Water Audit Program (high water users only);
- improved water efficiency in the irrigation of public sportsgrounds, parks and schools; and
- communication and education campaign (displays, events and activities).

Programs for 2007-08 include:

- the Water Efficient Toilet Program (replacement of 11 litre single flush toilets with dual flush 6/3 litre toilets or less);
- Implementation of Sustainable Schools Water Audits;
- Greywater System Rebates for the residential sector;
- the Commercial Water Audit Implementation Program; and
- demonstration projects.

Catchment Management

In support of the Government's goal of securing a long term, reliable and high quality water supply for the ACT and the region, an integrated approach to catchment protection and management is being pursued through specialist vegetation management, stabilisation of disturbed ground and protection of riparian values. Engagement of, and support for the activities of community-based catchment management groups is a key strategy in achieving common goals.

A particular area of focus will be the restoration of the Lower Cotter catchment. Commencing in 2007-08, the Government will undertake a substantial soil and vegetation management program. This work will build on previous projects such as re-vegetation, pest plant control, constructing and reinstating sediment control dams, improving drainage of fire trails and roads, and closing unwanted roads. Partnerships with ACTEW and community groups will continue to feature strongly.

Work is progressing on enhancing the understanding of the Googong Catchment. The Government in conjunction with NSW Government agencies and ACTEW is mapping the performance of the Googong Catchment as part of the development of a catchment management plan, consistent with the undertakings in the Memorandum of Understanding on Cross Border Water Supply.

Catchment management activities continue to benefit from investment strategies that support delivery of the Natural Heritage Trust, the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*, and the *National Water Initiative*, which includes the *National Water Fund*.

The Australian Government's National Water Security Plan

The 'National Plan for Water Security' aims to reform the management of water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Plan includes new governance arrangements for the Murray-Darling Basin.

The ACT's support for the Plan is conditional on the development of an agreed cap on diversions for the ACT and region; resolution of management of Googong Dam and foreshores; and the Australian Government giving due consideration to the ACT's proposal for Australian Government Water Fund contribution to the financing of works to address the ACT and region's water supply security. If new governance arrangements are agreed, the ACT would be required to pass supporting legislation in 2007-08.

Murray-Darling Basin Initiative

As a party to the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement, the ACT will continue its commitment to relevant programs. The ACT is developing a *Salinity Management Strategy* in concert with the Commission. In accordance with the COAG agreement on the Living Murray, the ACT will meet its commitment to contribute to increased environmental water flows in the Murray River to protect key ecological assets. The commitment will be met by the ACT's adoption of Permanent Water Conservation Measures and a range of other water efficiency measures to reduce outdoor water use. Measures include improving irrigation efficiency of sportsgrounds, parks and schools, and residential water efficiency programs (GardenSmart and Greywater System Rebates).

National Water Initiative

The ACT is a signatory to the 2004 National Water Initiative (NWI). The NWI covers such aspects as increasing the security of water access entitlements; encouraging the expansion of water markets; establishing best practice water pricing; ensuring ecosystem health and protecting environmental assets; improving measuring monitoring and information; and encouraging water conservation in urban areas.

Water pricing issues are expected to be a major issue in 2007-08 along with the expansion of water accounting. The ACT continues to be an active member of the National Water Commission and a biennial assessment of the ACT NWI Implementation Plan will be conducted by the Commission during 2007-08.

Energy

In 2007-08, the focus for energy policy will be the continued development of the national energy reforms; the interface of these reforms on the ACT energy markets; the impact of the drought on markets; and improving the security of the electricity supply for the ACT and region.

A significant task will be to develop and modify energy policies to complement the ACT's *Climate Change Strategy*. Electricity use accounts for some 60 per cent of greenhouse gas generation attributable to the ACT. Containing the trend for increased electricity use will be a significant challenge.

National Market Reforms

The national energy reform program will gain momentum during 2007-08. Initiatives include:

- implementation of the first stage of the 2006 National Electricity and Gas Laws and Rules concurrently with the development of the distribution and retail market frameworks that will form the national 2007 legislative package;
- establishment of a National Energy Market Company to cover electricity and natural gas as well as the rollout of electricity smart meters; and
- commencement of the National Framework for Energy Efficiency Stage II will provide leverage for the energy efficiency initiatives under the *ACT Climate Change Strategy*.

The ACT Government will continue to work closely with ActewAGL and TransGrid to put in place a second line of electricity supply to the ACT and south-eastern NSW. The project will ensure appropriate electricity supply capacity for the Capital Region's continuing development.

Environment and Heritage Protection

Environmental protection will continue as a key element of the Government's environment agenda. It includes the development of policy and supporting legislation, the establishment of standards and guidelines for activities that may harm the environment, monitoring of environmental conditions, community engagement and awareness-raising of environmental matters and the investigation of incidents that may warrant remedial or compliance actions.

Environmental protection services provided by Government embrace water resources and water quality, air pollution, noise issues, land contaminants and urban tree protection. Regulatory and compliance support extends to nature conservation, fisheries management, veterinary services, pest management and heritage conservation. ACT membership of the Environment Protection and Heritage Council provides currency with national issues and provides guidance for a common approach to related matters.

During 2007-08, in support of its commitment to implementation of the National Environment Protection Measure for Ambient Air Quality, the Government will implement an enhanced air quality monitoring program, particularly in relation to fine particulate matter. New air monitoring equipment will provide additional data and contribute to a more detailed understanding of particulate pollution across Canberra.

The ACT will continue its participation in the National Pollutant Inventory, an Australia-wide program designed to provide the community, industry and governments with information on the types and amounts of polluting substances being emitted into the environment.

As part of a program of development and review of environment protection policies under the *Environment Protection Act 1997*, the Government will review the Hazardous Material and Contaminated Sites Environment Protection Policies.

During 2007-08, the Heritage Council will continue its work to update the ACT Heritage Places Register to better reflect the rich Aboriginal, natural and historic heritage of the ACT.

Waste Management

The Government is continuing to implement the *NOWaste Strategy* and has achieved notable success with a 75% resource recovery rate in 2005-06. The underpinning programs are aimed at achieving a balance between infrastructure development in both the government and private sectors, providing waste pricing mechanisms to encourage waste generators to divert materials to recovery and recycling alternatives, and promote complementary community behaviour. It is anticipated that these initiatives will further increase resource recovery rates and reduce waste to landfill.

Infrastructure and Services

Municipal waste service delivery will continue to be provided at the current service levels to the community. Improvements at the Mugga Lane Resource Management Centre have been achieved through tendering new operational contracts for landfill, resource recovery, reusables and weighbridge operations. The new contracts established will progress waste to landfill reduction goals by enhancing infrastructure and service capabilities.

The *Waste Pricing Strategy* will continue to be implemented with pricing being modified to reflect the true cost of waste to landfill. The price mechanism continues to be an important factor in encouraging waste generators to take up cheaper and more beneficial recycling alternatives.

The new Mugga Lane Landfill Cell will become operational in 2007-08 and will provide 6-7 years of landfill capacity to Canberra and the surrounding region, depending on waste generation rates. The new cell has been designed and constructed to meet stringent environmental standards set by the Environment Protection Authority.

A focus on improving asset management practices will be progressed in 2007-08 with the development of a new Strategic Asset Management Plan and site-specific master plans for Mugga Lane and Belconnen landfills.

Policy and Programs

The *NOWaste Strategy* aims to achieve a society where unwanted materials are seen as resources rather than waste and is based on a hierarchy of 'reduce, reuse and recover resources' before landfill disposal is considered an option. In 2003, the Government released its action plan for 2004-07 'Turning Waste into Resources' which committed the Government to a review, in 2007, of the progress of the Strategy and planning for further programs to achieve the NOWaste target. That review will be completed in 2007-08.

In December 2006, the Government introduced a *Used Packaging Materials Industry Waste Reduction Plan* to reduce environmental degradation arising from the disposal of used packaging material, conserve virgin material through the encouragement of waste avoidance and the reuse and recycling of used packaging. This measure supports and complements voluntary strategies promoted by the Government through its commitment to the *National Packaging Covenant*.

An important element of the 2004-07 action plan is to target cultural and attitudinal change within the community with respect to waste. One of the most notable successes of the program is the Waste Wise Schools program which seeks to incorporate waste minimisation

programs and activities into the school curriculum. The uptake of this program has exceeded all expectations and the Government will continue to support the program strongly in 2007-08. Integrated delivery with the Sustainable Schools program will see efficiency benefits and a more comprehensive service delivery.

Nature Conservation and Natural Resource Management

Nature conservation embraces the spectrum of activities that are directed at ensuring the Territory's natural assets and values are managed and used in a sustainable fashion. It includes survey, monitoring and evaluation, protection, land use planning and management, and research. An area of particular focus is the identification of vulnerable or sensitive elements of biodiversity and the management of threats to their conservation requirements.

The parks and reserves that make up our nature conservation estate comprise the core of our nature conservation assets (54% of the Territory), but their long term viability is dependent on an integrated landscape scale approach that involves a complementary land planning and management environment, strong support for community awareness-raising and engagement, and science-based expert advice on management directions and programs.

The Government's environment agenda will continue its strong commitment to nature conservation and natural resource management. Key activities for 2007-08 are discussed below.

Conservation of Ecological Communities

Woodlands, grasslands and aquatic ecosystems comprise important elements of the Territory's biodiversity. Management of degrading influences and application of special conservation measure remain continuing challenges. Key priorities for 2007-08 include:

- upgrading management standards of woodland reserves at Gorooyaroo, Mulligans Flat and Callum Brae;
- construction of predator-proof fencing at Gorooyaroo woodland reserve as part of a collaborative research program into management options for threatened species;
- continuing ecological surveys in the nature reserves adding to information about woodland flora and fauna with a particular focus on woodland mammals and birds;
- protecting threatened woodland plants and animals through special management arrangements with land-holders at south Aranda, Hall and in the Naas Valley;
- exploring planning options for protection of woodlands and grasslands of the Kama rural property adjacent to the Molonglo urban development; and
- a survey of priority riparian areas to determine ecosystem characteristics and their conservation needs.

Threatened Species Research

Determining the conservation needs of species and communities that are threatened with extinction calls for specialist skills that are typically not widely available. While the ACT Government maintains a wildlife research capability and has nationally recognised expertise in a number of specialty areas, collaboration with other government agencies and research

institutions is often the most effective means of developing or progressing the research elements of a threatened species conservation strategy.

Parks, Conservation and Lands, in the Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS), as the land management and wildlife research agency of the Government, is now entering the second of three years of collaborative research with the Fenner School of Environment and Society at the Australian National University. The research is focused on ecological restoration of woodlands, particularly in relation to the role of grazing, fire and fallen timber in maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem functions, and how best to manage them to assist in the recovery of threatened or declining woodland species.

Research by the University of Canberra into the conservation requirement of grassland fauna in the Majura and Jerrabomberra Valleys will continue to be supported.

The successful captive husbandry program at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve for the Northern Corroboree Frog will continue in 2007-08. The key focus now is successful breeding and re-introduction of frogs to the wild. Two new discrete breeding facilities have been established as a safeguard against a catastrophic loss of breeding success in an individual facility.

The cross-fostering program at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve for the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby was severely impacted by the January 2003 bushfire when most of the captive colony was lost. The program, reinstated in 2004-05, is continuing its work in collaboration with the Victorian Recovery Team.

Fisheries Management

Aquatic survey work in ACT and regional streams will be continued with targeted monitoring programs for species of particular concern. Surveys in 2005 and 2006 indicated that numbers of the threatened Two-spined Blackfish have recovered strongly from the January 2003 bushfire at some sites, with trout populations also recovering in 2005. Over the past year it has become evident that the endangered Macquarie Perch is breeding successfully in the Cotter River and its extent has expanded upstream of the Cotter Dam using the fish ladder installed in the Cotter River. Investigation of aquatic biota in relation to the implications of environmental flow regime will continue.

Management Planning for Parks and Reserves

Management Plans for Public Land are required under the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*. They identify conservation and land use values and issues and set out how prescribed management objectives are to be achieved.

Preparation of a new management plan for Namadgi National Park has been a major exercise in recent years. It takes account of special management issues arising from the January 2003 bushfire, including a heightened awareness of the need to provide for water supply and fire management. The Government will be considering a new plan for formal adoption early in 2007-08.

Other management plans under development that are expected to be considered by the Government during 2007-08 include Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve, Googong

Foreshores, Glebe Park, Black Mountain Peninsula District Park, and Urban Open Space and Public Access Sportsgrounds in the Gungahlin Region.

Pest Plant and Animal Management

Management of the impact of pest plants and animals on environmental, production resources and urban amenity requires a substantial collaborative effort by both public and private land managers, volunteer groups and the broader community. The Government accepts this work as a substantial and continuing challenge. An annual program of survey, monitoring and control will be maintained that builds on significant successes already being achieved.

The *ACT Weeds Strategy* provides the policy framework for a strategic approach to weed management. A revised Strategy will be considered by Government during 2007-08.

In 2007-08, priority action for weed control will target alligator weed, broom and gorse, tall African love grass, serrated tussock and African boxthorn as weed species of particular concern. Weeds control more generally, for example blackberry, will be important in or adjacent to areas of high conservation value. Management of pest willows on the Molonglo River and Ginninderra Creek will also be undertaken.

Pest animal priority actions in 2007-08 will continue to be focused toward feral pigs, wild dogs and feral horses. The Government will continue its collaborative research work with the Invasive Species Cooperative Research Centre for new techniques for wild pig control, and with the University of Newcastle for fertility control methods for Eastern Grey Kangaroos.

Maintaining the Urban Forest

Canberra's urban forest is expanding and ageing. Studies indicate that the exotic and deciduous urban trees planted between 1913 and 1928, and native species planted between 1968 and 1982 are expected to reach the end of their safe and useful life over the next 20 years. As these trees decline they will need to be removed and replaced so that the integrity of the urban forest is not compromised.

The continuing drought conditions have exacerbated this situation with over 10,000 trees having to be removed over the past four years. It is anticipated that a further 5,000 or more dead and drought-affected trees will need to be removed over the next two years.

The *Urban Trees Asset Management Plan* for the period 2005-2022 has been further reviewed taking into account the issues associated with the natural decline of the urban trees and the need to manage their replacement.

A major initiative is being developed for the programmed replacement of the urban forest, including ensuring the effects of ongoing drought conditions are managed effectively through dead tree removal and timely replacement, and sustaining young trees through their development.

Biosecurity

The increasing profile of biosecurity nationally and internationally is recognised by the Government as a significant policy and management challenge if our natural resources,

primary industries, and public health and amenity are to be protected from the negative impacts of new pests and diseases.

Existing arrangements under the *Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed* and the *Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement* establish a national collaborative approach between industry and governments to prepare for, respond to and recover from incursions of pests and diseases of primary industries. These agreements provide for affected parties to the agreements (both industries and governments) to jointly decide on necessary actions and to share the costs involved in a pre-agreed way.

A parallel process for responding to pests and diseases that are not covered by existing arrangements is being progressed by the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council and the Primary Industries Ministerial Council under the AusBIOSEC banner. During 2007-08 an intergovernmental agreement will be developed to provide for a national approach to the management of new pests and diseases that impact on the environment and where responsibility for achieving the public good outcomes sought would primarily rest with governments.

Fire Fuel Management and Fuel Reduction

In accordance with the *Emergencies Act 2004*, Parks, Conservation and Lands in TAMS, as the Government's single land management agency, prepares the *Bushfire Operations Plan*. This plan details the activities to be undertaken to meet the fire management standards specified in the *Strategic Bushfire Management Plan*. These activities relate to fuel management, access improvement, fire infrastructure, training and equipment and aim to protect assets and increase the capacity to respond to and manage fires on unleased land.

Implementation of the *2006-07 Bushfire Operations Plan* has largely proceeded to plan, including prescribed burning, slashing, grazing for the purpose of fuel reduction, physical fuel removal, fire trail upgrades, and staff fire training.

National Natural Resource Management Programs

The Government has entered into arrangements with the Australian Government for joint delivery of a number of national natural resource management programs. Bilateral Agreements for the Natural Heritage Trust and the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* are the primary underpinning agreements. Investment in these programs is guided by the *ACT Natural Resource Management (NRM) Plan* and related Government priorities for conservation of the natural environment.

Existing bilateral agreements expire in June 2008. Through its membership of related ministerial councils, the Government will be working with the Australian Government on the development of new national natural resource management funding arrangements with a view to maintaining impetus and ensuring a successful transition.

During 2007-08, the Government, with the assistance of the ACT NRM Council, will be giving priority to completing the range of projects that are supported by Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and National Action Plan funding and planning for a new suite of projects to be delivered under the next iteration of the NHT.

Animal Welfare and Domestic Animal Management

A comprehensive approach to animal welfare embraces wildlife and pest management, working animals, animals used for production, sporting pursuits, research and teaching, and domestic pets. During 2007-08, the Government will continue to support development and application of the highest standards for meeting health and welfare requirements of animals. Key areas of activity will include:

- incorporation of animal welfare principles in all relevant management practices;
- a progressive review of Codes of Practice relating to animal welfare; and
- amendments to the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* to accommodate policy initiatives that reflect changes in community expectations and standards.

The Government's domestic animals policies aim to promote responsible pet ownership, including ensuring that animal welfare and health standards are met to a high degree and that the undesirable impacts of stray and feral dogs and cats on native wildlife are minimised. Policies underpinning the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* were reviewed in 2006-07 and an amendment Bill will be considered by the Government.

As the new suburbs of Forde and Bonner in Gungahlin become populated, the Government will require cat containment to protect threatened bird species in adjacent nature reserves.

Community Engagement, Education and Support

Through individual actions or as part of an organised group, the contribution to environmental goals by members of the community, businesses and non-government organisations is a vital ingredient for successful environmental outcomes. Increased awareness, commitment and capacity can be achieved through both structured and informal programs designed to engage the community in gaining a greater understanding of the local environment and cultural heritage. The provision of information products and services, and targeted financial support are important components of such a strategy.

Grants Programs

The ACT Environment Grants and the ACT Heritage Grants programs will continue to support worthwhile small projects in such diverse areas as:

- conservation planning;
- sustainable landscape development;
- reducing environmental impacts;
- community engagement, education and awareness-raising; and
- natural and cultural heritage conservation works.

The Natural Heritage Trust and the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* provides funding support for a range of community-based projects, including a network of natural resource management facilitators that helps generate, coordinate and implement suitable projects. This program will continue in 2007-08.

Community Awareness Education and Information

Community information and engagement programs will be designed to target particular issues with an integrated approach being pursued wherever possible. Improved coordination of the delivery of communications services will be achieved through a whole of agency approach within the Department of Territory and Municipal Services.

Programs to be delivered will include:

- conservation of natural and culture heritage;
- best practice use of solid fuel heaters;
- energy and water conservation; and
- integrating life style choices to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Following the success of the pilot program in 2006-07, the Government will continue to support and deliver the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative which helps schools become more ecologically sustainable.

In 2007-08 the program will:

- develop curriculum support material for teachers;
- support the existing 70 schools in the program and engage more schools;
- provide professional development for teachers;
- produce a best practice guide for elements of the program including water, energy, biodiversity and curriculum development;
- develop an accreditation system for schools; and
- establish an ACT Sustainable Schools Award.

Delivery of the Sustainable Schools initiative will be coordinated with related programs that promote water, energy and waste management efficiencies.

Visitor Services

Visitors to parks and reserves are provided with a range of use and information services and facilities, including visitor information centres, recreational facilities, directional signs, information about local conditions and general information and educational products.

During 2007-08, visitor services will include the following:

- a new shelter will be opened on the site of the former Franklin Chalet burned during the January 2003 bushfire. It will incorporate an information display about the natural and heritage values of this area of Namadgi National Park;
- new signage, including park entrance signs and visitor information displays will be provided in Canberra Nature Park;
- the Tidbinbilla Nature Discovery Centre will commence operation. It will create a unique nature-based recreation, education, research and tourism attraction. The Centre, based around the pre-existing Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve wetlands, will provide a stimulating

experience where visitors can observe wildlife in natural settings supported by innovative information displays and education programs;

- in selected parks and reserves, reservation systems are being refined for events and activities such as camping, bushwalking, orienteering, ceremonies and car rallies. Camping bookings are being introduced; and
- the development of a number of heritage travel routes including the installation of on-ground directional and interpretative signage will be finalised. They will provide links to themed itineraries and existing heritage attractions.

Indigenous Engagement

The Government remains committed to consultation with the Territory's Indigenous community on natural and cultural heritage matters, particularly where traditional ties with the land and aspirations for strengthening those ties are important.

Arrangements for participative management in Namadgi National Park will be reviewed following completion of the Namadgi National Park Management Plan.

The Government will continue its successful Indigenous traineeship program, building on the successes of previous years where traineeships in natural resource management saw participants secure permanent employment. In 2007-08, funding will be provided for two Indigenous traineeships within the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. Each traineeship will be for two years and will include both formal study and 'on-the-job' training in rotations throughout the Department.