

8. BUDGET CONSULTATION

Introduction

The Government sought input from the community in December 2002, along with the release of a Budget consultation document. This provided an overview of the Territory's financial position to aid the discussion and debate on budget issues and priorities.

The Government also invited Standing Committees of the Legislative Assembly to participate in the consultation process. This offer was not accepted.

Forty three budget submissions were received by the ACT Government from a range of community, business, sports, union and environmental groups.

Headline Issues for Consideration

January 2003 Bushfire

Generally, the submissions from the community registered their appreciation of the Government in balancing the needs of the community, affected by the January 2003 bushfires, with the needs of the wider community.

Submissions received called for transparency in purpose, use and presentation of bushfire revenue and expenditure initiatives. The community requested the Government quarantine the impact of the bushfires on the budget, in the consideration of other initiatives.

Many community groups argued for additional funding in recognition of their efforts in meeting the increased demands for their services, resulting from the bushfires.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns in the Budget through:

- the inclusion of a supplementary paper dedicated to the Bushfire Recovery;
- the clear identification of bushfire initiatives within the budget papers (for example in the supplementary paper and Chapter 6.1 of Budget Paper 3);
- the provision to community groups occupying the Grant Cameron Centre of a one month rental waiver within the 2002-03 Appropriation Act No.2, in recognition of the additional services provided during the bushfires; and
- additional funding in 2002-03 to St Vincent de Paul to assist with the distribution of emergency clothing and food following the January 2003 bushfire.

Housing

General concern focused on the availability of affordable housing, provision of facilities for special interest groups (the aged, disabled, youth, women, single homeless men and students) and the Government's support for community housing.

The submissions called for the implementation of the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Taskforce and Homelessness Strategy.

The aged community requested a study into unmet needs, a change to stamp duty laws to remove the obstacle of changing housing accommodation, and the creation of land banks for housing projects for the elderly.

Submissions called for greater transparency in public housing programs, a focus on long-term housing options, and greater participation and support (including the transfer of property ownership) for the community housing sector.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by:

- providing for the expansion of the ACT Supported Accommodation Assistance Program through the response to homelessness initiative, including the provision of crisis and medium term accommodation services for single homeless men;
- a review of the flexibility of support options and best match of housing and early intervention strategies, including considering the accommodation options for homeless women;
- additional short term supported accommodation places for men, families and couples;
- continued support for FaBRiC to provide respite care to children with a disability and their families;
- consideration for the provision of land for aged care accommodation in the forthcoming draft Land Release Program for 2003-04;
- continuation of discussions with community groups on alternate accommodation models, especially as it relates to services for the aged community; and
- further consideration of the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Taskforce and provision of a response to these recommendations, including the development of a community housing plan.

Health

Mental health was an area of particular concern for a significant number of groups. Specific concerns relate to accommodation options, community based support programs, carer support, services in corrections facilities, support for women with dual diagnoses and their children (and animals), outreach programs and non-government health care. In addition, the community groups requested additional funding for disability services, respite care and aged care, especially for aged persons from a multilingual and culturally diverse background.

The community requested funding for epilepsy education, needle and syringe programs, programs to address problem gambling and funding for alzheimer support, counselling and education services.

Nursing unions called for additional nursing staff, pay increases, additional training and an increase in the level of higher qualified nursing staff. There was also general concern for the

level of bulk billing general practitioners and general practitioners in suburban areas and for the career opportunities of carers.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns through a number of Budget initiatives provided for:

- supervision and co-ordination of early assessment for mental health clients at Calvary Hospital;
- a mental health worker to provide integrated services management of consumers with dual diagnosis disorders;
- outreach services for mental health clients of Gungahlin in their own homes;
- a carer training and support package and for the evaluation of the program;
- review of the flexibility of support options and best match of housing, including considering the accommodation options for homeless women including brokerage and the purchase of specialist services;
- continued support for monitoring unmet vocational education and training demand, in relation to the demand for training of enrolled nurses and working with hospitals and training providers to explore ways and means of increasing the numbers of enrolled nurses in training; and
- continued support to maintain industry training advisory arrangements, following the withdrawal of Commonwealth funding.

Disability Services

The community called for an expansion of accommodation options, respite care, investigation into the unmet needs, easy access to service provision, support for students with disabilities, assistance for carers and the consideration of people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds in the development of policies and service delivery models.

They requested the implementation of disability reform in response to the Gallop Inquiry and specific funding to address an ageing population, people with disabilities and funding for public therapy facilities.

The community requested implementation of recommendations of the Standing Committee on Health and Community Care's report into Elder Abuse and offered support for the Government's approach to development of the Canberra Plan as it relates to the Social Plan.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns through:

- an initiative to address the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Health and Community Care's report into Elder Abuse introducing a multifaceted approach to addressing Elder Abuse. This includes the introduction of a Hotline Service for reporting elder abuse and for providing an information and education resource concerning elder abuse prevention, a Community Awareness Campaign involving the development of a communication strategy that will include media advertising, pamphlets, posters and information dissemination through forums and community announcements; the development of a set of comprehensive training materials for professionals who come in contact with older people, and the development and conduct of an initial benchmarking survey to establish the level of awareness of what constitutes elder abuse in the ACT; and
- an initiative that responds to critical funding requests for people with disabilities who have been assessed as having high and complex unmet support needs. The initiative will provide immediate and ongoing support for people with disabilities and their families who have reached a personal crisis and need ongoing support.

In addition, the community's concerns should be addressed through:

- continued support to implement the reforms specified in Steps to Reform, in response to the Gallop Inquiry;
- continued support for a review of the access, eligibility and funding arrangements for support services in the ACT, including the development of an ACT resource model to provide support for students with disabilities to access and participate in their educational program, linked to the Individual Learning Plan for each student;
- introduction of a new model for the delivery of therapist services and additional funding for therapeutic services targeted at the adolescent and adult aged group;
- consideration of opportunities for people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (and others in the community) within the Social Plan;
- continued support for the development of a whole of government approach to identifying and supporting the needs of carers. The 'carers strategy' is aimed at strengthening the capacity of informal carers in the ACT;
- consideration of alternative communication media, for example pamphlets, to assist people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds to learn about the services offered by the Government; and
- continuation of the policy of requiring the consideration of the needs of people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds within community service contracts.

Education

The community called for support and funding to reduce class sizes (preschools, high school), for students with disabilities and the aged, further research into alternative models of education and support, a stronger focus on literacy and numeracy programs, curriculum development, personal welfare support and parental involvement programs.

In addition, many community groups raised concern with the level of maintenance and refurbishment to school facilities and reliance on parents for funding school equipment, insurance, cleaning, facilities and administration resources. They also raised concern about perceived drop in the level of funding per student relative to the national average.

The non-government schooling sector raised concerns about the level of per capita funding the ACT Government provides to this sector in general and for disabled students. They requested an extension of various initiatives (for example information and communication technology and smaller class sizes), into non-government schools or the inclusion of these initiatives within the public school base funding formula. They also requested a continuation to the existing funding for the Interest Subsidy Scheme, especially as it relates to newly established institutions.

Teacher groups called for greater teacher resources within schools and for more flexible employment structures and conditions of service to improve teachers' career paths, wage parity with NSW, a greater focus on relief staff conditions, implementation of various recommendations of studies into schooling and access to professional development for staff.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative for a youth worker for every high school to complement existing counselling and welfare services;
- an initiative for the establishment of an integrated curriculum renewal program for ACT preschool to year 12 across eight broad learning areas;
- an initiative for additional funding for the non-government schooling sector;
- an initiative for preschools to contribute to cleaning and consumables costs incurred by preschool parent associations; and
- the establishment of a support unit to provide specialist assistance to schools on contract management, especially as it relates to school cleaning.

In addition, the government considers that the community's concerns will be addressed by:

- continued support for the Student Pathways Initiative which is aimed at improving student literacy and numeracy levels, and developing individual pathway plans for all students and targets students potentially at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes;
- continuation of the Parentlink service that provides assistance to parents in accessing services for students with disabilities;
- continuation of the Enhanced Indigenous Support Program that addresses learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy for indigenous students;
- implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan 2003-04, requiring all primary schools, high schools and secondary colleges to develop literacy and numeracy plans and establishing a resource team focussed on assisting Government high schools to plan and improve educational programs and develop engaging, relevant and inclusive curricula;

- continued support for the 2002-03 initiative targeted at reducing Year 3 Class Sizes for primary schools;
- consideration of recommendations made by a government working party that examined the range of issues relating to casual teachers;
- continuation of the High School Development Program that creates structures that support and respond to the emerging needs of adolescents and their community's;
- continuation of the Disability Services for Children initiative to 2003-04 for appropriate and integrated clinical and community services for children with complex behavioural and support issues;
- continuation of policies like the development of the ACT Government Schools Plan and the Parent/Carers as Partners in Schooling Policy that illustrates the commitment to working closely with parents and carers. This includes the establishment of parent rooms/centres for meetings, events and liaison with staff. Further, a Review of School Reporting will lead to enhanced parent-school partnerships through improvements in the provision of timely, useful and accurate information to parents/carers;
- implementation of the 2002-03 Parent/Carers as Partners in Schooling Policy;
- continuation of the Review of Counselling Services included in the 2002-03 Budget;
- continuation of funding for literacy and numeracy officers in high schools and secondary colleges;
- continued investment in information technology continues through the 2002-03 initiatives Laptops for Teachers and Schools IT Capacity Upgrade including professional development for teachers;
- continuation of various programs aimed at further improving these results particularly for boys and Indigenous students, including the Count Me In numeracy program and programs involving the publication of contemporary Aboriginal stories; and
- continuation of support for the Centre for Teaching and Learning Technologies which offers many courses for teachers in Information Technology.

Family, Youth and Other Community Services

A wide range of initiatives were proposed by the peak youth advocacy body, covering the broad themes listed in this document. In addition they requested support and funding for youth co-morbidity outreach services, individual support packages, early intervention schemes, lobbying the Commonwealth Government for parity between the youth allowance and the aged pension, support for the wage claims of child care workers and funding community services to ensure employees are able to meet the obligations under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (1989)*.

They highlighted concern with the number of young people entering aged care institutions.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative for the continuation of the RecLINK program, an early intervention initiative that aims to reduce anti-social behaviours amongst at risk young people and increase their participation in recreation and sporting activities;
- an initiative to strengthen the government's statutory response to children at risk of abuse and neglect. This system will improve the assessment, intervention and case management of children and young people by the implementation of a centralised intake system, improved data collection standards and strengthened quality assurance; and
- a review of The ACT Young Peoples Framework.

In addition, the government considers that the community's concerns would be addressed through:

- continued support for the provision of workplace assessment workshops, and for the maintenance of the ACT Assessors Network;
- continued support for the Youth Services Program as an early intervention program for young people in the ACT community;
- reaffirm the commitment to preventing inappropriate admissions to nursing homes for young people; and
- continued participation in the national reconciliation group progressing these issues identified in the working group on 'Indigenous child safety and well-being'.

Justice and Community Safety

Submissions from the community focussed mainly on corrective service and policing issues. In respect to the ACT Remand Service the community called for the establishment of forensic mental health services, funds for the new remand centre and counselling services at remand centres

The community requested a broadening of the eligibility of reform programs to those with the potential for violence and the provision of training for police dealing with youth and people from a diverse cultural and linguistic background.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative for the provision of health services to detainees accommodated at the temporary remand centre at Symonston;
- an initiative for the design and documentation of a new remand centre. In planning the new remand centre, particular attention will be paid to the special needs of women and other minority groups;
- an initiative to meet additional operational requirements of the Court Transport Unit and Symonston Temporary Remand Centre to provide safe, secure and efficient services to the Magistrates Court, Supreme Court and Sentence Administration Board, and reduce the need to use NSW facilities as a remand option;

- an initiative to allow the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Australian Federal Police to jointly identify, research and develop an appropriate program to improve investigation and prosecution of sexual offences in the ACT;
- support for the development of a forward design proposal for an upgrade of Quamby Youth Detention Centre to address the needs of residents on admission; have separate accommodation for female residents; a separate induction/assessment unit for new residents; better meet the accommodation needs for young people with special needs; culturally sensitive facilities for indigenous young people; and improve the indoor education, recreation and other program facilities;
- support for the continuation of counselling services provided by ACT Corrective Services; and
- support for The Sex Offender Consultative Stakeholder Group consideration of a request from community groups for members of the community to voluntarily participate in programs, otherwise only offered to offenders.

Roads, Planning and Infrastructure

There was support from both the environment, community service and business groups for the wider introduction of paid parking throughout the ACT. The community offered support for the Government's approach to development of the Canberra Plan, including the Spatial Plan.

The community requested the development of the Gungahlin Drive extension and called for the immediate construction of four lanes, including the separation of the development work into small parcels to facilitate local contractors' involvement. There was also support for a light rail system servicing the Gungahlin community.

The community also requested the further construction and maintenance of cycle and pedestrian paths.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative for the introduction of paid parking in Barton;
- an initiative for implementation of planning investigations as part of the Canberra Spatial Plan;
- continued support for the construction of Gungahlin Drive Extension, commencing construction in June 2004 and progressing towards completion by June 2006;
- continued support for the Public Transport Futures Feasibility Study. The study will identify the best options for public transport in Canberra and will produce an action plan to achieve the transport vision; and
- continued support for the Procurement Plan for the siting of the Gungahlin Drive Extension, that requires the design component be divided into three packages to allow competition between local consultants as well as large interstate consultants. For similar reasons, the construction work for this project will also be divided into a number of stages for tendering.

Transport

The community requested implementation of policy changes flowing on from the Public Transport Feasibility Study, the review of public investment in transport, the Taxi Transport Scheme and the Travel Smart program. They focused on safe, comfortable and a timely public transport system.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative of reforms for taxis and hire cars, including the auction of additional licences, accreditation fees for taxi and hire car services and hire car licence fees;
- an initiative for the implementation of the Sustainable Transport Plan, including an initiative to support the Travel Smart program in 2003-04 and an initiative for ACT's participation in a national Travel Behaviour Change program;
- an initiative for the development of a business model for a low cost and flexible (door-to-door) public transport feeder service for people wanting to travel to and from suburbs late in the evening;
- the provision of "Keep Left" signage on shared paths around lakes Burley Griffin, Tuggeranong and Ginninderra;
- continuation of the Government's existing program of preparing a comprehensive transport plan (Sustainable Transport Plan) to serve the ACT to the year 2020 considering the public transport system, infrastructure and service requirements of the ACT community;
- support for a cycle infrastructure review to help set priorities for provision of on road lanes and new cycle paths; and
- continued support for television advertisements to encourage motorists to give enough space to cyclists and encourage cyclists to obey traffic controls.

Business and Tourism

In relation to tourism, there was a belief that the Government needs to consolidate its approach to marketing the ACT across agencies and the National Capital Planning Authority, with a specific focus on attracting major events (sporting) to the ACT.

The business sector requested a focus on gaining a share of the convention market and creation of international tourism. This included the provision of a new multi-function convention centre, the refurbishment of the existing convention centre, advertising internationally and creating a truly international airport.

The business community raised objections to the Government's involvement in land development but provided support for the creation of the Planning Authority. In addition, the business community requested the government support regional small to medium business by breaking up larger projects, providing fair treatment, providing them with information on

selling to government, briefings on specific opportunities and by ensuring there are open channels of communication.

The social services sector called for greater disclosure of the concessions and rebates provided to business.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative that will extend the suite of Government programs available to develop small and micro business in the ACT;
- an initiative for a Partners Canberra program that will build a new competitive advantage for the Canberra region economic area by improving the access and quality of information to companies and individuals; and
- an initiative for a Council of Education Export. The Council will be the peak body responsible for establishing the ACT as a preferred study location for international students. It will support the development of the ACT as a university and further education centre. In addition to promoting the ACT as a mainstream education destination, the Council will develop and implement a campaign targeting parents and relatives of ACT-based students as a means of encouraging international tourism to the region.

The Government considers the issues raised in various submissions will be addressed by:

- continued support for the six procurement principles outlined in Government Procurement (Principles) Guideline 2002 (No 1) issued as a Disallowable Instrument on 6 June 2002, especially as it relates to local industry development;
- continued support for Treasury's Buyers and Sellers Information Service (Basis), BusinessACT briefing sessions on specific procurement projects and ACT Procurement Solutions industry forums;
- continued support for the ongoing work in evaluating the refitting and refurbishment of the National Convention Centre;
- ongoing efforts in fostering and developing the tourism alliance between Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation, the National Capital Planning Authority and the event management industry for the purpose of promoting the national capital through campaigns and events, including providing a platform for discussions concerning the attraction of major events to Canberra. This includes continuing the consultative forum at senior executive level with Department of Transport and Regional Services;
- ongoing support for the Events Assistance Program which is focused on attracting a wide range of events that provide or have the potential to provide tourism-related benefits to Canberra and commitment to the Tourism Masterplan;
- support for the facilitation of international flights from Canberra Airport;
- ongoing commitment to funding the Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation; and
- continued commitment to the Government's election policy of direct involvement in land development and continuation of other development models including public/private partnerships and a continuation of the sale of greenfield parcels to private sector developers.

Insurance

Community groups identified a need to broaden the Government's definition of organisations eligible for the ACT Government-negotiated scheme, and the inclusion of insurance costs within the Government's new and existing initiatives.

Community Groups also focused on reform within Professional Indemnity Insurance arrangements.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- a focus on the availability and affordability of public liability insurance for the ACT community;
- continued support for the Government's policy of abolishing stamp duty on public liability insurance for local community, non-profit and sporting groups;
- continued support for the standardisation of public liability insurance levels across government for all community groups occupying government property under written agreements; and
- continuation of involvement in the discussion of the various federal/state officer and ministerial forums in the discussions regarding professional indemnity insurance.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Concerns were expressed regarding funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in health, justice, housing and community services.

The community requested the implementation of the recommendations of various reports and plans on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage in the ACT.

The Government has considered these concerns. The 2003-04 Budget provides for an Indigenous Official Visitor initiative who can assist ACT Indigenous offenders who are detained in ACT facilities, such as the Belconnen Remand Centre, Symonston Temporary Remand Centre, Quamby Juvenile Detention Centre or in NSW prisons.

The Government will continue to seek advice from the Working Group on Optimising Services Delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and give consideration to the recommendations of the various reports and plans on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage in the ACT.

Community Groups

Requests were received for the funding of additional peak groups and an increase in funding for peak groups that actively participate in the processes of the government, including inquiries into the bushfires and for greater independent lobby group representation. Specific funding was requested for advocacy support for seniors groups, epilepsy groups, sexual assault groups, volunteering groups, women's groups and youth groups.

Many submissions requested catch up payments within the 2003-04 budget to make up for shortfalls in previous budget indexed increases and recent increases in the SACS Award.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- initiatives for the provision of additional funding to community groups in response to changes in the SACS Award;
- an initiative for increasing the repairs and maintenance program and minor capital works for community facilities;
- continuation of work to address issues and identify potential areas for reform to non-government services purchasing arrangements, including the development of a whole-of-government approach to service purchasing;
- continued support for the Community Information Technology Access Plan, as it relates to the provision of information technology training and support to the non-Government social services sector;
- continued support for the epilepsy peak group; and
- development of a housing Asset Management Strategy for Community Facilities.

Environment

Requests covered most themes identified within this document including funding for the reconstruction of the environment after the bushfires and for various post bushfire initiatives including weed control and the wood heater rebate scheme.

The community offered support for the Government's approach to the development of the Canberra Plan, including the Economic White Paper. Submissions referred to many of the initiatives identified within the Discussion Paper on the Economic White Paper and requested the implementation of these initiatives, including reform within water charges.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- increases to the water abstraction charge and developing a submission to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission for a change in the price path for water services for the five year period ending June 2009;
- expansion of the EcoBusiness program within the commercial sector;
- an initiative for the development of a recreation strategy that will guide the future development and management of government recreation facilities including areas and structures of heritage significance;
- the introduction of a Wood Heater Subsidy Scheme aimed at improving air quality by facilitating the replacement of polluting wood heaters with cleaner forms of heating;
- various weed suppression initiatives;
- ongoing monitoring and remediation work to prevent erosion and contamination of water in dams;

- an initiative for the replacement of fencing to limit the likelihood of stock and feral animal incursions on Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the Murrumbidgee River Corridor;
- an initiative for the restoration and rehabilitation of fire suppression trails cut through land administered by Parks and Conservation as well as the restoration of existing walking trails and fire trails damaged as a result of the fire;
- an initiative for consultation with the Community in the planning and implementation of conservation, restoration and construction works along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and Catchment;
- an initiative for the extension of the Government's free plant issue scheme to residents whose houses and/or gardens were destroyed by the January 2003 bushfires; and
- an initiative for the greening of verge and shrub beds and screen plantings, dryland grass areas, semi natural open space and sportsgrounds, providing new line marking, replacing signs and painting of bridge rails, bus shelters and street furniture.

Other

Other requests covered the provision of higher quality sporting grounds, including planning for the maintenance of grounds in response to drought conditions.

The community called for improvements in the accessibility to government services and the delivery of services across agencies.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- support for tighter controls over sports ground maintenance contracts;
- support for the water management plans as they relate to ACT sports grounds and the prioritisation of sports grounds for the allocation of water; and
- the ongoing consideration of policy issues associated with early intervention and service referral across the ACT Government, including those being undertaken through the development of the Social Plan and the Addressing Disadvantage Project.

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ACROD ACT Division

ACT Council of Social Service Incorporated

ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service Incorporated

ACT Equestrian Association

ACTSPORT

Alzheimer's Australia ACT

Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn

Arawang Parents and Citizens Association

Association of Independent Schools of the ACT

Australian Education Union – ACT Branch

Australian Nursing Federation ACT Branch

Canberra Business Council

Carers ACT

Catholic Education Commission

Coalition of Community Housing Organisations of the ACT Incorporated

Community Housing Canberra Limited

Community Information and Referral Service for the ACT

Community Information Technology Advisory Group

Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra (Incorporated)

Council on the Ageing (ACT)

Deakin Traders Association

Directions ACT

Disabled People's Initiative

Epilepsy Association (ACT) Incorporated

Gold Creek School Parents and Citizens Association

Gordon Primary School Parents and Citizens Associations

INANNA Incorporated (Womens Shelter)

Master Builders Association of the ACT

McRedmond, Mr David and Ms Melinda

Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs

National Council of Women ACT Incorporated

Pedal Power ACT

Property Council of Australia

Service Assisting Male Survivors of Sexual Assault

SupportLink Systems Pty Ltd

Trades and Labour Council of the ACT Incorporated

Toora Women Incorporated

Tuggeranong Community Council

Volunteering ACT

Western Creek Community Council

Women's Electoral Lobby ACT

Youth Coalition of the ACT