



ACT Government

2003-2004 BUDGET

BUILDING A MORE SECURE COMMUNITY

Chief Minister and Attorney General Jon Stanhope today said that the Justice and Community Safety budget for 2003-2004 will deliver better and more efficient systems for the ACT legal system, and will help build a safer city and community.

“Included in this year’s Budget is funding to identify and undertake risk assessments of critical community infrastructure in the ACT including Canberra’s electricity, gas and water supplies, hospitals and health services, transport and distribution systems, and significant public events and entertainment areas,” Mr Stanhope said.

\$195,000 is being provided this financial year to identify and undertake the risk assessments. A Security Coordinator will develop and advise on security measures for the protection of infrastructure from terrorist attack. The new ACT Security Assessment Program has been developed in consultation with other jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth, and with the industry sector.

The project will include a detailed security assessment of government facilities and advice about appropriate security measures to ensure the continuity of essential government services.

“My Government has also taken steps to ensure the Canberra community will be made safer through the allocation of \$425,000 to fund the buyback of prohibited handguns,” Mr Stanhope said. “The scheme will operate from 1 July 2003 to 1 January 2004, and with approximately 1,700 registered handguns in the ACT, it is estimated that 50% (850) would comprise the prohibited categories.

“\$180,000 has been provided for the identification, research and development of a program to improve the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences in the ACT,” Mr Stanhope said. “The Australian Federal Police and Public Prosecutor are well placed to undertake the development of a collaborative interagency approach, which is critical to any implementation of reform. Both agencies have gained valuable experience in this area through the interagency approach to family violence undertaken in the Family Violence Intervention Program.

“It is anticipated that many of the lessons of interagency cooperation learnt will benefit the development of a program, which responds to sexual assault.

Almost \$1 million has been provided for information technology in the ACT’s Courts, which will lead to the replacement of outdated Case Management systems and provide better services to the community.

“The ACT Courts’ vision is to be recognised by the Canberra community as providing high quality, professional, efficient, timely, and empathetic dispute and resolution services,” Mr Stanhope said. “The old outdated IBM AS400 software can no longer cope with those objectives.

“The basic needs of staff, the community and legal professionals cannot be met with the current system, and the ongoing maintenance costs are far too high. The immediate introduction of new systems will fix all those problems,” said Mr Stanhope.

Following the successful trial of electronic voting at the last ACT election, funding has been provided to introduce electronic voting for the 2004 election and beyond.

Funding of \$70,000 is provided in this budget to ensure the system is ready for the next election to be held on 16 October 2004. In addition, funding of \$80,000 has been provided in the election year to provide for hardware and polling place set up to facilitate computer voting at four pre-poll centres and eight polling places on polling day.

Mr Stanhope said \$200,000 has been allocated to implement the Bill of Rights Committee recommendations in relation to the administration of the Human Rights Act, if they are accepted by Government. The funds will also be used to promote the provisions of the Act and conduct an information campaign to raise public sector and community awareness of the Act.

This year’s Budget also provides \$35,000 this year for the appointment of an Indigenous Official Visitor (IOV) who will be available to visit adult and juvenile Indigenous ACT offenders who are held in custody in correctional facilities. The Chief Minister said the functions of the IOV will be to ensure that the correctional facilities are being conducted in an appropriate manner, insofar as the conduct of the facilities affects the welfare of Indigenous detainees. The IOV will also receive and inquire into complaints by detainees about their treatment.

Mr Stanhope said \$750,000 has been provided in the 2003-2004 budget to meet additional operational requirements of the Court Transport Unit (CTU) and Symonston Temporary Remand Centre (STRC). The funding will enable the CTU and STRC 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.

The Government is investing over \$1.4 million over the next 4 years to support the introduction of alternate dispute resolution processes for land and planning appeals before the ACT Administrative Appeals Tribunal. \$348,000 will be provided this financial year to fund a mediation service managed by the Tribunal, and to provide additional Tribunal members to sit on the 3-member panel. Similar amounts have been provided in the forward Budget years for this service.

“This initiative is part of a package to improve the way land planning and environment matters are dealt with in the ACT,” Mr Stanhope said. “It makes it clear that the independent review process is actually part of our planning system. Legislation is due to commence on 1 July 2003.

\$75,000 has been provided in 2003-04 to introduce a new regulatory framework to be administered by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) for the retail sale of fireworks. This includes licensing, inspection, complaints handling, audit of records and on the spot fines.

Mr Stanhope said his Government is committed to introducing a regulatory scheme in relation to retail fireworks, which will address safety concerns surrounding the packaging and sale of fireworks. The scheme will also be cost friendly to the retailer and purchaser with respect to licence fees.

Mr Stanhope said \$1.5 million is being provided in the 2003-2004 Budget to undertake the Coronial Inquest into the 18 January 2003 bushfire emergency. The complex and important Inquest into the Bushfires will provide vital information into the rebuilding of the ACT.

Mr Stanhope said the majority of fees and charges in the Justice and Community Safety portfolio would increase only by the movement in the CPI in the 2003-2004 budget. The exceptions are in the areas of births, deaths and marriages, land titles and business names and associations and liquor licence fees where fees will increase as set out as follows:

Births, Deaths and Marriages

1. Standard fee for certificates increased by \$2, from \$30 to \$32, achieving additional revenue of \$25,000 per annum.
2. Fee for commemorative certificate packages increased by \$5, from \$40 to \$45, achieving additional revenue of \$12,500 per annum.

Land Titles

1. Land title common lodgement fee increased by \$2, from \$78 to \$80, achieving additional revenue of \$80,784 per annum.
2. Transfer fee increased by \$5, from \$155 to \$160, achieving additional revenue of \$68,040 per annum.

Business Names and Associations

1. Application for registration fee increased by \$6, from \$114 to \$120, achieving additional revenue of \$22,000 per annum.
2. Application for renewal fee increased by \$7, from \$93 to \$100, achieving additional revenue of \$30,000 per annum.

Office of Fair Trading

1. Renewal of minimum liquor licence fee increased by \$93, from \$807 to \$900, achieving additional revenue of \$28,500 per annum.
2. Renewal of maximum liquor licence fee increased by \$352, from \$2148 to \$2500, achieving additional revenue of \$86,500 per annum.

“In all, the Justice and Community safety Budget delivers a safer community, and ensures that the ACT legal system is again running smoothly.

“Many of these funding initiatives are long overdue, and will help build a more secure city and community,” Mr Stanhope concluded.

Statement ends.