



ACT Government

2004-2005 BUDGET

MEDIA RELEASE

NEW GRASSLAND RESERVES IN JERRABOMBERRA VALLEY

The ACT Government will commit additional grassland in the Jerrabomberra Valley to nature reserve, Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment, Jon Stanhope announced today.

The 2004-05 Budget contains \$50,000 in funding to establish two new grassland reserves in the Jerrabomberra Valley. The new reserves, of about 200 hectares each, will be located on the west and east sides of the Monaro Highway.

"In putting this additional land in the nature reserve, we are protecting some of the largest remaining areas of native grasslands in the ACT region for future generations to enjoy," said Mr Stanhope

"This new grassland reserve will be a very significant step towards protecting the Grassland Earless Dragon, one of the ACT's most threatened species. Its distribution is now confined to the Majura and Jerrabomberra valleys.

"About 90 per cent of the world's population of this precious species is contained in grasslands in the Majura and the Jerrabomberra Valleys in the ACT. By protecting the Jerrabomberra Grasslands, the Government is making a very significant step to ensure the species survival. For the first time in the ACT, this endangered species will be protected in dedicated nature reserves," said Mr Stanhope

"This is a tremendous step forward for conservation in the Territory, building on my Government's record of protecting endangered species and ecological communities."

"This commitment is more significant when one considers the fact that the land, if it had been sold for development, would have delivered to the Government returns of approximately \$400 million," said Mr Stanhope.

The need for new reserves was identified during a planning study of the Jerrabomberra Valley jointly undertaken by the ACT Planning and Land Authority, the Land Development Agency and Environment ACT.

"Through this Budget, my Government is maintaining its commitment to protecting the ACT's environment. Last year's Budget was a record one for the environment, and I am pleased to be able to build on the many positive initiatives announced at that time," said Mr Stanhope.

The Chief Minister said that initially the Government will reserve about 200 hectares of native grassland, Grassland Earless Dragon habitat and Yellow Box - Red Gum Grassy Woodland west of the Monaro Highway.

"This is a major expansion of our nature reserves, and one which establishes a linkage which will consolidate protection of grassy woodlands at 'Callum Brae' announced last year.



“We will establish another 200 hectare nature reserve east of the Monaro highway when discussions with the National Capital Authority and Department of Defence are completed. The second reserve will be adjacent to the Letchworth Nature Reserve in Queanbeyan, making this a cross-border conservation area.

“This announcement continues my Government’s strong record of establishing nature reserves in areas of outstanding conservation value.

“Last year we allocated \$1.671 million over four years to protect and restore grassy woodlands that included the addition of 1050 hectares of grassy woodland to Canberra Nature Park. We have continued to build on that commitment with the addition of the area known as Conder 4A into Canberra Nature Park,” said Mr Stanhope.

The Chief Minister said the Government is preparing a Native Grassland Conservation Strategy designed to focus on native grassland and grassland habitat for threatened species. This strategy is expected to be released for public comment later this year. It complements the Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy completed this year and deals with another of the most endangered ecological communities in south-east Australia.

Background

The Jerrabomberra Valley Planning Study has looked at the opportunities and constraints of the Jerrabomberra Valley to establish its land capability. This included defining the most appropriate land use policies, locating indicative boundaries for heritage precincts and nature reserves and establishing principles for development in sensitive areas to inform the future land use structure for the area. The outcomes of this study will enable the Government to make informed decisions regarding future development.

The Grassland Earless Dragon is a small dragon lizard about 20 cm long. The dark brown or grey markings enable it to remain inconspicuous amongst the straw coloured grasses. During the cold winter it shelters in burrows made by spiders.

“The fact this endangered animal and its native grassy habitat can still be found in the new reserve is a credit to the care by previous land holders who have managed the land conservatively and not developed it for cropping or other agricultural activities,” said Mr Stanhope.

“The protection of this area of the Jerrabomberra Valley will be a vital component of its survival and continues the Government’s commitment to protecting endangered species in the ACT.

Natural Temperate Grassland is one of Australia’s most threatened ecological communities. It contains a diverse range of native grasses and wildflowers that present a colourful display in spring. In late summer and autumn Kangaroo Grass turns a golden brown, producing a characteristic landscape in paddocks and along many roadsides. Trees are naturally absent or are sparsely scattered usually as a result of cold air drainage which prevents seedling survival. Where natural grasslands have been disturbed by past land use practices the more sensitive wildflowers are often scarce or absent and only native grasses are found. However these areas may still provide important habitat for threatened species such as the Grassland Earless Dragon

Statement Ends