



## ACT Government

# 2003-2004 BUDGET

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### ENVIRONMENT A WINNER IN 2003-04 BUDGET

The environment has emerged as a big winner in the 2003-04 Budget, Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment, Jon Stanhope, said today.

“Budget 2003-04 is a great budget for the environment.

“My Government has significantly increased funding for the environment this year, providing an additional \$1.040 million in ongoing funding.

“This funding is in addition to the additional funding to help restore and regenerate our environment following the January bushfires.

“Through this budget my Government furthers its commitment to creating a sustainable environment.

“Last year we increased funding by more than \$1 million dollars, providing extra money for the solar hot water subsidy, the Government’s nature conservation initiative – A Sustainable Bush Capital in the New Millennium and the national program to eradicate the Red Imported Fire Ant.

“This year we are directing considerable resources towards restoring and improving our parks, reserves and recreational facilities after the devastating bushfires.

“We are aiming not simply to return to our pre-bushfire status, but to take advantage of the opportunity to restore the best of the Bush Capital and enhance other aspects of our natural environment.

“The 2003-04 budget contains an additional \$2.36 million in bushfire recovery funding for the environment. This is in addition to the \$2.19 million allocated in 2002-03,” said Mr Stanhope.

The Chief Minister said the budget also contained significant additional funding for key environmental initiatives not related to bushfire recovery.

“This year we are moving ahead on major environmental initiatives.

“We have allocated an additional \$1.671 million over 4 years to improve our management of endangered grassy woodlands.

“We are increasing the amount of yellow box/red gum woodland going into reserve by a third.

“This is a key environmental milestone for the ACT, providing significant additional protection to grassy woodlands and threatened woodland birds that depend on these habitats.

Media Release



“It will also allow for the replanting of yellow box and red gum trees in some woodlands previously cleared of trees,” said Mr Stanhope.

“Two field staff will be appointed to assist with the establishment and ongoing management of the woodland reserves.

The budget also provides \$300,000 over two years to introduce a subsidy scheme to encourage people to replace wood heaters with cleaner forms of heating and to purchase equipment to monitor air quality.

“Smoke from wood heaters creates major air pollution and contributes to asthma and other breathing problems.

“The problem is particularly severe in the Tuggeranong Valley.

“To encourage people to switch to a cleaner and more environmentally friendly form of heating, we are introducing a subsidies between \$400-\$800, depending on the replacement heating system selected.

“We will consider extending the scheme if it proves successful,” said Mr Stanhope.

The budget also provides \$75,000 for the development of a water resources strategy and a review of the *Environment Protection Act 1997* to allow a report to be presented to the Legislative Assembly in 2004.

In addition, the funding will establish more effective arrangements for the implementation of environment protection measures with industry.

“The Government is committed to developing a Water Resources Strategy to ensure we conserve and make the best use of this precious and finite resource.

“Work is already underway on the development of the Strategy and the funding will ensure its development continues with strategic input from Government agencies, Actew Corporation and from interested stakeholders,” said Mr Stanhope.

An important part of the ACT’s overall water management strategy will be an increase in the Water Abstraction Charge from 10 cents to 20 cents per kilolitre from 1 January 2004. This is the first increase in the charge since December 1999 and is consistent with the Council of Australian Government (COAG) water reform requirements.

While the current severe drought highlights the need for charges to reflect the true value of water, the Government was mindful that consumers have full control over their water usage. If consumers restrict their water usage, as they have done under voluntary and mandatory water restrictions, they will limit the cost faced under the Water Abstraction Charge.

The Environment Protection Act contains a mandatory provision that requires a review to be commenced in June 2003 and the result presented to the Legislative Assembly before 1 June 2004.

The Chief Minister said more effective liaison with industry was critical to ensuring stronger partnerships in environmental protection.

“By working more closely with industry we can help reduce the number of breaches of the Environment Protection Act, thereby reducing the harm caused to the environment,” said Mr Stanhope.

**Statements ends**