

9. ENVIRONMENT

Summary Highlights

The 2003-04 Budget highlights the Government's commitment to best practice in environmental protection, environmental management, heritage and cultural conservation management. In a variety of areas, the ACT takes a leadership role in protecting and enhancing environmental and heritage values.

As a result of the bushfire disaster, 81% of reserve land and 57% of rural land in the ACT was burnt. Many assets and heritage sites were destroyed. In response to the fire, significant Government resources will be directed towards fire recovery. A Fire Recovery Plan has been developed to monitor and assist environmental recovery, reconstruct built assets and to provide improved facilities for visitors.

A five-year Recreation Strategy is being developed to guide recreational developments in the ACT's natural areas. Programs involving the community in monitoring will get underway during 2003. The development and implementation of operational plans for the control of weeds and feral animals are pivotal to fire recovery. Catchment monitoring, erosion control and water quality monitoring are essential to securing Canberra's water supply.

The Government is developing an Integrated Nature Conservation Plan which will provide the key framework for management objectives, priority setting and decision making for nature conservation in the ACT. The Integrated Nature Conservation Plan will be a vital tool in the management of information and providing accessible information to the community.

A Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy is a key conservation initiative for the ACT. The Strategy sets a framework for the protection of the endangered ecological community-Yellow Box Red Gum Grassy Woodland. A final strategy is expected to be completed in late 2003.

Environment ACT has the lead role in coordinating a comprehensive, whole of government approach to the management of the ACT's water resources through the development of a Water Resources Strategy. The Strategy will address issues of water quality as well as quantity, take a catchment perspective, and use the water cycle as a basis for integrating the consideration of stormwater, water supply and waste water elements.

Canberra has substantial amounts of nationally and internationally significant heritage. During 2003-04, the Heritage Council will work to update the ACT Heritage Places Register so that it fully reflects the Aboriginal, natural and historic heritage of the ACT. The Government will also take the opportunity to survey for Aboriginal heritage sites that have become exposed after the fires. New information gathered from the surveys will enhance community understanding and appreciation of our Aboriginal heritage.

The Government continues to have a strong commitment to seeking community and expert advice on environmental matters. Further benefits of these partnerships have been gained by establishing a tighter focus on the various environment advisory committee functions.

Bushfire Recovery

Bushfire Cleanup

A key priority for the Government, following the January 2003 bushfires, is the ongoing clean up of public land to ensure it is safe for recreational use. This includes the removal of hazardous materials such as treated pine, chemical plant and building refuse as well as the ongoing assessment and removal of dangerous trees in high use areas.

Disposal sites

ACT NOWaste has established a temporary area at West Belconnen landfill and a larger site in the Stromlo Forest for the disposal of fire damaged demolition waste. These sites will be closed, capped and finalised during 2003-04.

Catchment management

Management plans formulated for remediation of urban and non-urban catchments, including the Cotter Catchment (water supply) have been implemented. Works within the water supply catchment have focused on both quality and quantity issues, with particular reference to prevention and control of sediment and nutrient movement throughout the catchment. Remedial activities are likely to continue throughout 2003-04 and will include ongoing water monitoring, which will take into account community-based monitoring programs.

Monitoring of stormwater prior to and following rain events within bushfire effected areas, combined with the implementation of stormwater sediment controls, will continue throughout the year.

Auditing and monitoring natural areas and heritage sites

Environment ACT is undertaking an audit of the ecological impacts of the fire within Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and other affected areas outside the nature conservation estate. After establishing the degree to which the ACT's natural ecosystems have been affected, a monitoring program of post-fire recovery in ACT parks and reserves will be established, early in 2003-04. Community volunteers will be involved in suitable projects. The monitoring of threatened species recovery will be a high priority.

A comprehensive audit of Aboriginal and European heritage sites to assess damage is also being conducted in the wake of the fires. Consultation with stakeholders and their involvement in developing conservation measures for heritage sites will be a high priority in 2003-04.

Rehabilitation and Revegetation

Replacement of vegetation destroyed by the fire in key recreation areas such as the Murrumbidgee River Corridor will be a high priority throughout 2003-04. Rehabilitation, and where necessary, revegetation of fire containment lines will also be undertaken.

Feral animal management

An ACT Vertebrate Pest Control Program was developed in 2002-03 for the first time. Development of the program was guided by the ACT Vertebrate Pest Management Strategy, released in April 2002. The program identified the priority vertebrate pest control actions to be undertaken across the ACT and focussed on the management of the known impacts of feral animals.

As a result of the January bushfire, pest control officers have had to significantly adjust the focus of vertebrate pest control activities. A post-fire audit of natural resource values is currently being undertaken within the bushfire affected reserve and rural areas of the ACT. The outcomes of this audit will include identifying the post fire distribution of many pest species. This will assist in determining the priority pest control measures that need to be implemented over the coming year in order to facilitate the recovery of key flora and fauna species.

Significant opportunities exist for effective long term control of pests such as goats and deer as a result of the fire events.

Weeds management

The January 2003 bushfire, combined with prolonged drought conditions, will have long term implications for weed control in the ACT. Removal of ground vegetation on the scale that has occurred has provided opportunities for weed species to colonise previously uncontaminated areas. The mass movement of machinery and people, and widespread soil disturbance that occurred as a result of the fire fighting effort is also likely to have transported weed seeds into remote areas previously free of these species.

The challenge facing land managers will be to determine the extent of new weed infestations across the ACT and assess the impact of the fire on previously treated areas. The audit of natural resources currently being undertaken, and post fire monitoring over the next few years, will assist to identify the presence of weeds across a large area of the ACT.

Timing of weed control actions is crucial and will vary for different species. Over the coming months land managers will focus on control of broad-leafed annual or biannual species emerging in disturbed areas. Control of grass weeds cannot take place until at least Spring 2003, while control of regenerating woody weed species will be best left until the plants have a large enough leaf area to enable a sufficient amount of herbicide to be applied to the plant.

The widespread extent of the fires has also significantly impacted on populations of many of the biological control agents released in the ACT and region. Staff will need to work with specialist agencies to re-introduce these agents back into the ACT.

Fire Fuel Management and Fuel Reduction

The *Bushfire Act 1936* requires Bushfire Fuel Management Plans for all government managed land to be prepared every two years. The 2002-04 ACT Bushfire Fuel Management Plan was released in November 2002. While many of the activities prescribed in the plan have been completed, there are still outstanding actions that will require completion in 2003-04. These activities include the slashing and physical removal of fuels in Canberra Nature Park and may include prescribed burning activities in areas of Black Mountain and Aranda Bushland.

Following the January 2003 bushfires, an ongoing process of assessing additional areas that may require fuel management treatment is under way. Such areas may include the removal of fuel from fire affected areas or the identification of additional areas that may warrant fuel treatment. The Government will consider any submission made by the public relating to fuel management and follow through with appropriate action.

The experience of the recent fires, including the outcomes arising from the Government inquiry into the fires, will provide important input into the development of future fire plans and management actions to ensure that risk to life and property is minimised.

Planning for the 2004-06 Bushfire Fuel Management Plan will commence in July 2003. The existing plan will be reviewed extensively by ACT Land Managers and the Bushfire Fuel Management Committee, and issues relating to both fuel management at the urban interface and in non-urban areas will be comprehensively addressed. Input to the plan will again be sought from interested stakeholders and community groups.

Environment ACT will continue with the development of the Fire Management Plan for Namadgi National Park. This plan will address in detail, fire suppression, fire preparedness and fuel management issues relating to the Park, and develop the policies, strategies and actions for long-term fire management. This plan will be prepared in consultation with a wide range of experts from within the ACT Government, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, the Australian National University and community stakeholders and groups.

Aboriginal Heritage Study

The Government will be making the most of significant opportunities that have arisen after the January 2003 bushfires to conduct archaeological surveys for Aboriginal sites. This research will increase our understanding and appreciation of the ACT's rich Aboriginal heritage.

Recreation Strategy

A five-year Recreation Strategy is being developed for the non-urban natural areas of the ACT (lands managed by Environment ACT and ACT Forests) that will guide the restoration, recovery and redevelopment of recreation facilities destroyed and damaged by the January 2003 bushfire.

The Strategy is being developed in consultation with recreation users, the tourism industry, the Interim Namadgi Advisory Board, conservation groups and land managers, to ensure that all relevant views are considered in the final strategy and will also consider the outcome of current reviews.

The Australian Alps

The Government is committed to continuing the ACT's involvement in the Australian Alps Cooperative Management Program. This year, in the wake of the January 2003 bushfires, the focus of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee will be researching and monitoring, best practice rehabilitation and interpretation.

Greenhouse Issues

Implementation of the *ACT Greenhouse Strategy* is a major commitment of the Government.

The Strategy is now in its fifth year of implementation. Updating the ACT Greenhouse Strategy through a process of reviewing emissions abatement of current measures and assessing the effectiveness of potential new measures will be a priority in 2003-04. Detailed

assessment of the environmental, social and economic benefits, and costs of a range of measures will be evaluated as part of the process in updating the Strategy.

A range of priority measures will also be pursued during the year. They include measures to assist residents to improve home energy efficiency, including the Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme and the Cavity Wall Insulation Subsidy Program. The new Energy Advice Service, now called Home Energy Advice Team will continue to provide free information and seminars to residents on a broad range of energy efficient house design and appliance issues.

Two energy efficiency programs designed to assist and educate private businesses in the ACT are underway. They are the Commercial Building Energy Performance Program and the Eco-business program.

Office of Sustainability

The Government has a comprehensive commitment to preserve and build on Canberra's strengths such as its natural environment, diverse community and developing economic base. To this end, an Office of Sustainability was established within the Chief Minister's Department in March 2002. It has an across-government role in assisting the integration of economic, social and environmental considerations into the decision making processes of Government.

The Government's policy for sustainability in the ACT, *People Place Prosperity* was launched in March 2003, and the first Towards Sustainability Report will be prepared during 2003-04.

Environmental Advice

The Government has a strong commitment to seeking community and expert advice on environmental matters. The benefits of these partnerships have been improved by establishing a tighter focus for the various advisory committee functions. Changes have been introduced to reduce duplication of effort, and overlapping terms of reference and lines of communication.

The Environment Advisory Committee, a source of expert and community advice on environmental matters, has been replaced by two new committees, the Natural Resource Management Committee and the Environment Protection Technical Advisory Committee. Two community forums, a Rural Forum and an annual Community Forum, were also established. Other existing committees, boards and authorities remain as complementary forums for expert advice and community consultation.

Further, supporting the Government's commitment to independent advice, the Commissioner for the Environment will continue to receive Government support and an Independent Conservator of Flora and Fauna will be established. The independent Conservator will have a close relationship with the existing Flora and Fauna Committee.

The Government will be conducting a full review of the operation of the *Environment Protection Act 1997*, including a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Environment Protection Authority. This will support the statutory review of the Act to be undertaken in 2003-04.

Participation in National Environment Forums

Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council

In 2003-04, the Government will be involved in a range of Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council activities of significance to the ACT. These will include the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, and the Natural Heritage Trust Extension.

Environment Protection and Heritage Council

In 2003-04, the Government will support a range of Environment Protection and Heritage Council activities of significance to the ACT. These will include National Environment Protection Measures and the development of an Integrated National Heritage policy.

Primary Industries Ministerial Council

In 2003-04, the Government will continue to support a range of Primary Industries Ministerial Council activities of significance to the ACT. These will include the control of Imported Red Fire Ant Eradication Program, Foot and Mouth Disease issues, Bovine *Spongiform Encephalopathies* (mad cow disease) issues, and mandatory livestock identification and tracing system.

Murray Darling Basin Commission

Participation in the Murray-Darling Basin Commission was formalised by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 1997.

The Government will continue to support the Commission activities of significance to the ACT. This will include on-going discussions with other jurisdictions to identify how a cap on water extraction could apply to the ACT and the implementation of the Basin Salinity Management Strategy within the ACT.

High Level Greenhouse Group

The Council of Australian Governments' High Level Group on Greenhouse was formed in 1997 to involve States and Territories in the development of the National Greenhouse Strategy.

In 2003-04, the Government will support Council of Australian Governments processes to increase greenhouse abatement including implementing agreed measures in the National Greenhouse Strategy and providing input into national policies and processes. In addition to local measures, the Government continues to work with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments on implementation and review of the National Greenhouse Strategy.

Environmental Legislation

The Government is committed to creating a best practice legislative base for environmental activity in the ACT, and proposes to continue with a significant program of new environmental legislation.

Animal Health Issues

As part of a program to improve preparedness for an outbreak of an animal disease (such as foot and mouth disease) and to prevent such an outbreak, the Government proposes two sets of amendments to relevant legislation.

First, the Government will be implementing a ban on the feeding of improperly processed meat products (known as swill) to pigs, a practice that carries a substantial risk of causing an outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

Secondly, the Government proposes to implement a more robust system of stock tags, to allow more accurate tracing of movement of animals, which will assist in control of an outbreak of disease.

Tree Protection Legislation

The Government will be introducing new legislation to replace the *Tree Protection (Interim Scheme) Act 2001*. The Bill will be part of the Government's response to community consultation on the discussion paper 'Tree Protection for the ACT – the Next Steps' and will be seeking to balance the protection of trees and the interests of lessees in the Territory.

Weeds Legislation

The Government will be introducing legislation in 2003-04 to revise the pest plant and animal provisions in the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*, with a particular focus on more direct and effective measures for the control of the proliferation of environmental weeds.

Environmental Management

National Environment Protection Measures (NEPMs)

The Environment Protection and Heritage Council, incorporating the National Environment Protection Council (NEPC), comprises Ministers from the Commonwealth, States and Territories. Complementary legislation in each jurisdiction establishes the NEPC and gives it the power to make National Environment Protection Measures (NEPMs).

NEPMs are designed to provide equivalent protection from pollution to all Australians and to ensure that decisions by businesses are not distorted and markets are not fragmented by variations in environmental standards between jurisdictions.

Ambient Air

Under the Ambient Air Quality NEPM, all jurisdictions established monitoring procedures and commenced assessment and reporting by 30 June 2001. These procedures were formalised in the ACT's Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Plan. As agreed in the plan, particles 10 micrometres or less in size are now monitored on a continuous basis. Monitoring started in mid March 2002 and data will be included in the 2002-03 Ambient Air Quality Report.

In September 2001, NEPC started the statutory process to make a variation to the Ambient Air Quality NEPM to extend its coverage to particles 2.5 micrometres or less in size (PM_{2.5}). Formal consultation has been completed and draft variation is due to be considered by Council in May 2003.

It is anticipated that jurisdictions will need to start monitoring PM_{2.5} by 1 January 2004 to feed data into a full review of the NEPM, which is to start in 2005.

Air Toxics

On 29 June 2001, the NEPC initiated the development of an Ambient Air Toxics NEPM. Air toxics are gaseous, aerosol or particulate pollutants (other than the six criteria pollutants), which are present in the air in low concentrations with characteristics such as toxicity or persistence so as to be a hazard to human, plant or animal life.

It is anticipated that a draft impact statement and NEPM will be released by Council in May 2003, and will satisfy the NEPM deadline in October 2003. It is envisaged that the NEPM will take the form of a guideline and, similar to the diesel NEPM, the ACT will need to undertake a preliminary scoping study.

Movement of Controlled Waste

This NEPM covers the movement of controlled waste into, and out of, the ACT. During 2003-04, the Government will continue to implement the NEPM through the issuing of Consignment Authorisations and the licensing of disposal/treatment facilities under the *Environment Protection Act 1997*. The ACT will provide an annual report to the NEPC on the implementation and effectiveness of the measure.

The NEPM will also undergo a formal review in 2003-04, which will be undertaken by a project team comprising government jurisdictions. The ACT will participate in this review process.

National Pollutant Inventory

The National Pollutant Inventory is a Federal government coordinated initiative jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments designed to provide the community, industry and government with information on the types and amounts of polluting substances being emitted to the environment. The National Pollutant Inventory provides information to assist governments with environmental planning and management. It also assists the industry through raising awareness to certain manufacturing processes that could be cleaner and/or more efficient. Data collected is available through an Internet database (www.npi.gov.au).

Under the National Pollutant Inventory NEPM and *Environment Protection Act 1997*, 23 facilities are expected to report specific substances emitted to the land, water and air during 2002-03. In 2001-02 there was no significant change in the number and type of ACT facilities reporting emissions compared with previous years and there was no significant difference in the amount and type of substances emitted from these facilities.

Used Packaging

The Government's obligation with regard to the Used Packaging Materials NEPM has been addressed by way of an Industry Waste Reduction Plan under the *Waste Minimisation Act 2001*. The Industry Waste Reduction Plan requires brand owners of used packaging materials to undertake or assure the systematic recovery, reuse and recycling or energy recovery of consumer packaging in which the brand owners' products are sold. They are also required to report to the Environment Protection Authority on an annual basis the rates of recovery and

types of material recovered. The ACT will provide an annual report to the NEPC on the implementation and effectiveness of the measure.

Diesel Vehicle Emissions

The NEPC made the Diesel Vehicle Emissions NEPM in June 2001. The NEPM sets standards for in-service diesel vehicle emissions and a range of strategies for governments to introduce to meet those standards. In 2001-02, a scoping study was undertaken on the extent of the need to manage emissions from diesel vehicles. The results of this study will form the basis of implementation of the NEPM in 2002-03.

Firewood Licensing / Firewood Strategy

The sale or supply of firewood in the ACT has been regulated under the *Environment Protection Act 1997*. Firewood merchants must hold an environmental authorisation and comply with standard conditions including only selling by weight. The government will continue to monitor merchant compliance.

The Government will introduce a subsidy scheme to help with the replacement of older, less-efficient heaters in the 2003-04 Budget.

The Government will continue to promote the ACT Firewood Strategy and its public education program including the use of a firewood display at both public shopping centres and events.

State of the Environment Report

The Government works with the ACT Commissioner for the Environment to implement the agreed recommendations from his State of Environment report. The Government has also been working with the Commissioner on streamlining the data and information transmission process in preparation for work commencing on the 2003 report. The Commissioner's Office was allocated additional funds to prepare the 2003 State of the Environment report.

Cooperative Research Centre Partnerships

The Government is working closely with Cooperative Research Centres that are contributing to further research in the areas of freshwater ecology, pest animal control and marsupial biology and impacts.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology is undertaking a major project on the Cotter River to assess the effectiveness of environmental flows. Much of the ACT's in-kind contribution to Cooperative Research Centres is focused on this project.

Waste Management

Load-Based Discharge Licensing

The load-based discharge licensing scheme, introduced in July 2000, to encourage activity managers to reduce pollutant emissions to air, water and soil has been implemented. The scheme encourages minimisation of emissions through the application of economic measures, which include a component that varies according to the amount of pollutants actually emitted.

Managers of activities covered by the scheme either hold an environmental authorisation or have submitted applications for environmental authorisations, which are being considered in conjunction with environment management plans where necessary.

No Waste by 2010

Implementation of the No Waste Strategy will continue with the following priorities for 2003-04:

- identify and address factors inhibiting the reuse and recycling of the priority waste streams;
- augment education and community programs to better inform, encourage and engender community commitment to achieving reductions in the waste. Ecobusiness workshops will be conducted to encourage commercial businesses to minimise the waste they produce. The Waste Wise Schools program will be implemented in all Government schools in the ACT;
- facilitate the implementation of best practice waste management throughout Government buildings;
- continue implementation of the waste pricing strategy that sets disposal charges at levels that provide incentives to reuse and recycle;
- through contract arrangements with Thiess, operate the Mitchell Resource Management Centre and small vehicle transfer station at Mugga Lane;
- manage the No Waste Education Centre to further enhance recovery and educational opportunities in the ACT;
- develop markets for recycled materials to provide waste generators with alternatives to landfill disposal and to recover the true value of resources including management of the West Belconnen resource recovery estate;
- implement improved services for the collection and processing of domestic waste and recyclable material from ACT households;
- target building and demolition waste through the Development Control Code and development of appropriate regulations;
- participate in the National Packaging Covenant and assess the requirements for waste management regulations; and
- monitor emerging waste reduction techniques and identify the application of future waste management technologies in the ACT.

Nature Conservation

The Government will continue to deliver environmental programs aimed at monitoring and improving the quality of the ACT's natural environment. Programs for threatened species and ecological communities are a high priority. The newly formed ACT Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee will oversee monitoring and evaluation of the implementation environmental programs relating to nature conservation and natural resource management.

Integrated Nature Conservation Plan

The Government is developing an Integrated Nature Conservation Plan which will provide the key framework for management objectives, priority setting and decision making for nature conservation in the ACT. Environment ACT will continue to develop this project during 2003-04 in consultation with community and professional groups, to enable public access to information relating to management plans and strategies governing natural resource management in the ACT through a geographic information system based portal.

The Integrated Nature Conservation Plan is also playing a vital role in the management of information and reporting of actions undertaken during the bushfire recovery process.

Conservation of Biodiversity

Environment ACT carried out detailed surveys in Yellow Box - Red Gum and other woodlands in spring 2002, as an input to the preparation of a Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy. The Strategy will combine nine Action Plans covering those for Yellow Box Red Gum Grassy Woodland endangered ecological community, six threatened bird species and two threatened plant species. Consultation forums were held to elicit the views of community groups and interested individuals. The Strategy was released in April 2003 as a draft for public comment. A final strategy is expected to be completed in late 2003.

An Action Plan for the threatened species Ginninderra Peppercress (*Lepidium ginninderrense*) and Silver Perch (*Bidyanus bidyanus*) were released for public comment in September 2002. It is expected that final Action Plans will be published before the end of 2002-03.

A report titled 'A Planning Framework for Natural Ecosystems in the NSW Southern Tablelands and the ACT' was released by the Minister for the Environment in March 2003. The report will assist all spheres of government in the region, community groups and land development interests to access the natural resource information they require for ecologically sustainable development.

Eastern Grey Kangaroos

For several years the Government has supported the Marsupial Cooperative Research Centre in its research into fertility control of kangaroos. Funding for the Cooperative Research Centres ends on 30 June 2003 and existing cooperative arrangements will cease. Environment ACT will have a continuing interest in fertility control of over-abundant grey kangaroos and it will investigate ways in which it can support research in this area through new linkages with the previous Cooperative Research Centre's partners.

Threatened Species Projects

Two projects were established in 2002-03 – the Northern Corroboree Frog Captive Breeding Program and Behavioural Investigation of Threatened River Species. The Corroboree Frog project will enable Environment ACT to assist recovery of the Northern Corroboree Frog, whose habitat in the Ginini wetlands in Namadgi National Park was severely affected in the January 2003 fires. A better understanding of the habitat requirements of Macquarie Perch, Two-spined Blackfish and Murray Crayfish will assist in managing these species and waters in which they live.

Off-reserve conservation

Off-reserve conservation is a key element of ecologically sustainable development. An across-government approach will be used to ensure the conservation requirements of significant natural assets, including threatened species and ecological communities, are addressed through planning, development, and land management processes. Off-reserve conservation on rural and peri-urban lands will be supported through the provision of biodiversity information and advice on best practice land management.

The Rural Conservation Fund

The Rural Conservation Fund is a financial assistance scheme directed at providing support for projects on leased rural land that contribute to the conservation needs of the biodiversity of the ACT. It commenced operations in May 2000. Greening Australia is a partner in the project, promoting the fund and assisting in the application process. The rural community also provides in-kind support for the project.

Fisheries Management

Fisheries Management is guided by the report, *'The Status of Fish in the Australian Capital Territory: A Review of Current Knowledge and Management Requirements'*, which was released in 2000. Fisheries management is conducted under the *Fisheries Act 2000*.

Following the January 2003 bushfires, a monitoring program will be established to examine the impacts of the fires on aquatic systems. A particular focus of the monitoring program will be the threatened fish species Macquarie Perch and Two-spined Blackfish in the Cotter Catchment.

The Government has released the *Fish Stocking Plan for the ACT: 2001-05*, which outlines the Government's stocking program for urban lakes and ponds. Murray Cod will be stocked in Googong Reservoir and Gungahlin Pond during 2003-04, with Golden Perch to be stocked in Lake Ginninderra and Lake Tuggeranong.

Land Management Agreements

Land Management Agreements establish a framework for ecologically sustainable management of leased rural land, and are negotiated with each rural lessee as they apply to renew their lease. Land Management Agreements address issues such as land care requirements, fire and drought protection, and natural resource management. Nature conservation issues identified in a Land Management Agreements may lead to a proposal for funding by the Rural Conservation Fund.

Soil Conservation

A Rapid Stream Assessment of the condition of ACT streams was finalised in 2001. The aim of this report was to identify degraded stretches of waterways for priority action. The information has been used to strategically allocate funding for restoration projects, and continues to be incorporated into Land Management Agreements between the Government and affected rural lessees. Resources provided through Landcare extension and the ACT Riparian Restoration Fund have assisted both farmers and Environment ACT officers to develop and implement sustainable improvements in ACT river health.

Further monitoring will be undertaken during 2003-04 to determine the extent of other issues affecting soil conservation such as dryland salinity and soil acidification in the Territory.

Management Planning

Management plans for public land are required under the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*. During 2003-04, a management plan for the Lower Molonglo River Corridor and a draft Wetlands Policy will be published.

The draft management plan for Namadgi National Park will be released to provide opportunity for comment on the proposed management directions for the park. It is expected the final plan will be published in 2004.

The Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Murrumbidgee River Corridor management plans will be assessed to ascertain whether they need to undergo review due to the January 2003 bushfires.

Tree Protection

Approvals have been required for tree removal or significant works under the canopies of trees since the implementation of the *Tree Protection (Interim Scheme) Act 2001* in March 2001.

The Government is committed to introducing a permanent tree protection scheme that finds a balance between protecting the cultural and natural heritage of Canberra without impinging unduly on the expectations and rights of property owners.

Community consultation has been undertaken following the release of the discussion paper '*Tree Protection for the ACT: The Next Steps*', in October 2002. The paper discussed issues regarding tree protection and explored a range of available options for better, long term tree protection. A total of 69 submissions were received from the community addressing many of the issues raised in the discussion paper. These comments will be considered by the government as part of its consideration of policy and legislative options.

Animal Welfare and Companion Pet Ownership

Codes of Practice

The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) will be reviewing all gazetted codes of practice to identify key welfare issues within each code and to use this information as the basis of educative fact sheets for the general community.

The AWAC will also be commencing drafting a code of practice for the welfare of captive reptiles.

Review of the Animal Welfare Act 1992

The AWAC has expressed concerns regarding various provisions of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* (the Act). An AWAC sub-committee has reviewed the Act. The review issued a public consultation paper regarding the proposed amendments recommended by AWAC. The comments are currently being examined by AWAC for recommendation to the Minister. It is intended that the review's recommendations will be incorporated with various technical amendments arising from the National Competition Policy review of the Act.

Native Animals as Pets Workshop and Policy

The welfare needs of native animals kept as pets are being considered by AWAC. A public consultation paper will be released in 2003-04.

Assistance to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

The Government has provided dedicated funding assistance to the ACT branch of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for their animal welfare activities and for the Animal Welfare Inspectorate under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*.

Managing Exotic Animal Diseases

In 2002-03 the ACT participated in a series of simulation exercises designed to test preparedness for a national response to an exotic animal disease outbreak, in particular Foot and Mouth Disease.

Recognising the seriousness of exotic disease outbreak, the Government will continue to participate in national forums regarding management and preparedness. Training of field staff throughout 2003-04 will be undertaken so that the ACT has a number of trained staff to manage an animal disease outbreak emergency should it occur.

Water Resources Management

Sustainable urban water management

Environment ACT has the lead role in coordinating a comprehensive whole of government approach to the management of the ACT's water resources through the development of a Water Resources Strategy. The Strategy will deal with issues of water quality as well as quantity, take a catchment perspective, and use the water cycle as a basis for integrating the consideration of stormwater, water supply and waste water elements. The project is also intended to engage and educate the broader community about impacts of individual water use on the environment and better ways to use water around our homes, workplaces and elsewhere in Canberra.

Integrated Catchment Management Framework

The Integrated Catchment Management Framework provides the foundation on which secure long-term sustainable development can be planned and put in place. An implementation plan was completed in 2001. The Natural Resource Advisory Committee will review the Framework in 2003 to ensure that it continues to reflect community and government aspirations and results in more sustainable land and water management practices. Finalised sub-catchment plans for the Tuggeranong-Tharwa and Woden-Weston Creek sub-catchments were launched in 2002, and planning in south-west rural ACT continues in 2003. A Catchment Coordinator continues to assist community groups to further develop the sub-catchment plans and implement on-ground works under the banner of the Southern ACT Catchment Group.

Salinity and Water Quality

The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality is the first comprehensive national strategy to address salinity and deteriorating water quality issues seriously affecting the sustainability of Australia's agricultural production, the conservation of biological diversity

and the viability of our infrastructure and regional communities. The ACT has signed an inter-governmental agreement with the Commonwealth as the first step in accessing funds under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

The Murrumbidgee River catchment has been identified as a priority region for funding under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The ACT is required to enter into a Bilateral Agreement with the Commonwealth in relation to the detailed arrangements for the delivery of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality in the Territory. The ACT is also cooperating with the NSW Government and is a member of the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Board in recognition of the need to address many issues relating to salinity and water quality on a broader scale than the ACT.

At the Territory level, the regional (or Territory) natural resource management body is the Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee. This Committee was originally established to advise the Environment Minister on issues relating to the natural resource management in the ACT. Its membership has been increased by appointment of three members representing the Aboriginal, rural and catchment communities. This enhanced Committee will perform the functions of a regional body for the purposes of this agreement as well as for the Natural Heritage Trust.

Negotiations are progressing with the Commonwealth on the Bilateral Agreement, which, once signed, will be followed by the submission of interim priority funding proposals for consideration by the Commonwealth.

These proposals together with those developed in relation to the Natural Heritage Trust must address targets identified in an accredited regional natural resource management plan. This plan has been drafted following extensive community consultation and accreditation is anticipated early in 2003-04.

Riparian Policy

The Government recognises that good management of the ACT's riparian zones is important for maintenance of water quality and river ecosystem health. A discussion paper is being prepared for management of riparian zones currently on rural land. The major focus will be on land adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River between Point Hut Crossing and Tharwa.

Lessees of the land in question include those who have applied to have their leases renewed. It is appropriate that future management of riparian zones be resolved before these leases are renewed.

Environmental Education and Community Awareness

Community Participation

Waterwatch

Waterwatch is a community driven program using community water monitoring networks to further effective partnerships between community members, government and the private sector to understand and protect the natural environment.

Waterwatch delivers the "healthy waterways" message to the community through four linked, but different programs. These are as follows:

- education in schools and the general community;
- monitoring the state of our waterways;
- history of the changes in our waterways; and
- community support.

AirWatch

AirWatch is a comprehensive program for teachers and students involving collaborative, enquiry-based, hands-on learning which:

- examines the causes and effects of local air pollution;
- investigates social and behavioural aspects for improving air quality in our own communities;
- leads from local issues to a better understanding of global issues;
- develops a real understanding of air pollution issues and solutions; and
- is more than a 'science' program – it also addresses values, citizenship and lifestyle.

In the ACT the program is aimed at primary schools.

Park Care

Park Care is an ACT program where people from the community form groups of volunteers and work with Environment ACT to care for local nature reserves and Namadgi National Park. There are currently 15 active Park Care groups. A key initiative for each Park Care group is to strengthen their affiliation with a Catchment Group. This will lead to Park Care activities becoming more closely aligned with sub-catchment and regional priorities.

Environment ACT will work closely with Park Care groups in fire affected reserves to re-establish walking trails, interpretation signs and undertake monitoring programs.

Landcare

The Landcare program seeks to encourage landholders to undertake landcare and related conservation works by supporting collective action by communities to sustainably manage the environment and natural resources.

Environment ACT has received a further year of Natural Heritage Trust funding for Landcare support in the ACT. In 2003-04 the Government will be involved in actively promoting Landcare and supporting Landcare groups. Currently there are seven rural Landcare groups and 21 urban Landcare groups including two catchment groups which employ their own part-time coordinators.

The ACT Landcare Coordinator will continue to organise a range of activities, including assistance to rural Landcare projects, field days, workshops and participation in environmental events. The Coordinator will also target rural areas of the ACT, where Landcare groups do not exist, to encourage participation in Landcare.

International Year of Fresh Water

The ACT Government will celebrate 2003 International Year of Freshwater with a series of events and activities throughout the year to provide information, to educate, and to maintain

heightened awareness of the need for long-term behaviour change to support more sustainable water use and management.

Natural Heritage Trust

The Natural Heritage Trust is a Commonwealth program of funding investment in issues relating to natural resource management, sustainable production and capacity building. A partnership agreement was established for the first phase of the Trust that ran from 1997-98 until 2001-02.

In May 2001, the Commonwealth announced its commitment to a further extension of the Trust from 2002-03 to 2006-07. The Bilateral Agreement with the Commonwealth was signed on 27 March 2003. This included a commitment to an initial provision of funding totalling \$1.750m from the Commonwealth from 2002-03 until 2004-05. With this Agreement in place, ACT proposals for interim priority projects can be progressed with the Commonwealth, following their endorsement by the Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee.

Dedicated Funding for Key Community Organisations

The Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra is the peak environmental organisation for community groups in the ACT. In recognition of its role as a source of community views and advice and an environmental advocate, the Government has provided dedicated funding assistance to the Conservation Council so it can continue its work with greater certainty of financial support. Similarly, the Government has provided dedicated funding assistance to the Canberra Environment Centre in recognition of its role as a community environmental education and information resource.

ACT Environment Grants

Following the Government's decision to directly fund the Conservation Council of the South East Region and the ACT, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the Environment Centre, there has been a review of the ACT Environment Grant categories for 2002-03. Future grant funding will be provided in the categories of:

- on-ground environmental projects;
- sustainable development and resource management;
- environmental research and advocacy; and
- animal management and welfare services.

Environment and Heritage Awareness, Education and Community Support

In 2003-04, the Government will enhance cooperative arrangements with the community in protecting, preserving and promoting the natural and cultural environment. A Nature Conservation Communication Strategy will be developed to set the framework and forward agenda for education, information and volunteer support programs to be delivered as part of the new focus on nature conservation.

There will be opportunities and support for the community to become more involved with nature conservation through the establishment of education and information programs promoting awareness and knowledge of, and commitment to, the environment.

Community Partnership Database

In 2001-02, Environment ACT continued to develop a database to support partnerships between Government and the community in caring for the ACT environment. The database provides information on community organisations, activities, sites and resources relating to environment and heritage in the ACT and the region. During 2002-03, further enhancements to the database occurred with mapping and photographs of projects. The proposed incorporation of the database into a website originally planned for 2002-03, following a trial of the grant management component, will occur in 2003-04.