

11. ENVIRONMENT

Summary Highlights

The 2004-05 Budget is a continuation of the Government's strong commitment to our natural and cultural heritage and the protection and enhancement of Canberra's natural environment.

The initiatives in this Budget will further the Government's goal of achieving a sustainable, high quality environment for the Canberra Community building on the directions established in The Canberra Plan and the ACT sustainability policy People Place Prosperity.

The January 2003 bushfire devastated enormous areas of the ACT. Many built assets, infrastructure and heritage sites were destroyed, and 81% of reserved land and 57% of rural land was burnt. The effects of the bushfire have been compounded by above average temperatures and historically low rainfall.

Substantial government resources have been directed toward repair and reconstruction. A Fire Recovery Plan was developed to establish priorities and directions for environmental recovery, the reconstruction of built assets and to provide improved facilities for visitors.

The Government is continuing the extensive revegetation, stabilisation and reinstatement work which begun immediately after the fires. Heritage and ecological surveys have been conducted to help assess damage and guide future management priorities. Additional funding has been provided to weed and pest animal control programs to assist the natural recovery processes. Planning for reinstatement of destroyed community facilities in the non-urban area will ensure opportunities are explored for innovation and change to ensure a safer and more secure future.

New and existing Government commitments to the environment include:

- setting new direction for water resource management through addressing challenges of future water supply, environmental flows, water quality, and the cost-effective implementation of integrated catchment management strategies. The recently released Water Resources Strategy provides the blueprint for engaging the community in efficiently managing our water resources;
- delivery of regional Natural Resource Management programs through the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Water Quality and Salinity;
- continued support for the ACT Environment Grant funding program;
- development of multi-species conservation strategies and the inclusion of more than 1000 hectares of important lowland grassy woodland into Canberra Nature Park;
- new nature reserves for grassland conservation in the Jerrabomberra Valley will be established in 2004-05;
- supporting research priorities identified in the ACT Threatened Species Actions Plans (*Nature Conservation Act 1980*), such as research projects to recover threatened species (i.e. the Northern Corroboree Frog and the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby);

- focusing and significantly adjusting vertebrate pest and weed control activities as a consequence of the January 2003 bushfire;
- preparation of a draft management plan for Namadgi National Park taking account of special management issues arising from the 2003 bushfire;
- joint management arrangements for Namadgi National Park will continue to be developed with the Ngunnawal Aboriginal community;
- the natural resource management traineeship program for the ACT's Aboriginal community will be continued with funding for two Aboriginal traineeships within Environment ACT in 2004-05;
- support for the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment will continue, with a new commissioner to be appointed in 2004-05;
- continuing financial support for its community partnerships, such as the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra, the RSPCA and the Canberra Environment Centre;
- increased investment in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through an incentive package for the residential sector in 2004-05;
- continue its active membership of intergovernmental forums such as the Murray Darling Basin Commission, the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council and the Environment Protection and Heritage Council; and
- promote, protect and conserve the ACT's diverse and significant cultural heritage that is recognised nationally and internationally.

New Budget Initiatives for 2004-05

Riparian Habitat Recovery

Greening Australia will be engaged in the rehabilitation of rivers, streams and drainage lines affected by the January 2003 bushfire. This program will deliver significant benefits in soil stabilisation, biodiversity conservation and water quality improvements. The Government will be promoting strong community participation through the establishment of Riparian Green Teams to promote and coordinate community involvement in the renewal work.

2004 ACT Greenhouse Strategy

Compared with other jurisdictions, the ACT is a small contributor to Australia's greenhouse gas emission profile. However, the Government has a strong commitment to reducing the emission attributable to the ACT.

In 2004-05 the Government will continue to support rebate programs for solar hot water systems and cavity wall insulation in the residential sector, and continue to encourage industry engagement in energy efficiency improvements. A home energy audit and financial assistance package for the residential sector will be introduced in 2004-05 to encourage changes in energy use patterns and provide incentives for retrofitting of approved energy efficiency measures.

Threatened Species Recovery

The Government is maintaining its commitment to support research priorities identified in ACT Threatened Species Actions Plans (*Nature Conservation Act 1980*) and ACT components of National Recovery Plans. These plans have identified research priorities essential to conservation management actions and long-term recovery of ACT threatened species, through partnerships with external research organisations.

Research priorities include:

- habitat requirements for threatened and declining woodland birds to inform conservation management of nature reserves and other woodlands;
- effects of habitat fragmentation on viability of populations of grassland reptiles and other fauna;
- impacts of urbanisation on water quality, aquatic biota and riparian communities; and
- post-fire restoration ecology of upland wetland communities.

As part of this initiative the Government will be offering a new scholarship for a post-graduate student to further progress research in accordance with the priorities identified.

This initiative builds on the Government's ongoing commitment to research projects to recover threatened species such as the Northern Corroboree Frog, the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby and the Grassland Earless Dragon.

Aboriginal Employment Opportunities

Joint management arrangements for Namadgi National Park will continue to be developed with the Ngunnawal Aboriginal community. The Government is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal people to develop skills in land management and natural resource management as an important part of this process. Building on a successful pilot study in 2002, the Government will provide funding for two Aboriginal traineeships within Environment ACT in 2004-05. Each traineeship will be for two years and will include both formal study and 'on-the-job' training.

Improved Catchment Management

The January 2003 bushfire, together with persistent drought conditions, have had a significant impact on the ACT's water supply and highlighted the need for better governance arrangements and more focussed catchment management strategies. The Government is committed to providing secure integrated outcomes for water supply and catchment management in the ACT.

The government is exploring a range of measures to address and resolve these issues as soon as possible. Collaborative arrangements with NSW will be an important component of an effective governance and management structure. The Government has announced a significant financial commitment to developing and implementing an integrated approach to catchment management with a view to securing a long term, reliable and high quality water supply for the ACT and region.

In addition, the Government will employ a Forest Ecologist to provide specialist input for vegetation management, forest recovery and management of catchment and riparian vegetation.

National Water Initiative

The Government is continuing to support the development of a National Water Initiative to further the 1994 COAG water reforms and focuses on: increasing the security of water access entitlements; encouraging the expansion of water markets; establishing best practice water pricing; ensuring ecosystem health and protect environmental assets; improved measuring monitoring and information; and encouraging water conservation in urban areas.

Water Resources Strategy

The ACT Water Resources Strategy sets out a comprehensive approach to the management of the ACT's water resources. The implementation of this strategy will begin in 2004-05.

The Government has provided financial support for a range of incentive programs as well as an education and awareness campaign to engage the greater community to protect our most valuable resource.

The Strategy addresses water quality as well as quantity, as well as promoting the use of the water cycle as a basis for integrating stormwater, water supply and wastewater elements in the management of the catchment.

New Works for 2004-05

Construction

Specific construction works to be initiated by the Government in 2004-05 include:

- design of the Tree Top Walk overlooking the Cotter precinct;
- a heritage trail from Angle Crossing to Uriarra; and
- improvements to the Murrumbidgee River Corridor track linking Pine Island, Kambah Pool and the Cotter.

Minor New Works

Minor new works to commence in 2004-05 include:

- establishment of new grassland nature reserves in Jerrabomberra Valley;
- exotic weed control;
- pest willow removal along Molonglo River;
- Yarralumla Creek restoration; and
- in addition, the third appropriation for 2003-04 has funded significant works at Tidbinbilla and Cotter Reserve.

Existing Initiatives For 2004-05

Water Resources Management

Murray Darling Basin Commission

The Government will further its commitment in 2004-05 to Commission activities of significance to the ACT. The Government will continue discussions with other jurisdictions to identify how a cap on water extraction could apply to the ACT as well as the implementation of the Basin Salinity Management Strategy within the ACT.

Catchment Management

In addition to improved catchment management arrangements, community involvement in land and natural resource management arrangements continues to be supported by the Government. Support for catchment management groups will be continued in recognition of the important planning role they play in coordinating community engagement. A review of the Integrated Catchment Management Framework will commence in mid-2004 to ensure it continues to reflect community and government aspirations and accommodates recent developments in catchment management and administration.

Catchment management activities will benefit from investment strategies that support delivery of the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

Post-fire Opportunities

A key priority for the Government, following the January 2003 bushfire, has been the ongoing clean up of public land to ensure it is safe for recreational use. The Government has also provided substantial resources to rebuild and maintain community assets damaged or destroyed by the bushfire. This has included a significant investment in ongoing monitoring, planning and rebuilding projects.

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the Cotter Precinct - Non Urban Study

The January 2003 bushfire destroyed wildlife and infrastructure, and significantly affected the ecology and natural environment of both the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the Cotter Precinct. The community has shown strong support for both areas as demonstrated by the significant attendance at events celebrating their post-fire recovery.

The Government remains committed to implementing the recommendations from the *Shaping Our Territory – Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT* report. Master Plans and Business Cases for these areas are being developed and will include feasibility assessments of potential locations for new projects, area enhancement and the potential for commercial partnerships.

Many projects in both areas are either underway or have been completed as a result of insurance payments and work directed at reinstating, repairing and enhancing facilities in these areas will continue.

In 2004-05 the Government will build on the existing partnership between Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Birrigai Outdoor School to further develop opportunities to collaborate in areas such as education, visitor experience, research, administration and land management.

Catchment remediation and monitoring

The Government has implemented management plans formulated for remediation of urban and non-urban catchments, including the Cotter Catchment (water supply). Remedial activities will continue throughout 2004-05 and will include ongoing water monitoring, incorporating community-based monitoring programs.

Remedial works include erosion control, the removal of fire debris from streams, repair of creek crossings and the rehabilitation of sphagnum bogs vital to the water supply and the survival of the endangered Northern Corroboree Frog.

The replacement of damaged fences bordering the Namadgi National Park will continue to be a priority in 2004-05.

Monitoring of stormwater both before and after rain events within bushfire affected areas, combined with the implementation of stormwater sediment controls, will continue throughout the year.

Auditing and monitoring natural areas and heritage places

The Government will continue to monitor recovery of fire impacted ecological communities within Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and other affected areas outside the nature conservation estate. Surveys have revealed many hundreds of newly discovered Aboriginal sites in areas affected by the bushfire. Remediation work in fire affected wetlands in the Brindabella Ranges will also be supported. The Government will continue to consult with and engage stakeholders in developing conservation measures for heritage places.

Fire Fuel Management and Fuel Reduction

Following the January 2003 bushfire, and consistent with the existing Bushfire Fuel Management Plan 2002-04 (required under the *Bushfire Act 1936*), fuel reduction and fire trail improvements have occurred in many urban areas, areas of Canberra Nature Park and Namadgi National Park. The Government will continue priority works that include mowing and slashing of road verges and grassy areas adjoining selected residential areas. As required under the *Bushfire Act 1936* a Bushfire Fuel Management Plan for 2005-07 will be developed.

The Government is continuing to develop the Fire Management and Access Plan for Namadgi National Park. This plan addresses in detail, fire suppression, fire preparedness and fuel management issues relating to the Park, and develops the policies, strategies and actions for long-term fire management. Consideration will also be given to protection of ecologically sensitive areas, unburnt refuges and minimising spread of pest weeds and animals along new fire trails. A strategic fire trails working group, consisting of a wide range of stakeholders, has been established and is playing an important role in shaping this work.

Delivery of National Natural Resource Management programs

To guide the investment of National NRM programs, the ACT Natural Resource Management Plan and Investment Strategy have been developed by the Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee. The Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) is an Australian Government investment program for environmental and natural resource management. The National Action Plan for Water Quality and Salinity (NAP) is a joint Australian and State/Territory Government investment program aimed at addressing natural resource management issues in partnership with the broader community.

Natural Heritage Trust

In 2003, the ACT and the Australian Governments negotiated a Bilateral Agreement for the delivery of NHT funding in the ACT. This partnership commits the ACT to match the Australian Government investment with equal or better in-kind or cash contributions. The Government, community and industry will work in partnership to support and implement natural resource management projects with the community.

National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality

In 2004-05, the ACT will continue negotiations with the Australian Government for the delivery of the NAP in the ACT. The ACT is also working with the NSW Government and

the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority in recognition of the need to address many issues relating to salinity and water quality on a broader scale.

Whole of Government Coordination

The Government's sustainability agenda will continue to coordinate environment matters on a whole-of-government basis in pursuit of an integrated approach to a sustainable Canberra community.

Office of Sustainability

The Government has a comprehensive commitment to preserve and build on Canberra's strengths as a diverse and tolerant community, with a unique natural environment and a developing economic base – providing for people, protecting our place and creating prosperity. To this end, the Office of Sustainability was established within the Chief Minister's Department in March 2002.

The Office continues to implement the ACT sustainability policy, People Place Prosperity across Government. This policy describes the guiding principles that the Government will use to lead the transition to sustainability for the ACT. Sustainability is integral to the implementation of the Canberra Plan.

Environmental Advice

The Government continues its 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. The Government is committed to the role of the Commissioner for the Environment, with a new commissioner to be appointed in 2004-05. The Government has acknowledged the work by the previous commissioner and the expert advice that has been provided.

State of the Environment Report

The Government will support the work of the new ACT Commissioner for the Environment for monitoring, investigating and reporting upon environmental issues through the production of the State of the Environment Report.

During 2004-05, the results of the review of the role and functions of the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment will be implemented in consultation with the Commissioner.

Participation in National Environment Forums and Initiatives

In 2004-05, the Government will continue to support and be actively involved in a range of intergovernmental forum. These include:

- Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (NRMMC);
- Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC);

- Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC);
- Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council (MDBMC);
- High Level Greenhouse Group;
- The Australian Alps Cooperative Management Program; and
- Cooperative Research Centre Partnerships.

Environmental Legislation

The Government will continue to pursue a strong legislative program with regard to environmental issues. In 2004-05 the Government will:

- implement the proposals of the Review of the *Environment Protection Act 1997* and the Role of the Environment Protection Authority;
- incorporate regulation of Clinical Waste into the *Environment Protection Act 1997*;
- introduce water efficiency labelling legislation in accordance with the national model;
- introduce Heritage legislation reform - a revised bill reflecting contemporary best practice in heritage will be introduced to the Legislative Assembly in mid-2004 for implementation in 2005;
- promote legislation to regulate use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals to reduce the risk of antimicrobial resistance in humans, in accordance with national standards;
- implement the new tree protection legislation subject to passage by the Legislative Assembly in 2004; and
- continue to use experience and policy development to regularly review and amend legislation.

Environmental Protection

The Government remains committed to environment protection in the ACT. The ACT's membership of the National Environment Protection Council (NEPC) through the ministerial Environment Protection and Heritage Council has led to the development of complementary legislation in each jurisdiction for agreed National Environment Protection Measures (NEPMs). This legislation provides for a standards and monitoring program for environment protection matters of national concern.

An initiative to be pursued through 2004-05 is the monitoring for particulate atmospheric environmental pollutants down to 2.5 micrometers in diameter. This includes mobile air monitoring equipment that will give a more detailed understanding of particulate pollution across Canberra. The ACT continues its participation in the National Pollutant Inventory (NPI), an Australia-wide program designed to provide the community, industry and government with information on the types and amounts of polluting substances being emitted to the environment.

The Environment Protection Unit is responsible for regulatory activities related to water resources, environment protection, nature conservation, fisheries, tree protection, and

veterinary services. These responsibilities are fulfilled through the provision of education and information, complaint resolution and formal regulation.

Solid Fuel Heaters

Since 5 April 2001, the sale or supply of firewood in the ACT has been regulated under the Environment Protection Act 1997. Firewood merchants must now hold an environmental authorisation and comply with standard conditions that include a requirement to only sell by weight. The Government will continue to monitor and audit merchant compliance.

The Government will continue its public awareness campaign to promote best practice in the use and maintenance of solid fuel heaters. Information will be disseminated to the public via displays and the Environment ACT website. Environment ACT will also continue to receive and investigate complaints regarding wood heaters.

The subsidy scheme introduced in 2003-04 to contribute towards costs incurred by households in replacing wood heaters that do not comply with current standards with cleaner forms of heating will continue in 2004-05. Since the scheme commenced in January 2004 over 200 applications have been received from homeowners.

Waste Management

The Government will continue its commitment to Waste Management in the ACT through 2004-05. The ACT has two significant initiatives in relation to waste management; Load-Based Discharge Licensing and the *No Waste Strategy*.

No Waste Strategy

Implementation of the No Waste Strategy will continue in 2004-05. Implementation will include identifying reuse and recycling priorities, education programs, encourage recycling businesses, continue best practice throughout Government, and monitoring emerging technologies.

Plastic Bags

On 2 October 2003, the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC) agreed to the Australian Retailers Association Code of Practice for the Management of Plastic Shopping Bags, requiring a national reduction in plastic bag use. The first formal audit report from retailers on the implementation of the Code will be for the period January to June 2004. It is anticipated this report will be submitted to the EPHC in July 2004.

A national campaign, coordinated by Clean Up Australia, will promote behavioural change in the community in support of the Code's initiatives. The key message is '*Say No to Plastic Bags*'.

The ACT Government launched a local campaign supporting the national initiative in April 2004 and is the first state or territory government in Australia to commit funding to a local campaign. Implementing plastic bag reduction and recycling programs will continue to be a key priority for 2004-2005.

Nature Conservation

The Government continues to undertake 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 ACT Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee and the Flora and Fauna Committee provide expert advice to the Government on the development and delivery of nature conservation and natural resource management.

Integrated Nature Conservation Plan

The Government will launch the Integrated Nature Conservation Plan as part of World Environment Day celebrations. It will provide, for the first time, on-line public access to natural resource information through the Internet, enabling users to search statistics and view maps of threatened species distribution through the integrated geographic information system. Management plans and strategies related to our reserves and threatened species are also available to the community.

The system is also to be used by the Government to assist the planning and management of the ACT's nature conservation estate.

Forest ecology and recovery

In July 2003 the Government released its report *Wildfires in the ACT 2003: Report on initial impacts on natural ecosystems*. This provided an assessment of ecosystems following the severe fires of January 2003 and showed that while the extent and severity of the fires had caused significant change, the majority of communities were showing signs of regeneration. Additional monitoring was undertaken in autumn 2004 in combination with a similar program covering the Australian Alps National Parks. Monitoring post-fire recovery of vegetation will continue through 2004-05.

Woodlands Conservation Strategy

The Government completed the Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy, an Action Plan prepared pursuant to the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*. Implementation of the strategy commenced in 2003-04 with a \$1.67m program that will continue in 2004-05.

Some key components of the program include:

- fencing, weed control and visitor access to the new woodland reserves at Gooroo and Callum Brae;
- a revegetation program has been developed and will be implemented when drought conditions ameliorate and in coordination with other revegetation programs. Revegetation guidelines are being developed to assist community, government and individuals undertaking planting programs;
- ranger guided woodland walks are supplementing an education program for primary schools developed in 2003-04;
- ecological surveys are being conducted in the new nature reserves, adding to information about woodland fauna; and

- designation of further reserves which amount to over 1000 hectares of additional area of these important ecosystems.

Grassland Conservation Strategy

The Government has developed a draft Grassland Conservation Strategy, with a focus on native grassland and grassland habitat for threatened species, to be implemented in 2004-05. In the development of this strategy, grassland sites throughout the ACT have been resurveyed (spring and summer 2003-04) and their status, condition and extent have been reviewed. A public forum was held in early 2004 to facilitate community input to the draft strategy.

The draft Grassland Conservation Strategy will be finalised during 2004-05 following a period for public comment. In addition, the Government will establish new nature reserves for grassland conservation in the Jerrabomberra Valley in 2004-05.

Action plans

In 2004-05, the Government finalised action plans for the Ginninderra Peppercreese (*Lepidium ginninderrense*) and the Silver Perch (*Bidyanus bidyanus*). Nine Action Plans covering Yellow Box - Red Gum Grassy Woodland and six woodland birds and two woodland plants were superseded by the single, integrated Action Plan Number 27 (Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy). In 2004-05 an Action Plan for the Spotted-tailed Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus maculatus*) will be drafted for public comment.

Fisheries Management

Following the January 2003 bushfire, aquatic survey work in ACT and regional streams revealed that fish populations had been severely affected. Surveys have indicated that numbers of the Two-spined Blackfish are recovering strongly at some sites, although the prolonged drought continues to stress aquatic communities. The endangered Macquarie Perch was also able to breed successfully in the Cotter River following the release of a modified environmental flow regime.

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

As part of the Government's Fish Stocking Plan for the ACT: 2001-2005, Golden Perch and Murray Cod will be stocked in selected ACT lakes and ponds through 2004-05. The 2001-05 fish-stocking plan will be reviewed in 2004-05 and a new five-year plan issued.

Management Planning for Parks and Reserves

The Government will continue its support for the Interim Namadgi Advisory Board in a collaborative approach for the development of a new plan of management for Namadgi National Park. Joint management arrangements for Namadgi National Park will continue to be developed with the Ngannawal Aboriginal community.

Management Plans for Public Land are required under the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*. During 2004-05 the Government will release the draft management plan for

Namadgi National Park to provide an opportunity for public comment on the proposed management directions for the park. The Namadgi National Park Management Plan will take account of special management issues arising from the 2003 bushfire, including a heightened awareness of the need to provide for water supply and fire management. The Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve plan of management will also be reviewed in 2004-05.

Pest Plant and Animal Management

Weeds management

Following the January 2003 bushfire, the Government developed a program to address both broadleaf and woody weeds on fire-affected land. The implementation of this program will continue through 2004-05.

Feral animal management

Significant opportunities exist for effective long-term control of pests such as goats and deer as a result of the fire events. As a consequence of the January 2003 bushfire, the focus of vertebrate pest control activities required significant adjustment. A post-fire audit of the impact of feral animals on natural resource values is continuing within the bushfire affected reserve and rural areas of the ACT.

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.

In order to achieve a more appropriate balance between protecting the cultural and natural heritage of Canberra without impinging unduly on the expectations and rights of property owners, the Government will be introducing legislation in 2004-05 to deliver a more effective and efficient tree protection regime.

Animal Welfare and Companion Pet Ownership

The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee continues to provide expert advice to the Government on animal welfare matters. The Government in 2004-05, will continue to ensure 'best-practice' in the ACT through:

- a review of all gazetted Codes of Practice relating to animal welfare; and
- a review of the Animal Welfare Act 1992.

The Government will progress its policy of cat containment for new suburbs in the Gungahlin area, displaying a commitment to both responsible pet ownership and nature conservation.

Environmental Education and Community Support

Community groups

The Government will continue its strong commitment to community-based environmental activities supported by its agreement with the Australian Government for delivery of Natural Heritage Trust funding. This support ranges from in-kind support such as office accommodation to provision of facilitators and coordinators, project design and training, and financial contributions to operating expenses. Examples of community-based environmental activities include:

- Waterwatch;
- Airwatch;
- Parkcare; and
- Landcare.

The Government will continue to provide financial support for its community partnerships. Dedicated recurrent funding assistance will be maintained through 2004-05 for the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra, the RSPCA and the Canberra Environment Centre in recognition of the important role of these groups in our community and their need for certainty in funding support for effective operation.

ACT Environment Grants

ACT Environment Grants funding continue to 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 Information

An important mechanism for raising community awareness and commitment is the provision of information products and services.

The Government remains committed to enhancing cooperative arrangements with the community for protecting, preserving and promoting our natural and cultural environment. The highly popular Canberra and Region Heritage Festival will run in April 2005 for the 24th consecutive year. The ACT Heritage Grants program will continue to provide funding for community projects designed to celebrate and conserve our rich heritage.

For the fourth year the Heritage Education in Schools program will be available to primary and lower secondary students in the ACT. Opportunities and support for the community to become involved in nature conservation will continue to exist through education and information programs that promote awareness, knowledge and commitment to the environment. Existing and newly developed environment policies and strategies will continue to include provisions for education and community awareness.

Canberra's significant cultural heritage

Canberra's significant cultural heritage is recognised nationally and internationally. During 2004-05, the Heritage Council will continue its work to update the ACT Heritage Places Register to better reflect the rich Aboriginal, natural and historic heritage of the ACT. The Government has taken the opportunity to survey Aboriginal heritage sites exposed as a result of the January 2003 bushfire and through this has developed a closer working relationship with the (Ngunnawal) Aboriginal community. The Government will continue this work in 2004-05. The Government will use the new information gathered from the surveys to enhance community understanding and appreciation of our Aboriginal heritage.

Heritage signage and travel routes

The Government will develop a number of heritage travel routes including the installation of on-ground directional and interpretative signage. These diverse heritage trails will encourage visitors and residents to explore the rich natural and cultural heritage attractions of Canberra and the region. The heritage trails will take visitors to popular viewpoints such as Mount Ainslie, Red Hill, Black Mountain and Mount Pleasant, and provide links to themed itineraries as well as new and existing heritage attractions. An innovative online presentation of the trails will also be developed. This project will enhance the variety of tourism opportunities in the ACT and promote heritage awareness and protection.

Aboriginal Heritage Study

The Government will continue to develop a closer working relationship with the local Aboriginal community by inviting their participation in heritage surveys and encouraging input into the development of recommendations for future management of Aboriginal heritage places. Environment ACT will provide induction training for sub-contractors on major development projects with regard to heritage issues, such as Aboriginal site recognition and the relevant ACT legislation.

