

11. ENVIRONMENT

Summary Highlights

The 2005-06 Budget continues the Government's strong commitment to the Territory's natural and cultural heritage and the protection and enhancement of the environment.

The initiatives in this Budget will advance 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*.

Substantial government resources continue to be directed toward repair and reconstruction of assets damaged in the January 2003 bushfire. The Government is continuing the extensive revegetation, stabilisation and reinstatement work which began 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 for weed and pest animal control programs to assist the natural recovery processes. Planning and construction 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.

Areas of particular environmental focus include:

- setting 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 Water Resources Strategy, *Think water, act water*, provides the blueprint for engaging the community in efficiently managing our water resources;
- delivering regional natural resource management programs through the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Water Quality and Salinity, and targeted grants;
- developing and implementing multi-species conservation strategies and protecting significant grasslands and woodlands;
- focusing and significantly adjusting vertebrate pest and weed control activities to suit the ongoing needs of the ACT;
- supporting indigenous engagement in the management of natural and cultural heritage;
- supporting the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment;
- continuing to invest in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through an incentive package for the residential sector;
- continuing active membership of intergovernmental forums such as the Murray Darling Basin Commission, the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, the Environment Protection and Heritage Council, and the Primary Industries Ministerial Council;
- promoting, protecting and conserving the ACT's diverse and significant cultural heritage through new Heritage Legislation;
- increasing capacity to manage fire and fuel; and

- continuing support for visitor services and community engagement in natural and cultural heritage management.

Budget Initiatives for 2005-06

National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program

Additional funds have been allocated for the ACT's contribution to the National Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) Eradication Program. This is a national program aimed at eradicating a localised infestation of this significant Queensland exotic pest. There are serious social, economic and environmental implications if this pest spreads to other parts of Australia. Continued participation in national programs such as the this highlight the Government's commitment to minimising the risk of pest species entering and establishing in the ACT.

Replacement of Ageing Plant and Equipment

Additional funds have been allocated to ensure that the Government has sufficient plant and equipment to continue to maintain the nature conservation estate, including fire management.

New Works for 2005-06

During 2005-06, a number of specific construction projects will be undertaken:

- construction of groundwater observation bores;
- enhanced signage in the Canberra Nature Park;
- rehabilitation and enhancement works at Jedbinbilla adjacent to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve;
- upgrade and fire-proofing of wildlife enclosures at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve; and
- asset refurbishment at Government Horse Paddocks.

Environment Priorities for 2005-06

Water Resources Management

Water Resources Strategy

The ACT Water Resources Strategy sets out a comprehensive approach to the management of the ACT's water resources. Implementation of the strategy commenced in 2004-05 and continues during 2005-06.

Implementation includes financial support for a range of incentive programs for households and the commercial sector to reduce water consumption, as well as an education and awareness campaign to engage the community.

The strategy addresses water quality, quantity, and promotes the use of the water cycle as a basis for integrating stormwater, water supply and wastewater elements in the management of the catchment. The *Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act* was passed in March 2005. This legislation is part of a national scheme to implement water efficiency labelling and the making of water efficiency standards.

In implementing the ACT Water Resources Strategy, an investigation was required into the requirements of water supply storage for the ACT. This investigation was undertaken in 2004 by ACTEW and a report was provided to the Government. In addition, ACTEW undertook a study of the preferred water storage options for the ACT. Both of these studies have analysed a broad range of technical, environmental, economic and social considerations in making recommendations to the Government.

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. A range of measures to address and resolve these issues continues to be explored. Collaborative arrangements with NSW will be an important component of an effective governance and management structure.

The Government remains committed to securing a long term, reliable and high quality water supply for the ACT and region. Integral to this commitment are specialist vegetation management strategies, forest recovery and management of catchments, and riparian vegetation. A particular focus will be on ensuring the restoration of the lower Cotter catchment.

To better guide catchment management in the ACT, the Government has set up a Catchment Management Expert Group to advise the Government on catchment management strategy, implementation and governance.

Community involvement in nature conservation and natural resource management arrangements continues to be supported by the Government. Support for catchment groups will continue in recognition of the important planning role they play in coordinating community engagement.

Catchment management activities will benefit from investment strategies that support delivery of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP), and the National Water Initiative, which includes the National Water Fund.

Intergovernmental Arrangements

The Government will further its commitment in 2005-06 to the Murray Darling Basin Commission's activities that are of significance to the ACT. Discussions will continue 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.

Development of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) between the ACT and NSW on cross border water resources will continue to be progressed. Conditions of supply form the basis of the MoU. Of particular interest is how the waters from the Googong Dam are to be distributed to users within the region. Accompanying the water MoU will be a MoU on the principles of regional settlement in areas surrounding the ACT that will draw on the *ACT Spatial Plan* and the Sydney Canberra Corridor Study.

National Water Initiative

At the national and regional level, all governments have recognised that repairing and protecting the environment contributes to better river health, more profitable industries that rely upon water and underpins sustainable urban development and lifestyle. In addition to National Programs such as NAP and NHT, the Government continues to participate in and support the National Water Initiative developed to further the 1994 and 2004 COAG agreements on water reforms and the implementation of best water conservation and use practices. This includes: increasing the security of water access entitlements; encouraging the expansion of water markets; establishing best practice water pricing; ensuring ecosystem health and protecting environmental assets; improved monitoring and information; and encouraging water conservation in urban areas. Through the Commonwealth's National Water Commission, progress in these areas is expected to intensify during 2005-06. The Government will continue to pursue projects through the National Water Fund as part of the National Water Initiative.

Catchment Remediation and Monitoring

The Government has developed management plans for remediation of urban and non-urban catchments, including the Cotter water supply catchment. Remedial activities will continue during 2005-06 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 that are 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 2005-06.

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

Fire Management

Fire Fuel Management and Fuel Reduction

In accordance with the *Emergencies Act 2004*, each agency responsible for land management is required to prepare a Bushfire Operations Plan. Environment ACT, Canberra Urban Parks and Places, and ACT Forests have each prepared Bushfire Operations Plans. These plans detail the activities to be undertaken to meet the fire management standards specified in the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan. These activities relate to fuel management, access improvement, fire infrastructure, training and equipment.

The program of activities outlined in the Bushfire Operations Plans are designed not only to protect assets from fire but also to provide strategic areas for containing fires, ensure a quick response to fires and to increase the capacity of agencies to respond to and manage fires.

Implementation of the Environment ACT Bushfire Operations Plan commenced following its approval by the Commissioner of the Emergency Services Authority in late 2004. This work will continue and includes prescribed burning, slashing, fuel management grazing, physical fuel removal, fire trail upgrades and staff fire training.

The planning for the construction of new fire trails in parks and reserves will continue.

Fire Response and Management Capacity

Arts Heritage and Environment is developing a 24 hour, 7 days a week fire response capacity which will involve all staff assisting in preparing for fire management activities. This involves a structured staff training program and reallocation of priorities to ensure that fire management responsibilities can be met at short notice.

Whole of Government Coordination

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

Office of Sustainability

The Government remains committed to preserving and building 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.

The Office of Sustainability continues to implement the ACT sustainability policy, *People Place Prosperity*. Sustainability initiatives, including the possibility of establishing sustainability legislation for the ACT, demonstrate an ongoing commitment by the Government to a sustainable ACT.

Environmental Advice

The Government continues its commitment to seeking community and expert advice on environmental matters. The benefits of these partnerships have been improved through more strategic involvement of various advisory committee functions. The Government is committed to the role of the Commissioner for the Environment with a new Commissioner 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 in monitoring, investigating and reporting upon environmental issues through the production of the State of the Environment Report.

Participation in National Environment Forums and Initiatives

In 2005-06, the Government will continue to support and be actively involved in a range of intergovernmental forums. These include the:

- Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council;
- Environment Protection and Heritage Council;
- Primary Industries Ministerial Council;
- Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council;
- High Level Greenhouse Group;
- The Australian Alps Cooperative Management Program; and
- Heads of Agencies Parks Forum.

Environmental Legislation

The Government has a strong environmental legislation program to support policy implementation. Particular activities to be progressed include:

- implementing the findings of the Review of the *Environment Protection Act 1997*;
- developing sustainability legislation for the ACT; and
- implementing new legislation for:
 - Pest Plants and Animals;
 - Stock and Animal Diseases;
 - Tree Protection; and
 - Heritage.

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 matters of national concern on environment protection.

An initiative that will continue to be pursued 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 types and amounts of polluting substances being emitted.

The Government 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 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 also continue its public awareness campaign to promote best practice in the use and maintenance of solid fuel 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 2005-06. Since the scheme commenced in January 2004, over 200 applications have been received from homeowners.

Greenhouse Gas Abatement

Greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide and methane, pollute the atmosphere and contribute to the greenhouse effect. These gases are produced mainly as the by-product of energy generation and use. 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 emissions attributable to the ACT.

The development of an ACT Energy Strategy and a review of the existing ACT Greenhouse Strategy are currently underway.

In 2005-06, the Government will continue the home energy audit and rebate program to encourage changes in energy use patterns and provide incentives for retrofitting of approved energy efficiency measures in existing houses. The ACT Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme, which sets mandatory greenhouse gas benchmarks on ACT electricity retailers, will move into its second year of operation. The 2005 benchmark will be lowered in 2006 in line with the legislation governing the scheme.

Waste Management

No Waste Strategy

Implementation of the No Waste Strategy will continue in 2005-06. In August 2004, the Government agreed to the Turning Waste into Resources Action Plan for further implementation of the No Waste by 2010 Strategy. Initiatives under the Action Plan include:

- Business No Waste Challenge;
- Construction Waste Program;
- Government Leadership Program; and
- Community Engagement Initiative.

The Business No Waste Challenge and the Construction Waste Program will develop partnership and alliance programs that engage the business and construction sectors to influence and change their practices. The Community Engagement Initiative will continue to provide appropriate support services and to further engage the community and encourage better recycling practices.

Other initiatives include identifying re-use and recycling priorities, expanded education programs, encourage recycling businesses, continue best practice throughout Government and monitoring emerging technologies.

Plastic Bags

In 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. Audit reports from retailers on the implementation of the Code have occurred for the periods January to June 2004 and July to December 2004. These reports indicate that retailers have achieved their 25% reduction target by the end of 2004 and are on target to achieve 50% reduction by the end of 2005.

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

The Government launched a local campaign supporting the national initiative in 2004 and was the first state or territory government in Australia to commit funding to a local campaign. A new local initiative was launched in April 2005 aimed at encouraging local retailers to sign up to the national retailers reduction campaign. Implementing plastic bag reduction and recycling programs will continue through 2005-06.

Nature Conservation and Natural Resource Management

The Government continues to undertake programs to conserve, monitor and improve the quality of the ACT's natural environment. Programs for threatened species and ecological communities are high priorities. The ACT Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee and the Flora and Fauna Committee provide expert advice to the Government on the delivery of programs for nature conservation and natural resource management.

Integrated Nature Conservation Plan

The Government launched its Integrated Nature Conservation Plan (INCP) as part of World Environment Day celebrations in 2004. It provides, 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 through the website.

The system is also used by the Government to assist the planning and management of the ACT's nature conservation estate. The INCP is now at an operational level and its use and enhancement will be a continuing priority.

Forest Ecology and Recovery

Monitoring of the post-fire recovery of the forest ecosystems is continuing, building on the initial findings published in the report *Wildfires in the ACT 2003: Report on initial impacts on natural ecosystems*, released in July 2003. Autumn monitoring programs of the forest ecosystems are undertaken and fauna and flora programs are being integrated to provide overall site assessment of plant and animal recovery. This program is providing information on the extent to which the forest ecosystem is regenerating, and will assist in planning future fire management priorities.

Woodlands Conservation Strategy

The Government is implementing 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 \$1.670m program that continues in 2005-06.

Some key priorities for 2005-06 are:

- continuing work on fencing, weed control and visitor access for the new woodland reserves at Goorooyarroo and Callum Brae;
- a revegetation program is being implemented, although this has been restricted by dry conditions. Revegetation guidelines prepared in 2004-05 will be used to assist community, government and individuals undertaking planting programs;
- the continuation of ranger guided woodland walks;
- ecological surveys are being conducted in the new nature reserves; and

- protecting threatened woodland plants and animals through special management arrangements with land-holders at south Aranda and at the Hall Cemetery.

Grassland Conservation Strategy

The Government is finalising its Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy following public consultation late in 2004. The Strategy identifies priority tasks to improve conservation of lowland native grassland and component threatened species in the ACT. In 2005-06, the Government will start implementing the strategy with the establishment of two new grassland nature reserves in the Jerrabomberra Valley.

The Lowland Native Grassland Conservation Strategy will complement the National Recovery Plan for Natural Temperate Grassland in the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT). Environment ACT has received Natural Heritage Trust funding to implement this recovery plan in cooperation with NSW government agencies, particularly the Department of Environment and Conservation.

Threatened Species Recovery

In 2004-05 the Government provided support for a four-year program of research into the recovery and management of threatened species and ecological communities. During 2004-05 work was undertaken with local universities to establish two research partnerships, which included support for post-graduate scholars and establishing field research programs.

Environment ACT and the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the Australian National University are collaborating to establish a research program that will provide new insights into best practice strategies for management of endangered Yellow Box - Red Gum Grassy Woodlands. An application to the Australian Research Council for a Linkage Grant will, if successful, supplement ACT Government funding and allow the scope of the research studies to be expanded to a level that will have national significance. The role of grazing, fire and fallen timber are three of the topics being studied, as these are considered to be major influences on the ecological condition of woodlands and their ability to sustain their characteristic flora and fauna.

Environment ACT will also be supporting three post-graduate students from the University of Canberra in a research program designed to underpin planning and management of native grasslands in the ACT. This research is focused on grassland fauna, particularly the Grassland Earless Dragon, Striped Legless Lizard, Granite Worm Lizard and grassland invertebrate fauna. Two students commenced their studies in March 2005 and a third is expected to join the group early in 2005-06.

Conservation of native grasslands and the suite of lizards and insects that are now threatened with extinction is an important planning and management issue in the Majura and Jerrabomberra valleys, which contain some of the best and largest areas of habitat left in the region.

This research work complements the Government's ongoing commitment to research projects into the recovery of threatened species such as the Northern Corroboree Frog and the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby.

The successful captive husbandry program for the Northern Corroboree Frog will be significantly expanded in 2005-06 with the construction of a second husbandry facility. These two facilities provide safeguards against the extinction of the species, producing frogs for release back to the wild.

The cross-fostering program for the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby was severely impacted by the January 2003 bushfire when most of the captive colony at Tidbinbilla was killed. The program, reinstated in 2004-05, will continue to be expanded in 2005-06 as additional wallabies are added to the colony from other zoo institutions and breeding at Tidbinbilla.

Fisheries Management

Following the January 2003 bushfire, aquatic survey work in ACT and regional streams revealed that fish populations had been severely affected. Surveys in 2004 and 2005 have indicated that numbers of the Two-spined Blackfish have recovered strongly at some sites, with trout populations also recovering in 2005. In both 2003 and 2004 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. Stocking of urban lakes and ponds is programmed according to the Fish Stocking Plan for the ACT: 2006-2010. Fisheries Management is conducted in accordance with the *Fisheries Act 2000*.

Management Planning for Parks and Reserves

Management Plans for Public Land are required under the *Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*. During 2005-06 the Government will release a final management plan for Namadgi National Park, following public consultation on the proposed management directions for the park. The Namadgi National Park Management Plan will take account of special management issues arising from the January 2003 bushfire, including a heightened awareness of the need to provide for water supply and fire management. Other management plans to be progressed include Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve, Googong Foreshores and a variation to the Management Plan for Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve to allow for controlled camping.

Pest Plant and Animal Management

Management of the impact of pest plants and animals will remain a significant natural resource management commitment. In collaboration with all land managers, the Government will maintain an annual program of pest management, building on significant successes already being achieved. New pest plant and animal legislation will allow a more effective response to pest issues.

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 tabled the *Tree Protection Bill 2005* on 17 March 2005. When enacted, this Bill will deliver a more effective and efficient tree protection regime for urban Canberra that will 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.

Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality

The Government has entered into arrangements with the Australian Government for joint delivery of a number of national natural resource management programs. Investment in these programs is guided by the ACT Natural Resource Management Plan and Government priorities.

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.

In 2005-06 the ACT will finalise 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.

Living Environment Program

In 2005 the ACT Government, in partnership with Greening Australia, expanded an existing program to address priority issues relating to biodiversity, water quality, soil health, salinity and the capacity of communities to address these issues. The Government continues to promote strong community participation through the establishment of Riparian Green Teams to promote and coordinate community involvement in the renewal work. These partnerships build on work already undertaken for the rehabilitation of rivers, streams and drainage lines affected by the January 2003 bushfire.

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 hundreds of newly discovered Aboriginal sites in areas affected by the bushfire. Remediation works in fire affected wetlands in the Brindabella Ranges are also being supported. The Government will continue to consult with and engage stakeholders in developing conservation measures for heritage places.

Animal Welfare and Companion Pet Ownership

In 2005-06 the Government will continue to pursue an exemplary standard in the application of animal welfare principles through:

- incorporation of animal welfare principles in all relevant management practices
- a progressive review of all gazetted Codes of Practice relating to animal welfare;
- a review of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*; and
- targeted community promotion of the importance of animal welfare.

The Government will progress its policy of cat containment for new suburbs in the Gungahlin area, to encourage both responsible pet ownership and the protection of threatened species in adjacent nature reserves.

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 the 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.

Grants for Environmental Projects

Grant funding for environmental projects continues to be provided in the categories of:

- on-ground projects;
- sustainable development and resource management;
- 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 on products and services.

A brochure and map of the Canberra Nature Park has been published. It has for the first time provided the community with detailed information about their local bushland reserve and the grassland and woodland communities that are protected within them.

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 be run in April 2005 for the 24th consecutive year. The Heritage Grants program will continue to provide funding for community projects designed to celebrate and conserve our rich heritage.

For the fifth 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 2005-06, 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 2005-06. 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 continue the development of a number of heritage travel routes including the installation of 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.

Visitor Services

A key priority for the Government, following the January 2003 bushfire, has been the ongoing clean up of public land to ensure that 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 monitoring, planning and rebuilding projects. The reinstatement of many assets is to enhance the visitors' experience of the natural environment. There will be an emphasis given to visitor services. Significant attendance at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the Cotter Precinct events indicates strong community support for Government reinstatement directions in those areas.

Following the Shaping Our Territory – Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT report, a Master Plan and business case has been developed for Tidbinbilla and the Government is considering further development options.

Within the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Cotter Precinct many post-bushfire reinstatement and enhancement projects have been completed or are currently underway. These projects include the reconstruction of wildlife enclosure fences, the return of koalas at Tidbinbilla, the current construction of a 'Nature Discovery' Playground at Tidbinbilla and the construction of a new walking trail and lookout system at the Cotter.

Indigenous Engagement

Interim Namadgi Advisory Board

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. Cooperative management arrangements for Namadgi National Park will continue to be developed.

Aboriginal Heritage Surveys

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.

Aboriginal Employment Opportunities

The Government is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal people to develop skills in land management and natural resource management. Building on a successful pilot study in 2002, the Government will provide funding for two Aboriginal traineeships within Environment ACT in 2005-06. Each traineeship will be for two years and will include both formal study and 'on-the-job' training.

Cultural Awareness Training

Each year a special cross-cultural awareness raising course is run for non-Aboriginal staff members who are engaged in natural and cultural heritage work. This successful and innovative program will continue.

