

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT



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AIR QUALITY

We all breathe the same air. Exposure to air pollution can have serious negative health impacts. The ACT is fortunate to have good air quality by world standards. However, Tuggeranong Valley is among the three valleys worst affected by pollution from wood heater smoke in Australia, as demonstrated by continued PM2.5 monitoring (Keywood et al. 2017, p. 77). Increased bushfires and dust storms due to climate change are likely to periodically affect air quality in future.

PRINCIPLES

The ACT Greens believe:

1. clean air is a universal right
2. air quality standards should be as rigorous as possible, recognising that some pollutants have no known safe level
3. in a changing climate, we need to take a range of measures to protect people from reduced air quality, including from bushfire smoke.

GOALS

The ACT Greens want:

1. a whole-of-government air quality strategy—covering issues such as health, building quality standards and protection of vulnerable people—to ensure ACT community members are protected from low air quality events, such as lingering bushfire smoke
2. improved monitoring of outdoor air quality and publication of up-to-date, accessible air quality data from monitoring stations throughout the ACT
3. improved monitoring of indoor air quality in public buildings
4. provision of publicly accessible clean air refuges, such as shopping centres and libraries and school halls, as well as provision of accurate information, advice, sufficient masks and medical supplies for the community during events that reduce air quality
5. updated construction standards to ensure buildings can provide acceptable indoor air quality
6. air quality standards for workers, especially outdoor workers
7. air quality standards for events, including sporting events
8. mental health and wellbeing monitoring and support during extended smoke events
9. planning to protect vulnerable people, such as older people and children, from poor air quality
10. stronger national air pollution standards, particularly for nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide, to protect human and ecosystem health
11. ongoing research into the relationship between human health and air quality, including the short-term and long-term effects of air pollution
12. banning of persistent bioaccumulative toxic substances (PBTs), such as brominated flame retardants, endosulfan and mercury, which cannot be safely managed in the atmosphere
13. improved health-based standards for wood heaters and implementation of measures to phase out heaters that do not meet the standard.

BIODIVERSITY AND CONSERVATION

Ecosystems provide vital services that maintain life on our planet. The protection and conservation of remaining biodiverse areas is essential for the wellbeing and survival of all life on Earth, including human beings. Human beings have been part of a dynamic interaction with Australia's ecosystem for over 60,000 years.

PRINCIPLES

The ACT Greens believe:

1. ecosystems have inherent value
2. the best way to support biodiversity and threatened species is through the creation of healthy ecosystems; we should take a holistic approach, rather than reductionist approach, towards ecosystem management
3. current generations have a responsibility to ensure that local and global ecosystems are maintained and strengthened
4. maintaining, expanding and connecting protected areas is vital to preserving healthy ecosystems and biodiversity
5. ecosystem management and restoration activities must integrate understandings of climate change and its impacts
6. the precautionary principle should be integrated into all decision-making where there is potential for serious or irreversible environmental damage
7. the major threats to biodiversity are ecosystem destruction and fragmentation caused by humans, the spread of invasive species and climate change
8. high-value biodiverse areas that cannot be replaced need to be protected; biodiversity offsets should be used as a last resort, after efforts to avoid and mitigate any human impacts, and only if evidence suggests biodiversity offsets will work
9. the ACT's unique grassland and woodland environments should be valued, restored and protected
10. local First Nations knowledge should always be integrated into sustainable natural resource management and conservation
11. government, the private sector, volunteer organisations and people must work together to improve biodiversity
12. community leadership in biodiversity and conservation should be enabled and supported
13. conservation and re-introduction of local species should be encouraged throughout the ACT
14. economic interests should not compromise the conservation of ecosystems or the survival of protected species
15. the ACT has a role to play in national and global reforestation and should lead local efforts to mitigate climate change impacts and biodiversity loss through re-vegetation.

GOALS

The ACT Greens want:

1. to ensure the ACT's biodiversity, native bushland and riparian systems are protected and enhanced as our population grows and as we respond to climate change impacts, including extreme weather events
2. to increase the urban tree canopy cover in the ACT to reach at least 30% by 2045—with realistic interim planting targets—and to increase water-absorbing permeable surfaces, such as soil and gravel, consistent with Canberra's Living Infrastructure Plan to cool the city and provide habitat
3. to maintain and enhance the resilience of local and regional ecosystems by increasing ecological connectivity
4. all government-funded initiatives to monitor, evaluate, manage, repair and report on the status of the ACT's protected ecosystems and threatened species, including through support for community-based projects
5. government-funded programs to educate the ACT community and visitors about the importance of biodiversity and the role of trees, as well as how to protect and enhance biodiversity
6. ACT planning and land maps to clearly display biodiversity and tree coverage data, including up-to-date information on biodiversity quality
7. biodiverse areas, key areas that link habitat, and First Nations' songlines to be protected before development proposals are considered
8. integrated regional management of native habitats, including regional biodiversity corridors and buffer zones, and enhanced riparian and water management strategies
9. evidence-informed management of ecosystems
10. targeted education and management programs to address the negative impacts of invasive species and pests in the ACT
11. to reduce the impacts of domestic cats on native wildlife through local consultation, education and enforcement of cat containment areas, as well as the gradual implementation of cat containment throughout the whole of the ACT, beginning with suburbs that border nature reserves
12. increased ongoing funding for strategic invasive species management programs
13. ACT Government to stop the use of herbicides such as glyphosate in its operations and reduce the use of pesticides generally
14. a biodiversity offsets policy that does not perpetuate biodiversity loss and is only used where evidence indicates offsets will work, with a clear threshold for when offsets will not suffice. Offsets should:
 - a. result in a net gain for the specific species or ecosystem within the local area
 - b. achieve benefits in perpetuity
 - c. include a monitoring and reporting system to assess effectiveness
 - d. be legally enforced
 - e. not include past conservation actions, unless previously protected for offset purposes
 - f. be in place prior to development commencing
 - g. be supported by adequate funding, including for research, restoration and monitoring

15. joint management of ACT protected areas by local First Nations representatives and government, which demonstrates best practice and provides opportunities for employment of local First Nations peoples
16. greater community involvement in the management of the ACT's natural areas, and enhanced and ongoing support for continued volunteer efforts in caring for these areas, including ACT ParkCare, Landcare ACT, FrogWatch, citizen science programs and Catchment Groups
17. integration of Indigenous cool burning practices into ACT fire prevention, management and recovery strategies, with the aim to maximise biodiversity outcomes and protect vulnerable species
18. implementation of incentives and regulations to encourage rural and urban communities across all land tenures to conserve and restore habitat for biodiversity protection purposes, as well as provision of environmental services to these communities.

BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Climate change is increasing the length, severity and frequency of extreme weather events, including fire seasons, droughts, floods, heatwaves and storms. Emergency responses, accompanied by a rapid reduction in emissions, are essential to addressing and mitigating the consequences of this reality.

PRINCIPLES

The ACT Greens believe:

1. well-resourced and well-coordinated emergency services are essential to protecting human life and the natural environment. Responding and adapting to unprecedented events and the consequences of natural disasters is particularly important
2. as Traditional Custodians, First Nations peoples have cultural expertise in fire ecology and the sustainable management of country
3. urban planning, building codes and infrastructure decisions must incorporate activities to address risks associated with living in a bushfire-prone landscape
4. the ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan should incorporate the latest climate change forecasts and recognise Canberra as a regional hub in a bushfire-prone landscape
5. disaster management strategies must include public education about bushfire hazards, fire risks, bushfire survival planning and disaster response
6. vulnerable people in the community must be equitably supported in disaster response.

GOALS

The ACT Greens want:

1. the ACT community to be prepared for the risks of living in a bushfire-prone landscape and the risks of severe weather events
2. the ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan to recognise and use the cultural expertise of Traditional Custodians in the sustainable management of country, and to ensure cultural burns are part of bushfire management in the ACT
3. a well-coordinated regional plan to respond to bushfires and other severe weather events
4. to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate the increasing length and severity of bushfire seasons
5. evidence-informed bushfire management practices with a range of fuel reduction measures, including burns that protect ecosystems, which also minimise the risk and impact of bushfire on urban land
6. emergency services to adopt best practice and regularly monitor new developments in response techniques to be prepared for unprecedented extreme weather events
7. emergency services to be properly and sustainably resourced to meet the increasing needs of the community, complexity of bushfires and natural disaster management
8. recognition of the importance of volunteer emergency services personnel, continued collaboration between volunteer and professional emergency services and sufficient volunteer training opportunities

9. increased funding for community engagement, training and disaster preparedness programs
10. expertise and resources for emergency response services to be provided to vulnerable countries in our region
11. continued refinement of new communication technologies and policies to assist in broadcasting emergency information and warnings to the broader community, including those with hearing and vision impairment
12. increased resources for the recruitment of professional firefighters to meet anticipated increased demands and community need
13. increased support, resources and protections for emergency responders, including maintenance of core skills, specialist training programs, wellbeing initiatives and post-incident support
14. fire stations and equipment ensured to be fit for purpose, interoperable and equipped to promote firefighter wellbeing
15. responsibilities of relevant coordinating agencies to be clear and up to date with bushfire zone development regulations
16. public, airtight and air-conditioned spaces for people to access in heatwaves and other extreme weather events, such as hazardous smoke.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

The world is facing a climate change emergency requiring urgent actions across all levels of government to both mitigate and adapt to its impacts. Inadequate action on climate change has already resulted in widespread negative social, ecological and economic impacts, including but not limited to more extreme weather events, harm to public health—including mental health—disruptions to food, power and communications supply, and increased displacement of people and animals.

PRINCIPLES

The ACT Greens believe:

1. we are facing a climate crisis that poses serious risks to people, ecosystems, biodiversity and infrastructure; we must rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions to keep global warming to below 1.5 °C
2. ACT Government must ensure a just transition for those impacted by ACT Government actions in the shift to net zero emissions
3. delayed action increases the risks we face and will result in costly and devastating impacts on our communities and ecosystems
4. democracy, justice and equity must be guiding principles in the transition towards net zero emissions
5. use of all fossil fuels needs to be rapidly phased out
6. reducing pollution at its source should be our primary method of addressing climate change, rather than offsetting emissions
7. addressing climate change requires broad participation by the community; community leadership should be enabled and supported
8. the planning of our built environment is integral to our transition to net zero emissions
9. existing vegetation must be protected and re-vegetation must be used to draw down greenhouse gases.

GOALS

The ACT Greens want:

1. the ACT to strive to reach net zero emissions by 2030
2. the ACT to advocate for a coordinated federal, state, territory and local government approach to rapidly reducing emissions
3. an energy strategy, developed in partnership with the sector, to maintain at least 100% renewable electricity, increase local electricity generation and storage capacity, improve reliability and support innovative local solutions
4. to build capacity within our communities and industries to expand the local renewable energy sector, including through increasing community ownership of energy production and storage
5. ACT Government to support workers throughout the transition to net zero emissions through appropriate vocational training and re-training for affected and emerging sectors

6. support for households in the just transition to net zero emissions, with priority given to low-income and rental households
7. ACT Government to set standards that enable and inform the private sector to transition to net zero emissions
8. to improve energy efficiency in existing public housing, and ensure all new public housing is 100% electric
9. to facilitate reduced consumption of energy in addition to increasing energy efficiency
10. to legislate to end the extension of the natural gas network in the ACT and to implement a strategy to phase out natural gas, recognising that natural gas is a polluting fossil fuel
11. gas appliances that reach the end of their life, if replaced, to be replaced with appliances using renewable energy, as well as incentives to support this transition
12. alternative energy sources to be used only if they are produced sustainably; for example, hydrogen should only be created using renewable electricity, and biogas should only be captured from waste products with no higher use
13. ACT Government to divest fully from companies with income derived predominantly from fossil fuels by 2023, and to legislate against future investment
14. an appropriately regulated energy system to encourage and support people and communities to generate, store, share and use renewable energy, such as microgrids
15. measures to help transition the ACT from a reliance on private car travel, such as through convenient and prioritised sustainable transport—including a high-quality bus and light rail network—and extensive provisions for walking, cycling and e-mobility, and car share networks
16. measures to support the rapid transition of ACT vehicles to become zero emissions vehicles, including incentives for the private purchase of zero emission vehicles, both new and second-hand; a zero emissions ACT Government passenger vehicle fleet, including buses and other ACT Government vehicles; and infrastructure to support electric and hydrogen vehicles
17. planning and building regulations and incentives to require new commercial, residential and government buildings to minimise lifecycle emissions. This includes increasing minimum energy efficiency and use requirements, designing buildings to use renewable energy, ensuring new suburbs maximise solar passive orientation and solar design, and providing appropriate incentives and subsidies
18. measures to support existing buildings to transition to zero emissions operations and minimise lifecycle emissions. This includes education and information campaigns, incentives and support for zero emission alternatives—including a continuation of existing Actsmart and Home Energy Efficiency programs—and government strategies for hospitals and schools to reach zero emissions
19. the ACT to have a world-leading and science-based approach to climate change adaptation by ensuring that:
 - a. the ACT has at least 30% tree canopy coverage and 30% permeable surfaces by 2045, with realistic interim planting targets (see also the ACT Greens Biodiversity and Conservation Policy)
 - b. all planning and procurement for ACT infrastructure, such as sporting facilities, playgrounds and schools, takes account of predicted changes to the ACT climate
 - c. plans are put in place to support vulnerable communities

20. ACT Government to lead the way by reducing its own 'scope 1' and 'scope 2' emissions to zero before 2030, and to exemplify best practice in zero emissions building, transport, waste and procurement, including minimising (embodied) 'scope 3' emissions
21. ACT Government to adopt a 'social cost of carbon'¹ to evaluate the climate change impacts of budget, policy, procurement and infrastructure decisions
22. ACT Government to reinvest an equivalent social cost of carbon into new emissions reduction measures, if the ACT Government misses any of its emission reduction targets
23. ACT Government to advocate for strong and science-based national policies and targets to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support the transition to a net zero emissions economy, and to work cooperatively with all levels of government wherever possible
24. ACT Government policies and support to help calculate and reduce the ACT's 'scope 3' emissions. This includes policies to promote reduced consumption and sustainable living
25. ACT Government to support innovation, research and development of renewable energy technologies and climate change solutions.

¹ The social cost of carbon is an estimate of the actual economic, social and environmental costs of emitting greenhouse gases in dollar terms.

ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT OF THE ACT

Humanity currently uses 1.7 times more resources than the planet's ecosystems renew. Current levels of resource consumption are unsustainable. The ACT's ecological footprint is determined by the number of people in the ACT and their per capita consumption of resources and energy. The ACT's per capita ecological footprint is 5.24 hectares—three times more than the global average of 1.8 hectares (ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment 2019, p. 9).

PRINCIPLES

The ACT Greens believe:

1. we must substantially reduce our ecological footprint
2. that we can reduce the total ecological footprint of the ACT without reducing the total population
3. urban design, technology, transport, industry, food production and food consumption are important factors that can reduce ecological footprints
4. alternative approaches to prosperity that are consistent with a sustainable ecological footprint need to be developed
5. efforts to reduce per capita resource consumption need to take into account social justice, equity, cultural and economic considerations
6. the ACT should set an example to encourage other regions to reduce their ecological footprint.

GOALS

The ACT Greens want:

1. ACT Government to legislate a long-term sustainable ecological footprint target to be achieved by 2050
2. ACT Government to set a target of reducing the ecological footprint per capita by 10% by 2025, based on 2020 levels
3. the ACT to be a leader in encouraging and enabling a small ecological footprint way of life
4. the ACT community to take action to reduce the impact of its consumption on local, regional, national and global environments
5. regional and national collaboration to find solutions to transport, urban development, water, food production, waste and other issues to enable low impact living
6. the ACT to meet its emission reduction targets and phase out the use of fossil fuels
7. introduction of closed loop cycles of production and consumption.

FOOD PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

The impacts of climate change—such as extreme weather events and more frequent and severe droughts—threaten our food security. Globally, half of all habitable land is used for food production. Livestock account for 77% of farming land, while producing only 18% of the world’s calories (Poore & Nemecek 2018, p. 990). Consuming more plant-based foods will have co-benefits for overall human health and our capacity to adapt to, and mitigate the impacts of, climate change.

PRINCIPLES

The ACT Greens believe:

1. food is essential to community, cultural expression, enjoyment and nourishment
2. the current system of food production, consumption and waste is unsustainable, insecure and economically unjust
3. the long-term viability of agriculture depends on the adoption of ecologically sustainable practices
4. people have a right to know where their food comes from and how it is produced
5. ACT Government has an obligation to ensure the health and wellbeing of our community by ensuring access to affordable, sustainable and nutritious food (see also the ACT Greens Health Policy)
6. food producers, distributors and consumers must consider the ecological impact of producing, transporting, packaging, storing, preparing and disposing of food and food waste
7. local and regional farmers should be supported to develop sustainable and affordable food systems
8. backyard and community food growing are valuable community activities that can contribute meaningfully to food supplies in the ACT
9. agricultural production, processing and distribution should:
 - a. be ecologically sustainable and climate-appropriate
 - b. provide nutritious and healthy food
 - c. support diverse local and regional fresh produce
 - d. be fair to farmers, distributors and consumers
 - e. respect animal welfare
10. food production and consumption play an important role in community-building and food and agriculture education
11. factory farming of animals is detrimental to animal welfare
12. factory farming causes high levels of pollution
13. food and organic waste should be used as a valuable resource
14. urban sprawl and extractive industries pose serious threats to the scarce land and water resources needed to produce food in our region
15. insect pollination plays an important role in food production.

GOALS

The ACT Greens want:

1. to reduce the environmental impact of producing the food consumed by people in the ACT
2. to ensure that ACT community members have access to adequate quantities of affordable and nutritious food
3. to enable more consumption of plant-based foods to improve human health and animal welfare while simultaneously reducing the environmental impacts of food production
4. policies and programs to facilitate increased community access to public land for food production, including stronger government support for city farms, community gardens, market gardens, nature strip planting, commercial gardens, aquaponics and community orchards
5. new urban developments to set aside space for community gardens
6. support for local First Nations communities to foster traditional farming practices
7. to reduce excess food packaging
8. policies and programs that allow all food packaging to be recycled in ordinary household recycling bins
9. programs to minimise food wastage (see also ACT Greens Waste Policy)
10. to continue to expand provisions for animal welfare in food production
11. to foster communication and networking between local and regional growers
12. to increase the use of local compost for fertilisers
13. to reduce the use of pesticides and encourage bee friendly gardens
14. urban planning and government landscape planning to factor in bee friendly habitat
15. to protect farmland and water resources from competing development and use
16. to ensure master plans for rural and urban areas reflect the ACT landscape and resources, and plan food production accordingly
17. to protect the natural ecosystems that underpin the production of food in the ACT, including grasslands and woodlands that provide pollinators with clean air, water sources and nutrients
18. water security for sustainable agricultural production
19. to ensure children in the ACT are educated about growing and preparing food through school gardening and cooking programs
20. broader education and awareness programs on food production and preparation
21. to ensure that all catered ACT Government facilities and events provide plant-based food options.

WATER

Water is vital to all life. Climate change projections for the ACT predict hotter summers and more severe droughts in the future. Water resources must be managed sustainably.

PRINCIPLES

The ACT Greens believe:

1. everyone has a right to a minimum and affordable supply of clean water
2. water management must be fully integrated with wider social, economic and ecological policies
3. water and water catchments should be managed in a way that safeguard ecological and human health
4. water should be effectively, efficiently and equitably managed in partnership with the community, First Nations representatives, scientists, industry, agriculture and government
5. water is best managed at the catchment scale, recognising the linkages between land use, vegetation, surface water and groundwater
6. the ACT has an obligation to contribute to reforms in the wider Murray-Darling Basin
7. the ACT has an obligation to ensure that water leaving the ACT is of the same or better quality than water entering the ACT
8. water is an increasingly limited resource and all sectors of the ACT community have an obligation to use water wisely
9. investment in and management of water infrastructure must consider climate change projections and impacts on ecosystem health
10. large scale water usage should be priced to reflect the full social and environmental costs of water extraction, transport, use and treatment
11. trees, vegetation and water bodies play an important role in improving soil health, cooling the city, retaining water in the landscape and managing microclimate and urban amenity
12. water restrictions should cover indoor and outdoor water use
13. the ACT's water resources must remain publicly owned, with transparent management to ensure an equitable pricing structure and integration of environmental objectives.

GOALS

The ACT Greens want:

1. a comprehensive water management strategy based on a vision for long-term ecological health, human health and water security in a changing climate
2. a clear framework for setting water restrictions to consider climate change projections, such as more frequent and severe droughts
3. adequate environmental flows to ensure the health of ecological systems and biodiversity
4. drinking water in the ACT to meet or exceed national and international quality standards

5. ACT water catchments to have well-resourced, best practice management
6. community participation in catchment management through partnerships and funding with community organisations, such as ACT ParkCare, Landcare ACT, FrogWatch, citizen science programs and Catchment Groups
7. water-sensitive urban design principles to be embedded into urban planning and development, such as
 - a. ponds and wetlands, to intercept pollutants in stormwater and to protect the ecological and recreational value of lakes and streams
 - b. mulching, vegetation and tree cover, to enhance local surface water retention and recycling, and to hydrate soils and groundwater recharge
8. continued interjurisdictional and regional collaboration and coordination to improve water quality and environmental flows in the Murray-Darling Basin
9. education programs and incentives to encourage water efficiency and water re-use in homes, offices, industry and agriculture
10. use of pumped hydropower technology only where it is 'off-river', to prevent ecological damage; and implementation of clear guidelines about ecological requirements for pumped hydro
11. development of a long-term strategy to address water quality in lakes, ponds and waterways
12. restoration of local waterways to provide habitat, improve soil health, manage water flow, improve amenity and retain water in the landscape.

GLOSSARY

Cool burns: Cool burns, also known as cultural-ecological burns, are a specific method of First Nations cultural burning. Cool burns are generally of low intensity and severity. The main purpose of a cool burn is cultural renewal; other outcomes can include renewal of native vegetation, protection of culturally significant sites, reduction of bushfire hazards, and maintenance of groundwater sources and water catchment areas (Williamson 2015, p. 21).

Ecological connectivity: Ecological connectivity is the degree to which separate patches of habitat are connected. This connectivity is important because it enables crucial ecological process to occur, such as seed dispersal, gene flow between populations and animal migration. Methods to increase ecological connectivity include establishing landscape corridors and stepping-stone reserves.

Ecological footprint: An ecological footprint is a calculation of the amount of land and water required to support demand for goods and services and our use of resources. It also takes into account the area needed to absorb our waste (including greenhouse gases). The ecological footprint provides a calculated measure of the extent of human impact on the earth, determines our relative consumption of global resources, and helps us understand the link between our lifestyles and the environment; providing us with a means by which to assess the sustainability of our lifestyle (ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment 2015, p. 1).

First Nations peoples: The ACT Greens use the term 'First Nations peoples' to refer to all nations and clan groups that occupied the land that would become Australia prior to colonisation. First Nations peoples never ceded their sovereignty and continue their connections with land, water, sky, culture and community. The ACT Greens acknowledge the limitations of any term in accounting for the complexity and diversity of First Nations identities and experiences.

Local First Nations community: Local First Nations community refers to all First Nations peoples who live, reside and/or work in the ACT community. The ACT Greens use this phrase in its most inclusive sense to include Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians as well as other Traditional Custodians in the region—the Ngarigo and Ngambri peoples—and all other First Nations peoples and communities.

Precautionary principle: The precautionary principle states that, 'where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation' (Principle 15 of the 1992 Rio Declaration from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development).

Traditional Custodians: The ACT uses the phrase 'Traditional Custodians' instead of 'Traditional Owners' to refer to the First Nations peoples of this region, due to the land title system in the ACT. In the ACT, land title holders do not own the land, but hold up to 99-year leases on the land. The Ngunnawal Peoples are recognised by the ACT Government as the Traditional Custodians of this land.

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