

REPAIRING WATERWAYS

INTRODUCTION

Canberra is a beautiful city, having been planned around maximising a sustainable water catchment for the ACT over a century ago. Thus our suburbs nestle into valleys and our lakes, wetlands and waterways are an integral part of our lifestyles. These waterways also provide critical water and habitat for the hundreds of thousands of plants and animals that form our urban ecosystems.

Yet poor urban planning and an outdated view that treats water as a waste product has led to murky, unhealthy and polluted aquatic environments.

The solution is simple: treat water as part of the urban ecosystem, not separate to it.

That's why the Greens wetlands and water quality package will ensure a healthy aquatic environment across the ACT. As part of our commitment to making Canberra Australia's first urban biodiversity sanctuary, the Greens have a plan for a major infrastructure investment of \$30 million to protect and improve ACT's rivers, lakes and ponds and build new wetlands, rain gardens and swales across Canberra's key catchments.

The ACT Greens have worked hard to increase urban wetlands across Canberra over the past 12 years - resulting in increased wildlife such as birds, frogs and a myriad of insects and reptiles. We have seen how increased urban flora around areas like our wetlands has enabled Canberra to host more diverse birdlife over the past few months, supporting migrating birds, including those searching for food in the aftermath of the devastating bushfires last summer.

The Greens think it is time to take an ecosystems approach to urban land and water management, to better support our biodiversity.

We have a plan to restore, strengthen and better manage the ACT's unique ecosystems and waterways. Through a range of community, government and local First Nations-led conservation initiatives we can build a better normal for the animals, plants and people who live on this country - by slowing down our water flows, increasing river and creek habitats and reducing pollution into our lakes and ponds.

We also have a plan to improve water management in the ACT, noting that while many agencies work separately on water issues, there is no agency solely responsible for improving our urban water quality.

Remember the open spaces around Dickson and Lyneham before the wetlands were built? Tired stretches of grass bisected by concrete storm drains, areas people largely avoided.

Those spaces are now vibrant ecosystems where native vegetation creates homes for skinks and lizards, birds skim in to land on the bright water and frogs croak noisily after rain.

Our vision extends these newly enriched landscapes throughout Canberra, to the catchments of creek systems in Tuggeranong, Gungahlin, Woden and Weston Creek.

1. IMPROVING THE ACT'S WATER QUALITY AND AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS

The ACT Greens will prioritise improving the health of the ACT's aquatic ecosystems, which are essential for biodiversity, the community, recreation, and especially downstream - agriculture. [Currently only 42% of ACT waterways are in good or excellent condition, and 48% have poor to degraded riparian condition.](#) Canberra's lake and river sites still regularly experience closures due to issues such as blue-green algae / cyanobacteria. The Greens want major infrastructure investment to protect and improve the ACT's rivers, lakes and ponds with new wetlands, rain gardens, swales and water restoration projects across Canberra's key catchments.

IMPROVING RIPARIAN HABITAT ALONG OUR EXISTING WATERWAYS

We will take a range of measures to improve the health of the ACT's precious aquatic environments, such as:

- **rolling out a major infrastructure program of \$30 million**, continuing the successful Healthy Waterways project to continue to slow the flow of water through our suburban creeks - reducing pollutants and providing essential habitat. This will include new wetlands, rain gardens, ponds, swales and restoration projects to benefit Canberra's water catchments, including Lake Tuggeranong, Yarralumla Creek, West Belconnen, and Molonglo. Funding can be directed immediately to a [range of projects considered under the Healthy Waterways project](#), which have not yet been funded. Noting the success of the \$85 million investment from the Federal Government on these projects thus far, we will seek further Commonwealth funding for these projects.
- developing a plan to protect and manage Canberra's urban river and creek corridors as nature reserves, like the Molonglo River Reserve, over the next 4 years (such as Ginninderra Creek, Jerrabomberra Creek, Woolshed Creek).

IMPROVING OUR WATER QUALITY

While there has been significant investment in ACT catchments over the past decade or more, there are still high nutrient-levels in most of our waterways: from high amounts of leaf matter in Autumn, high loads of sediment and pollutants from construction sites - especially in our developing suburbs, and overuse of fertilisers and detergents in our suburban gardens and yards. The Greens would like to see further action to improve the ACT's water quality - to make sure that water leaving the ACT is as pristine (or better) than when it arrived. We will do this by:

- reducing pollutants entering our waterways - from reducing coarse litter in our creeks, to reducing nutrients such as leaves going into our stormwater channels and drains and reducing fertiliser runoff on our lawns. This will partially be a community education exercise, but may also need a review of government operations to identify systemic improvements.
- a Commissioner for Environment and Sustainability investigation into the state of lakes and waterways in the ACT, with recommendations for Government action.
- increasing community education programs about urban water use and the stormwater system, to increase awareness about where our stormwater goes and its effects on our waterways and wildlife.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

We know that our waterways and riparian zone management is critical to addressing the heat island effect. The Greens want to increase ecologically-sensitive management practices in the ACT by:

- increasing permeable surfaces, to meet the ACT Government's [Living Infrastructure Plan](#) target of 30% permeable surfaces across our urban footprint by 2045 at the latest, thus better allowing for water flow through our gardens and suburbs into our waterways in a more sensitive manner.
- applying water sensitive urban design across more of our urban footprint - through improved requirements for estate development plans and development applications.
- developing a strategic investment program for green and blue 'living infrastructure' across Canberra to both improve water quality and mitigate the urban heat island effect.

2. SUPPORTING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The Canberra community plays a critical role in caring for the ACT's environment. Organisations such as Canberra's valuable community catchment groups, Waterwatch and Frogwatch are key to protecting and sustainably managing our precious waterways. Supporting these volunteer organisations enables localised and dedicated care from people who truly love and understand their neighbourhoods.

To better support our community groups and increase community education on water management issues, the Greens plan will:

- ensure increased and reliable ongoing funding and support of \$3.2M over 4 years for Canberra's valuable community local environmental volunteer-based groups, such as Landcare ACT, Parkcare, catchment groups, rural leaseholders and urban park groups - noting that many of these groups manage the vital landscapes that surround our rivers and creeks.
- increase Environment Grants funds for removing invasive plant species including woody weeds, and re-establishing riparian vegetation to improve habitat and protect lakes and waterways from pollutants.
- support dedicated volunteer groups to help keep our local wetlands clean, litter-free and focused on ecological improvement outcomes.
- commit recurrent funds to our citizen science programs already developed by Canberra's many knowledgeable scientists and keen environmentalists to continue their work of monitoring key ecological indicators. These programs provide significant and valuable information to the government, and include Frogwatch and Waterwatch.
- increase community education programs about stormwater and caring for water bodies.

3. CREATING AN ACT WATER OFFICE

While the ACT Government has many agencies responsible for various parts of our city's water management, there is no single agency solely responsible for ensuring high water quality outcomes for the Territory.

The ACT Greens would like to see amalgamation of the many different arms of government responsible for water management in the ACT, to create one single water management agency.

This would incorporate, amongst others, the water pollution enforcement activities of the Environment Protection Authority, the catchment management and water policy section of the

Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, and the roads and stormwater management section of City Services that build and manages our wetlands and empties gross pollutant traps. This single office would then better be able to coordinate with our volunteer organisations to focus on catchment and ecosystems outcomes.

Establishment of an ACT Water Office would enable the Government to reduce silos, gaps, overlaps and bureaucracy, to better:

- administer new water programs, such as large-scale infrastructure programs to continue and improve the ACT's existing Healthy Waterways project, including new wetlands, rain gardens, ponds, swales and restoration projects across Canberra's water catchments.
- accelerate programs to improve water quality - including for recreational activities, and report annually on the causes and types of pollutants, with prioritised, funded action plans each year.
- support new, best practice 'water sensitive urban design' requirements being introduced into the Territory Plan, to ensure new developments are designed to sustainably manage urban water and minimise stormwater runoff and associated pollutants.
- audit stormwater infrastructure and create a ten year upgrade plan to ensure it can handle storm events in line with climate change predictions of increased flooding events.
- support government agencies and activities to work in cooperation with our volunteer riparian management activities to improve habitat and water quality.

4. CULTURAL WATER MANAGEMENT

The ACT Greens have committed to providing an additional 10 full-time and ongoing Ngunnawal Indigenous Rangers to work in Namadji and Canberra Nature Park. The Indigenous Rangers program will be able to engage the community on traditional cultural practices and cultural water and fire management, including supporting Rangers to work with key community groups under direction of the Dhawura Ngunnawal Committee. Key activities would likely be:

- development of an Indigenous water management program. By establishing an Indigenous River and Catchment Rangers program to work alongside Traditional Custodians, we can better manage water health and design strategies to improve water health through cultural understanding of water resources and management.
- increasing our recognition, respect and use of Indigenous cultural practices in environmental management to better engage the Indigenous community on environmental management practices, including water management.