

PEOPLE POWERED SUSTAINABILITY

SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERS

As the bush capital of Australia, we have a responsibility to lead the nation in fighting climate change and protecting our natural environment. In the ACT, community environmental volunteers are the lifeblood of our efforts to undertake this work.

Over 100 environmental volunteer groups in the ACT contribute 300,000 hours in conservation work annually, or the equivalent of \$22 million every year. The work of these volunteers ranges from obvious things like weeding, planting trees and caring for injured wildlife, to researching and advocating for changes to Government policies.

As our native habitats are torn up by climate change and construction on the edges of the city, the precious wildlife that rely on these habitats are being pushed towards extinction. That means securing the viability of these groups is one of the best investments we can make.

Now more than ever, we need to give certainty to our environmental volunteers and recognise the crucial role they play in battling the environmental impacts of the climate crisis. The Greens will stop these groups from having to operate from hand to mouth, year on year, and instead recognise the vital services they provide.

THE ACT GREENS WILL:

- ▲ Provide guaranteed ongoing funding for key community-based environment groups and secure ongoing increased funding for the ACT's Environmental Grants
- ▲ Establish a sustainability hub for local environmental champions, educators, artists and enterprises that facilitate community sustainability and circular economy practices
- ▲ Establish a new Gardens for Wildlife program that will support Canberrans to create wildlife-friendly gardens
- ▲ Create an Adopt a Patch program to allow local neighbourhoods to adopt their local laneway, verges or similar public spaces to spruce them up as native habitat
- ▲ Establish a new native plant nursery to provide stock for restoration projects, new employment opportunities, and free plants to Canberrans

COMMUNITY POWERED SUSTAINABILITY

Every year, Canberrans from all walks of life give back to our environment through practical, on-ground work like weeding and planting, citizen science such as wildlife and water quality monitoring, care for injured native wildlife, and so much more. Volunteering to help care for our environment also cares for us by fostering personal and community wellbeing and connection. Simply put, what is good for the environment is also good for us.

With over 100 environmental volunteer groups across the Territory, it would cost the Government \$22 million, or more than 300,000 hours, to replace the extraordinary community work to care for our woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, waterways, parks and reserves. The environmental outcomes delivered by volunteers are enabled by incredible community organisations including Landcare ACT, our Catchment Management Groups, ACT Wildlife, Wombat Rescue, Waterwatch and Frogwatch. In addition to the work they do to protect, restore and enhance our natural environment, they are also connected to a large group of avid and knowledgeable citizen scientists.

The ACT Greens secured the first four-year funding agreements for environmental groups including the three Catchment Management Groups, Frogwatch and ACT Wildlife, along with a

60% increase in the ACT Environment Grants.

But we need to go further. Our community environment groups need increased and secure long-term funding to do their vital work and put in place long-term work plans to best support environmental volunteers. We also need to increase environmental grants to better match the number of projects local groups are seeking to deliver.

Additionally, we need to expand the opportunities for everyone, from formal community groups to like-minded neighbours, to adopt the patches of local habitat they love and plant their gardens to function as important wildlife havens, particularly for our smaller wildlife that relies on grasses and shrubs, as well as trees.

Canberra is also home to grassroots community organisations that support us all to adopt healthier and more sustainable habits, such as the Canberra Environment Centre, SEE-Change and the Conservation Council, all of whom are heavily relied upon by Government for community engagement, consultation and outcomes, and need long-term support to ensure their ongoing sustainability.

Groups focused on promoting sustainability and the circular economy also need a physical home. We want all Canberrans to be able to access an inspiring location that demonstrates sustainable practices and provides practical help to anyone seeking it.

Climate change means that environmental health is our greatest protection against current and future impacts, which means it must be core government business.

SUPPORTING ON-GROUND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING

Every dollar that the government invests in our environmental volunteers and organisations is magnified and returned through thousands of donated hours of work, habitat restoration, care and connection, community action to increase sustainability, and healthier, happier people.

The ACT Greens will champion our environmental volunteers by commissioning outcomes from environmental advocacy and change organisations like the Conservation Council, SEE-Change and Canberra Environment Centre to facilitate greater environmental education, advocacy and engagement outcomes, and ensure these vital environmental organisations are sustainable in the long term. This includes providing guaranteed ongoing funding for the ACT Catchment Management Groups, FrogWatch and Waterwatch, ACT Landcare, ACT Wildlife and Wombat Rescue, and funding for veterinary services to support volunteer wildlife rescuers and carers.

We will secure and increase funding for the ACT's Environmental Grants. This will include expanding the existing environmental grants program to provide multi-year grants for small scale, expert environmental volunteer organisations, who provide critical advice to government on biodiversity, environment management, and natural and cultural

heritage, to support their ongoing capacity. We will further streamline and simplify grant application and reporting processes to reduce administrative burden and allow community efforts to focus on achieving environmental outcomes.

The ACT Greens will establish a sustainability hub for local environmental champions, educators, artists and enterprises that facilitate community sustainability and circular economy practices. This will provide a home for many community organisations to deliver their important work.

We will establish a new 'Gardens for Wildlife' program that will support Canberrans to create and manage wildlife-friendly gardens through education and advice, recognition, and annual access to 10 free native plants a year for new gardens or 5 for established gardens.

To support local neighbourhoods to champion their local areas, we will create 'Adopt a Patch' program for communities to adopt their local laneway, verges or similar public spaces to spruce them up as native habitat, with access to small scale grants and free native plants without needing to form an ongoing Urban Park Group.

INVESTMENT: \$16.5M OVER 4 YEARS

ESTABLISHING A NEW NATIVE PLANT NURSERY TO SERVICE CANBERRA

The Yarralumla Nursery, with its program of gifting free plants to new homeowners and providing plant stock like native trees, is a cherished community asset.

But one nursery isn't enough, particularly to support community-led environmental habitat restoration and the adoption of local patches and cherished places across our city, nor to provide all Canberrans with easy access to plants needed to improve urban biodiversity. More native plant stock can also support Canberrans to create Gardens for Wildlife and Adopt a Patch. Providing a new, smaller nursery to service the north of the city will provide better service to our whole community.

Creating a new native nursery is also an opportunity to partner with First Nations enterprises, and to support social enterprises that provide training and employment opportunities for people with disability or others experiencing barriers to employment.

**INVESTMENT: \$4M OVER 4 YEARS
(\$2M TO ESTABLISH A NURSERY,
\$500K PER YEAR FOR PLANT
DONATIONS)**