

# CARING FOR WATERWAYS AND CATCHMENTS

## INVESTING IN LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE AND A HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL

Rivers, creeks and lakes are an important part of what makes life in the ACT great - whether it's a local pond or the Murrumbidgee River, these places add beauty and value to our lives.

The growth of our city and climate change are both putting pressure on the health of local waterways. They are the lifeblood of our local environment and need our support.

The ACT Greens have led a huge program of water quality improvements across the ACT that have enhanced biodiversity and made our city more liveable and beautiful in the process.

Our next plans will build on these achievements to deliver new wetlands, creek and river restoration projects, education programs and water quality research.

We want healthy rivers, creeks and lakes across our city that support wildlife and provide great places for us all to enjoy. We want Canberra to be a city that uses water respectfully and takes good care of the creeks, rivers, lakes and ponds we are so fortunate to have throughout our city.

### THE ACT GREENS WILL:

- ▲ **Expand the Healthy Waterways program** with an additional \$50 million to restore creeks and rivers, enhance biodiversity, build new wetlands and deliver water quality education and research
- ▲ **Support community catchment groups and Frogwatch** by providing increased funding and certainty for four years
- ▲ **Improve transparency and accountability** by ensuring the Water Abstraction Charge on your water bill is spent on water management and improving catchment health
- ▲ **Embed First Nations perspectives and knowledge in water management** by creating two new dedicated First Nations positions in the Office of Water
- ▲ **Restore the health of the upper Murrumbidgee River** working with stakeholders, First Nations and governments to restore flows
- ▲ **Improve water efficiency** to save 6.36GL each year.

# MORE WETLANDS, CLEANER WATER, HEALTHIER RIVERS

## INCREASE THE HEALTHY WATERWAYS PROGRAM TO \$50 MILLION

Last election the Greens promised \$30 million for the Healthy Waterways program and with a Greens Minister for Water, we have delivered.

Projects have included a new wetland in **Belconnen**, a stormwater reuse project at **Kambah** playing fields, re-naturalisation of a section of **Tuggeranong Creek**, floating wetlands in **Lake Tuggeranong** and **Yerrabi Pond**, and revegetation of the **Naas River** to reduce erosion.

But our local waterways are still under pressure from Canberra's growing population and climate change. Caring for waterways and catchments is more important than ever.

In urban areas, human activity creates sediment and nutrient pollution that flows into waterways and leads to poor water quality and algal blooms. In rural areas, livestock access to rivers erodes banks and washes sediments and nutrients into rivers, leading to outbreaks of bacteria that can make the rivers unsafe for swimming after rainfall events.

Next term, the Greens will expand the Healthy Waterways program to build more wetlands, re-naturalise and restore

creeks and rivers, continue education programs and conduct research and monitoring to improve water quality, enhance biodiversity and restore waterway health.

## LOCAL PROJECTS, LOCAL BENEFITS

With our increased investment in Healthy Waterways the ACT Greens will:

- Restore a creek line and reconnect it with **Tuggeranong Creek** at **Tuggeranong Homestead** in **Richardson**, working closely with traditional custodians and community members to protect and restore the ecological and cultural values of the site.
- Deliver stage one of the **Sullivans Creek** Re-naturalisation Plan to restore biodiversity, improve water quality and increase catchment health.
- Build a wetland in the area adjacent to **Yarralumla Bay**.
- Rehabilitate a section of the **Molonglo River** upstream of **Lake Burley Griffin**.
- Build a rain garden at **Bevans Street playground** in **Higgins** to filter stormwater.
- Deliver new stormwater reuse projects to clean stormwater and reduce reliance on drinking water for irrigation.
- Complete a design study for re-naturalisation of the concrete channel in **Teloopa Park**.
- Deliver other wetlands, restoration projects and improvements at sites

across the ACT, working with community members to finalise sites.

– We will also deliver catchment plans for **Lake Burley Griffin, Lake Ginninderra, Lake Tuggeranong, the Naas-Gudgenby River** and **Yerrabi Pond** to set out a clear pathway to improve the health of these systems.

– Continue education programs to support community members in caring for waterways.

– Continue research, monitoring and evaluation of Healthy Waterways assets to gather data on water quality outcomes and sources of pollution.

These projects will improve water quality, helping to reduce algal blooms in our lakes. They will also increase biodiversity, improve habitat and create valuable local attractions for outdoor recreation and enjoyment of nature.

### WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- \$50 million including \$47 million in capital, \$2 million in monitoring, education and research and \$1 million in staffing (1.5 FTE at SOGC level for 4 years).

## BOOST SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY CATCHMENT GROUPS

### PROVIDE FOUR YEARS OF FUNDING CERTAINTY FOR COMMUNITY CATCHMENT GROUPS, FROGWATCH AND WATERWATCH

The three catchment groups – **Southern ACT Catchment Group, Ginninderra Catchment Group** and **Molonglo Conservation Group**, provide hundreds of hours of work to support catchment health each month, playing a vital role in caring for our waterways.

The catchment groups maintain areas by weeding and caring for plants, they coordinate volunteers and organise work parties to target weeds, re-plant riverbanks and contribute to maintaining parks and reserves and protecting environmental values.

They work across the landscape, providing a holistic approach to catchment health that complements and adds great value to the work of the ACT Government.

They also run education programs that enable community members to connect with and learn about their local environment and the species that call it home.

The **Frogwatch** program uses citizen science to monitor frog populations through the annual Frog Census that delivers 600 surveys across the ACT. This program provides detailed information about frog species presence that is used to inform ACT Government work to protect waterway health and frog populations.

We will increase funding to the three catchment groups and continue funding for the Frogwatch program, providing funding certainty for four years. This will support the continuation of this important work and enable these organisations to increase their capacity in recognition of the growing challenges of weed management, sediment control, education and maintaining plantings as the city grows.

We will also continue the **Waterwatch** program, a comprehensive citizen science program that provides valuable information on water quality across the ACT.

### WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- \$3.44 million including \$250,000 per year for the three catchment groups and \$110,000 per year for the continuation of the Frogwatch program. Waterwatch is funded with existing resources.

## IMPROVE WATER GOVERNANCE

### STRENGTHEN THE OFFICE OF WATER

Our Greens Minister for Water established the Office of Water in 2022 to bring together areas of Government that are involved in water management. The Office of Water has performed well and is fulfilling the goal of providing a holistic approach and a central point for

coordination on water management and catchment health.

To build on this success, the Greens will further consolidate water related work across ACT Government and increase capacity for research, engagement, compliance, catchment planning and project implementation.

### IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF MONEY CHARGED ON YOUR WATER BILL

Best practice water governance requires transparency in how funding is allocated to water management and improving catchment health. The Water Abstraction Charge (WAC) is levied on all ACT water users to recover catchment management costs and environmental costs associated with water extraction. In 2023-24 the WAC was \$0.69 per kilolitre for potable water and 50% of that amount (\$0.345 per kilolitre) for non-potable water.

Water spending and revenue for Australian jurisdictions is reported in the ACCC Water Monitoring Report. The most recent report shows that in 2022-23 ACT revenue from water planning and management charges (98.5% of which is from the WAC) was \$32.7 million and ACT expenditure on water planning and management activities was \$13.4 million. This leaves a substantial gap of \$19.3 million between revenue collected and expenditure on water and catchment management.

To improve transparency and accountability, and to deliver the best outcomes for local waterways and our community, we will hypothecate the WAC and ensure these funds are allocated to water management activities and improving catchment health throughout the ACT.

Healthy catchments and landscape-scale restoration are integral for protecting our water supply, and ensuring high quality water for years to come. We will report publicly each year on how revenue from the WAC is expended.

## **FURTHER INTEGRATE CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECTIONS AND RISKS IN WATER MANAGEMENT**

Our climate is changing and projections for the ACT region are for greater year-to-year rainfall variability, hotter temperatures, changes in seasonal rainfall patterns and more periods of prolonged drought. This has major implications for water supply and catchment health.

The Greens will ensure the Government continues to consider the latest climate projections and climate change risks in all water management decisions and drought planning.

We will also review current settings for triggering water restrictions, and identify changes that may be needed to account for climate change and altered rainfall patterns.

## **WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?**

- Office of Water: \$2.5 million including \$2.2 million for 2 ASO6 and 2 SOGC positions for four years and \$300,000 for research, engagement and project implementation.
- Water Abstraction Charge: This will be implemented within existing resources. WAC revenue over the four years is estimated to be at least \$120 million. This is based on a conservative estimate of \$30 million per year. Around \$37 million was expected to be collected through the WAC in 2023-24.
- Climate projections: Within existing resources.

## **EMBED FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES IN WATER MANAGEMENT**

### **CREATE TWO NEW DEDICATED POSITIONS IN THE OFFICE OF WATER**

The traditional custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people, have a deep and ongoing connection to the lands and waters of this region. There are other families and groups that also have a

connection to these lands and waters. As custodians of these lands and waters, Ngunnawal people should be offered the opportunity to participate in managing these natural areas and protecting and restoring cultural and ecological values. Respectfully inviting traditional custodian participation, perspectives and knowledge in water management will add great value to our approach while honouring the wisdom and experience held by traditional custodians.

To help embed First Nations perspectives and knowledge in water management we will create two new dedicated First Nations positions in the Office of Water.

In 2021 we created a dedicated Ngunnawal Water Policy Officer position in recognition that traditional custodian knowledge is critical to our understanding of the natural environment and sustainable management of the land and water. Establishing this position, and working closely with traditional custodians within this region, has provided great depth to our work in water management, catchment planning and policy development.

Building on this work, we will establish two more dedicated First Nations positions within the Office of Water to further embed First Nations knowledge

and perspectives into water management in the ACT.

### WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- \$1.1 million for two positions for four years (1 SOGC and 1 ASO6).

## RESTORE AND PROTECT RIVER HEALTH

### RESTORE THE HEALTH OF THE UPPER MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER

The Murrumbidgee River has high ecological and cultural value and is a key feature of the Canberra landscape.

The upper Murrumbidgee River is the section from the headwaters upstream of the ACT to Burrinjuck Dam in NSW, downstream of the ACT. This section of the river is deprived of flows because the Snowy Hydro scheme diverts on average over 96% of the natural flow of the river at Tantangara Dam.

This is damaging river health and leading to sediment build up, altered riparian vegetation, reduced habitat availability and decline of species. Upland rivers naturally have high flow events in winter and spring, which scour the riverbed of sediment.

The operation of Snowy Hydro has meant these flood events do not occur and summer flows are often very low or zero, with serious negative consequences for river health. While there are environmental flow targets for the upper Murrumbidgee River, these are set too low and are not enforceable so are rarely met.

The Greens will continue to advocate to restore flows and improve the health of the upper Murrumbidgee River, working closely with governments, First Nations and stakeholders.

We will work to increase and protect environmental flows, deliver cultural flows, ensure opportunities for First Nations involvement in decision making, improve the flow regime to better represent natural seasonal variation and high flow events, and restore riparian vegetation.

We will work with NSW and Commonwealth governments to deliver on-ground restoration works, and we will continue to collaborate to ensure improved governance arrangements for managing the river.

### **PROTECT THE FREE-FLOWING STATUS OF THE NAAS AND GUDGENBY RIVERS**

The Naas and Gudgenby Rivers flow from the mountains of Namadji National Park into the ACT, joining the Murrumbidgee River at Tharwa. These

ivers are home to many species, support farms along their banks and form an important part of the ACT landscape.

We will protect these rivers and ensure they continue to flow freely rather than being dammed, supporting biodiversity and habitat connectivity, adding beauty to the landscape and providing water to farming communities along the rivers.

### **WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?**

- This will be implemented within existing resources.

## **PLAY OUR PART IN RESTORING THE MURRAY DARLING RIVER SYSTEM**

### **IMPLEMENT THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN PLAN AND INCREASE WATER EFFICIENCY**

Canberra is the largest city in the Murray Darling Basin and what we do here affects the waters that flow out of the ACT, through NSW and into the Murray River.

The Greens will continue to advocate for delivery of the Murray Darling Basin Plan in full, with strong accountability measures and on-ground auditing.

We will continue to advocate for water justice for the First Nations along the rivers, with improved access to water,

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involvement in decision making and delivery of cultural flows.

We will also deliver on the ACT Government commitment to save 6.36GL of water per year by implementing water efficiency and demand management measures. This will reduce our impact on the Murray Darling River system and enable environmental flows to be delivered to improve the health of the system.

### WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- No cost impact, the water efficiency work has been funded by the Commonwealth Government allocation of \$58.8 million.

## IMPROVE HABITAT CONNECTIVITY FOR AQUATIC SPECIES

### UPGRADE RIVER CROSSINGS TO ENABLE FISH PASSAGE

The ACT's waterways support diverse ecosystems and are home to many species, including endangered fish species such as the Macquarie Perch, Silver Perch and Trout Cod.

In addition to the impacts of reduced water quality and reduced river flows, physical barriers limit fish movement and

have negative impacts on the health of these fish populations.

To improve habitat connectivity for aquatic species we will:

- Upgrade river crossings to remove barriers to fish passage, including Point Hut Crossing and Burkes Creek Crossing.
- Implement a requirement that any new river crossings must be designed to facilitate fish passage.
- Investigate building a fish ladder at Scrivener Dam to allow fish passage from the lower section of the Molonglo River up to Lake Burley Griffin.

### WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- Estimated at \$1.5 million for river crossing upgrades.
- Fish ladder investigation and staffing to be covered by existing resources.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

These initiatives to improve the health of the ACT's waterways and combat the impacts of urbanisation and climate change will work alongside the ACT Greens' election commitments to [Care for the Bush Capital](#) and support [People Powered Sustainability](#). All this is possible, if you vote for it.