



budgetconsultation@act.gov.au

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12 September 2023

RE: Budget Consultation - Champion Local Environment Organisation

Environment and climate is identified as one of the 12 domains of wellbeing for the ACT.¹ Canberra based Environment organisations play an important role in Government strategies to reduce emissions on the pathway to net zero emissions by 2045, for a circular economy and to restore and conserve natural places in the ACT region. These organisations, including the Conservation Council ACT Region, do not have sufficient funds or secure, appropriate and affordable tenancy. This prevents the organisations from being as effective as possible and therefore contributing as fully to ecological justice in our region.

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the region's leading environmental advocacy organisation and hub for community groups. Our mission is to protect nature and create a safe climate future in the ACT and region. Since 1981 we have been at the centre of the region's most important wins for wildlife, bushland and communities. We run campaigns, promote and upskill local groups, undertake research, advocate passionately, and engage and inform our community. We serve as a galvanising hub that promotes connection and collaboration between our member groups and works to amplify the voices of our local community. We are able to provide resources and expertise, practical equipment, as well as a physical meeting space/workspace for our 40+ member groups.

Our belief is in the power of collective action to create change. Any group in our region that wants nature and climate to thrive is welcome to join us as a member group. We work collaboratively with and empower our local environment community by working together to create inspiring and informative events, providing upskilling opportunities, connections with decision makers, facilitating networking, knowledge sharing, campaign guidance, providing practical essential equipment and meeting space. Our member groups include groups undertaking crucial environmental protection, care and restoration for our region such as the Canberra Forest Alliance, Friends of Grasslands, National Parks Association of the ACT, Canberra Ornithology Group, Field Naturalist Society, Canberra Nature Map and ACT for Bees. These groups not only deliver valuable results for the environment but also build community and provide social connections to individuals thus increasing physical and mental wellbeing.

The ACT region is home to incredible nature from temperate grasslands to native spotted gum forests, flocks of Gang-gang cockatoos, the golden sun moth to rare marsupials. But nature in Australia and our region is declining - under pressure from a warming climate, roads and infrastructure fragmenting habitats, deforestation and exploitation. Now more than ever community

¹ https://www.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1498198/ACT-wellbeing-framework.pdf

organisations like the Conservation Council ACT Region, working for nature protection and a safe climate future are needed. We know what it takes to protect the nature we love. We know that the actions we take in the ACT and region have a far reaching impact on our national and global environment. However, due to the cost of living pressures, a significant rise in the award salary rate and super, an insecure lease arrangement, a significant rise in insurance cover and other business compliance and operation costs - the Conservation Council is currently facing serious financial pressures. This has resulted in the inability to employ further staff, including filling the Biodiversity Campaigner role. Consequently, the Conservation Council cannot continue to operate at the capacity level required to contribute fully to environmental action in our region, including supporting and implementing the ACT Government's own strategies.

The Conservation Council ACT Region requires operational funding to become financially stable - to keep the heart of environmental action in the ACT Region beating. Further funding will help us to have working technology, pay our rent, be able to adequately and ethically fulfil obligations to staff, purchase a working PA and projector for use by the environment community, operate as a galvanising hub for local groups, and continue our impactful campaign and advocacy work to protect our region's nature. Without funding it is impossible to participate in government roundtables, consultations, forums and community consultation.

In July 2022, a landmark State of Environment Report was released outlining that overall Australia's natural environment is "poor and deteriorating". The cause of this extreme loss: climate stresses, habitat loss and degradation. Nature in the ACT suffers the same fate as the rest of the country. Approximately 6.2% of Canberra's mature trees have been removed in the past 5 years; our beloved faunal emblem, the Gang-gang Cockatoo is endangered; and our natural areas are at increasing risk from invasive plants and animals.

Investing in protecting, restoring and enhancing natural places in the ACT region has cross community benefits including for supporting tourism, livelihoods, health and wellbeing. Furthermore it is invaluable that the ACT plays a stewardship role in the protection of important local species and ecosystems. Investing in environment organisations who work to maintain high-quality urban greenspace will help build resilience against the impacts of climate change, enhance nature connectivity across the urban landscape, and deliver quality-of-life benefits to the community. Trees and shrubs provide vital refuge for wildlife and pollinators across the urban landscape and cool the urban environment.

Current ACT Government initiatives have already identified the importance of biodiversity for our region. We congratulate the Government on this, however without adequate funding to local environment organisations such initiatives cannot be adequately delivered. Furthermore, without investment in local environment organisations it is clear the Government is in fact not prioritising or valuing the ongoing sustainability of the sector which provides cross community benefits for health and wellbeing.

Significantly the maintenance of ACT waterways, parks, reserves and urban green spaces is heavily dependent on volunteer labour and small organisations including LandcareACT and the three Catchment Groups. Activities including citizen science, weeding, work parties, planting and activities are invaluable in supporting biodiversity in the ACT. This work should be valued as core business for

managing the bush capital's ecosystems and habitats. Investment is required for these organisations not just to cover ground costs but to increase their capacity, and upskill.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. We would be pleased to discuss further how local environmental organisations can continue to thrive and as a result our biodiversity and community. Funding local environment organisations including the Conservation Council ACT Region with increased operational funding to be financially stable would have far reaching benefits for our community, climate and nature.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elle Lawless". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'E'.

Elle Lawless

Executive Director