



ACT
Government
Environment and Planning

Community Engagement Strategy on Climate Change



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Renewable energy showcase including both wind and solar initiatives on display at the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre.





Minister's Foreword

The ACT is leading the way in Australia on climate change mitigation; that is, reducing our greenhouse gas emissions as the cause of climate change. The primary pathway to reducing emissions is to increase the proportion of the ACT's energy needs from renewable sources such as wind and solar power. Our renewable energy target is 90% by 2020 and we are on track to meet this.

Despite our efforts, the climate is changing. Slowly but surely, through incremental and ongoing changes, we will move to a different climate in the not so distant future.

There are many ways to help our people, our city infrastructure and our natural environment adapt and become more resilient, but government cannot do this alone. Everyone has a responsibility to take action – and to share the benefits of a city adapted to climate change.

In continuing to respond to the challenges posed by a changing climate, the ACT Government's approach is to increase our community partnering to ensure we all have the information and support we need to make the right decisions. This Community Engagement Strategy on Climate Change outlines this commitment.



Simon Corbell MLA
Minister for the Environment



Why we need this strategy

Despite global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, there will be inevitable changes to the planet's climate in our lifetime. Changes are already noticeable.

The United Nations International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), delivered in 2013–14, reaffirmed that the existing rate of global greenhouse gas emissions will result in a two degree Celsius (2°C) increase to average global surface temperature before mid-century. However, to have the best chance of averting the most catastrophic effects of climate change, a rise above 2°C must be avoided. The IPCC recently stated that climate change poses many threats to humankind and it is essential for governments and the public to plan and commence action for protection from a significantly changed climate.

Climate projections for the Australian Capital Region indicate warmer and drier conditions with increased frequency of natural disasters including drought and bushfire, and severity of extreme weather events such as wild storms, flash flooding and prolonged heatwaves. A changing climate affects us all, and is not a problem that governments can address independently from the community. Mitigating the causes and adapting to the changes is a shared challenge that can be best addressed through a well-informed community. To achieve this outcome requires ongoing engagement and collaborative actions.

Extreme weather events particularly affect our most vulnerable people – the very young and old, the poor and sick.

Extreme weather events and natural disasters put significant strains on our health system and emergency services. It is therefore important that we, as a community, can help each other to better manage and bounce back from such events, that is, to be resilient.

In 2012 ACT's climate change policy and action plan, referred to as Action Plan 2, set the vision that **'by 2060 we will be a more sustainable and carbon neutral city that is adapting to climate change.'**

Action 5 of Action Plan 2 requires a community engagement strategy as part of achieving that vision.

Action Plan 2 – action 5: Community Engagement Strategy

Develop a comprehensive strategy to engage the community on climate change matters and to provide integrated information, advice and support to Canberra households on reducing energy bills and cutting emissions.

With information from the community engagement activities since 2012, the purpose of this strategy has been refined to be more wide-reaching:

Develop a comprehensive strategy to continue to effectively engage the community about climate change matters to guide the ACT's future responses on mitigation and adaptation.



Credit: M. Maconachie



How we developed this strategy

The ACT Government is committed to principles of open government and consultation, with community engagement guided by the government’s publication *Engaging Canberrans*, 2011. This publication is the foundation of this strategy.

The key to effective engagement is awareness. In developing this strategy, the ACT Government’s Environment and Planning Directorate (EPD) was guided by our community’s views and values. These were provided through:

- previous consultations on climate change (from 2007 to 2013)
- a survey of ACT residents’ attitudes towards climate change in 2013 and
- a subsequent stakeholder workshop in early 2014.

Key messages from prior engagement

The key engagement activities since 2007, with published findings about climate change, include the:

- 2009 *Sustainable future* lectures series with its workshop findings report
- 2010 *Time to Talk: Canberra 2030*
- 2011 draft and 2012 final climate change strategy and action plan, Action Plan 2
- 2011 draft and 2012 final ACT Planning Strategy.

The overwhelming message from these sources is that the ACT community knows about climate change and cares how we respond.

Resident survey in 2013

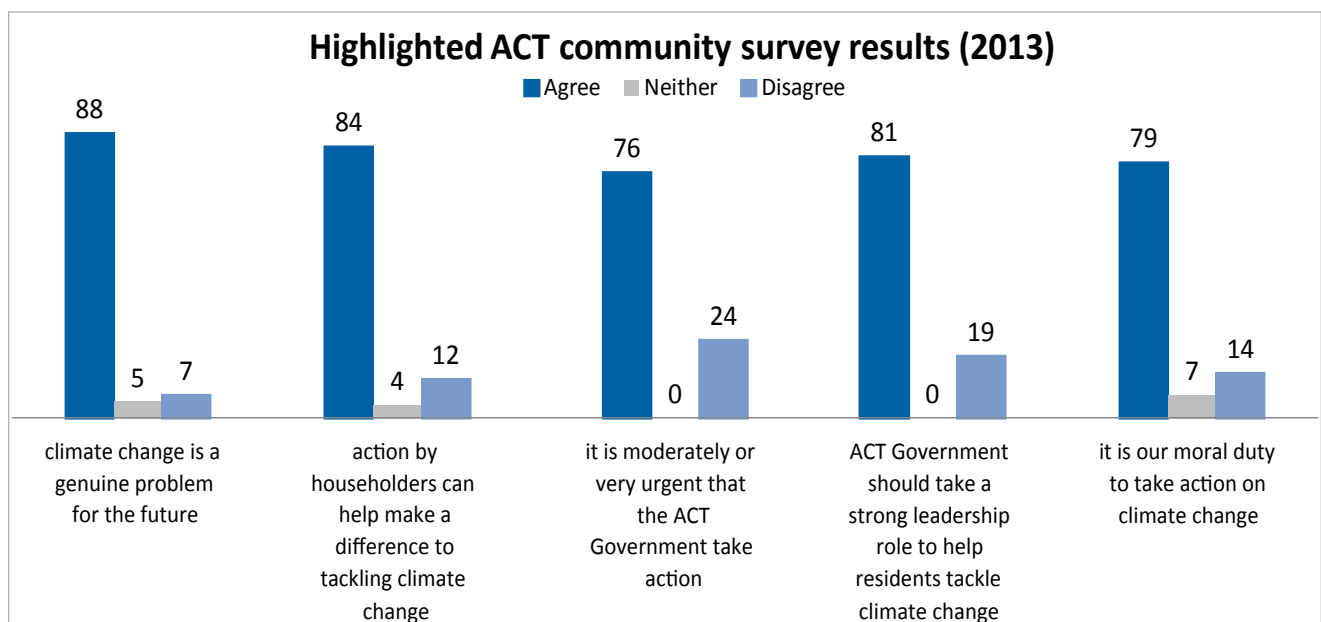
The survey identified that ACT residents have:

- a high general awareness of climate change
- a high level of support for local action on climate change and
- a willingness to commit to individual household actions.

However, respondents were generally unaware of the specific actions being undertaken by the ACT Government, with only 40% aware of the government’s climate change policies or emissions reduction targets. Consequently, there is a clear need to improve the understanding and knowledge in the wider community on climate change impacts over time, and of the ACT Government’s subsequent actions and the reasons behind them.

See the full results of the survey at:

www.environment.act.gov.au/cc/community-engagement





Stakeholder workshop in 2014

Following analysis of the survey, a workshop of ACT community and environmental organisations and peak businesses was held in 2014. Attendees shared their experiences and ideas on how to best engage ACT residents and organisations in local climate change action. They agreed the elements of successful community engagement on climate change were:

- providing targeted and accessible information for informed choices
- building on strengths, and supporting innovation in adaptation and mitigation responses
- empowering behaviour change and allowing diverse engagement opportunities
- partnering with community sectors on climate change matters
- developing a culture of active citizenry enabled by social inclusiveness
- creating ownership through distributed engagement, such as sharing stories through existing networks and
- celebrating successes and leadership.

These findings have been used in the development of this strategy and will be further used in developing specific activities and then reviewing the performance of this strategy.

What is clear from these ‘elements’ is that to be successful, the efforts of many are needed and these go well beyond the limitations of government. The responsibility for achieving a more climate resilient place and population rests with us all.

A number of key messages synthesised from this recent engagement will be used in our ongoing activities and are displayed in caption boxes on following pages.



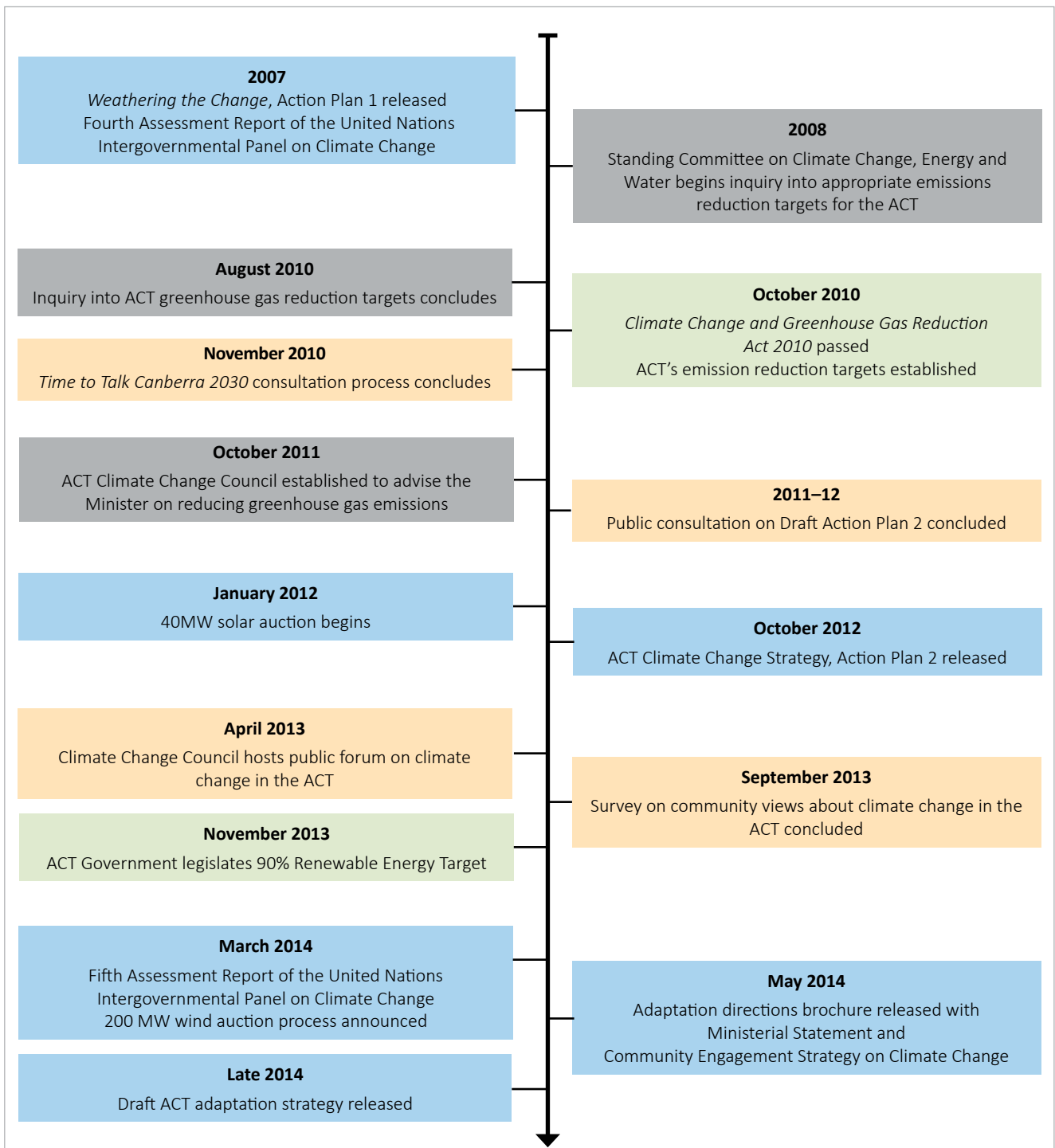


What actions the ACT has taken on climate change so far

The ACT Government has taken a leading role on climate change in Australia and is undertaking a range of activities to reduce ACT emissions and allow our community to better adapt to a changing climate. These actions have been developed from the best scientific information of the time and with close community engagement and support, including grass roots community campaigns.

To make a difference, changes don't need to be difficult. Other people are taking action on climate change. You can too.

The timeline below charts key milestones.





The government’s actions on climate change fall into the following categories:

Policy – what government aims to achieve.

Legislation (and regulation) – what government must do.

Programs – actions by stakeholders with support by government.

The key initiatives, completed or ongoing, are outlined below.

Policy

ACT climate change policy and action plans

In 2007 the government released its first policy and action plan on climate change *Weathering the Change – Action Plan 1*, and in 2012, released the current policy referred to as Action Plan 2.

The primary focus is on emissions reductions and setting the Territory on the path to meeting our greenhouse gas reduction target of 40% reduction on 1990 levels by 2020 and zero emissions by 2060.

The focus of the next phase is climate change adaptation, and determining the pathway for resilience, where people lead more sustainable lifestyles and the community is vibrant, healthy and informed about climate change. This new strategy will be guided by community engagement and the latest science about local climate projections. The draft will be released in the latter half of 2014 with the final completed in 2015.

www.environment.act.gov.au/cc

Carbon Neutral Government Framework

In August 2012, the ACT Government endorsed the Carbon Neutral ACT Government Framework to achieve carbon neutrality in its own operations by 2020. This leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions supports the legislated greenhouse gas reduction targets.

The purpose of the framework is to enable and coordinate a whole-of-government approach to achieving carbon neutrality in a cost-effective manner by 2020. By implementing the framework and reducing its carbon footprint, the ACT Government can build its resilience to rising energy prices and the impacts of climate change.

Under the framework, action 20 is to achieve carbon neutral schools, that is ‘continuing the implementation of resource reduction actions in education facilities to enable all ACT schools to implement priority energy efficiency actions and support the aspirational target of public school carbon neutrality (in its operations) by 2017.’





In partnership with all sectors of the community, the ACT Government is initiating changes to 'business as usual', so together we can adapt and be resilient to a different future.

Legislation

ACT emission reduction targets

The ACT Legislative Assembly enacted the *Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010*, establishing the most ambitious emissions reduction targets in Australia:

- zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2060
- peaking per capita emissions by 2013
- 40% reduction of 1990 levels by 2020
- 80% reduction of 1990 levels by 2050.

ACT renewable energy target

A major shift to renewable energy sources is required to meet the Territory's 2020 emission reduction targets. Therefore in November 2013 the ACT Government established a 90% renewable energy target. www.environment.act.gov.au/energy/90_percent_renewable

Programs

There are three government funded programs (long running initiatives) to assist the non-government and government sectors to take climate change mitigation actions.

ACTSmart programs

ACTSmart is a one-stop-shop for direct engagement between government and the community, with separate ACTSmart programs for households, businesses, schools and community groups, as well as ACTSmart for government.

There is a range of advice and assistance available to save energy and water, reduce waste and cut greenhouse gas emissions. www.actsmart.act.gov.au

Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme

Reducing energy use in existing homes is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to reduce emissions and minimise household exposure to rising power (electricity and gas) prices. Therefore energy efficiency is major component of Action Plan 2. Under action 1, all ACT energy service providers are responsible for reducing energy use in homes under the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme (EEIS).

The EEIS was introduced from 1 January 2013 for an initial term of three years. From 1 July 2013, the EEIS was expanded to small to medium enterprises, including private businesses and non-government community organisations.



Carbon Neutral Government Loan Fund

The 2012–2013 ACT Budget provided \$5 million to establish the Carbon Neutral Government Fund, a loan facility accessible to ACT Government directorates to implement energy saving and greenhouse gas reduction initiatives.

The fund supports the government target for carbon neutrality in its operations by 2020 by investment in energy efficiency projects. The fund also assists the government to minimise the impacts of rising energy costs.





Next steps

This section outlines the key actions that are the next step for government. These respond directly to the findings from recent engagement.

Information sharing

It is important for the government to provide up to date, relevant and accessible information to the different groups in our community on:

- the potential impacts and risks from climate change
- what the ACT Government is doing to address them
- actions we can all take to achieve our goal of becoming more sustainable
- best practice learnings and supportive actions being undertaken by the community.

Therefore, in addition to continuing with existing initiatives and programs, the following actions will commence in 2014:

Public awareness campaign

Responding to the need for more information, a continuous 'campaign' is to commence that provides up to date information. This campaign is an essential part of achieving the purpose of this strategy. The campaign will utilise and expand on existing engagement mechanisms such as www.timetotalk.act.gov.au and social media.

Sustainability portal (web hub)

A central sustainability web hub will be established for accessing information on a range of sustainability issues, including climate change. To achieve this, incremental upgrades to the existing ACTSmart website will be made. This primary information source on sustainability will have links and contact information for government and non-government entities.

Increasing interactive media

Community advice identified that future engagement activities need to allow people to ask questions and share ideas on an ongoing basis. Therefore the use of interactive social media by government will be increased over time. The extensive networks, diverse communication tools and methods used by our partners will extend the 'reach' of information into the community.

The ACT Government is continuing to take significant steps to reduce carbon emissions (mitigate the cause of climate change) by changing to renewable energy sources.





Partnerships

Since the ACT's first climate change strategy and action plan, the community's views on climate change have guided the ACT's policies and targets. The government knows it is only in working together that we can meet the challenges of adapting to a changing climate.

Already many community organisations and businesses have a significant role in climate change actions. This strategy commits the government to build on the existing partnerships with the community with the clear purpose of achieving enhanced knowledge and understanding, capacity building for informed decision making, and promoting collaborative local action.

In engaging with the sectors identified below, the ACT Government will use a range of methods that are appropriate to the needs and preferences of our partners. The precise activities to be undertaken over time will be determined with each sector.

Your lifestyle habits contribute to climate change. Your actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions make a difference.

1. Households

Households are responsible for approximately 31% of total ACT emissions, and need to adapt and transform in response to the changing climate. Issues of importance to households will vary and need to be determined with them. The ACT's community councils and welfare agencies will play an important part in this engagement.

2. Community organisations and schools

Canberra has a broad range of active and engaged community organisations, many of which are active proponents of local climate change action. Schools play an important role in the education of our children and are often the focal point of a local community. Together these groups have enormous potential in providing leadership in adaptation across generations.

Climate change is a genuine problem for the future – it will affect you, but it is not too late to take action.

3. Business and industry

Canberra's business and industry sector is responsible for the largest proportion of ACT's emissions at approximately 42%. Two sub-sectors are particularly important to addressing climate change issues: energy utilities, which are heavily involved in the communication of information, for example through energy bills, and the building and construction industry, which will be crucial to the adaptation to climate change.

4. Knowledge brokers

The ACT's Climate Change Council and the presence of the national institutions, embassies and world-class universities and research institutions, provides Canberra with unique access to resources, information, key decision makers and a chance to explore international markets. Canberra's growth depends upon the 'knowledge economy' and this sector's vital role in sparking innovation. The Council will play an important role in implementing this strategy.

5. Our region

The ACT Government recognises the role Canberra plays within the broader south-east region of NSW as a regional city servicing a population of over 600,000 people. Within our region, cross jurisdictional engagement – working across the border – is very important to successful climate change responses, and existing working relationships will be expanded to address this issue.

6. Governments

Recent engagement has identified it is important to the community that the ACT Government's actions in responding to climate change are coordinated. And it is important to efficient and effective government that initiatives are integrated. This strategy reinforces the 'one government' approach on climate change matters.

Ongoing engagement with federal, state and local governments in NSW is necessary to guide the shape of the ACT's policies and actions. Working in harmony with our neighbours is critical to success.



Implement and improve

This strategy is the framework to direct engagement actions until 2020. Work to commence in 2014 will include:

- building partnerships with each of the sectors
- commencing the public awareness campaign
- initiating changes to the sustainability portal web hub
- integration across ACT government and our region on climate change matters.

The evaluation of success will be built-in to the specific projects undertaken. To gauge the community's understanding of and engagement in local climate change matters, follow-up feedback and surveys on people's attitudes and knowledge will be undertaken. This annual information will feed into implementation of this strategy and the 2017 review of Action Plan 2.

