ACT Government
Environment and Planning

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ACT Water Strategy 2014–44: Striking the Balance

The ACT Water Strategy 2014–44: Striking the Balance (ACT Water Strategy) sets out how the ACT Government will manage the Territory's water resources over the next 30 years to meet our urban, environmental needs and regional responsibilities.

The previous water strategy, Think Water, Act Water (2004) increased our water security following the Millenium Drought and contamination of major reservoirs from the 2003 bushfires. Successful actions under the strategy included the construction of the Enlarged Cotter Dam and the Murrumbidgee to Tantangara pipeline, and reduced water usage through through residential water efficiency programs, the implementation of water sensitive urban design guidelines, permanent water conservation measures and increased use of stormwater for purposes such as irrigation.

The ACT Water Strategy builds on Think Water, Act Water and aims to deliver security of water supply, improved water quality and catchment health, and a 'water smart' community. It covers the full breadth of water management activities in the ACT, including catchment management, stormwater and flood management, water supply and services, water for the environment, recreational water use and public health.

The ACT is wholly situated within the Murrumbidgee River Catchment, which feeds into the Murray–Darling River system. The ACT therefore has obligations under the Murray–Darling Basin Agreement and Murray–Darling Basin Plan (Basin Plan) which set a limit on the volume of water that can be diverted from the Murrumbidgee River, unless water use is supplemented by water trading arrangements. The Basin Plan also requires the ACT to maintain the health of the Murrumbidgee River system. In general the ACT aims to ensure water leaving the ACT is of the same or better quality than water entering the Territory.

The ACT Water Strategy will guide the development, integration and implementation of activities by ACT Government agencies, often with ACTEW, Commonwealth and state agencies, developers, the ACT community, natural resource management groups and other stakeholders involved in planning and water management and water use.

The community's involvement and support is crucial to the success of the ACT Water Strategy. While government has a role in making many changes, individuals and community groups have – and can – make a difference.

The ACT Water Strategy will provide a basis for ensuring the ACT Government can continue to support current and future growth, achieve desired environmental outcomes and be responsive to climate change. It has 3 outcomes:

1. Healthy catchments and waterbodies
2. A sustainable water supply used efficiently
3. A community that values and enjoys clean, healthy catchments

For each outcome, the The ACT Water Strategy identifies strategies and actions (see Table 1).

The ACT Water Strategy will be implemented through five year implementation plans. The effectiveness of implementation will be monitored through targets and indicators identified for each of the strategy's outcomes.

Table 1: An overview of the ACT Water Strategy

Vision: A community working together, managing water wisely to support a vibrant, sustainable and thriving region

OUTCOME 1: Healthy catchments and waterbodies		
Well-managed, functioning aquatic ecosystems that protect ecological values and contribute to the liveability of the ACT community.		
STRATEGY 1: Achieve integrated catchment management across the ACT and region		
Actions	1	Strengthen coordination and collaboration for catchment management across the ACT and region
	2	Enhance knowledge and spatial planning for water and catchment management
	3	Integrate water cycle management and green infrastructure into the planning and design of urban environments
	4	Improve water monitoring and analysis across the ACT and region
STRATEGY 2: Protect and restore aquatic ecosystems in urban and non-urban areas		
Actions	5	Improve water quality and ecosystem health in the ACT and region's rivers, lakes, aquifers, ponds and wetlands
	6	Ensure appropriate management (volume, timing, and quality) of environmental flows
	7	Strengthen compliance and enforcement for water resource management
STRATEGY 3: Manage stormwater and flooding		
Actions	8	Manage stormwater infrastructure sustainably
	9	Improve planning, monitoring and compliance for stormwater management
	10	Improve planning, information and regulation for flood management
OUTCOME 2: A sustainable water supply used efficiently		
An integrated and efficient water supply system that provides for the optimal mix of supply options, encourages efficient use of water, and is resilient to climate variability, and supports the social, economic and environmental needs of the ACT community.		
STRATEGY 4: Secure long term water supplies		
Actions	11	Plan for long term water security
	12	Strengthen water trading arrangements
	13	Investigate the benefits and costs of more diverse water supply options
STRATEGY 5: Manage and promote and sustainable use of water		
Actions	14	Improve and monitor provision of water services
	15	Encourage water users to conserve and use water wisely
OUTCOME 3: A community that values and enjoys clean, healthy catchments and waterways		
Work with the ACT community to continue to use water efficiently, and to ensure safe, clean water for recreation and the environment.		
STRATEGY 6: Provide clean and safe water for the ACT		
Actions	16	Improve management of rivers, lakes and public space to promote recreational use and reduce risks to public health
STRATEGY 7: Engage the community on understanding and contributing to a more sustainable city.		
Actions	17	Promote community involvement in management of ACT water resources
	18	Ensure that indigenous and other cultural values are recognised in managing water planning and use

ACT's water resources

In an average year, 380 gigalitres (GL) flow from the ACT from rain falling within the ACT's boundaries and 100 GL are available from the Googong Dam. While ACTEW has a licence to extract 65 GL a year, water users actually consume about half or less (10–40 GL/year) with the remainder returning to the Molonglo River after treatment and eventually into the Murray–Darling system.

Most water consumed in the ACT is used for residential use (see Figure 1). The ACT community has made significant progress in becoming more water efficient. Total residential and non-residential consumption has declined since 2003, mainly due to a combination of factors including demand reduction (efficiency) and water restriction measures, and water pricing (see Figure 2). While water restrictions were lifted after the drought, permanent water conservation measures remain in place.

Unlike other jurisdictions, the ACT reserves water for environmental flows (the release of water from dams to ensure healthy aquatic ecosystems are maintained) before taking water from the system for human consumption. While there is potential for conflict between environmental flows and human consumption during periods of prolonged drought, this has been successfully managed in the past.

Under the ACT Water Strategy, the government will periodically review the environmental flow guidelines.

Predicting future water demand is complex and takes into account population growth, likely climate trends, price, the changing nature of housing density, regional growth in high water demand industries, government policies on water use, behaviour change (for example, water users learning to become more efficient), appliance and fitting efficiency and other demand reduction and efficiency programs.

Best current estimates are that regional populations that rely on ACT water supply (the ACT and Queanbeyan) could be over 700,000 by 2049, which will significantly increase water demand and require a proportional increase in water and sewerage services.

Sustainable diversion limits

Under the Basin Plan, from 2019 states and territories in the Basin will have an annual limit (called the sustainable diversion limit or SDL) on the volume of water that can be diverted from the river systems that feed into the Murray–Darling. The ACT's SDL is for surface water (watercourses) is 40.5GL per year.

Figure 1. Estimated water demand by sector

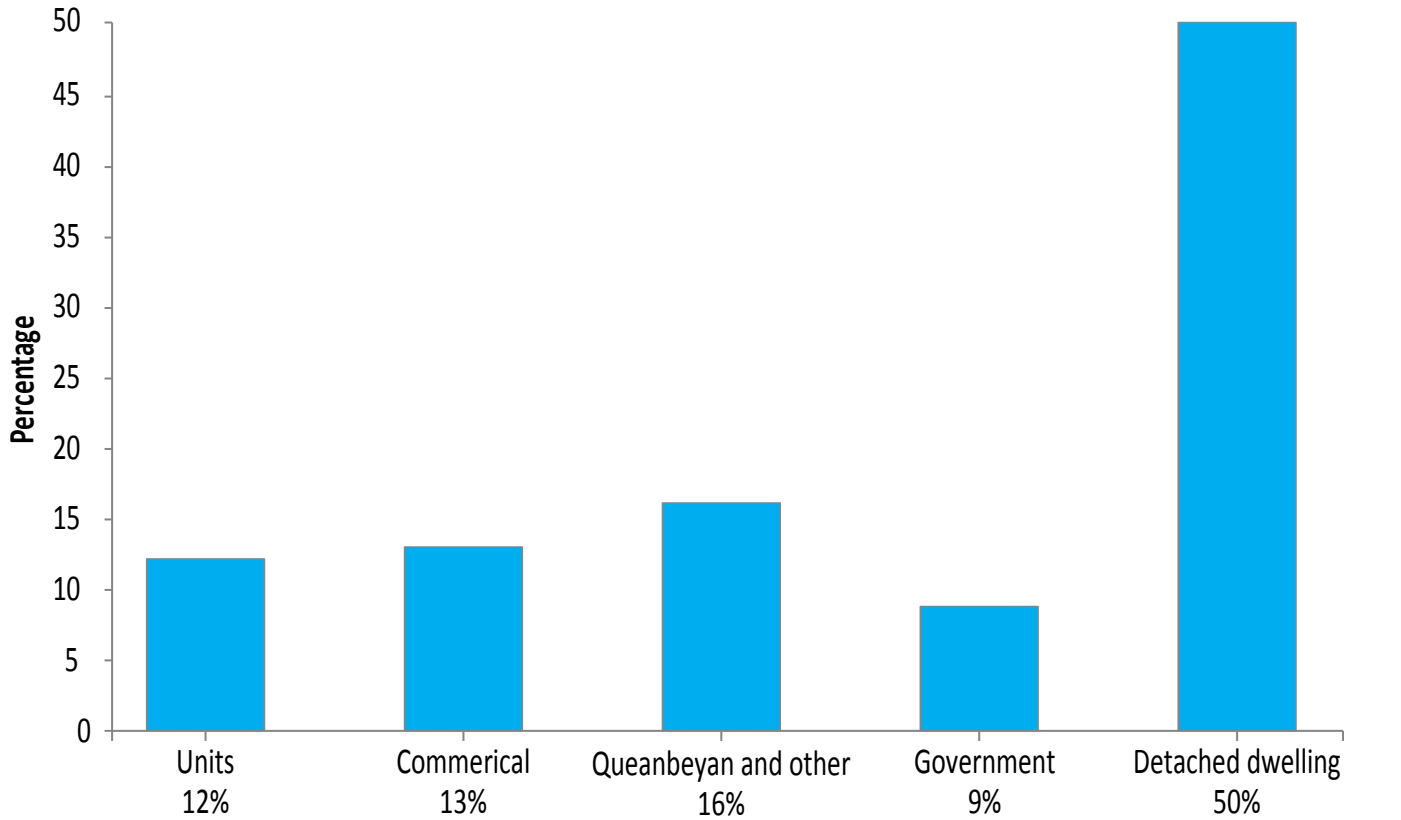
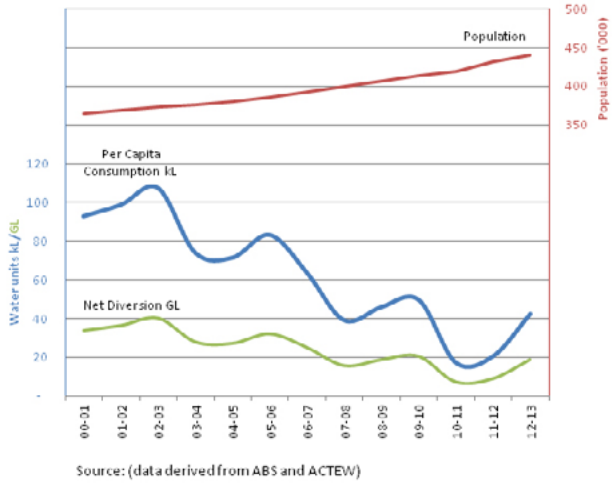


Figure 2. Net water consumption and population growth



Source: (data derived from ABS and ACTEW)

The SDL is central to the ACT's long term planning. Initial modelling illustrates the SDL should not be exceeded for at least 20 years, subject to population growth and climate variability. A mixture of policy responses will be required to meet additional future demands, including continued efficiency and demand reduction measure, accessing water markets and water trading.

Community support

The ACT community has a strong and active role in maintaining healthy catchments. Dozens of community-based groups donate thousands of hours every year to help manage catchments, including monitoring water quality and aquatic life and removing weeds.

Individuals also make a difference. Using water wisely and reducing water use has become the norm, but the ACT Government has programs to help households further reduce water use. The ACT Water Strategy will encourage people to keep pollutants, litter, runoff and leaves out of the stormwater system and contribute to improvements in water quality.

Implementation

The ACT Water Strategy has a 30 year planning horizon. Implementation will be guided by five sequential implementation plans, each covering five years. The first plan covers 2014–2018 and subsequent plans will be developed following a final year review of each implementation plan.

Implementation will be dependent upon the availability of funding. The ACT Government will focus efforts to secure resources for actions that demonstrate cost effectiveness in terms of improving water quality, contributing to improved water security, and better community health and recreation outcomes. Actions that are currently unfunded remain future options.

Monitoring, evaluation and review

The effectiveness of the ACT Water Strategy will be measured through targets and outcomes. Each outcome has at least one long term (30 year) target and one interim target for the first implementation plan (2014–2018). Additional interim targets may be established in later implementation plans.

Reporting against the strategy's actions will occur through the Environment and Planning Directorate annual reports. The condition of ACT catchments will continue to be reported through the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment State of the Environment Report and the ACT Water Quality Report.

A major review of the ACT Water Strategy will be undertaken at ten year intervals to ensure the overarching policy framework is responsive to the evolving water management context in the ACT and nationally.

For more information

The ACT Water Strategy 2014–44: Striking the Balance

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