

2019–20

ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group **Annual Report**





Front cover image:

Dickson Wetlands, Sep. 2020. Photographer Jessie Copeman

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Dickson Wetlands, Sep. 2020. Photographer Jessie Copeman



Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present the 2019-2020 ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group Annual Report and in so doing I wish to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and surrounding areas. I honour their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of Canberra and the region. I also acknowledge all other First Nations people in the region and across Australia and pay my respect to all Elders past, present and emerging.

This is my first Annual Report as Chair of the Coordination Group and it is an honour to have been appointed to this role in late 2019 by the ACT Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Mr Mick Gentleman. Admittedly however, the appointment comes with a tinge of melancholy, as it occurred during what can only be described as one of the most challenging periods in the history of the ACT and surrounding region.

It started with the 2019-2020 summer fires raging across our region, with dense bushfire smoke intermittently carpeting the region. Fires that burnt 87,000 hectares of the ACT, 80% of Namadgi National Park and thousands of hectares of rural land, impacting the south coast, Queanbeyan-Palerang and Snowy Monaro regions. The fires came off the back of severe and prolonged drought and extreme heat conditions which have also had their own impacts on our catchments. Thankfully, the Coordination Group had previously prepared an ACT and Region Catchment Post-Emergency Recovery Plan that assisted in the aftermath.

As the fires abated, there was little opportunity to enjoy the steady improvement in rainfall and catchment levels before we came to face the next great challenge – the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted our ability to undertake a number of community-led programs and projects. However, we have been able to maintain administrative efforts, thanks largely to the wonders of modern technology.

Despite the fires, heat, drought, smoke and the pandemic, much has been achieved during the last 12 months of the Coordination Group. In presenting this report I would like to mention some key achievements which come to mind:

- » Consulting with a number of academic, policy and regulatory experts to guide our focus on catchment matters. Broad consultation across environmental, social and water matters enables a holistic approach to understanding and managing the catchment
- » Publication of the Water Strategy Striking the Balance 2014–44 Implementation Plan 2 2019–23. This new Implementation Plan will guide the activities of the Coordination Group for the next four years
- » Allocating funding support for a number of community-led projects and organisations that play critical roles in maintaining the health of our region's waterways and catchments, included providing support to the H2OK: Keeping Our Waterways Healthy campaign, the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network, Landcare and other catchment groups.

These achievements demonstrate the dedication of the Coordination Group. In commending the Coordination Group, I would also like to thank Mr Michael Ross from the ACT's Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. Michael has provided invaluable secretariat and project management support for the Coordination Group. I would also like to thank my predecessor, Professor Ian Falconer who has been involved with the Coordination Group since the beginning.

Emeritus Professor Falconer's dedication to all matters relating to water, his efforts in championing community involvement and developing close partnerships with key ACT Government and regional government agencies should be commended. I would specifically like to acknowledge Emeritus Professor Falconer's work in the following areas:

- » Leading the development of the ACT and Region Catchment Post-Emergency Recovery Plan. As previously mentioned, this Plan has guided the recovery efforts of fire-ravaged catchments in our region
- » Championing regional cooperation, specifically addressing urban settlement and water and sewerage connection to residential areas in NSW adjacent to the ACT
- » Addressing regulatory matters regarding discharge guidelines for the proposed Queanbeyan sewage treatment plant
- » Maintaining the high standards and good governance the Coordination Group has come to expect.

I look forward to building on Emeritus Professor Falconer's work. With the support of the Coordination Group, I will continue the review of the Coordination Group's functions and operations, with a specific focus on supporting the involvement of the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians and senior NSW Government representation. I will continue to seek innovative ways to support community-led catchment rehabilitation. I will continue to champion the Coordination Group's role in supporting the rehabilitation of the region's bushfire impacted catchments. I will continue efforts to foster regional collaboration with a focus on addressing population growth and urban settlement on ACT borders. Finally, and most importantly, I will ensure the Coordination Group continues to bring the right minds together to achieve the best outcomes for our region's waterways and catchments.

Dr Maxine Cooper
Independent Chair
ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group

Emeritus Professor Ian, Falconer, Dr Maxine Cooper and Michael Ross at the Dickson Wetlands, Sep. 2020. Photographer Jessie Copeman



1. Background

This report outlines the activities of the ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group (the Coordination Group) from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020 and fulfils the Coordination Group's obligations as per the Water Resources (Catchment Management Coordination Group) Amendment Bill 2015 Part 2 S. 67D:



1.1 67D Annual report by the Coordination Group

1. For each financial year, the Coordination Group must prepare a report about the group's activities during the financial year, including any advice given, or recommendations made, to the Minister
2. The group must give the report to the Minister within three months after the end of the financial year.
3. The Minister must, within 21 days after receiving the report, table the following in the Legislative Assembly:
 - a. the report;
 - b. a statement by the Minister responding to any advice given or recommendations made to the Minister in the group's annual report.
4. However, if there are no sitting days during the 21-day period—
 - a. the Minister must give the report and the statement, and a copy of each for each member of the Legislative Assembly, to the Speaker; and
 - b. the report and the statement are taken for all purposes to have been tabled in the Legislative Assembly on the day the Minister gives it to the Speaker (the report day); and
 - c. the Speaker must arrange for a copy of the report and a copy of the statement to be given to each member of the Legislative Assembly on the report day; and
 - d. despite paragraph b, the Speaker must present the report and the statement to the Legislative Assembly on the next sitting day.

The establishment of an interjurisdictional coordination body to strengthen governance and catchment management in the ACT and surrounding regions was approved by the ACT Government in October 2014. The Coordination Group was established on an interim basis on 25 February 2015. The ACT Legislative Assembly passed the [Water Resources \(Catchment Management\) Amendment Act 2015](#), which amended the [Water Resources Act 2007](#) and established the Coordination Group as a statutory body, on 4 August 2015.

This amendment allowed for the appointment of an independent chair and a community representative. In October 2019, Dr Maxine Cooper was appointed to the position of Chair and Karissa Preuss was appointed the position of Community Representative.

Dr Cooper replaces Emeritus Professor Ian Falconer AO as Chair, and Ms Karissa Preuss replaces Dr Fiona Dyer in the position of Community Representative. Both Emeritus Professor Falconer and Dr Dyer had held their respective positions since October 2015.

The Coordination Group is specified in the work plan for the ACT and NSW Memorandum of Understanding for Regional Collaboration (the MoU) which was re-signed in 2020. Consistent with the intent of the MoU, the considerations of the Coordination Group and the contribution of staff and financial resources are negotiated on a project-by-project basis. The format of this annual report sets out the range of activities undertaken by the Coordination Group, focussing on key priorities, achievements over the period and planned future activities.

The Catchment Management and Water Policy Branch, EPSDD provides secretariat support to the Coordination Group.

1.2 Functions

The Coordination Group is committed to improving governance of catchment management within the region. It works for the long-term benefit of the ACT and region catchments and the people who reside therein. It aims to:

- » be a responsive, dynamic and representative body which aims to work in a fair, open and collaborative manner
- » take a holistic approach to understanding and managing the catchment
- » promote a whole-of-catchment and whole-of-government approach to improving the catchment's health in the long term, using best available science and community engagement to support its work.
- » The Coordination Group was established to:
- » advise the ACT Minister for the Environment and Heritage responsible for water catchment management in the ACT and region's catchments
- » improve coordination, cooperation and direction of effort in catchment management across the ACT and region
- » facilitate collaborative problem solving for interjurisdiction and interagency issues
- » provide advice on opportunities to align national, regional and territory investment in the context of integrated catchment management
- » oversee the development of an integrated catchment management strategy with agreed principles and actions
- » provide advice on proposed developments in terms of their likely impacts and strategies and actions to mitigate any risk to catchment health
- » undertake other matters as determined by the Minister.



2. Membership

ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group Chair

[Dr Maxine Cooper](#)

The role of the Chair is to independently facilitate a collaborative process between jurisdictions to ensure the best outcomes are achieved. Dr Cooper, who is an adjunct Professor with the University of Canberra, has extensive leadership experience, having held key positions including ACT Auditor-General, ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Chair and Executive Director of the ACT Water Security Taskforce. More recently, Dr Cooper was appointed to the role of independent Chair of Landcare ACT and to the board of the National Landcare Network.

ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group Community Representative

[Ms Karissa Preuss](#)

The Community Representative's role within the Coordination Group is to contribute to discussions about the role and work undertaken by peak stakeholder groups, volunteers, community groups, property owners and land managers in maintaining and improving the region's catchments and waterways. Ms Preuss was appointed to the role of independent Community Representative in October 2019 and brings a wealth of experience in community engagement and representation in natural resource management from both a practical and theoretical level. Ms Preuss currently holds a number of key community leadership roles including CEO of Landcare ACT, ACT representative on the National Landcare Network Members Council and Executive Committee Member of the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network (UMCN).

ACT Emergency Services Agency

[Commissioner, Ms Georgeina Whelan](#)

The ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) comprises the ACT Ambulance Service, ACT Fire and Rescue, the ACT Rural Fire Service, the ACT State Emergency Service and the ESA Support Services. The ESA plays a key role in helping the Coordination Group coordinate risk analysis, and in planning for and managing emergency situations such as storms, floods and bushfires.

ACT Health Directorate

[Director-General, Ms Kylie Jonasson - Represented by the Director, Health Protection Service, Conrad Barr](#)

In respect to environmental health, the Health Directorate protects and promotes the good health of the ACT community by fostering safe and healthy environments. It provides information, policy development, monitoring and enforcement in relation to public health activities including the Guidelines for Recreational Water Quality. The directorate provides a framework for the management of recreational water sites within the ACT, addressing risks from blue-green algae as well as microbial pathogens.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

[Head of Service, Ms Kathy Leigh - Represented by the Executive Branch Manager, Economic and Regional Policy, David Clapham](#)

Ms Leigh supports the Chief Minister at intergovernmental forums, notably meetings of the National Cabinet. The directorate manages and coordinates the ACT's relationships with other jurisdictions, most significantly with the Australian and NSW governments and Australia's other capital cities and NSW councils surrounding the ACT.

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

[Director-General, Mr Ben Ponton](#)

The EPSDD has several roles in managing water in the ACT, including responsibility for high-level strategic water policy development and participating in the national water reform agenda and competition issues relating to water access, pricing and trading. In addition, the directorate regulates the Territory's water resources and monitors and reports on water quality. The directorate also has a role in the demand management of water resources and in developing and implementing strategies to address catchment management issues in the ACT and wider region.

Icon Water

[Managing Director, Mr Ray Hezkial](#)

Icon Water owns and operates the ACT's network of dams for drinking water, water treatment plants, sewage treatment plants, reservoirs, water and sewage pumping stations, mains and other associated infrastructure. It provides water and sewerage services to the ACT and bulk water to Queanbeyan. Icon Water's interests in healthy catchments include the security, quality and sustainability of water resources for a range of uses and minimising the impact of its network on the region's waterways.

National Capital Authority

[Chief Executive, Ms Sally Barnes](#)

The National Capital Authority (NCA) manages some of Canberra's nationally and culturally significant landscapes and attractions including Lake Burley Griffin and surrounding lands. It is keen to see national land and water bodies used and enjoyed by visitors and Canberra residents for a range of recreational uses. However, it aims to ensure there is an appropriate balance between public access to national land with the protection of national assets.

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate

Director-General, Ms Alison Playford – Represented by the Acting Executive Group Manager, City Operations, Mr Ken Marshall

Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) is responsible for managing Canberra's urban lakes and ponds, including management of stormwater control. TCCS is also responsible for providing services to manage the Territory's waste and other infrastructure.

Regional local government members

Queanbeyan—Palerang Regional Council (QPRC)
Chief Executive Officer, Mr Peter Tegar

Snowy Monaro Regional Council (SMRC)
Director of Environmental Services, Mr Peter Smith

Yass Valley Council
General Manager, Mr Chris Berry

The local government areas of QPRC, SMRC and Yass Valley Council make a significant contribution to the management and protection of the region's natural resources.

Local governments undertake a wide range of activities related to catchment management, including the development and implementation of land use planning, managing public land and regulating private activities. They play a key role in translating the policies of the Australian and state governments into local and on-ground projects. As such, their input to strategic planning, economic development and stormwater management is vital to providing the best outcomes for an interjurisdictional catchment.

South East Local Land Services

General Manager, Mr Anthony Marshall –
Represented by Luke Pope, Local Manager, Monaro

The South East Local Land Services (LLS) brings agricultural production advice, biosecurity, natural resource management and emergency management into a single organisation. Its services add value to local industries, enhance natural resources, protect industries from pests and disease and helps communities respond to emergencies like flood, fire and drought. The South East LLS will ensure the natural assets, local industries, landholders and communities of the surrounding tablelands region are represented on the Coordination Group.

Additional Attendees

On a regular basis, both by invitation and necessity, significant contributions of knowledge and expertise are also supplied to Coordination Group meetings from the following areas:

- » Environment Protection Authority (EPA) – Ms Narelle Sargent and Mr Heath Chester
- » Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment – Dr Sophie Lewis





3. Resourcing

Secretariat services and support are provided for the Coordination Group on an ongoing basis through the EPSDD.

Members of the Coordination Group cover their own staff time from their respective budgets.

Both the Chair's and the Community Representative's positions, being independently appointed, receive honorariums as determined under the Remuneration Tribunal Determination (Determination 5 of 2019) and are funded from the EPSDD budget. For 2019–20, both the outgoing Chair, Emeritus Professor Ian Falconer and incoming Chair Dr Maxine Cooper received remuneration from this budget.

Through an interjurisdictional investment and resourcing framework (Refer to Action 2, under Highlights below), the Coordination Group members agreed to provide funds from their respective budgets to collectively fund activities related to the region's catchment management and improvement. These monies are placed in a sanctioned EPSDD holding account and are subject to the same level of audit and accountability as all other government funds.

Any other expenses relating to consultants for reviews and the annual report preparation are carried by EPSDD as part of their support for the activities of the group.

4. Highlights

The Coordination Group continues to set a leading example for multijurisdictional collaboration in regional catchment management. In 2019–20 it made further progress against actions in the ACT and Region Catchment Strategy. A brief synopsis of these is provided below, together with other key activities undertaken.



4.1 Progress on priority actions from the Catchment Action Implementation Plan (2016–21)

The ACT and Region Catchment Strategy (the Catchment Strategy) identifies 19 actions to promote a healthy catchment region and bring governments, community and industry together to produce a healthy, productive, resilient and liveable catchment region.

The Catchment Strategy's key themes

Governance, policy and planning—a framework for coordination of policy, planning, investment and knowledge processes that provide a foundation for our work.

Communities—acknowledging the outstanding contribution that catchment groups and volunteer programs play in protecting our natural resources, motivating people to connect to their catchment and increasing their capacity to adapt to change.

Regional development—recognising that the catchment is a growth area and strategies are needed to support the prosperity of the region with sound catchment management planning principles and technical expertise to support sustainable growth.

Water, land and biodiversity—support the biophysical processes that maintain the resilience and health of natural resources that are essential for thriving communities and ecosystems.

A copy of the Catchment Strategy can be found at: www.environment.act.gov.au/water/water-strategies-and-plans/act-and-region-catchment-strategy.

The Catchment Strategy is supported by the ACT and Region Catchment Action Implementation Plan (2016–21) (the Implementation Plan), which sets out the 19 actions under their respective themes and provides additional detail in terms of what each action will achieve, key stakeholders, who should be involved, resourcing status and likely timeframes.

The Implementation Plan includes criteria for determining the project timeframes and an outline of the principles for applying adaptive management based on issues such as ease of implementation, budget availability, existing data, technology and appropriate policy settings.

The Coordination Group identified eight priority actions from the Implementation Plan as a focus for its work in 2019–20. Progress against these eight actions is provided on the following pages.

Action 2: Establish an inter-jurisdictional investment and resourcing framework.

The co-investment framework for un-resourced or continuing projects was endorsed by the Coordination Group in November 2018. The resourcing framework provides principles on how the Coordination Group will co-invest, align, collaborate and cost-share in resourcing activities for improved catchment management. The co-investment from all group members in the 2019–20 financial year provided a financial basis to fund, for the first time, a variety of projects in line with the key objectives of the framework. This included funding of the UMCN part-time secretariat to continue their important coordination role. It also afforded the opportunity to fund a variety of small-scale community group projects across the entire region that also aligned with these objectives. Regrettably, a combination of the 2019–20 bushfires and COVID-19 impacts saw a delay in the rollout of these grants and they will now be a priority for 2020–21 financial year, as well as a funded catchment forum to be held by the UMCN.

Action 3: Promote evidence-based decision making for improved healthy catchments.

ACT Healthy Waterways ACT Data Lake program

The Coordination Group has continued to support and provide input into the development of the ACT Government's catchment and waterway data monitoring and collection initiative known as the ACT Data Lake.

The ACT Data Lake, funded through the ACT Healthy Waterways program, provides unified, clear results on water quantity and quality. The ACT Data Lake gathers information from:

- » community-supported water quality management programs including Waterwatch and Frogwatch
- » existing ACT Government waterway and catchment data collection activities.
- » In the 2019–20 financial year, the ACT Data Lake project saw a number of key achievements realised including:
 - » development of a flash-flood warning system for the ACT ESA
 - » daily rainfall and streamflow updates published on the ACT Government Open Data Portal (data.act.gov.au)
 - » existing ACT Government water quality and quantity data formally incorporated into the program.

Waterwatch

In June 2020, the Coordination Group's Community Representative provided a summary of the Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch Catchment Health Indicator Program report to the Coordination Group. The Program recorded 2,040 water quality surveys, 184 water insect surveys and 211 riverbank vegetation assessments collected by over 200 volunteers. Collating information provided by various community catchment groups, such as Waterwatch, is critical to the Coordination Group in making informed policy decisions about catchment health.

Action 7: Strategically support the role and work undertaken by peak stakeholder groups, volunteers and land-owners and managers.

Community group funding

The Coordination Group plays a key role in supporting community-based waterway and catchment management programs. Key activities undertaken in the 2019–20 financial year are listed below:

- » Fostering support for water-saving urban design projects for another three years by securing an extension to the H2OK: Keeping our waterways healthy program. The Coordination Group jointly provided \$200,000 for this.
- » Improving regional networking and collaboration among members and the broader community by:
 - supporting the UMCN to employ an executive officer, which was enabled through a \$60,000 collective contribution by the Coordination Group
 - supporting the UMCN in hosting catchment community forums, which the Coordination Group committed to providing \$15,000 on a biennial basis.
- » Securing \$55,000 in ACT Government funding to support a leadership development program for Landcare and local catchment groups over the next three years.

Water education

In order to support the community with the provision of water education, Icon Water recently updated the water education materials on the Icon Water website (iconwater.com.au/water-education/education-resources) to assist school educators across the region and improve water literacy in the community. All three ACT Catchment Groups (Ginninderra, Southern ACT and Molonglo) provided community education regarding waterways and increased stewardship of Healthy Waterways Assets, enabled by funding from the ACT Government through EPSDD.



Action 8: Develop an integrated catchment emergency response plan.

Investigations on this Action commenced in 2017 with the assistance of funding from the Natural Disaster Resilience Program. EPSDD engaged the consultancy firm Alluvium to develop the ACT and Region Catchment Post-Emergency Recovery Plan. The Recovery Plan was developed under the guidance of the Coordination Group and is designed to enhance the capability of the Upper Murrumbidgee catchment community, including government, private and civic bodies, to recover effectively from natural disasters and emergency events in a coordinated and cooperative manner. The Recovery Plan identifies:

- » the intrinsic uses and values of each catchment
- » the potential impact of an emergency event on catchment and waterway uses
- » values, objectives and desired outcomes for the catchment and waterways recovery after an emergency event.

Following the devastating 2019–20 summer bushfires, the detailed information and inventory on the Regions' catchments contained in the emergency response plan assisted in guiding recovery efforts across affected catchments within the ACT region.

Action 10: Provide an integrated catchment management planning approach for growth and settlement patterns in the ACT and region.

Planned progress to reinvigorate the NSW 'Actions for Clean Water' Plan with the South East LLS did not take place due to the 2019–20 summer bushfires. This will, however, remain a focus for the 2020–21 financial year.

Action 12: Secure long-term water supplies for the ACT and region.

Sub-regional water supply strategy

The project brief for a sub-regional water supply strategy covering the Yass Valley, Queanbeyan-Palerang and Snowy Monaro regions was submitted in January 2020 to the NSW Department of Planning Industry and Environment's Water Division for funding consideration under the Safe and Secure Water Program. The purpose of the strategy is to investigate options to secure water supply for projected growth in local government areas adjoining the ACT. This was a key project identified in the South East and Tablelands Regional Strategy, which is supported and being closely monitored by the Coordination Group.

Legislative Assembly resolution on water security and the ACT Water Strategy

On the 27 November 2019, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed a resolution on water security, which calls on the ACT Government and Icon Water to:

- » continue to implement and promote the ACT Water Strategy: Striking the Balance 2014–44, which provides the basis for continuing to support current and future growth
- » hold consultations with water stakeholders and relevant experts and report back to the Assembly
- » ensure climate change projections are considered in long-term planning and decision-making regarding water use and restrictions.

Action 12 is a key priority of the Coordination Group and, recognising its primary function in facilitating collaborative problem solving for interjurisdiction and interagency issues, Dr Cooper agreed to Chair two workshops on ACT water security as part of the consultation process with stakeholders and relevant experts. However, the 2019–20 bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic impacts meant the workshops did not proceed by 30 June 2020. It is anticipated that this consultation will occur in the first half of 2020–21. Outcomes of Icon Water's expert panel will also be used to inform these workshops.

Action 13: Improve water quality, protect and restore aquatic ecosystem health and reduce nutrient, sediment and pathogen loads at key sites across the catchment.

The Coordination Group established a Queanbeyan Sewage Treatment Plant (QSTP) working sub-group to provide advice in relation to discharge guidelines given the potential impact on water quality in Lake Burley Griffin. The group, Chaired by Emeritus Professor Ian Falconer, met in November 2019 and June 2020.

The general consensus from the June 2020 meeting determined that the QSTP working sub-group was no longer required as there was more clarity of the discharge levels for the new plant and a formal assessment process was put in place with an impending Environmental Impact Statement for the project. This consensus was formalised through a motion on the sub-group at the June meeting of the Coordination Group. Whilst not detracting from the importance that the authorisation standards should reflect both the current plant performance and industry standards and that these should be reflected in the authorisation for the new plant, it was felt that this could be managed through on-going involvement of the broader Coordination Group.

Action 14: Ensure Indigenous and other values are recognised.

Work continues on identifying ways to harness the knowledge and experience of the Region's First Nations people, the Ngunnawal and investigating ways to better integrate traditional land and water management practices into the region's catchments and waterways. This will continue as a priority in 2020–21 and would be greatly assisted by the addition of permanent Ngunnawal Traditional Custodian representation in the Coordination Group, which is being pursued.

4.2 Progress on administration and governance of the Coordination Group

Coordination Group functions and operations review and future recommendations

In September 2019, the Coordination Group commissioned an independent review of the functions and operations of the Coordination Group. The review, tabled at the March 2020 meeting of the Coordination Group, was undertaken by external consultancy firm Communication Link. The review found that:

"The Coordination Group has made great achievements during the time of its operation and the legislative framework that governs the group does appear to lend itself to achieving these outcomes."

The review made six recommendations highlighting improvements that could potentially increase the effectiveness of the Coordination Group. The Coordination Group agreed to implementing a number of these recommendations, noting that some require the Minister's approval. The Coordination Group is looking forward to making further improvements to operational and administrative processes currently being undertaken. Recommendations that will be progressed in 2020–21 are listed below under '2020–21 priorities'.

Water Strategy Striking the Balance 2014–44 Implementation Plan 2 2019–23

The ACT Water Strategy- Striking the Balance 2014–44 Implementation Plan 2 2019–23 was published following significant input from the Coordination Group. This new Implementation Plan will guide the activities of the Coordination Group for the next four years as it works to address the Plan's three outcome areas:

- » Healthy catchments and waterbodies.
- » A sustainable water supply used efficiently.
- » A community that values and enjoys clean, healthy catchments and waterways.

4.3 Stakeholder engagement

To continue to strengthen the coordination between the Coordination Group and community in the ACT and NSW, the Chair and officers met with a number of key stakeholder groups and executives of the key bodies to discuss furthering the priority actions and issues of wide concern to catchment management. Some of this engagement is provided below.

ACT Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainability

In June 2020, the Coordination Group was briefed by the then newly appointed Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainability, Dr Sophie Lewis who provided a background about her role and her expectations for the office. Dr Lewis also reinforced the importance of taking a regional approach to environmental and sustainability matters, an area in which her office will focus more on.

Bureau of Meteorology (BOM)

In June 2020, the BOM provided a succinct overview of anticipated temperature and rainfall predictions of the next three to six months. In summary, day and night-time temperatures were predicted to be above average while rainfall for the same period is also predicted to be above average. Briefings from the BOM provide an important tool for the Coordination Group to use for short and medium-term planning.

EPSDD

In March 2020, the EPSDD (Parks & Conservation Service) provided the Coordination Group with a detailed update on the effects of the Orroral Valley bushfire on the ACT and surrounding region's catchments. The update to the Coordination Group highlighted a number of findings and actions:

- » The fire was unpredictable and took place following a very dry year.
- » The fire did not follow traditional terrain and fuel availability. It was observed tracking back into previously burnt areas.
- » The fire was difficult for the ACT Incident Management Team to manage.
- » A Rapid Risk Assessment Team was established to investigate priority risks and actions for the bushfire recovery efforts that will be undertaken over the next three to five years.
- » The Coordination Group members were provided with the Steps to Recovery After the Orroral Valley Fire Initial Report for consideration.
- » It is anticipated that the recovery tasks will be funded by the ACT Insurance Authority, ACT Government and the Australian Government.

ESA

Presenting to the group in September 2019, the ESA informed the group that significant planning efforts were underway in preparation for a predicted bad fire season.

Icon Water

Icon Water briefed the Coordination Group on several matters during the 2019-20 financial year as outlined below:

Icon Water Climate Change Adaptation Plan

Icon Water released its Climate Change Adaptation Plan on 5 June 2020. The Plan supports Icon Water's commitment to sustainability and has been enacted to mitigate risks posed to Icon Water due to climate change in the ACT and region. The Plan will gradually inform asset management plans and standards to improve business resilience. It contains 59 actions, with 38 already in practice.

Water security

In June 2020, Icon water briefed the group on the status of the ACT's water security situation, noting that the combined dams level reached a low of 44.4% in February 2020. Decreased rainfall saw the 2019 calendar year being the driest year on record in terms of dam inflows. The short-term climate outlook, however, is forecasting improvements in dam levels due to an increase in rainfall. Icon Water also worked with the community, the QPRC and various partners in an attempt to reduce community water use with the launch of the 'Care for Water' campaign. Icon Water is in the process of updating its water resources model and has completed the first version of its Drought Management Plan.

Impacts from bushfires

Within the Upper Cotter catchment, 99% of the Corin Dam catchment and 29% of the Bendora Dam catchment were burnt. Icon Water is working closely with the ACT Government on rehabilitation efforts to improve water quality within drinking water catchments by focussing on hill slope and gully erosion, existing road and track networks and riparian rehabilitation. In responding to the Orroral Valley fire, Icon Water redirected the movement of water between dams to maintain quality and storage and redirected water within the reticulation network to support the potential need to fight fires in the urban areas of Canberra's south.

Cotter Actions for Clean Water

The Cotter 'Actions for Clean Water' Plan has been drafted by Icon Water to help identify and prioritise erosion hotspots for attention. Engagement of consultant Alluvium has been extended to develop an Addendum to the Plan, with input from Icon Water's internal GIS team. The purpose is to provide up-to-date analysis of the potential impact of the recent fires on water quality, with a focus on tributary scale solutions.

Icon Water expert panel

Three meetings of Icon Water's expert advisory panel were held in June 2020. The panel explored emerging opportunities and innovations in relation to water security for the ACT and region. The expert panel included specialists across a broad range of social, economic and environmental policy sectors. Insights will be taken into consideration as part of future water security planning.

Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre

Planning for upgrades to Canberra's primary sewage treatment plant, the Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre, is underway. Upgrades are required to renew aging infrastructure and support Canberra's growing population whilst ensuring compliance with water discharge and air quality requirements.

Landcare ACT

The Coordination Group received a briefing by Landcare ACT in September 2019 on the organisation's role and the overarching benefits it brings to the ACT and surrounding regions with regards to connecting communities with conservation. In June 2020, the Coordination Group was provided an update about the bushfire recovery tasks being undertaken by Landcare ACT. It was noted that over 900 individuals signed up to assist the bushfire recovery process on three different registers. This is in addition to the 60 Landcare groups in the region. Other bushfire recovery tasks the organisation led included hosting forums on the community response to the bushfires and facilitating community engagement in bushfire recovery actions, an initiative which was enabled through two small grants

NCA

In September 2019 the Coordination Group heard from NCA Chief Executive Officer Sally Barnes. Ms Barnes highlighted:

- » that the NCA was trialing an 'aqua park' over the summer, with an inflatable obstacle course, located on Lake Burley Griffin at Black Mountain Peninsula
- » the NCA are investigating strengthening work on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge.

QPRC

The Coordination Group was provided an update from QPRC in September 2019 and March 2020.

Water mining

In September 2019, the QPRC Chief Executive Officer, Peter Tegart advised the Coordination Group of a trial being undertaken to 'mine' water from fractured rock aquifers under forests in the region.

Queanbeyan sewage treatment plant (QSTP)

The Coordination Group was provided with an update about the proposed QSTP. Mr Tegart explained that the QSTP was in an initial design phase. The update prompted the Coordination Group to establish a working party to support the QSTP in developing a water resource management plan and provide advice in relation to discharge guidelines.

Bushfire impacts to the Queanbeyan-Palerang region

The Coordination Group was briefed on bushfire damage and rehabilitation. Points raised included:

- » 120,000 hectares of the Queanbeyan-Palerang region were fire-affected.
- » 53 residential dwellings were destroyed and there was 150 kilometres of road requiring repair.
- » A regional recovery plan has been created and is being actioned.
- » Hazardous waste disposal was a concern for QPRC, with 50% of damaged dwellings containing asbestos.
- » Rain events in February and March 2020 were creating concerns for maintaining water quality in the Shoalhaven River.
- » There were significant fencing losses experienced in the region.

SMRC

Snowy Hydro 2.0

In September 2019, Mr Peter Smith from SMRC provided an update to the Coordination Group with regards to Council concerns relating to Snowy Hydro 2.0, specifically regarding the river flow into and out of the Tantangara Dam. It was also noted that the project would increase vehicle traffic due to the haulage of raw materials including sand, gravel and steel. Mr Smith informed the Coordination Group that there would be public education undertaken to address the increased flow of traffic through the catchment.

Bushfire impacts to the Snowy Monaro region

In March 2020 the Coordination Group was provided with an update about the extensive regional impacts and subsequent recovery efforts taking place as a result of the 2019–20 fires which greatly impacted the region:

- » The Snowy-Monaro region did not lose significant assets in the fire, with more significant assets being damaged in flooding that took place in February/March.
- » Three recovery offices were created and located in different locations within the local government area.
- » In-total, 192 buildings were impacted by the fires of which most were outbuildings. Of those buildings, 33 homes were destroyed with investigations ongoing.
- » Approximately 3,500 kilometres of fencing was destroyed.
- » Residents and business owners of the Snowy Monaro region are challenged by the eligibility restrictions of the bushfire recovery grant funding as many who were impacted do not fit within the primary producer category.
- » Blaze Aid volunteers and backpackers have been engaged to assist with recovery efforts.

South East LLS

The South East LLS briefed the Coordination Group on the latest progress with the Upper Murrumbidgee 'Actions for Clean Water Plan'. The Plan identifies strategies to improve surface water quality and reduce turbidity in the upper Murrumbidgee River catchment.

UMCN

In March and June 2020, the UMCN tabled progress reports at the regular meetings of the Coordination Group. Key highlights of the UMCN are listed below:

- » Planning has begun for the biennial UMCN forum, which will have the focus of 'Weeds, Water and Wellbeing'. This will be held in winter 2021.
- » UMCN sent a letter to the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, raising concerns about the Snowy 2.0 Major Works Environmental Impact Statement consultation process.
- » UMCN drafted a letter regarding water use in the Upper Murrumbidgee, which outlines concerns that principles of water access are not being applied consistently between jurisdictions.
- » The UMCN is drafting a strategic communications plan to be finalised in 2020–21.
- » The UMCN Forum Planning Sub-Committee has been established and met in March and June 2020 to organise various large and small catchment forums subject to COVID-19 restrictions.

Yass Valley Council

In September 2019, Yass Valley Council informed the Coordination Group that the Yass to Murrumbateman drinking water pipeline is under construction and the waste treatment plant is currently being designed.

4.4 Advice to the ACT Minister for the Environment and Heritage

The outgoing Chair, Emeritus Professor Ian Falconer met with Minister Gentleman on 9 September 2019, 4 February and 7 April 2020, with incoming Chair, Dr Maxine Cooper attending the latter two meetings as part of the transition and hand over process. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the Coordination Group's progress in implementing the Strategic Plan and participation in coordinating the Coordination Group members' relevant activities.

Items raised by Professor Falconer and Dr Cooper with Minister Gentlemen are outlined below:

Governance

Having Ngunnawal people and Senior-level NSW representation on the Coordination Group was recommended. It was noted that the appointment of a senior-level person from the NSW Government would not require legislative changes but would simply be an ACT ministerial appointment in consultation with the NSW Government.

Regional cooperation

Urban settlement, water and sewerage connections to residential areas in NSW adjacent to the ACT requires Coordination Group facilitation with Yass Valley Council, Icon Water and the ACT Government. Preserving the Yass Valley Council's RU6 Transition Zone on the ACT and Yass Valley border and consolidating development of urbanisation were also important.

Water trading

It is essential to establish protocols for water trading between the Australian Government, NSW and the ACT to maintain the ACT's water security. Any sell-off of ACT water will also impact water security for the ACT.

Water Quality

The water quality of ACT lakes and creeks is low due to urban nutrient discharge. The Healthy Waterways H2OK: Keeping our waterways healthy program is helping but is only one piece of the puzzle required to improve water health. Quality recreational lakes and ponds are needed and concerted ongoing action is required. As part of this, the proposed new QSTP discharge guidelines must be in place for maintaining and improving the water quality of the ACT's lakes and creeks.

ACT and Region Catchment Post-Emergency Recovery Plan

The Plan's adoption and subsequent use in the bushfire aftermath has proved greatly beneficial and this has been warmly received by the Coordination Group.

Recognition of the increased strength of the UMCN

The Coordination Group is optimistic that the recently funded Executive Officer for the UMCN will strengthen connections with the community.

2019–20 Fires effects on ACT and region catchments.

Minister Gentleman was provided with an update about fire impacts to the region's catchments and the subsequent recovery efforts being undertaken. It was noted that EPSDD activated the Rapid Response Assessment Team to identify priorities to guide recovery actions. Catchment recovery is a priority for the Coordination Group.

Water security

Icon Water's Climate Change Adaptation Plan, which provides a framework for it to be more responsive to climate change risk, has been developed. The plan also considers climate change impacts to customers, financial and environmental impacts

Lake Burley Griffin water quality

The NCA is liaising with the ACT EPA regarding managing water in the Lake. The NCA also advised that it is working with the University of Canberra to improve data analytics related to water quality. The new QSTP was discussed in relation to its potential effect on Lake Burley Griffin.

Functions and operations review and future recommendations for the Coordination Group

An independent review of the functions and operations of the Coordination Group was undertaken in 2019. The Coordination Group is currently working to incorporate a number of recommendations from that review.

Operation of the Coordination Group during COVID-19.

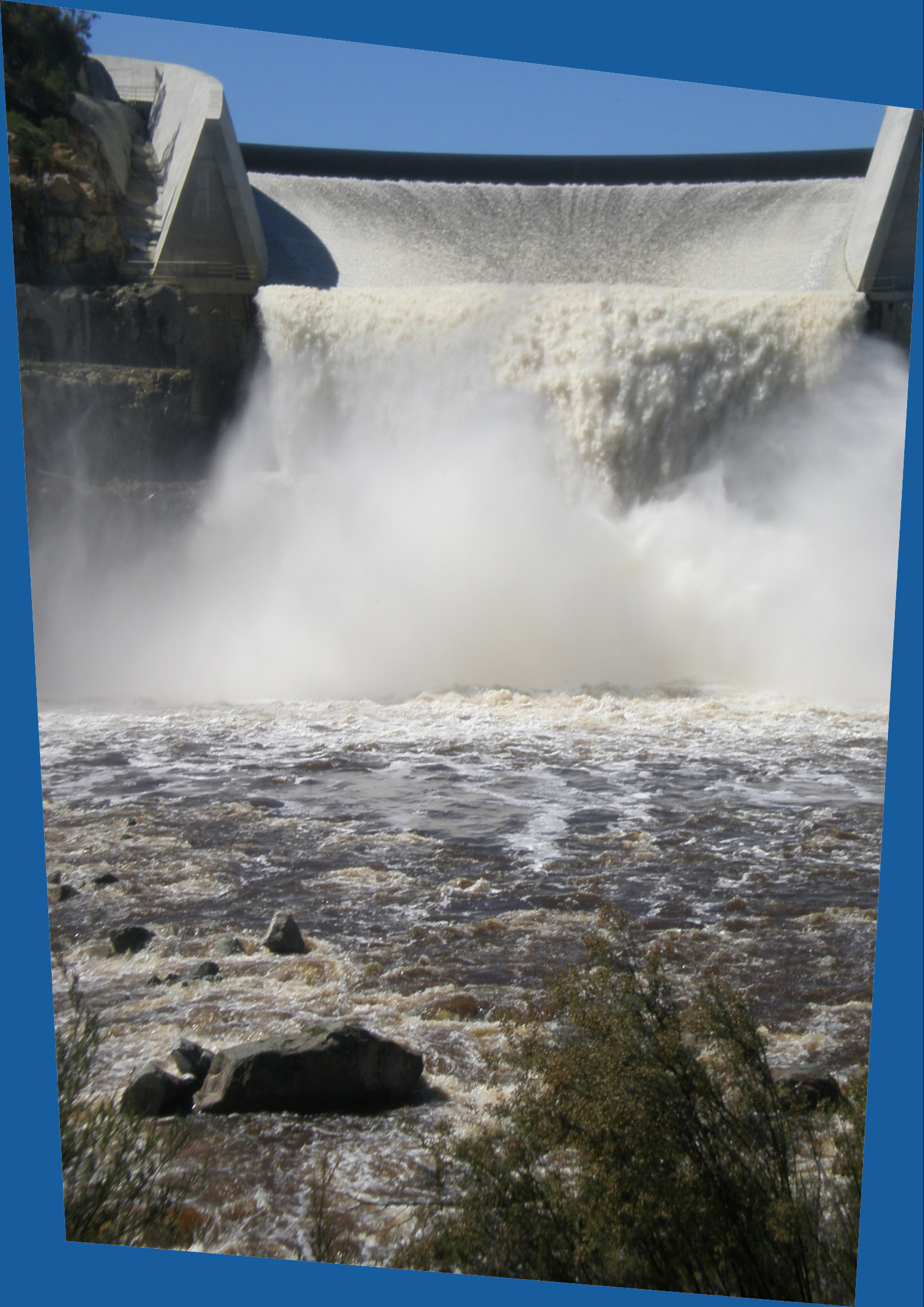
The Coordination Group noted the challenges in place due to COVID-19 restrictions and will continue to function and operate via digital channels.

ACT Legislative Assembly resolution on water security

As one of the requirements to address the ACT Legislative Assembly's resolution on water security, a consultation workshop with stakeholders and relevant experts was scheduled for March 2020. Planning and arrangements were put in place to host the workshop but COVID-19 restrictions meant the workshop was postponed to August 2020.

Recognition of Emeritus Professor Falconer's service as the Group Chair

Minister Gentleman thanked Emeritus Professor Falconer for his service at the meeting on 7 April.



5. 2020–21 Priorities

The key focus areas for the Coordination Group in 2020–21 will be to further actions within the Implementation Plan 2 and review the current operations and member representation of the Coordination Group itself, with an emphasis on the following priorities:

Action 2: Establish an inter-jurisdictional investment and resourcing framework.

With the co-investment framework for un-resourced or continuing projects endorsed by the Coordination Group and structured and prioritised distribution of funds having commenced in 2019, efforts to consider on-going strategic funding priorities will be maintained and reviewed regularly over the coming years.

Action 7: Strategically support the role and work undertaken by peak stakeholder groups, volunteers, land-owners and managers.

As part of the interjurisdictional investment and resourcing framework, the Coordination Group agreed to manage the funding of a small grants program to support local subregional community-based catchment management groups. The rollout of the small grants program was scheduled to take place in 2019–20. However, disruptions caused by COVID-19 restrictions and the 2019–20 bushfires meant the small grants program was delayed. The strategic rollout of the small grants program is now a priority for the Coordination Group in 2020–21.

Action 12: Secure long-term water supplies for the ACT and region.

The Coordination Group will maintain efforts to monitor and address the potential impact to the ACT region's catchment from the construction phase of Snowy Hydro 2.0. To do this, the Coordination Group will work closely with the Snowy 2.0 Regional Coordination Group to highlight the relevant environmental matters that may need to be addressed.

To ensure that the Coordination Group remains abreast of all the current issues relating to water security, Dr Cooper will Chair workshops with stakeholders and relevant experts, required as part of the response to the ACT Legislative Assembly resolution on water security.

Action 14: Ensure Indigenous and other values are recognised.

Following recommendations of the independent review of the functions and operations of the Coordination Group (see below), the Coordination Group will seek to establish permanent representation of Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians on the Coordination Group.

Coordination Group functions and operations review.

The Coordination Group agreed to implement a number of the recommendations of the independent review of the functions and operations of the Coordination Group. This includes:

- » pursuing permanent senior NSW Government representation on the Coordination Group
- » seeking permanent Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians representation on the Coordination Group
- » maintaining relevant and senior representation of Coordination Group member organisations
- » considering avenues for proactive promotion of the role of the Coordination Group and its achievements to increase awareness and effectiveness of the Coordination Group's initiatives.

