

**New Government outlines its plans**

Following the ACT Legislative Assembly election in October 2001, Ministers in the new ACT Government announced their plans to the ACT Legislative Assembly in December 2001.

The Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, said that work was progressing in his department to establish an Office of Sustainability, intended to be fully operational by March 2002. The intention is that the Office will have a role in assessing policy, expenditure and government initiatives against a combination of economic, environmental and social parameters. It would also have a role in assessing government purchasing against sustainability criteria or parameters.

The Minister for Urban Services and the Arts, Bill Wood, announced:

- the allocation of an additional \$1.5 million for nature conservation over the next three years;
- an enhanced commitment to achieving greenhouse gas targets through measures such as reviewing the Energy Advisory Service and commencing the solar hot water rebate scheme immediately, with a commitment of \$100, 000 this financial year.

The Minister for Planning, Simon Corbell, reaffirmed the Government's intention to establish a land planning framework which will take account of transport, population growth, employment location, land availability, retail and leisure activities, ecological constraints and community and environmental values. The Minister said that, in view of the dual planning system in Canberra, he would be making fresh approaches to the Commonwealth to pursue avenues for closer cooperation on planning. Discussions would also be pursued with the NSW Government on regional planning, sustainability and quality urban design.

**Planning Task Force established**

On 15 February 2002, Simon Corbell, the Minister for Planning, announced the formation of a Planning and Land Development Task Force to prepared designs for an independent planning and land management authority, a new planning appeals commission and a return to public land development. Mr Corbell foreshadowed these proposals in the run-up to the ACT Legislative Assembly election in October 2001.

An expert advisory committee will assist the Minister and the Task Force. The members of the committee are expected to be from outside the ACT, with expertise and experience in land and planning administration.

**Chief Minister announces Legislative Program**

On 19 February 2002, the ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, presented the ACT Government's 2002 legislation program to the ACT Legislative Assembly. This includes legislation to establish an independent planning and land authority and a planning appeals commission (see above). Also included is a proposed Gene Technology Bill to provide for ACT participation in the national scheme for regulating gene technology. (See also NELR No 3/2001, page 11).

## **Community Consultation Online pilot launched**

In December 2001, the ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, launched the Community Consultation Online pilot, an initiative to make it easier for the community to comment on government proposals. The initiative would place the ACT at the forefront of online citizen engagement in Australia, Mr Stanhope said.

The pilot includes projects from a number of ACT government agencies, ranging from arts and culture, through to community care, education, and land management and planning. It has the potential to incorporate additional projects such as those relating to neighbourhood planning, health issues, the ACT Budget and the proposed Bill of Rights.

The Chief Minister said that the pilot system includes design elements to bridge the digital divide, particularly for people with a visual impairment or in possession of an older computer.

The pilot can be accessed at [www.consultation.act.gov.au](http://www.consultation.act.gov.au) or via links from the ACT Government and Canberra Connect web sites.