

New Planning Authorities Go Online

The ACT's overhaul of its planning system was reviewed briefly in the May edition of NELR. Since coming into operation on 1 July, a number of progressive initiatives have been announced in relation to this review.

The new ACT Planning & Land Authority is one of the first planning authorities in the country to make development plans / consents available on line. Following an earlier trial in which single residential development applications and consent were made available, larger and more complex DAs will now be made available for public viewing over the Internet (with the exception of some larger files such as expert reports, etc.) The Authority also intends to launch an "electronic lodgement" facility for lodging DAs on a 24 hour basis, within the coming months. For more details and to see these developments first hand, go to the Authority's website at <http://www.actpla.gov.au>

Providing advice to the Minister and the ACTPLA on significant policy, planning and community issues, is the Planning & Land Council. The government has decided to make all of the minutes and recommendations of the Council available online as well, for public comment and review. These can be viewed at <http://www.planninglandcouncil.act.gov.au>

Greenhouse Strategy Review

With the ambitious aims of capping ACT's greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by 2008 and then reducing them by 20% before 2018, Environment ACT is considering a number of strategies for encouraging energy efficiency. Among its latest recommendations are legislative changes that would see commercial building tenants in paying their share of central services energy consumption. The theory is that building owners would attempt to increase building efficiency so that lower prices could be offered to tenants as inducements to enter into leases. Of course, it needs to be kept in mind that the ACT has barely 1% of the total greenhouse emissions around Australia, but these initiatives should still serve as useful models for other States.

A Bill of Rights for the ACT?

The report of the ACT Bill of Rights Consultative Committee was finalised towards the end of May 2003, with strong recommendations made for a *Human Rights Act* to be implemented in the Territory. Government feedback on the report is due out during the month of September.

NEPM Amendments on Air Quality in the ACT

With one of the higher wood fire smoke problems in the country, the ACT Government has indicated its willingness to implement the amendment to the *National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure*, which will focus on particle matter one quarter of the size of that previously covered under the 1998 Agreement terms. With most wood fire smoke particles falling within this smaller size range, the Government seems likely to impose harsher restrictions on air pollution in the future. The will be complemented by other environmental programs, including those that are seeing subsidies being provided to ACT residents for replacing their old wood fire heaters.

Three Year Ban on Genetically Modified Food

While continuing to provide support for further research on GM Crops under the auspices of the national Gene Technology Regulator, the ACT Government has committed to a 3 year ban on any commercial release of genetically modified organisms.