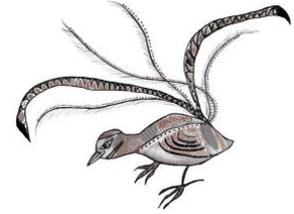


Submission on the ACT Climate Change Strategy 2026–2035



From: Gregory Andrews, Managing Director, Lyrebird Dreaming Pty Ltd

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Summary position: The ACT should accelerate mitigation ambition and accountability, but also start treating adaptation as an equal priority. This is a make-or-break decade for Canberra and the world. Climate change is no longer a future emergency. What the Territory does now on mitigation and adaptation will help determine whether Canberra remains a livable, safe and resilient city for current generations as well as future ones.

1. Introduction

Lyrebird Dreaming welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the ACT’s next Climate Change Strategy. We do so as a Canberra-based Aboriginal-led social enterprise with experience across climate policy, adaptation, community engagement and caring for Country. We encourage strong climate action and recognise that the ACT has already established itself as a national leader in several important areas.

The ACT has made progress: 100% renewable electricity, sustained work on electrification, support for low-carbon buildings, investment in zero-emissions public transport, and a willingness to speak plainly about climate risk. The opening of the new Woden electric bus depot - Australia’s largest electric bus depot - is a positive example of visible public investment that helps turn policy into practical infrastructure and community confidence.

At the same time, the Territory’s own material makes clear that the ACT can’t rest on its laurels. While it has led on renewable electricity and other flagship measures, the ACT did not meet its 2025 interim emissions target, and transport remains a significant emissions source. That matters because targets are only meaningful if they are met. The next strategy should thus be more ambitious, more integrated and much more focused on implementation and accountability.

This new strategy is at a make-or-break moment. The ACT has strong foundations, but climate leadership can no longer be judged mainly by early achievements or ambitious targets on paper. The climate crisis is already affecting cities, infrastructure and communities in real time. What matters now is whether the Territory can translate ambition into delivery, and whether it can protect Canberra’s livability and safety for people living here now, not just for future generations.

2. Overall assessment

Lyrebird Dreaming broadly supports the direction of the discussion paper. It rightly recognises that the next strategy must address emissions reduction and climate resilience, and that key systems such as transport, buildings, nature, infrastructure and community wellbeing need to be considered together.

Our central submission is simple: the ACT's next Climate Change Strategy should be framed as a climate resilience and decarbonisation strategy. Adaptation should not be treated as a secondary matter or an add-on to mitigation. It should sit alongside mitigation as an equal organising principle.

This is not an argument to soften emissions reduction. It's the opposite. Science shows the world is warming faster than many communities and institutions have prepared for, and policy now has to respond to two realities at once: the need to cut emissions rapidly and deeply, and the need to prepare for more heat, flood, storm, fire weather and social disruption. The ACT should therefore retain its leadership on mitigation while substantially lifting its ambition on adaptation.

3. What the strategy gets right

The discussion paper gets several important things right. It acknowledges that Canberra's climate is becoming hotter and more variable, and that climate change is already affecting health, homes, ecosystems, infrastructure and daily life. It also recognises the importance of supporting vulnerable communities and pursuing a fair and inclusive transition.

Lyrebird Dreaming also supports the paper's emphasis on public transport, active travel and zero-emissions vehicles. These should remain central planks of the strategy. Electrification of buses is a practical success story. But so too is the broader lesson behind it: climate action works best when it is visible, convenient and built into the fabric of the city.

The ACT should continue this practical approach by accelerating investment in active travel. Continued improvement in cycling infrastructure, especially dedicated and separated lanes, will be essential if Canberra is serious about reducing transport emissions, lowering congestion, improving public health and giving people realistic alternatives to car dependence.

4. Where the strategy should be strengthened

4.1 Adaptation must be elevated

The next strategy should state more clearly that adaptation is now a core responsibility of government, not simply a supporting theme. Canberra needs explicit adaptation objectives, practical priorities, and a framework for measuring whether our city is becoming safer, cooler, more resilient and better prepared.

This should include stronger attention to heat, bushfire smoke, flooding, stormwater, drought, water security, urban cooling, critical infrastructure resilience, service continuity and community preparedness. Public reporting should track progress in these areas, not just emissions reduction.

4.2 Build for the climate ahead

The strategy should make a stronger commitment to climate-ready buildings, precincts and infrastructure. Canberra can't afford to keep designing or procuring assets as though the climate of the past still applies. Climate resilience needs to be built into planning assumptions, materials choices, siting, flood management, passive cooling, shade, water sensitivity and asset maintenance.

A recent local example helps make the point. The basement of the new CIT Woden building has been closed after flooding damage, including the failure of chipboard walls and fixtures. This is a reminder that climate adaptation is not theoretical. If a new building can quickly become non-functional after a water-related event, it raises wider questions about resilience standards, procurement choices and design assumptions.

The ACT should use this next strategy to send a clear signal: all new buildings and major public investments must be designed for the climate ahead, not just for average historical conditions.

4.3 Transport policy should focus on mode shift as well as electrification

Transport remains the ACT's largest emissions source. Electrification is essential, but electrifying the existing vehicle fleet will not be enough on its own. The Territory has set important transport ambitions, but the next strategy should be clear that leadership will now be judged less by setting targets and more by meeting them. That requires sustained mode shifts towards public transport, walking and cycling.

That means reliable and attractive bus services, integration with light rail, and a safe, connected cycling network that ordinary people can use. Unprotected or fragmented lanes will not deliver the shift required. Dedicated lanes, safe intersections, continuity between routes and end-of-trip facilities should all be treated as core climate infrastructure.

4.4 Nature and Country should be treated as essential infrastructure

The final strategy should more clearly recognise that healthy landscapes, biodiversity, waterways and tree canopy are not optional extras. They are essential infrastructure for cooling, flood mitigation, habitat, wellbeing and resilience.

This is where the ACT has an opportunity to bring together mainstream climate policy and a stronger First Nations perspective. Caring for Country is not symbolic. It is a practical framework for long-term stewardship, adaptation and ecological health. A city that looks after Country is better placed to look after people.

4.5 Waste, landfill emissions and the circular economy

The strategy should give greater attention to waste and circular economy measures. Waste management may be less visible than electricity or transport, but it is an important source of avoidable emissions, particularly through landfill methane and the loss of recoverable materials. This next strategy should strengthen waste reduction, reuse, recycling, organics diversion and circular economy initiatives as part of a serious whole-of-system mitigation agenda.

4.6 Gas phase-out should be accelerated

The ACT should strengthen its approach to phasing out fossil fuel gas in homes and buildings. Gas is still a significant source of emissions, and this next strategy should commit to a faster and more supported phase out of all gas appliances. This means practical assistance for households, renters, landlords and small businesses, including additional subsidies, targeted rebates and transition support for efficient electric alternatives. A fair transition requires not just signals to phase gas out, but real help to make the switch affordable and achievable.

5. A First Nations perspective

Lyrebird Dreaming encourages the ACT to embed Ngunnawal and broader Aboriginal perspectives more deeply in the final strategy's governance, design and implementation. This should not be treated as a niche concern or a stand-alone cultural paragraph. It should be understood as part of good climate policy.

Our work on Aboriginal climate resilience in New South Wales highlights several lessons that are directly relevant here. First, vulnerability is not only biophysical; it is social, cultural and institutional. Second, trusted relationships and local organisations matter greatly in preparing for and responding to climate impacts. Third, Aboriginal knowledge should not be mined for isolated 'insights' but rather 'engaged' through respectful, ongoing partnerships grounded in Country, culture and consent.

For the ACT, this means deeply embedding caring for Country into land management, biodiversity, urban cooling, water, fire and community resilience initiatives. It also means ensuring that Aboriginal organisations and communities are recognised not merely as stakeholders to consult, but as partners in shaping and delivering the resilience agenda.

6. Equity and community resilience

The strategy should maintain a strong focus on those who are most exposed to climate impacts and least able to absorb new costs. Renters, low-income households, older Canberrans, people with disability, Aboriginal and culturally diverse communities and socially isolated residents experience climate risk differently and often more intensely.

A fair transition thus requires more than broad statements of principle. It requires targeted programs, trusted delivery partners, affordable household transition pathways, and practical support before, during and after climate-related shocks. Community organisations and Aboriginal organisations should be resourced as resilience partners, not treated only as communication channels.

7. Recommendations

1. Strengthen mitigation ambition and implementation pathways across transport, buildings, waste and energy.
2. Give adaptation equal standing with mitigation, including through clear objectives, actions and accountability.
3. Develop measurable adaptation indicators and report publicly on resilience outcomes as well as emissions outcomes.
4. Embed climate risk assessment into planning, procurement, infrastructure investment and asset management across government.
5. Require new buildings and major upgrades to be designed for worsening climate conditions, including heat, water and flood resilience.
6. Continue investment in zero-emissions public transport, including electric buses and depot infrastructure.
7. Accelerate delivery of safe, connected cycling infrastructure, including more dedicated and separated lanes and safer intersections.
8. Accelerate the phase-out of fossil fuel gas appliances, supported by additional subsidies, targeted rebates and practical transition assistance.
9. Treat nature, waterways and urban tree canopy as essential resilience infrastructure and invest accordingly.
10. Embed caring for Country and Aboriginal partnership approaches within the strategy's governance and delivery.

8. Conclusion

The ACT has already shown that climate leadership is possible. The next challenge is to evolve that leadership. The 2026–2035 strategy should reflect a changed reality: climate disruption is no longer a future threat but a present challenge.

Lyrebird Dreaming encourages a strategy that is more ambitious on emissions, much stronger on adaptation, more serious about climate-ready infrastructure, more committed to active travel and public transport, and more deeply grounded in equity, Country and community resilience.

Canberra can remain a national model. But to do so we must recognise that this is a make-or-break moment. Climate disruption is no longer a future threat. The choices made now on mitigation, adaptation and resilience will help determine whether Canberra remains a livable, safe and equitable city for the people who live here today, as well as for future generations

Gregory Andrews, Managing Director, Lyrebird Dreaming Pty Ltd