



**Australian Government**  
**National Capital Authority**

# Sustainability and Environmental Management Plan

**2023 - 2026**



# Document Control

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# Message from the Chair of the National Capital Authority

The NCA's work retains and enhances Canberra's substance and character as envisioned by its first architects and planners – Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin – whose design envisaged a city that integrated the natural and built environment and embedded the ideals of the City Beautiful and Garden City movements to form Australia's famous bush capital. Importantly, this early work set the human scale and size of central Canberra and its relationship to existing green spaces and new landscapes.

These green spaces and linkages are more important than ever as modern Canberra becomes the fastest growing city in Australia. Changing climate will place pressures on these important green spaces and the buildings of the Central National Area. Managing climate change will require thoughtful and proactive responses from the NCA and the ACT Government working together on many matters including the provision of a range of housing, transport, and social and environmental protection infrastructure.

It is within this context that the NCA has prepared this Sustainability and Environmental Management Plan (SEMP) 2023-2026.

The SEMP identifies 6 pillars, each with a goal and a list of targets that if delivered, will achieve that goal. The targets are sufficiently broad to provide scope in how they are achieved and allow for NCA to adjust its approach as circumstances change over time (for example, in response to changing technology that may help reduce emissions).

The 6 pillars identified in the SEMP are:

1. Net Zero
2. Water Management
3. Built Environment
4. Energy Management
5. Biodiversity & Conservation
6. Circular Economy

The 6 pillars align with the NCA's key functions. For example, the Built Environment pillar captures operations performed by the planning and design, and events teams, and operations by estate management teams are reflected in predominantly the water, energy and biodiversity and conservation pillars. The agency collectively will be responsible for committing to and delivering the goals and targets in the SEMP.

These pillars represent crucial aspects of environmental sustainability for the next three years but are by no means exhaustive.

We are dedicated to diligently tracking our progress and providing regular updates to our valued stakeholders. The SEMP provides a roadmap for collaboration with stakeholders and for our work. The NCA will monitor and report upon the implementation of this SEMP annually. This will include a copy of the Emissions Reporting Tool summary prepared for the Australian Government.

The NCA Board endorsed the SEMP in December 2023.

Terry Weber

December 2023

## Executive summary

The Sustainability and Environmental Management Plan (SEMP) results from a detailed planning exercise to set goals, targets and an execution plan with the intent to reduce the associated environmental risks and to position the National Capital Authority (NCA) differently within global sustainability challenges.

It is aligned with the NCA Corporate Plan 2023-24 to 2026-27 and complements the Australian Government's Net Zero Policy. The SEMP has been prepared following a case study analysis, a comprehensive engagement process representing the key internal stakeholder groups and peer review. Internal consultation has driven the development of the goals and targets set by the SEMP.

The goals and targets set out in the SEMP are set out under 6 pillars that align with the NCA's key functions and represent the areas where the NCA can deliver sustainable, long-term change. The 6 pillars are:

1. Net Zero
2. Water Management
3. Built Environment
4. Energy Management
5. Biodiversity and Conservation
6. Circular Economy

Key SEMP goals were benchmarked against the goals of other Australian Government agencies and organisations with similar asset bases to the NCA.

The specific targets with the SEMP are sufficiently flexible to enable implementation of the SEMP over time and for the NCA to respond to changing data, advances in technology, and government policy and priorities.

The NCA is committed to the implementation of the SEMP. The SEMP forms one component of a suite of corporate plans and policy driving decision-making and budget allocation and is critical in ensuring that the NCA is at the forefront of functioning in a sustainable, forward-thinking way.

## Rationale

The SEMP goals and targets are defined based on the current and anticipated risks associated with the environmental aspects and impacts of the NCA's operations, and its stakeholder interests.

Not establishing a SEMP for the agency presents several risks to the NCA, including financial management and reputational. Not implementing change aligned with the goals and targets of the SEMP may result in higher energy costs, extra purchase costs in managing the National Capital Estate, and poor resource utilization. Reputational loss may result from not being proactive in reducing or eliminating known energy consumers or implementing technological change to do so, not meeting Australian Government policy applicable to all government agencies, and not being seen to proactively sustainably manage the National Capital Estate which is the centerpiece of the National Capital.

## Link with the NCA's Corporate Plan

The pillars, goals and targets are derived to align with the NCA's strategic intent. There is a clear line of sight between the NCA's strategic intent and the SEMP.

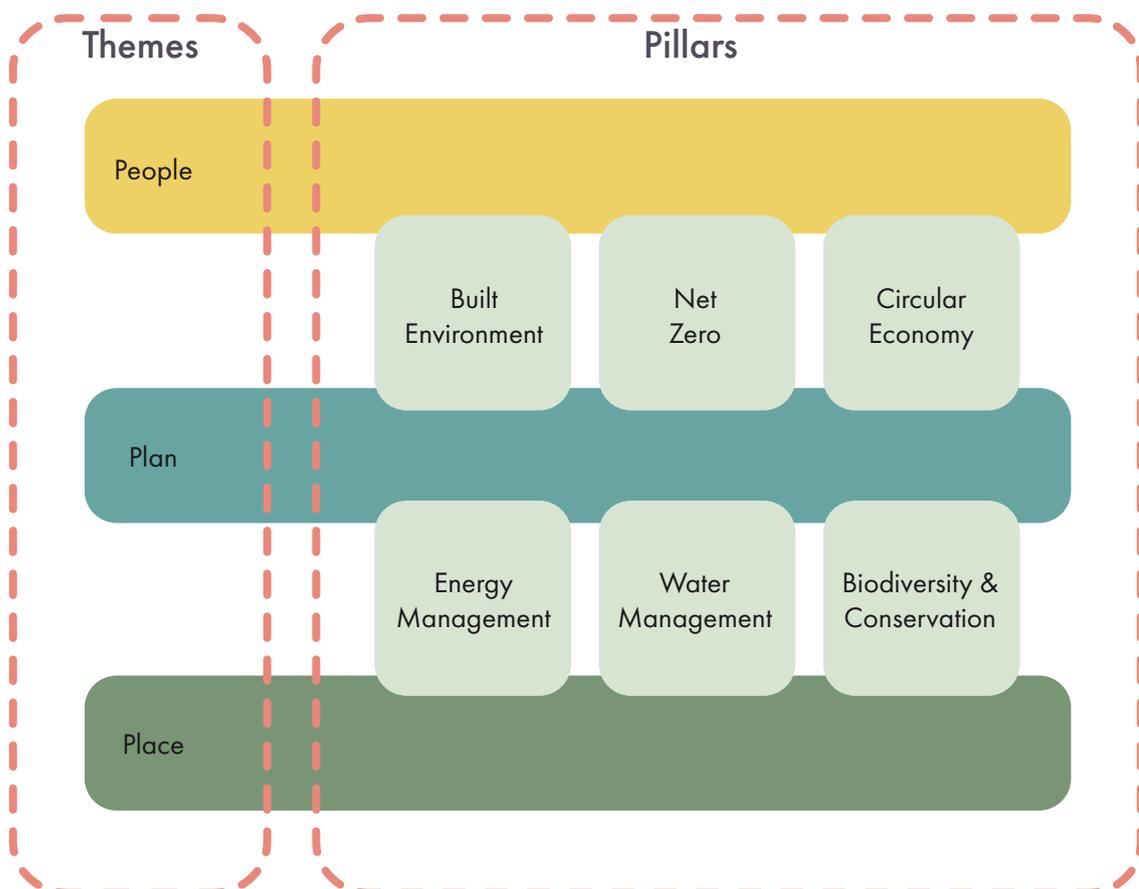
The NCA's Corporate Plan 2023-24 to 2026-27 is the agency's primary strategic planning document and sets out the goals and strategies we will pursue to achieve our purpose over the next 4 years. The plan is structured to identify strategic priorities and overarching planned outcomes, supported by key activities and focus areas.

One of the NCA's strategic priorities for the life of the Corporate Plan 2023-24 to 2026-27 is to continue to create and renew a National Capital that successfully balances the Griffin plan and legacy with the aspirations of a modern, sustainable and dynamic city.

A key 'planned outcome' includes a commitment to 'improving the ecological values of conservation areas and reducing the environmental impact of NCA's activities and programs as we track towards net zero emissions by 2030'. Directly related to this planned outcome is the key activity and focus area for the 2023-24 financial year of developing and implementing a SEMP.

Developing the SEMP is just one of a suite of key activities over the life of the Corporate Plan, with others encompassing sustainable management of open space areas, development of planning and design policy to guide and promote sustainable development practices, and implementation of the NCA's Tree Management Policy and horticultural renewal programs.

These activities and focus areas will be guided by the SEMP.



# Goals and Targets

Goals and targets were identified and subsequently aligned with the 6 key pillars. A leader for each pillar has been identified to assign logical leadership responsibilities to the goals.

| PILLAR                         | LEADER  |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Net Zero                    | Manager – Sustainability                                |
| 2. Water Management            | Director – Estate Management                            |
| 3. Built Environment           | Director – Strategic Planning                           |
| 4. Energy Management           | Director – Built Assets & Director – Corporate Services |
| 5. Biodiversity & Conservation | Director – Estate Management                            |
| 6. Circular Economy            | Director – Visitor Experience                           |

The leaders will be assisted as required by relevant managers or other directors (such as the Director – Lake and Dam).

The overall coordination, management and single-point contact for the SEMP will be lead by the Manager of Sustainability at the NCA.

The intent of the SEMP is that it will lay the pathway to establishing an Environmental Management System which leads to certifying the NCA under ISO 14001 standards.

## Pillar 1 – Net Zero

APS Net Zero 2030 is the Australian Government’s policy for the Australian Public Service (APS) to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2030, and transparently report on its carbon emissions. This policy is consistent with Australia’s international commitments and will contribute to achievement of Australia’s Paris Agreement targets.

Each government entity is responsible for reducing its own emissions as close as practicable to net zero, with arrival at Net Zero for the APS achieved through the purchase of credible offsets. This process is coordinated by the Net Zero Unit in the Department of Finance. The NCA first reported carbon emissions in the 2022-23 financial year and will continue to comply with and report its energy emissions by financial year in accordance with Australia Government requirements.

### GOAL

NET-ZERO EMISSIONS BY 2030, IN ACCORDANCE WITH APS NET ZERO 2030 POLICY

### TARGETS

1. Transition to net zero emissions by 2030.
2. Net-zero certification, emissions accounting, and planning integration.
3. Engagement of internal expertise and First Nations partners.

<sup>i</sup> Refer [www.finance.gov.au/government/aps-net-zero-emissions-2030](http://www.finance.gov.au/government/aps-net-zero-emissions-2030)

## Pillar 2 – Water Management

The NCA is one of the largest water users in the ACT. Managing water consumption is imperative to ensuring the national estate can continue maintaining the heritage environment and landscape and providing world class facilities. The NCA has implemented programs to reduce water use across the estate where possible. Central to this is a tree replacement program that includes planting of species suitable for a drying climate.

### GOAL

REDUCE TOTAL POTABLE WATER USE BY 10% BY IMPROVING MONITORING, CONTROL & LEAK-IDENTIFICATION IN IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

### TARGETS

1. Reduce potable & extracted water consumption for irrigation.
2. Establish a prioritisation of irrigated areas.
3. Reduce per capita potable water consumption.
4. Increase application of WSUD principles, including rainwater harvesting & reuse, and surface water intake.
5. Undertake a comprehensive audit of existing stormwater systems and identify opportunities for biofiltration across the NCA's estate.
6. Develop partnerships for stormwater management practices with upstream stakeholders (University of Canberra, Australian National University, ACT, QPRC).

<sup>ii</sup> Target will be defined based on the sum of visitors to the National Estate (derived from footfall data) and the population of buildings managed by the NCA

## Pillar 3 – Built Environment

The NCA's strategic and statutory planning roles aim to improve the built environment through better city and building sustainability. As custodians of the bush capital the design and construction of the built environment must consider this. Buildings and green & blue spaces need to work in unison with their surrounding area to create a harmonious built and natural environment.

### GOAL

ENHANCE BUILT ENVIRONMENT SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH ADOPTION OF CLIMATE-RESPONSIVE PRINCIPLES IN PLANNING POLICY AND CAPITAL WORKS AND THROUGH EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

### TARGETS

1. Undertake a thorough review of the National Capital Plan to strengthen requirements around sustainability, including consideration of industry best-practice.
2. Enhance sustainability through climate-responsive, high-quality design and landscaping on National Land and in Designated Areas.
3. Classification scheme for office/licenced spaces, building performance assessments.
4. Sustainable practices for events and licensed activities on NCA land.
5. Sustainable procurement in accordance with the Commonwealth Procurement Rules.

<sup>iii</sup> NCA-managed buildings are to receive a base-rating with the NABERS rating scheme. New government buildings on National Land are to achieve the applicable Greenstar rating

## Pillar 4 – Energy Management

The extensive national estate – including roads, streetlights and area lighting – means the NCA is a significant energy user in the ACT. Energy accounted for over 90% of the NCA’s reportable carbon emissions in the FY2022-23 period. The NCA will undertake active programs to reduce its energy consumption over the life of this SEMP. This will include measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions arising from all energy sources.

### GOAL

OPTIMISE THE ENERGY EFFICIENCY OF OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT, CONTROLS AND PROCESSES TO REDUCE THE ENERGY CONSUMPTION BY 10% IN 2025 COMPARED TO 2023

### TARGETS

1. Optimizing energy efficiency in built environment, controls and processes.
2. Reduction of energy consumption by 12% by 2026.
3. Replacement of ICE engine vehicles in accordance with Australian Government policy.
4. Energy assessments (NABERS), renewable energy generation and conservation schemes for part of the NCA’s planning approval considerations.

<sup>iv</sup> The Emissions Reporting Tool summary can be viewed in the NCA Annual Report 2022-23

## Pillar 5 – Biodiversity and Conservation

The NCA’s estate contains a diverse range of landscape typologies. These vary from highly curated and manicured landscapes such as Anzac Parade and Commonwealth Park, to natural temperate grasslands and critically endangered woodlands. The NCA will continue to manage these landscapes and biodiversity within them in accordance with the provisions of the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

### GOAL

EXPAND THE NCA’S EXISTING TREE REPLACEMENT POLICY TO BECOME A LANDSCAPE AND CONSERVATION STRATEGY BY 2025

### TARGETS

1. Engage in knowledge sharing with First Nation peoples on traditional land management practices.
2. Renew and expand tree canopy in line with the Tree Management Policy 2021, while increasing species diversity, food & habitat species and protecting remnant & heritage trees.
3. Increase shrub layer cover by 25% with local endemic and fit-for-place species.
4. Increase protection and enhancement of habitat for native flora and fauna.

<sup>v</sup> Refer [www.nca.gov.au/planning/plans-policies-and-guidelines/tree-management-policy](http://www.nca.gov.au/planning/plans-policies-and-guidelines/tree-management-policy)

<sup>vi</sup> Shrub layer defined as vegetation <3m in height and therefore excluded from the tree canopy calculation

## Pillar 6 – Circular Economy

Internally, the NCA has an active program of waste minimisation which includes measures to reduce consumption of office paper and recycling of cardboard, co-mingled recycling, e-waste, batteries, small-plastics and composting.

The current open space contract will be reviewed to ensure a greater focus on recycling and incorporate measures to report on quantities of collected recycling and waste to landfill. The NCA will continue to apply the best onsite composting practices and reuse of fill and organic material in and around the National Estate.

Activities and messaging promoting other circular economy initiatives will be coordinated out of the National Capital Exhibition (NCE).

Recycling bins (1:1 ratio with waste-to-landfill bins) will be mandatory at all NCA events, and a trial of composting will aim to determine the suitability of composting at events.

### GOAL

ACHIEVE YEAR ON YEAR PER CAPITA WASTE REDUCTION ACROSS THE NCA WITH PUBLIC & STAFF ENGAGEMENT, EVENTS AND CONTRACTOR MANAGEMENT

### TARGETS

1. Reduce waste-to-landfill by 20% from existing levels for all events held on NCA Land.
2. Increase waste diversion (recycling) to 40% by 2025.
3. All events, and 50% of licenced activities, to be 'Plastic-free events' by 2025.
4. Update NCA Event Guidelines to require an event-specific EMP.

<sup>vii</sup> Level to be established per event in the FY2023-24 period, or at the first instance of an event

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/recycling-and-waste/single-use-plastics/getting-plastic-sorted-for-events>

# Governance

## Strategic governance

The NCA Board is responsible for the strategic leadership, management, and performance of the NCA. The NCA Board approves the agency budget and sets the strategic direction of the NCA and will be responsible for doing so in the context of the goals and targets of the SEMP.

The NCA Senior Executive Team assists in the strategic management of the NCA. The Senior Executive Team will provide broad direction to those responsible for managerial and operational aspects of delivering the SEMP, consistent with the strategic directions set by the NCA Board.

## Managerial and operational

Management, monitoring and implementation of the SEMP will be undertaken by the Manager of Sustainability at the NCA. This officer will coordinate a Sustainability and Environmental Management Working Group comprised of senior NCA staff representing each Branch of the agency.

The working group is intended to promote ownership of the SEMP by each Branch and business unit and provide opportunities for participation in delivering the goals and targets of the SEMP.

The Manager of Sustainability will report regularly to the Senior Executive Team and NCA Board concerning operational matters, projects that support delivery of the SEMP, and risks concerning delivery of projects supporting SEMP goals and targets.

The NCA may seek external technical advice where required.