To: CoordinationGroupSecretariat@act.gov.au

Submission On: Draft Refreshed ACT and Region Catchment Strategy

The Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network (UMCN) welcomes the opportunity to provide our views on the draft refreshed ACT and Region Catchment Strategy.

The UMCN is a strong and diverse community-based network of individuals, community groups, businesses and organisations (government and non-government) committed to improving natural resource management (NRM) in the upper Murrumbidgee catchment. The UMCN (and its predecessor organisation – the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Coordination Committee) has been operating for three decades, in recognition that NRM issues do not stop at State or Council boundaries. The UMCN values knowledge sharing, networking, collaboration and inclusion, and is the regional leader in facilitating communication between the community, NGOs and government agencies.

General Support for the Strategy

We would like to begin by acknowledging that the overall approach of the strategy provides a constructive framework for collaboration, cooperation, and coordination, and we express our support for it.

Specific Comments

- P6 Our living catchment, introduction (first 3 paras).

The current introduction reads as predominately ACT-focussed and does not adequately reflect the region. Given the broader scope of the strategy, we suggest the introduction be revised to better reflect the full range of communities, sub-catchments, and future pressures influencing the upper Murrumbidgee catchment.

For example, the tributaries of the Murrumbidgee River upstream of the ACT, i.e. Bredbo and Numeralla Rivers and Michelago and Cooma Creeks play a role in the health and function of the catchment, however, are not sufficiently acknowledged. While the strategy discusses sub-catchments in and around the ACT, it omits important areas such as the Yass River catchment and the upper Murrumbidgee catchment upstream of the ACT which are essential to the overall system.

References to ‘landcare groups in NSW’ should be expanded to specifically acknowledge regional organisations such as the Yass Area Network of Landcare Groups and the Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee, which are actively engaged in catchment management and community stewardship. Similarly, the strategy refers to ‘landcare groups in NSW’ without specifically referring to the corresponding Yass Area Network of Landcare Groups and the Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee.

We also note inconsistencies in mapping, such as the inclusion of the Goodradigbee River in the text but its absence from the accompanying map.

Finally, future pressures on the upper Murrumbidgee catchment should be recognised. While Lake George does not drain into the Murrumbidgee, and sits just outside the defined catchment, yet includes growing urban centres such as Bungendore, alongside a productive agricultural sector that closely identifies with the upper Murrumbidgee region. The proposed transfer of ACT waster to Bungendore, if implemented, could accelerate development and increase demands on the upper Murrumbidgee catchment’s water resources.

- P12 Our Catchment under Pressure, Climate Change (Also Goals 3 and 5).

The current section notes climate change will contribute to water insecurity and “more extreme events,” but it should more clearly state what those events are—regular droughts, floods, storms, and wildfires. These are not one-off occurrences but potentially frequent and severe events that can devastate communities, alter landscapes, and place long-term strain on individuals through financial hardship and mental health impacts.

While some resilience and preparedness measures—such as updated flood mapping and stormwater reviews by local councils—are underway, they are not acknowledged. Including them would show alignment with local action. Similarly, the need for increased environmental flows during drought, and other times when river ecosystems are most stressed, should be explicitly recognised.

The section would benefit from a clearer, stronger articulation of these climate impacts and the response they demand.

- P14 Biosecurity and land management

We suggest including a brief reference to 'pollution' in the main body of the strategy, as current mentions are limited to the Attachments. For example, growing research highlights the widespread presence of microplastics in the environment and their impact on wildlife, underscoring the need to acknowledge pollution as a pressure on catchment health.

- P21 Shared flames, stronger Country (text box)

We suggest the following amendments:

- '...*organised by ... Icon Water showcased the powerful...*'. Remove reference to 'Landcare groups' as they were not hosts of this event.
- *'Bringing together ... community environment groups, scientists...*'. Add community environment groups.

- P23 Goal Sustainable human settlement and regional development

We suggestion FrogWatch and Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch's platypus/rakali surveys are also noted as they are key initiatives in the region.

- P32 Community networks, groups and individuals

The two community Landcare/catchment groups mentioned do not fully represent the broader region. Rather than focusing on just two groups, the strategy could better refer to community involvement across both ACT and NSW. This would allow for inclusion of key organisations such as the Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee, Yass Valley Network of Landcare Groups, and the three ACT catchment groups, offering a more balanced and region-wide perspective.

- P33 Community Networks, Groups and Individuals (particularly Design based Solutions and Participate in Knowledge Creation).

A recurring challenge is the lack of ongoing maintenance for completed projects. Without follow-up actions—such as weed control, watering, replanting, and monitoring—initial investments of grant funding and community effort risk being lost. This can lead to frustration and disillusionment among volunteers. For long-term success, projects need to be adopted locally and given a sense of community ownership. Long-term monitoring of sites needs to show how work is contributing to overall catchment condition.

Local governments and relevant agencies have a key role to play in supporting volunteer groups through on-ground planning, coordination, and access to basic mapping and planning tools. With appropriate resourcing, local governments and landcare/catchment groups could take on this role more effectively. Grant programs should also explicitly recognise and fund the maintenance phase of projects as well as coordinating projects across the catchment.

This issue directly relates to several strategic actions in the strategy (pp. 36–37), including: resourcing community participation, establishing feedback loops, managing risks to community wellbeing, aligning investment in shared management issues, building consistent monitoring

systems, and fostering continuous learning. While this may be better resourced in the ACT, it remains an issue in other parts of the region and should be considered at a regional scale.

- P34 Your impact pathways, Advocate for community voice – Citizens engage in surveys and consultations

We strongly suggest strengthening this outcome by shifting the proposed long-term outcomes (7–10 years) into the short-term timeframe. The broader community has consistently called for a more inclusive role in decision-making—not just through consultation, but as active participants in a genuinely collaborative process.

Additionally, the strategy should acknowledge that most catchment improvements occur through numerous local projects and actions across the many sub-catchments. It is the cumulative impact of these efforts that drives real progress, as these are in turn supported by broader-scale decisions such as environmental flows and water regulation.

- P37 – Decision makers (Government agencies and councils), Your impact pathways

Create accessible governance – (medium term) communities resourced to participate meaningfully. Suggest that this outcome is moved to short term. The catchment strategy has been in place and operating for a number of years and given the community survey results noted elsewhere in the strategy strongly indicates the impetus to get this moving.

The strategy references the recent community survey which also highlighted key results that support the case for more inclusive participation in policy and management. Notably, around 40% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed communities had input into water management. As noted in the survey report, while the results were mixed, this level of disagreement reflects a clear lack of knowledge of and confidence in current processes.

Additionally, a significant number of respondents selected "unsure," suggesting that even among a well-educated cohort, there may be a knowledge gap or lack of transparency in decision-making that prevents people from forming informed views.

These findings indicate a strong need for more collaborative and accessible governance that actively involves local communities, alongside policymakers and other stakeholders, in shaping the future of the catchment. Furthermore, resource allocation to ensuring adequate community literacy to make informed decisions should be prioritised.

We thank you again for the opportunity to comment and look forward to seeing the finalised strategy.

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Executive Officer
For and on behalf of the Executive Committee

8 October 2025