To: climatechange@act.gov.au.

Submission On: Developing a new Climate Change Strategy for the ACT: ACT Government Discussion Paper

The Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network (UMCN) welcomes the opportunity to provide our views on the above discussion paper.

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.

Priority areas for the Strategy

The UMCN supports strong action on emissions reduction and climate resilience. We recommend that the Strategy elevate **water security and catchment health** as core priorities. Water underpins all ecological, social, and economic systems in the ACT and region, yet it is not sufficiently recognised as a focus area. Existing evidence indicates that, without policy change, climate change will significantly impact water availability well beyond the life of this Strategy.

UMCN also emphasises **integrated catchment management** as essential. Climate impacts cross administrative boundaries, and effective responses require coordinated, catchment-scale approaches that integrate land, water, and biodiversity management across jurisdictions.

Gaps and opportunities

UMCN considers that the Strategy should act as a **comprehensive and accessible guide** to the full suite of climate-related legislation, policies, and frameworks in the ACT. Currently, these can operate in silos. Greater clarity on how they interact, where gaps exist, and how coordination can be improved will strengthen implementation and transparency for the community.

The Discussion Paper appears to take a relatively **static (business as usual) approach** to climate change. In practice, climate impacts are dynamic and accelerating. Ecosystems are already responding in non-linear ways, including shifts in species distribution as wildlife moves to new areas to survive. The Strategy should adopt a more **adaptive and flexible framework** that can respond to rapid environmental change and evolving knowledge.

Illustrative is several proposed actions focus on promoting known solutions without addressing the underlying barriers to their uptake. For example, the built environment section references low carbon materials—these have been understood and available for decades (if not longer). The key issues are why planning frameworks do not more strongly enable or require their use and how cost barriers can be addressed. Similarly, embedding trees in urban areas is identified as a priority, yet decades of suburban development demonstrate that planning settings have not consistently supported sufficient tree growth (preferably native) to deliver effective canopy cover and shading. These examples highlight the need for the Strategy to move beyond identifying solutions to directly addressing the policy, regulatory, and economic constraints that limit their implementation.

A similar issue is evident in the treatment of the **natural environment**. While the Discussion Paper acknowledges its importance, the focus is largely on human-dominated systems such as urban areas and agriculture. A significant proportion of the ACT consists of natural landscapes, yet consideration of these areas is limited, with only high-level statements and a narrow emphasis on threatened species. A more comprehensive approach is needed that recognises the scale and complexity of climate impacts on natural ecosystems and supports proactive, landscape-scale responses to maintain ecological function and resilience.

Implementation and community involvement

UMCN highlights the importance of **genuine community participation**. Effective climate action depends on informed and engaged communities working alongside government, industry, and regional stakeholders. The Strategy should embed mechanisms that support ongoing participation, knowledge sharing, and locally driven solutions.

Summary

UMCN recommends that the Strategy prioritise:

- Water security and catchment health as central pillars
- Integrated, cross-jurisdictional catchment management
- Better alignment and integration of existing legislation and policies
- Adaptive, flexible approaches to climate impacts
- Addressing regulatory and economic barriers to implementation
- Strong and ongoing community participation

These steps will better position the ACT and region to respond to a rapidly changing climate.

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Chair

18 March 2026