



Australian Capital Territory

# Sustainable Ways of Environmental Education in the Territory (SWEET) Youth Bill 2026

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## Rationale

The ACT Government has reiterated their incentives to address climate action and supporting the local environment through simplifying energy transitions, funding for ACT wildlife and expanding the ACT Environment Grants program. However, meaningful changes and actions still remain limited within the community, particularly due to minimal residential engagement in the environmental sector. The insufficient participation of ACT local significantly hinders the territory's ability to progress forward with climate change mitigation as knowledge and concern of climate impact will ultimately reduce future development. Therefore, the SWEET Bill aims to implement actions that improve community involvement with the environment, further increasing social cohesion and sustainable practices.

The Y has identified a significant issue in progressing towards a sustainable future is the lack of encouragement young people receive to participate in the environmental sphere. In the 2020 National survey of children and young people, it was discovered that only 13% of young Australians felt that they were listened to by leaders in government, an alarming statistic that remains unacceptable as today, 67% of young Australians are experiencing climate anxiety, reaching a critical threshold of negative impact on their livelihood. The education system already neglects the significance of environment and sustainability by excluding a mandatory and distinct establishment of the topic in the Australian curriculum and inadequately providing incentives for young people to engage with sustainable practices. To promote young people in environmental engagement, we recommend implementing additional sustainability related educational events. A particular initiative could be a school-based competition that prompts students to propose an innovation, invention or other idea that improves environmental sustainability in some manner. This suggestion was inspired by the already established model for business students with the organisation Young Change Agents. Students were tasked with creating an entrepreneurial framework and later pitch the ideas to

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real potential stakeholders. These types of events highly motivate young people to get involved when they are assured their work will progress to some sort of development.

Supporting Community Gardening is vital in providing youth and the wider community with practical climate positive actions. Encouraging intergenerational learning and connecting with others through welcoming third spaces are essential to enhance community cohesion. In practice, this can look like empowering people to grow their own food in a communal, especially when they do not have access to their own backyard due to their living situation. It reduces the upfront costs of starting their own garden, educates individuals on gardening and sustainable garden management and promotes circular economy principles through composting food waste to turn into organic fertiliser. This leads to a wider mindset shift where people become conscious of their sustainable daily habits in terms of food and waste management. Gardening has also been seen to have physical and mental health benefits, including natural antidepressant effects in soil contact, reducing social isolation through community initiatives and providing purpose, pleasure and passion to participants.

Organic waste makes up a significant proportion of household waste and, when disposed of in landfill, contributes to greenhouse gas emissions through the production of methane. Expanding composting initiatives will assist the ACT in achieving its waste reduction and environmental sustainability objectives. Improving the management of garden and organic waste across the Australian Capital Territory by increasing composting participation, reducing the amount of organic waste sent to landfill, and encouraging sustainable waste management practices. Placing a greater emphasis on implementing a territory-wide compost collection service would be useful as it would ensure all households have access to environmentally responsible method of disposing of food and garden waste.

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It is also important to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in waste management policy and decision-making. Traditional knowledge and long-standing land management practices can contribute valuable perspectives on sustainable resource management. Consultation and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities when developing programs and providing recourses to community groups.

Increasing sustainable and environmental education in the ACT will benefit engagement with the wider community. Increasing community gardening, food and garden waste management and community consultation for implementation with a wide variety of stakeholders will aim to empower locals with practical forms of climate action.



Australian Capital Territory

# **Sustainable Ways of Environmental Education in the Territory (SWEET) Youth Bill 2026**

**Y2026-1**

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A Bill for an Act to increase environmental education, community land use, and local sustainability initiatives, and for related purposes.

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The Youth Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory enacts as follows:

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## Part 1 Preliminary

### 1 Name of Act

This Act is the *Sustainable Ways of Environmental Education in the Territory (SWEET) Youth Act 2026*.

### 2 Commencement

This Act commences nine months after its notification day.

*Note* The naming and commencement provisions automatically commence on the notification day (see [Legislation Act](#), s 75 (1)).

### 3 Dictionary

The dictionary at the end of this Act is part of this Act.

*Note 1* The dictionary at the end of this Act defines certain terms used in this Act, and includes references (*signpost definitions*) to other terms defined elsewhere.

For example, the signpost definition ‘*head of service*—see the [Public Sector Management Act 1994](#), dictionary.’ means that the term ‘head of service’ is defined in that dictionary and the definition applies to this Act.

*Note 2* A definition in the dictionary (including a signpost definition) applies to the entire Act unless the definition, or another provision of the Act, provides otherwise or the contrary intention otherwise appears (see [Legislation Act](#), s 155 and s 156 (1)).

### 4 Object of the Act

The object of this Act is to —

- (a) Supporting access to community gardening;
- (b) Encouraging sustainable land usage;
- (c) Empowering communities to better utilise their own garden and food waste; and
- (d) Increasing sustainable education through community events and competitions.

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## Part 2 **SWEET Council**

### **5 Council established**

The SWEET Council shall be established to administer:

- (a) an annual grant round supporting initiatives supporting this Act's objects;
- (b) community land covenants under this Act; and
- (c) run community programs and events supporting this Act's objects.

### **6 Composition of Council**

The Council shall be composed of:

- (a) a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) appointed by the Minister administering the *Environment Protection Act 1997*;
- (b) two community members appointed by the Council on advice of the CEO;
- (b) one **youth** member appointed by the Minister administering the *Children and Young People Act 2008* on advice of the Children and Young People Commissioner appointed under the *Human Rights Commission Act 2005*; and
- (c) a member appointed by the Minister administering the *Planning Act 2023*.

### **7 Consultation by Council**

Where this Act imposes a requirement on the Council to publicly consult, this shall mean:

- (a) publishing materials in public places, on social media, the Council's website, and other relevant places determined by the Council;

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- (b) inviting public submissions on matter for at least 15 days and inviting stakeholders and directly affected persons to make submissions; and
  - (c) holding at least one community consultation session.

## **Part 3                      SWEET Grant**

### **8                      Establishment of grant voucher program**

- (1) The SWEET Council shall administer an annual grant voucher program which supports this Act's projects.
- (2) The Council must publicly consult on the criteria, eligibility, and application process for the grant voucher. The grant must be focussed on ease of application and be more similar to a voucher application rather than full grant program.
- (3) There shall be three grant streams:
  - (a) local water management and collection;
  - (b) sustainable waste management; and
  - (c) green spaces and botanical diversity.
- (4) The Council must provide resources assisting a person to develop a project granted funding.

## **Part 4                      Community land covenants**

### **9                      Creation of land covenant**

- (1) The SWEET Council may, upon application from a *community group*, make a notice of intention to make a covenant if satisfied that:

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- (a) the group has a sufficient interest in the establishment of the covenant;
  - (b) the land is disused, abandoned, or otherwise unreasonably managed;
  - (c) the creation of a covenant supports this Act's objects;
  - (d) the covenant will be duly maintained and upkeep; and
  - (e) where the covenant:
    - (i) is over public land – the Council deems it appropriate that the land be placed under covenant; or
    - (ii) is over private land – has the landholder's consent or is acquired under laws providing for compulsory acquisition by the Council.
- (2) After a notice of intention is made, the Council must engage in public consultation as specified in s7.
  - (3) After public consultation, the Council may, if still satisfied of the conditions in (1), make a community land covenant.
  - (4) The Council must give the **community group** reasons for rejecting an application under subsections (1) or (3).
  - (5) Standing to challenge a decision under subsections (1) or (3) is limited to the **community group** or the Minister administering the *Environment Protection Act 1997*.

## 10 Use of land covenant

- (1) A community land covenant can be developed by the **community group** into a wetlands, tree canopy, or community garden. No other development on such land may be made without the SWEET Council's consent.
- (2) The Council shall provide advice and guidelines for the administrators of a community land covenant on how to develop a covenant and comply with this Act.

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- (3) The Council may investigate a covenant without notice to ensure it complies with this Act.
  - (4) Where the Council informs the **community group** that the covenant fails to comply with the conditions in s5(1) and the group fails to take reasonable steps to remedy the failure, the Council may cancel the covenant.

## **Part 5 Tax incentives**

### **11 Administration of tax incentives**

- (1) The tax incentive under this Part shall be a reduction of relevant taxes owed by a person by either \$1000 or 3.5% of the person's relevant tax bill, whichever is greater.
- (2) For the purposes of this Part, a person's relevant taxes and relevant tax bill shall be calculated by the sum of the taxes, levies, and rates owed by a person under the *Land Tax Act 2004* and *Rates Act 2004*.
- (3) If a person is eligible for more than one tax incentive under this Part, the incentive shall be capped at \$3000 or 5% of the person's tax bill.
- (4) The ACT Revenue Office shall be required to include information about these tax incentives on every tax bill which levies a tax affected by this Part.
- (5) The SWEET Council shall establish guidelines on what development qualifies to receive tax incentives under this Part and may investigate landholders who purport to claim such an incentive to ensure compliance.

### **12 Community land covenant tax incentive**

A landholder who consents to a community land covenant being made over their land under s9(1)(e)(ii) shall receive a tax incentive.

## Sustainable land management tax incentive

A landholder who uses their land to establish a wildlife corridor, water reservoir, or rain garden shall receive a tax incentive.

## Native gardens tax incentive

- (1) A landholder who establishes a native garden on their property covering at least 30% of the unimproved part of their property shall receive a tax incentive worth 50% of the tax incentive specified in s11(2).
- (2) A landholder who establishes a native garden on their property covering at least 66% of the unimproved part of their property shall receive a full tax incentive.

## Part 6 Community events and programs

## Public resources and tools

- (1) The SWEET Council shall develop resources for the public and schools promoting the Council's programs and this Act's objects. The Council must publicly consult on the development of such resources.
- (2) The Council shall attend schools, events, markets, and businesses with these resources to encourage uptake of the Council's programs and other sustainability initiatives.
- (3) On its website, the Council shall maintain a fundraising hub which will include a fee-free function for ACT residents to fundraise for community projects supporting this Act's objects.

## Schools sustainability competition

- (1) The SWEET Council shall run an annual sustainability competition for schools in the ACT to encourage schools to develop ideas on how to make changes supporting sustainability in their schools.

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- (2) The Council shall select one government and one non-government school as the winners with reference to:
    - (a) the creativity of the solution;
    - (b) the cost and ease of implementation of the solution;
    - (c) the effectiveness of the solution;
    - (d) the community-building nature of the solution; and
    - (e) any other criteria the Council deems appropriate.
  - (3) The winning schools shall receive a grant to implement the solution.
  - (4) One year after a winning solution has been implemented, the Minister administering the *Education Act 2004* must consider whether the solution should be extended to more schools.

## **17 Sustainability Fair**

- (1) Every year, the SWEET Council shall run a Sustainability Fair to showcase its programs and other community initiatives which support this Act's purposes.
- (2) The Council must advertise this fair to all government and non-government schools.

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## Dictionary

(see s 3)

*Note 1* The [Legislation Act](#) contains definitions and other provisions relevant to this Act.

*Note 2* For example, the [Legislation Act](#), dict, pt 1, defines the following terms:

- ACT
- auditor-general
- entity
- head of service
- integrity commissioner
- Legislative Assembly
- Minister (see s 162)
- Office of the Legislative Assembly
- officer of the Assembly
- ombudsman
- public sector standards commissioner
- public service
- statutory office-holder
- Supreme Court
- territory authority
- territory instrumentality
- territory law
- territory-owned corporation
- the Territory.

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**Youth** means a person aged 16 to 25.

**Community group** means a group of individuals prepared to collaborate on a shared interest or passion within a recognisable local area.

**Native garden** means a garden comprised mostly of native flora.

**Wildlife corridor** means a piece of undeveloped land connecting two habitats so wildlife can move safely between them.

**Rain garden** means a garden bed that slows and cleans stormwater before it drains into waterways.

**Water reservoir** means an artificial place for storing liquid.

**Sustainability** means the practice of using resources to meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

I certify that the above is a true copy of the Youth Voice (Representation) Youth Act 2026, which originated in the Legislative Assembly as the Youth Voice (Representation) Youth Bill 2026 and was passed by the Assembly on 1 January 2026.

Clerk of the Youth Legislative Assembly