

Canberra:

Laboratory of democracy

The Australian Capital Territory proves that governments can implement innovative, controversial policies while involved in various power sharing arrangements in the parliament. New national polling shows that most Australians support these policies. Policy makers and politicians in other jurisdictions could learn from the success of these proven and popular policies.

Discussion paper

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Summary

The advantage of a federal system like Australia's is that other states and territories can adopt successful policies once they have been proven to work in one jurisdiction. Several innovative, controversial policies that have proven difficult to introduce in other jurisdictions have been successfully implemented by the ACT Government, all while involved in various power sharing arrangements in the parliament.

The ACT is seven years into its 20-year stamp duty for land tax "swap", in which stamp duties phase out and land value taxes (or "general rates") increase over the same period. The ACT has the second lowest stamp duty rate in the country and has phased out insurance taxes altogether; stamp duty takings are still high because of high house prices and the structure of the phase-out. Think tanks, government inquiries and some industry peak bodies have all supported stamp duty swaps.

The ACT's 100% renewable energy by 2020 target will be achieved later this year. It includes a reverse auction mechanism that other states have already adopted for their renewable energy purchase agreements. While the policy is currently a net cost for customers, it is expected to become a net earner by 2026.

A ban on billboard advertising in the ACT reduces distractions and commercial interference in Canberra's public spaces.

Permitting pill testing facilities for recreational drugs at music festivals is a recent ACT policy that has been tested successfully twice at Groovin' the Moo, in April 2018 and 2019. Testing at the 2018 festival revealed that about half of all drugs sold were "duds" without psychoactive content, that two of the drugs contained toxic substances and that many of the drugs were adulterated. After testing, only 58% indicated that they would use the drug as planned, with others planning to discard the drug, take less of it or take a different drug instead.

The policies are not only successful – they are popular as well. Along with the four policies discussed in detail in this report, we selected seven other policies from the Australian Capital Territory and polled respondents across Australia to see whether they supported or opposed them:

- decriminalising cannabis for personal use
- a public holiday for "Reconciliation Day" to share Indigenous cultures and history, and explore reconciliation in Australia
- exclusion zone around polling booths on election day, where people cannot hand out electoral material

- building public housing so it is spread out throughout all suburbs including new developments
- building a light rail network
- legalising and regulating assisted dying for terminally ill
- spending on programs to reduce youth crime and incarceration
- allowing people at music festivals to test the contents of recreational drugs for poisonous substances
- Removing the tax on buying and selling houses (stamp duty) and replacing it with a progressive rates system (annual tax based on property value)
- a ban on outdoor billboard advertising
- 100% renewable energy

There was majority support among Australians for 10 of the 11 policies. The ACT's longstanding billboard ban was the only policy we polled that did not have majority support from Australians. That aside, the ban has seen recent and forceful community support from Canberrans, who not only support the ban but have also called on the government to close existing loopholes.

The ACT has done the work and taken the risk to prove the viability of these progressive and widely-supported policies. They are ripe to be adopted in other jurisdictions.

Introduction

Canberra – once derided as stuffy and bureaucratic – has enjoyed a revival in recent years that has made it cool, lively and forward thinking. At the end of last year, Lonely Planet placed Canberra in the top three of its “Best in Travel” rankings – the highest ranking ever achieved by an Australian city.¹ They were a little late: the New York Times and news.com.au have been singing Canberra’s praises as a hub of arts, culture and good food since 2015.²

Part of Canberra’s cultural growth is tied to its reputation as a welcoming city and progressive polity. After the AEC announced the results of the same-sex marriage survey in November 2017 (in which the ACT recorded the highest “yes” vote of any state or territory), an impromptu party broke out in the metropolitan suburb of Braddon. A mix of government and community initiatives have followed the ad hoc celebration, including a rainbow roundabout, pedestrian crossings depicting male–male and female–female couples, and a scheduled party on the anniversary of the “yes” result.³

Following the large swing towards the Labor Party in the 2018 Victorian election, Premier Daniel Andrews said, “We are the most progressive government in the nation. We are the most progressive state in the nation”.⁴ Guy Rundle has observed that Victoria has been socially liberal for decades, with a markedly different “ensemble” of social and economic policies.⁵

¹ Scott (2017) “*Criminally overlooked*”: Canberra named third-best travel city in the world, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-25/canberra-named-third-best-travel-city-by-lonely-planet/9081954>

² Fleming (2015) *7 reasons Canberra doesn’t suck. Really*, <https://www.news.com.au/travel/australian-holidays/nsw-act/7-reasons-canberra-doesnt-suck-really/news-story/4893bf17725c87495be144f37b9ef6c5>; Pearce (2014) *36 Hours in Canberra, Australia - The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/08/travel/36-hours-in-canberra-australia.html?_r=1#

³ Black (2018) *Canberra gives green light to diversity with Australia’s first same-sex pedestrian signals*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-26/same-sex-street-lights-signal-intersectional-push-for-diversity/10554126>; Williams (2018) *Explosion of colour as Braddon hosts street party in the name of love*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/explosion-of-colour-as-braddon-hosts-street-party-in-the-name-of-love-20181117-p50gn9.html>

⁴ Henriques-Gomes & Cox (2018) *Victorian state election 2018: Labor celebrates after Liberal wipeout – as it happened*, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2018/nov/24/victorian-election-2018-live-results-seats-analysis-labor-daniel-andrews-matthew-guy-liberals>

⁵ Rundle (2018) *How Victoria became “the most progressive state in the nation,”* <https://www.crikey.com.au/2018/11/26/victorian-election-progressive-state/>

Although Victoria is distinct, it does not have a monopoly on progressivism. The ACT has had a Labor government for seventeen years – since electing Jon Stanhope in November 2001 – and the Greens have held the balance of power since 2008. Since 2012, the arrangement with the Greens crossbench has included a ministry for Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury.

The ACT has legislated many progressive reforms – and has mostly done so while in minority government. In other jurisdictions, the crossbench has been described as causing “deadlock” or “chaos” for minority governments, but the ACT shows that governments can work with crossbenchers to achieve enduring, popular, constructive policy reform.

The electoral structure of the ACT is designed to be representative and competitive. Proportional representation means that the makeup of the Legislative Assembly more closely reflects a party’s actual share of the vote. Mixed-member electorates and the “Robson Rotation” mechanism for printing ballot papers (which stops parties from having a set order of candidates) means that candidates compete against their fellow party-members as well as other parties, encouraging accountability and allowing candidates to appeal to distinct parts of the electorate.

The success of these reforms shows that governments can pursue bold, progressive policies – and be re-elected. Other state and territory governments should consider following the ACT’s example.

IN DEFENCE OF FEDERALISM

It is one of the happy incidents of the federal system that a single courageous State may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.

– Justice Brandeis, *New State Ice Co v Liebmann* (1932)

Our federal system is the product of decisions and compromises made at constitutional conventions in the 1890s. Since then, the state–federal divide has been attacked as anachronistic or inefficient.

The most recent prominent call came in 2017 from former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who called for the abolition of state governments.⁶ The lobby group Beyond

⁶ Harris (2017) *Heed Hawke’s call – Australian federalism is an idea whose time has ended*, <http://theconversation.com/heed-hawkes-call-australian-federalism-is-an-idea-whose-time-has-ended-71001>

Federation conducted polling in 2014 that found that 39% of people would vote for the abolition of state governments at a referendum, compared to 30% against.⁷

These arguments usually turn on finances (removing the costs of running state governments), efficiencies (Australia is relatively small to have three layers of government), or a way to reduce being “over-governed”.

One case for federalism depends on the duplication that others criticise. As imagined by Justice Brandeis, state and territory governments serve as “laboratories of democracy” – where different jurisdictions can experiment with different policies and share the results. In this way, state governments can learn which policies work from observing them in other states and territories.

This report chooses one particular jurisdiction – the Australian Capital Territory, where The Australia Institute is based – and identifies several successful policies that have emerged from this “laboratory”. Supporters of our federal system should learn from these successful experiments and could adopt them in their own states.

⁷ Galaxy Research (for Beyond Federation) (2014) *State Government Study*, <http://members.webone.com.au/~markld/PubPol/GSR/Polls/Galaxy%20State%20Government%20Study%20May%202014.pdf>

Replacing stamp duty with land tax

Sometimes the smallest governments can spark the biggest national reforms, and virtually all economists are hoping that the ACT is doing just that with its plan to abolish stamp duty.

– Michael Janda⁸

POLICY

In 2012, the ACT Government introduced a 20-year plan to phase out stamp duty (formally called conveyance duty) and insurance taxes and to offset the revenue lost with increases to general rates.

Stamp duty is a tax on property transactions. General rates are annual levies on the unimproved value of land; they are also called land taxes or land value taxes.⁹

Rationale

Trading stamp duty for land tax replaces an inefficient and inequitable tax with one that is expected to encourage property to be allocated more efficiently.

Stamp duty critics describe it as inefficient because it discourages property transactions, and therefore discourages people from selling property that is less suited to their needs and buying property that is more suited to their needs. It discourages retirees from downsizing and discourages people from moving for work. It also encourages people who do not currently need large houses but think they will in the future (like young families) to buy beyond their current needs to avoid a second transaction.¹⁰

⁸ Janda (2013) *Time to stamp out inefficient duties*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-01/janda-stamping-out-inefficient-duties/4496356>

⁹ The ACT has a separate tax it calls a “land tax”, which is a levy applied to properties other than owner-occupied residences. ACT Government (2018) *2018–19 Budget Paper No 3*, p 235-237

¹⁰ Henry (2010) *Australia’s Future Tax System: Final Report - Chapter 6*, http://taxreview.treasury.gov.au/content/finalreport.aspx?doc=html/publications/papers/final_report_part_1/chapter_6.htm; Janda (2013) *Time to stamp out inefficient duties*

Stamp duty is inequitable because it means that people who move house more often pay more tax. A wealthy family that buys a multi-million dollar mansion and lives in it for 20 years can end up paying less stamp duty than a poor family that moves multiple times in that period, buying a modest house each time.¹¹ The cost of stamp duty also comes “at the worst possible time” – when home buyers are already paying a deposit, conveyancing costs and bank fees, and buying household goods.¹² Some jurisdictions do allow short-term stamp duty deferrals.¹³

Equity issues do exist with land taxes as well, particularly for those who are asset-rich but income-poor – for whom land taxes could represent a large share of income. There are mechanisms for alleviating these problems, such as allowing people to defer rates payments until they sell their property, but there may be people affected who do not qualify for the deferral scheme. Deferral schemes for older people are a common feature of property tax schemes around the world.¹⁴ See “Deferral scheme”, below, for details on how the ACT has attempted to address land tax equity issues.

Land tax is regarded as efficient, partly because land is an “immobile” tax base – investors cannot take their land and move it to a lower-tax jurisdiction. Land taxes are also less volatile than stamp duties because they are only affected by changes in property values, while stamp duty revenues are affected by property values and transaction volumes.¹⁵

States that are reliant on stamp duty are at a greater risk of budget shortfalls or windfalls following the fortunes of the property market – as shown in NSW and Victoria. NSW Treasury lowered its stamp duty forecasts by \$8 billion in 2018 and by a further \$750 million in 2019.¹⁶ Victoria’s 2019 budget reported stamp duty earnings

¹¹ For an example with full calculations, see Bentley & D’Cruz (2016) *A Plan to End Stamp Duty*, p 15

¹² Henry (2010) *Australia’s Future Tax System: Final Report - Chapter 6*; Janda (2013) *Time to stamp out inefficient duties*

¹³ See for example NSW Government (2017) *First home buyer grants, stamp duty exemptions and discounts in NSW*, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/projects-and-initiatives/first-home-buyers/>

¹⁴ See for example Max (2018) *This Secret Tax Break Could Save You Thousands of Dollars a Year If You Own a Home*, <http://time.com/money/5375073/seniors-missing-property-tax-deferral/>

¹⁵ Henry (2010) *Australia’s Future Tax System: Final Report - Chapter 6*; Janda (2013) *Time to stamp out inefficient duties*

¹⁶ Wade (2018) *House of cards: NSW faces \$8b stamp duty shortfall*, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/house-of-cards-nsw-faces-8b-stamp-duty-shortfall-20181214-p50mfg.html>; Burke (2019) *NSW Treasury slashes extra \$750 million from stamp duty forecasts as property downturn continues*, <https://www.domain.com.au/news/nsw-treasury-slashes-extra-750-million-from-stamp-duty-forecasts-as-property-downturn-continues-806616/>

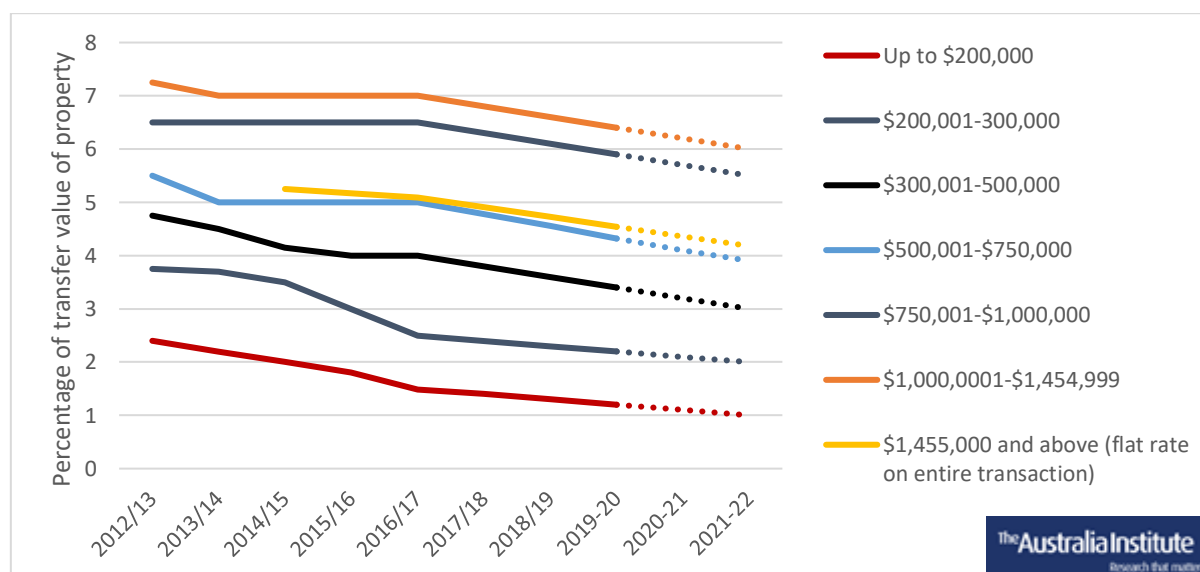
would be \$5.2 billion lower than expected.¹⁷ The ACT's stamp duty earnings for 2018–2019 were \$20 million lower than expected, although higher revenue from other taxation more than made up the difference.¹⁸

Implementation

To date, the ACT Government has raised general rates, lowered stamp duty and abolished insurance taxes, and from 1 July 2019 will abolish stamp duty for commercial properties below \$1.5 million and for first-home buyers with a household income below \$160,000.¹⁹

As shown in Figure 1, stamp duty rates have fallen between 9% and 50% since 2012 (depending on the threshold) and are set to fall by a total of 15% to 58% by 2022.

Figure 1: Stamp duty rates (historical and projected)



Source: Hopkins (2018) *Analysis ACT tax reform initiative*, <https://hia.com.au/-/media/HIA-Website/Files/IndustryBusiness/Economic/fact-sheet/act-stamp-duty-feb18.ashx?la=en&hash=2CAA629410F72965C781BF55694476EDE1F397A7>; ACT Government (2011–2019) *Budgets*, Budget Paper Number 3

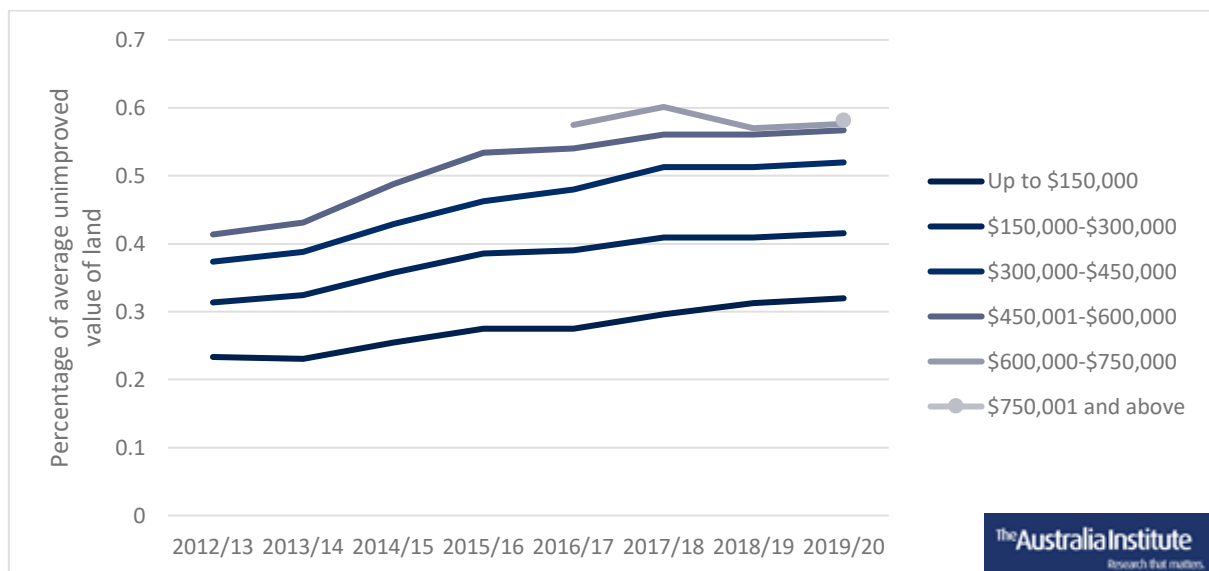
General rates, shown in Figure 2, have risen by between 32% and 41% since 2012.

¹⁷ Baxendale (2019) *Housing fall blows \$5.2bn hole in Victorian budget*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/housing-fall-blows-52bn-hole-in-victorian-budget/news-story/b3f8bedafa7ad255572e1c3f859a9751>

¹⁸ ACT Government (2019) *2019–20 Budget*, Budget Paper Number 3, p 230

¹⁹ ACT Government (2019) *2018–19 Budget*, Budget Paper Number 3, p 177, 237–238

Figure 2: General rates (historical and current)



Source: Hopkins (2018) *Analysis ACT tax reform initiative*; ACT Government (2011–2019) *Budgets*, Budget Paper Number 3

Note: Between 2012 and 2016, the highest rate was “Above \$450,000” and between 2016 and 2018 the highest rate was “Above \$600,000”.

Deferral scheme

The ACT has a deferral scheme that allows households that meet the criteria to defer paying general rates until they sell their property. The Government charges a “relatively low” rate of interest on deferred rates.

When the Government introduced the stamp duty to land tax swap, the rates deferral system covered pensioners, non-pensioners over the age of 65, property owners suffering substantial financial hardship and people with disabilities. However, those over 65 years of age needed to have combined incomes below annual average earnings, and the unimproved land value had to be higher than that of four-fifths of properties.²⁰

In 2018, the ACT Government has expanded the deferral scheme so that combined incomes and unimproved land values are no longer considered. The expansion was not expensive; the Budget estimates the cost at \$50,000 in the year it is introduced.²¹

²⁰ ACT Government (2012) *2012-13 Budget Paper No 3*, p 51–52

²¹ Burgess (2018) *Here’s how rates will change for every suburb in Canberra next year*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/politics/act/act-budget-stamp-duty-scrapped-for-first-home-buyers-from-next-july-20180604-p4zjbw.html>

The ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) has encouraged the ACT Government to track participation in its deferral scheme and other rates concessions; they also noted challenges for people on low incomes with high-value properties.

ACTCOSS supports reforming the concession scheme rather than abolishing the stamp duty to land tax swap, with spokesperson Sue Helyar saying:

We should deal with [the challenges] through the concessions program, not through changing the revenue policy.²²

OUTCOMES

Because of increases in house prices and the total number of houses in the ACT, stamp duty revenues have remained relatively high after the reforms began in 2012, with stamp duty from residential transactions remaining between \$160 and \$200 million in subsequent years.²³

The ACT also used the land value tax to fund a phase out of insurance stamp duty, completed in 2016, which used to be worth over \$40 million a year in revenue.²⁴

Revenue raised by land value tax has more than doubled, from \$209 million in 2011–12 to \$487 million in 2017–18 (residential and commercial).²⁵

As of 2018, the ACT had the second lowest stamp duty rate in the country, at 2.9% of the median dwelling price. Because house prices are high in the ACT, it has the fourth highest average stamp duty price in dollars (\$18,100), although this is still lower than the national average (\$20,587).²⁶

The ACT also has the lowest “dependence” on stamp duty (as a share of tax revenue), at 18.2%.²⁷

²² Baker (2016) *Canberra rates pricing people out of their homes*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/canberra-rates-pricing-people-out-of-their-homes-20161019-gs5tkb.html>

²³ ACT Government (2011–2019) *Budgets*, Budget Paper Number 3

²⁴ Chen (2016) *Australian Capital Territory To Abolish Stamp Duty On Insurance Premiums*, <http://www.mondaq.com/australia/x/502178/Insurance/Australian+Capital+Territory+to+abolish+stamp+duty+on+insurance+premiums>; ACT Government (2011) *Budget 2011–12*, Budget Paper Number 3

²⁵ ACT Government (2011–2018) *Budgets*, Budget Paper Number 3

²⁶ Bladen (2018) *ACT stamp duty falls, curbing national trend*, <https://www.allhomes.com.au/news/act-stamp-duty-falls-curbing-national-trend-20180119-h0l2ni/>

²⁷ Bladen (2018) *ACT stamp duty falls, curbing national trend*

The media has criticised changes in how general rates apply to units; the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommended several reforms.²⁸ The ACT Government has modified how it calculates ratings for units from 2019–20.²⁹

In 2018, the ACT Greens proposed basing general rates on the capital improved value of land rather than the unimproved value of land. This would make the general rates scheme closer to a tax on wealth, but it may discourage capital works and home improvement. The ACT Government had earlier rejected a similar proposal,³⁰ saying it would be too expensive to implement.³¹

An anticipated consequence of a stamp duty for land value tax swap is an increase in house purchases. So far, this has not happened in the ACT, with Figure 3 showing no obvious trend upwards in transfers after the reforms in June 2011. It is possible that the land value tax has deterred speculators (and therefore reduced the volume of transfers), but a larger influence is likely to be that the stamp duty cuts have so far been focused on lower-value dwellings.³²

²⁸ Burdon (2018) *ACT government urged to overhaul Canberra rates, land tax system*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/canberra-news/act-government-urged-to-overhaul-canberra-rates-land-tax-system-20180920-p504wz.html>; Petherbridge (2018) *Consider the human cost of higher rates for units*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/consider-the-human-cost-of-higher-rates-for-units-20180919-p504on.html>; Standing Committee on Public Accounts (2018) *Methodology for determining rates and land tax in strata residences*

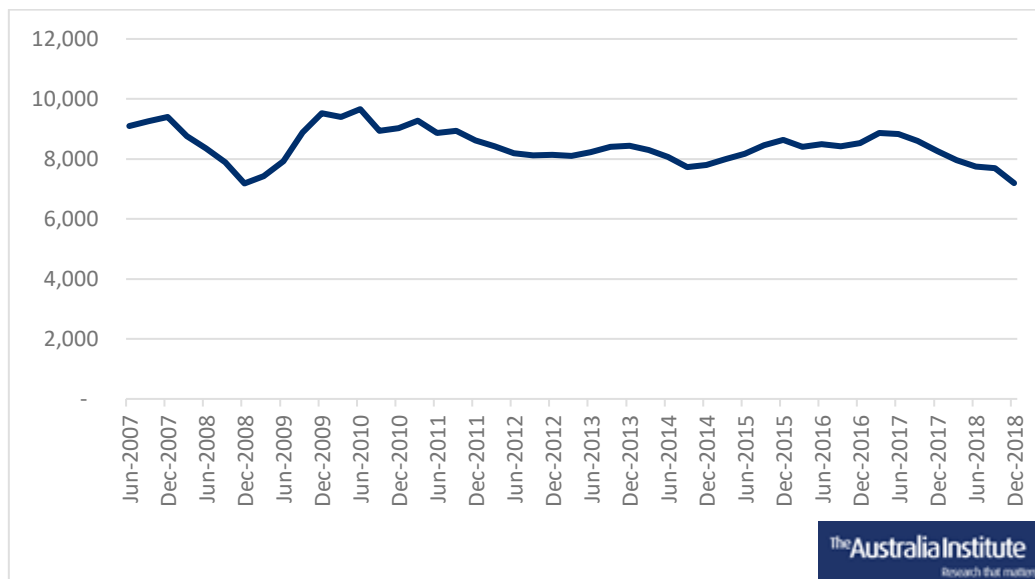
²⁹ ACT Government (2019) *2019–20 Budget*, Budget Paper Number 3, pp 232–233

³⁰ Applying to what the ACT calls “land tax”, which is an additional charge on top of general rates for property owners other than owner-occupiers.

³¹ Burgess (2018) *Government knocked back market value rates reform*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/politics/act/government-knocked-back-market-value-rates-reform-20180828-p500ay.html>; (2018) *Property Council calls Greens’ proposal to reform rates “dangerous,”* <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/politics/act/property-council-calls-greens-proposal-to-reform-rates-dangerous-20180829-p500is.html>; Le Couteur (n.d.) *Keeping rates fair*, https://www.carolinelecouteur.com.au/keeping_rates_fair

³² Hopkins (2018) *Analysis ACT tax reform initiative*, <https://hia.com.au/-/media/HIA-Website/Files/IndustryBusiness/Economic/fact-sheet/act-stamp-duty-feb18.ashx?la=en&hash=2CAA629410F72965C781BF55694476EDE1F397A7>

Figure 3: Transfers of established houses and attached dwellings, 2007 to 2018 (rolling annual average)



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) 6416.0 - Residential Property Price Indexes: Eight Capital Cities, Jun 2018, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6416.0>

Note: The ABS changed data sources in the March 2014 quarter.

Because the first five years saw stamp duties fall mostly for low-value homes and general rates rise mostly for high-value homes, the Housing Industry Association describes the reform as “a process of first phasing in the new rates system and then phasing out stamp duties. The former has occurred ... while the latter has yet to occur in a material way”.³³

IMPLEMENTATION IN OTHER STATES AND TERRITORIES

Academics, government inquiries and think tanks identify land value taxes as politically fraught but economically sound. The McKell Institute has assembled a list of supporting reports, including ones prepared by the NSW Government (twice), the Federal Government, the Productivity Commission (three times), PwC and the Business Council of Australia.³⁴

³³ Hopkins (2018) *Analysis ACT tax reform initiative*

³⁴ Bentley & D’Cruz (2016) *A Plan to End Stamp Duty*, <https://mckellinstitute.org.au/research/reports/a-plan-to-end-stamp-duty/>

Grattan proposal

In 2015, the Grattan Institute proposed a 0.2% tax on unimproved land value or 0.1% tax on improved property value. Either would raise about \$7 billion per year from Australian land, which was valued then at \$4.3 trillion.³⁵ Land values have increased to \$5.9 trillion as of June 2018,³⁶ suggesting that the proposed Grattan tax would now raise about \$10 billion per year.³⁷

The Grattan Institute also calculated that, because stamp duties are inefficient, replacing them with a land value tax “could add \$9 billion a year to GDP”.³⁸

McKell proposal

In 2016, the McKell Institute proposed that NSW could abolish stamp duties and make up the revenue by extending its land tax on the unimproved value of land to all properties.³⁹

NSW land tax currently does not apply to the family home or primary production land,⁴⁰ although all homeowners do currently pay council rates. The tax-free threshold, and progressive rates, use aggregate holdings rather than a square metre value of land calculation.

The McKell Institute proposal would abolish stamp duty, remove all exemptions on land tax and apply the tax per square metre, with a tax-free threshold of \$120 per square metre, then 0.75% of assessed land value under \$775 per square metre and then 1% of assessed land value above \$775 per square metre.⁴¹

The McKell Institute identifies three key concerns, and ways of avoiding them:⁴²

³⁵ Daley & Coates (2015) *Property Taxes*, p 5, <https://grattan.edu.au/report/property-taxes/>

³⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) *5204.0 - Australian System of National Accounts, 2017-18*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/5204.0Main+Features12017-18?OpenDocument>

³⁷ The Grattan Institute’s original calculation accounted for lower Commonwealth government income taxes from the introduction of a land value tax (pages 7-8). We have just adjusted their original net result by the growth in land values over the intervening four years.

³⁸ Daley & Coates (2015) *Property Taxes*, p 11

³⁹ Bentley & D’Cruz (2016) *A Plan to End Stamp Duty*

⁴⁰ Also exempt are boarding houses, low cost accommodation, residential parks (including caravan parks), non-profit organisations, and retirement villages, aged care establishments and nursing homes: Bentley & D’Cruz (2016) *A Plan to End Stamp Duty*, p 23

⁴¹ Bentley & D’Cruz (2016) *A Plan to End Stamp Duty*, p 19

⁴² Bentley & D’Cruz (2016) *A Plan to End Stamp Duty*, p 7

- The impact on those who have recently paid stamp duty, which could be rectified by having homeowners not pay land tax until they move to a new home
- The impact on retirees who are often asset-rich but income poor, which would be rectified in part by the above measure and in part through a rate deferral scheme like that operating in the ACT
- The impact on agricultural primary producers, which could be rectified by using a square metre value of land calculation instead of an aggregate holdings calculation – which would put “almost all” primary producers below the tax-free threshold

Other proposals

Other proposals include one from the NSW Business Chamber, NSW Council of Social Services and the NSW Branch of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, using modelling by KPMG. The modelling found that the swap “could increase Gross State Product by more than 1 per cent – currently equivalent to about \$5 billion – and create up to 10,000 jobs”⁴³

The Centre for Independent Studies welcomed the Henry Tax Review’s proposal to remove stamp duties and insurance taxes and replace them with a broad land tax,⁴⁴ and subsequently identified it as having a \$11.5 billion revenue effect (for 2011–12).⁴⁵ However, the centre was subsequently critical of the ACT’s policy for having “a socialist twist” – that stamp duty has (so far) been cut proportionately more for low value transactions than high value ones.⁴⁶

⁴³ Wade (2016) *Challenge to Mike Baird: replace stamp duty and gift the NSW economy \$5b*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/business/the-economy/challenge-to-mike-baird-replace-stamp-duty-and-gift-the-nsw-economy-5b-20160404-gnxu3h.html>

⁴⁴ Centre for Independent Studies (n.d.) *The Henry Tax Review - Some Initial Comments*, https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2015/04/images/stories/henry_tax_review.pdf; see also Carling (2008) *State Tax Reform: Progress and Prospects*, <http://www.cis.org.au/commentary/articles/state-tax-reform-progress-and-prospects/>

⁴⁵ Carling (n.d.) *Shrink Taxation by Shrinking Government!*, <http://www.cis.org.au/publications/target30/shrink-taxation-by-shrinking-government/>

⁴⁶ Carling (2016) *ACT’s tax reform test case*, <http://www.cis.org.au/commentary/ideas-the-centre/archive/ideas-40-2016/>

POLLING

There was majority support for replacing stamp duty with a land tax in every state and among voters for each political party.

Table 1: Removing the tax on buying and selling houses (stamp duty) and replacing it with a progressive rates system (annual tax based on property value)

Response	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Qld	Vic	WA
Total support	57%	59%	55%	56%	57%	58%	50%
Total oppose	23%	28%	19%	23%	25%	23%	22%
Strongly support	24%	24%	23%	26%	25%	24%	19%
Support	33%	34%	31%	31%	32%	34%	31%
Oppose	14%	17%	11%	12%	17%	15%	12%
Strongly oppose	9%	10%	8%	11%	9%	8%	10%
Don't know / not sure	20%	14%	26%	21%	18%	19%	28%

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Table 2: Removing the tax on buying and selling houses (stamp duty) and replacing it with a progressive rates system (annual tax based on property value)

Response	Total	LNP	ALP	Greens	PHON	Other	Undec
Total support	57%	57%	59%	59%	55%	53%	51%
Total oppose	23%	29%	21%	21%	21%	27%	17%
Strongly support	24%	22%	25%	25%	28%	24%	19%
Support	33%	34%	33%	33%	27%	29%	32%
Oppose	14%	17%	14%	14%	12%	15%	9%
Strongly oppose	9%	12%	7%	7%	9%	12%	8%
Don't know / not sure	20%	14%	21%	21%	24%	19%	32%

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The Australia Institute conducted a national survey of 1,459 people 26 October and 6 November 2018, online through Research Now, with nationally representative samples by gender, age and state and territory.

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the lower house. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs, but results are also shown separately for undecideds. "LNP" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" includes Centre Alliance, United Australia Party and Independent/Other.

100% renewable energy

The ACT Government has set a target of 100% renewable energy by 2020, which they will achieve in part by contracting for 640 MW of renewable energy (76% of Canberra energy use).⁴⁷ The policy has tripartisan support from Labor, the Greens⁴⁸ and the Liberals.⁴⁹

POLICY

In 2013, the ACT Government announced a 90% renewable energy by 2020 target for the territory.⁵⁰ In 2015, they also announced a 100% renewable energy by 2025 target.⁵¹ The target is one of three targets (the others concerning greenhouse gas emissions reductions and zero net emissions) that make up the Government's Climate Change Action Plan 2 (AP2).⁵²

In 2016, the ACT Government moved the 100% renewable target forward to 2020, and in May 2019 announced that it expected to meet the target by October 2019.⁵³

⁴⁷ ACT Government (n.d.) *Canberra 100% Renewable - leading innovation*; Lawson (2016) *ACT commits to 100 per cent renewable energy target by 2020*: Simon Corbell, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/act-commits-to-100-per-cent-renewable-energy-target-by-2020-simon-corbell-20160428-goh1l9.html>

⁴⁸ ACT Greens (n.d.) *Canberra Liberals must not abandon ACT's clean energy target*, https://www.actgreens.org.au/canberra_liberals_must_not_abandon_act_s_clean_energy_target

⁴⁹ Jeremy Hanson (2016) *Canberra Liberals commit to renewable energy and carbon emission reduction targets*, <http://canberraliberals.org.au/canberra-liberals-commit-to-renewable-energy-and-carbon-emission-reduction-targets/>

⁵⁰ Corbell (2013) *ACT sets 90% renewable energy target in law*, http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/corbell/2013/act-sets-90-renewable-energy-target-in-law7

⁵¹ ABC News (2015) *Canberra to run on 100pc renewable energy by 2025*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-22/canberra-to-run-on-100pc-renewable-energy-by-2025/6716336>

⁵² Jacobs (2017) *Review of Next Generation Renewables Auction and the Electricity Feed-in (Large-scale Renewable Energy Generation) Act 2011*, <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/energy/cleaner-energy/next-generation-renewables>

⁵³ Evans (2019) *Canberra will be 'effectively' run on 100 per cent renewable energy from October*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-17/canberra-to-run-on-100-per-cent-renewables-from-october-1/11121676>

Rationale

The ACT Government is pursuing renewable energy to act on climate change. The ambitious 100% renewable energy target allows the ACT to lead the country.⁵⁴

The target also creates jobs and provides local economic benefits; it should also reduce price volatility for electricity customers.⁵⁵

The renewable energy target is not expensive. The Government estimates that the overall cost of the policy peaks in 2020 at an average of \$255 per household, before falling – and becoming a net earner for the territory by 2026.⁵⁶ Consultants Jacobs arrive at a lower overall cost of \$114 per household in the peak year because they predict that National Electricity Market prices will be higher.⁵⁷ The Government's Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme goes some way to mitigating the additional cost.⁵⁸

Implementation

Multiple instruments support the target.⁵⁹

- “Reverse auctions” for large-scale renewable power (76%)
- Rooftop solar (3%), including home and small business batteries
- Purchases by Canberra homes and businesses from the states' GreenPower scheme (1%)
- The federal government's Renewable Energy Target (20%)

Of these, the reverse auction system warrants particular interest.

⁵⁴ ACT Government (n.d.) *Canberra 100% Renewable - leading innovation*

⁵⁵ ACT Government (n.d.) *Canberra 100% Renewable - leading innovation*

⁵⁶ Revised down from the original figure of \$290 per household by 2020: Burgess (2018) *The cost on your power bill of the ACT's switch to renewable energy*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/politics/act/the-cost-on-your-power-bill-of-the-act-s-switch-to-renewable-energy-20181130-p50jdg.html>; Lawson (2016) *ACT commits to 100 per cent renewable energy target by 2020: Simon Corbell*

⁵⁷ Jacobs (2017) *Review of Next Generation Renewables Auction and the Electricity Feed-in (Large-scale Renewable Energy Generation) Act 2011*

⁵⁸ Stock, Bourne, Stock, & Climate Council of Australia (2016) *Territory trailblazer: how the ACT became the renewable capital of Australia*

⁵⁹ Lawson (2016) *ACT commits to 100 per cent renewable energy target by 2020: Simon Corbell*; Stock et al. (2016) *Territory trailblazer: how the ACT became the renewable capital of Australia*

Reverse auctions

The ACT Government's reverse auction system of commissioning large-scale renewable energy has been in place since the large-scale feed-in tariff system was legislated in 2011. They held the first auction, for three solar farms, in 2012.

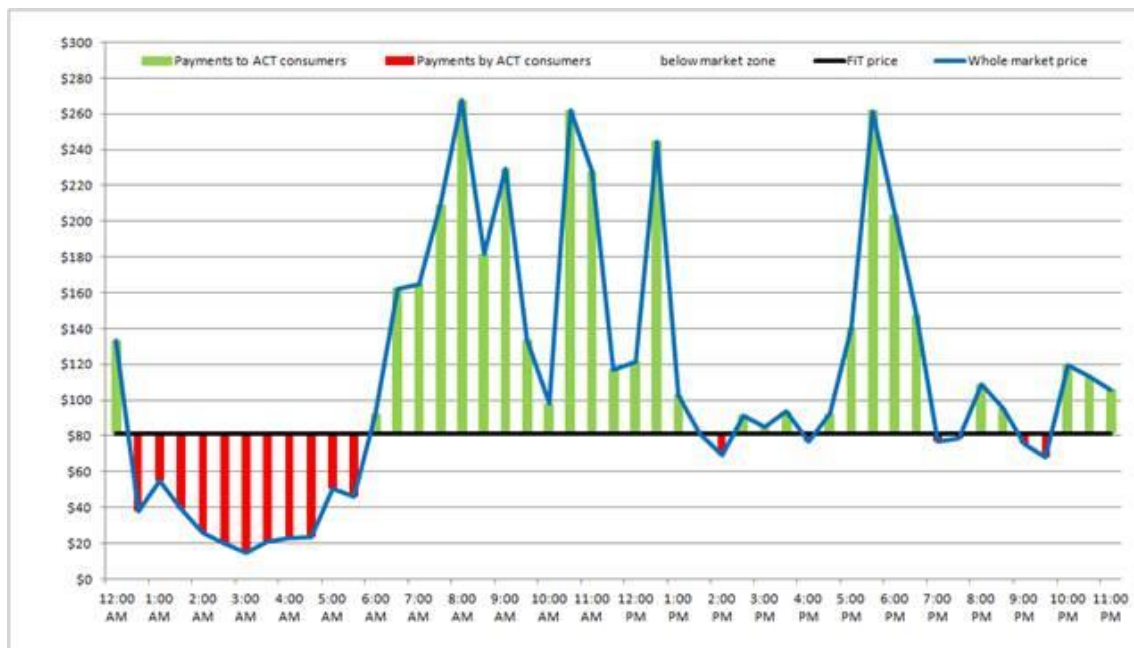
In the reverse auctions, companies offer to generate renewable electricity at a certain "feed-in tariff" price per megawatt hour (MW h). This price is compared to four other factors – risks, community engagement, economic benefits to the ACT and reliance on a Treasury Financial Guarantee – to determine which projects are best value for money.⁶⁰

In practice, the projects sell into the National Electricity Market and distributors pay the wholesale market rate for that electricity. However, a "contract for difference" arrangement with the territory's electricity distributor then applies. The distributor tops up any gap in the market price and the agreed tariff if the wholesale price is lower – but it receives the gap if the wholesale price is higher.

This is shown in Figure 4, where the blue line shows the market price for electricity (which fluctuates) and the black line shows the agreed feed-in tariff (\$81.50/MW h). ACT consumers always pay \$81.50. When the market price is lower than \$81.50/MW h, ACT consumers top it up. But when the market price is higher than \$81.50/MW h, the power plant pays back the difference to ACT consumers.

⁶⁰ ACT Government (n.d.) *Canberra 100% Renewable - leading innovation*; Jacobs (2017) *Review of Next Generation Renewables Auction and the Electricity Feed-in (Large-scale Renewable Energy Generation) Act 2011*

Figure 4: Feed-in tariff diagram



Source: ACT Government (2018) *How do the ACT's renewable energy reverse auctions work?*, <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/energy/cleaner-energy/how-do-the-acts-renewable-energy-reverse-auctions-work>

The ACT often receives a payment from participating projects. In the April to June 2017 quarter, the ACT came close to receiving a net overall payment: half of its projects received payments and half made them, for a net cost to the ACT of just \$0.1 million.

Table 3: April to June 2017 feed-in tariff payments by project

	Electricity supplied (MWh)	FiT support payment paid
Mugga Lane	5,401.15	\$455,805.79
Royalla	8,089.55	\$743,399.85
Williamsdale	2,605.64	\$237,818.44
Hornsedale Wind Farm	70,094.29	(\$638,710.00)
Ararat Wind Farm	26,030.40	(\$328,894.09)
Coonooer Bridge Wind Farm	14,354.27	(\$345,592.86)
Total	126,575.30	\$123,827.13

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Note: FiT stands for "feed-in tariff".

Source: ACT Government (2017) *April to June 2017*, <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/energy/cleaner-energy/renewable-energy-target-legislation-reporting/act-large-scale-feed-in-tariff-cost-data/april-to-june-2017>

This guarantees that the ACT pays exactly what it has contracted for its electricity.

In addition, the feed-in tariff is fixed for 20 years (not indexed for inflation). That means that as inflation increases electricity prices, the ACT will be paying relatively less for its electricity. On the other hand, the fixed price means that if electricity prices fall dramatically in the next two decades, the ACT could end up paying more than it otherwise would have.

The legislation creating the federal Renewable Energy Target subsumes state renewable energy targets that “substantially correspond” to the federal target (e.g. by also using tradeable certificates). The legislation’s explanatory memorandum specifically mentions the Victorian RET as such a corresponding scheme, making it impossible to revive the Victorian RET in its original form. By contrast, the ACT scheme *is* compatible with the federal RET because it operates through a feed-in tariff that commits taxpayer funds.⁶¹

OUTCOMES

Several benefits of the 100% renewables target have been identified:

- Securing \$500 million in local investment/local economic benefits for Canberra⁶²
- Scaling up the program in 2016 allowed the Government to take advantage of low prices during the 2014–2016 national drop in renewables investment; the ACT was “the only game in town” during those years⁶³ - in 2015, the only wind projects under construction were because of the ACT’s policy⁶⁴
- 510 people are employed in renewable energy in Canberra⁶⁵
- Canberra acknowledged as the Renewable Capital of Australia by the Climate Council⁶⁶

⁶¹ Kallies & McConnell (2015) *Here’s how the states can dodge Canberra’s renewable roadblock*, <http://theconversation.com/heres-how-the-states-can-dodge-canberras-renewable-roadblock-42043>

⁶² ACT Government (n.d.) *Canberra 100% Renewable - leading innovation*; Lawson (2016) *ACT commits to 100 per cent renewable energy target by 2020: Simon Corbell*

⁶³ Baldwin (2016) *Why is the ACT bringing forward its 100 per cent renewable electricity target to 2020?*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/opinion/why-is-the-act-bringing-forward-its-100-per-cent-renewable-electricity-target-to-2020-20160502-gok8ms.html>; Lawson (2016) *ACT commits to 100 per cent renewable energy target by 2020: Simon Corbell*

⁶⁴ Stock et al. (2016) *Territory trailblazer: how the ACT became the renewable capital of Australia*

⁶⁵ White (2016) *A clean energy transition is already happening, but it is at risk* | Alexander White, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/southern-crossroads/2016/oct/11/clean-energy-transition-happening-act-at-risk>

⁶⁶ Stock et al. (2016) *Territory trailblazer: how the ACT became the renewable capital of Australia*

- A three million tonne reduction in emissions in 2020⁶⁷

Although the Canberra Liberals supported the target, then Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce described the target as “completely insane”. Climate Change Minister Shane Rattenbury pointed out that the ACT’s target had built a wind farm in Joyce’s electorate of New England.⁶⁸

The ACT’s target and its implementation legislation were reviewed in 2017 by professional services firm Jacobs, which found that the legislation had achieved its objectives, the target had stimulated wind and solar projects, the ACT’s greenhouse gas emissions had been reduced, value for money had mostly been achieved and that the auction was administered efficiently and effectively. Jacobs did make several points about the scheme, at least two of which should be considered by other jurisdictions.⁶⁹

- Projects may “surrender” their entitlement to the feed-in tariff, and refinance so that they sell in the wholesale market without the contracts for difference. This would leave the ACT to source new renewable energy projects, potentially at higher prices. The ACT Government is considering amending the legislation to give it time to source alternative renewable energy supplies if needed.
- The ACT has committed to “surrender” its certificates instead of on selling them in the federal Renewable Energy Target scheme. However, the legislation does not compel this – and the government continues to hold the certificates in case Commonwealth policy or other matters change.

IMPLEMENTATION IN OTHER STATES AND TERRITORIES

The value of the ACT as a laboratory of democracy is obvious from the take up of the reverse auction policy mechanism in other jurisdictions. It has already been mentioned that the original Victorian RET was incompatible with the federal RET, while the ACT system of feed-in tariffs was compatible.

⁶⁷ Stock et al. (2016) *Territory trailblazer: how the ACT became the renewable capital of Australia*

⁶⁸ Trask (2017) “It’s crazy”: Barnaby Joyce rubbishes ACT’s renewable energy target, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/its-crazy-barnaby-joyce-rubbishes-acts-renewable-energy-target-20170328-gv7rvq.html>

⁶⁹ ACT Government (2017) *Government Response to Next Generation Renewables (NGR) Auction and Large Feed-in Tariff Act Review Recommendations*, <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/energy/cleaner-energy/next-generation-renewables>; Jacobs (2017) *Review of Next Generation Renewables Auction and the Electricity Feed-in (Large-scale Renewable Energy Generation) Act 2011*,

States looking to implement state-based RETs have therefore looked at the ACT model, with the Climate Council identifying projects from Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales that use the ACT's reverse auction process, including the tender for the Sydney Metro Northwest rail project's renewable power.⁷⁰

Victoria has based its new Victorian Renewable Energy Auction Scheme (VREAS) on the ACT model. The Victorian target is 25% renewable by 2020 and 40% by 2025. VREAS has contracted for 669 MW of renewables under its first reverse auction tranche, with a total capital investment of \$1.2 billion. This is 6.2% of Victoria's current generation⁷¹ – and the largest renewable energy auction in Australia to date.⁷² The scheme is a hybrid, paying a combination of a contracts-for-difference payment and a fixed base amount.⁷³

Queensland's Renewables 400 reverse auction (under its Powering Queensland Plan) also draws heavily on the ACT model to contract for up to 400 MW of renewable energy capacity, including 100 MW of storage.⁷⁴ Its earlier Solar 120 program followed the same model.⁷⁵

POLLING

There was majority support for 100% renewable energy in every state and among voters for each political party.

⁷⁰ Stock et al. (2016) *Territory trailblazer: how the ACT became the renewable capital of Australia*

⁷¹ Victorian Government (2018) *VRET auction benefits*, https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/391159/VRET-Auction-fact-sheet.pdf

⁷² Valley (2017) *All eyes on energy auction*, <http://www.bendigoadvertiser.com.au/story/5013803/all-eyes-on-energy-auction/>

⁷³ Victorian Government (2017) *Victorian Renewable Energy Targets (VRET) 2017 Reverse Auction Questions and Answers*, https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/89254/VRET-2017-Reverse-Auction-Q-and-As.pdf

⁷⁴ Moore (2018) *Major parties clash over Queensland's renewable energy funding*, <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/major-parties-clash-over-queensland-s-renewable-energy-funding-20180720-p4zsqp.html>; Queensland Government (2017) *Renewables 400*, <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/energy/renewable/projects-queensland/renewables-400>

⁷⁵ Stock et al. (2016) *Territory trailblazer: how the ACT became the renewable capital of Australia*

Table 4: 100% renewable energy

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>WA</i>
Total support	78%	75%	80%	75%	78%	79%	83%
Total oppose	14%	18%	10%	16%	16%	11%	7%
Strongly support	39%	35%	42%	38%	39%	41%	43%
Support	39%	40%	38%	37%	39%	38%	40%
Oppose	8%	11%	6%	8%	9%	7%	7%
Strongly oppose	5%	7%	4%	8%	7%	4%	0%
Don't know / not sure	9%	7%	11%	9%	6%	10%	10%

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Table 5: 100% renewable energy

	<i>Total</i>	<i>LNP</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Undec</i>
Total support	78%	66%	85%	85%	68%	82%	77%
Total oppose	14%	25%	6%	6%	20%	13%	7%
Strongly support	39%	25%	46%	46%	27%	40%	36%
Support	39%	41%	40%	40%	41%	42%	41%
Oppose	8%	15%	5%	5%	8%	7%	5%
Strongly oppose	5%	10%	1%	1%	11%	6%	2%
Don't know / not sure	9%	9%	9%	9%	12%	5%	16%

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The Australia Institute conducted a national survey of 1,459 people 26 October and 6 November 2018, online through Research Now, with nationally representative samples by gender, age and state and territory.

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the lower house. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs, but results are also shown separately for undecideds. "LNP" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" includes Centre Alliance, United Australia Party and Independent/Other.

Polling done previously by The Australia Institute shows enduring strong support for the policy, from both ACT residents and people across Australia:

- In Reachtel polling conducted in the ACT in late 2015:⁷⁶
 - 78% of respondents supported the 100% by 2025 target and only 10% opposed it

⁷⁶ Swann (2016) *Clean Energy Capital: Public support for ACT clean energy leadership*, <http://www.tai.org.au/content/clean-energy-capital-public-support-act-clean-energy-leadership>

- 73% of respondents were prepared to pay more for electricity to achieve the target, including 49% who were prepared to pay \$10 or more per week extra
- In Research Now polling conducted across Australia in late 2015:⁷⁷
 - When told about the ACT's target, 72% of Australians supported a similar policy in their own state, including 37% who strongly supported it.
 - State-level results show that 71% of Victorians, 72% of NSW, Queensland and SA residents and 78% of WA residents supported a similar policy in their own states
- Support for renewable energy is enduring.
 - Research Now polling conducted across Australia in early 2016 showed 76% of Australians supported an increased renewable energy target in their own state, including 36% who strongly supported it⁷⁸
 - Research Now polling conducted across Australia in early 2017 showed almost identical levels of support, with 77% support and 35% strong support for increased state renewable energy targets⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Swann (2016) *Clean Energy Capital: Public support for ACT clean energy leadership*,

⁷⁸ The Australia Institute (2016) *Massive support for renewable energy targets*,
<http://www.tai.org.au/content/massive-support-renewable-energy-targets>

⁷⁹ The Australia Institute (2017) *Polling brief - Renewable energy*,
<http://www.tai.org.au/sites/default/files/Polling%20Brief%20-%20March%202017%20-%20Renewables.pdf>

Billboard ban

In October 2018, Prime Minister Scott Morrison described the Sydney Opera House as “the biggest billboard Sydney has”.⁸⁰ The comment attracted outrage from Australians who considered that the heritage-listed building had a value beyond the size of the advertisements it can display.

The stoush is particularly significant given that the ACT offers an alternative way forward: ban billboards altogether.

POLICY

Some form of outdoor advertising ban has existed in the ACT since 1937, pre-dating self-government by 50 years. The current legislation bans most third-party signs larger than two metres square. Separately, the National Capital Plan forbids roadside signs in parts of Canberra.

Rationale

Because the billboard ban pre-dates self-government and is broadly popular, the policy has continued without needing to be defended or justified by the ACT Government.

However, in the 2017 the Legislative Assembly held an inquiry into the ban, which heard arguments for and against the policy. Canberra residents arguing for the ban gave several reasons, including:⁸¹

- billboards are an inefficient way of raising revenue or providing infrastructure
- billboards reduce the character and amenity of the ACT
- billboards distract drivers, reducing road safety
- billboards have negative economic effects on real estate and tourism.

⁸⁰ Khalik (2018) *Morrison says Opera House is “the biggest billboard Sydney has,”*
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-07/pm-says-sydney-opera-house-biggest-billboard-sydney-has/10348398>

⁸¹ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*,
<https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/in-committees/standing-committees-current-assembly/standing-committee-on-planning-and-urban-renewal/inquiry-into-billboards>

Following the inquiry, the ACT Government announced a review into the billboard regulations but said it was doing so to make the rules clearer and that there is “no appetite” from the ACT Government “for Canberra to become Times Square”.⁸²

Implementation

The ACT’s billboard ban dates back to *An ordinance relating to roads and other public places No. 24 of 1937*, which forbade people – without permission – from putting advertisements on Commonwealth property that was in or adjoining a public place.⁸³

Although the ordinance was converted into legislation in 1989 and subsequently replaced by the *Public Unleased Lands Act 2013*, it remains relevant to national land because of the *National land ordinance 1989*.

The *Signs General Code 2008* (ACT) is the document that regulates ACT signs outside of the areas controlled by the National Capital Authority. Although it does not explicitly use the term “billboard”, third-party erected signs must be no more than two metres square and must be in commercial and industrial zones only, on the ground floor only.⁸⁴ “Third-party” signs are those advertising goods and services not sold on the premises or companies that do not own the land where the sign is.

At the federal level, the National Capital Plan forbids commercial roadside signs in designated areas of special significance to the capital. The plan is a legislative instrument that arises from Commonwealth legislation.⁸⁵

There are some exceptions to the prohibition:⁸⁶

- The National Capital Plan was amended recently to permit commercial signs on bus shelters.
- Mobile billboards are permitted because they are mobile, although they are covered by their own code of practice
- Bus wrap-arounds are not regulated

⁸² ACT Government (2018) *Billboard rules to be reviewed for ACT*, https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/gentlem/2018/billboard-rules-to-be-reviewed-for-act

⁸³ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*

⁸⁴ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*

⁸⁵ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*

⁸⁶ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*; Fettes (2017) *Why does Canberra have so few billboards?*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/curious-canberra/2017-06-19/why-doesnt-canberra-have-billboard-advertising/8622186>

- Signs on private land – like the electronic sign on the Convention Centre and the multi-storey signage on the Canberra Centre – are permitted (under development applications)
- The Federal Government in 2000 gave Canberra Airport the right to erect billboards after privatisation

The code covers static signs and does not cover digital or “evolving media”.⁸⁷

OUTCOMES

The billboard ban is widely popular in Canberra.

When the government floated the idea of changing or winding back billboard restrictions, a community campaign – including #KeepCbrNude nude protests – pushed back strongly.⁸⁸ The *Canberra Times* issued an editorial that said that the ACT Government needed to act on “the community’s desire to close existing loopholes to ensure Canberra remains beautiful and billboard free”.⁸⁹

Polling conducted of Canberra residents by Lonergan Research found that:⁹⁰

- 69% agreed that “outdoor advertising reduce[s] the quality of public spaces”,
- 78% agreed that Canberra’s “advertising-free environment [makes] it a more pleasant place to live” and
- almost half (48%) said there should be less public space available for advertising, compared to 42% who said it should stay the same and just 9% who said it should increase.

When a Legislative Assembly committee investigated this topic, only six of the 166 submissions supported billboards. There were also significant numbers of signatures on petitions opposing billboards.

Billboards have safety implications, as they can prove distracting to drivers.⁹¹ As campaigner and public finance academic Ian McAuley notes, the cost of outdoor

⁸⁷ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*,

⁸⁸ Baker (2018) *Canberra billboard ban: New polling shows disapproval for relaxing of laws*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/canberra-billboard-ban-new-polling-shows-disapproval-for-relaxing-of-laws-20180218-h0w9ma.html>

⁸⁹ The Canberra Times (2018) *Canberra’s billboard ban has strong community support*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/canberras-billboard-ban-has-strong-community-support-20180219-h0wbor.html>

⁹⁰ Baker (2018) *Canberra billboard ban: New polling shows disapproval for relaxing of laws*,

⁹¹ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*,

advertising is ultimately passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices. Billboards also send a message: “this is no longer your space, this is a commercial space”.⁹²

The billboard ban is not a comprehensive ban on outdoor advertising – some of which is as unpopular or anti-social as billboards.

The ban does not cover in-situ signage, e.g. first- or second-party advertising – although it can be as intrusive as billboards. The Outdoor Media Association found that across Australia complaints about visual pollution “usually” referred to first-party signs, not billboards.⁹³

The website “Awfulising Canberra” records signs that breach the spirit of the billboard ban, even if they comply with the letter of the law.⁹⁴

In 2014, the *Canberra Times* reported that the Canberra Centre had first- and second-party signs that were outside of the ACT planning rules.⁹⁵

MLA Caroline Le Couteur made recommendations that went beyond the consensus decision of the committee, to scale back advertising given broad community opposition to public space advertising.⁹⁶

IMPLEMENTATION IN OTHER STATES AND TERRITORIES

The global trend is for public space advertising to be wound back, with four US states and 1,500 towns and cities banning billboards; two other states ban “new” billboards. There are Brazilian and Indian cities that ban billboards.⁹⁷

Relying on advertising licensing to raise state revenue or build public infrastructure is extremely inefficient. Using figures from the Outdoor Media Association, Ian McAuley calculates that the administration cost of such a benefit is about 40%.⁹⁸ States would

⁹² Fettes (2017) *ACT’s no-billboard policy may need shake-up, Chief Minister says*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-25/billboard-policy-shake-up-in-canberra/8210290>

⁹³ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*,

⁹⁴ McAuley (n.d.) *Awfulising Canberra*, <http://www.ianmcauley.com/cras/cras.html>

⁹⁵ Mannheim (2014) *Canberra Centre’s huge ads “unlawful” but no one checked*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/canberra-centres-huge-ads-unlawful-but-no-one-checked-20140717-ztz4p.html>

⁹⁶ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*

⁹⁷ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*

⁹⁸ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*

be better off collecting the revenue to fund public services through conventional taxes than doing it obliquely through advertising licensing.

Australia's states and territories have a variety of signage regulation, but none bans billboards or other large outdoor advertising in the same way that the ACT does.⁹⁹ There is also interest in reform at the federal level, with a House of Representatives committee in 2011 looking at the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising.¹⁰⁰

Other states should adopt the ACT's billboard ban, although they should also take into consideration the 2016 committee inquiry and its recommendations for simple and clear regulation. Other states and territories will not have the additional complication of navigating the National Capital Authority–ACT Government power divide.

POLLING

A ban on outdoor billboard advertising was the only ACT policy that did not attract majority support in our recent poll. 30% supported and 46% opposed a billboard ban, with a large share (24%) that didn't know or were not sure.

This is somewhat surprising since ACT-specific polling on this and related issues conducted last year show majority support. Further polling could delve into the nature of the objection and see whether related positions (like scaling back all outdoor advertising, but not banning a specific type of advertising) are more popular.

Table 6: A ban on outdoor billboard advertising

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>WA</i>
Total support	30%	33%	28%	28%	30%	33%	28%
Total oppose	46%	48%	45%	47%	54%	43%	44%
Strongly support	9%	10%	8%	8%	8%	10%	9%
Support	21%	23%	20%	20%	22%	23%	19%
Oppose	37%	38%	36%	38%	41%	35%	39%
Strongly oppose	9%	10%	9%	9%	13%	8%	5%
Don't know / not sure	24%	20%	27%	25%	16%	24%	29%

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⁹⁹ ACT Legislative Assembly (2017) *Report 2 - Inquiry into Billboards*

¹⁰⁰ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs (n.d.) *Reclaiming public spaces*,

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=spla/outdoor%20advertising/report.htm

Table 7: A ban on outdoor billboard advertising

	<i>Total</i>	<i>LNP</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Undec</i>
Total support	30%	32%	27%	27%	30%	33%	24%
Total oppose	46%	51%	46%	46%	48%	47%	42%
Strongly support	9%	8%	8%	8%	8%	10%	6%
Support	21%	23%	19%	19%	22%	23%	18%
Oppose	37%	39%	38%	38%	35%	36%	35%
Strongly oppose	9%	11%	8%	8%	12%	11%	7%
Don't know / not sure	24%	18%	27%	27%	22%	21%	34%



The Australia Institute conducted a national survey of 1,459 people 26 October and 6 November 2018, online through Research Now, with nationally representative samples by gender, age and state and territory.

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the lower house. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs, but results are also shown separately for undecideds. “LNP” includes separate responses for Liberal and National. “Other” includes Centre Alliance, United Australia Party and Independent/Other.

Pill testing

POLICY

Pill testing (also called drug testing since it includes powders and other substances) is a service where a person can ask to have the contents of illicit drugs analysed.

Rationale

Although illicit drugs are inherently unsafe, they are more dangerous if the drug user does not know what is in the drugs they take – either because a drug was adulterated with other substances or because a more dangerous drug has been sold as a less dangerous drug. The ACT Government uses pill testing to help drug users make a more informed choice about whether to take illicit drugs.¹⁰¹

Pill testing facilities are common in Europe, the Americas and New Zealand.¹⁰²

Implementation

The first Australian trial occurred at the Canberra Groovin' the Moo music festival in April 2018,¹⁰³ conducted by STA-SAFE, a consortium of harm reduction groups.¹⁰⁴ The estimated delivery cost per festival is \$34,000.¹⁰⁵ The trial did not require legislation.¹⁰⁶

The entrance to the pill-testing tent was via the general health tent, meaning that those planning to use the pill testing service are indistinguishable from those planning to use general health services. A security guard was present, which some patrons

¹⁰¹ ACT Government (2018) *Pill Testing*, <https://www.health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/population-health/pill-testing>

¹⁰² ACT Government (2018) *Pill Testing*

¹⁰³ ACT Government (2018) *Pill Testing*

¹⁰⁴ STA-SAFE is comprised of Harm Reduction Australia, the ANU's Australian Drug Observatory, the Noffs Foundation, DanceWize (Harm Reduction Victoria) and Students for Sensible Drug Policy Australia.

¹⁰⁵ For this trial, \$15,500 of that cost was provided pro bono: Harm Reduction Australia (2018) *Report on the Pill Testing Pilot - ACT June 2018*, <https://www.harmreductionaustralia.org.au/3780-2/>

¹⁰⁶ Scott (2018) *Australia gets first-ever festival pill-testing trial*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-26/pill-testing-trial-approved-for-groovin-the-moo-in-canberra/9700720>

found off putting. Staff were not allowed to test “trafficable” quantities of drugs, but no person presented such quantities.¹⁰⁷

A patron presented to the service staff and identified the substances they believed were in the drug. The service staff tested a sample and reported the results to the patron – along with information about the potential risks of consuming whichever substances the test found.¹⁰⁸ The test was anonymous, but patrons provided some general information about their drug use to help formulate policy.¹⁰⁹ Patrons could choose to wear a wristband with the ID number of their sample – so if they had a medical episode, responders could check the test result to help with treatment.¹¹⁰

There was also a notice board where staff posted some results, including cases where substances differed from what the patron expected or where the substance found is known to have an increased risk of harm or death.¹¹¹

The policy is based on the principle of harm reduction and does not endorse or encourage drug use. Patrons signed a waiver before the test “stating that there is no safe level of drug use and if prospective users do not want to put themselves at risk they should not consume illicit drugs”.¹¹² The drug test creates a space for a conversation – with the medical professionals conducting the testing or with peers – about the risks of drug use.

ACT Policing announced their support for the process and said they would not target the pill-testing facilities.¹¹³

Festivals held in the ACT on Commonwealth land also require approval from the National Capital Authority,¹¹⁴ which prevented the implementation of pill testing at the

¹⁰⁷ Harm Reduction Australia (2018) *Report on the Pill Testing Pilot - ACT June 2018*

¹⁰⁸ ACT Government (2018) *Pill Testing*

¹⁰⁹ Scott (2018) *Australia gets first-ever festival pill-testing trial*

¹¹⁰ Harm Reduction Australia (2018) *Report on the Pill Testing Pilot - ACT June 2018*

¹¹¹ Harm Reduction Australia (2018) *Report on the Pill Testing Pilot - ACT June 2018*

¹¹² Long (2018) *There’s a hidden benefit to pill testing at festivals*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-20/pill-testing-splendour-in-the-grass/10008522>

¹¹³ Hayne (2018) *“Pill popping centre of Australia”: Chief Minister uninterested in trial as Opposition launches attack*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-27/groovin-the-moo-canberra-pill-testing-attacked-by-opposition/9702834>

¹¹⁴ Scott (2018) *Australia gets first-ever festival pill-testing trial*

Spilt Milk festival.¹¹⁵ Hundreds of ACT residents rallied against the federal government's decision to block testing at Spilt Milk.¹¹⁶

The trial in 2019 had two chemical detection machines, twice as many as the first trial. It also represented the first use of a gas chromatography–mass spectrometry machine in pill testing, which was reserved for chemicals that the chemical detection machines could not pick up. This was the last pill testing trial in the ACT to be funded by Pill Testing Australia; if it is to continue, it will have to be funded by government, festival organisers or private donors.¹¹⁷

OUTCOMES

During the initial pill testing trial at Groovin' the Moo, 128 people consulted with the medical tent crew and 85 substances were tested (in some cases a group would arrive to test a single "substance") with promising results:¹¹⁸

- None of the 86 people who were treated by first-aid workers were wearing the armbands that indicated that they had made use of the pill testing
- 58% of those who had drugs tested said they would use the drugs "as planned"; the remainder planned to use less (7%), use a different drug instead (5%), not use the drugs (18%) or were undecided (7%). Even among those whose drugs were found to be high purity, 12% said they would not use them
- Testing found two highly toxic chemicals, including the stimulant n-ethylpentalone, which had been sold as "meth". This was the first time that n-ethylpentalone was identified in the ACT by medical professionals,¹¹⁹ and the testing meant that medical professionals could be alerted to its presence

¹¹⁵ Scott & Hayne (2018) *Pill testing could be held outside Spilt Milk festival, ACT Government says*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-19/pill-testing-act-government-blocked-nca-spilt-milk/10281070>

¹¹⁶ Burgess (2018) *Garema Place rally to urge Commonwealth to reconsider pill testing*, <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/politics/act/garema-place-rally-to-urge-commonwealth-to-reconsider-pill-testing-20181001-p5074f.html>

¹¹⁷ Medhora and Evans (2019) *Take a look inside Groovin the Moo's pill-testing facility*, <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/look-behind-the-scenes-of-canberra-groovin-the-moo-pill-testing/11051862>

¹¹⁸ Harm Reduction Australia (2018) *Report on the Pill Testing Pilot - ACT June 2018*; Healy & Sibthorpe (2018) *Arnica, metal paint and Polish toothpaste: Festival pill test comes back with all sorts*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-30/groovin-the-moo-pill-testing-finds-lethal-product/9710112>; Long (2018) *There's a hidden benefit to pill testing at festivals*

¹¹⁹ It had previously been found in drugs seized by law enforcement. Harm Reduction Australia (2018) *Report on the Pill Testing Pilot - ACT June 2018*

immediately – aiding in identification if an overdose case presented (although none did in this instance)

- There was an increase in drug disposal, with five people using the bin in the medical tent and 10–20% saying they were considering disposing of their drugs
- Toby Keene of ACT Ambulances said: "other than possibly an increase in the amount of illicit substances discarded, there is no evidence of decreased presentations to site health services ... though security reported a number of pill bags discarded on site. This is unusual in my experience and likely attributable to the pill testing."
- The "dud" rate (pills containing no psychoactive substances) in the ACT was about 50%, much higher than the global rate of about 20%

After the successful testing in 2018, the process was repeated at Groovin' the Moo in 2019. While a full report is not yet available, early media reporting found that 234 people consulted with the tent, testing 171 substances – double the 85 substances tested in 2018. Seven people submitted pills that testing revealed contained the highly toxic substance n-ethylpentalone; at least six of the seven subsequently chose to dump their pills. 86% of substances tested were "high purity" ecstasy or MDMA, which led many to say they would take less or none of the substance.¹²⁰

Dr David Caldicott, a clinical lecturer and emergency consultant at the ACT's Calvary Hospital, says that the discovering that they have adulterated or misidentified drugs can change drug-users' attitudes to drugs in two ways: "The idea that what they're taking could kill them and the idea that they've been ripped off".¹²¹

The policy has broad support, including from the Australian Medical Association, the ACT Chief Ambulance Officer Howard Wren, former Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Palmer, the ACT Government, the Uniting Church and parents of children who died from drug overdoses.¹²²

¹²⁰ Lyons (2019) *'It's just assumed it's 100%': The toxicology of pill testing*, <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/clinical/%E2%80%98just-assumed-it%E2%80%99s-100-%E2%80%99-the-toxicology-of-pi>; Lowrey (2019) *Second pill-testing trial at Groovin the Moo hailed a success as partygoers dump dangerous drugs*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-29/pill-testing-trial-at-groovin-the-moo-for-second-time/11053350>; Brown (2019) *Lethal substances identified in second pill testing trial at Groovin the Moo*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6094009/lethal-substances-identified-in-second-pill-testing-trial/>

¹²¹ Long (2018) *There's a hidden benefit to pill testing at festivals*

¹²² Hansford (2018) *We need to talk about drugs in a radically different way*, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/we-need-to-talk-about-drugs-in-a-radically-different-way-20180917-p504b0.html>; Hayne (2018) *"Pill popping centre of Australia": Chief Minister uninterested in trial as Opposition launches attack*; Long (2018) *There's a hidden benefit to pill testing*

The Liberal Opposition in the ACT and Liberal Senator Zed Seselja oppose the policy.¹²³

Thanks to pill testing policies in other countries going back to the 1990s, the viability of the policy is well established.¹²⁴

- Studies in the UK show that test results affect the consumption choices of over half of drug-possessors and one in five users discard drugs after receiving the pill test results
- German and Swiss research shows that the introduction of pill testing led to a change in the market where pills were increasingly described accurately and were less likely to contain contaminants

Toxicologists Andrew Leibie and John Lewis have raised several concerns about onsite pill testing, including that:¹²⁵

- participants may wrongly assume the process is 100% accurate
- participants may be intoxicated when they participate
- the machines may not be able to identify drugs in poly-drug mixes
- the machines may not pick up newer synthesised drug varieties
- testing does not reveal the dose
- there is no safe dose for illicit drugs
- off-site testing is significantly more accurate (but takes several days).

at festivals; Nunn (2018) *"My son made a mistake and it killed him. Here's how we can save others,"* <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-12/defqon1-gladys-berejiklian-adriana-bucciantis-pill-testing-drugs/10487998>; Scott (2018) *Former top cop calls on Groovin the Moo to allow pill testing*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-29/former-top-cop-calls-on-groovin-the-moo-to-allow-pill-testing/9598642>

¹²³ Hayne (2018) *"Pill popping centre of Australia": Chief Minister uninterested in trial as Opposition launches attack*; Scott & Hayne (2018) *Pill testing could be held outside Spilt Milk festival, ACT Government says*

¹²⁴ Harm Reduction Australia (2018) *Report on the Pill Testing Pilot - ACT June 2018*; Long (2018) *There's a hidden benefit to pill testing at festivals*

¹²⁵ Parliamentary Library (2018) *The pros and cons of pill testing*, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2018/May/The_pros_and_cons_of_pill_testing; Lyons (2019) *'It's just assumed it's 100%': The toxicology of pill testing*, <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/clinical/%E2%80%98it%E2%80%99s-just-assumed-it%E2%80%99s-100-%E2%80%99-the-toxicology-of-pi>

IMPLEMENTATION IN OTHER STATES AND TERRITORIES

Harm minimisation has been the underpinning objective of Australia's National Drug Strategy since it was introduced in 1985.¹²⁶ It follows that harm minimisation measures like pill testing are compatible with Australia's philosophy towards illicit drugs.

After the successful pill testing trial in 2018, trial conductors STA-SAFE recommended that other states and territories consult with the ACT on how to introduce their own pill testing services and that the federal government advance "a mixed-model approach to pill testing". There are also opportunities to establish a national pill testing evaluation framework and a public early warning system of all drug test results.¹²⁷

NSW led in opening a safe injecting room in 2001, something that required "an extraordinary amount of courage by a few individuals [including then Labor Premier Bob Carr] in the face of pretty withering opposition".¹²⁸

More recently, the state has attracted negative attention for drug overdose deaths at the Defqon.1 festival, prompting a threat from the NSW Coalition Government to "do everything we can" to shut the festival down and an offer from ACT Greens Minister Shane Rattenbury that the festival could come to Canberra.¹²⁹

Coalition ministers, including Premier Gladys Berejiklian, have consistently opposed pill testing, with Deputy Premier John Barilaro saying that "parenting can't be outsourced to a pill tester".¹³⁰ NSW Labor Opposition Leader Michael Daley says pill testing should be on the table, following support from shadow ministers Walt Secord and Adam Searle in 2018.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Australian Government Department of Health (2017) *National Drug Strategy 2017-2026*, <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ministerial-drug-alcohol-forum>

¹²⁷ Harm Reduction Australia (2018) *Report on the Pill Testing Pilot - ACT June 2018*

¹²⁸ Deakin University (2017) *Why pill testing has never been trialled in Australia*, <http://this.deakin.edu.au/society/why-pill-testing-has-never-been-trialled-in-australia>

¹²⁹ An offer that Chief Minister Barr did not repeat: Graham (2018) *Defqon. 1: Drug deaths spark plan to poach festival*, <https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/music/music-festivals/push-to-relocate-defqon-1-to-canberra-after-drug-deaths/news-story/ed68af15c2c7c4bf2ed0241e076acf33>

¹³⁰ Barilaro (2019) *Why parenting can't be outsourced to a pill tester*, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/why-parenting-can-t-be-outsourced-to-a-pill-tester-20190103-p50pck.html>

¹³¹ Rawsthorne (2018) *"Pill testing should not be off the table": NSW Labor leader*, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/pill-testing-should-not-be-off-the-table-nsw-labor-leader-20181230-p50otc.html>

The NSW Government could continue the leadership that it showed in 2001 by bringing in pill testing at music festivals.

Victoria opened a supervised injecting room in Richmond in 2018. In a three-month period, 140 people were treated for overdoses – leading the Victorian Government to declare the centre a success. The Coalition Opposition declared that it would shut down the injecting room if it won the 2018 state election.¹³² With the Labor Party being re-elected with an increased majority, the Victorian Government has an opportunity to adopt further harm minimisation measures like pill testing.

At the federal level, Labor backbencher Lisa Singh and Liberal backbencher Warren Entsch support more pill testing.¹³³ The Australian Greens have called for pill testing sites “all across the country”, including consultations with trained counsellors. The testing would feed in to an early warning system that could report findings around contaminated or mislabelled drugs.¹³⁴

Politicians and public servants from Queensland, NSW and Victoria inspected the 2019 pill testing program the day before the festival began.¹³⁵

POLLING

There was majority support for allowing people at music festivals to test the contents of recreational drugs for poisonous substances in every state and among voters for each political party except for One Nation.

¹³² Henriques-Gomes (2018) “*It’s saving lives*”: community rallies to support Melbourne’s drug-injecting room, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/16/its-saving-lives-community-rallies-to-support-melbournes-drug-injecting-room>

¹³³ Iggulden (2018) “*How many funerals do we have to go to?*”: Politicians call for more pill testing, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-01/politicians-from-across-the-divide-say-more-pill-testing-trials/9712578>

¹³⁴ Australian Greens (n.d.) *Just Test It*, <https://greens.org.au/campaigns/just-test-it>

¹³⁵ Medhora and Evans (2019) *Take a look inside Groovin the Moo’s pill-testing facility*, <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/look-behind-the-scenes-of-canberra-groovin-the-moo-pill-testing/11051862>

Table 8: Allowing people at music festivals to test the contents of recreational drugs for poisonous substances

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>WA</i>
Total support	58%	60%	57%	60%	58%	56%	59%
Total oppose	32%	32%	31%	27%	35%	36%	27%
Strongly support	27%	27%	27%	26%	26%	26%	37%
Support	32%	33%	30%	34%	32%	30%	22%
Oppose	13%	13%	13%	10%	15%	14%	13%
Strongly Oppose	19%	20%	17%	16%	20%	22%	14%
Don't know / not sure	10%	8%	12%	13%	7%	8%	14%

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Table 9: Allowing people at music festivals to test the contents of recreational drugs for poisonous substances

	<i>Total</i>	<i>LNP</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Undec</i>
Total support	58%	54%	60%	60%	43%	62%	52%
Total oppose	32%	39%	30%	30%	44%	29%	27%
Strongly support	27%	22%	30%	30%	16%	32%	22%
Support	32%	32%	31%	31%	26%	30%	30%
Oppose	13%	16%	13%	13%	18%	12%	11%
Strongly Oppose	19%	23%	17%	17%	26%	17%	16%
Don't know / not sure	10%	7%	10%	10%	13%	9%	21%

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Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the lower house. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs, but results are also shown separately for undecideds. "LNP" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" includes Centre Alliance, United Australia Party and Independent/Other.

Other policies

As well as the four policies profiled in this report, The Australia Institute asked respondents whether they supported or opposed seven other policies:

- decriminalising cannabis for personal use
- a public holiday for "Reconciliation Day" to share Indigenous cultures and history, and explore reconciliation in Australia
- exclusion zone around polling booths on election day, where people cannot hand out electoral material
- building public housing so it is spread out throughout all suburbs including new developments
- building a light rail network
- legalising and regulating assisted dying for terminally ill
- spending on programs to reduce youth crime and incarceration

Each of these policies received majority support from respondents overall, and from both male and female respondents, and from respondents in each of the large states (NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia). Most policies also received majority support from voters of every political party, although there were some exceptions.

Figure 5: Support for ACT policies and positions

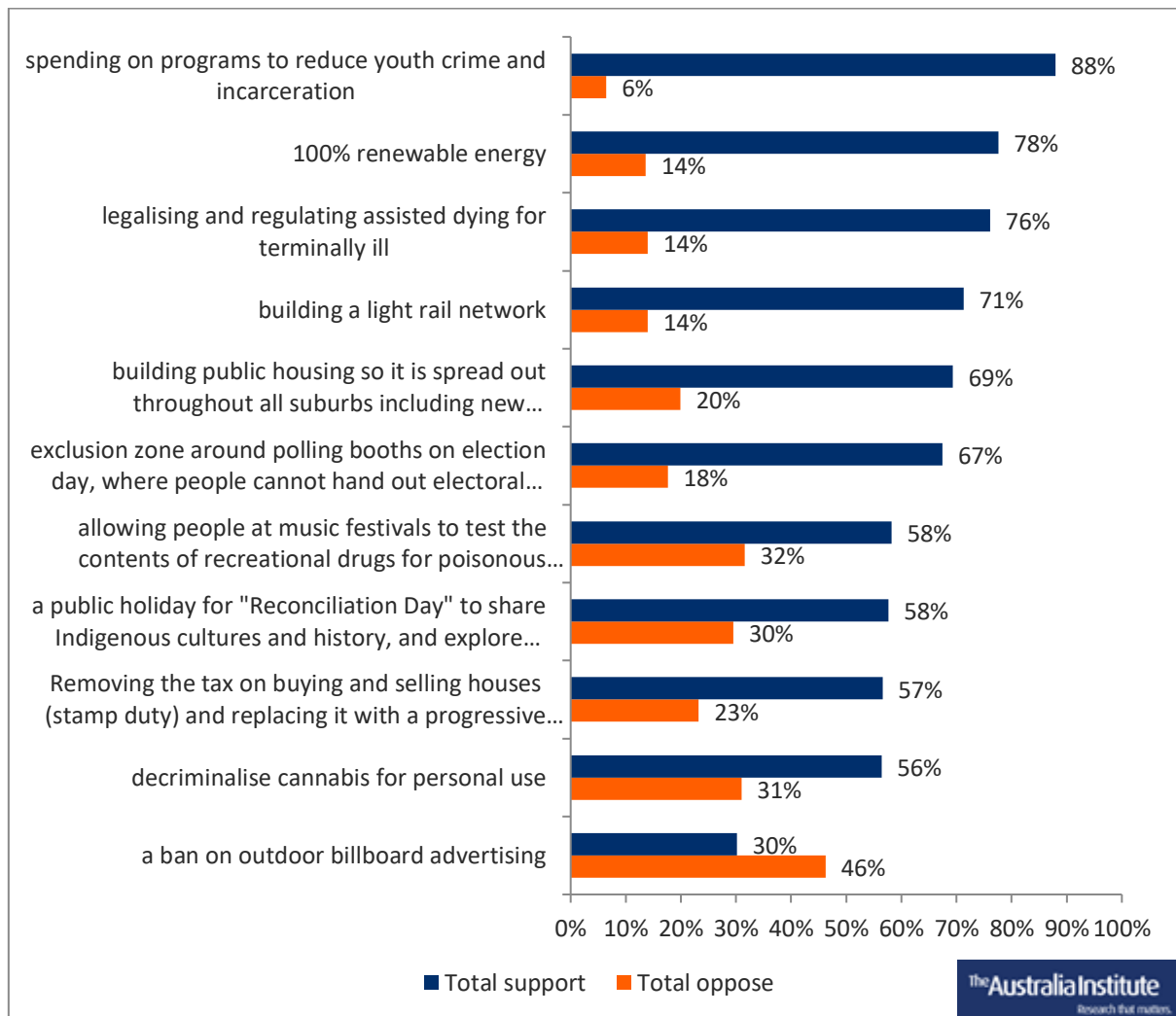


Table 10: Support for ACT policies and positions

	<i>Total supp</i>	<i>Total opp</i>	<i>Strong supp</i>	<i>Supp</i>	<i>Opp</i>	<i>Strong opp</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
spending on programs to reduce youth crime and incarceration	88%	6%	36%	52%	5%	2%	6%
100% renewable energy	78%	14%	39%	39%	8%	5%	9%
legalising and regulating assisted dying for terminally ill	76%	14%	38%	38%	7%	7%	10%
building a light rail network	71%	14%	24%	48%	11%	3%	15%
building public housing so it is spread out throughout all suburbs including new developments	69%	20%	24%	45%	14%	6%	11%
exclusion zone around polling booths on election day, where people cannot hand out electoral material	67%	18%	31%	37%	15%	3%	15%
allowing people at music festivals to test the contents of recreational drugs for poisonous substances	58%	32%	27%	32%	13%	19%	10%
a public holiday for "Reconciliation Day" to share Indigenous cultures and history, and explore reconciliation in Australia	58%	30%	24%	34%	15%	14%	13%
removing the tax on buying and selling houses (stamp duty) and replacing it with a progressive rates system (annual tax based on property value)	57%	23%	24%	33%	14%	9%	20%
decriminalise cannabis for personal use	56%	31%	24%	32%	16%	15%	13%
a ban on outdoor billboard advertising	30%	46%	9%	21%	37%	9%	24%



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Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the lower house. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs, but results are also shown separately for undecideds. "LNP" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" includes Centre Alliance, United Australia Party and Independent/Other.

Conclusion

While Premier Daniel Andrews may call Victoria the “most progressive state”, there is a quietly progressive territory to its north. The Australian Capital Territory has had a Labor or Labor–Greens Government for 17 years. These governments have developed and implemented a suite of progressive policies; for most of the time, they have done so in negotiation with the crossbench.

The ACT’s policies should serve as a template for other states and territories, and evidence that governments can win election with bold reform agendas. The ACT has already taken the risk of implementing novel policies and paid the costs of developing and testing them, so other jurisdictions should find them easier to implement. Furthermore, our polling shows that most Australians support most of these policies.