Canberra BUSINESS CHAMBER

20 October 2026

Refresh of the ACT Small Business Strategy
ACT Government
**BY EMAIL: ecodevpolicy@act.gov**

**SUBMISSION: REFRESH OF THE ACT SMALL BUSINESS STRATEGY**

**Introduction**

We wish to make a submission on the discussion paper: *Refresh of the ACT Small Business Strategy*.

**About the Chamber**

The Canberra Business Chamber is the peak body for business in the ACT. Our membership is very diverse, and is broadly representative of the ACT economy and business sector. The majority of our members are small to medium businesses, but we also have a number of larger firms our members.

Our membership includes businesses that are owned and operated by Canberra-based individuals and families; some from the NSW Capital Region; as well as some national and multinational firms.

Notwithstanding their different sizes and ownerships, all our members operate in Canberra and the surrounding region.

Our vision is that Canberra should be the greatest place in Australia for business.

**The context**

With respect, the Chamber's view is that the proposed refreshed strategy is not sufficiently aspirational. It appears to treat business as a minor part of Canberra, suggesting that the "...small business community.... contributes to the Canberra's economic prosperity, liveability and inclusive growth."

We would respectfully suggest that the business sector *drives* the economic prosperity and liveability of the territory. It is not a minor contributor. Without the private business sector operating in Canberra, there would be (for example):

- no shops;
- no cafés, restaurants or hotels;
- no telecommunications or Internet services;

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- no housing development;
- no professional services firms;
- significantly reduced employment opportunities;
- no Payroll Tax revenue for the ACT Government;
- no Commercial Rates revenue for the ACT Government.

**The strategy should be more aspirational and ambitious**

We suggest the Government's goal for business should be far more aspirational and ambitious, and reflect its significance now and potential significance into the future, if policy settings are right.

Small business is a subset of business more generally - and the Government should be aiming to provide an environment where businesses can grow, prosper and thrive. The strategy should be supportive of small, medium and large businesses (bearing in mind that most large businesses in Canberra are small in global terms).

We suggest that the Strategy should be recast as a strategy for *business* (not *small* business), and that a better vision for 2030 might be along the lines of:

*"A resilient, productive and growing business sector that is driving Canberra's prosperity, liveability growth. Small business is playing a key role, and is incentivised to grow and maximise its potential."*

**Why does business growth matter?**

Enabling and incentivising small businesses to grow into medium and then large businesses is the best way to deliver long-term prosperity for the ACT. Ultimately, it growth leads to more employment opportunities, higher incomes for residents; and more tax revenues for Government.

As New South Wales Premier Chris Minns recently said:

*"The undeniable lesson in Australia's economic history is [that] the way to build a strong economy is private sector growth, capital investment, and entrepreneurial spirit rooted in our economy."*

While his remarks were made in the context of New South Wales, they are equally true of the ACT.

Unfortunately, the current ACT policy settings do not deliver. On the contrary, current policy settings, particularly around Payroll Tax, encourage businesses to stay small. They inhibit growth and/or encourage businesses to grow outside the ACT, to the detriment of the ACT Government and the entire Canberra Community.

**Specific strategic objectives would add value**

While it is hard to disagree with the general points raised in the four draft priorities, we respectfully suggest that the document would be strengthened by the inclusion of some specific strategic objectives, which underpin the vision. These could include:

- reducing the cost of doing business in the ACT;
- reducing the volume of regulation and the cost of compliance;
- setting KPIs for responsiveness to business across the ACT Government, and measuring and reporting on performance against customer (business) satisfaction;
- seeing more small businesses grow into larger businesses;

**Decisions need to made with business as a core consideration, not an afterthought**

We also recommend that proper consideration be given to the impacts of Government decisions on business. For example, we would be strongly supportive of requirements that:

- all Cabinet papers include specific sections on the impacts of proposals on business and small business;
- all regulatory, legislative and taxation proposals include a full cost-benefit analysis for consideration by Cabinet;
- full consultation on proposals occur prior to decisions being made and announced.

**How far should Government's role go?**

We note too that the draft strategy appears to envisage a role for Government in "helping businesses develop new products, services and markets"; "improving access to investment"; and providing "advice, mentoring and business development opportunities".

Many of these kinds of activities and support are already provided by the private sector on a commercial basis. We do not think it is the ACT Government's role to seek to supplant the private sector, or to deliver services that compete with private enterprise. Rather, the Government's focus should be on reducing barriers to business and business growth. The focus should be particularly on those factors within Government's control (e.g. regulation and taxation).

**In conclusion**

I trust these are comments are of assistance. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet you to discuss these points further.

Yours sincerely

Greg Harford
Chief Executive