

# DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

22 March 2022

## PMB – Carbon calculator for ACT businesses

### Start

Thank you, Mister Deputy Speaker.

I'm really excited to table in the Assembly today a motion that will provide ongoing support to our local businesses across the ACT.

A constituent recently reached out to me, stating, quote:

*"I'm a local business owner who wants to move our business towards carbon neutrality. However, there is no clear pathway or guidance for businesses to do this, provided by the federal or state governments; just a lot of different companies offering different services locally and overseas.*

*It would be great if there was a site for ACT businesses, provided by the ACT Government, to be able to calculate their carbon and sign up to reduce or totally offset their carbon emissions – especially for small and medium sized businesses.*

*It's a confusing space and we don't have the size to engage a consultant to formally organise reducing our carbon. Even calculating our carbon usage in terms of energy is not easy.*

*If the ACT, as a climate leader, could assist businesses through a platform and suggest private offset providers to commit to reducing their carbon this would make a great difference.*

*If, as a business owner, you could easily calculate and commit to a range of carbon goals this would get a lot of uptake and be in line with the ACT Government's commitments".*

Unquote.

This got me thinking, and I did some research and fact-checking.

The business owner was right: we have an excellent online carbon calculator for households in the ACT – the Home Energy Assessment Tool – provided by the ACT Government through the Act Smart team within EPSDD.

It helps households – particularly renters – to identify the quickest and most effective ways to reduce their energy bills; improve the comfort of their homes and receive a tailored report on how to reduce their energy costs.

Further to this, the Act Smart team also offers a wealth of resources, tips and advice for households about heating, lighting, draught proofing and more. There's also the Sustainable Home Advice program, the Sustainable Household Scheme with a variety of subsidies, rebates and incentives available, and the Act Smart eco-challenge.

I commend everyone involved in these programs across the ACT Government – they're a fantastic resource and a critical help for households to contribute to our net zero emissions policy.

For businesses, it seems that individual service providers nationally and globally provide some online calculators to assist businesses in understanding their energy and carbon costs, and ideas to help reduce these. And, of course, expert consultancy assistance – for a fee!

The ACT Government offers a wide range of business support for climate change action including the Community Clubs Program, Business Sustainability Awards, a Business Recycling Program, business rebates for energy and water efficiency upgrades, the 'Solar for business' program, a lighting efficiency webtool for businesses to check the efficiency of their lighting setup, and the 'straws suck' campaign.

This is all great.

And an online carbon footprint calculator for local businesses seems the next logical step.

This is why I'm calling on the ACT Government today, through this motion, to investigate the development of an online portal, as a one-stop-shop, for local businesses to calculate their carbon footprints and help them reduce their energy costs – financially and environmentally.

I see this as a win-win-win for Government support for local businesses, for local businesses to be able to reduce their running costs, and while doing something positive for the environment – which benefits us all.

It's a constructive way to provide ongoing assistance and support to ACT businesses who are still reeling from the effects of COVID, while also providing positive environmental outcomes.

The ACT Government is always looking for new and innovative ways to support local businesses. Never has this been more important.

Throughout the pandemic, the ACT Government has supported local businesses through a wide range of programs including the Small Business Hardship Scheme; Covid-19 Business Support Grants; commercial tenancy support measures; waivers on food business registration, outdoor dining and liquor licencing fees; payroll tax exemptions for apprentices and trainees; and rental relief for tenants of ACT Government owned properties.

As we start to move towards a 'new normal' in the ACT, it's important that we continue to support businesses through programs and activities that are financially sustainable for the ACT Government and the community. It's equally important that those programs and support measures have practical, pragmatic and tangible outcomes while providing long-lasting solutions.

We already have over 900 businesses across the ACT and in Queanbeyan signed up to be better business recyclers. This is great, and it demonstrates the interest in our community for this kind of challenge.

To uphold our ACT Government commitment to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, we need to support local businesses.

We need to cut straight to the chase and create one clear, authoritative reference point from which local businesses can submit some basic information, calculate the carbon footprint of their business activities, and be guided on where and how to make the best upgrades and savings.

I envisage that local businesses will be able to use a carbon calculator to potentially help with things like lighting upgrades, the installation of solar panels, installing insulation, upgrading appliances, and draught proofing – amongst others.

I note that many businesses operate in leased accommodation across the ACT. This is an important factor in considering the development of this online calculator.

The Net Zero Emissions Policy Forum was founded in November last year – initiated by the ACT, South Australian and New South Wales governments – to work together on solutions to prioritise policies and to develop practical solutions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving net zero emissions.

Sub-national governments across Australia and internationally are invited to join the Policy Forum, and I'm proud – and not surprised – that the ACT Government is one of the founding members.

Led by our progressive and forward-thinking Chief Minister, we have some of the country's most ambitious climate change policies and activities.

This motion I'm presenting to the Assembly today will help local businesses contribute to our net zero emission target.

The motion calls for the involvement of the Policy Forum, including consideration of ways in which members of the Net Zero Emissions Policy Forum can collaborate and share resources, as well as looking into existing tools that can be adopted and adapted to the local ACT context.

One ambition of the Forum is to provide a shared suite of tools across jurisdictions to address the policy challenges of achieving net zero emissions. An online carbon calculator for local business, tailored for regional or unique circumstances, lends itself well to this vision; and will be a good early contribution to the work of this group from the ACT Government.

Through this motion, consideration will also be given to ensure that local ACT businesses have a pathway and clear guidance to assist them to reduce and/or offset their carbon emissions. I am also calling on the ACT Government to consider an accreditation scheme, rewards and incentives, promotional opportunities and/or gamification. This will help businesses engage with the calculator and commit to their carbon reduction goals.

Gamification has proven an effective method of committing to and achieving goals – whether these be environmental or related to health and fitness, financial savings, productivity, e-commerce and business rewards programs.

In exploring opportunities to assist businesses to offset their carbon emissions, I would anticipate this would include suitable suggestions for programs and activities which ACT Businesses can contribute, endorsed by the ACT Government and the Net Zero Emissions Policy Forum.

I want to acknowledge the many, many businesses across the ACT taking positive steps to lower their greenhouse gas emissions.

I want to thank the many organisations and groups in the ACT who are assisting local businesses in their endeavours to become more environmentally friendly.

Mister Deputy Speaker and colleagues, the development of an online carbon calculator is a practical solution that will be able to be easily accessed by all local businesses in the ACT.

Thank you.

**Ends**

## Closing Speech

Thank you, Mister Deputy Speaker.

And I'd like to thank my colleagues for their support of this motion.

When the constituent came to me with this issue, I thought there is a solution here, there is something we can do. And what was reiterated in everyone's speeches in response to this is that there is a solution to this, we are committed to reaching net zero emissions by 2045.

I thank Ms Lee for her amendment.

I note and agree with the points Ms Lee has made – that every business in the ACT is unique; that many have expressed their desire to make positive change to tackle climate change and reduce their running costs; and that any changes made by local businesses must be financially viable and economically positive.

I accept the amendments proposed and welcome that cost considerations will form part of the investigations to be undertaken in scoping a carbon footprint calculator for local businesses.