

Benchmark report

State of Public Sector Sustainability

June 2023



“If the Australian Public Service were a company, it would be in the top 50 [greenhouse gas] emitters in the country”.

Alicia Payne, Canberra MP, 2022

The public sector leading by example

Good governments lead by example and nowhere is this best exemplified than in addressing the climate emergency.

In September 2022, the Australian Government enacted legislation which establishes Australia's greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 43% from 2005 levels by 2030 and commits the country to net zero by 2050. The Australian Public Service (APS) will lead by example with the APS achieving net zero emissions by 2030.

“Reducing public sector emissions is not only a strong signal of how serious the government is about reducing emissions more broadly in Australia, but will also over time save taxpayers money, and of course, have a positive impact on the environment,” Minister Katy Gallagher said.

The APS Net Zero 2030 is the Government's policy for the Australian Public Service to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2030, and transparently report on its emissions commencing from the latter half of 2023.

The Australian Government and the ACT Government are the only two Governments to have set specific net zero emissions targets for their respective public services. The WA Government has established an interim target of 80% below 2020 levels for the West Australian Public Service (WAPS).

This annual insights and benchmarking report aims to shine a spotlight on public sector agencies sustainability performance, highlighting where and how public sector leaders are leading their agencies to net zero and beyond.

This snapshot is not definitive. It focuses on just a handful of public sector agencies. The intention is to give public sector leaders from across the federal, state/territory and local governments a clear sense of individual and collective progress on emissions reduction, adaptation strategies and to highlight practical and creative approaches adopted by leaders to drive systemic, long-term behavioural change across their operations and workforces.

01

Net zero targets

01

Net zero targets for the public sector

**Net zero by
2030**

Australian Public Sector (APS)



**Net zero by
2040**

Australian Capital Territory
Public Service (ACTPS)

**80%
emissions
reduction by
2030**

West Australian Public
Service (WAPS)

**Achieved net
zero in 2020**

Tasmanian Public Service
(TPS)

**No net zero
target.**

New South Wales Public
Service (NSWPS)

**No net zero
target.**

Queensland Public Service
(QPS)

**No net zero
target.**

Victorian Public Service
(VPS)

**No net zero
target.**

South Australian Public
Service (SAPS)

**No net zero
target.**

Northern Territory Public
Service (NTPS)

02

APS Sustainability Performance

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APS sustainability

“We believe that the Australian Public Service can set the benchmark on emission reductions and inspire other major workplaces to follow suit,”
~ Minister Katy Gallagher. ACT Senator

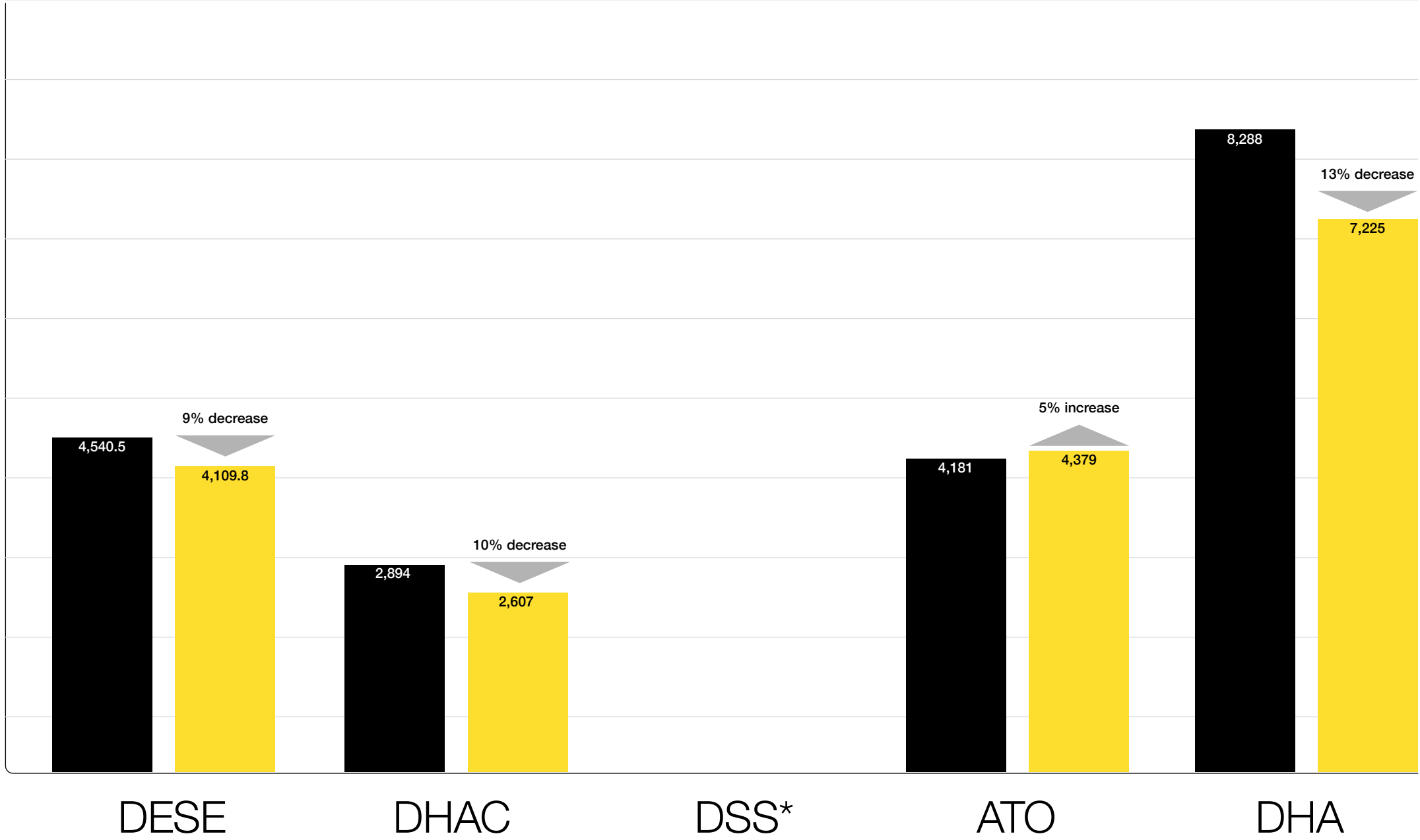
Achieving APS Net Zero 2030 requires early action by all government entities. Over the next seven years APS agencies will employ a mixture of demand reduction, renewable supply, and offset purchases including:

- Implementing improved energy efficiency of government properties.
- Increasing renewable energy supply.
- Introducing a low-emissions vehicle target for the Commonwealth fleet of 75% of new purchases and leases by 2025 and electrifying government passenger vehicle fleets by 2030.
- Implementing a Buy Australian Plan which involves prioritising local content, and securing cheaper, renewable energy for its operations.

Yellow Edge has selected five federal agencies including the Dept. of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE); the Dept. of Health & Aged Care, the Dept of Social Services; the ATO and the Dept. of Home Affairs to highlight current sustainability reporting and initiatives.

Indicator 1

Energy intensity per annum per person (MJ)

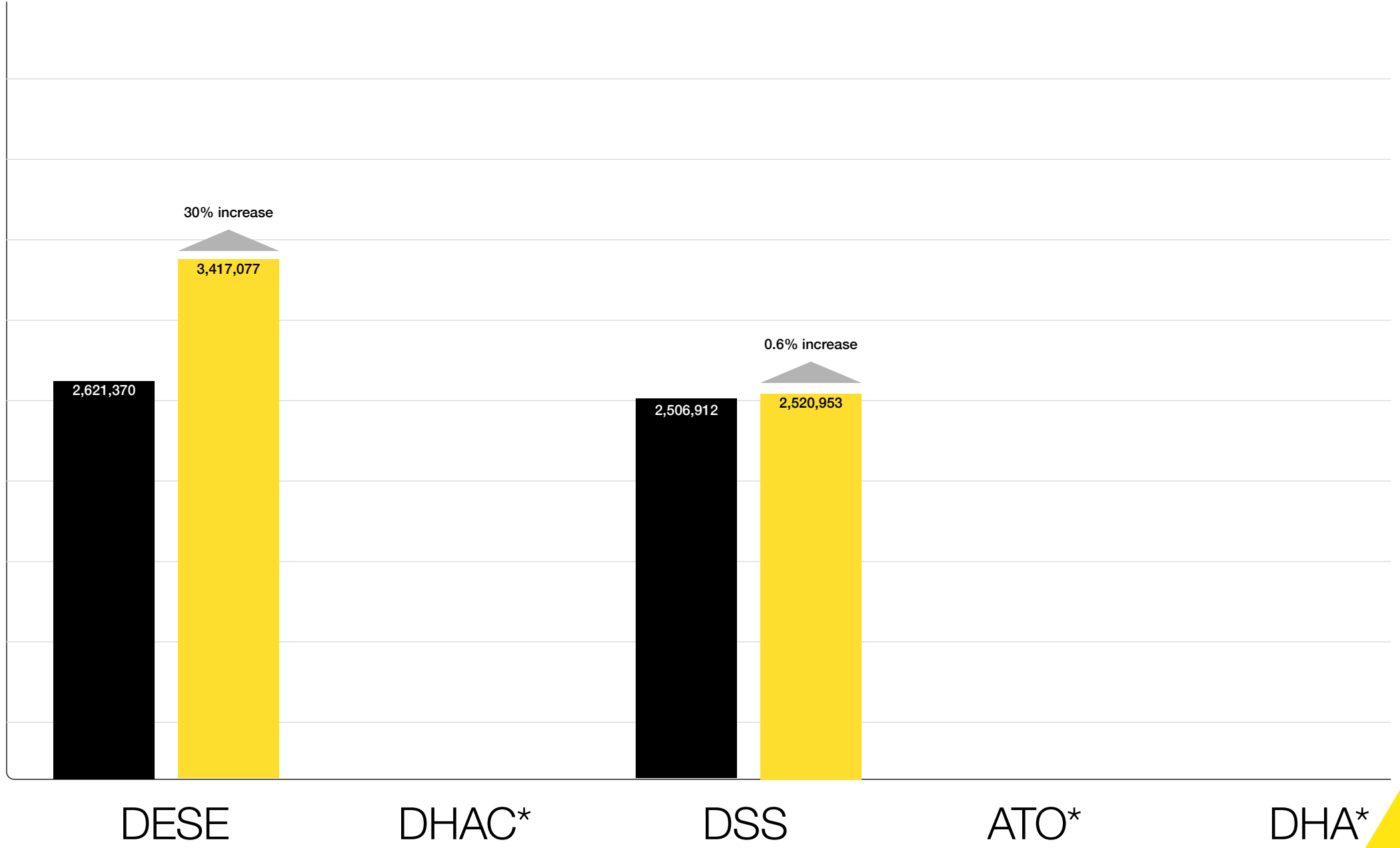


*No data was provided on energy intensity per person per annum in DSS's annual report. DSS did report that total consumption of energy in buildings had increased over the reporting period by 12%.

2020/21 2021/22

Indicator 2

Total distance travelled by air (Km)

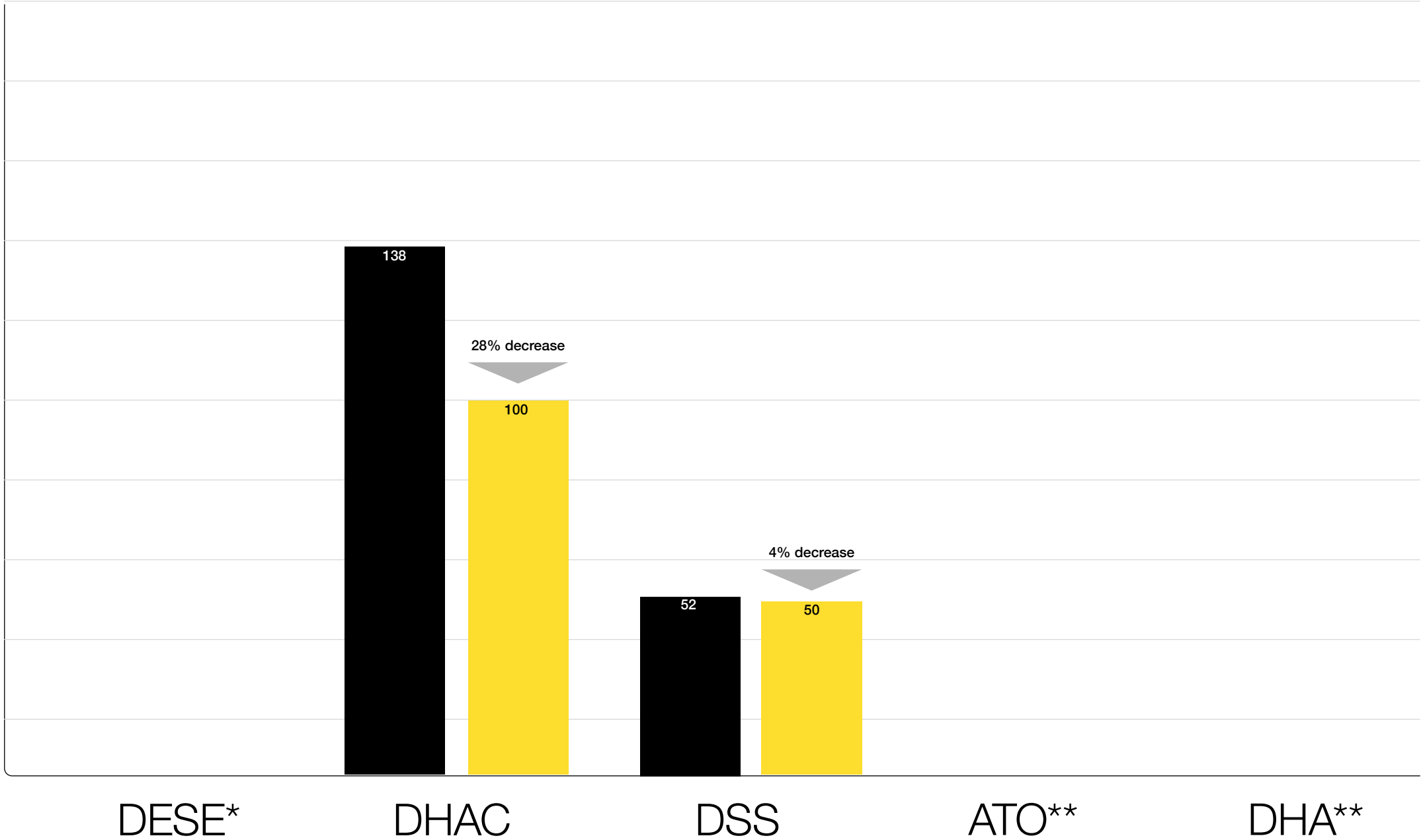


*No data was provided by DHAC, ATO and DHA on the number of km traveled by air in their respective annual reports.

2020/21 2021/22

Indicator 3

Total waste sent to landfill (Tonnes)



*No data was provided on total waste to landfill in DESE’s annual report. DESE did report that total waste fell by 31% from 79.64 kg per FTE to 54.97 kg per FTE over the reporting period. **No data was provided by ATO and DHA on total waste to landfill in their respective annual reports.

2020/21 2021/22

Initiatives in the spotlight

Electrifying fleets. DESE reported continuing to replace ageing vehicles with more efficient models and hybrid vehicles. The Dept. of Health reported working with landlords to provide electric vehicle charging stations in office parking areas.

Digitising workflows. DSS reported both workflow efficiencies and emissions reductions associated by adopting different approaches to waste management and disposal including reducing paper file holdings and physical storage requirements.

Installing energy efficient technology including efficient lighting solutions, sensor lighting and fit-out designs that take advantage of natural light.

Flexible work policies and arrangements continue to have a positive downward impact on an agency's energy consumption however there is no mention of how agencies are helping staff to reduce or conserve their energy consumption whilst working remotely.

Setting and monitoring targets. The Dept. of Health and Aged Care along with other agencies set a ceiling target of 7,500 mega joules (MJ) per person, per annum, for office tenant light and power as per the Energy Efficient in Government Operations (EEGO) Policy. This figure is the most consistently reported by APS agencies.

Areas for improvement

Emissions from air travel. It appears anecdotally that after several years of covid restrictions and border closures air travel has returned to pre-covid levels. Where travel is necessary it should be offset at the time of purchase.

Staff consumption behaviour. Whilst the amount of waste sent to landfill or bioreactors has generally declined, this is mostly due to staff working remotely. The amount of waste produced may have just shifted to household and commercial streams. Whilst recycling rates are a positive sign that materials are being diverted away from landfill, effort needs to be on reducing overall consumption habits and therefore reduce total waste.

Inefficient buildings and slow take-up of technology. DHA has reported challenges with reducing its operational emissions due to the need to operate sites continuously or for extended out of hours periods. The challenge is compounded by old infrastructure and slow uptake in new technologies i.e., solar panels, energy efficiency lighting, sensors etc

Collaboration and urgency. There needs to be greater collaboration around the 'how' to reduce and keep emissions down. The challenge is effecting long-term behavioural change and sharing what works with others. The Dept. of Finance is supporting public sector agencies with information, tools, L&D opportunities and through facilitating the sharing of knowledge and experience via GovTEAMS.

03

ACTPS Sustainability Performance

03

ACT Public Sector sustainability

The ACT is often seen as a leader in reducing emissions, having already reached a target of 100% renewable electricity in the ACT in 2020.

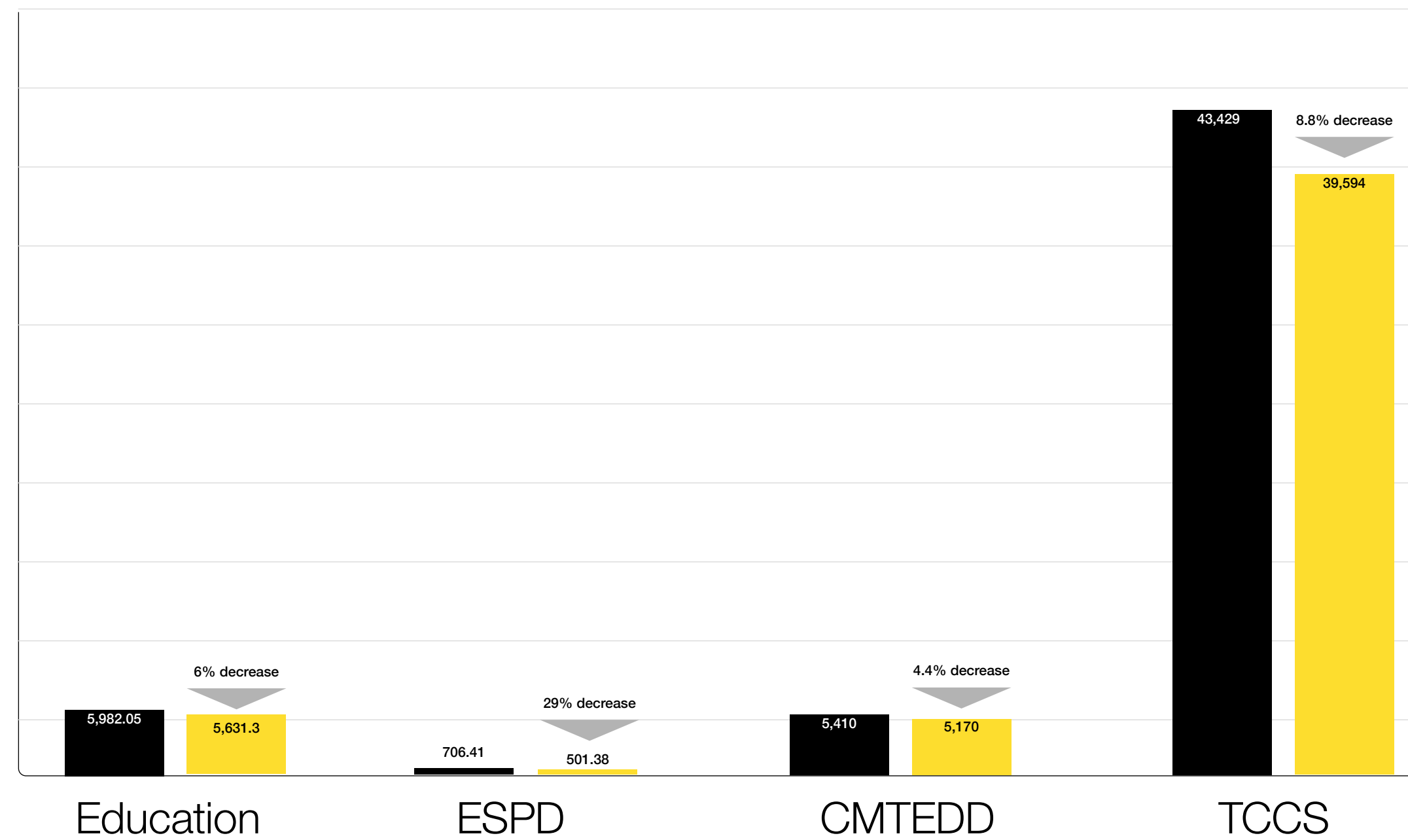
The goal is net zero emissions from ACT Government operations by 2040. The Zero Emissions Government Framework sets actions such as:

- Ensuring government buildings and facilities all-electric and climate-wise.
- Transitioning the car and bus fleet to zero emissions buses.
- Co-locating government staff in centralised offices and supporting flexible work arrangements.
- Providing interest free loans to government agencies through the Zero Emissions Government Fund, which are paid back through energy savings at no net cost to agencies.

Yellow Edge selected four ACT Directorates including Education; Environment, Sustainability & Planning; Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development and Transport Canberra & City Services and focused on - total emissions, total waste produced, and total water consumed. These indicators reflect both emissions reduction and resource conservation practices. Where agencies report against other insightful indicators, these will be picked up under the heading overall sustainability insights.

Indicator 1

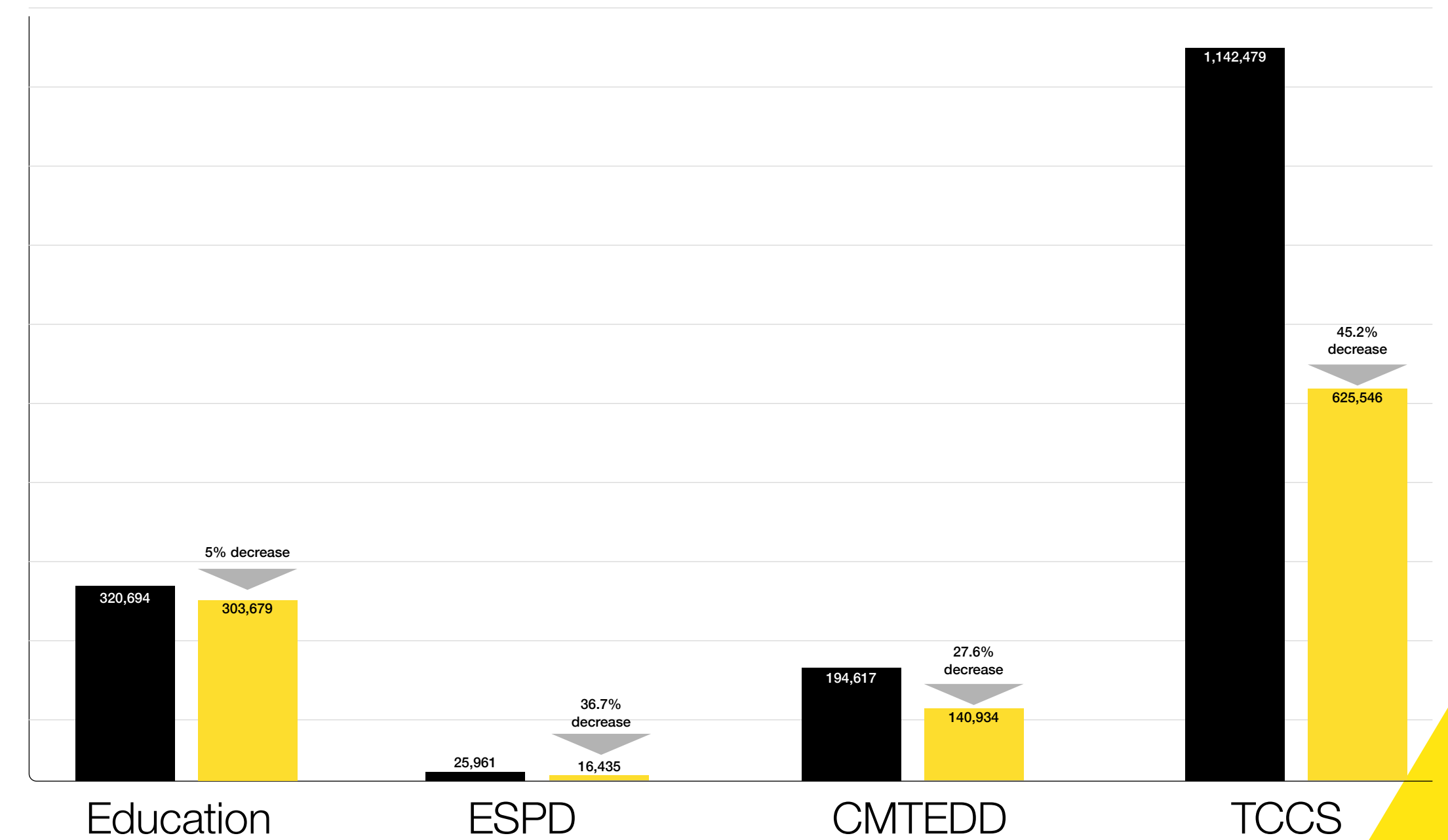
Total CO2 emissions (Tonnes)



2020/21 2021/22

Indicator 2

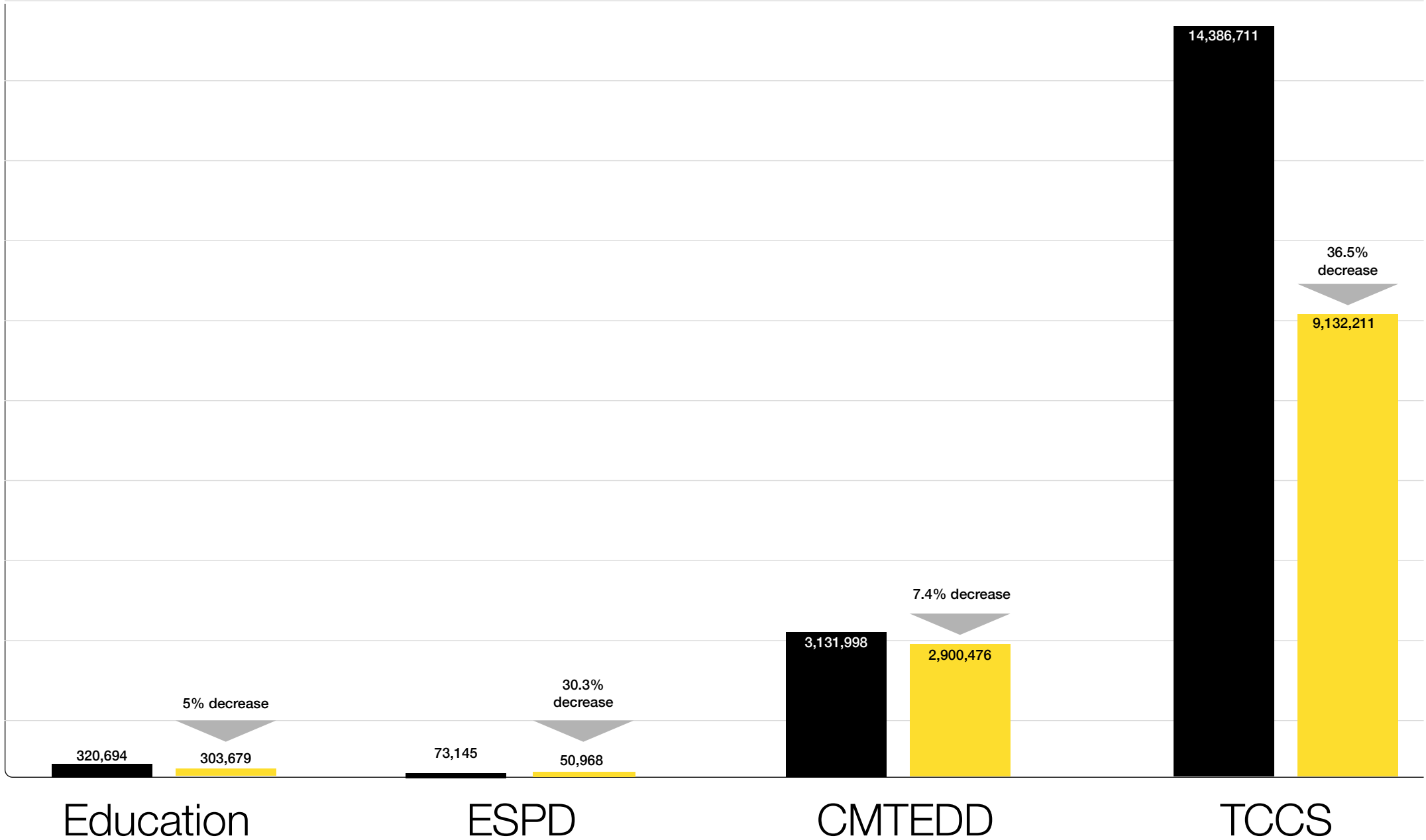
Total water consumption (Kilolitres)



2020/21 2021/22

Indicator 3

Total waste to landfill (Litres)



2020/21 2021/22

Initiatives in the spotlight

Higher levels of staff and business engagement. Organisational leaders within TCCS have adopted a consultative and collaborative approach to identifying existing and potential sustainable pursuits across the Directorate. They have established of executive sustainability meetings with individual business areas to focus on identifying existing and potential

Co-location. The ACT Government is co-locating government staff in centralised offices which are all-electric and climate-wise.

Staff and business consultative groups. TCCS has plans to establish an Emission Reduction Working Group with representation from across business areas to centralise and coordinate emission reduction efforts and to share ideas and better practice.

Staff education and training. TCCS have partnered with CIT to design and deliver targeted capability development training initiatives for staff including basic courses in electric vehicle operation and safety. The training helps to ensure that staff can not only maintain the new fleet of buses and engage with electrification specialists but also remain “fully informed and at forefront of ideas, thinking and planning”.

Engaging expertise. TCCS are commissioning external studies to understand the sustainability features of their physical infrastructure and the potential for solar and big battery solutions to augment power and green hydrogen options.

Flexible working arrangements. A recycling communications campaign and continued hybrid working arrangements have contributed to a reduction in EPSDD’s waste and paper usage (89% reduction in paper usage over 2 years).

Decarbonising buildings and assets. All new schools and expansion projects are constructed to ensure that they are zero emissions in operation and meet highest standards of energy efficiency.

Reducing diesel and petrol plant equipment. The transition of the government’s vehicle fleet to zero emission vehicles (ZEVs) will have a significant impact on CO2 emissions. In 2021-22 CMTEDD ensured that all passenger fleet vehicle leases were replaced with ZEVs (where fit for purpose and supply available).

Areas for improvement

Scope 3 emissions. The ACT Public Service accounts for 33% of the ACT's Scope 3 emissions. The majority of scope 3 emissions by the ACTPS i.e., emissions produced outside of the ACT as a result of activities occurring in the ACT, relate to government services provided by the rest of Australia, including payments from the Commonwealth Government to State Governments for maintenance of Commonwealth owned property, and joint Commonwealth/State Government programs based in Canberra. This is followed by healthcare, construction and education within Australia and retail trade outside Australia. The ACTPS needs to demonstrate strong climate leadership by taking responsibility for Scope 3 emissions.

04

What are public sector
leaders doing globally to
decarbonise?

04

Public-sector agencies around the globe are focusing their decarbonising efforts in four areas. They include:

1. Decarbonising buildings and operations.

Targeting Emission Scopes 1, 2, & 3.

This includes:

- Carbon-neutral designs in new buildings and installing green roofs which could reduce energy consumption, improve water management, and foster biodiversity.
- Improving insulation, installing LED lighting, replacing oil and gas boilers with heat pumps, certifying buildings, installing lighting and temperature control sensors to reduce energy consumption.

2. Creating more sustainable travel policies and fleets.

Targeting Emission Scopes 1 & 3.

This includes:

- Adopting sustainable travel policies such as using environmentally sustainable hotels, encouraging flight classes with lower CO2 footprints, replacing flights with train travel, introducing stricter criteria for necessary business travel, offsetting essential travel with carbon credits, and choosing more sustainable airlines.

3. Introducing new procurement criteria.

Targeting Emission Scopes 3.

This includes:

- Integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals and principles into internal procurement processes including adding CO2 pricing to their procurement-decision logic.
- Decarbonising their supply strategies by, for example, selecting local service providers and updating their supplier codes of conduct.
- Introducing new requirements and collaboration models with suppliers to promote sustainability throughout the value chain can ensure access to innovations that would meet demands, by customers and markets alike, for sustainable products and technologies.

4. Promoting new workforce behaviour.

Targeting Emission Scope 3.

This includes:

- Introducing incentives such as cycle-to-work campaigns and continued work-from-home arrangements.
- Encouraging the adoption of sustainable “micro-behaviours”—such as recycling and conserving power by turning off lights and programming thermostats.
- Engaging key internal sponsors to help promote their organisational culture.

References

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Page 3. [Climate Change Bill 2022](#) (Australian Parliamentary Services, September 2022)

Page 3. [Joint media release Australia joins international net zero government initiative](#)

Page 5. WA [Government emissions interim target](#) (www.wa.gov.au); [ACT Government public service target](#) (www.climatechoices.act.gov.au); [APS Net Zero Emissions 2023](#) (www.finance.gov.au); [Tasmanian GHG report 2022 released](#) (Dept. of Premier and Cabinet, August 2022)

Page 7. [Australia joins international net zero government initiative](#) (Bowen/Gallagher Media Release, November, 2022) and [APS emission reduction strategies](#).

Page 8 - 10. [Department of Education, Skills and Employment Annual Report \(2021 – 2022\)](#); [Department of Health Annual Report \(2021 – 2022\)](#); [ATO Annual Report \(2021-22\)](#); [Department of Home Affairs Annual Report 2021-22](#); [Department of Social Services Annual Report 2021-22](#)

Page 12. [What is the ACT Government doing?](#) (www.climatechoices.act.gov.au)

Page 13-15. Annual Reports including: [ACT Education Directorate](#); [ACT Environment, Sustainability and Planning Directorate](#); [Transport Canberra & City Services Directorate](#); and [Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate](#)

Page 16. [Scope 3 Greenhouse Gases in the ACT](#) (Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability & the Environment, September, 2021)

Page 18. [Target net zero: A journey to decarbonizing the public sector](#) (McKinsey, August 2022)

Benchmark report

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