

ATTACHMENT A

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Review of the ACT Environmental Grants

1996 – 2019



ACT
Government

**Environment, Planning and Sustainable
Development Directorate - Environment**

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SUMMARY

The ACT Government has been funding Environmental Grants since 1996. Grants fund community projects that support environmental activities consistent with the ACT Government's policies and priorities. In total (to 2018-19), 262 projects have shared in almost \$4 million of funding. The current criteria for assessing grant applications is shown in the [Introduction](#) section below and on the [ACT Government's Environment website](#).

This report provides an overview of the grant program to date and summarises the findings of both qualitative and quantitative research conducted among grant recipients. Overall participants were very appreciative of the funding offered by the ACT Government and many of those interviewed, either face-to-face or by telephone, emphasising their gratitude for the opportunities created by the grant program. The long-term benefits of the program, including a discussion of unexpected non-financial benefits created by the program, are discussed in the [Findings](#) section. This report also includes four case studies highlighting successful projects supported by the program.

All the funding recipients interviewed for this research reported that their grant achievements had been either fully or partially met. All the research participants (with one exception) reported that they either already had or would consider applying for another ACT Environmental Grant, perhaps the biggest endorsement of the program's success.

While some participants found the application and/or aquittal process onerous the vast majority reported that they understood stringent oversight of public money was required and that compared with other similar grant programs the level of administrative effort required was about right. Some [Recommendations](#) have been made to improve these processes and other aspects of the grant program.

A total of 262 organisations have been [grant recipients](#), with 33 entities being awarded more than one grant. Seven organisations have been awarded 10 or more grants. Overall, local environmental groups were the [organisations](#) that have benefited most from the Environmental Grants program, gaining 57% of the funding (over \$2.2 million), with national charities gaining just over \$1 million.

The average value of individual grants has trended upward during the 21 year period analysed, more than doubling from \$8,171 during the first three years of the program (1996-1998) to \$19,518 during the past three years (2016-2018). See [who received the grants?](#) for more information.

There has been a significant change in the [categories](#) of activities supported by the grants since the focus of the program was adjusted in 2011 (Graph 7). Grants focused primarily on education activities account for just 4.4% of the dollars allocated since 2011, compared with over half (54.5%) prior to that date. In the same timeframe landscape restoration projects have been awarded more than half the dollars available since 2011 (55.9%), compared with just 16% before. Similarly, weed control projects have been allocated a fifth of the funding available since 2011 (21%), compared with just 3.6% before.

The weather and prolonged inter-departmental government approvals were blamed as the most frequent cases for [risks and delays](#) to projects. Ongoing maintenance of projects and maintaining enthusiasm and commitment from volunteers is identified as the main challenges for the ongoing success of projects supported by the grants.

INTRODUCTION

The ACT Environment Grants Program is an ACT Government initiative that has been funded annually, since 1996, to provide financial assistance for community based environmental projects consistent with the ACT Government's policies and priorities.

In 2011, there was a shift of focus to support projects concentrated on delivering on-ground components and this focus has continued, with recent grants aligned with the *ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2018-2023*.

Interested parties are invited to apply for grants through a competitive process. The current selection criteria for assessing grant applications for the 2019/20 round are stated on the ACT Government [website](#) and application form:

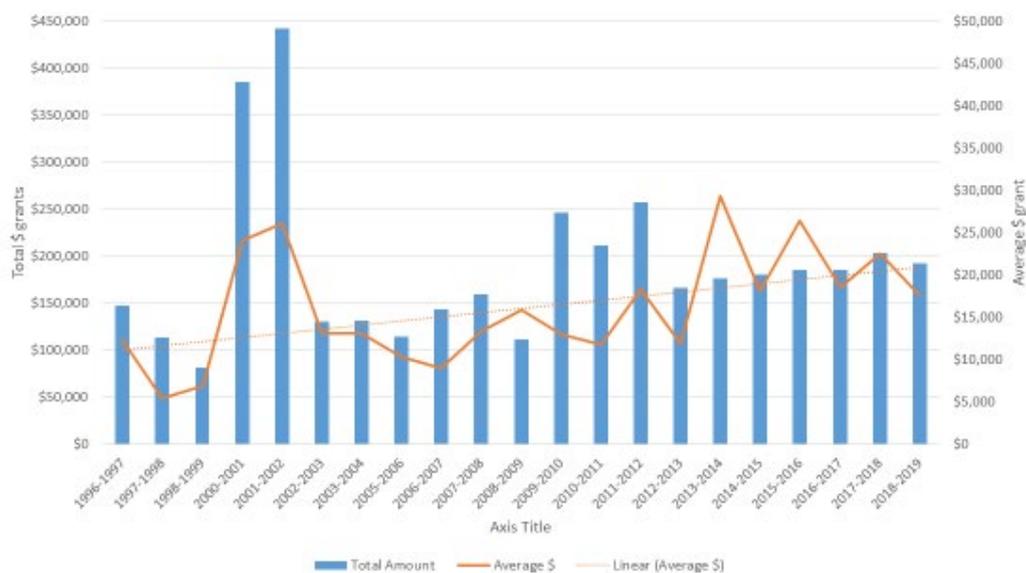
1. Alignment with funding priorities for 2019-20 ACT Environment Grants:
 - a. Enhance condition and connectivity of woodlands, grasslands and/or aquatic ecosystems
 - b. Help manage threats to biodiversity, such as managing weeds and/or pest animals
 - c. Protect native plants and animals
 - d. Enhance biodiversity in urban areas
 - e. Engage the community in on-ground environmental work
 - f. Connect people to nature through innovative approaches
 - g. Improve opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through 'Connecting to Country'.
2. Effectiveness of your project
3. Demonstration of sound project planning, including achievable milestones, timelines and project outcomes.
4. Demonstration of sound project budgeting, including value for money.
5. Demonstration of community and stakeholder engagement and partnerships.

Successful projects are required to be completed within twelve months of receiving the funding. Occasionally grant recipients are unable to complete their project within the specified timeframe, usually due to factors outside of their control, most notably extreme weather incidents. When this occurs applicants may be granted an extension to complete their project at the discretion of the ACT Government.

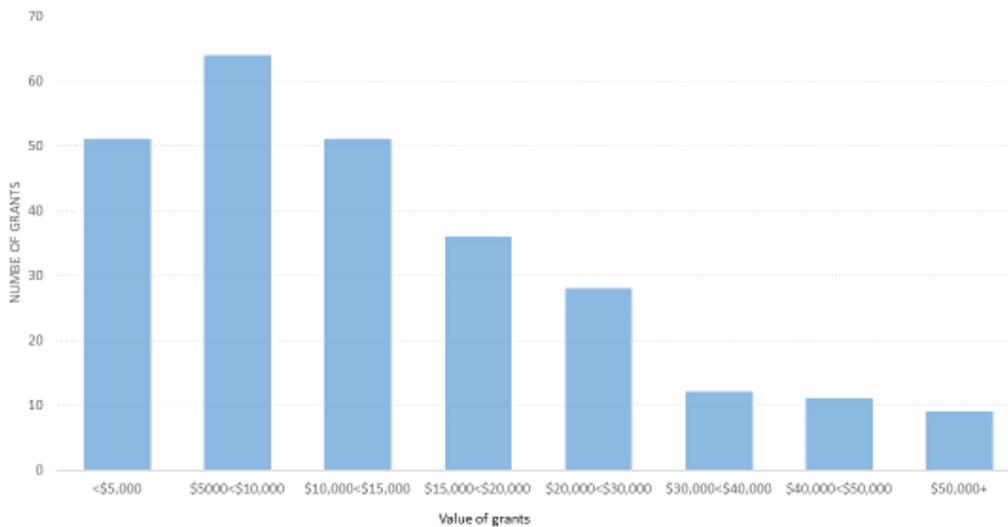
WHO RECEIVED THE GRANTS?

The ACT Environmental Grants have been funding projects since 1996. In total nearly \$4 million (\$3,964,483) has been distributed to support 262 projects. In 2000-2002 average annual funding peaked at around \$400,000 (\$414,294). During the past decade, funding has averaged at around \$200,000 per year (\$200,374).

The average value of individual grants has trended upward during the 21 year period analysed, more than doubling from \$8,171 during the first three years of the program (1996-1998) to \$19,518 during the past three years (2016-2018). During the two years where funding for the program was significantly increased (2000-2001) the average value of grants also significantly increased, to \$25,079. The average value of grants peaked in 2013-14, when 3 grants over \$30,000 lifted the average to \$29,333 (see Graph 1).



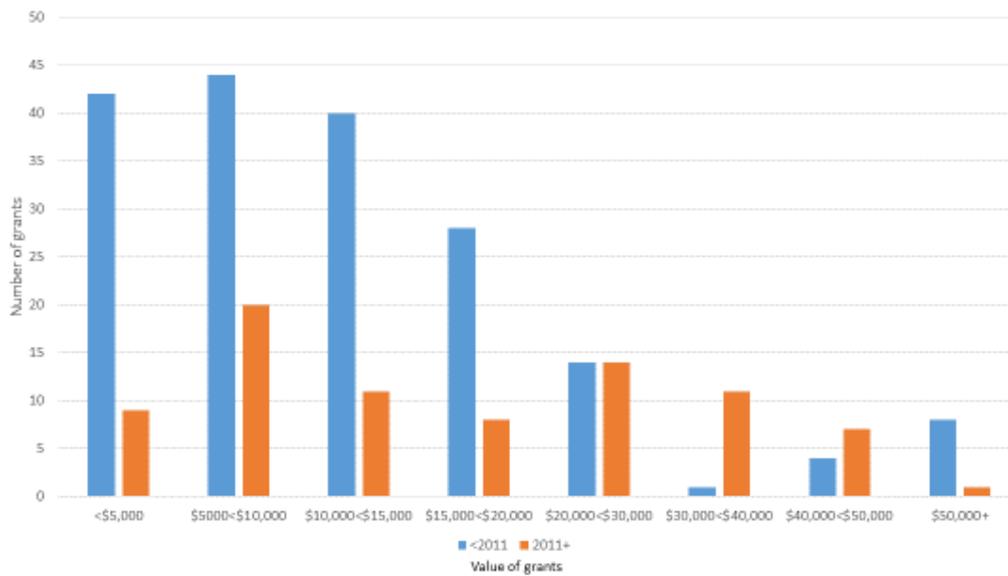
Graph 1: Value of grants awarded by year



Graph 2: Number of grants awarded by value

The maximum value of a grant has been limited to \$50,000 during most of the time funding has been made available. However, larger grants were available during the years when funding peaked (2000-2001), during which time the largest grant of \$82,998 was awarded. For this year’s applicants individual grants were capped at \$35,000.

As illustrated in Graph 2, over three quarters of the grants awarded (77%) have been for amounts of less than \$20,000. Graph 3 shows that in recent years (since 2011) there has been a significant reduction in the number of very small (<\$5,000) grants awarded. Nearly a quarter (23%) of the grants awarded prior to 2011 were for small amounts compared with only 11% since that date.



Graph 3: Number of grants awarded by value pre and post 2011

1) Grant Recipients

108 organisations shared the 262 grants awarded and Table 1 shows the 33 entities which received more than one grant.

Table 1: Recipients receiving more than one grant

Organisation	Total no. grants	Total\$	% total no. grants	% Total\$
Southern ACT Catchment Group	26	\$493,939	9.9	12.5
Greening Australia	23	\$473,085	8.8	11.9
Ginninderra Catchment Group	16	\$250,733	6.1	6.3
Molonglo Catchment Group	14	\$229,061	5.3	5.8
Environmental Defenders Office	13	\$86,270	5.0	2.2
Conservation Council of South East region and Canberra	12	\$312,032	4.6	7.9
National Parks Association	10	\$133,907	3.8	3.4
RSPCA	9	\$321,300	3.4	8.1
Canberra & South East Region Environment Centre	7	\$233,397	2.7	5.9
Canberra Ornithologists Group	7	\$129,835	2.7	3.3
Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) - ACT Branch	4	\$25,088	1.5	0.6
Lake Tuggeranong College	4	\$28,996	1.5	0.7
Scout Association of Australia ACT Branch Inc (Scouts ACT)	4	\$33,305	1.5	0.8
SEE-Change Inc	4	\$102,980	1.5	2.6
Australian Network for Plant Conservation	3	\$36,265	1.1	0.9
Belconnen Model Aero Club	3	\$17,900	1.1	0.5
Canberra Indian Myna Action Group	3	\$23,584	1.1	0.6
Coolman Ridge Park Care Group	3	\$9,300	1.1	0.2
Urban Ecology (ACT)	3	\$28,300	1.1	0.7
A Chorus of Women	2	\$27,615	0.8	0.7
ACT Wildlife	2	\$54,473	0.8	1.4
Chifley/Pearce Land Care Group	2	\$7,920	0.8	0.2
Clean Up Australia 2001	2	\$15,548	0.8	0.4
Conservation Council ACT Region	2	\$24,267	0.8	0.6
Friends of Mount Painter	2	\$8,000	0.8	0.2
Friends of the Aranda Bushland	2	\$6,579	0.8	0.2
Friends of the Grasslands	2	\$20,294	0.8	0.5
Ginninderra Wetlands Care Group	2	\$12,832	0.8	0.3
Lions Youth Haven	2	\$20,000	0.8	0.5
North Ainslie Primary School	2	\$2,600	0.8	0.1
Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park	2	\$25,958	0.8	0.7
Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Coordination	2	\$13,000	0.8	0.3
Watson Community Association	2	\$12,726	0.8	0.3

Appendix 1 shows the additional 66 organisations that were awarded a grant (one) during the period studied.

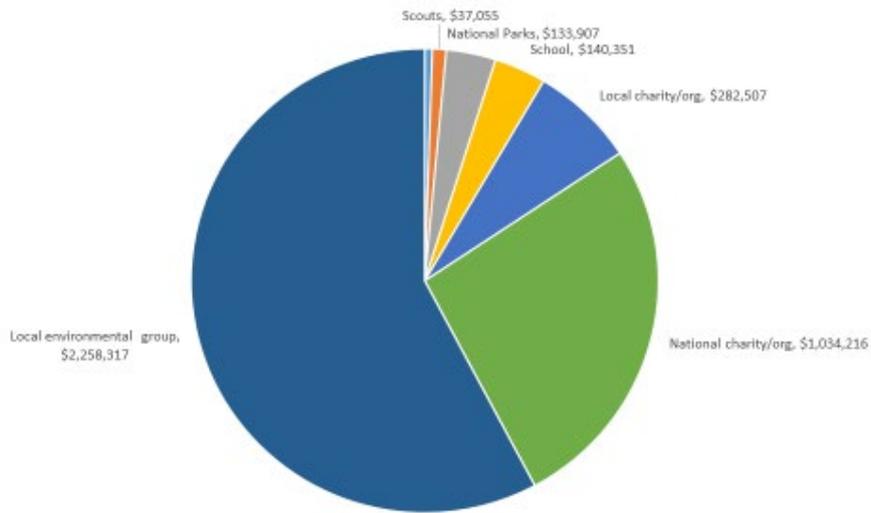
There has been a significant shift in the organisations receiving grants since on-ground activities were made the grant focus in 2011. Prior to 2010, 84 organisations received a total of 181 grants (an average of 2.2 per recipient). Since 2011, 28 organisations have shared 81 grants, an average of 2.9 per grants per organisation (details are shown in Appendix 2).

2) Grants by organisation type

Overall, local environmental groups have benefited most from the Environmental Grants program since it commenced in 1996, gaining over half (51.9%) of the grants awarded and 57% of the funding (over \$2.2 million – see Graph 4). On average local environmental group projects were awarded \$16,605, nearly 10% (9.7%) higher than the value of the average grant awarded (Table 2).

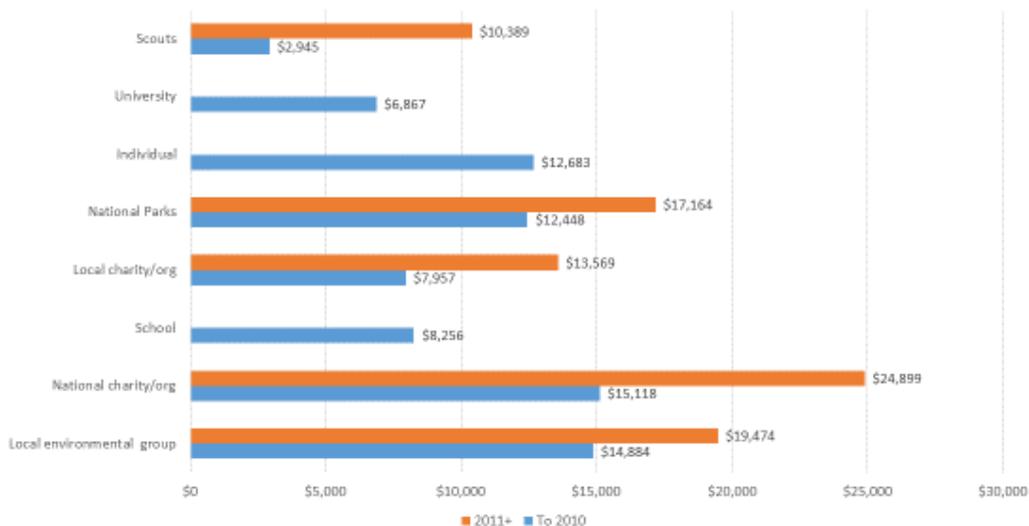
Table 2: Grants by organisational type

Organisation type	Total no. grants	Total \$ grants	Average grant	% no. grants	% money
Local environmental group	136	\$2,258,317	\$16,605	51.9	57.0
National charity/org	60	\$1,034,216	\$17,237	22.9	26.1
Local charity/org	27	\$282,507	\$10,463	10.3	7.1
School	17	\$140,351	\$8,256	6.5	3.5
National Parks Association	10	\$133,907	\$13,391	3.8	3.4
Scouts	5	\$37,055	\$7,411	1.9	0.9
Individual	3	\$38,050	\$12,683	1.1	1.0
University	3	\$20,600	\$6,867	1.1	0.5
Unknown	1	\$19,480	\$19,480	0.4	0.5
Totals	262	\$3,964,483	\$15,132	100	100



Graph 4: Grants by organisation type - Value

There has been a shift in the type of organisation receiving grants since the focus of the grants was changed in 2011, as shown in Graph 5. Individuals, schools and universities have not received grants since that date, while local environmental groups now attract nearly two-thirds of the funding available (64.3%). National charities attract the highest average value grants since 2011 (\$24,899), in total accounting for a fifth of the money allocated (20.9%), but only 16% of the number of grants. The Scouts and local charities have, on average, attracted lower value grants (\$12,954), however this is a significant increase on the average \$7,367 awarded to these groups prior to 2011.



Graph 5: Average value of grants by organisation type

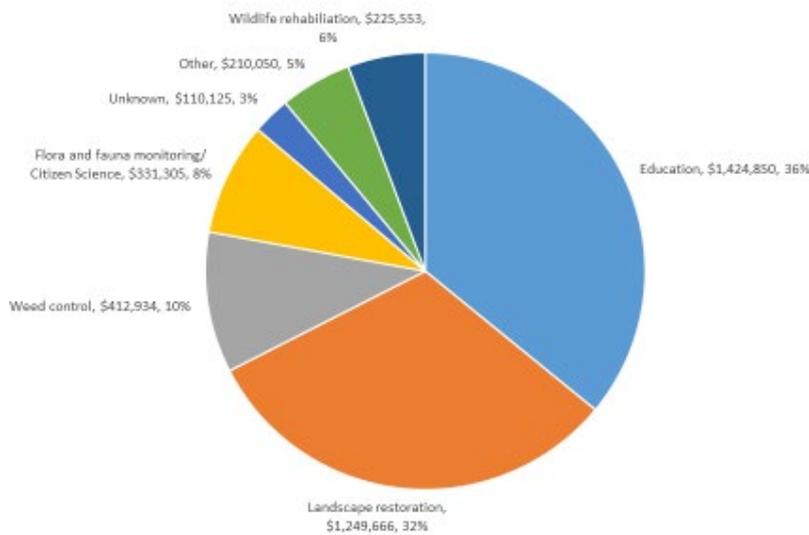
3) Grants by category

Grants were allocated to categories based on the detailed description of activities provided by the applicant. Many grants were used to finance multiple activities but an attempt has been made to allocate by category based on the activities where the majority of funds were being committed (Table 3 and Graph 6). *Weed control* has been shown separately from *Landscape restoration*. Many landscape restoration projects include significant weed control efforts, however where projects were solely dedicated to the removal of weeds these have been separated.

Weed control, *Wildlife rehabilitation* and *Flora and fauna monitoring/Citizen Science* projects have been awarded significantly higher average value grants.

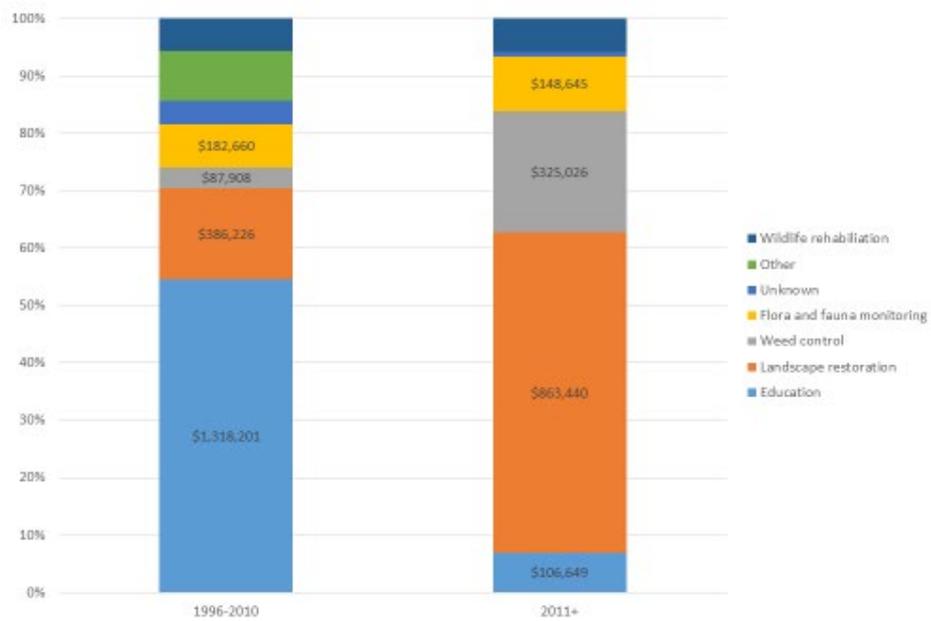
Table 3: Grants by category

Category	No. grants	Total \$	Average \$
Education	102	\$1,424,850	\$13,969
Landscape restoration	81	\$1,249,666	\$15,428
Weed control	22	\$412,934	\$18,770
Flora and fauna monitoring/Citizen Science	19	\$331,305	\$17,437
Unknown	19	\$110,125	\$5,796
Other	10	\$210,050	\$21,005
Wildlife rehabilitation	9	\$225,553	\$25,061
Totals	262	\$3,964,483	\$15,132



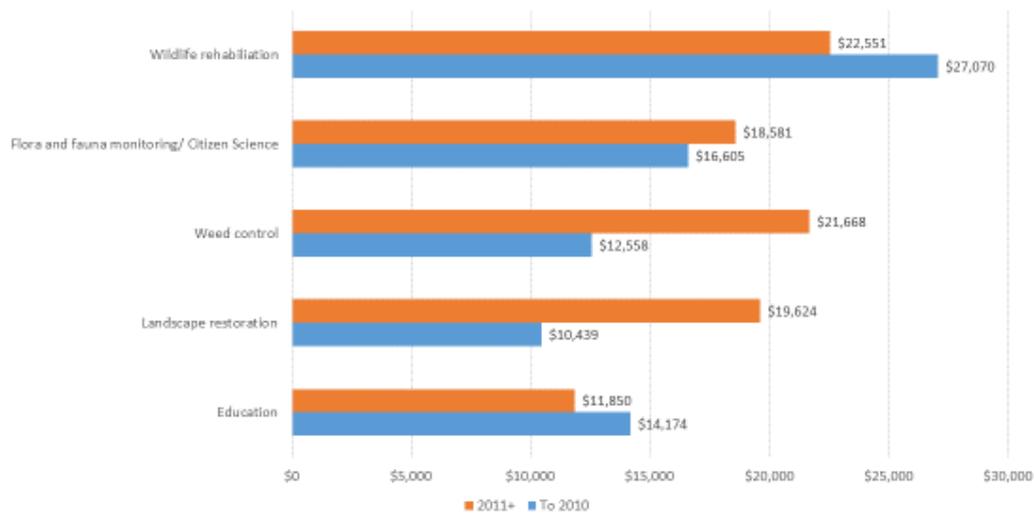
Graph 6: Grants by category - value

There has been a significant change in the categories of activities supported by the grants since the focus of the program was adjusted in 2011 (Graph 7). Grants focused primarily on education activities have seen the biggest drop, accounting for just 4.4% of the dollars allocated since 2011 compared with over half (54.5%) prior to that date.



Graph 7: Grants by category

In keeping with the renewed focus, landscape restoration projects have been awarded more than half the dollars available since 2011 (55.9%), compared with just 16% before. Similarly, weed control projects have been allocated a fifth of the funding available since 2011 (21%), compared with just 3.6% before. Since 2011, education projects have been less likely to receive funding and the average value of grants awarded to these projects is significantly below average (Graph 8).



Graph 8: Average value of grant by category

METHODOLGY

To assist with the review of the ACT Environment Grants, feedback was sought from previous successful grant recipients, who had received a grant since 2005. Attempts were made to contact 77 organisations with 31 providing responses through an online survey or by telephone with an additional five participating in face-to-face interviews. Organisational and staff/volunteer turnover made it increasingly difficult to connect with knowledgeable representatives for older grants.

A focus on a qualitative assessment of the feedback received has been included in this section of the report.

FINDINGS

Overall participants were very appreciative of the funding offered by the ACT Government and many of those interviewed either face-to-face or over the phone going out of their way to express their gratitude for the opportunities created by the grant program.

We find the Environment Grants are a very valuable grant program, the best that we have access to and we love it actually. It is a big investment for ACT priorities, the only investment for community engagement on ground outcomes. So we really appreciate the program and we've never not gone for it (applied for a grant) in 16 years.

All the members appreciate getting the grants and I think the government appreciates that we value add to their work. At least that is the feedback we get.

Frequently participants were also keen to express their gratitude to the ACT Government grants team for the understanding shown by adopting a flexible approach to accommodate changes to projects required as a result of circumstances, often out of the control of the applicant (extreme weather events or delays in receiving approvals).

[We are] very appreciative of flexibility shown by the grants administrator – this project was significantly delayed by drought – but good rains flooded the area and brought nutrients to the ground and it is now well established for a recent planting.

I still have to acquit last year's grant but I have until November to do that. That is a good thing about the organisation they are a little bit flexible – they know we have to acquit the grant in November but lot of grants start in September so there is some element of trust that we will account for the money.

All the respondents participating in the online survey reported that their grant achievements had been either fully (60%) or partially (40%) met. When asked to focus on long-term outcomes 40% said they were 'very satisfied' while 60% reported they were 'quite satisfied'.

This was a nothing area and we hope as the plants get bigger (and you can see these ones peeking out from their plant guards already), that it becomes a space that people like to picnic in or stop to look at. So this project I think is making something out of a space that wasn't anything.

Participants did not report any difficulty in measuring the progress toward completion of any of the tasks nominated in applications. Virtually all participants said they had gained the expected level of support from all the stakeholders nominated in their application.

All the online participants reported that they either already had or would consider applying for another ACT Environmental Grant, perhaps the biggest endorsement of the program's success. One participant contacted by telephone said they would not apply for another grant as the administrative burden was too great for small projects.

The long-term benefits of the grants were immediately highlighted by several participants – keen to illustrate the legacy benefits enjoyed by the ACT Government in addition to the projects themselves.

We got \$3,000, or something, to cut out the woody weeds and we engaged the community in that and that went well. We saw the change happened almost the day we did it you know you can see native grasses and no weeds, the place can breathe.

The project is still running today – it is now called Forest 20 and is near the visitor centre at the Arboretum. The government can be assured that for the money invested they have reaped enormous reward. On Thursdays volunteers still turn up to work on the project.

Participants were also keen to highlight the community building benefits of their grants, in addition to their official milestone achievements:

I think people like to be feeling they are making a difference and to get out there and actually plant and you are doing something physical and you are meeting other people and it's outside and nice.

It's been a very happy community project with 200 volunteer hours doing this and many, many volunteers, repeatedly came back so a good kind of community building exercise. People from [organisations involved with the grant], scouts, people who live close by, older people, residents here, it was a good mix of people.

The value of that is the engagement rather than the outcome. We say that is a positive outcome but the grants don't often ask about that – What did the community get out of it? What are the social benefits of these things? It is really important - environmental and community are not separate creatures, they are really not. If the community are involved they will do more to help the environment.

A range of other unexpected long term outcomes were highlighted by participants:

In [this book published with grant funding] we acknowledged the grant by the logo and also by stating that the publication is made possible with the assistance of the ACT Government Environment Grant. We do try and acknowledge the government the best we can. The book exemplifies the ongoing nature of the grant. We get the grant for only a year and we have been selling this book for years. The effect of the grant can go on for decades.

Another one that I wanted to mention to you was a grant from three or four years ago, looking at aboriginal usage of the land and trying to emulate what they might have done to maintain vegetation, in particular to maintaining vegetation in a couple of big areas. We are still going out there today, in fact we are going out there this Saturday to do some more work on this project. So we get a grant for one year but the project goes on for many, many years.

She [Aboriginal woman] came out to check the site, she used to do a lot with her mum privately but not in public. She came out with her mum and they decided this was a women's site but apparently the effect it had on her was so strong that she said, 'I want to come and

join in the planting'. She never planted plants before so here we were empowering this woman and liberating this woman from her whatever it was she was not doing. She's now doing an environmental management course at TAFE and she's now leading the works we do up in the women's area. She speaks in front of people, she is in consultation with government and she is quite forthright in what she thinks should be done right. Her brothers all came and said, 'This is amazing. We have been trying for years to get her engaged'. I feel very proud that this happened and now we're trying to develop programs for education. So out of that tiny grant the ACT Environment should be congratulated for allowing us to do that and funding us to do it.

The role the grants played in supporting organisations trying to recover from the 2003 bush fires was also noted by at least two participants, particularly noteworthy as it is now 16 years after the event.

We received grants that were used to rehabilitate a camp site which was hit hard in the 2003 bush fires. We are very grateful for the funds received, we couldn't have done what we did without it.

One participant from a catchment group highlighted the importance of the grants in developing relationships with private landholders.

This program is the one program that it almost facilitates me building that relationship with landowners. I can't really approach landowners when I don't have anything to give. These grants happen every year, always available, they facilitate that relationship so very beneficial.

Another participant highlighted that they had used their grant funds to get programs established and now run larger programs (focusing on food waste and active transport) using other funding sources.

Case Study: Landscape Restoration

Enhancing the biodiversity value of Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla - building Ngunnawal engagement in natural resource management. Molonglo Catchment Group, ACT Environmental Grants: 2014, \$6,508, 2015, \$3,945 and 2016, \$23,187.

This project involved undertaking rubbish removal, weed control and replanting of indigenous species to protect threatened remnant native woodland and sustain habitat connectivity. It restored the understorey of threatened remnant native woodland to help protect a threatened population of the (nationally listed) Button Wrinklewort. It involved working closely with representative Traditional Custodians, Friends of Grassland, Greening Australia and community volunteers. Karen Williams explained progress on this project:



We started off knowing that there is a lot of Aboriginal culture in this area. Our motivation was to find a location where we could raise awareness of Aboriginal and ecological connectivity.

There is this wonderful story being told, the builders of Canberra, that's the guys that literally built Canberra, camped on those hills. You have remnant woodlands as an ecological story, threatened species and Button Wrinklewort (an endangered species) and an Aboriginal story trying to emerge.

That's the message that we tend to try and get across - that living in this modern city of Canberra is wonderful; it's like a juxtaposition, you can actually get patches of remnant past and gain a sense of place.

We originally went for a small grant to just get rid of the woody weed. It is all nice and clean now and it's amazing what's come back just by cutting out the weeds.

We thought about putting some seeds in an area that had been scraped. We came back a couple months later, after it had rained, to do a bit of a survey and all these rare species were coming up. In the right time they all come up on their own and flowers are everywhere now.

We saw the change happen almost the day we did it, you can see native grasses and no weeds, the place can breathe.

We let the local Landcare groups know around, Ainslie, Majura and Red Hill and there was real interest in working on the land with Aboriginal people. Everyone is focused on ecology and planting plants but they're not realising that they may be destroying something cultural. I've always tried to bring the two together in some way.



The next grant we went for [was aimed at providing] maintenance and stewardship. Rather than trying to arrange walks and workshops onsite we chose places that we knew there was a good story to tell and would demonstrate features to watch for.

We chose a site of significance to Aboriginal women and another suitable to take the general public to. We ran the walks there and got a good turnout.

The women's one was great because I got a local Aboriginal woman to help me lead the walk and people were just stunned watching her discover cultural features of the site. She didn't know the area in detail, she was responding to the landscape in a cultural way and explaining what she was thinking about.

The women thought it was wonderful that this was within their patch all the time and they didn't realise. They all started to have a very different relationship and we found we had them coming to the workshops we had here on Bullan Mura and helping with planting and weeding.

We work quite closely with Friend of Grasslands they helped us a lot on this project. A lot of our work is involved in building partnerships.



1) Grant structure

Most of the recipients interviewed were satisfied that grants were only available for a one year period. The flexibility shown by the grants team to allow acquittal dates to be adjusted should circumstances dictate was often noted as a reason for this acceptance.

Some participants highlighted that some projects could not be completed in a year and it would be more appropriate for a longer funding period.

I am a scientist always looking for research proposal to get involved with. The outcome was a management proposal to the ACT Government on how they would manage this threatened species. It is not a one year project – we used the first grant money to buy instrumentation; radio transmitters and collars. Even as we were learning how to use them and how we could benefit from them we started learning ..., we know so much more we can't possibly stop the project now – it is truly a five year project.

A multi-year grant would be a much better idea. Approvals take months.

Three participants commented on the maximum available grant being reduced to \$35,000 from \$50,000. They felt the new lower funding level too low to have any major impact. Three participants complained the annual allocation was too small.

When grants are so small you can't expect big outcomes, can't expect good monitoring. You can't expect a whole lot of stuff really. What can you do with \$35k at a max?

Don't expect big things when you are not offering a lot of money.

The amount is cut down to \$35,000 and so it's very limiting what you can do with that.

Of the participants who had received only one grant most stated that they had not applied for another grant as they had been unable to identify any additional projects suitable to apply for funding. Two participants from smaller organisations said they had been put off applying for another grant due to the administrative overhead.

The amount of work required to submit an application and acquit a grant has been a major factor in us not applying for another grant.

One participant suggested that it would be beneficial to see how the funding priorities of the Environmental Grants aligned with overall territory policies. They found it unclear and suggest there should be more transparency around how they all align, especially around topics such as climate change.

Another asked for more transparency on the overall strategy for EPSDD:

It would be good if there was an NRM strategy and this program was able to feed into that strategy. Then I think structurally that would work a lot better. Particularly around community engagement and community priorities.

A participant also questioned if ACT Natural Resource Management (NRM) was the correct administrator for the grants, as they believed their focus to be strategy. They recommended ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) as a more appropriate administrator as they are involved with on ground works.

We need more money on local priorities and less on commonwealth priorities. Which is why I think the NRM unit, who are very focused on commonwealth priorities, because that is where all their money comes from, the PCS should be managing it as they are focused on local priorities.

One participant expressed their frustration at the scope of the grants.

Innovation is the bane of our existence. We have so much work to do on stuff at the moment. Innovation is the last thing we worry about. I understand the Minister wants to do something new and exciting but what needs to happen is more weeding. We need more money to do more weeding. That is the big problem and we can't put money into innovation when we need to deal with this.

One participant expressed their disappointment with the current direction of funding.

The program is being abused by ACT Environment, particularly the last round where it was quite clear they had priorities which means that if there's groups out there with projects needing small dollars it's not going to make the cut. If you know that up front, what do you tell the members when they are enthusiastic, and you have to tell them they knocked themselves out for something you won't get near. This year in particular it was really quite clear there was double dipping by the Government, this is meant to be community funds, and they had a strong hand guiding where the funds should go.

2) Application process

Most participants, when asked about the application process, acknowledged that, as public money was at stake, it was appropriate that there was a detailed application process to enable formal evaluation of proposals. In comparison with other grant application processes participants rated the Environment Grants as fair and reasonable.

There were some exceptions:

It takes a lot of work to put in a grant application and you are never quite sure what the Government wants as it uses kind of formal language. Do they not trust us? You have to provide documentation about the people involved in a project to show they have the appropriate skills and paperwork to show they are allowed to handle native animals. We had to go through the steps of providing all that information, which we had given them before. It is government money, it is tax payers' money so there has to be due process... it takes a long time.

Two participants felt the application process could be simplified:

What they really need to see is objectives, outcomes and activities and that is it. Instead the same question is asked three times.

The question about are you in a place that is historically registered appears twice, maybe three times on the form.

Several participants made the suggestion that a two-stage application process should be considered. The requirement to provide detailed costings and quotations to support the budget was seen as particularly onerous and potentially wasting time for potential commercial suppliers quoting for projects that do not receive funding. Similarly, the detailed project plan was seen as creating a significant workload for projects that did not proceed. As many organisations applying for the grants are small community based organisations they do not have access to professional administrative support to complete grant applications. A two-step process would allow the Government to review potential projects and ask for further details for only those projects which were likely to receive funding.

I think it would be a good idea to have a stepped application process, as you have to have lots of quotes and costings and things in your proposal and that can be very time consuming and costly if you don't get the grant.

Two participants emphasised they believed that there should be a community member on the evaluation panel.

There used to be a community person on the panel, years ago, once there was. It is great that there is a government program but it is supposed to be for the community. We would like to see a community rep on the panel every year.

Case Study: Birdscaping #CBR-Bringing Back Birds Butterflies and Bees

Landscape Rehabilitation – SEE-Change, 2017 ACT Environmental Grant, \$43,638

This project aimed to revegetate sections of urban open spaces adjacent to Sullivan’s Creek with understorey shrub cover to attract small insectivorous birds and butterflies to suburban areas. Jennifer Tonna explained progress on the project.



“The original idea was that the planting would provide habitat that is missing here – there are large trees and grass but no groundcover and low to mid-story plants, so no habitat for small little birds to forage and nest in.

“The original idea was to vegetate along Sullivan’s Creek from David Street to Macarthur Ave to make a corridor. The public consultation was positive. In February 2018, there was a severe storm event and there was some flooding – that whole area that we planned to plat out was under water. The water was even going over the road bridge.”

As a result SEE-Change were obliged to alter their plans, which involved complex negotiations with several government departments, causing a significant delay to the project. An adjacent site, on higher ground, was eventually selected for the project.

We have had bird surveys of the site so the whole idea is that the species here will increase habitat for insects and small birds like the Scarlet Robin, which is endangered and will disappear from Canberra in 50 years unless we help them.



“This project will also increase nectar feeding opportunities for butterflies and bees. Hopefully, we will have some insect hotel in here as well. The logs will break down and attract insects providing food for the birds.



“We finished planting 2,000 plants in December (2018). Originally we planned to plant the previous April. We had to set aside a sum of money to water the plants over the summer, which cost over \$2,000. Each watering session cost us \$600.” Which allowed the majority of plants to survive the hottest summer on record.

“We are still doing some community weeding days and spreading mulch. It's still quite an active volunteer group of people, we've had four community planting days; two classes from the school and the rest were attended by between 30 and 50 people.

“It's been a very happy community project with over 500 volunteer hours and many volunteers, repeatedly coming back, so a good community building exercise. People from ANU and from ACT for Bees, Scouts, people who live close by, older people and local residents, it was a good mix of people.”

This was an underutilised area and we hope that, as the plants get bigger, it becomes a space that people like to picnic in or stop to look at. So this project, I think, is making something for the community out of a space that wasn't anything - increasing habitat for small birds and bringing people together.

3) Risks and delays

Weather was identified as the main risk affecting the delivery of projects, with wind, rain and drought adversely affecting projects. The major storm of February 2018 impacted at least one grant, with delays compounded by government process:

In February 2018, there was a severe storm event and there was some flooding – that whole area that was originally planned for planning was under water. We identified an underutilised area that was high and we had to consult other ACT Government people like tree people and hydrology people, to work out where the 1 in 100 year flood line was. A lot of finding out information through different sources to show the location was less risky.

In fact, delays caused by waiting for approvals from other government departments was the biggest cause of frustration reported by participants. Delays caused by approval processes between government departments were widely reported as the main impediments to completing projects in a timely manner:

We weren't previously aware of the ACT/Commonwealth land boundaries and the challenges they posed in getting timely agreement for construction of an access path.

Gaining inter-jurisdictional approvals for signage was a lengthy and complicated process. Good outcomes eventually achieved. Discovery of Aboriginal cultural sites complicated delayed and complicated process. Again, we experienced difficulties with achieving inter-agency communication between Heritage and Environment. We facilitated the process and were pleased with the outcome.

The difficulty I have is when you are doing work on a piece of land that's owned by another agency there's a real disconnect between the people who are running the grants in the Environment [department] and the planning director at any of the other agencies. I think I mentioned to you that it would be fantastic to get help facilitating like on one hand, EPSDD gives us the money and away we go but we are not given any support really if we are having to liaise with say, in my example, city services unit and territory administrative services. I've made a recommendation to the Nature in the City enquiry that the process of approvals be streamlined.

Having to deal with both ACT and Federal Government over access issues.

We built a preliminary cultural survey into the project plan, however, the time it took to resolve Heritage and grant variation issues pushed the project timing back. This affected the planting schedule and our ability to fit coordinate with targeted Landcare group calendar of activities. We planned and rescheduled our workshops to fit with the new timetable.

We found an aboriginal site... That is when we got behind with the project, because we had to stop everything and bring in the Heritage Unit.

A significant delay (almost 12months) in securing the licence for use of the ACT Government building. Long delays in responses to questions and requests for updates from ACT Government.

One thing about this project is that approval was given to do this project through ACT Environment Grants and so we got the money conditional on public stakeholder approval which we got, but there was a missing link with the land owners, the ACT Government, because we then had to renegotiate where it should be there was this frustration process of going backwards and forwards with ACT Government, everything we proposed wasn't right and there wasn't much guidance about what we had to do. We did have to do a 17 page permit application to do this and a traffic management plan and everything but the type of document that we had to fill out was really more for a large scale developer. It wasn't appropriate for community based small scale plan.

Several participants thought the grants team should take a more active role in interfacing with other government departments and assisting with securing approvals and support:

The government should facilitate communications between departments – all land is leased in the ACT so the government should take care of conversations with the Heritage Unit.

At least one project was delayed by the need to seek ethics approval:

Ethics approval was not obtained until early December, which delayed the start of the treatment phase slightly.

Many of the difficulties and impediments reported by grant recipients related to logistical issues, applicants have not given sufficiently detailed consideration to the execution of their projects. For example:

The logistics of storing and distributing 15 large aviaries has to be experienced to fully appreciate just how heavy and difficult it is. When they arrived from Wollongong the panels were stacked in batches. 90 sections had to be individually labelled to ensure they were correctly matched and delivered to carers.

In this example, the logistical issues could easily have been avoided or significantly reduced had the grant recipient been encouraged to obtain details from the supplier of the aviaries about the weight of the shipment and how the products would be delivered.

In retrospect, the scope and expectations of the original project were far too ambitious for not only the talents of [our] volunteers, but also the grant monies available.

In this example, the scope of the project was reduced in consultation with the grants team and the reduced project (an education space at the arboretum) successfully delivered. A more critical review of the original project proposed may well have shown the project to be too ambitious when considered against the capacity and resources available.

4) Other items

Several of the larger organisations who assist smaller community groups to gain financial support for their project proposals noted that insufficient allowance was made to cover costs associated with applying for and managing the grants.

I can't remember if we get 5% project administration or 10% project administration but it actually takes more than that, particular if you dealing with all this bureaucracy.

Currently project grants do not cover project management costs. Without funds to support a project manager provide consistent and ongoing management and coordination of the project. Funding of administration of the project is inadequate for complex projects.

The grant program doesn't cover project management so writing the form, administering it – there is a small amount for administration, which is such a pittance it is hardly worth it. If you've got a member group come in, the consultation and the facilitation of the project design and planning takes many hours, sometimes several days. Site visit and all of that sort of stuff, none of that is covered by the grant which makes it very difficult.

Catchment groups have limited funds – so carrying the overheads and transaction costs associated with these grants is a real challenge.

We are pretty good at managing money really, we don't need a lot. There's an expectation that projects like this give money to catchment groups but they cost us money to run. Supporting these little groups particularly ... with a \$5,000 grant how much can you actually charge for us. For a \$5,000 grant what we need to be looking is a call out fee. An electrician says you know that there is a flat callout fee for me to engage that's what we don't have and without the core funding [it's not sustainable]. I just put in five grants and this year we experimented with not supporting land owners at all and only supporting community groups and they are all tiny. I calculated it cost me \$6000 worth of staff time to put in those grant applications.

A lot of the time [put into the project] was me, I am a volunteer but not everyone has that and eventually I need to call on technical people, I can't do it all and I think that the government should be funding that sort of thing.

One participant highlighted the variability of project management costs across grant applications:

There is a very big inconsistency on project management costs. I put in \$48 per hour as that is what it costs to do project administration. Others are putting \$80 or something and \$100 something. That is our problem we should include a flat rate. I don't want government dictating what the rate should be. If I can do it cheaper that is great.

One participant felt strongly that the lack of funds was impacting the work the catchment groups were established to complete:

The whole idea of having community network groups is that you encourage volunteers to get out and engage in stewardship and one of the things that the groups tell us, going back to the 90s, is the groups haven't got the capacity to administer the projects and do the plan design. That's why they come to experts, so that's not covered in the program and that in the long term needs to be addressed because stewardship, you don't get some lasting outcomes if you don't allow facilitators to encourage that stewardship.

Catchment groups take their responsibilities seriously, acting as a gate keeper for grant applications.

Rangers call me wanting to do this or that but there is no community engagement at all. I am not here to subsidise ranger work. It's a communications issue for the rangers to know the grants are for the priority of the community and not government employees.

FINDINGS BY GRANT CATEGORY

1) Weed control

Eleven acquittal reports were provided for projects where the main focus was on the control of weeds. Maintaining enthusiasm from volunteers was the major challenge reported for many of these projects. The weather was also a significant factor contributing toward the outcome of these projects, with unfavourable conditions (both drought and flood) preventing native seeds from being sown to replace the vegetation removed.

Some projects used funds to purchase assets for the mapping and treatment of weeds (e.g. Ginninderra Catchment Group's, *Catchment Wide Pest Species Mapping and Coordinated Control Program* and Molonglo Catchment Group's, *Catchment Wide Pest Species Mapping and Coordinated Control Program*) – while others used funds to pay contractors to undertake weed control activities (e.g. Southern ACT Catchment Group's, *Protecting Threatened Ecosystems on Kerrabee – The National Equestrian Centre* and Booroomba's, *African Love Grass containment and control in Booroomba and upper reaches of the Paddy's River*, where the entire grants (\$20,000 and \$39,880) were used to pay contractors).

Most grant recipients demonstrated they had plans to maintain the land cleared during the project. However, one recipient was unable to answer how they proposed to maintain their project saying they had no plans to continue to monitor or further develop their project adding:

Government policies re weed funding in the future seem to change from year to year depending on perceived priorities in the short term. It is extremely difficult for landholders to have any influence on this.

From the follow up survey some participants from smaller organisations were uncertain if their project had been maintained. In these cases there was an expectation that projects had been maintained by other organisations (usually government or Landcare groups) but in some cases this had not been monitored.

One participant noted that the grants awarded to help landowners to get on top of their weed infestation problems acted as an incentive.

A \$50k grant on a large property doesn't go very far. But it does help to incentivise landholders to keep on top of it and keep the landholders engaged. Engagement, rather than on ground activities, could be biggest outcome.

Another participant commented directly on the issue of who should benefit from support for weed control:

All grants have issues with the public private benefit with landholders. I find it less of a problem on private lands than public lands. Private lands are part of our landscape and there is always neighbouring issues. If a landholder wants help to clear his blackberry, we need to help clear his blackberry. I know it is his core responsibility, but most landholders don't have the funds to do that and the weed problem has been very often caused by management outside their property. Because weeds don't know property lines.

The same participant highlighted the value of comparing treatment results and learning from the knowledge gained:

They have an infestation of blackberry that is so thick it is completely inaccessible. We got Yamaha in to do drone spraying. The panel wanted us to downsize the \$50k for spraying. I was against this as we will only get part of the infestation. But we have managed to get the landowners put in more and we are doing a trial where we have given only \$10k to Yamaha and \$22k to the land owners. We are doing a comparison to find what is more effective. It is as expected the drones are more effective on large dense infestations. The simple stock plants here and there we are getting better coverage with hand spraying. Lucky they are going to get a proper report on that comparison for that money.

2) Landscape Rehabilitation

Landscape rehabilitation projects were well represented in this analysis with 24 acquittal reports available for analysis. These projects typically included weed control activities but the main focus was on planting native vegetation or other rehabilitation activities. As with the weed control projects, landscape rehabilitation initiatives were frequently reported as being affected by the weather (especially drought) and by a lack of consistent support from volunteers.

So we finished planting in December, originally we planned to do it the previous April so then we had to set aside a whole lot more money to water the plants over the summer, which cost an extra \$2,000. We had to get a water truck which cost \$600 a pop.

Grant recipients were more likely to report successes than failures although one project reported on plant species that did not germinate or failed to survive their seed production process [milkmaids (*Burchardia umbrellata*), early nance (*Wumbea dioica*), and flax Lily (*Linum marginale*)].

Acquittal reports suggest that some small projects (sub \$10,000) delivered impressive results (e.g. Southern ACT Catchment Group's 2012-15 project, Murrumbidgee river Riparian Revegetation at Castle Hill and SEE-Change's 2012-13 project, Living with Jerrabomberra Wetlands). These projects emphasised communications to engaged large numbers of volunteers and achieved significant weed control and native plantings.

Most of the project completion reports provided for landscape rehabilitation projects appear to have been largely successful. At least one recipient highlighted the fact they had not given sufficient thought to how to continue the project after the grant funding ended:

PCS will continue to manage the area and they have plans to expand on the work that has been done to date by additional planting and setting up a Park Care group at some stage in future to help take care of the site.

In the online survey the participants who reported on landscape regeneration projects rated their efforts as partially successful. Participants highlighted the need for ongoing intervention to prevent the treated area from returning to a disturbed landscape. When asked about the survival rates of plantings financed through the grant program responses varied from 50% to 85% with the weather reported as the most important factor affecting this result:

Grass cover has been successfully restored over the whole area but the grass is a mixture of native and exotic species. Initially a wet period allowed exotic grass and weeds to continue to grow from seed stock already in the ground. The more recent drought period has preferentially benefitted native species. Most of the weeds have been suppressed or eliminated. (50% success rate)

Waterlogging due to a heavy rain event a few months after, and the effects of dry summers. (80% success rate)

Good planning helped one participant achieve an 85% success rate:

Luckily we allowed for follow up watering with a water cart ... - most of our plants survived the hottest summer on record for 2018/19.

One participant highlighted that their planting activities had only been partially successful (around 50% survival rate) but they discovered that, by simply clearing the land of weeds, native plants were able to quickly re-establish themselves.

The land is just breathing and it is beautiful.

Case Study: Landscape Rehabilitation and Weed Control

Learnings from projects supported by ACT Environmental Grants

Applying for an Environmental Grant does require the development of a detailed plan to demonstrate the project is achievable and represents good value for money. This fact sheet highlights some of the main considerations your plan should address and warns of some of the unforeseen pitfalls that could affect your project. Plans that demonstrate they have given consideration to these factors are more likely to be favourably considered by the evaluation committee.

Find a site

Identifying a site is among the first considerations for any landscape restoration or weed control project. It is important to consult with all the stakeholders with an interest in the land to ensure adequate time is available to obtain the relevant approvals. The ACT Government's City Services Unit and Heritage Unit will often need to be consulted before a project can commence. Depending on the feedback from the stakeholders you may need to be flexible when finalising your selection of a site.

'We weren't previously aware of the ACT/Commonwealth land boundaries and the challenges they posed in getting timely agreement for construction of an access path.'

Of course even the best plans can be affected by unforeseen circumstances. In such cases the ACT Environmental Grants team will work with you to help adjust your plans accordingly.



Nicki Taws, Greening Australia

'We found an Aboriginal site... That is when we got behind with the project, we had to stop everything and bring in the Heritage Unit.'

Plan for the weather

When planning a project involving landscape restoration or weed control it is prudent to build flexibility into your project plan to allow for unforeseen events. Often projects are delayed by extreme weather events, with large sections of ACT affected by both drought and flood in recent years.

Although frustrating, these weather events can sometimes deliver unexpected long-term benefits:

'This project was delayed by drought – but good rains flooded the area and brought nutrients to the ground and it is now well established following a recent planting.'



Weather can also have an impact on new plantings. Survival rates are heavily dependent on the weather. Planning can improve survival rates, for example, by budgeting for watering though the first summer.

'Luckily we allowed for follow-up watering with a water cart... most (85%) of our plants survived the hottest summer on record for 2018/19.'

Boundaries

When returning an area to natural habitat it is important to consider how the area will be divided off from the surrounding landscape.

'The Landcare group has mulched the boundary (between the weeds and the native species) to reduce the weed seeds continually blow into the project area.'

Volunteers and maintenance

Most projects involve volunteers to get the job done and provide ongoing maintenance. It is important to consider how you will maintain enthusiasm for your project and to ensure you have considered the availability of any volunteer groups you might rely on.

'It got held up, and it threw it all out, we didn't fit the program for the Parkcare group's calendar really well.'

Plantings will often require watering to get established and ongoing maintenance. If your project is near an area rich in native vegetation consider concentrating on removing the weeds and let nature take its course.

'We put some seeds in and it rained, we came back a couple months later to do a bit of a survey and all these rare species were coming up. In the right time they all come up and flowers are everywhere. We cut out the woody weeds ... and we saw the change happen almost the day we did it ... you can see native grasses and no weed, the place can breathe... There was the sea of stuff that came up on its own.'



3) Flora and Fauna Monitoring/Citizen Science

Four acquittal reports were provided for projects dedicated to wildlife monitoring. Two grants were provided to organisation developing the Canberra Nature Map and these projects were completed well and have left a good legacy. A project to monitor Gang Gang Cockatoos in the region was also successful as it engaged a large number of volunteers to use existing technology (Atlas of Living Australia) to track sightings.

In contrast, the grant provided to the development of another project was not well managed. In particular, detailed technical requirements were not developed before an IT contractor was engaged to deliver the project. This approach is almost certain to result in frustration as there is likely to be a mis-match between what the client is expecting and what the IT consultant is prepared to deliver for the funds available. In hindsight, this grant recipient realised the importance of technical specifications and meetings with the IT provider to ensure the client's expectations are fully understood.

Again maintaining volunteer commitment was identified as a key challenge:

We have 250 members but getting people to go out there week after week [is a challenge] – it is a long drive – an hour to get there and spend all day there, an hour back, and you usually get back in the dark and it is cold.

One participant highlighted the difficulty in completing monitoring projects within the grant funding period. A project team might require time on the ground to understand the complexities of the tasks:

The ethics stuff was important as they won't let you put any attachment to an animal which is more than a certain percentage of its weight. We halved that number to be on the safe side. But the radio trackers we bought are too heavy to put on females. We have put them on about 15 males but only one female. We have to buy smaller trackers to put on the females so we can track what they do in winter time – no one knows they just disappear. That is important as they will come out in September and start breeding.

Other grant recipients highlighted the unforeseen dangers of using technology, with one reporting the animals being monitored had destroyed or damaged equipment and another reporting:

During a routine video surveillance... five of the 12 cameras were stolen.

4) Wildlife Rehabilitation

Only two acquittal reports were provided for projects concentrated on providing wildlife rehabilitation. One project aimed to provide 15 aviaries for use by volunteers to rehabilitate birds and reptiles. The project's main challenge was logistical; the tasks of receiving, distributing and installing the aviaries had not been thought through sufficiently, and required significantly more effort to ensure the project's success. However, overall this project was highly successful with a significant number of animals treated and the aviaries remaining in place at the end of the grant period to allow volunteers to continue to care for injured wildlife.

The other report received related to a project to treat wombats for mange. Only about 30 animals were treated at a cost of \$20,000. Monitoring and treatment equipment was damaged or stolen during the grant period. However, the results of the grant might be useful to assist the grant recipients in their efforts to collect data on the effectiveness of Cydectin to treat Sarcoptic mange in wild wombat populations. This could lead to regulations around using Cydectin to be modified and include this treatment as an approved practice.

This project highlights the importance of considering non-financial benefits when evaluating grant outcomes. While the cost to treat an individual animal in this project was very high, the results from this experiment might well result in a significant change to regulations designed to improve the health of wild wombats.

Case Study: National Parks Association

ACT Environmental Grants

The National Parks Association have successfully applied for a number of Environmental Grants from the ACT Government over the years and projects include:

- Publication of a picture book featuring the attractions of Namadgi National Park.
- Studying Aboriginal usage of the land and trying to emulate how they might have maintained vegetation in a couple of large areas in the Namadgi National park.
- Organising three symposium and publishing the proceedings from each.

Kevin McCue reports:



All the members appreciate getting the grants and I think the government appreciates that we value add to their work.

The Rosenberg Goanna project was serendipity really – we had some money bequeathed to the association for looking at large animal conservation in the National Park. At the same time we had a chief scientist from the government Parks Wildlife group, who had retired. And we had a group from the University of Canberra (UC), including an adjunct professor there who is writing a book about lizards and is writing about Rosenberg’s goanna. They all came together to ask if we could help study Rosenbergs in the ACT. All the planets aligned.

The outcome was a proposal to the ACT Government on how they would manage this threated species. It is not a one year project – we

used the first grant money to buy instrumentation; radio transmitters and collars.

As an early part of the project we put up 30 cameras and baits just to see what was going past and we got some amazing photos from that including of the underside of goannas.



That also showed us there were few or no foxes in that part of the National Park. There are deer which we used to inform the group looking after deer management.

Even as we were learning how to use the technology and how we could benefit from it, we started to discover how many Rosenberg there were; how much they travelled, where did they eat, where



did they live, how much sex do they have, how many relationships they have.

All that stuff was unknown, we know so much more we can't possible stop the project now – it is truly a five year project.

If we get funding for two years we can support the rest of it.

We have been learning on the job - the radio trackers we bought are too heavy to put on females. We

have put them on about 15 males but only one female. We have to buy smaller trackers to put on the females so we can track what they do in winter time – no one knows they just disappear. That is important as they will come out in September and start breeding.

We work with three different organisations, the ACT Environment Grant team, Parks ACT, who manage the parks, and we also work with ANU (Australian National University) and UC and the membership of National Parks. We have a PhD student studying genetics at UC who is an adjunct to the program. Timing is always a problem. We can only get into the Park to do certain things at certain times of the year. When it has been raining you can't get in there. It doesn't stop us much – probably only a couple of working parities have been cancelled.

We have 250 members but getting people to go out there week after week to track goannas is a challenge.

It is a long drive – an hour to get there and spend all day there, an hour back, and you usually get back in the dark and it is cold. We have dedicated members. We have the right people – but we are always looking for more!

5) Education

Only two reports were inspected from recipients of education grants. One grant resulted in a permanent education facility being established at the National Arboretum while the other resulted in the production and distribution of a brochure to raise awareness of the environmental threat posed following the introduced Spotted Dove.

At least two participants said they had not applied for funding due to the shift in focus of the grant evaluation criteria. It was reported that this change had left a gap in the market, with no available funding for organisations keen to conduct educational activities around the importance of biodiversity or climate change.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1) Applications

Some participants reported minor annoyances with the application process and made some suggestions for improvements:

- Several participants commented that the same application form has been used for many years and has been updated and added to over time. As a result the formatting has become complex and dated and should be renewed. One participant added:

*Each grant round *** has been [forced] to provide feedback to the grants team on application issues such as dead links, repetition in the form, form malfunctions, vagueness in questions and communication about pre-approvals (e.g. with the ACT Heritage Unit)). Whilst most of these have been attentively addressed and responded to, this has cost *** time.*

- Downloading forms caused frustration for a small number of participants.
We have a strong relationship with government and we value that and it is open and honest. The staff are good, sometimes the technology lets them down. This year we found it hard to get hold of the template and it wouldn't come down, two weeks into the grant writing. They need to improve that.
- While details of how to contact other government departments to seek approval to undertake on ground activities are given there are no contact details for ACT Heritage.
- It was noted that the project plan and budget templates were only available on request this year and not included with the application form as in previous years. It was suggested that this could make evaluation more complex, as a wide variety of formats are likely to be submitted compared with previous years.
- Encouraging the use of a more detailed (Gant chart style) project plan template may help to identify overly ambitious time lines.
- A small number of participants suggested the application process should be available as an online form.
- A number of participants noted that the grants are only open for application for a short time period, usually encompassing the Easter and/or Anzac Day holidays. It was noted that potential applicants might not become aware of the grants immediately they become available and this can reduce the effective time available to apply. It was also noted that interactions with the Heritage Unit (or other government agencies) is time consuming and therefore they suggested that the grants should be open for longer (one participant even suggested three months).

This round was open for three weeks. And it is always just before the holidays. We just did five grant [applications] in two weeks that is an awful lot for a small organisation. Why not make it longer? Why make it so tight? You don't have to read them if they come in early. Give people time to work it up and think about it.

- Two participants highlighted an issue with obtaining the approvals needed to submit a grant application. Interactions with the Heritage Unit (or other government agencies) is time consuming and therefore they suggested that the grants should be open for longer (one participant even suggested three months).

If you are looking at a heritage site you need approval – which takes six weeks, while the grants are only open for three weeks. The Heritage Unit does not have easy access to what is listed – 70% of rural lands have heritage listing on site. Then you need a RFI and that takes five weeks and then [you need] go to the Heritage Council for permission. Often the heritage site turns out to be nowhere near the area you are targeting.

Heritage stuff is really interesting – when they first started getting really nervous about heritage listed lands – they want us to get approval about if there is a heritage listed site in three weeks, you have to go to the Council and that takes six weeks. And then I would ring Heritage and ask them about that and they had heard nothing. Inter government communications as usual.

When the Heritage listing comes it might cover a block of 100 hectares and the site you want to work on is well away from the heritage site. We don't want to start a process that is scaring landowners into not telling us what is on their property.

- Two participants highlighted that the relatively short application period was particularly relevant to small organisations and to newcomers to the grant program, as considerable effort is required to submit a detailed application. As many applicants frequently re-apply for grants this was less of an issue for them as they were familiar with the deadlines.
- Some recipients suggested splitting the application process into two-stages. In effect the current selection process would be split into two separate events:
 - Expressions of interest – to check the application aligns with funding priorities for ACT Environment Grants and the project has potential to be effective
 - Detailed application - applications which are deemed to have satisfactorily met the first 2 selection criteria would then be invited to complete the detailed application, including the project plan, budget and risk assessment. The second stage of assessment would consider the remaining selection existing criteria.
- Alternatively, applications could be split by value; with requests for larger funding amounts being supported by a full business case and a less onerous process offered for those seeking smaller grants.
- Several participants noted that this year a new requirement for a risk assessment was introduced. The main complaint was that this new requirement was not highlighted to potential applicants, many of whom were already familiar with the previous application process (and had not studied the *Application Information Pack*). Therefore, they only discovered the new requirement when submitting their application form, discovering the requirement for a risk assessment when reviewing the final Checklist (at the end of the application form). This created anxiety and frustration among participants attempting to submit their application near the deadline. It was also noted the link provided for more information was not working –pointing to content that has been moved. (The link returns: *The ACTIA risk management content has now moved to a new intranet site within CMTEDD. This site can only be accessed by ACT Government employees.*) Two participant who tracked down the referenced material complained it was a spreadsheet with seven tabs requiring completion.

Now they want a risk assessment – and I got sent a seven page spreadsheet. I've asked for \$200 worth of admin budget just to fill that sheet in and that is before I have the grant. Why not say, 'If you are successful you will be required to provide a risk assessment'?

- Adding a section asking applicants to provide precise details of the proposed location of their project would enable more accurate mapping, enabling more accurate spatial reporting and allowing complimentary projects to be more easily identified.
- A participant from a catchment group noted:

I find it frustrating the NRM team say you can just be a sponsor. But being a sponsor means nothing different to being a project manager. Legally it is the same responsibility to us and that needs to be recognised. If they fail to deliver and I am the sponsor I have the same legal responsibility as if I am the project manager and I don't know that the NRM team understand.

- The availability of grants should be widely promoted and previous applicants should be informed when a new round of funding is available.

2) Acquittals

As with the application form the majority of participants interviewed appreciated that grant recipients need to be fully accountable for government money received to support projects. Participants often referred to the funds as public money and believed it appropriate there was a significant emphasis on accounting for expenditure during the acquittal process. In comparison with other grants they usually considered the Environmental Grants acquittal process to be fair and reasonable.

A small number of participants reported the acquittal process made them anxious. Projects often have to adapt to situations as they are executed on the ground and this can cause anxiety as the recipients reported that they are not confident their acquittal reports will be accepted.

3) Measurable outcomes

While many projects focus on a single activity (education or weed control for example) many projects encompass more than one. Where this is the case it would be valuable to ask applicants to allocate budget items between the activities to enable a more accurate assessment of the costs involved to be made.

This is particularly relevant where projects include weed control and landscape rehabilitation activities. Some grant recipients gave quite detailed information on the size of areas covered by their project and the number of plants introduced, while others gave very limited information on these important indicators. The inclusion of an estimated size of area (in hectares) to be treated (together with a description of the terrain and difficulty of access) would enable proposed projects to be more easily compared. Similarly, where plantings are expected to occur, an estimate of the number of plants (clearly identifying the costs involved) would simplify project comparisons.

4) Volunteers

Many projects rely on volunteers to be successfully executed and for ongoing support. There is inconsistency in how volunteers are treated in grant applications and evaluations with some applicants attaching an in-kind contribution based on a (widely varying) hourly rate (although guidance on volunteer rates is now given in the Application pack).

Accurate recording of the number of volunteers engaged in a project and the number of hours given to support a project would also be beneficial, although some participants highlighted they did not have the systems in place to accurately track volunteer involvement.

It was highlighted, by two participants, that applying a standard rate to all volunteers was unfair in their opinion. Highly specialised and experienced volunteers offering the equivalent of professional services are currently only valued at the same hourly rate (currently \$33.71) as unskilled volunteers completing basic manual tasks. These participants felt there should be more flexibility to consider the value of these specialist in-kind contributions when completing the application form. In the application form it states, '*Specialist labour can be costed at current average industry rates*'. It would appear there is some ambiguity if this applies to volunteer labour.

Many projects were affected by a lack of consistent ongoing support and maintenance from volunteers. Proposals that rely heavily on volunteers should be interrogated to ensure the sponsor has given adequate consideration as to how to engage and maintain support from volunteers.

There was a break of one month prior to the start of long term treatment as a result of changeover of volunteers managing the project. This set back those treatments by one month.

Maybe we could have done this project in a year, but sometimes when you are working with volunteers and you have a tight budget you can't exhaust them so you can't have planting all done in four weeks with your volunteer base won't come every weekend to do it – so that is a good point in favour of having a little bit longer.

Grant applicants should be encouraged to consider issues caused by key volunteers going sick or leaving the project for personal reasons.

The contribution made by some volunteers is outstanding. There are reports of people giving up many hours to support projects and making long and difficult journeys to and from project sites at their own expense. There is an opportunity to recognise and reward the efforts of volunteers through the issuing of certificates or awards to acknowledge outstanding contributions.

[We have a volunteer], a retired scientist, the project manager. He goes out maybe twice a week, sometimes four or five times a week, with his own car and his own petrol, as he is that committed to the project.

5) IT Projects

Particular attention needs to be given to projects requiring IT investments. Grant applicants should demonstrate that they understand that detailed requirements (including use case, and wireframes) need to be developed before an IT contractor is engaged to deliver a project. Where applicants lack the resources to develop requirements consideration should be given to making funding conditional on achieving milestone 1.

6) Staff – Contingency and redundancy

A number of projects struggled to meet their objectives due to staff turnover as one recipient explained:

Some difficulties arose in relation to staff turnover within both MCG and PCS, which created a lot of unanticipated work during the staff changeover. Controls need to be put in place to ensure a smooth project handover when staff leave (from both proponent and partner organisations).

Consequence of PCS staff changeover were not fully assessed as a potential risk in project planning. In undertaking future partnered projects SACTCG will include partner capacity and staffing in the project risk assessment.

This comment highlights the need for the role of key staff to be considered and contingency plans made to cope with departures. As another grant recipient (MCG) noted:

Although unusual for two key staff to leave at the same time, it is important to have good documentation for all project aspects.

Appendix

- 1) Table 4 shows the additional 66 organisations that were awarded a grant (one) during the period studied.

Table 4 Organisations that have received one ACT Environmental Grant

ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACT Chapter
Australian Association for Environmental Education
ACT Electric Vehicle Council
ACT Herpetological Association INC
ANU
Australasian Bat Society
Australian Geological Society
Australian-New Zealand Solar Energy Society
Belconnen Community Services
Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.
Canberra Youth Theatre
Capital Region Fishing Alliance
CCSERACT
Community and Youth Sector Training Council Inc. T/as Education and Training
Concerned Residents for West Kambah
Conservation Volunteers Australia
Cook Primary School
Cotter Road Landcare Group
Crozier Urban Carers
Duntroon Paddocks
Environmental Peacemakers of St Francis of Assissi
Friends of Googong Foreshores
Friends of Mount Majura Parkcare Group
Friends of Tidbinbilla
Garran Primary School Parents and Citizens Association
Geological Society of Australia (ACT Division)
Griffin Promotions Helen Peade Trading as
Hall District Landcare group
Healthy Cities Canberra
Ian Fraser
Jackie Howe Roustabouts
Jamison SEE
John Hyles
Paddy's River Landcare Group
John Roe, Martha Rees and Arthur Georges
K2C Inc
Kaleen High School Parents and Citizens' Association
Kambah School Cluster
Lanyon Bowl Remnant Woodland Rescue
Lend a Hand

Lions Club of Canberra/Woden
Macarthur Scout Group
Macgregor Landcare Group
Ginninderra Catchment Group
Macgregor Primary School
Mapping Lower Molonglo Project Steering Group
Melba High School
Monash Urban Carers
Mt Ainslie Park Care Group
North Belconnen - Enhance Biodiversity of Ginninderra Creek
Old Narrabundah Community Council
Paddy's River Landcare Group
Peter Marsack
School of Design & Architecture University of Canberra
SCRAP (School Communities Recycling All Paper)
Shareability Incorporated
St Bede's Primary School
Sullivans Creek Catchment Group
The Spirit of Canberra
Tuggeranong Dog Training Club
UCA
Uniting Church Greenhills Centre
University of Canberra Cooperative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology
Weetangerra Primary School (P and C)
West Belconnen Landcarers
Woden SEE-Change Inc.
WWT
Youthhaven Horticulture Project Sponsored by Anglicare (Canberra and Goulburn)

- 2) Table 5 shows the number of grants awarded by organisation, split between those awarded before and after 2011.

Table 5 Number of grants awarded pre and post 2011

Organisation	Total no. grants	No. grants to 2010	No. grants 2011+
Southern ACT Catchment Group	26	5	21
Greening Australia	23	12	11
Ginninderra Catchment Group	16	6	10
Molonglo Catchment Group	14	6	8
Scout Association of Australia ACT Branch Inc (Scouts ACT)	4	1	3
National Parks Association	10	8	2
SEE-Change Inc	4	2	2
Canberra Indian Myna Action Group	3	1	2
ACT Wildlife	2	0	2
Friends of the Grasslands	2	0	2
RSPCA	9	8	1
Canberra Ornithologists Group	7	6	1
Belconnen Model Aero Club	3	2	1
Friends of the Aranda Bushland	2	1	1
Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park	2	1	1
Environmental Defenders Office	13	13	0
Conservation Council of South East region and Canberra	12	12	0
Canberra & South East Region Environment Centre	7	7	0
Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) - ACT Branch	4	4	0
Lake Tuggeranong College	4	4	0
Australian Network for Plant Conservation	3	3	0
Coolleman Ridge Park Care Group	3	3	0
Urban Ecology (ACT)	3	3	0
A Chorus of Women	2	2	0
Chifley/Pearce Land Care Group	2	2	0
Clean Up Australia 2001	2	2	0
Conservation Council ACT Region	2	2	0
Friends of Mount Painter	2	2	0
Ginninderra Wetlands Care Group	2	2	0
Lions Youth Haven	2	2	0
North Ainslie Primary School	2	2	0
Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Coordination	2	2	0
Watson Community Association	2	2	0