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Page 2: SURVEY ON THE A.C.T. BUDGET 2018-19 PRESENTED BY THE A.C.T. GOVERNMENT ON 5 JUNE 2018

**Q1 Full name of group/organisation:**

ACT and Region Frogwatch Program

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**Q2 Contact person for this survey:**

Name	Karissa Preuss
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Phone Number	[REDACTED]

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**Q3 Please provide a brief overview of your organisation/group and its purpose:**

The ACT and Region Frogwatch Program (Frogwatch) is an award-winning citizen science program that has been operating for 16 years with thousands of ACT residents participating in the Program. Frog species are widely recognised as indicators of environmental health.

Frogwatch provides the only frog monitoring in the ACT Region and one of the very few long-term studies of frog populations in the world. Based on long-term research, Frogwatch has been able to strategically improve and create frog habitat across the ACT through community revegetation events. In addition specific projects co-produced by Frogwatch have improved the understanding and management of frogs and waterways in the ACT region (see for example Westgate et al, 2015; Hoefler and Starrs 2016), which influenced the ACT Government Lakes and Ponds Plan of Management.

Frogwatch has also be named in a range of ACT policy papers, plans and strategies as an outstanding example of citizen engagement. Frogwatch facilitates community education to over 3500 people each year. Frogwatch community education includes 6 training seminars for new volunteers; frog friendly habitat workshops; over 100 school classes (P-Yr12) engaging in Tadpole Kits for Schools Program; over 20 presentations to schools, scout groups or other interest groups about frogs; public presentations and workshops. Frogwatch has led to long-term behavioural change of participants, with positive environmental outcomes and well-being benefits to participating individuals and communities

Since 2015, Frogwatch has been investigating climate change effects on frog behaviour and, in partnership with the University of Canberra, has developed the world's first remote frog survey device based on mobile phone technology (high impact publications on both topics are in preparation). Climate change projections strongly suggest that frogs are among the animal groups most negatively affected by rising global temperatures. Amphibians are already experiencing dramatic world-wide declines, due to a number of reasons, including habitat loss and introduced pests. Ongoing monitoring of this vulnerable species group is paramount to allow for informed management decisions in the future.

Frogwatch data has been analysed in international publications and attracted wide media attention. The achievements of Frogwatch over the last 16 years, have been a result of the strong government-community partnership, particularly with the ACT Government.

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**Q4** Has your organisation/group developed a written analysis of the ACT Budget that it would like to submit to the Committee? **No**

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**Q5** Please list and provide details of your three key priority areas regarding the ACT Budget 2018-2019:

Environment – Canberra is the “bush capital”, 70 per cent of the ACT’s land is undeveloped - either protected in national parks and nature reserves, or managed as pine plantation. With growing urbanisation in the ACT, programs that improve environmental understanding and engage ACT citizens in wildlife monitoring and restoration are increasingly important.

Education –

Suburbs -

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**Q6** Are there any other particular issues with the 2018-19 ACT Budget that you would like to bring to the Committee's attention (which are not included in your three priority areas)?

**Yes,**

If yes, please comment::

While appreciating the one-year funding provided to the Community Catchment Groups, there is broad community dissatisfaction that ACT and Region Frogwatch Program was not also funded. Frogwatch is a low-risk, high return investment that if funded could continue to:

- Maintain and enhance the only frog monitoring project in the ACT through the annual Frog Census and ongoing frog monitoring
- Monitor the impacts of climate change by comparing current trends in frog call behaviour to historical data across the ACT
- Identify high value frog habitat and areas for protection and restoration,
- Provide extensive community education to over 3500 people annually about frogs and strategies to protect this threatened species group
- Leverage additional funding for frog monitoring, environmental restoration and community education in the ACT
- Provide the opportunity to better integrate Frogwatch data into the relevant ACT government frog data needs under a number of strategies and plans (outlined below)

Frogwatch leverages the skills, knowledge and labour of volunteers and mobilises them to undertake project-specific monitoring and restoration work, which value-adds to ACT Government data and environmental management. It has the capability and capacity to deliver the above with a longstanding proven track record in successful delivery and a high success rate at grant funding from a variety of government, business, community and other agencies. Without funding for Frogwatch there will be no ACT monitoring of frogs, an ecological indicator species group, which will cause the very regrettable end to one of the worlds few long-term data sets on frogs. Support for 2000 existing and new volunteers will cease. Substantially less environmental education and community engagement in wildlife conservation in the ACT will occur. In addition, well established and highly productive partnerships with Universities, Government agencies and schools will be lost.

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**Q7** Did you provide a pre-budget submission to the ACT Government for 2018-19?

**Yes**

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**Q8** Has the 2018-19 ACT Budget addressed the issues raised in your pre-budget submission?

If No/Partially please comment:

The pre-budget Frogwatch submission explained that “To ensure the program can continue to achieve outcomes of value to the ACT, Frogwatch requires \$90,000 per year over the next 4 years, which equates to \$360,000.” Given these funds were not part of the 2018-19 Budget, the award-winning ACT and Region Frogwatch Program will cease to function, including the annual high-profile region-wide Frogwatch census, educational services and advisory services. Only two very-specific short-term frog-related projects will continue. Ultimately this will mean the demise of the program into the future. The Frogwatch pre-budget submission was strongly aligned with the ACT Government’s strategic priorities of sustainability and local services. Frogwatch is recognised as important for the implementation of numerous ACT Government Strategies and Plans and is relevant to the ACT and Region Catchment Strategy 2016-2046, ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2013- 2023 and the ACT Climate Adaptation Strategy 2016, the Conservation Effectiveness Monitoring Program and the draft ACT Integrated Water Monitoring Plan. The ACT Nature Conservation Strategy (2013) notes: “The ACT has a wealth of community science to draw upon through established groups and individuals willing to volunteer skills and experience. Community groups such as ...Frogwatch...provide critical monitoring of the ACT’s biodiversity... The success of the Strategy will continue to rely on these groups”. The Environment in the ACT will suffer with the loss of the Frogwatch Program. This has been noted in various letters to the Minister from various stakeholders including University Staff, researchers and community members.

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**Q9** Does your organisation/group wish to provide its views in a Committee public hearing on Friday 15 June 2018, at the Legislative Assembly, London Circuit, Canberra?

**Yes**