



Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment,
Climate Change and Biodiversity

Inquiry into environmental volunteerism

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity

Approved for publication

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About the committee

Establishing resolution

Pursuant to resolution, the Assembly established the Standing Committee on the Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity (ECCB) on 2 December 2020.¹ The purpose of a general-purpose standing committees such as the ECCB committee is to:

...enhance the scrutiny of the Executive, to examine and suggest improvements to any bills referred to it, to enable the citizens of the Territory to engage and to participate in law-making and policy review, to enable financial scrutiny of the Executive's budget proposals and to review annual reports of taxpayer funded agencies.²

Committees may also inquire and report on matters referred to them by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community and within the nominated areas of responsibility. The ECCB committee is responsible for examining the following areas:

- climate change;
- climate action;
- environment;
- heritage;
- water and energy policy and programs;
- emissions reductions;
- environment and ecological sustainability;
- Commissioner for the Environment;
- Environment Protection Agency; and
- parks and conservation.

You can read the full establishing resolution [on our website](#).

¹ Legislative Assembly for the ACT, *Minutes of Proceedings No 2*, 2 December 2020, pp 17, 20, (as amended 11 February 2021, 30 March 2021, 22 April 2021, 16 September 2021, 9 November 2021, 10 February 2022, 5 April 2022 and 4 August 2022) available at: <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/parliamentary-business/in-committees/committees/eccb>

² Legislative Assembly for the ACT, *Minutes of Proceedings No 2*, 2 December 2020, pp 17, 20, (as amended 11 February 2021, 30 March 2021, 22 April 2021, 16 September 2021, 9 November 2021, 10 February 2022, 5 April 2022 and 4 August 2022) available at: <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/parliamentary-business/in-committees/committees/eccb>

Committee members

Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Chair

Ms Jo Clay MLA, Deputy Chair (from 9 December 2021)

Ms Leanne Castley MLA (until 4 August 2022)

Mr Ed Cocks MLA (from 4 August 2022)

Secretariat

Dr Frieda Scott, A/g Committee Secretary (from 16 April 2021 to 11 March 2022)

Ms Joanne Cullen, Committee Secretary (from 15 March 2022 to 9 September 2022)

Ms Kate Mickelson, Assistant Secretary (from 27 June 2022 to 9 September 2022), A/g Committee Secretary (from 12 September 2022)

Ms Miona Ikeda, Assistant Secretary (from 8 August 2022)

Mr Adam Walker, Assistant Secretary (from 16 September 2022)

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About this inquiry

Under Standing Order 216, standing committees can self-initiate an inquiry into any subject area it is given responsibility for by the establishing resolution. The Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity resolved to conduct an inquiry into environmental volunteerism on 14 December 2021.

The committee informed the Assembly of its intention to conduct this inquiry on 8 February 2022.³

Terms of reference

The Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity will inquire into and report on matters relating to environmental volunteerism in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), with particular reference to:

1. the type and nature of volunteerism in the environment sector in the ACT and the existing or potential benefits and challenges they bring to Canberra's:
 - biodiversity conservation and enhancement;
 - parks and conservation;
 - environmental protection;
 - climate resilience;
 - wildlife protection;
 - landcare; and
 - other areas;
2. opportunities to improve environmental volunteerism in the ACT, including in encouraging the involvement of young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to improve community stewardship;
3. managing relationships between volunteers and their organisations, the ACT Government and the public;
4. current policy or regulatory settings that facilitate and/or impede the work and the involvement of volunteers and volunteer organisations in the ACT; and
5. any other relevant matters.

³ Legislative Assembly for the ACT, *Minutes of Proceedings No 37*, 8 February 2022, p 470 available at: https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1945615/MoP037F.pdf

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Acronyms

Acronym	Long form
AABR	Australian Association of Bush Regenerators
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AM	Member of the Order of Australia
ASbA	Australian School-based Apprenticeships
CHIP	Catchment Health Indicator Program
CNM	Canberra Nature Map
CNP	Canberra Nature Park
COG	Canberra Ornithologists Group
Cth	Commonwealth
DNCCC	Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee
EPBC	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)
EPSDD	Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate
FOG	Friends of Grasslands
FTE	Full-time equivalent
IVD	International Volunteer Day
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NSW	New South Wales
NTG	Natural Temperate Grasslands
OCSE	Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
PCBU	Person in Control of a Business or Undertaking
PCS	Parks and Conservation Service
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SACTCG	Southern ACT Catchment Group
TCCS	Transport Canberra and City Services
UPP	Urban Parks and Places

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government streamline the approval process for permits, and coordinate this with the grant process so that grants and permits relying on each other may be applied for and approved together.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government standardise terms and conditions for grant applications and acquittal across ACT Government directorates, and where differentiation is necessary, those unique clauses to be outlined after the standard wording and requirements.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government institute a process for notifying previous applicants in grant programs when those programs open for new funding rounds.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure tenders for construction and repair contracts of roads and fire trails in Namadgi, including risk management plans, are developed by officers with relevant experience and are adequately funded.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government review and standardise operational policy over the activities of volunteers across ACT Government directorates, particularly in reference to the use of power tools and chemicals.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that TCCS joins the Biodiversity Conservation Forum as a standing member.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government build engagement and culture between volunteer groups and TCCS and facilitate more cooperation between TCCS and EPSDD who have established practices in place.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government facilitate coordination between TCCS, volunteer groups and mowing contractors to ensure that mowing is compatible with ACT government policy and volunteer efforts.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure volunteer groups have access to data they have provided to the government about their activities, and information on how that data is being used.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government update the ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government hold an annual day during National Volunteer Week to celebrate environmental volunteer activities and contributions.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure clear and specific recognition of volunteer expertise and contributions to ACT Government plans and programs in government publications.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government engage a specialist wildlife vet, employed full-time, to respond to the needs of injured and orphaned wildlife in the ACT.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund more volunteer coordinators in both directorates and environmental groups.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government funding be made available to provide more training for volunteer coordinators and facilitators.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government:

- fund a Junior Landcare program;
- facilitate coordination between EPSDD and the Education Directorate to develop further school-based environmental education programs; and
- fund a grant program specifically to further environmental education and engagement.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government promote opportunities to participate in environmental volunteering more widely, both through increased signage at the sites of volunteer activities, and online based on a model such as the ACT Parks and Conservation Service 'ParkCare Volunteer Hub'.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government proactively promote specific engagement opportunities with environmental groups, such as:

- events;
- wildlife surveys; and
- opportunities to volunteer in governance and administrative roles.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund Ngunnawal-specific training for volunteer groups that employs Ngunnawal trainers, including culture on Country and language.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate the feasibility of increasing the program of cultural-ecological burning as part of the land management regime.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund Aboriginal heritage projects to protect and preserve Country and Ngunnawal culture.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund annual Ngunnawal Country family fun days, employing Ngunnawal people to communicate their culture, language and care for Country.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. On 14 December 2021, the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity resolved to inquire into and report on matters relating to environmental volunteerism in the ACT.

Conduct of the Inquiry

- 1.2. On 15 December 2021, the committee published a media release announcing the inquiry and inviting public submissions by 7 February 2022. The inquiry was also published through the Canberra Times, social media, and direct emails to stakeholders.
- 1.3. On 1 February 2022, upon receiving several requests for more time from submitters, the committee agreed to extend the deadline for submissions to 10 March 2022.
- 1.4. On 8 March 2022, the committee agreed to further extend the deadline for submissions to 6 May 2022.
- 1.5. The committee received a total of 30 submissions. They are published on the inquiry webpage⁴ and listed in this report as Appendix A.
- 1.6. Two public hearings were held, on 19 July 2022 and 14 September 2022. The public hearings were open to the public and livestreamed.⁵ A total of 30 witnesses appeared before the committee. Witnesses giving evidence before the committee are listed at Appendix B. Transcripts⁶ and video recordings⁷ of the hearings are available on the ACT Legislative Assembly website.
- 1.7. During the hearings one question was taken on notice and one question on notice was asked. These questions are listed in Appendix C.⁸

Acknowledgements

- 1.8. The committee thanks everyone who assisted the inquiry, including representatives from volunteer groups, ACT community associations, environmental organisations, the Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA in her capacity as Minister for the Environment, and accompanying directorate officials.

⁴ <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/parliamentary-business/in-committees/committees/eccb/inquiry-into-environmental-volunteerism>

⁵ As the hearings were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, they were held under the COVID-Safe arrangements. The arrangements limited the number of people at the hearing room to a maximum of eight people sitting at the hearing table and 15 people sitting in the public gallery.

⁶ Transcripts available at: https://www.hansard.act.gov.au/hansard/2021/comms/default.htm#3_eccb (19 July 2022).

⁷ Video recordings available at: <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/parliamentary-business/watch,-read-and-listen/vimeo-links> (19 July 2022).

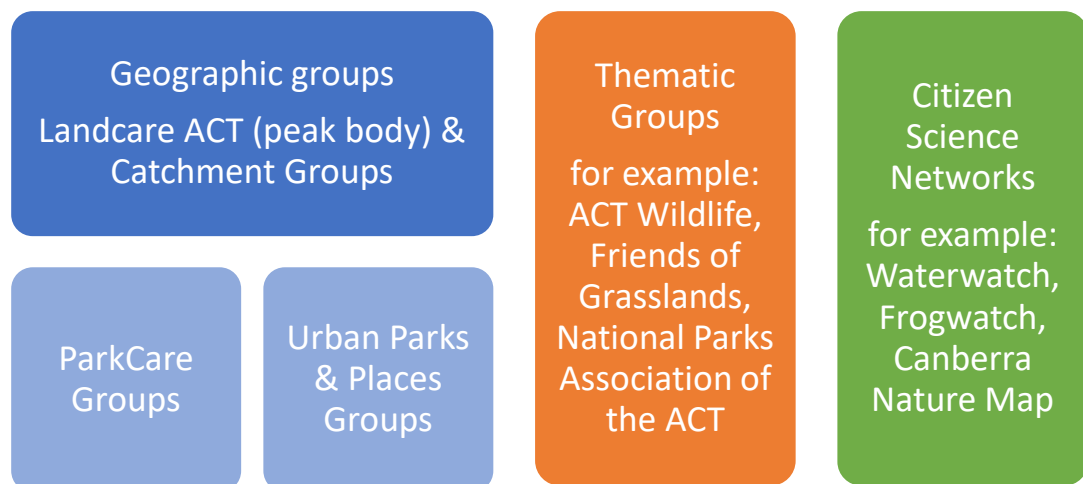
⁸ <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/parliamentary-business/in-committees/committees/eccb/inquiry-into-environmental-volunteerism>

2. Environmental volunteer groups in the ACT

- 2.1. The ACT is very fortunate to have a strong culture of environmental volunteerism. Many people come together regularly or occasionally to maintain and protect the ACT's wild spaces, urban parks, wildlife, and flora. Their combined efforts may include pulling weeds, caring for injured wildlife, collecting data, applying for grants to support their group's activities, planting trees, or advocacy. Together they contribute significant time, effort, and expertise to the benefit of their local environment, their community, and the ACT Government.
- 2.2. Approximately 100⁹ environmental volunteer groups are active in the ACT. These include geographical based groups looking after a local 'patch' and working in a Landcare, ParkCare or Urban Parks and Places program, thematic groups¹⁰ such as ACT Wildlife and Friends of Grasslands, and citizen science programs such as Waterwatch and Frogwatch. The relationships between these groups are complex and layered, and are aptly described by the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (OCSE) as an 'ecosystem':

... a volunteer group may work with several different government agencies and community organisations at once, in a variety of different ways. The entities a volunteer group works with varies depending on the geographic location of the group, the part of government that manages the land where they are working, and the type of projects they are doing.¹¹

- 2.3. The graphic below shows a simplistic view of the different types of environmental volunteer groups working in the ACT region.



⁹ Landcare ACT, *Get Involved*, [Get involved - Landcare ACT](#) (accessed 13 July 2022) lists 82 groups; ParkCare has 26 active groups; UPP has approximately 60 active groups. There is very likely considerable overlap between Landcare ACT and the other two lists. These lists do not include citizen science networks or special interest groups such as Canberra Ornithologists Group.

¹⁰ Thematic groups, as described in the OCSE Report, *02. The ACT Volunteering Ecosystem*, [The ACT Volunteering Ecosystem - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 23 August 2022), have an interest in a particular facet of the environment, such as wildlife, a plant species, or an ecosystem.

¹¹ OCSE Report, *02. The ACT Volunteering Ecosystem*, [The ACT Volunteering Ecosystem - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 29 July 2022).

Landcare and catchment groups

- 2.4. Landcare ACT is the peak representative body for community Landcare in the ACT region.¹² It works in partnership with the three catchment groups, Ginninderra Catchment Group, Molonglo Conservation Group, and Southern ACT Catchment Group (SACTCG), to represent and support respective member groups. The catchment groups are foundation members of Landcare ACT, along with the ACT Rural Landholders' Association and Buru Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation.¹³
- 2.5. Membership of the catchment groups is based on geographical area of operation, and includes local ParkCare, urban, rural, junior, and Aboriginal Landcare groups.
- 2.6. Landcare ACT and the catchment groups assist their member groups with project ideas, funding opportunities, equipment, planning on-ground work, coordinating community engagement, and large-scale restoration programs. They are incorporated bodies and provide support to smaller unincorporated groups to allow them to access funding, as well as running their own volunteer activities.
- 2.7. Catchment groups also provide networks for their member groups and volunteers, linking the catchment community with the ACT Government and other stakeholders.¹⁴

ACT Government volunteer organisations

- 2.8. ParkCare and Urban Parks and Places (UPP) are ACT Government programs, hosted by the Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) and Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) respectively.

ParkCare

- 2.9. The ParkCare program¹⁵ has been hosted by PCS since 1989. ParkCare has four streams:
 - ParkCare Patch: local ParkCare and 'Friends of' groups looking after a specific area. Activities include weed management, track maintenance, revegetation, erosion control, education programs, and biodiversity surveys.
 - RangerAssist: volunteers work alongside PCS rangers on land management.
 - WildlifeAssist: volunteers work with the Threatened Species Team at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve to assist in the care and management of native wildlife, and on-field surveys of threatened species such as the Gang-Gang Cockatoo.
 - VisitorAssist: volunteers work in the Visitor Interpretation Program at Tidbinbilla, Namadgi National Park, or in visitor information centres.

¹² Landcare ACT, *About*, [About Landcare ACT](#) (accessed 13 July 2022).

¹³ Landcare ACT, *Members*, [Members - Landcare ACT](#) (accessed 13 July 2022).

¹⁴ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *About Us*, [About Us - Ginninderra Catchment Group \(ginninderralandcare.org.au\)](#) (accessed 13 July 2022).

¹⁵ ACT Government, Parks ACT, *Get Involved*, [ParkCare volunteering - Parks ACT](#) (accessed 13 July 2022).

- 2.10. The ACT Government's submission notes that there are currently 26 active ParkCare Patch groups, contributing over 26,000 hours of voluntary work in 2020–21, worth over \$1 million. The entire ParkCare program has been managed by four PCS employees, with a fifth recruited in early 2022.¹⁶

Urban Parks and Places (UPP)

- 2.11. UPP supports volunteer work on land managed by TCCS,¹⁷ including parks, playgrounds, wetlands, grasslands, and green spaces.
- 2.12. There are over 60 UPP groups,¹⁸ including ‘Friends of’ and Urban Landcare groups, currently active. Groups may meet regularly or on an ad hoc basis, and volunteer activities include weed control, litter collection, planting, community education, citizen science, monitoring, and reporting issues. UPP is supported by 1.5 FTE staff within TCCS.¹⁹

Thematic groups

- 2.13. Thematic groups have an interest in a particular facet of the environment, such as wildlife, a plant species, or an ecosystem.
- 2.14. The National Parks Association of the ACT was formed in 1960 with the aim of establishing a National Park in the ACT and met this goal in 1984 when Namadgi National Park was proclaimed.²⁰
- 2.15. National Parks Association volunteers promote national parks and their management, protection of fauna and flora, scenery, and cultural heritage. The association provides many outdoor activities and produces field guides and monthly newsletters, as well as a quarterly Bulletin for members.
- 2.16. ACT Wildlife is a completely volunteer-run organisation and was established in 2013 to care for injured, sick, and orphaned native animals within the ACT. It operates a 24/7 hotline for the public and Access Canberra to report wildlife needing care. Each year the organisation takes around 9,400 calls and cares for approximately 1,500 animals. It has two permanent buildings for training and administration, and permanent aviaries including a flying fox aviary.²¹ ACT Wildlife is the only wildlife care group registered to work in the ACT.²²
- 2.17. ACT Wildlife and Wombat Rescue work collaboratively with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) to help address the issue of wombat mange in the ACT. They recently jointly released the Wombat Sightings Portal²³ to enable the public to easily report wombat sightings, including mangy or sick wombats. The portal

¹⁶ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 7.

¹⁷ ACT Government, City Services, Public Land, Maintenance, *Volunteering*, [Volunteering - City Services \(act.gov.au\)](https://www.act.gov.au/city-services/public-land/maintenance/volunteering) (accessed 14 July 2022).

¹⁸ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 11.

¹⁹ Mr Daniel Iglesias, Executive Branch Manager, City Presentation, TCCS, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 25.

²⁰ National Parks Association of the ACT, [National Parks Association of the ACT \(npaact.org.au\)](https://npaact.org.au) (accessed 14 July 2022).

²¹ ACT Wildlife. *Our Story*. [Our story | ACT Wildlife](#) (accessed 14 July 2022).

²² ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 5.

²³ Wombat sightings portal, [Record wombats in the ACT \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com) (accessed 14 July 2022).

allows the organisations to coordinate their responses and ensure timely treatments for sick animals.

- 2.18. Friends of Grasslands²⁴ (FOG) was established in 1994 and is dedicated to the conservation of natural temperate grassy ecosystems in south-eastern Australia. It is based in Canberra and members include people interested in conservation, landowners and managers, members of Landcare and ParkCare groups, professional scientists and ecologists, private and government agencies.
- 2.19. FOG advocates, educates, and advises on matters to do with the conservation of grassy ecosystems, and carries out surveys and other on-ground work. It is considered a key partner with the ACT Government for grassland conservation and restoration initiatives.
- 2.20. In 2021, FOG provided specialist and scientific input on the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan, Threatened Species Action Plan, Natural Resource Management Plan, Regional Fire Management Plan, Franklin Grasslands Landscape Plan, and listing assessments for Monaro Grassland Earless Dragon and Golden Sun Moth.²⁵
- 2.21. Interest groups such as the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) conduct conservation and citizen science activities alongside their regular society meetings and events. The ACT Government submission notes that COG makes ‘exceptional contributions’ in monitoring bird life, including providing data to the Atlas of Australian Birds and the Action Plan for Australian Birds. COG’s Garden Bird Survey and Woodland Bird Monitoring Program is considered one of the strongest such data sets in the country. COG contributes ecological advice to the ACT Government both through direct provision of empirical data and by reviewing draft government strategy, policies, and plans.²⁶
- 2.22. COG meets monthly, its aims being to encourage interest in, and develop knowledge of, the birds of the Canberra region, to promote and co-ordinate the study of birds, and to promote the conservation of native birds and their habitat.²⁷

Citizen science networks

- 2.23. Citizen science is the collection and analysis of scientific data in relation to the natural world, performed predominantly by citizens, usually in collaboration with scientists and field experts. Citizen scientists work with scientists or the scientific framework to achieve scientific goals. The Australian Citizen Science Association definition is ‘citizen science involves public participation and collaboration in scientific research with the aim to increase scientific knowledge’.²⁸
- 2.24. Waterwatch Australia²⁹ is a national citizen science network monitoring local waterways. Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch has volunteers testing water quality throughout the

²⁴ Friends of Grasslands, [Friends of Grasslands Home Page \(fog.org.au\)](https://fog.org.au) (accessed 14 July 2022).

²⁵ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 6.

²⁶ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, pp 5–6.

²⁷ Canberra Ornithologists Group, [Canberra Birds](https://canberra.birds.org.au) (accessed 14 July 2022).

²⁸ Australian Citizen Science Association, *About Us*, [About us – Australian Citizen Science Association](https://citizenscience.org.au/about-us) (accessed 13 July 2022).

²⁹ Waterwatch Australia, [Waterwatch Portal](https://www.waterwatch.org.au) (accessed 14 July 2022).

ACT and in surrounding NSW conducting surveys of water bugs, surveying, monitoring, and restoring frog habitats with the Frogwatch program and conducting platypus surveys.³⁰

- 2.25. The ACT Government submission notes that Waterwatch has been running since 1995 and currently has over 200 volunteers collecting water quality data from over 220 sites throughout the region. A further 100 volunteers collect other data such as platypus surveys. Frogwatch has been running in the ACT since 2002 with thousands of volunteers collecting over 20,000 frog species records.³¹
- 2.26. Waterwatch produces an annual report called the Catchment Health Indicator Program³² (CHIP) which is used by catchment managers, including the ACT Government and regional councils.
- 2.27. In 2020 Waterwatch and the ACT Government launched a 'Platy and Ratty Portal' to allow the general public to log sightings of platypus and rakali.³³ Waterwatch is the only organisation monitoring platypus in the ACT region.³⁴
- 2.28. Canberra Nature Map³⁵ (CNM) is a software platform which enables gathering and sharing wildlife data across the ACT. It was founded in 2013 as a website to map rare plants in the ACT and has expanded to include most types of wildlife and flora in the Canberra region and beyond. Submissions through its smartphone application are supported by 142 volunteers who administer and monitor the website and provide species identification.
- 2.29. CNM is a valuable resource for ACT Government decision-making and land management. In 2021 alone, 270 new rare plant and 300 threatened and rare fauna records were recorded on CNM and accessed by the ACT Government to inform management.³⁶

³⁰ Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch, *Programs*, [Programs - Waterwatch](#) (accessed 14 July 2022).

³¹ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, pp 8–9.

³² Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch, *Catchment Health Indicator Program (CHIP) Reports*, [Catchment Health Indicator Program \(CHIP\) Reports - Waterwatch](#) (accessed 14 July 2022).

³³ *Hydromys chrysogaster*, an Australian native rodent also known as a rabe or water rat.

³⁴ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, pp 5, 8.

³⁵ Canberra Nature Map, [Home - Canberra Nature Map \(naturemapr.org\)](#) (accessed 14 July 2022).

³⁶ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 10.

3. Benefits of environmental volunteerism

- 3.1. The benefits of environmental volunteerism are many-layered and inter-connected: volunteers benefit from improved mental and physical health and wellbeing; the government saves on health costs; volunteers provide a wider contribution to land management than government could fund or staff, which in turn provides environmental benefits such as weed control, wildlife health, and carbon sequestration; government decision-making is facilitated by citizen science data and on-ground experience and observations; volunteers benefit from knowledge-sharing and contribute expertise often beyond that of government ranger staff.
- 3.2. The OCSE noted several values of environmental volunteering in a 2021 background report, produced as a website at www.actenvirovolunteers.com.au.³⁷ The report identifies as benefits:
- wage dollar value: equivalent for the work carried out by volunteers;
 - citizen science: research and data contributing to conservation projects and knowledge;
 - health and wellbeing benefits;
 - relationship benefits: leverage of networks, community and social benefits;
 - specialist skills and knowledge;
 - financial benefits: value-add through grants, donations and in-kind contributions; and
 - education and engagement: carried out by volunteer groups.
- 3.3. Volunteers contribute work and expertise to land management and environmental efforts to an extent that would not otherwise be possible due to budgetary and other constraints. The most easily recognised area of this contribution is perhaps weed control, which comprises most of the work carried out by Landcare and ParkCare groups.³⁸ The ACT invasive plants operations dashboard, which displays weed control carried out by government staff, paid contractors, and volunteers, shows that ParkCare volunteers alone are the second highest contributors to weed control based on area covered.³⁹
- 3.4. The OCSE report estimates that environmental volunteers provide over 300,000 hours of work each year, including on-ground work, citizen science, wildlife management, and administration. The wage saving for the ACT Government of this work is estimated to be

³⁷ OCSE, ACT Environmental Volunteers – showcasing volunteer environment work, [Overview - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 5 October 2022).

³⁸ OCSE Report, 07. *Values of Volunteering in the ACT – Environmental Values*, [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 15 July 2022).

³⁹ 2021-22 Operations Dashboard – invasive plants, [2021-22 Operations Dashboard - invasive plants \(desktop view\) \(arcgis.com\)](#) (accessed 14 July 2022).

over \$21.5 million each year.⁴⁰ Much of the work of volunteers likely goes unrecorded, largely due to the administrative burden of keeping these records.⁴¹

- 3.5. Environmental volunteers often act as an extension of government rangers, being the first to report problems and matters of concern.⁴² CNM is the main source of reports of new weed incursions into the ACT, enabling government land managers to react quickly to eradicate new infestations before they become widespread.⁴³
- 3.6. Citizen science data is increasingly incorporated into government reports and used to inform decision making and management actions. For example, Waterwatch data is used by multiple agencies, including in ACT State of the Environment reporting, the ACT Wellbeing Framework, several environmental monitoring programs conducted by EPSDD, and the 3-yearly Sanitary Survey conducted by Icon Water which is reported to ACT Health.⁴⁴
- 3.7. Several submissions noted the social benefits of volunteering.⁴⁵ In a 2021 joint Landcare Australia and KPMG report, *Building resilience in local communities: The wellbeing benefits of participating in Landcare*, many environmental volunteers reported an increased sense of connection:
 - 90 percent feel more connected to people;
 - 86 percent feel more connected to their community; and
 - 93 percent feel more connected to the environment.⁴⁶

These connections are strongly correlated to improvements in mental wellbeing and resilience. Based on KPMG's figures, the OCSE estimates that environmental volunteering in the ACT saves the government over \$13 million per year in avoided mental and physical healthcare costs and loss of productivity.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ OCSE Report, 07. *Values of volunteering in the ACT – Equivalent Wage Value*, [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 15 July 2022).

⁴¹ See, for example, Red Hill Bush Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 6; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, p 1.

⁴² See, for example, Red Hill Bush Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 3; OCSE Report, 07. *Values of volunteering in the ACT – Environmental Values*, [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 15 July 2022).

⁴³ OCSE Report, 07. *Values of volunteering in the ACT – Science and Knowledge Values*, [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 15 July 2022).

⁴⁴ Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch, *How is Waterwatch data used*, [How is Waterwatch data used - Waterwatch](#) (accessed 14 July 2022).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Sue Ross, *Submission 13*, p 2; Caroline Le Couteur, *Submission 15*, p 6; Friends of Mount Painter, *Submission 18*, p 2; Rosemary Blemings, *Submission 20*, p 1; Australian Association of Bush Regenerators, *Submission 24*, p 3.

⁴⁶ Landcare Australia and KPMG, *Building resilience in local communities: The wellbeing benefits of participating in Landcare*, [Wellbeing-benefits-participating-landcare-Report-KPMG-2021.pdf \(landcareaustralia.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com\)](#) p xi, (accessed 14 July 2022).

⁴⁷ OCSE Report, 07. *Values of volunteering in the ACT – Volunteering and Wellbeing*, [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 15 July 2022).

- 3.8. Knowledge-sharing was ‘by far the most commonly identified benefit of involvement in Landcare by those interviewed’ for the Landcare Australia and KPMG report.⁴⁸ Many volunteers in the ACT have specialist expertise, often to a very high level. They may work or have worked in conservation or research and may have built up decades of experience working in a particular reserve.⁴⁹ This level of expertise can be difficult to attain amongst government staff who generally do not stay in one role long-term.⁵⁰

Barriers to increased and continued volunteering

- 3.9. Volunteers are committed and passionate about the activities they generously give their time and energy to. Many are determined and will persevere despite barriers and frustrations, but there is significant risk of volunteers becoming discouraged, burned out, or giving their time elsewhere.
- 3.10. Submitters identified several barriers to increased and continued volunteering, under the broad themes of lack of appreciation, accessing funding, lack of vision, administrative burdens, and conflict with ACT government activities.
- 3.11. The following chapters will address some of these barriers, particularly noting the challenges in:
- administrative burdens;
 - use of power tools and chemical weedkillers;
 - lack of recognition and appreciation;
 - communication failures;
 - lack of support and resources;
 - facilitation and coordination; and
 - volunteer recruitment.

⁴⁸ Landcare Australia and KPMG, *Building resilience in local communities: The wellbeing benefits of participating in Landcare*, [Wellbeing-benefits-participating-landcare-Report-KPMG-2021.pdf](https://landcareaustralia.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/Wellbeing-benefits-participating-landcare-Report-KPMG-2021.pdf) (landcareaustralia.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com) p 44, (accessed 14 July 2022).

⁴⁹ See, for example, OCSE Report, *07. Values of volunteering in the ACT – Science and Knowledge Values*, [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 15 July 2022); Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park, *Submission 4*, p 2; Southern ACT Catchment Group, *Submission 21*, p 5; Australian Association of Bush Regenerators, *Submission 24*, p 3; Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 4; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, p 3; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 3.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Red Hill Bush Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 3; Friends of Mt Majura Parkcare Group, *Submission 7*, p 2; Cooleman Ridge Park Care group, *Submission 17*, p 4; Friends of Mount Painter, *Submission 18*, p 3.

4. Governance and administration

Grants

- 4.1. The ACT Government provides a range of grants and funding opportunities for groups and individuals that provide benefit to Canberra and the community. Grants are administered by different directorates and agencies, and are managed using the SmartyGrants application, a cloud-based administration software package which is used by several federal, state, and local government entities as well as charitable and corporate funding bodies.⁵¹
- 4.2. The ACT Environmental Grants program is administered by EPSDD and provides three streams of funding: Environment Grants, Nature in the City Grants and Environmental Volunteer Group Assistance Grants.⁵² In 2021–22 the ACT Government allocated \$3.49 million over 4 years to the ACT Environmental Grants program to support community volunteer activities.⁵³
- 4.3. In addition to the Environmental Grants program, other grant programs administered by EPSDD that environmental volunteer groups can access include:
 - Community Garden Grants, which support public gardens including Indigenous and traditional food gardens, micro-forests, and urban gardens;⁵⁴
 - Community Zero Emissions Grants, which support projects that seek to reduce emissions and increase community resilience to climate impacts,⁵⁵ and
 - Heritage Grants Program, for activities promoting and conserving local heritage including Indigenous cultural heritage activities.⁵⁶
- 4.4. TCCS administers the Adopt-A-Park Community Grants Program for projects that contribute to the amenity and improvement of the ACT's neighbourhood parks and places.⁵⁷
- 4.5. The processes for applying for ACT Government grants and permits are not well-aligned, so that a grant may be given, but a permit must still be secured to allow the work or event to go ahead, or vice versa.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Smartygrants, *Homepage*, [SmartyGrants | Home](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁵² EPSDD, *ACT Environmental Grants*, [ACT Environmental Grants - Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate - Environment](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁵³ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 3.

⁵⁴ Climate Choices ACT, *Community Garden Grants*, [Community Garden Grants - Climate Choices \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁵⁵ Climate Choices ACT, *Community Zero Emissions Grants*, [Community Zero Emissions Grants - Climate Choices \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁵⁶ EPSDD, *Heritage Grants Program*, [Heritage Grants Program - Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate - Environment \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁵⁷ TCCS, *Volunteering*, [Volunteering - City Services \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁵⁸ Hawker Landcare Group, *Submission 9*, p 3.

- 4.6. This was confirmed by Ms Lauren McQueen, Volunteer Programs Manager for EPSDD, when asked during the public hearing whether, when a group gets a grant approved, they then have to get more permit approvals:

Yes. Essentially, they would get endorsement for the works in order to go for that grant, to show that there is support from ACT Parks and Conservation Service to conduct those works.⁵⁹

- 4.7. Furthermore, the Terms and Conditions in deeds for the different grant programs, and wording and requirements on the SmartyGrants application website, are inconsistent,⁶⁰ placing a larger burden than necessary on volunteers submitting applications.

- 4.8. Mr Chris Mobbs, Chair of Hackett Community Association, noted that his organisation auspices grants under different programs for other volunteer groups. Because the association works with different grant programs, it has observed that terms and conditions differ:

Different directorates have different wording, and I suspect that sometimes they operate in a parallel universe. It is very frustrating for volunteer groups.⁶¹

- 4.9. Mr Mobbs also noted inconsistencies with insurance requirements, where one grant requires \$20 million public liability insurance but another only \$10 million. Furthermore, the auditing requirement for a \$3,000 Adopt-a-park grant from TCCS was ‘for provision of a copy of the relevant financial statement, certified by a registered accountant.’ This requirement is much more stringent than the legislative requirements for incorporated bodies, which do not require the person who reviews the annual statements of a small association, defined as an association having a total revenue of less than \$400,000 in a financial year, to be a qualified accountant.⁶²

- 4.10. Dr Esther Gallant of the National Parks Association of the ACT noted that grant acquittal can take longer than the work funded by the grant itself, remarking, ‘With acquitting the grant, I was not involved in it, but I heard that the people who did the work went out and did the work, but acquitting the grant was just in the too-hard basket.’⁶³

- 4.11. Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Minister for the Environment, noted that while a lot of work in streamlining the application process for environmental grants has been undertaken for the current round, more remained to be done. She noted the need for consistency across different programs, and has spoken to Minister Steel about the issue, noting the need to:

... line up the different programs that volunteer groups will be interested in applying for and be really clear that projects of this type are probably better

⁵⁹ Ms Lauren McQueen, Volunteer Program Manager, Volunteer and Visitor Experience, EPSDD, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 33.

⁶⁰ See, for example: Hackett Community Association, *Submission 23*, pp 1–2; Australian Association of Bush Regenerators, *Submission 24*, p 7.

⁶¹ Mr Chris Mobbs, Chair, Hackett Community Association, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 12.

⁶² Mr Chris Mobbs, Chair, Hackett Community Association, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 13; *Associations Incorporation Act 1991*, s 70B.

⁶³ Dr Esther Gallant, President, National Parks Association of the ACT, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 72.

suited to an adopt-a-park grants program as opposed to a specific environmental grant or a specific stream within the Environmental Grants Program.⁶⁴

- 4.12. Notification of new grant rounds appears to be lacking,⁶⁵ leading to applicants missing out on applying for grants despite having previously applied for grants in the same program.
- 4.13. Submitters noted the need for volunteers skilled in administrative and governance areas—applying for grants and permits, project management, financial management, communications, and secretariat functions, for example.⁶⁶ Many also noted that the time-consuming process of identifying grant opportunities and lodging applications detracted from the time available for on-ground work such as planting and weeding.⁶⁷
- 4.14. Ms Frances Knight of Hawker Landcare Group noted that support to write grant and permit applications would be much appreciated by her small group:

Having some support would be awesome... When it comes to the application process, that is an area where you can spend days trying to fill out an application. Often, there is a lack of continuity or communication regarding the requirements of the application itself and all of the other attendant requirements. Invariably, you will put in an application and find out three months later that you should have done something else.⁶⁸

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government streamline the approval process for permits, and coordinate this with the grant process so that grants and permits relying on each other may be applied for and approved together.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government standardise terms and conditions for grant applications and acquittal across ACT Government directorates, and where differentiation is necessary, those unique clauses to be outlined after the standard wording and requirements.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government institute a process for notifying previous applicants in grant programs when those programs open for new funding rounds.

⁶⁴ Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Minister for the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 31.

⁶⁵ Scullin Community Group, *Submission 27*, p 3.

⁶⁶ See, for example: SEE Change, *Submission 2*, p 2; National Parks Association of the ACT, *Submission 19*, p 2; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, pp 1, 4.

⁶⁷ See, for example: Red Hill Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 4; Rosemary Blemings, *Submission 20*, p 3.

⁶⁸ Ms Frances Knight, Convenor, Hawker Landcare Group, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 7.

Procurement

4.15. The ACT Government spends more than \$1.5 billion on procurement each year.⁶⁹ ACT Government construction projects must comply with a range of statutory and policy minimum standards, including pollution, water use, and erosion.⁷⁰

4.16. Procurement ACT advises that Territory entities must consider procurement risk and should include a written risk assessment and a risk management plan in procurement documentation. It further advises that:

There are additional risks to be considered when procuring construction and risk management plans for ACT Government construction should be developed by officers with relevant experience.⁷¹

4.17. The National Parks Association of the ACT is concerned about the quality of repairs to the fire trail network in Namadgi National Park. The Association cited an example where an elaborate culvert structure had been installed by contractors, only to wash out in a flood shortly afterwards, rendering the road impassable:

... the thing that comes to mind immediately is the network of fire trails down there, which we have just been very concerned about. That is certainly an area where more funding is needed and more emphasis on getting it done right—not just kind of patched over but done right—with some input from people who understand what building rural roads involves. We looked at one while we were out there—and you saw it—where they had put in this elaborate culvert structure and the whole thing had washed out in the flood and made the whole road impassable. They need to have advice from people who understand how those roads should be built. Maybe the problem there, in part, is not enough communication between the rangers, and even the upper level staff who might understand this, and the contractors on the ground. That is one thing that I would suggest that there needs to be some emphasis put on—not only the money for fixing it but the advice to do it right.⁷²

4.18. The National Parks Association of the ACT noted that PCS staff have the required expertise to advise on suitable repairs and construction, but that sharing this knowledge is not provided for when contracts are awarded, resulting in repairs that are unsuitable for local conditions.⁷³

4.19. The Minister for Planning and Land Management noted that the fire trail network has suffered damage from prolonged drought, bushfires, and extreme rain events, and that several trails have been closed for safety reasons and to prevent further damage. The

⁶⁹ Procurement ACT, *FAQs – Direction and Charter of Procurement Values*, [FACTSHEET-Direction-and-Procurement.pdf](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁷⁰ Procurement ACT, *The Procurement Values Guide*, [ACT Government Publication template purple](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁷¹ Procurement ACT, *Procurement Risk Management*, [Factsheet-Risk-Management.pdf](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

⁷² Dr Esther Gallant, President, National Parks Association of the ACT, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 68.

⁷³ Dr Esther Gallant, President, National Parks Association of the ACT, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, pp 68–69.

Minister observed that the ACT Government has spent \$987,000 in 2021–22 on maintenance of fire trails. Further funding of \$2.8 million from the Commonwealth-funded Black Summer Recovery program has been allocated to fund repairs and build resilience in stream crossings and the fire trail network in Namadgi National Park.⁷⁴

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure tenders for construction and repair contracts of roads and fire trails in Namadgi, including risk management plans, are developed by officers with relevant experience and are adequately funded.

Risk management

4.20. WorkSafe ACT advises that a Person in Control of a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) must try to eliminate, to a reasonable and practicable extent, any health and safety risks to workers including volunteers. In particular, a PCBU must ensure that machinery and equipment are safe and properly maintained, and that chemicals are used, handled, and stored safely.⁷⁵

4.21. The ACT Parks and Conservation Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct requires that:

The use of powered tools and equipment is limited to those activities that are assessed safe for volunteers in a risk assessment and where the training, certification requirements and procedures are in place to the same level required of PCS staff.⁷⁶

4.22. In reference to herbicide and pesticide use, it states:

All volunteers using herbicides or pesticides will comply with the Work Health and Safety Act 2011, associated regulations and relevant product labels and permits. ACT Parks and Conservation Volunteer Policy Volunteers who are Australian Qualification Training Framework Level 3 (equivalent to ChemCert and SMARTtrain 3) accredited can undertake weed control using herbicide products containing active ingredients Glyphosphate (Round Up), MCPA (Agitone 750), Fluroxypr (Starane) and Metsulfuron Methyl (Brushoff). Herbicides containing active ingredients other than those listed can only be used upon prior approval from the Volunteer Coordinator. Cut-stump (cut and dab) herbicide application may only be undertaken by volunteers who are not accredited if they are under the direct supervision of an AFQ3 qualified volunteer or staff member. Herbicides for approved use in the ACT parks and reserves will only be issued to accredited volunteers. It is then the responsibility of the accredited volunteer to ensure the

⁷⁴ Mr Mick Gentleman MLA, *Answer to QON 1: Rural Road Maintenance*, 26 July 2022 (received 28 August 2022), p 1.

⁷⁵ WorkSafe ACT, *Workplaces Rights and Responsibilities*, [Workplace rights and responsibilities - WorkSafe ACT](#), (accessed 17 August 2022).

⁷⁶ ACT Parks and Conservation, *Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct*, [ACT Parks and Conservation Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct](#) (accessed 17 August 2022), paragraph 6.4.

chemicals are stored, transported and applied in accordance with their training and product labels. A volunteer will be issued with a maximum five litres of liquid chemical and maximum 10 grams of powder chemical at any one time.⁷⁷

4.23. The TCCS Volunteer Handbook paragraph on high-risk activities states:

Volunteers are not permitted to undertake high-risk activities. Examples of these include: Working on roads, working at heights, using power tools unless approved to do so, and undertaking law enforcement and compliance activities.⁷⁸

4.24. Many submitters remarked that ACT Government policy did not allow volunteers to use powered tools such as brush cutters, whipper-snippers, or lawnmowers. Submitters recognised the need to ensure safe use of such equipment and indicated willingness to undertake training and certification to meet Workplace Health and Safety standards.⁷⁹

4.25. Both Red Hill Bush Regenerators and Conservation Council ACT Region noted that in contrast, volunteers are permitted to use some types of power tools on National Capital Authority land.⁸⁰

4.26. Submitters also noted that TCCS Urban Landcare groups are prohibited from using chemical weedkillers other than glyphosate, despite PCS volunteer groups being permitted to use other herbicides with training and as appropriate.⁸¹

4.27. The restriction on use of powered tools and, where applicable, of weedkillers, requires volunteers to conduct manual weed control, described as 'hard labour'.⁸² Such labour puts volunteers at increased risk of strain injuries, and excludes less physically-able members of the community. In many places this manual effort is insufficient to manage weeds, resulting in spread of invasive plants leading to volunteers being overwhelmed, disillusioned, and disengaged.⁸³

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government review and standardise operational policy over the activities of volunteers across ACT Government directorates, particularly in reference to the use of power tools and chemicals.

⁷⁷ ACT Parks and Conservation, *Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct*, [ACT Parks and Conservation Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct](#) (accessed 17 August 2022), paragraph 6.5.

⁷⁸ TCCS, *TCCS Volunteer Handbook*, [TCCS Volunteer Handbook \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 17 August 2022), p 15.

⁷⁹ See, for example: Jarramlee Park Landcare Group, *Submission 11*, p 1; Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group, *Submission 17*, p 4; Friends of Mount Painter, *Submission 18*, p 5; SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 6; Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 2; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, p 5; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, pp 4, 6.

⁸⁰ Red Hill Bush Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 6; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, p 5.

⁸¹ See, for example: Jarramlee Park Landcare Group, *Submission 11*, p 1; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, p 5; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 6.

⁸² Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 6.

⁸³ See, for example: Jarramlee Park Landcare Group, *Submission 11*, pp 1–2; Friends of Mount Painter, *Submission 18*, p 5.

5. Partnership

- 5.1. The ACT government relies on the goodwill of volunteer groups for their invaluable contributions to the environmental and general well-being of the Territory. This goodwill can be eroded by differing priorities, inconsistency, and miscommunication on the part of government agencies responsible for working with volunteers.⁸⁴
- 5.2. The Biodiversity Conservation Forum, co-chaired by EPSDD and Conservation Council ACT Region, was established in late 2021.⁸⁵ The forum was established with the aims of enabling dialogue on opportunities in biodiversity conservation, planning, policy, and management, empowering the biodiversity community to present and codesign actions to enhance biodiversity conservation in the ACT, and encouraging the community and Government to focus on collective solutions.⁸⁶
- 5.3. Member organisations of the forum include:
- ACT Bushfire Council;
 - ACT For Bees;
 - ACT Landcare;
 - ACT Scientific Committee;
 - Canberra Ornithologist Group;
 - Friends of Grasslands;
 - Invasive Species Council;
 - Molonglo Conservation Group;
 - National Parks Association ACT; and
 - Woodlands and Wetlands Trust.
- TCCS is not a standing member of the forum, but they may be invited to attend meetings at the request of the co-chairs.⁸⁷
- 5.4. Many submitters cited partnership as both highly desirable and lacking in their relationships with government agencies.⁸⁸ Submitters observed that while many volunteers are highly skilled and qualified experts in their relevant fields, including ecologists, botanists, wildlife experts, engineers, project managers, and policy experts,⁸⁹

⁸⁴ See, for example: Lions Croke Place Wetlands Land Care Group, *Submission 25*, p 1; Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 2; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 5.

⁸⁵ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 11.

⁸⁶ Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, *answer to QTON 1: Biodiversity Conservation Forum*, 19 July 2022 (received 1 August 2022).

⁸⁷ Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, *answer to QTON 1: Biodiversity Conservation Forum*, 19 July 2022 (received 1 August 2022).

⁸⁸ See, for example: Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park, *Submission 4*, p 3; ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, *Submission 5*, p 3; SACTCG, *Submission 21*, pp 3–5; Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, pp 2–3; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, pp 4–5.

⁸⁹ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 3.

volunteers often feel that they are being ‘managed’ by government land managers rather than working as partners,⁹⁰ and that their expertise is not valued or is even ignored.⁹¹

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that TCCS joins the Biodiversity Conservation Forum as a standing member.

Communication and volunteer support

- 5.5. Submitters noted that working with TCCS is often difficult, due to communication failures. Volunteers noted that they were often not informed when contractor activities such as mowing were planned near their work sites, or when rangers with whom they had spent time building constructive relationships were re-assigned elsewhere.⁹² Others mentioned long delays in policy development, with subsequent delays for projects.⁹³
- 5.6. The UPP program hosted by TCCS has been in operation since the 1990s⁹⁴, and supports over 60 volunteer groups⁹⁵ with 1.5 FTE staff.⁹⁶ The ParkCare program hosted by PCS has similarly been running for over 30 years⁹⁷ and has five full-time employees⁹⁸ supporting more than 20 ParkCare Patch groups as well as the smaller Visitor Assist, Wildlife Assist, and Ranger Assist streams.⁹⁹ TCCS is perceived as less experienced in the volunteer space by volunteer groups, with SACTCG remarking that ‘the volunteer support program on urban open space is relatively new’¹⁰⁰ and Friends of Grasslands that ‘It seems to me that TCCS is a new player in this area, and I think the others have learnt from experience.’¹⁰¹
- 5.7. In its submission, SACTCG noted that:
- The volunteer management program in TCCS responds to groups wanting to form from community interest, however with the rapidly growing interest in urban parks the TCCS team can only facilitate some aspects of what volunteer groups require to function effectively and maintain volunteer numbers.¹⁰²
- 5.8. SACTCG detailed an occasion on which a dead tree was due to be felled on TCCS land where members were working. The Operations Leader at the time agreed that the main trunk of the tree would be left on site to provide habitat and ground cover. However, the

⁹⁰ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 3.

⁹¹ Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park, *Submission 4*, p 3.

⁹² SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 2.

⁹³ See, for example: Lions Croke Place Wetlands Land Care Group, *Submission 25*, p 2; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, p 6.

⁹⁴ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 7.

⁹⁵ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 11.

⁹⁶ Mr Daniel Iglesias, Executive Branch Manager, City Presentation, TCCS, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 25.

⁹⁷ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 1.

⁹⁸ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 7.

⁹⁹ OCSE Report, 03. *On-Ground Volunteering*, [On-ground Volunteering - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 1 August 2022).

¹⁰⁰ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 4.

¹⁰¹ Mr Geoff Robertson, former President, Friends of Grasslands, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 59.

¹⁰² SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 4.

tree was not felled for another six months, and the message had not been passed to the tree removal team, so the trunk was completely removed.¹⁰³

- 5.9. In her submission, Caroline Le Couteur remarked, ‘We have had meetings onsite with government where different parts of the government clearly had no idea what the other was doing.’¹⁰⁴
- 5.10. In its submission, Hawker Landcare Group detailed how a permit was granted to plant a laneway. TCCS were unaware of the permit until informed by Hawker Landcare Group, who waited to confirm the activity had been discussed with mowing contractors before planting. Yet the section was mowed the day after it was planted.¹⁰⁵
- 5.11. In her submission, Rosemary Blemings noted, ‘There are fewer “rangers” for the TCCS system and yet the staff have numerous and diverse groups requiring their liaison, procedural and ecological assistance.’¹⁰⁶
- 5.12. In its submission, Scullin Community Group noted that it lost regular volunteers because there was no timeline available for Adopt-A-Park grant announcements, and it was unable to advise volunteers whether they would be needed. It also noted that while its Green Spaces Sub-group is registered with the TCCS Urban Parks & Places program, occasionally it becomes aware of various workshops and initiatives undertaken by the PCS ParkCare groups which would be relevant and of interest to its volunteers. This awareness is often after the fact, highlighting a lack of communication and coordination between the programs.¹⁰⁷
- 5.13. Several groups remarked that it was difficult to understand the structure of the agencies they worked with, and whom to contact, especially as responsibilities were subject to change as staff moved on.¹⁰⁸
- 5.14. Mr David Denham AM of Griffith Narrabundah Community Association remarked:
- One of the recommendations that we had in here was that we have a detailed organisation chart to see who is responsible for these sorts of things in City Services, because what happens now is that there is one coordinator for the volunteer groups and that person is running around madly and probably stretched to the limit. It would be nice to know who is responsible for what in City Services.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 2.

¹⁰⁴ Caroline Le Couteur, *Submission 15*, p 5.

¹⁰⁵ Hawker Landcare Group, *Submission 9*, pp 2–3.

¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Blemings, *Submission 20*, p 3.

¹⁰⁷ Scullin Community Group, *Submission 27*, pp 2–3.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example: Red Bill Bush Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 5; Griffith Narrabundah Community Association, *Submission 12*, p 3; Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group, *Submission 17*, p 4; SACTCG, *Submission 21*, pp 1–2; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, p 5.

¹⁰⁹ Mr David Denham AM, President, Griffith Narrabundah Community Association, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, pp 9–10.

- 5.15. The result of these communication failures can be volunteer ‘burnout and pessimism’¹¹⁰ as volunteers see their work being wasted or undermined. The Lions Croke Place Wetlands Land Care Group noted in its submission:

There is dismay at the limited, protracted, and often unnecessary efforts of the government’s environmental organising bodies, and a sense that it is all too difficult to consult before taking action—which is often to the detriment of the site or wishes of those who have volunteered and so often have expertise that is ignored or overlooked.¹¹¹

- 5.16. Bushfire recovery projects in Namadgi National Park were held to be a model for better communication between community and government. SACTCG credited this to early planning and engagement between land management staff and the catchment group, the consistency and length of tenure of catchment group staffing, and community trust in the catchment group as a long-standing and experienced organisation.¹¹²

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government build engagement and culture between volunteer groups and TCCS and facilitate more cooperation between TCCS and EPSDD who have established practices in place.

Mowing

- 5.17. The ACT’s annual mowing program normally runs from September to March, with suburbs and open space areas mown every four weeks and arterial roads mown every five weeks. One of the stated aims of the mowing program is to help the environment, by reducing weed seed, creating habitat for endangered species, and promoting growth of native grass species.¹¹³ Of the 4,907 hectares covered by the mowing area, 38 hectares falls within conservation areas. TCCS notes that some conservation areas are mown less regularly than general open spaces, to maintain conservation values.¹¹⁴
- 5.18. Many submitters reported conflicts between their activities and the mowing program.¹¹⁵
- 5.19. SACTCG noted that groups working on land managed by TCCS prioritised biodiversity conservation while the land manager’s priority is maintenance of amenity. This can lead to one part of TCCS approving volunteer planting of native seedlings, which are then mown over by a different part of TCCS.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Hawker Landcare Group, *Submission 9*, p 2.

¹¹¹ Lions Croke Place Wetlands Land Care Group, *Submission 25*, p 4.

¹¹² Ms Martine Franco, Executive Officer, SACTCG, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, pp 57–58.

¹¹³ ACT City Services, *Grass mowing*, [Grass mowing - City Services \(act.gov.au\)](https://www.act.gov.au/city-services/grass-mowing), (accessed 17 August 2022).

¹¹⁴ ACT City Services, *Mowing frequently asked questions*, [Mowing frequently asked questions - City Services \(act.gov.au\)](https://www.act.gov.au/city-services/mowing-frequently-asked-questions), (accessed 17 August 2022).

¹¹⁵ See, for example: Hawker Landcare Group, *Submission 9*, pp 2–5; Caroline Le Couteur, *Submission 15*, pp 3–4; SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 4; Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 3; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 5.

¹¹⁶ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 4.

- 5.20. The Ginninderra Catchment Group described the mowing program for urban open spaces as 'excessive'. It considers that the program includes areas 'that are or should be listed as remnant Natural Temperate Grasslands (NTG)', a critically endangered plant community under the EPBC Act¹¹⁷. The group also observed that it has seen an increase in weed distribution, which it attributes to current mowing and land management encouraging weed spread.¹¹⁸ The group believes that current guidelines are not followed through to day-to-day land management practices and noted that it has observed grassland sites being mown 'multiple times in a year', despite being listed on ACTmapi¹¹⁹ as native grasslands.¹²⁰
- 5.21. Landcare ACT noted as a concern, 'Government contractors mowing over conservation listed grassland restoration sites and not ensuring mown grass does not go down the drains into our lakes.'¹²¹

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government facilitate coordination between TCCS, volunteer groups and mowing contractors to ensure that mowing is compatible with ACT government policy and volunteer efforts.

Information sharing

- 5.22. The ACT Parks and Conservation Volunteer Policy requires volunteers and volunteer groups to report their hours and activities regularly to the PCS Volunteer Coordinator. PCS produces an annual report on volunteer involvement with PCS activities.¹²²
- 5.23. The TCCS Volunteer Handbook requires that volunteers record their attendance at activities, as a health and safety requirement and for insurance purposes. The handbook notes that TCCS produces an annual report on volunteer involvement, focussing on the number of volunteers involved in TCCS programs, the hours recorded, activities undertaken, training attendance, and incident reporting.¹²³
- 5.24. Some volunteers in the ParkCare and UPP programs provide data about their activities to the ACT Government through the Better Impact online tool. The OCSE report noted that keeping up with this sort of administrative task competes with the priority of on-ground

¹¹⁷ Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth).

¹¹⁸ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 5.

¹¹⁹ ACTmapi is an ACT Government website providing open Geospatial data. *ACTmapi*, [ACTmapi viewer](#) (accessed 23 August 2022).

¹²⁰ Ms Kat McGilp, Executive Officer, Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 56.

¹²¹ Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 3.

¹²² ACT Parks and Conservation, *Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct*, [ACT Parks and Conservation Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct](#) (accessed 17 August 2022), paragraph 2.3.

¹²³ TCCS, *TCCS Volunteer Handbook*, [TCCS Volunteer Handbook \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 17 August 2022), p 10.

work,¹²⁴ and Caroline Le Couteur observed in her submission that lack of access to the data or knowledge of its use meant there was little motivation to do so.¹²⁵

- 5.25. Volunteers felt that a better understanding of the reasons for this data collection, and access to the information generated, would better demonstrate the value the government places on their contributions.¹²⁶
- 5.26. The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment further suggested that public reporting of metrics unrelated to monetary value, such as ‘How much land is being cared for and what are the outcomes?’, could more broadly reflect the true value of volunteer contributions, to the benefit of the volunteers, the government, and the wider community.¹²⁷

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure volunteer groups have access to data they have provided to the government about their activities, and information on how that data is being used.

Recognition

- 5.27. The ACT Parks and Conservation Volunteer Policy states that PCS Volunteer Supervisors will ensure that all volunteers subject to the policy are recognised and celebrated appropriately. It notes that ParkCare volunteers are entitled to discounts on the Annual Park Pass to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and at Tidbinbilla and Namadgi National Park cafes and gift shops, and that PCS will provide written references and a Statement of Service to volunteers on request, as well as hosting an annual Christmas part for active volunteers.¹²⁸
- 5.28. The ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan 2018–2021 has four themes for volunteering in the ACT. Volunteering should be:
- recognised;
 - valuable;
 - diverse; and
 - supported.

Actions, outputs, and indicators are provided for each theme, including that volunteers are celebrated through awards, are publicly acknowledged at events attended by ACT Government representatives, government and community volunteers are linked though

¹²⁴ OCSE Report, 07. *Values of Volunteering in the ACT*, [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 16 August 2022).

¹²⁵ Caroline Le Couteur, *Submission 15*, p 5.

¹²⁶ See, for example: OCSE, *Submission 5*, p 2; Griffith Narrabundah Community Association, *Submission 12*, p 2; SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 5.

¹²⁷ Dr Sophie Lewis, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 41.

¹²⁸ ACT Parks and Conservation, *Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct*, [ACT Parks and Conservation Volunteer Policy and Code of Conduct](#) (accessed 17 August 2022), paragraph 7.

Volunteering and Contact ACT's Network Forum, promotion of the ACT Government volunteer parking permit scheme, promotion of grants, and ensuring that application processes are 'as simple as possible' for the size of the grant.¹²⁹

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government update the ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan.

- 5.29. National Volunteer Week takes place in May each year. It is an opportunity to celebrate and recognise the essential work volunteers do and to say thank you.¹³⁰ During the 2022 Volunteer Week, Volunteering ACT held a Volunteering Symposium to provide professional development to managers and coordinators of volunteers,¹³¹ and a Volunteering Expo to promote volunteering opportunities.¹³²
- 5.30. International Volunteer Day (IVD), held each year on 5 December, is coordinated by the United Nations Volunteer program.¹³³ The program advocates for the recognition of volunteers and their contributions to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. IVD is also supported by Volunteering Australia, and Volunteering ACT will hold the 2022 Volunteering Awards, Canberra Region on 7 December 2022 in honour of IVD.¹³⁴
- 5.31. Despite these efforts and intentions, some volunteers feel taken for granted. In its submission, Red Hill Regenerators noted, 'While environmental volunteers "value" is lauded by input hours and some support, there is little, or no recognition of just how much environmental and conservation benefit has been made by the volunteers. This particularly relates to shifting workload from government bodies to volunteers.'¹³⁵
- 5.32. In their submissions, both Landcare ACT and Ginninderra Catchment Group remarked that government volunteer programs such as ParkCare and UPP are commonly promoted as a service provided by the government to the community.¹³⁶
- 5.33. The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment noted that while volunteers do want to volunteer, and to 'get out there and work', often volunteers would not hear how their work had been used or contributed to a particular project, which left them feeling that their value was diminished.¹³⁷

¹²⁹ ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan 2018–2021, [ACT VOLUNTEERING STATEMENT ACTION PLAN 2018-2021](#), (accessed 17 August 2022).

¹³⁰ Volunteering Australia, *National Volunteer Week*, [National Volunteer Week - Volunteering Australia](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

¹³¹ Volunteering ACT, *2022 Volunteering Symposium*, [2022 Volunteering Symposium - VolunteeringACT](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

¹³² Volunteering ACT, *2022 Volunteering Expo*, [2022 Volunteering Expo - VolunteeringACT](#), (accessed 16 August 2022).

¹³³ Volunteering ACT, *International Volunteer Day*, [International Volunteer Day - Volunteering Australia](#), (accessed 26 October 2022).

¹³⁴ Volunteering ACT, *2022 Volunteering Awards*, [2022 Volunteering Awards - VolunteeringACT](#), (accessed 26 October 2022).

¹³⁵ Red Hill Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 3.

¹³⁶ Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 4; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 4.

¹³⁷ Dr Sophie Lewis, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 36.

- 5.34. The commissioner noted that in general volunteers do not wish to be recognised as individuals or for their personal contributions but do want the value of volunteer work as a whole to be acknowledged. The OCSE report suggests that a yearly event celebrating all environment and citizen science volunteers would be a good way to thank volunteers and help them to feel recognised.¹³⁸

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government hold an annual day during National Volunteer Week to celebrate environmental volunteer activities and contributions.

- 5.35. Volunteers make significant contributions to government activities with their on-ground work, and volunteer-generated information and citizen science data are widely used by the ACT Government to inform strategy, policy, and plans for environmental management.¹³⁹
- 5.36. The OCSE report identifies an inconsistency in recognition of volunteer input, and recommends that there should be clear, specific, and detailed acknowledgement of voluntary contributions to ACT Government plans, programs, and strategies.¹⁴⁰
- 5.37. In its submission, SACTCG observed:
- ACT Government communications also provide a strong focus on what Government offers the community and little on the benefits the government receives from it's [sic] very engaged and informed community. Further acknowledgment and recognition of the time, knowledge and resources the community contribute is imperative to maintain motivation and interest by volunteers working on public land.¹⁴¹
- 5.38. In its submission, Landcare ACT described government acknowledgment of volunteer contributions as 'inconsistent and often cursory',¹⁴² and in her submission, Margy Burn noted:
- '... the most recent annual report of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate comprises 338 pages. It devotes just two paragraphs of text, one glossy photo, and two tables to volunteer Parkcare activities.'¹⁴³

¹³⁸ OCSE Report, 08. *Opportunities*, [Opportunities - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#) (accessed 10 August 2022).

¹³⁹ OCSE Report, *Values of Volunteering in the ACT*, [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#), (accessed 17 August 2022).

¹⁴⁰ OCSE Report, *Opportunities*, [Opportunities - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#), (accessed 17 August 2022).

¹⁴¹ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 5.

¹⁴² Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 5.

¹⁴³ Margy Burn, *Submission 16*, p 1.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure clear and specific recognition of volunteer expertise and contributions to ACT Government plans and programs in government publications.

6. Support

Wildlife vet

- 6.1. ACT Parks and Conservation service noted that the government focus for wildlife vet resources is the significant workload at Tidbinbilla managing captive wildlife populations. Other government vet resources look after agriculture, biosecurity, and domestic animal services.¹⁴⁴
- 6.2. ACT Wildlife detailed the difficulty they have in obtaining veterinary care for the animals they rescue and for other animals found by members of the public. An incomplete survey of private vet clinics revealed at least 78 animals brought in by members of the public had been euthanised in a period of six weeks.¹⁴⁵
- 6.3. ACT Wildlife noted that their licence requires them to rehabilitate animals to release. In cases where this would often be possible, lack of access to a vet who can provide the immediate care for the animal concerned sometimes means the animal must be euthanised instead. Further, injured animals may wait several hours before being seen by a local private vet. On other occasions, specialist veterinary knowledge may be required to accurately assess the animal's likelihood of recovery. ACT Wildlife noted that sometimes the ACT Government ranger euthanasia service will call them, unsure whether an animal is salvageable or not. The RSPCA is not in a position to provide vet care for ACT Wildlife.¹⁴⁶
- 6.4. This situation causes unnecessary suffering for the animals involved and great distress to the volunteers, and can contribute to volunteer compassion fatigue.¹⁴⁷

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government engage a specialist wildlife vet, employed full-time, to respond to the needs of injured and orphaned wildlife in the ACT.

Volunteer facilitation

- 6.5. The value of information sharing by facilitators in Landcare groups was considered in a 2020 cost-benefit analysis of the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program.¹⁴⁸ The study focused on a specific set of Landcare programs, enabling a clear understanding of the costs, other inputs, and potential outcomes. Benefits identified by the study included increased crop yields, carbon sequestration in the soil, and improved wellbeing and mental

¹⁴⁴ Mr Stephen Alegria, Executive Branch Manager, ACT Parks and Conservation Service, EPSDD, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, pp 30–31.

¹⁴⁵ Mrs Lindy Butcher, Volunteer, ACT Wildlife, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 62.

¹⁴⁶ Mrs Lindy Butcher, Volunteer, ACT Wildlife, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, pp 62, 64–65.

¹⁴⁷ ACT Wildlife, *Submission 10*, pp 1, 2.

¹⁴⁸ RPS Group (2020), *Landcare Victoria – Return on Investment: Cost-benefit analysis of the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program*, '[Landcare Return on Investment: Cost-benefit analysis of the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program](#)' (accessed 15 July 2022).

health. The study found that for a ‘modest annual investment of \$4 million’ in Landcare facilitators in Victoria, there was a return on investment of \$31 million in value, or over 700 percent.

- 6.6. As noted earlier in this report, the ACT Government currently employs five staff supporting environmental volunteer activities with PCS through ParkCare, and 1.5 staff supporting TCCS volunteers.¹⁴⁹ In addition, the catchment groups provide facilitation and support services to their member groups.¹⁵⁰
- 6.7. The importance of coordination and facilitation was stressed in several submissions.¹⁵¹ In its submission, Landcare ACT described funding for these positions as essential, and said the role of coordinator or facilitator is ‘the grease that makes it all happen’.¹⁵²
- 6.8. SACTCG noted that catchment groups, in partnership with land management agencies, provide essential coordination to volunteers on the ground. Such support includes ensuring the right tools are available on site, the work is approved to go ahead, and the impact of the work is seen in the context of wider land management in the area.¹⁵³
- 6.9. In his submission, John Davison-Mowle noted ‘limited and unreliable’ funding streams for catchment groups to employ and retain people to support and coordinate community groups in activities such as grant applications, plant selection, and ground preparation.¹⁵⁴
- 6.10. In its submission, SEE Change noted that ‘Skilled facilitators and community organisers are rarely found as volunteers, yet all other volunteers would benefit from their oversight’.¹⁵⁵ SEE Change further noted the need for careful engagement and inclusivity when facilitating and coordinating volunteer activities, which requires training and staff time and may incur salary costs.¹⁵⁶

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund more volunteer coordinators in both directorates and environmental groups.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government funding be made available to provide more training for volunteer coordinators and facilitators.

¹⁴⁹ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 7; Mr Daniel Iglesias, Executive Branch Manager, City Presentation, TCCS, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 25.

¹⁵⁰ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, pp 3–4; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *About Us*, [About Us – Ginninderra Catchment Group \(ginninderralandcare.org.au\)](https://ginninderralandcare.org.au), (accessed 18 August 2022); Molonglo Conservation Group, *Our Programs*, [Our Programs \(MolongloConservation\)](https://molongloconservation.org.au), (accessed 18 August 2022).

¹⁵¹ See, for example: SEE Change, *Submission 2*, p 2; Hawker Landcare Group, *Submission 9*, p 2; Caroline Le Couteur, *Submission 15*, p 5; Australian Association of Bush Regenerators, *Submission 24*, p 6; Scullin Community Group, *Submission 27*, p 4; Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, pp 2, 5.

¹⁵² Ms Karissa Preuss, Chief Executive Officer, Landcare ACT, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 47.

¹⁵³ Ms Martine Franco, Executive Officer, SACTCG, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 58.

¹⁵⁴ John Davison-Mowle, *Submission 14*, p 2.

¹⁵⁵ SEE Change, *Submission 2*, p 2.

¹⁵⁶ Dr Brook Clinton, Executive Officer, SEE Change, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 50.

7. Education and engagement

- 7.1. Volunteers play an important role in educating the wider public on environmental issues through advocacy, events, providing reports and educational resources, working with school groups, their organisation's websites, and engaging with the public in the course of their on-ground activities. Many groups have relationships with local schools, clubs, and church groups, encouraging participation in such projects as weeding, planting, and plant identification.¹⁵⁷
- 7.2. In its submission, the ACT Government noted that community stewardship encourages respect for the environment and reduces the likelihood of neglect.¹⁵⁸ Landcare ACT describes diverse stewardship as critical to protecting, restoring, and repairing the environment against the challenges of declining biodiversity, food insecurity, and climate change.¹⁵⁹
- 7.3. Government agencies can also play a strong role in public environmental education. Different jurisdictions around Australia take different approaches to this responsibility. For example, the NSW government provides grants of up to \$250,000 for projects that develop knowledge and skills in protecting and restoring the environment.¹⁶⁰ Recipients of these grants in 2020 and 2021 have included Murrumbidgee Landcare Association Inc for a project entitled *Connecting young people with nature: benefits for biodiversity, mental health and social connection*, Waminda South Coast Women's Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation for *Grow harvest heal – saving our species through traditional food stories*, and Macquarie University for *Enabling Healthier Gomeroi/Kamilaroi Country through On-Country Classrooms*.¹⁶¹
- 7.4. The Queensland Government's Department of Education and Training has a Sustainable Schools program which aims to raise awareness, provide inspiration, and encourage on-ground action to protect the environment.¹⁶² Also in Queensland, the City of Ipswich hosts the Queens Park Environmental Education Centre, and provides a free environmental education school holiday program for ages 5–12 and educational resources through its website.¹⁶³
- 7.5. In Western Australia, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions' Parks and Wildlife Service runs environmental education programs for schools based on the Western Australian Curriculum as well as seasonal holiday and community activities. This includes cadet activities for primary and secondary school students, fire-specific programs,

¹⁵⁷ See, for example: Red Hill Bush Regenerators, *Submission 6*, pp 2, 4; Friends of Mount Painter, *Submission 18*, p 4; Lions Croke Place Wetlands Land Care Group, *Submission 25*, p 3; Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 6.

¹⁵⁸ ACT Government, *Submission 30*, p 2.

¹⁵⁹ Landcare ACT, *What we do*, [What we do \(landcareact.org.au\)](https://landcareact.org.au), (accessed 18 August 2022).

¹⁶⁰ NSW Department of Planning and Environment, *Environmental Education*, [Environmental Education | NSW Environment and Heritage](https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmental-education), (accessed 24 August 2022).

¹⁶¹ NSW Department of Planning and Environment, *Environmental Education grants awarded and project summaries*, [Environmental Education grants awarded and project summaries | NSW Environment and Heritage](https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmental-education-grants), (accessed 24 August 2022).

¹⁶² Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training, Queensland Sustainable Schools, *Welcome to the Education Centre*, [Welcome to the Education Centre \(sustainableschools.qld.edu.au\)](https://sustainableschools.qld.edu.au), (accessed 24 August 2022).

¹⁶³ City of Ipswich, *Environmental Education*, [Environmental Education : Ipswich City Council](https://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/environmental-education), (accessed 24 August 2022).

and wildlife recovery fieldwork.¹⁶⁴ The Botanic Gardens and Park Authority offers education programs including curriculum-based school programs from early childhood to tertiary students, and community programs such as guided walks and public workshops.¹⁶⁵

- 7.6. In the ACT, EPSDD and the ACT Education Directorate have jointly produced *Understanding Canberra's wetlands: a school curriculum program for the study of constructed urban wetlands*, supporting units of work from early childhood through to later adolescence.¹⁶⁶

- 7.7. In its submission, Landcare ACT asserted that:

Stewardship is closely linked with an environmental ethic and is often inspired by an understanding of, and connection with, the environment. Many environmental volunteers consider that community education is vital to the preservation of the natural environment.

Greater public appreciation of nature is likely to lead to increased recruitment and retention of volunteers, or at least greater community support for the work of environmental volunteers.¹⁶⁷

- 7.8. Ms Karissa Preuss of Landcare ACT observed that 'to instil that environmental ethic we need to start with young people. There is a need for Junior Landcare, as well as broad community education'.¹⁶⁸ She observed that a lot of broad community education is happening through catchment groups and organisations such as SEE Change, but her organisation still sees gaps particularly in environmental education of younger people.¹⁶⁹

- 7.9. Ginninderra Catchment Group echoed these sentiments in its submission:

There is a huge importance for increasing community awareness of the environment, which is largely facilitated by Catchment Groups across the ACT. This includes Broader Community Education and Youth and Junior Education. In addition to engaging youth in Landcare, there is a need for greater environmental education and awareness-raising. Increasing research shows that learning about natural environments generates an ethic of appreciation and valuing of nature. This is likely to increase, likely to lead to greater recruitment of volunteers and greater community support for the work of environmental volunteers.¹⁷⁰

- 7.10. In its submission, Friends of Mount Painter noted that organising educational activities as it has previously done for Year 1–2 school children requires considerable time and effort and would require PCS and TCCS support for fuller development. It observed that 'Increasing

¹⁶⁴ Western Australia Government, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Parks and Wildlife Service, *Education & activities*, [Education & activities - Parks and Wildlife Service \(dpaw.wa.gov.au\)](https://dpaw.wa.gov.au), (accessed 24 August 2022).

¹⁶⁵ Western Australia Government, Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, *Research, Education and Training*, [Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority - Research and Education \(bgpa.wa.gov.au\)](https://bgpa.wa.gov.au), (accessed 24 August 2022).

¹⁶⁶ EPSDD - Environment, Education, [Education - Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate - Environment \(act.gov.au\)](https://act.gov.au), (accessed 24 August 2022).

¹⁶⁷ Landcare ACT, *Submission 26*, p 5.

¹⁶⁸ Ms Karissa Preuss, Chief Executive Officer, Landcare ACT, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 44.

¹⁶⁹ Ms Karissa Preuss, Chief Executive Officer, Landcare ACT, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, pp 47–48.

¹⁷⁰ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 8.

environmental awareness among children will not produce immediate on-ground results but could contribute to future interest in volunteering for the environment.’¹⁷¹

- 7.11. In its submission, the AABR suggested that closer relationships between PCS and ACT schools could encourage young people to engage in fieldwork and facilitate the development of materials to educate school students about bush regeneration while also addressing curriculum needs.¹⁷²

- 7.12. SEE Change noted the importance of a sense of belonging to encourage people from different backgrounds to engage in volunteer activities:

... the aspect of culture is very important. People are coming along to any type of volunteering because they want a life-affirming experience. Culture then becomes a really important aspect.

If you are a young person, you have gone along to someone [sic] and you are surrounded by retirees, you might have a nice time but you might not feel that sense of belonging and that thing that draws you back again.¹⁷³

- 7.13. In its submission, SEE Change also noted that urban-focussed environmental volunteering has the advantage that participants ‘need not buy into the identity politics of “environmentalism”’.¹⁷⁴ Dr Clinton described identity politics as ‘a bit of a trap’, noting that while people who identify as activists may be drawn to climate change advocacy and action, others may be put off from volunteering.¹⁷⁵

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government:

- fund a Junior Landcare program;
- facilitate coordination between EPSDD and the Education Directorate to develop further school-based environmental education programs; and
- fund a grant program specifically to further environmental education and engagement.

Volunteer recruitment

- 7.14. In its submission, National Parks Association of the ACT noted the difficulty in finding volunteers willing to take up governance and administrative roles. It suggested that organisations like Volunteering ACT might be able to assist local environment groups to fill these roles.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Friends of Mount Painter, *Submission 18*, p 4.

¹⁷² AABR, *Submission 24*, p 7.

¹⁷³ Dr Brook Clinton, Executive Officer, SEE Change, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 48.

¹⁷⁴ SEE Change, *Submission 2*, p 1.

¹⁷⁵ Dr Brook Clinton, Executive Officer, SEE Change, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 49.

¹⁷⁶ National Parks Association of the ACT, *Submission 19*, p 2.

- 7.15. In its submission, the Conservation Council ACT Region likewise noted that ‘there seems to be a shortage of volunteers who can fill specific roles, such as governance, fundraising and financial management’, and suggested that Volunteering ACT could be used to advertise for office bearers such as secretaries and treasurers.¹⁷⁷
- 7.16. In its submission, SACTCG noted that volunteering in urban parks has sharply increased in recent years, and that programs that engage the community in on-ground activities such as planting show high levels of engagement.¹⁷⁸ The group advised that it recruits volunteers mainly through partnership arrangements and public events where it collaborates with PCS and TCCS to recruit volunteers into its member groups.¹⁷⁹
- 7.17. In its submission, the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (AABR)¹⁸⁰ noted that the ACT Region Landcare Gateway website¹⁸¹ provides ‘a good welcome’ to becoming an environmental volunteer, leading with an invitation to become a citizen scientist. The AABR also noted that there is little signage in Canberra parks communicating volunteer activities and opportunities to participate or the goals of bush regeneration work undertaken.
- 7.18. In its submission, Friends of Mount Painter observed that it had most success with volunteers who responded to notices posted on the reserve. Expressions of interest through the ParkCare Volunteer Hub website rarely resulted in on-ground activity, and those who did join by this route seldom became regular contributors.¹⁸²
- 7.19. Wildlife ACT noted that while some volunteers are recruited through their website, others join the organisation having been inspired to help because of their experience in bringing injured wildlife in for care.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Conservation Council ACT Region, *Submission 28*, p 4.

¹⁷⁸ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 3.

¹⁷⁹ Ms Martine Franco, Executive Officer, SACTCG, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 57.

¹⁸⁰ Australian Association of Bush Regenerators, *Submission 24*, pp 4–5.

¹⁸¹ ACT Region Landcare Gateway, *Volunteer for the environment*, [Volunteer - ACT Landcare Gateway](#), (accessed 18 August 2022).

¹⁸² Friends of Mount Painter, *Submission 18*, p 4.

¹⁸³ Mrs Lindy Butcher, Volunteer, ACT Wildlife, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 63.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government promote opportunities to participate in environmental volunteering more widely, both through increased signage at the sites of volunteer activities, and online based on a model such as the ACT Parks and Conservation Service 'ParkCare Volunteer Hub'.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government proactively promote specific engagement opportunities with environmental groups, such as:

- events;
- wildlife surveys; and
- opportunities to volunteer in governance and administrative roles.

8. Indigenous care for Country

Canberra is Ngunnawal country. The Ngunnawal are the Indigenous people of this region and its first inhabitants. The neighbouring people are the Gundungurra to the north, the Ngarigo to the south, the Yuin on the coast, and the Wiradjuri inland. It is a harsh climate and difficult country for hunter-gatherer people. To live here required great knowledge of the environment, skilful custodianship of it and close cooperation.¹⁸⁴

- 8.1. The Canberra Nature Park management plan states that recognition of Ngunnawal people's right to speak for Country and respect for their land management and cultural practices is critical to cultural integrity and identity, as well as continued connection to Country.¹⁸⁵ The plan recognises the significant role of Aboriginal burning in Australian ecosystems, and notes that EPSDD is working to integrate traditional ecological knowledge and practices into the management of the park. Involving the local Ngunnawal community in cultural-ecological burning supports both the continued connection of Aboriginal people to Country maintaining and the goal of improving ecological function and habitat for threatened species.¹⁸⁶
- 8.2. The Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee (DNCCC) described the ACT as 'an island on Ngunnawal Country'. The Ngunnawal people are hosts on Country, and caretakers of all environmental matters in the ACT.¹⁸⁷

We welcome volunteers in the role that they play in caring for Country as long as they are working with the Ngunnawal people in that regard.¹⁸⁸

- 8.3. DNCCC underlined the importance of government acknowledgement of traditional custodianship and encouragement for volunteer groups to work in partnership with Ngunnawal both through the DNCCC itself and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council.

...acknowledging the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians needs to be very strong from the government perspective and should not waver. The role of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, and talking to that body—that peak body, as well as to the Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, encouraging volunteer organisations to reach out to both groups and look at opportunities to work in partnership with us.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ ACT Government, *Ngunnawal Country*, [Ngunnawal Country - ACT Government](#), (accessed 18 August 2022).

¹⁸⁵ EPSDD, *Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan 2021*, [Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 18 August 2022), p 73.

¹⁸⁶ EPSDD, *Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan 2021*, [Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 18 August 2022), p 48.

¹⁸⁷ Dr Caroline Hughes, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 72.

¹⁸⁸ Dr Caroline Hughes, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 72.

¹⁸⁹ Dr Caroline Hughes, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 73.

Volunteering by Ngunnawal

- 8.4. The ACT Government noted that there is a significant burden on First Nations people to contribute and engage in many initiatives. The Minister observed, ‘One of the real challenges for First Nations people is that we often look to particular people within the community to do everything.’¹⁹⁰
- 8.5. Volunteering Australia notes that Indigenous Australians face structural disadvantages that impact on their ability to participate in formally organised volunteering, and that mainstream volunteering programs do not typically meet the specific needs and aspirations of Indigenous people.¹⁹¹
- 8.6. While there is a dedicated Aboriginal ParkCare group in Gungahlin supported by PCS,¹⁹² and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are welcome in volunteer programs, the government focus is on providing First Nations people with training and paid employment in the first instance.¹⁹³
- 8.7. The DNCCC also stressed the need to focus on employment for Ngunnawal people, rather than asking them to volunteer:

So gainful employment and appropriate recognition of work to remediate what has been done to this country is really important for us as Ngunnawal people.

We are willing to work with volunteers from other groups, and non-Indigenous people, and, yes, we see that as vital in them working collaboratively with us and taking the lead from us; however, in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people volunteering, whilst some of us are able to do that, in some capacity—some minor, for some more—for the majority of our people, it is about gainful employment.¹⁹⁴

- 8.8. Mr Wally Bell cited the now-defunct Aboriginal Green Army Team as an example of a land management initiative for Indigenous Australians which did not result in employment:

People get trained up and they get fully qualified, but at the end of those programs, there is no employment. ... You have got this nice, younger generation who are wanting to learn all these skills, but when it comes to the end of the program there is nothing for them to go into.

It is those sorts of situations that I think should be looked at and rectified as soon as possible. It is fine to say, “let’s get people out there on Country volunteering”,

¹⁹⁰ Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Minister for the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 27.

¹⁹¹ Volunteering Australia, *Volunteering by Indigenous peoples*, [Volunteering by Indigenous peoples - Volunteering Australia](#), (accessed 25 August 2022).

¹⁹² Mr Frank Garofalow, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Natural Resources Management, EPSDD, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 28.

¹⁹³ Mr Stephen Alegria, Executive Branch Manager, ACT Parks and Conservation Service, EPSDD, *Committee Hansard*, 19 July 2022, p 28.

¹⁹⁴ Dr Caroline Hughes, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 73.

but people are also, as everybody has already said, looking for full-time employment as well.¹⁹⁵

8.9. Ms Roslyn Brown noted that poverty was a barrier to participation in volunteer activities:

It is a bit difficult getting volunteers amongst the oppressed, who are of the lowest socio-economic scale in this country. ...

Do not put too much on us, and we can be a support base for you, rather than looking to us for volunteers. Most of our people are really impoverished ... Maybe we can work on working together one day with volunteers from our community in the future, but we need to prioritise other issues that need to be fixed.¹⁹⁶

Ngunnawal stewardship and care for Country

- 8.10. Many submissions noted the value of Indigenous stewardship and care for Country, and a desire for more Indigenous input into environmental activities.¹⁹⁷
- 8.11. In its submission, SEE Change noted the importance of learning from Ngunnawal people as the rightful custodians of the land, and that its focus is on nurturing relationships with local people and supporting Ngunnawal mob in their goals and creating space for their voices.¹⁹⁸
- 8.12. In its submission, Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group remarked that there is a lack of knowledge about attitudes towards environmental volunteering by Indigenous Australians as well as young people and other diverse groups. It noted that anecdotal observation indicates that most environmental volunteers are of mature age but questioned whether this results from increased availability of older people or negative attitudes and lack of awareness amongst other groups.¹⁹⁹

Volunteer engagement with Ngunnawal

- 8.13. In its submission, SACTCG noted that there is strong interest in greater engagement with Ngunnawal for both knowledge sharing and conducting on-ground work. Member groups consistently seek to better understand the culture of the land they work on in order to provide better management and protection.²⁰⁰
- 8.14. In its submission, Ginninderra Catchment Group recognised the need for more caring for Country activities to ensure that cultural knowledge is handed down from one generation

¹⁹⁵ Mr Wally Bell, Committee member, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 76.

¹⁹⁶ Ms Roslyn Brown, Committee member, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 73.

¹⁹⁷ See, for example: Ross Knee, *Submission 1*, p 1; SEE Change, *Submission 2*, pp 1–2; Friends of Grasslands, *Submission 3*, p 1; Red Hill Bush Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 4; Sue Ross, Bass Gardens Group, *Submission 13*, p 3; Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group, *Submission 17*, p 3; Rosemary Blemings, *Submission 20*, p 2; SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 6; Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 7.

¹⁹⁸ SEE Change, *Submission 2*, pp 1–2.

¹⁹⁹ Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group, *Submission 17*, p 3.

²⁰⁰ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 6.

to the next. It also noted that Ngunnawal Country extends beyond the boundary of the ACT.²⁰¹

- 8.15. The DNCCC believes opportunities for volunteer groups to engage with Ngunnawal culture and caring for Country could be facilitated by government:

I believe that the government could fund training, Ngunnawal-specific training, for the volunteer groups—that there be specific dates throughout the year and that funding is provided to appropriate Ngunnawal elders to provide training about the Ngunnawal people and our culture on Country, and that includes language and information about the peak bodies and the connection to environment.²⁰²

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund Ngunnawal-specific training for volunteer groups that employs Ngunnawal trainers, including culture on Country and language.

Indigenous land management

- 8.16. In its submission, Red Hill Bush Regenerators noted that it has worked with Aboriginal representatives to make community submissions on planning or development issues, and that the group would welcome cultural-ecological burning on Red Hill in place of standard prescribed burns.²⁰³
- 8.17. In her submission, Sue Ross of Bass Gardens Group noted that Indigenous input for advice on native flora and cultural burns would be highly valued, but that resources to provide this may be limited.²⁰⁴
- 8.18. Ginninderra Catchment Group indicated its support for greater resources being provided to support Ngunnawal land management practices, including more Ngunnawal rangers for land management and resourcing for cool²⁰⁵ and cultural burning practices.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 7.

²⁰² Dr Caroline Hughes, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 74.

²⁰³ Red Hill Bush Regenerators, *Submission 6*, p 4.

²⁰⁴ Sue Ross, Bass Gardens Group, *Submission 13*, p 3.

²⁰⁵ Cool burning is a land management technique using a 'cool' fire. Low fires in small areas are lit at night or early morning when dew helps cool down the fire and the winds are often gentle. These fires are closely monitored, ensuring that only the underbrush is burnt. *Aboriginal Fire Management – What is Cool Burning?* [Watarrka Foundation](#) (accessed 12 September 2022).

²⁰⁶ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 7.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate the feasibility of increasing the program of cultural-ecological burning as part of the land management regime.

Heritage project funding

- 8.19. SACTCG noted in its submission that has sought funding for Ngunnawal interpretation and engagement but notes that the ACT heritage grant has failed to fund significant Aboriginal heritage on-ground projects for the past two years. SACTCG has also unsuccessfully applied to work with PCS, the ParkCare group, and an archaeologist to develop a management plan for a series of scar trees on Isaacs ridge.²⁰⁷
- 8.20. Ginninderra Catchment Group also observed that in recent years, only a small fraction of ACT heritage grants has provided funding for Ngunnawal or Aboriginal projects.²⁰⁸
- 8.21. Of 20 heritage grants funded for 2022–23, only one appears to be specifically for Indigenous culture: Indigenous welcome signs and online content for the National Rock Garden.²⁰⁹ In 2021–22, out of 18 heritage grants awarded, one was for ‘Ngunnawal Night Tales at Mulligans Flat’,²¹⁰ and in 2020–21, none of the 21 grants awarded are explicitly for Indigenous culture.²¹¹

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund Aboriginal heritage projects to protect and preserve Country and Ngunnawal culture.

Culture on Country

- 8.22. The DNCCC would also like to engage with the general public to celebrate Culture and caring for Country. Ms Brown raised the possibility of holding family fun days on Country, and stressed the importance of Ngunnawal providers and educators being reimbursed:

I can see new initiatives like having family fun days—caring for Country, fun days—and all of us being reimbursed. That helps to pull community together, especially if we have the children with us and parents and grandparents are able to teach the children with the volunteers. I think that would be a great

²⁰⁷ SACTCG, *Submission 21*, p 6.

²⁰⁸ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 7.

²⁰⁹ EPSDD, *Successful projects for 2022–23*, [Successful Projects for 2022-2023 - Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate - Environment \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 14 October 2022).

²¹⁰ EPSDD, *Successful projects for 2021–22*, [Successful Projects for 2021-2022 - Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate - Environment \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 14 October 2022).

²¹¹ EPSDD, *Successful projects for 2020–21*, [Successful Projects for 2020-2021 - Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate - Environment \(act.gov.au\)](#), (accessed 14 October 2022).

introduction to Ngunnawal Caring for Country through families, but elders would also have to be reimbursed and so would the younger adults.²¹²

- 8.23. While many volunteer organisations have existing relationships with schools, and the ACT Government has developed a curriculum program on urban wetlands, as outlined in Chapter 7, it is not clear that Ngunnawal culture and values are included in these initiatives. Dr Hughes noted an opportunity to formalise Ngunnawal values in caring for Country within the education system:

... I see a role for CIT, the public provider, in providing formal qualifications that then lead to their school certificate in year 10 and year 12. It could even start with informal training at a younger age in primary school—so getting young people thinking about the environment and caring for the environment would be really important.

That could be through school-based apprenticeship programs—ASbAs. There are a whole range of systems that are already in place, and it is a matter of bringing them together and formalising them.²¹³

- 8.24. Ginninderra Catchment Group also recognised in its submission that ‘education is key’ at all levels of schooling to support Ngunnawal leadership in caring for Country.²¹⁴
- 8.25. Reflecting on the opportunities and challenges of Ngunnawal engagement with environmental volunteerism, Dr Hughes observed:

You plant a seed, and a strong gum tree will grow, but you have to nurture it.²¹⁵

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund annual Ngunnawal Country family fun days, employing Ngunnawal people to communicate their culture, language and care for Country.

²¹² Ms Roslyn Brown, Committee member, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 75.

²¹³ Dr Caroline Hughes, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 75.

²¹⁴ Ginninderra Catchment Group, *Submission 29*, p 7.

²¹⁵ Dr Caroline Hughes, Co-Chair, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 14 September 2022, p 76.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1. The ACT Government, citizens, and environment benefit greatly from the efforts of the many people who generously give their time and labour to environmental volunteer activities. From contributing the occasional sighting to CNM, to showing up once a month at a regular working bee, to leading guided walks in reserves or writing grant applications to support group projects, volunteers add value to the scientific, ecological, and social wellbeing of the Territory.
- 9.2. The Committee has made 22 recommendations in this report with the intention of supporting, recognising, and encouraging volunteer efforts, so that these benefits may continue and grow.

Dr Marisa Paterson MLA

Chair

15 November 2022

Appendix A: Submissions

No.	Submission by	Received	Published
1	Ross Knee	26/01/22	01/02/22
2	SEE Change	28/01/22	01/02/22
3	Friends of Grasslands	05/02/22	15/02/22
4	Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park	06/02/33	15/02/22
5	ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment	07/02/22	15/02/22
6	Red Hill Bush Regenerators	18/02/22	08/03/22
7	Friends of Mount Majura ParkCare Group	24/02/22	08/03/22
8	Friends of Hawker Village	24/02/22	08/03/22
9	Hawker Landcare Group	25/02/22	08/03/22
10	ACT Wildlife	01/03/22	08/03/22
11	Jarramlee Park Landcare Group	02/03/22	08/03/22
12	Griffith Narrabundah Community Association	04/03/22	08/03/22
13	Sue Ross, Bass Gardens Group	08/03/22	15/03/22
14	John Davison-Mowle	08/03/22	15/03/22
15	Caroline Le Couteur	09/03/22	15/03/22
16	Margy Burn	09/03/22	15/03/22
17	Cooleman Ridge ParkCare Group	10/03/22	15/03/22
17a	Cooleman Ridge ParkCare Group	10/03/22	15/03/22
18	Friends of Mount Painter	10/03/22	15/03/22
19	National Parks Association of the ACT	10/03/22	15/03/22
20	Rosemary Blemings	13/03/22	29/03/22
21	Southern ACT Catchment Group	16/03/22	29/03/22
22	Martin Lind	15/03/22	29/03/22
23	Hackett Community Association	02/05/22	17/05/22
24	Australian Association of Bush Regenerators	05/05/22	17/05/22
25	Lions Croke Place Wetlands Land Care Group	06/05/22	17/05/22
26	Landcare ACT	06/05/22	17/05/22
27	Scullin Community Group	06/05/22	17/05/22
28	Conservation Council ACT Region	09/05/22	17/05/22
29	Ginninderra Catchment Group	09/05/22	17/05/22
30	ACT Government	20/06/22	21/06/22

Appendix B: Witnesses

Tuesday, 19 July 2022

Red Hill Regenerators:

- Mr Ross Kingsland, President
- Dr Michael Mulvaney, Conservation Officer

Coolleman Ridge Park Care Group:

- Mr Chris Oates, Vice President
- Mr Paul Sheils, Committee Member

Hawker Community Landcare:

- Ms Frances Knight, Convenor

Hackett Community Association:

- Mr Chris Mobbs, Chair

Griffith Narrabundah Community Association:

- Mr David Denham AM, President

Friends of Blaxland Park:

- Mr Mac Howell, Convenor

ACT Government:

- Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Minister for the Environment
- Mr Bren Burkevics, Executive Group Manager, Environment, Heritage and Water, EPSDD
- Mr Frank Garofalow, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Natural Resources Management, EPSDD
- Ms Lisa Testoni, Director - Volunteer and Visitor Experience, EPSDD
- Mr Daniel Iglesias, Executive Branch Manager, City Presentation, TCCS
- Ms Lauren McQueen, Volunteer Programs Manager, Volunteer and Visitor Experience, EPSDD
- Mr Stephen Alegria, Executive Branch Manager, ACT Parks and Conservation Service, EPSDD

Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment:

- Dr Sophie Lewis, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment,

SEE Change:

- Dr Brook Clinton, Executive Officer

Landcare ACT:

- Ms Karissa Preuss, Chief Executive Officer
- Dr Maxine Cooper, Chair

Friends of Grasslands:

- Mr Geoff Robertson, former President

Southern ACT Catchment Group Inc:

- Ms Martine Franco, Executive Officer

Ginninderra Catchment Group:

- Ms Kat McGilp, Executive Officer
- Dr John Giacon, General Member, Executive Committee; Convenor, Emu Creek Landcare; General Member, Landcare ACT Members Council

ACT Wildlife:

- Mrs Lindy Butcher, Volunteer

National Parks Association of the ACT:

- Dr Esther Gallant, President
- Mr Rod Griffiths, Convenor, Environment Sub-committee

Wednesday, 14 September 2022

Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee:

- Dr Caroline Hughes, Co-Chair
- Mr Wally Bell, Committee Member
- Ms Roslyn Brown, Committee Member
- Mr Stephen Mudford, Committee Member

Appendix C: Questions on Notice and Questions Taken on Notice

Questions on Notice

No.	Date	Asked of	Subject	Response received
1	26/07/22	Mr Mick Gentleman MLA, Minister for Planning and Land Management	Rural Road Maintenance	08/08/22

Questions Taken on Notice

No.	Date	Asked of	Subject	Response received
1	19/07/22	Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Minister for the Environment	Biodiversity Conservation Forum	01/08/22