



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Leanne Castley MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism in the ACT

Submission Number: 2

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Re: Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism

To the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity,

Thank you for providing this opportunity. As a volunteer-led organisation SEE Change is committed to providing **valuable opportunities for volunteers** of all ages and experience levels that help further our mission of achieving a fair and sustainable Canberra into the future.

Somewhat distinct from other environmental charities, SEE Change has a focus on the **urban environment** as opposed to conservation activities that occur in reserves etc. Conservation is an important aspect of environmental protection but we also recognise the benefits of encouraging reduced consumption (of materials, goods, energy etc) in terms of protection of the global environment, mitigating climate change and advocating for careful use of resources. In essence, our goals are directed towards **local climate action** for both local and global benefits. See [this document](#) for examples of projects and activities that SEE Change have led over the years.

Attracting more volunteers for climate action

An opportunity presented by urban-focussed climate action is that participants need not buy into the identity politics of 'environmentalism'. Environmentally beneficial action can arise from discussions of skills and community activities/projects that provide plenty of social benefits alongside climate change mitigation and can involve a larger subset of our wider community (or ideally, everyone!).

Holding space for Ngunawal mob where we can, and still learning

Activities focussed on the 'way we live' also bring the conversation around to an important point and that is that all of us in Canberra are living on Ngunawal land. Indigenous people in many traditions see white people's distinction from the land as very strange. To recognise that the way we live strongly influences the health of the land brings us closer to a position where we can more meaningfully learn from those that are the rightful custodians of this land.

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In 2021 SEE Change invested heavily in learning more about local Ngunawal history and culture. This is an ongoing conversation that is best taken gently and not rushed forward to questions such as 'what can we learn from Ngunawal people and how can we apply that to our environmental work?'. Valid preliminary questions may be more along the lines of:

"How do we best nurture relationships between SEE Change as an organisation and local Ngunawal mob?"

"How do we best support Ngunawal mob in their goals, in creating space for their voices?"

"How do we provide opportunities for SEE Change volunteers of all backgrounds to explore together?"

What do volunteers need?

As can be seen from the above, the challenges that face our volunteers are not necessarily related to equipping them with physical tools or technical skills. The challenges mostly lie in organising, facilitating, community building and relationship nurturing. Digital tools can introduce some efficiencies, but the main barrier remains to be coordinator time. Skilled facilitators and community organisers are rarely found as volunteers, yet all other volunteers would benefit from their oversight. Government programs that fund not just capital goods but also these skilled positions (can be on a project basis) would greatly accelerate volunteer retention and satisfaction.

Recognition of a much larger set of valuable 'environmental volunteering' activities would be advantageous. If the aim is to get more people considering the ways that they live then we need excellent communicators, artists and more. It's not all planting trees 😊

Sincerely,

Brook Clinton, Executive Officer