



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY  
Mr James Milligan MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Ms Laura Nuttall MLA

# **Submission Cover sheet**

## **Inquiry into Unpaid Work**

Submission number: 03

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Submission to the  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality  
Inquiry into Unpaid Work

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Dear Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's Inquiry into Unpaid Work. This submission reflects the experience of SEE Change in delivering projects, programs and services to the ACT community.

## **Background**

SEE Change was formed in 2008. We are a grass-roots sustainability organisation based in Canberra. We are focused on making beneficial changes to our Society, Environment and Economy (SEE) in order to live more sustainably. The SEE Change vision is that the community is contributing, collaborating and caring to create a fair and sustainable Canberra and surrounding region.

Our objects are to:

1. To foster the development of groups in the ACT and surrounding region that take practical actions relating to ecological sustainability. Such groups are to be broadly inclusive and promote community cohesion, and be open to people of all ages and from all societal groups.
2. To encourage people in the ACT and surrounding region to take practical action relating to ecological sustainability.
3. To promote exchange of information on ecological sustainability to SEE-Change members, across groups and with the broader public.

SEE Change is a registered charity and we maintain a Public Fund to accept gifts and donations to support and further the above environmental objects.

Through a central office in Downer, we support a range of volunteer-led groups across Canberra and the region to take practical action related to ecological sustainability. As at May 2024 there are 14 SEE Change Groups – details of each of the Groups and their activities is at [Attachment A](#). The central office includes 3 part time staff (1.5 full time equivalent) paid through a grant with the ACT Government. The central office also runs an e-bike library through a separate grant with the ACT Government.

## **Our impact**

A copy of our 2023 Impact Statement is included at Attachment B. SEE Change has 620 financial members, 3,300 newsletter subscribers, 10,000 Facebook followers, 17000 website visitors, and a network of more than 150 active volunteers. SEE Change encourages people to improve their sustainability through our volunteer-led community groups who delivered over 75 community events last year that engaged more than 7000 Canberrans in 2023. These activities included:

- Holding three repair cafes per month where volunteers repaired broken items and kept them out of landfill;
- Waste reducing activities, including advocacy, community education about recycling, and campaigns to reduce fast fashion and live plastic free;
- Biodiversity education;
- Our volunteer groups also:
  - regenerated local parks;
  - Undertook environmental advocacy;
  - Promoted electrification of our suburbs; and
  - Advocated for reducing transport emissions, active travel and safe and accessible streets.

Our Community Toolbox made 2,700 tool loans from their library of 900 tools. SEE Change also delivers the Canberra Electric Bike Library and a soil regeneration program aimed at reducing carbon emissions and increasing urban food production.

SEE Change also contributes to many strategies and consultations to assist government in meeting its objectives, most recently the Urban Food Strategy, Circular Economy, Active Travel and Light Rail, Acton Waterfront, Suburban Land Agency, ICON and the Climate Council.

## **Value of SEE Change volunteers to the Canberra Economy**

SEE Change volunteers conservatively contribute more than 500 hours of volunteer work per month to the Canberra community, or more than 6000 hours in 2023. If you calculate that contribution at \$41.72 per hour (the ACT government endorsed rate for 'in-kind' contributions), our operational funding leveraged more than \$250,000 in volunteer resources. Further economic activity ensues from our volunteer activities eg purchase of food and materials in support of some activities, ticket sales for some workshops.

We recommend the ACT Wellbeing Framework be enhanced by, in addition to collecting the percentage of people that volunteer, also capturing and put an economic value on the hours they contribute and in which sectors. As well as being an economic contribution, the value of volunteering can give an indication of social cohesion.

## **The impact of funding on volunteering**

Volunteering requires appropriate structures and systems in place. In SEE Change's experience, volunteers require management, governance and back-office support which can provide administration, ensure adequate public liability and other insurance is in place, appropriate policies and procedures meet modern workplace and organisational standards such as work health and safety at events.

The success of SEE Change in recruiting and maintaining a robust volunteer workplace is largely attributable to the organisational model under which the organisation functions. At SEE Change, the central office assists with project planning, social media and marketing, provides help with grant applications and support for issues management. The volunteer Board supports the volunteer workforce by setting a clear strategic direction for the organisation, and continuously reviewing and updating governance documents.

Without these supports, our volunteer groups would struggle to progress meaningful and impactful volunteer-led projects for the benefit of the ACT community. Volunteer skillsets or interest are often lacking in tasks that are essential for project success, such as marketing, accounting and grant writing. Most volunteer organisations without back-office support lack the resources to pay for insurance and/or the corporate structure for eligibility for grants or to attract donations (DGR status). Without assistance with grant applications, financial and project management, volunteers are limited by inadequate funding to smaller projects and/or the projects are at greater risk of non-delivery due to volunteer turnover and inadequate project governance. Without meaningful and engaging projects, volunteers drift away from the organisation, and without adequate support, lead volunteers are at greater risk of stress and burnout.

As mentioned above, SEE Change receives funding for a central office which handles the administration of our 14 volunteer led groups, including banking, insurance, promotional activities, ticketing etc. Due to resource constraints, this small office of 4 part time staff struggles to adequately support the needs of our current network of 150 volunteers. Overburden and inexperience of staff who, are mainly university students due to the low pay grade, limits our ability to provide what is needed to support the current networks and constrains our ability to develop and scaffold new groups and local university interns.

Together, with the Conservation Council ACT and the Canberra Environment Centre we put in a request for additional funding in November 2023. The submission highlighted the impact the current funding levels had on our operations. There is a direct impact between our operational funding and the amount we can achieve through our volunteers. Currently, SEE Change turns away volunteers due to insufficient resourcing to be able to manage everyone that wants to contribute. This is a lost economic and social opportunity to the ACT.

Inflation has risen by 26% in the past decade, contributing to high insurance and operational costs. Coupled with increased complexity of work, financial accountability, management of risk, competitiveness in the ACT labour market, and an increased need for an online presence, this means the current level of operational funding for the above three environment non-government organisations is unsustainable.

Increased funding for the three organisations would:

- harness additional volunteer effort for sustainable and cost-effective projects that positively impact environmental outcomes, build social cohesion and provide engaging and safe opportunities for volunteers;
- Assist government to build trust with the local community on its journey to net zero; and
- Increase reach, impact and efficiency of operations with adequate resources for IT and communications.

We would be happy to discuss this submission with the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Paula Mance  
Executive Director

### SEE Change Groups

- **Belconnen Group** – Focussed on accessibility to public transport, active travel including walking and prams, and waste reduction; run the Hawker repair café.
- **Co-Canberra** – Focussed on participatory democracy, food and housing co-operatives.
- **Community Toolbox** - Is home to the "library of things", which allows the community to borrow all sorts of tools and equipment for your DIY, craft, gardening, home and outdoor needs, thereby reducing consumption and contributing to a circular economy.
- **Creatives for Canberra** - Videography and photography to support sustainability initiatives.
- **Electrify Canberra** - Promoting electrifying and decarboniing our community.
- **Gowrie Group** – Aiming to build a Community garden and promote intensive food production (eg. Aquaponics).
- **Gungahlin Group** - Increasing biodiversity, wildlife education and regeneration of local parks.
- **Living Streets** - Promote active travel, safe, convenient and accessible public environs and spaces.
- **Kambah Group** - Urban forest and grasslands regeneration, Community and sustainability hub.
- **Inner North** - Solarshare, Kambri creek and parkland regeneration.
- **Climate Change Education** - Education on climate change for school children and their teachers.
- **Tuggeranong Group** – Run the Tuggeranong repair café, mending cafes, clothes swaps, community education and stalls, and recycling.
- **Wasteless Group** - Education to reduce consumption, plastics use and waste, and run wasteless cooking workshops.
- **Woden Group** – Helped build the Low Energy Super Shed at the Canberra City Farm and run the Hughes Repair Café.