

**2023**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**Report 6 - Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity - Inquiry  
into environmental volunteerism**

**Government Response**

**Presented by  
Rebecca Vassarotti MLA  
Minister for the Environment  
March 2023**



## Introduction

The ACT Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity Inquiry into environmental volunteerism. This inquiry provides an important review of the ACT's environmental volunteerism and highlights opportunities to further strengthen the supporting programs, procedures and systems that support volunteer efforts. The ACT Government is pleased to agree, or agree in principle, with all recommendations in this inquiry and to outline its approach to implementing the recommendations.

Volunteering and giving back to the community is strongly entrenched in the ethos of the Australian culture and is carried through into the day to day lives of many living in the ACT and surrounding region. An increasing population and higher than national average volunteerism rates<sup>1</sup>, provides an opportunity for greater involvement in natural resource management; however, resourcing and capacity constraints need to be addressed. The ACT Government recognises the significant contribution volunteers make in conserving nature and the range of benefits that accrue from their contribution. The Government is committed to supporting environmental volunteerism in the ACT.

Volunteering benefits the environment and can provide a level of consistency in monitoring and management over and above what is provided by Government. Of equal importance, volunteering provides participants with many benefits through promoting physical and mental health, social interaction, gaining work experience, learning new skills and a sense of personal satisfaction.

Community stewardship of the environment reduces the likelihood of neglect and encourages respect by others. For example, residents' groups record plants and animals, control weeds, undertake revegetation, remove rubbish, control erosion and raise environmental awareness. The activities volunteers undertake are a visible cue to others that the environment is important and volunteers play an important role in educating the broader community and advocating for positive change.

ACT Government environmental volunteer programs contribute to community-based delivery of environmental outcomes, stewardship of public assets, citizen science and participation in nature across a number of Government priorities. Volunteering brings people together to build a more active, engaged and inclusive community. It enriches the lives of volunteers themselves, as well as those who benefit from their commitment to Canberra, its people and its places.

While not covered in this inquiry, the ACT Government also recognises the contributions of emergency response volunteers to our community. These volunteers put their personal safety on the line when our community needs them the most. They also play an important role in protecting the built and natural environment during natural disasters.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Key-Volunteering-Statistics-2022-Update.pdf>

The Government will work in partnership with environmental volunteer groups to implement recommendations of this inquiry. The Government will continue identifying opportunities to improve the volunteer experience and support the significant contributions volunteers make to the prosperity of the ACT.

# **ACT Government Response to the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity Report No. 06 – Inquiry into environmental volunteerism**

## **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.*

## **Response**

### **AGREED**

The requirements of permits vary in line with the nature and values of the land and the activities proposed. Permits are essential to ensure projects are undertaken in a safe, coordinated and appropriate way that is compliant with ACT legislation and policy. The ACT Government will take a collaborative, continuous improvement approach to ensure that the administrative load for community and administrators is reduced and that required approvals can be obtained within grant application timeframes, although separate approvals may still be required.

## **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.*

## **Response**

### **AGREED**

All grants administered by the ACT Government are required to use a standard deed of grant designed by the ACT Government Solicitor. This deed of grant template outlines a standardised set of terms and conditions which can then be followed by the differing requirements of each program. ACT Government grant programs are also required to follow the whole of government *Administration of Government Grants in the ACT* policy. Through these two documents and relevant processes, the ACT Government will continue to ensure grant programs are standardised while still providing flexibility for the differing requirements of each program. The ACT Government notes the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is currently conducting an inquiry into grants management.

## **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.*

## **Response**

### **AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

Grant administrators strive to ensure that all eligible applicants are aware of the opportunity to apply for grant programs. An improved process to inform previous applicants will be investigated, noting the need to ensure privacy considerations are taken into account.

#### **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.*

#### **Response**

##### **AGREED**

ACT Government will 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. Experienced officers are reviewing the structural and functional integrity of Namadgi's management of roads to inform procurement and delivery of repairs and upgrade works. Funding is made available from a range of sources including the Commonwealth Government and Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) funding, in response to fire and flood events, insurance claims are accessed for funding.

#### **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.*

#### **Response**

##### **AGREED**

Further efforts will be made across directorates to ensure a consistent approach to operational policy regarding environmental volunteering. This work needs to ensure a high level of work health and safety is maintained to ensure duty of care and compliance with legislative requirements. Transport Canberra City Services (TCCS), Parks and Conservation Services (PCS) and the Environment Division of EPSDD are currently collaborating to standardise volunteer practice in relation to power tools and chemical usage.

#### **Recommendation 6**

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

#### **Response**

##### **AGREED**

TCCS representatives commenced attending the *Biodiversity Conservation Forum* in November 2022.

#### **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.*

## Response

### **AGREED**

TCCS and EPSDD business units involved in environmental volunteering developed formal governance arrangements in 2022 to enhance cross-directorate collaboration. TCCS has been invited to attend the Biodiversity Conservation Forum where volunteer management and its coordination is a regular topic of discussion. An example of how this approach has already resulted in improvements is the 2022 Environmental Volunteer Christmas party to acknowledge volunteerism achievements. This event was, for the first time, conducted as a collaboration between Landcare ACT, PCS, TCCS and EPSDD and was attended by a representative group of over 100 volunteers. These efforts in collaboration and engagement will be continued in 2023 and beyond, including an inaugural ACT Environment Volunteers Conference in the second part of 2023.

### **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.*

## Response

### **AGREED**

The TCCS Urban Parks and Places Volunteer Coordinator coordinates the efforts of volunteer groups with those of the mowing program. TCCS has committed to improving coordination between mowing activities and environmental outcomes.

### **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.*

## Response

### **AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

Volunteers and volunteer groups can request data exports, within the constraints of privacy and data sharing requirements. Many volunteer groups do this to identify and report metrics to their membership.

Data is important as a first point of understanding metrics such as who is volunteering, when and where so ACT Government can facilitate safe and supported volunteering opportunities. Data is used to understand the breadth of volunteering across the ACT. This helps ACT Government understand how it can better involve and support volunteers, to continue to secure sufficient resourcing and to advocate for the future of volunteer involvement with ACT Government programs.

### **Recommendation 10**

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

#### **Response**

##### **AGREED**

The Community Services Directorate (CSD) is working to update and renew the ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan during 2023.

### **Recommendation 11**

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

#### **Response**

##### **AGREED**

ACT Government holds multiple volunteer events throughout the year celebrating environmental volunteer activities and contributions. Opportunities for partnership events during National Volunteer Week will be explored in partnership with Landcare ACT and other volunteer stakeholders.

### **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.*

#### **Response**

##### **AGREED**

Public recognition of volunteer expertise and contributions is important in demonstrating volunteers are valued. ParkCare produces an annual report each year to recognise the efforts of volunteers. Volunteering contributions is also clearly articulated in the TCCS Volunteering handbook as well as the TCCS and EPSDD annual reports. Volunteers are also recognised via numerous ACT and National awards ceremonies and is promoted via ACT Gov social media. ACT Government will consider how volunteer contributions and expertise can be further recognised in public forums, including 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.*

#### **Response**

##### **AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

This recommendation would most effectively be implemented through additional funding to ACT Wildlife to engage a veterinarian, or by providing financial support to specialist wildlife veterinarians to support the services of ACT Wildlife. Additional resources may include funding for rehabilitation services, in addition to initial treatment by specialist veterinarians. ACT Government will investigate appropriate funding options.

### **Recommendation 14**



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

Response

**AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

The ACT Government currently funds five volunteer coordinators as part of the Parkcare program and one as part of the TCCS Urban Parks and Places program. It also funds the three ACT Catchment groups to provide volunteer support to groups in both programs. ACT Government will explore additional positions for both the Parkcare and TCCS programs would in future budgets.

**Recommendation 15**

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

Response

**AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

The standard suite of training offered by PCS and TCCS includes First Aid, CPR Refresher, ChemCert, Weed ID and Grass ID. The ACT Environment Grants program also provides funding for community stewardship groups wishing to undertake training and skill development. ACT Government will explore additional training in light of risk management considerations and feedback from volunteers.

**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.*

Response

**AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

The ACT Environmental Grants Program has opportunities for community to apply for funding for projects that ‘connect people to nature’ including for ‘nature based education’ projects. The ACT Government also facilitates the “Kickstart” program through the Environment Division that provides environmental education opportunities for disconnected students from mainstream schooling. This program is run in collaboration with the Education Directorate.

EPSDD will explore the possibility of further collaboration between EPSDD and the Education Directorate in relation to existing programs, noting that additional funding would be required for any expansion.

**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'.*

Response

**AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

Both PCS and TCCS have well-established systems for advertising volunteer opportunities through their respective Volunteer Hub and Volunteer Gateways. TCCS also utilises temporary and permanent signage at volunteer sites to advertise volunteer activities. PCS also utilise permanent Park Care signage at major sites. Both programs have attended public events in the past to promote volunteer opportunities. Both programs are open to additional opportunities for promotion, dependent on available funding and resources.

**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.*

Response

**AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

An Environment Volunteer Conference is currently being organised jointly with Landcare ACT and the Conservation Council for the second part of 2023.

ParkCare promotes volunteering events and opportunities for members of the public to be involved such as the recent Waterways Symposium.

The RangerAssist Program and WildlifeAssist Program also provide opportunities for volunteers to engage in wildlife surveys that run across EPSDD.

TCCS is open to promoting specific engagement opportunities should additional funding become available.

**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.*

Response

**AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

The ACT Government is working with the Ngunnawal community to assist with the development of traditional knowledge training packages that could be delivered to the general community including volunteer groups. The ACT Environmental Grants Program provides opportunities for volunteer groups to apply for funds for capacity building. The ACT Government will explore specific training to upskill volunteers in traditional custodian culture and knowledge.

**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.*

Response

**AGREED**

PCS recognises that cultural-ecological burning is an important part of land and cultural management. PCS will continue to engage with the Ngunnawal community to identify and implement burns that support community cultural aspirations and allow for the incorporation of Traditional Custodian knowledge and practice into land management in a culturally safe way.

**Recommendation 21**

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

Response

**AGREED**

The ACT Environmental Grants program and the ACT Heritage Grants provide opportunities for community to protect and preserve Country and Ngunnawal culture. The Environment Heritage and Water Division also run several programs that look at protecting and conserving traditional custodian knowledge. This included the recently re-convened rock art working group, a partnership project between government and Ngunnawal community aimed at conserving cultural heritage at rock art sites in Namadgi. Further programs and projects will continue to be explored as funding and opportunities become available.

**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.*

Response

**AGREED IN PRINCIPLE**

The ACT Environmental Grants program and the ACT Heritage grants provide opportunities for community-driven events that celebrate traditional custodian knowledge and culture. EPSDD will explore opportunities for an ACT Government arranged event to determine its feasibility and resourcing implications.