



National Parks Association of the ACT Inc.

conservation education protection

Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity
ACT Legislative Assembly
Via LAcommitteeECCB@parliament.act.gov.au

Submission on the Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism

The National Parks Association of the ACT (“NPA ACT”) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Standing Committee’s Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism (‘the Inquiry’).

The NPA ACT is a community-based conservation organisation with more than 60 years of experience in helping to protect our natural environment. It is an organisation run solely by volunteers across a broad range of activities throughout the ACT and region. These activities include:

- On-ground conservation works;
- Citizen science projects;
- Community education through publications, walking programs, seminars, social media and monthly talks; and
- Environmental advocacy.

In conducting these and other activities the NPA ACT’s members donate hundreds of hours to the protection of our environment.

Despite the generosity of its members in donating their time the NPA ACT recognises that its efforts forms only one part of a vast array of environmental volunteerism in the ACT. There are numerous not-for-profit organisations in the ACT with a primary focus on the environment including parkcare, catchment, waterwatch, landcare and “friends of” groups, the Conservation Council of the ACT and Region as well as special interest groups such as Canberra Ornithologists Group, Friends of Grasslands, ACT for Bees, Clean Up Australia, WIRES, and Climate Action Canberra to name just a few.

The work of these organisations is supplemented by individuals donating their time through programs such as the Parkcare Hub and members of other organisations whose focus may not be primarily on the environment such as pedal power and the ACT’s walking clubs.

With such a breadth of organisations and individuals donating their time across the ACT there are obvious opportunities to improve the outcomes of all this effort including:

- The provision of a strategic framework of key objectives for the improvement of the ACT’s environment. While the ACT’ Natural Resource Management (“NRM”)

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Strategy seeks to provide this framework, further work is needed in communicating and engaging volunteers in contributing to the NRM objectives.

- Providing opportunities for community stakeholders to engage directly with land managers and other community groups in order to identify key environmental objectives. The Biodiversity Community Forum is a good example of such an initiative.
- The continuation of the Parks and Conservation Service's important role in providing key training opportunities for environmental volunteers and the supply of on-ground conservation work consumables to volunteers and organisations.
- The creation of a land stewardship scheme in the ACT adapted for the leasehold nature of the ACT's land tenure. Such a scheme could draw on the principles of existing programs in other jurisdictions, e.g. land for wildlife, for use in the ACT.

It is important for the ACT Government and its agencies to be actively involved with volunteers and their organisations in working collaboratively on the setting of key environmental objectives and in helping draw together volunteer resources in meeting these objectives. The ACT Government and its agencies also have a key role in conducting the scientific research that should underpin the environmental objectives, in the sharing of that knowledge with the public and in fostering citizen science projects.

Many environmental organisations lack financial resources. Thus the continuation and maintenance of funding of environmental and heritage grant programs is another key role for the ACT Government.

The NPA ACT would also welcome the expansion of initiatives like the Parkcare Hub. The Hub could be used to advertise the opportunities for volunteering with environmental organisations. It can also be expanded to further support and advertise the activities of local environment groups. The ACT Government should also investigate the potential for working with organisations like Volunteering ACT to assist local environment groups in sourcing volunteers willing to take up the governance and administrative roles that are often so hard to fill within a volunteer organisation.

Current policy or regulatory settings that can impede the work and the involvement of volunteers and volunteer organisations in the ACT include WHS regulations and risk management practices which can limit the flexibility of volunteers to commit to on-ground work with the ACT Parks Service. Also inflexible or narrow grant guidelines can limit the scope of grant responses from volunteer organisations and reduce the opportunities able to be offered to the volunteers.

Should you require any further information on our comments or our organisation, please do not hesitate to contact the NPA ACT office, attention of Mr Rod Griffiths, convener, NPA ACT Environment Sub-committee.

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Yours sincerely



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