

## Chapter 2

### Commonwealth funding of environmental programs

#### Introduction

2.1 This chapter looks at the abolition of the Biodiversity Fund by the current government and the funding now available from the Commonwealth Department of the Environment (the department) for environmental programs, including current funding opportunities provided by the Green Army and 20 Million Trees programs.

#### Biodiversity Fund

2.2 The Biodiversity Fund was a Commonwealth government initiative under the previous government. The Fund aimed to improve the resilience of Australia's unique species to the impacts of climate change, enhance the environmental outcomes of carbon farming projects, and help landholders to protect carbon and biodiversity values on their land.<sup>1</sup>

2.3 The Biodiversity Fund was part of a larger \$1.7 billion Land Sector Package which was established under the Clean Energy Future plan. The Fund was provided with \$946 million in 2011 for its first six years.<sup>2</sup> In the 2013–14 Budget, it was announced that for the financial years 2013–2016, \$32.3 million of the Fund would be redirected to resource the implementation of the Tasmanian Forests Agreement and other government priorities. An additional \$225.4 million was also 'rephased' from this four year period, meaning that this money would be spent in 2017–18 and 2018–19. The reason provided by the government for this decision was the lower projected carbon price estimates.<sup>3</sup> In July 2013, the then Treasurer, the Hon Chris Bowen MP, announced that \$213 million of unallocated money for the Biodiversity Fund would be returned to the budget in response to a floating carbon price.<sup>4</sup>

2.4 Following the change of government in 2013, funding for the Biodiversity Fund was reduced over four years to achieve savings of \$1.4 million. This saving was in addition to the savings achieved by the government from abolishing the Biodiversity Fund as part of repealing the carbon tax. The Biodiversity Fund was abolished from 15 October 2013.<sup>5</sup>

---

1 Department of the Environment, *Biodiversity Fund*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/> (accessed 7 April 2015).

2 Australian Government, *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2011–12*, p. 282.

3 Australian Government, *Budget Measures, Budget Paper No. 2, 2013–14*, 14 May 2013, pp 79–80, 254, 255.

4 Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 'Environment and carbon farming programs cut to pay for ETS', ABC Rural, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-16/biodiversity-fund-cuts/4823176>

5 Australian Government, *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2013–14*, December 2013, pp 140, 143–144.

2.5 Under the Biodiversity Fund, two rounds of general funding were conducted (in 2011–12 and 2013–14). A further two targeted rounds focused on northern Australia and Tasmania. Projects included those in coastal areas, border ranges, urban waterways and central Australia.<sup>6</sup>

2.6 Projects which received funding greater than, or equal to, \$500,000 were required to conduct ecological monitoring and report the data collected to the department. These recipients were required to collect data using one of six methods.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Projects funded under the Biodiversity Fund***

2.7 The first round of funding provided \$271 million to 'revegetate, rehabilitate and restore over 18 million hectares of the Australian landscape over the next six years', with \$31 million allocated for the first year of the projects.<sup>8</sup> A total of 317 projects were funded under round one. The projects funded were generally for a period of three or more years. Information published in 2012 by the then Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) stated that:

Projects selected for Round One will increase the size of habitat areas for a whole range of at-risk native species and improve connectivity between them. The flow-on benefits of this include:

- increasing the biodiversity and therefore resilience of the landscape
- building up the environment's ability to cope with the pressures of climate change, and
- creating a means for more carbon pollution to be naturally captured and stored.<sup>9</sup>

2.8 The Biodiversity Fund represented a significant investment of Commonwealth funds in Australia's environment, and allowed ecologically complex solutions to be pursued across a variety of landscapes across Australia. After the successful projects were announced in 2012, it was stated that:

---

6 See for example, Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round Two 2013–2014*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-2/pubs/bf-r2-successful-all.pdf> (accessed 11 June 2015).

7 Those six methods were: Habitat Hectares; BioMetric: Terrestrial Biodiversity Tool; BioCondition; TasVeg: Tasmanian Vegetation Condition Assessment Method; Bushland Condition Monitoring; and Native Vegetation Condition Assessment & Monitoring for WA. Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/meri/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2015).

8 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One 2011–2012*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-1/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2015).

9 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One: 2011–2012*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-1/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2015).

---

Over 100,000 hectares of land nation-wide will be revegetated, while close to 5 million hectares will be restored. Around 13 million hectares will be protected from invasive species.<sup>10</sup>

2.9 The Biodiversity Fund projects also encouraged community support for environmental activities with SEWPaC stating:

The Biodiversity Fund has received overwhelming community support, with an additional \$207 million committed by the biodiversity projects in cash or in kind contributions. A number of project managers have vowed to continue building and working on the projects beyond the funding period.<sup>11</sup>

2.10 The following case studies highlight the types of projects that were conducted under the Biodiversity Fund and demonstrate the nuanced approach to the conservation of biodiversity that was possible under the Biodiversity Fund.

*Case study: Australian Rainforest Conservation Society*

2.11 The Australian Rainforest Conservation Society (ARCS) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation which seeks to 'protect, repair and restore the extraordinary rainforests of Australia' through research, advocacy and public education.<sup>12</sup>

2.12 The ARCS received funding of \$270,000 over three years. The funding was for a long-term project which aimed to:

...restore and enhance critical habitat and functional connectivity, lost over the last century, around the wet heartland of the Gondwana Rainforests Heritage Area...<sup>13</sup>

2.13 The project sought to increase carbon storage by regenerating the canopy cover and 'key ecosystem functions', thus making the area more resilient to climate change and restoring degraded lands. The project aimed to be cost-effective, drawing on current scientific theory and technology to evaluate strategies for regeneration.<sup>14</sup>

---

10 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One: 2011–2012*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-1/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2015).

11 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One: 2011–2012*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-1/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2015).

12 Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, *Our mission*, <http://www.rainforest.org.au/mission.html> (accessed 13 April 2015).

13 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One: Queensland*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-1/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2015), p. 2.

14 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One: Queensland*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-1/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2015), p. 2; see also Dr Aila Keto AO, President, Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2015, p. 26.

2.14 Dr Aila Keto, President, ARCS, told the committee that the program carried out by the ARCS and funded under the Biodiversity Fund to remove weeds from forest areas was more ecologically complex than planting trees. Dr Keto noted that ARCS's third year of funding was cut, which had a significant impact on its work:

That put enormous pressure on us to compress our work from what was essentially a three-year period into two. It does highlight that substantial funding is required for those really tough problems and not just planting trees.<sup>15</sup>

*Case study: Australian Wildlife Conservancy*

2.15 The Australian Wildlife Conservancy is the largest private owner of land for conservation in Australia, with ownership and management of more than three million hectares across 23 properties around Australia.<sup>16</sup> The Conservancy received funding of \$309,800 for six years under the Biodiversity Fund in order to carry out the restoration of wet sclerophyll forests and woodlands in north-east Australia, at Mount Zero-Taravale.

2.16 Sclerophyll forests provide habitats for native rainforest and woodland fauna. Wet sclerophyll forest is a distinct ecosystem type that occurs at a border between dry savannah and rainforest. It requires management in order to persist and retain its characteristic plants and animals. In the past, management was carried out through Aboriginal fire regimes, or regular planned burning.<sup>17</sup>

2.17 These forests require frequent burning in order to maintain their biodiversity and keep their grassy understory. Understory refers to the smallest height class of vegetation that can be found in a forest, and includes very small plants that can grow in the shade of taller trees. By burning the grassy understory regularly, weeds that have begun to dominate the understory of the forest can be removed, allowing the vegetation to be restored.<sup>18</sup>

2.18 The funding provided under the Biosecurity Fund allowed the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to thin out the dense understory, which had been taken over by rainforest plants, before reintroducing fire regimes. By undertaking this work, the wet sclerophyll forest is able to be restored to its former habitat. The project has been conducted with attention paid to monitoring of the impact of the work, and has drawn

---

15 Dr Aila Keto AO, President, Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2015, p. 26.

16 The Australian Wildlife Conservancy, *About*, <http://www.australianwildlife.org/about/about.aspx> (accessed 13 April 2015).

17 Wet Tropics Management Authority, *Wet sclerophyll forests*, <http://www.wettropics.gov.au/wet-schlerophyll> (accessed 13 April 2015).

18 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One: Queensland*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-1/index.html> (accessed 2 April 2015), p. 2.

on 'a suite of indicators of ecological health by undertaking each year more than 2,000 live trap nights, 24 vegetation surveys and at least 1,500 camera trap nights'.<sup>19</sup>

*Case study: Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority*

2.19 The Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (Goulburn Broken CMA) is the peak natural resource management body for the catchment of the Goulburn and Broken Rivers of northern Victoria and the Murray Darling Basin of southern New South Wales.

2.20 Funding of around \$2.67 million was allocated for six years to aid in the revegetation of Sand Ridge Woodlands. The project aimed to protect the cultural and natural value of sand hills, which have a significant cultural value for the Indigenous Yorta Yorta people in the area.

2.21 The project would work with the Yorta Yorta people in cultural heritage management and to revegetate 'rare, unique, endangered and degraded Sand Woodland ecosystems'.<sup>20</sup> Further, it was stated that:

Revegetation will expand the extent and connectivity of these ecosystems, provide linkages to fragmented remnants on farmland, and play a role in securing natural stores of carbon. These sites are also of high Indigenous cultural significance, and are often associated with occupation and burials.<sup>21</sup>

2.22 The Goulburn Broken CMA stated that the first three years of the project has yielded beneficial results including:

- 1,346 hectares of revegetation
- 237 hectares of remnant protection
- 1,583 hectare area managed for pest plant and animals
- 450 kilograms of native seed collected and direct drilled
- 16.56 km kilometres of fencing
- 4,466 plants planted.<sup>22</sup>

---

19 Australian Wildlife Conservancy, *Science: surveys and research at Mount Zero-Taravale*, <http://www.australianwildlife.org/sanctuaries/mount-zero-taravale-sanctuary/science-surveys-and-research.aspx> (accessed 11 June 2015).

20 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One: New South Wales*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/projects/pubs/nsw-round1.pdf> (accessed 11 June 2015), p. 7.

21 Australian Government, *Biodiversity Fund Round One: New South Wales*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/projects/pubs/nsw-round1.pdf> (accessed 11 June 2015), p. 7.

22 Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, *Outcome Stories and Case Studies: Sand Ridge Woodland*, [http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/publications/published\\_documents/outcome-stories-case-studies](http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/publications/published_documents/outcome-stories-case-studies) (accessed 11 June 2015).

2.23 The Goulburn Broken CMA noted that the funding provided an opportunity to pursue complex ecological work aimed at conservation of biodiversity and sites of cultural significance to Indigenous Australians:

The unique approach of a project that spans catchment boundaries and the state border has provided opportunity for YYNAC [Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation] to develop partnerships, in areas where there had previously been little engagement, and has allowed for the improved management of many sand ridge woodland sites and associated cultural values that were not previously recorded or protected.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Assessment of the Biosecurity Fund***

2.24 The Department of the Environment indicated to the committee that the 'total impact of the Biodiversity Fund has not been fully worked through, and it will be not be evaluated until near the completion of that program'. The department went on to state:

The follow-on from that is that it is very difficult to say—in the absence of the quantitative measurement of how many trees and how many threatened species were addressed, in terms of plantings and native vegetation restoration—what the impact of that has been, when you do not know what the full impact of the investments will be...probably a lot of the total value of those investments that are being made now and have been made for the last three years and will continue for the next two years will not be fully realised for a decade.<sup>24</sup>

### **Current environmental funding opportunities**

2.25 The Department of the Environment currently runs a number of funding and grants programs, including the National Landcare Programme, Reef 2050, Solar Towns and the National Environmental Science Programme.<sup>25</sup>

2.26 The current National Landcare Programme was announced in the 2013–14 Budget and replaced Caring for Our Country. Funding of \$1 billion would be provided over four years for the National Landcare Programme.<sup>26</sup> This represented a significant cut in funding compared to previous programs.

2.27 The committee's recent report on the National Landcare Programme provides an in depth assessment of the impact of funding cuts on natural resource management

---

23 Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, *Outcome Stories and Case Studies; Sand Ridge Woodland*, [http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/publications/published\\_documents/outcome-stories-case-studies](http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/publications/published_documents/outcome-stories-case-studies) (accessed 11 June 2015).

24 Mr Sean Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary, Biodiversity Conservation Division, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 May 2015, p. 3.

25 A full list of programs and grants currently offered may be found at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/about-us/grants-funding> (accessed 10 April 2015).

26 National Landcare Program, *About us*, <http://www.nrm.gov.au/> (accessed 10 April 2015).

programs and the consequent threat to environmental outcomes.<sup>27</sup> In particular, the committee commented on the loss of grant programs for community and Landcare groups and the diversion of funding to the Green Army and 20 Million Trees programs.

2.28 During the current inquiry, the Department of the Environment provided the committee with information on funding for on-the-ground small local projects. The department noted that these were consistent with regional priorities under the National Landcare Programme framework. It was indicated that the target of \$90 million of funding for small and local groups, out of a total \$450 million in total funding over the forward estimates, has been exceeded and that approximately \$120 million would be provided to these groups.<sup>28</sup>

2.29 The committee's report on the National Landcare Programme also commented on the newly created Green Army Programme, which provides training and experience in environmental and heritage conservation for young people in a practical setting,<sup>29</sup> and the 20 Million Trees project.

2.30 The department explained that the Green Army Programme is 'a hands-on, practical environmental action programme that taps into local knowledge and supports grassroots action to meet local environmental challenges'.<sup>30</sup> The program, which has been allocated \$525 million over four years,<sup>31</sup> provides funding for a range of activities, such as:

- habitat restoration;
- revegetating river catchments, coastal foreshores, rainforests and wetlands;
- constructing boardwalks;
- restoring culturally significant sites while working closely with traditional owners,;
- weed control; and
- monitoring threatened species.<sup>32</sup>

---

27 Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, *National Landcare Program*, March 2015.

28 Mr Sean Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary, Biodiversity Conservation Division, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 May 2015, p. 2.

29 Department of the Environment, *About the Green Army programme*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/land/green-army/about> (accessed 10 April 2015).

30 Department of the Environment, *Submission 33*, p. 5.

31 Department of the Environment, *About the Green Army programme*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/land/green-army/about> (accessed 10 April 2015). The program will support 250 projects in 2014–15, 500 projects in 2015–16, 750 projects in 2016–17, 1,150 in 2017–18 and 1,500 in 2018–19.

32 Department of the Environment, *Submission 33*, p. 5.

2.31 The department commented that the Green Army is being used by local groups as a way to deliver local environment outcomes.<sup>33</sup>

2.32 The 20 Million Trees Programme will provide \$50 million over the next four years to support projects that deliver environmental benefits at the local level through community participation in re-establishing native vegetation.<sup>34</sup>

### **Response to changes in funding arrangements**

2.33 The committee received general concerns from witnesses and submitters about the implications that changes to access to Commonwealth funding and decreases in the level of funding for environmental projects would have for the future of Australia's environment. For example, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) stated that:

Reducing our investment in the long term management and stewardship of our essential national assets is unwise and ultimately a false economy.<sup>35</sup>

2.34 The ACF went on to add:

The stewardship of national environmental assets, and the management of these assets, is a key test of any federal government or Parliament.<sup>36</sup>

2.35 The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Fraser Coast Branch, added:

...cuts to or abolition of environmental programs sabotage the investment in our environment by the tax-payer and the community over the last 25 years. Like health and education, the environment requires on-going investment. These cuts also undermine our democracy.<sup>37</sup>

2.36 Submitters and witnesses warned of the danger that funding gaps and short-term environmental planning would have on the future of Australia's environment. The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Fraser Coast Branch, stated:

A sustainable future for Australia depends on long-term vision, transcending the three-year federal election cycle. It also depends on achievement of 'triple bottom line' objectives: social and environmental, not just economic. Importantly, a vibrant economic future for Australia depends on diverse industries. Quite simply, the Abbott Government has shown a complete disregard for all sectors of the economy other than the mining sector. Without a healthy environment and a broad-based economy

---

33 Mr Sean Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary, Biodiversity Conservation Division, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 May 2015, p. 2.

34 Department of the Environment, *Submission 33*, p. 5.

35 Australian Conservation Foundation, *Submission 10*, p. 2.

36 Australian Conservation Foundation, *Submission 10*, p. 4.

37 Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Fraser Coast Branch, *Submission 13*, p. 4.

---

targeting future needs in a post-industrial world, our communities and personal well-being, and our economy overall, will inevitably suffer.<sup>38</sup>

2.37 The Adelaide Hills Climate Action Group wrote that 'the damage caused by this Government on environmental assets and protections will not be able to be fully undone'.<sup>39</sup>

2.38 The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland submitted that, with regard to funding cuts environmental programs, 'the big loser is the environment and its biodiversity'.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the Society's Fraser Coast Branch expressed the view that:

...short-sighted actions and decisions taken by the current federal Government which we are convinced will have an overwhelmingly negative impact on both our natural heritage and Australia's future prosperity.<sup>41</sup>

2.39 The concerns for the environment as a result of the decrease in funding under the National Landcare Programme were canvassed by the committee in its recent report. However, submitters to this inquiry also commented specifically about the abolition of the Biodiversity Fund and the impact on community groups. The following paragraphs consider this evidence.

#### ***Abolition of the Biodiversity Fund***

2.40 Submitters commented on the importance of biosecurity and asserted that the abolition of the Biodiversity Fund was a backward step. One submitter, for example, stated that:

There appears to be no consideration or concern for conserving the biological factors, the existence of which underpin our human existence, neither is there any apparent concern for degrading features that pollute the environment. The government policies defunding environmental protections for the various representative bodies are shockingly devoid of any pretence of environmental protections – which by extrapolation means society's health and welfare.<sup>42</sup>

2.41 The Australian Wildlife Protection Council stated that the 'axing of the Biodiversity Fund is a shock as it is replaced with nothing'.<sup>43</sup> The ACF also commented on the abolition of the Biosecurity Fund, with Mr Don Henry, CEO, stating:

...cuts to the Biodiversity Fund weaken Australia's efforts to protect our natural environment from the impacts of climate change and is a backward step.

---

38 Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Fraser Coast Branch, *Submission 13*, p. 2.

39 Adelaide Hills Climate Action Group, *Submission 5*, p. 9.

40 Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, *Submission 12*, p. 3.

41 Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Fraser Coast, *Submission 13*, p. 1.

42 Ms Leila Huebner, *Submission 1*, p. 3.

43 Australian Wildlife Protection Council, *Submission 30*, p. 1.

Our natural environment, including the Great Barrier Reef, our forests and tropical savannahs, are being impacted by climate change now – it's important we invest more in protecting, managing and restoring these landscapes so they can naturally store carbon more effectively.

ACF urges the Government to strengthen efforts to protect our natural environment from the impacts of climate change.<sup>44</sup>

2.42 Dr Keto, ARCS, argued that the loss of long-term funding would have detrimental effects on the environment:

The problem is that there is a loss of durable, long-term core funding for long-term environmental problems. More seriously, social capital can be lost. We had a coherent set of programs within a framework that was allied to monitoring outcomes that involve the atlas of living Australia. The original budget, whereas it was not long term, provided a good start for trying to recover the environmental problems that we have today.<sup>45</sup>

2.43 In evidence, the department acknowledged that 'biodiversity remains in decline', but added that there was evidence that 'activities and responses that have been made since the mid-nineties and particularly since 2001 or 2002 are beginning to show evidence of having an impact'. Further, although 'there has been recovery in a number of areas where there has been investment, the overall trend of biodiversity is still one of decline'.<sup>46</sup>

2.44 The department noted that, while the Biodiversity Fund has been abolished, 'the Government is...honouring the contracted projects entered into by the previous Government under the Biodiversity Fund'.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Impact of cuts on small community environmental organisations***

2.45 The committee received evidence of the importance of engagement of community groups in environmental projects. Engagement of community groups not only leads to improved environmental outcomes, but it also provides significant benefits through capacity building within communities and improving community cohesiveness.<sup>48</sup>

2.46 The recent reduction in the funding available for these groups to access was viewed with concern. For example, Ms Kate Watson commented that the funding cuts for environmental groups sends the message that 'the government does not actually

---

44 Mr Don Henry, CEO, Australian Conservation Foundation, 'Ups and downs in climate policy changes', *Media Release*, 16 July 2013.

45 Dr Aila Keto AO, President, Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2015, p. 25.

46 Mr Sean Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary, Biodiversity Conservation Division, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 May 2015, p. 1.

47 Department of the Environment, *Submission 33*, p. 5.

48 See Ms Leila Huebner, *Submission 1*, p. 1; Ms Samantha Willis, *Submission 7*, p. 1; Mr Kevin Shaw, *Submission 44*, p. 1.

value the environment and perhaps regards it as something that will survive despite all the cuts and without any support<sup>49</sup>.

2.47 Ms Nicky Hungerford from the Queensland Conservation Council indicated to the committee that the cuts to funding would have a significant detrimental impact on the capacity for organisations to provide assistance, for example, to farmers. Ms Hungerford went on to comment that this will have an impact on sustainable agriculture and noted that the Queensland Conservation Council has, in the past, provided advice to farmers to enable sustainable land management.<sup>50</sup>

2.48 In addition, Ms Hungerford noted that lack of funding for staff means that small organisations would not be able to provide current information or advice when changes are made to legislation.<sup>51</sup>

2.49 In a group submission, a network of state-level conservation councils and organisations commented on the role of community environment organisations. They argued:

Non-profit, non-government environment organisations play an important part in democratic society and make significant contributions to the protection and conservation of Australia's environment. For example, environmental NGOs can:

- Provide input into agenda-setting and policy development processes, including local, on-ground perspectives and case studies
- Support long term policy development, unlike Governments who operate within short term election cycles.
- Collate and disseminate information to supporters and the broader community.
- Keep Government accountable, including by monitoring the Government's performance and calling them to account.
- Undertake on-ground activities to restore and conserve natural landscapes.
- Advocate for the public interest and environmental justice.<sup>52</sup>

2.50 Submitters also voiced concern about the impact of new programs on community conservation groups. The Australian Council of Trade Unions, in relation to the Green Army, stated that:

---

49 Ms Kate Watson, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2015, p. 20.

50 Ms Nicky Hungerford, Coordinator, Queensland Conservation Council, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2015, pp 15–16.

51 Ms Nicky Hungerford, Coordinator, Queensland Conservation Council, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2015, p. 16.

52 Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Environment Tasmania, Conservation Council of WA, Queensland Conservation Council, Environment Victoria, Conservation Council ACT Region, Environment Centre NT, Conservation Council of SA, *Submission 37*, p. 10.

We also wish to register our disappointment with the 2014 Federal Budget announcement that stripped more than \$480 million from the National Landcare Program, which provides community grants to conservation volunteers. The funds previously allocated to Landcare have now been diverted into the Coalition's 'Green Army' Program. The Green Army pays young jobseekers less than the minimum wage to work on the very environmental projects that Landcare volunteers used to undertake. This may mean that local conservation groups are forced to shut down to make way for underpaid and poorly trained Green Army workers. We call upon the Senate to provide additional funding to those conservation projects that were defunded or had their funding stripped as a result of the 2014 Federal Budget.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Response to new programs***

2.51 The committee commented on the 20 Million Trees and the Green Army programs in its recent report on the National Landcare Program. However, the committee received further evidence on these two programs during this inquiry.

2.52 In relation to the 20 Million Trees program, Dr Keto, ARCS, noted that according to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, as set out by the Convention on Biological Diversity, planting trees should be seen as a last resort.<sup>54</sup> In addition, Dr Keto commented that the 20 million trees was not adequate to address broad scale environment concerns:

...you do not plant unless you have evidence that you absolutely need to because effectively the 20 million trees only amounts to the equivalent of about 25,000 hectares. That is infinitesimally small compared to the scale of the problem we have to address. To address that scale of a problem we have to find economically viable ways of scaling up small-scale work and we can only do it if we utilise the services of nature—let nature do most of the planting wherever it is possible. That is just not there in the 20 Million Trees Program or the current program so I think there is a lot of rethinking that needs to be done.<sup>55</sup>

2.53 The ARCS concluded that locally-targeted funding programs run by the Department of the Environment are not sufficient replacements for the Biodiversity Fund:

---

53 ACTU, *Submission 21*, p. 2.

54 Australia ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity on 18 June 1993, but has not signed or ratified the Nagoya Protocol which sets out the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Convention on Biological Diversity, *Aichi Biodiversity Targets*, <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/> (accessed 1 June 2015).

55 Dr Aila Keto AO, President, Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2015, p. 26; see also Australian Koala Foundation, *Submission 62*, p. 2.

---

The replacement by the 20 Million Trees, Green Army, National Environmental Science Program Threatened Species Hub is unlikely to help avert an escalating number of species extinctions.<sup>56</sup>

2.54 Submitters also did not consider that the Green Army initiative would make up for the loss of overall funding for environmental programs and was unlikely to deliver long-term environmental improvements.<sup>57</sup>

2.55 The department commented on both the 20 Million Trees and the Green Army programs. On the 20 Million Trees Programme, the department noted that a significant source of funding was being provided:

In terms of where else people can go for funding, there are significant funding rounds being undertaken with respect to 20 Million Trees as well, which is incredibly important, not only for delivering the target of 20 million trees and in terms of the connectivity that it is going to deliver in regional Australia, but also, importantly, for looking at plantings in both urban and peri-urban areas. So, again, there is funding in that that is available to those groups, but, obviously, the Biodiversity Fund funding is now fully allocated and being delivered.<sup>58</sup>

2.56 In relation to the Green Army, the department commented it is increasingly being used by local groups as a way to deliver local environment outcomes.<sup>59</sup>

### **Committee comment**

2.57 The committee considers that there is now a gap in environmental protection with the abolition of the Biodiversity Fund. The committee received evidence that biodiversity conservation requires complex environmental programs. The Biodiversity Fund provided much-needed funding for nuanced environmental programs which require more complex approaches than currently offered by locally targeted programs.

2.58 The Biodiversity Fund was also a significant investment by the Commonwealth in environmental programs which aimed at conserving biodiversity around Australia. Given that the outcomes of programs funded under the Biodiversity Fund have yet to be evaluated, the committee considers that its abolition was premature.

2.59 The committee acknowledges that funding will be provided to complete projects. However, the committee considers that the benefits arising from targeted funding programs are extremely important to the long-term biodiversity of the

---

56 Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, *Submission 45*, p. 3.

57 See Adelaide Hills Climate Action Group, *Submission 5*, p. 8; Environmental Defenders Office of Northern Queensland, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

58 Mr Sean Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary, Biodiversity Conservation Division, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 May 2015, pp 2–3.

59 Mr Sean Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary, Biodiversity Conservation Division, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 May 2015, p. 2.

Australian environment and therefore the funding, which had previously been available under the Biodiversity Fund, should be reinstated.

**Recommendation 1**

**2.60 The committee recommends that the Department of the Environment undertake an evaluation of the impact of the Biodiversity Fund.**

**Recommendation 2**

**2.61 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government reinstate funding for projects for biodiversity conservation to the level which had been available under the Biodiversity Fund.**