



Conservation Volunteers Australia Submission to  
Productivity Commission 2009  
Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector

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**Part 1**

**Overview - Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA)**

Conservation Volunteers Australia attracts and manages volunteers on practical conservation projects for the betterment of the Australian environment. This is perhaps an understatement of the extensive outputs and outcomes achieved through this simple model of community engagement.

Conservation Volunteers Australia is about *connecting people* to the environment in meaningful ways which *benefit* not only the environment (natural, cultural and built), but also *the individuals and communities within it*.

Through safely managed practical engagement with the environment, Conservation Volunteers Australia offers literal and metaphoric '*common ground*' for individuals and groups. This '*common ground*' provides a shared community focus, social connectivity, cohesion and inclusion, as well as health and well-being benefits. It is a holistic approach which engages our communities in the ongoing adaptation required to deal with 'wicked' policy issues some of which are environmental, and many of which are social.

Through interaction with the environment (i.e. 'connection to country') the community grows their interest, knowledge and skills to participate in their community; and take stewardship of the conservation of their various environments (natural, cultural, built). They also adapt to new ways of being i.e. a caring engaged community with shared interests in both their collective and individual futures and take on increased responsibility for their part in the problems and solutions.

Additionally there are direct and indirect economic benefits as our programs provide, amongst many things, opportunities for skills development and knowledge, mutual obligation volunteering, youth/adult training, employment, work experience (both accredited and non-accredited), and capacity building. This capacity building assists with the removal of barriers to employment through practical experience and skills development.

Conservation Volunteers Australia further develops social capital through involving individuals and communities in common interest projects developing social endowments such as biodiversity, cultural heritage conservation, and stronger communities.

What Conservation Volunteers Australia offers as a NFP is distinct from both government and business sectors in our efficiencies and our services. Conservation Volunteers Australia's programs and our existence assists in the implementation of public policy e.g. social inclusion agendas, and by developing the communities' capability to adapt and engage in a changing environment.



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The national scale on which we operate allows Conservation Volunteers Australia to be catalytic to change in our communities and our environment through providing a 'space' for this to happen. Conservation Volunteers Australia provides simple consistent messaging which is accessible to individuals and communities. Through access to the environment and practical experience we are able to engage the community in common/shared interests which empower citizens to make a difference. The environment is a beneficiary of this community building for future generations.

Refer to the *Conservation Volunteers Australia Capability Statement* for more detail on various Conservation Volunteers Australia programs which provide this community support, capacity building and engagement. Also refer Appendix A re Fire Recovery case study and Appendix B re Green Gym case study.

The challenge NFPs face through the corporatization / marketisation of government services and contracting is whether the focus is on 'best price', or 'best outcomes for the clients'. FPs are more likely to be better resourced and understandably their first interest will be the return on investment to their investors/shareholders. NFPs may be better placed to focus on the welfare of the 'client' or 'user' or 'beneficiary' of the services, as well as provide efficiencies. NFPs are generally have a philosophic / mission driven focus, and any surplus is reinvested into the work of the organisation for the benefit of the community.

The following submission provides responses, comment, and evidence as requested to assist the commission with their research regarding scale, scope and reach of Conservation Volunteers Australia as a not for profit to demonstrate our value, including the economic, social and environmental contributions.



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**Part 2**

**Responses to Productivity Commission Questions/Comments**

**Enhancing Efficiency and Effectiveness(EEE) of NFP**

**a) Access to human resources e.g. quality / quantity are important drivers of EEE**

***Question to answer***

***NFPs are invited to comment** on their experiences with attracting both paid and volunteer workers with the appropriate level of skills. Comments are also invited on the extent to which regulations surrounding the use of paid and volunteer labour adversely affect the capabilities of NFP organizations to undertake their activities. Where adverse effects occur, how might these be overcome?*

The sense of satisfaction and achievement in performing a role that clearly contributes to community and environmental benefits is attractive to the majority of potential employees and volunteers. It results in many employees making the decision to take up employment with our NFP, in preference to higher paid positions in the FP sector.

The challenge is to promote those idealistic benefits of working in the NFP sector, but more significantly to continually reinforce the attractions once the employment commences. Frequently with the NFP once employment has commenced the sustainability issues of the organization can take priority over the mission issue. When this occurs, it can be a challenge to retain highly competent employees in the face of personal economic pressures and issues around perceived social/professional status. They need to be made to feel valued, professionally and personally rewarded in ways other than purely monetary measures.

The direct and indirect costs of staff learning and development can present barriers to maintaining a level of skills that maintains an organizations effectiveness and competitiveness in the changing circumstances that evolve.

With this in mind it is clear that a major impediment for the Not for Profit sector is their reduced ability to compete financially for qualified or experienced paid staff as compared to the public and private sectors– this is only partially assisted by salary packaging benefits. NFPs generally are unable to compete for staff in the general marketplace.



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Additionally the challenges of achieving and maintaining PBI status are significant combined with the fact that it is not a level playing field for all NFPs in regards to PBI status so there are other factors at play. For example, Conservation Volunteers Australia is awarded a contract like Green Corps for three years and if this is not continued then Conservation Volunteers Australia may no longer be eligible unless we can replace the contract with a similar program/contract.

**To eliminate this inconsistency and provide certainty to our staff Government should look at providing certainty of PBI status on the basis of environment and its integral relationship to the community.**

Given the tight funding base for most NFPs, staffing is generally fixed, and increasingly Government funding often precludes employing staff or requires matching contribution or precludes capital purchases etc which limits our flexibility in delivering services or programs. There is also little recognition that while we are in a competitive environment with other NFPs and FPs we work in a non-competitive community service related industry with no profits returned to shareholders, but rather benefits (both economic and social) returned to the community and the environment.

**Government should recognise the need for a strong and stable third sector in the Australian democracy and provide core funding to assist NFPs to maintain themselves as a viable organisation.**

Regulations can also impose unnecessary requirements which ultimately impact on NFPs. For example when Conservation Volunteers Australia *receives government money in advance* and invests those funds in Banks, to obtain the Commonwealth Government guarantee on the funds. The government has stated that for each financial institution that Conservation Volunteers Australia invests with, we can have one million dollars invested and the government will 'guarantee' the funds. With CVA managing large community employment programs we can from time to time have large amounts of money that are being held in banks. CVA is required to insure anything over the \$1M which means that effectively Conservation Volunteers Australia is paying approximately \$12,000 insurance per year from our funds to protect the Government funds that are being held. We are unable to have this amount reimbursed.

**It would appear sensible to exclude not for profits from such insurance fees on excess funds over the \$1M held in approved Banks.**



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Another possible unintended consequence of Government regulations is where the Australian Taxation Office has taken a position in relation to the Medicare levy surcharge which negatively impacts our staff remuneration.

**Example:**

- Employee of Conservation Volunteers Australia (a PBI) has a taxable income of \$22,000
- Employee salary packages \$16,016 X gross up factor from ATO = Reportable Fringe Benefit on Group Certificate of \$30,000
- For the purposes of calculating the Medicare levy surcharge the ATO adds Taxable income \$22,000 + Reportable Fringe Benefit \$30,000 (Grossed up) and arrives at a figure of \$52,000. This is surprisingly over the \$50,000 limit for the Medicare levy surcharge, so our employee who actually receives a fairly meager salary is hit with a 1.5% Medicare levy surcharge or about \$512 if he or she does not have private health insurance.

This appears to penalize the not for profit sector employees in the method used by the ATO to calculate the Medicare levy surcharge.

*Comments invited on approaches taken by NFPs in forming partnerships with businesses for improving access to human resources and organizational capabilities and also on any impediments experienced. How might such impediments be resolved?*

While NFPs welcome the support that the FP sector can provide it should not be seen as without some issues. Typically offers of organisational capacity assistance from businesses to NFPs can be short-term and often related to the company's spare capacity. Often you are provided with the most junior person as a training exercise for them which may be of dubious value if you have to spend too long briefing / inducting/ training them. Then when economic circumstances change or demand changes, the NFP can be pushed to the back of the queue. For example in recent times we have seen offers of pro-bono / staff assistance prompted by a business's need to allocate under-utilised staff. We are concerned that this resource might be recalled just as quickly as/when economic conditions improve.

This is not to say that we don't appreciate the support; in fact Conservation Volunteers Australia has been fortunate to receive outstanding pro bono support from a number corporates to assist us to build our organisational capacity for future sustainability as a NFP in areas such as :-



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- strategic planning, development, sustainability
- building IT capacity and capability to assist our service delivery as a national organisation with international reach
- rebuilding our website and communications

Operating as an NFP brings the same requirements to understand government regulations and requirements with no understanding of the time and resource pressures this imposes. It can be difficult to keep abreast of changes/requirements when you are also struggling to keep up with funding cycles, application processes, submissions, policy changes etc.

**A solution could be for the Government to encourage (reward) the NFP sector to raise more money for themselves rather than asking for grants and other handouts. A pro-active approach would encourage NFP's to be more focused on partnerships and best practice by matching \$'s offered by government which is raised for specific purposes. Perhaps the same amount of money is given to the NFP sector, but via a reward for return. This would encourage NFP's to adopt best practice, be proactive and develop partnerships.**

**Another solution is to encourage and reward pro bono work. Often pro bono work can be of great advantage to the NFP sector and the organisation providing the pro bono work. The Government could consider providing funding support to NFP's which have benefited from pro bono work and as a consequence require \$'s to implement the outcomes.**

*Comments invited on the extent to which institutional arrangements and regulations restrict the financing options available to NFPs. If significant restrictions exist, what options are there to overcome them?*

Currently the NFP sector is experiencing some contraction in funding especially in their partnerships with Corporates, which have less money due to the global recession. It is still not clear whether this relates to individuals as well, and Conservation Volunteers is just embarking on a fundraising campaign. However, despite potential and actual reductions in monies there are still expectations on NFPs by governments and the public to continue to service community needs at the same or increased levels. While the pressure is greater, there is no recognition that NFPs need to be appropriately resourced to manage this growing demand.

Again without core funding NFPs become increasingly focused on short-term monetary opportunities at the expense of their core business which is not a healthy situation. A grant for limited core funding has been available (\$11,000 p.a. for the past 20 years at the same amount) and is no longer available as the rules have changed (Conservation



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Volunteers Australia's national turnover is over \$5M per annum). Given that Conservation Volunteers Australia has 23 offices around Australia each with a turnover of less than \$1M, (each of which provides specialist services according to community needs) one could argue that our national scope and status, efficiencies and economies of scale are penalized. Additionally when we deliver government programs e.g. Green Corps, part of the program involves managing the payment training wages i.e. money in, money out. This affects our turnover, precluding us for applying for some grants, yet the income does not actually improve our bottom line.

Some grants also limit administration costs to 15% which is very low and for many NFPs the administration is a large part of how the programs are delivered.

NFP's are essential to community well being and as such need to receive encouragement and investment. With lack of Government investment in larger NFP's then they will eventually suffer from burnout and lack of capacity in areas such as innovation and technology.

In terms of our fundraising campaign we are also finding that the marked differences in each state and territory charities collection law, can be a disincentive to NFPs which do not have dedicated fundraising staff. It is also not clear that differences in these laws are anything other than lack of coordination to ensure consistency of approach. For example in some states environment NFPs are exempt from having to comply with charities collections laws and in others there are onerous requirements to provide a complete suite of information in the application.

### **Capacity to innovate and use resources to best effect**

- *Evaluation and Research to identify what works*

*Comments invited on what factors are impeding the spread of knowledge among Australian not for profit organizations regarding how well they deliver their outcomes and key drivers of their efficiency and effectiveness in doing so. Also what factors facilitate the spread of such knowledge and how might these be enhanced.*

As mentioned above NFPs are generally too busy doing what they do with the limited resources available to them to spend too much time 'knowledge sharing' with other organisations whether NFP or not, regarding our successes and efficiencies. Another disincentive is that in the contestable environment there is generally a concern at times regarding intellectual property; along with a perceived need to be seen as 'better' than our competitors and, therefore, a more likely choice for corporate or government support.





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That is not to say that FPs do not share their expertise and experience. In the wake of the HIH insurance collapse, Conservation Volunteers Australia worked with both corporate and government sectors to share Conservation Volunteers Australia's OH&S risk management program 'In Safe Hands'. This was designed (through government and corporate sector funding), to build the capacity of community groups to engage in environmental volunteering in a safe and sustainable way. By building the capacity of others and establishing accepted standards and benchmarks for community volunteering Conservation Volunteers Australia hoped also to drive down insurance premiums for the sector whilst 'raising the bar'. Conservation Volunteers Australia also provided this training to a range of non-environmental community stakeholders including the Cancer Council and childcare centres.

Working against an easy method of sharing knowledge and expertise is the fact that there is no formal or standardised system for collection of data for NFPs, or indeed the often valuable (but expensive in time and resources) reporting and story telling. Unless Conservation Volunteers Australia is able to source funding support we generally are not in a position to share what is working. While we do make an effort to present at various conferences, and forums etc, due to limited resources we have to limit how much one-on-one engagement we can do within the sector.

Largely NFPs are paid poorly to produce 'best practice'. The limited amounts of funding applied to monitoring and evaluation within grant or program funding by governments, along with inadequate funding for program management, signals a desire to 'acquit' funds, rather than build an adaptive management model which benefits all.

As an RTO we have secured funding from time to time to deliver both accredited and non accredited training to build community capacity in various areas of expertise such as Certificate 1 in Active Volunteering, Conservation and Land Management, Volunteer Management, Project Management, Change Management, Team Development, Customer Service in a volunteer organisation, volunteer recruitment, and occupational health and safety; and have actively done so. We are less able to train our own people due to difficulties replacing staff while they are training and also funding that training.

Staff in the NFP sectors typically have a passion for the organisation's activity and frequently move from volunteering or a paid operational role to a management position. Managers would benefit from training in management skills to increase the effectiveness of organisations.



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- ***Incentive for innovation and best use of resources***

***Comments invited*** on the incentives (such as community attitudes and views of donors) on not for profit organizations to operate efficiently and effectively and to take innovative approaches. To what extent do these incentives differ as a result for the funding arrangements faced by an organisation? Are the incentives currently faced by NFPs sufficient to ensure they operate in an efficient and effective manner and, if not, what changes are needed to increase those incentives? Are there constraints on innovation, and if so what can be done to remove them?

As a not for profit Conservation Volunteers Australia pays market price for whatever we purchase and we do not have the economies of scale which the government and corporate sectors enjoy. Apart from an organisational perspective that running effectively and efficiently means (in some cases) a lowering of costs and an increase in our ability to do more, there are no external incentives for Conservation Volunteers Australia to operate in an efficient and effective manner. Inadequate funding for key program managers and monitoring, evaluating and reporting functions means that consistent approaches across the NFP sector are absent. A recognition of the role that the NFP sector plays in good governance in a democracy would go a long way to removing the idea that NFPs should run their programs and organisation in an inherently unstable and uncertain environment and on the smell of an 'oily rag'.

NFPs are increasingly being forced into the FP sector to maintain their services and core businesses. The current Employment Services Australia contracts are a prime example of where, unless presenting highly complex and comprehensive tender bids the NFP organizations have lost business and services that have been delivered effectively and sensitively for many years. Many NFPs did not have the level of financial and/or personnel resources to mount competitive tender bids against the FP and larger NFP groups.

It appears that the community and client attitudes to the smaller, often more discreet and responsive services provided by the smaller specialist providers are not shared by government departments when decisions and funding allocations are being made.

### **Regulatory Environment**

***Comments invited*** by NFPs on whether governance and accountability regulations faced by NFPs are appropriate and whether they provide sufficient flexibility to account for the diversity of scale and form of NFPs. Where such regulations are deemed inappropriate or impose an unnecessary burden, how might they be improved? For example are there significant regulatory burdens associated with NFP organizations operating across jurisdictions? How might this be addressed?



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*Comments invited on the extent to which **general regulatory reform** under the national reform agenda is benefiting not for profit organizations or whether more focused reforms are needed to benefit the sector. If the latter, what specific reforms might be.*

Governments provide funding to NFPs for a variety of purposes and in different forms e.g. one off grants, events, programs, welfare services on behalf of government etc. About a third of the sector's funding is received from government via mostly 'volume based' funding i.e. per client, or per student etc and from Australian, State and Territory governments with some support from local governments.

There is a requirement to distinguish between general support of NFP activities and funding which is attached to a service to be delivered (which can be difficult). Other issues/complications re funding may be:

- Increased reliance of some NFPs on government funding
- Greater use of competitive funding allocation mechanisms
- More stringent conditions and reporting requirements on funding to enhance transparency and accountability

*Comments are invited on what constitutes a '**government funded service**'. Where possible examples should be provided.*

Typically government is predominantly focused on outsourcing service provision and it makes little allowance for new initiatives and existing services. For example, many of Conservation Volunteers Australia's services are not in a government funded service, however they probably should be. If NFPs deliver government funded services efficiently and effectively the less likely they are to be given support from government - clearly a paradox.

Again we refer you to the previous example where Conservation Volunteers Australia is no longer eligible for (limited) funding support due to Conservation Volunteers Australia's national scope and scale and over \$5M turnover. Other grants programs often suggest that they are really 'one offs' for 'small' community groups and not 'to fund large organisations with multiple offices' e.g. Envirofund. Surely these are mixed messages to an NFP sector working in collaboration with government to deliver on the government's policy agendas with public monies.

*Comments are invited on **trends in government funded services**, including the extent to which governments are funding the traditional activities or new service initiatives of the NFP sector and the extent to which governments are 'outsourcing' service provision to the NFP sector.*



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Currently there is an anomaly in the funding of some environment NFPs. For example government is providing some NFPs with ongoing core funding e.g. Landcare Australia Limited and Regional Bodies / Catchment Management Authorities. This means that they are better equipped to compete with non-funded NFPs such as Conservation Volunteers Australia for grants e.g. Caring for our Country and therefore have an advantage over other environment NFPs. In some cases they will duplicate services and do the work themselves rather than part with money and fund the NFP to do the work which is the NFP's core business

We recognise that the environment funding bucket is limited and Conservation Volunteers Australia looks to extend its works with the community through a 'broader social environment' building skills and capacity, which results in considerable social capital and social endowments to the Australian community. CVA believes in attracting additional support to funded programs to expand results and deliver greater value for \$ invested. This service of 'community building' utilizing the conservation of the environment as 'common ground' for social inclusion is largely not recognized or valued by governments as it does not fit squarely in any Minister's or department's 'box'.

***Comments are invited** on experiences in relation to the **relative treatment of for profit and not for profit providers in competing for government contracts**. Do arrangements at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels provide a competitive neutrality? If not, what features result in unequal treatment and how could this be addressed?*

Government decisions to change how services are delivered can quite often have a detrimental consequence on the NFP sector. For example funding models such as Caring for our Country, Natural Heritage Trust and the development of the regional body network has disadvantaged many local and national groups such as CVA. This has meant increased transaction and engagement costs as we need to negotiate with each individual regional body (total 59), plus a diverse and often patchy response to government initiatives based on the capacity of these regional organizations. We found the roll out of the Natural Heritage Trust programs to have an enormous impact on our organisation i.e. confusion over programs and the time taken to establish regional bodies meant that programs were delayed and impacted. It appeared that engagement with NFP sector and large NGO's was not important and not considered. .

**Example : Green Corps**

*The inherent strength of Conservation Volunteers Australia is its credibility in that it builds on 8 years of successful management of the Green Corps program to date. Conservation Volunteers Australia continues to be innovative in its management of Green Corps, particularly in seeking to add value to the experience of Green Corps participants.*



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*Conservation Volunteers Australia has a proven record in the delivery of environment management projects and training programs. In particular, Conservation Volunteers Australia has an intimate knowledge of the Green Corps program, the principal stakeholders and their requirements.*

*During 1997 – 2002 Conservation Volunteers Australia was the inaugural and sole contract manager of the Green Corps Program. In consultation with government, Conservation Volunteers Australia initiated and implemented the original Green Corps concept, developed and managed more than 871 Green Corps projects, recruited and trained in excess of 9,000 young Australians nationwide in capital cities, regional areas, remote inland and island communities. The processes and systems established by Conservation Volunteers Australia have continued to be used in managing the program.*

*Conservation Volunteers Australia has again delivered the Green Corps program on behalf of the Commonwealth for 2006-2009 – an additional 132 projects and 1320 placements. The success of the program is a testament to the endeavours of participants, partner agencies, Government Departments and Conservation Volunteers Australia.*

*As such, Conservation Volunteers Australia is by far the most experienced and comprehensive Green Corps Service Provider.*

*After the successful implementation of the program government proceeded to call for open tenders which saw many of our competitors bidding including both 'for profits' and 'not for profits'. In effect our IP was 'incorporated into the program' by Government and we saw ourselves pitted against commercial organisations - instead of working with us to develop a partnership. The NFP sector needs to develop long term partnerships to work with government – and for strong community based programs to be successful the Government needs invest in the NGOs which are prepared to step up and deliver the needs identified by Government without the fear of being dumped for a commercial organisation which aims to take profits out of the community*

Increasingly governments look to encourage competition within the NFP sector and outside the sector for funding, as an expression of a healthy and participative environment. This is often despite it not necessarily adding to efficiency and effectiveness. For example in the recent Caring for our Country call for applications the program was oversubscribed and arrangements took months to broker and prepare. Not only did this detract from efficiency and effectiveness on day to day business, it also caused many NFPs to lose valuable staff as they were unable to wait for the government decision.



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NFPs are increasingly being forced into the FP sector to maintain their services and core businesses. The current Employment Services Australia contracts are a prime example of where, unless presenting highly complex and comprehensive tender bids the NFP organizations have lost business and services that have been delivered effectively and sensitively for many years. Many NFPs did not have the level of financial and/or personnel resources to mount competitive tender bids against the FP and larger NFP groups.

Overall a balance was achieved and efficiencies gained. In many cases it was NFP sector provider that has been selected to provide the services. This demonstrates the strength and leadership of the sector. Unfortunately this process does not apply to all areas of business – as per the CVA experience with Natural Heritage Trust and Caring for Country where certain providers are given preferred status. (Regional bodies / Catchment Authorities for all areas of business)

The *trend of government* towards working with a decreasing number of Employment Services providers is definitely decreasing the capacity and likelihood of smaller NFPs maintaining their share and place in this industry.

The *payment schedules* of some government contracts, particularly state government, require the service or a large part of the service to be provided prior to payment being received. In essence this means that the *NFP is required to fund the service* in the first instance, in the hope that all KPIs are achieved and all funding allocated by the end of the contract. In many cases the final payments are not provided until well after final reports are received and signed off. This means that all work has been completed and funded by the NFP months in advance of full payments i.e. the *NFP funding government programs*.

In attempting to attract the funding initially, margins have usually been kept to an absolute minimum in the proposal phase. This exposes the NFP to an unsatisfactory level of risk. When this delayed allocation of funds via the payment is also included, the level of risk is further escalated.

Some government departments intentionally or unintentionally use the passion of the NFP to deliver on their missions and/or the need of the NFP to stay in business and maintain their employees to screw the funds down to a level that places the quality and/or sustainability of the service at risk.



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*Comments are invited on the effect of government funding on other services offered by NFPs. Are there significant economies of scale and/ or scope in service delivery? How important is the capability of some NFPs to deliver and integrated service to the value they generate?*

It is not surprising to find that NFPs are increasingly being subjected to the vagaries of the electoral cycle which results in the creation and abolition of programs on an increasing basis. This means many program become, in effect, 'orphans' as they are scrapped due to new programs being developed; sometimes with little difference to the old program e.g. Defeating the Weeds Menace, Community Water Grants, Green Gym etc.

Conservation Volunteers Australia does not receive government funding for its operation. Consequently it is subject to these changes in direction especially as it designs and develops programs which from time to time the government may support as part of the implementation of various policies.

Conservation Volunteers Australia is a Registered Training Organisation with a focus on delivering training in Conservation and Land Management. Conservation Volunteers Australia is well placed to deliver this training in conjunction with practical land management activities building the capacity of communities to take on stewardship of their environment i.e. building social capital/social endowment. However Conservation Volunteers Australia is unable to access government financial support as allocation of profile hours. A number of NFPs have the expertise to deliver training that is relevant, targeted and of high quality.

**Additional support for qualified training NFP organizations would enhance the effectiveness of organisations.**

**b) Funding arrangements**

**c) Contract requirements**

**d) Governance & Accountability arrangements**

**e) General regulatory & taxation matters (including concessional i.e. income tax exemption, GST concessions, FBT exemptions, FBT rebates (charities only), deductible gifts**

**f) Specific service delivery issues**

*Comments invited on*

- *opportunities for improving funding and contractual arrangements to promote better outcomes*
- *the effectiveness of existing accountability and reporting requirements, including options for improvement*



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- *how **changes in service delivery requirements** have affected the effectiveness of NFP organizations and what changes to those requirements might be warranted to enhance their effectiveness*
- *the **effectiveness of arrangements for trialing or piloting** new approaches for service delivery*
- *the **effectiveness of program and service delivery evaluation arrangements***
- *the extent to which **governance and reporting requirements** associated with funding and contracted arrangements have **replaced 'black letter'** regulation (?)*

*Where possible, participants **support views with evidence**. Comments on the extent to which arrangements are necessary to enhance transparency and accountability would also be appreciated.*

In relation to improving funding and contractual arrangements there appears to be a distinct gap developing between small funding and contractual opportunities and the larger ones, with minimal middle ground.

The small funding opportunities are time consuming to prepare and manage, with little return on investment. If successful, they usually result in the employees being very busy or busier and can detract from core business and strategic allocation of work priorities. In the longer term, they help to keep the organization afloat, however tend to distract the business in delivering on its mission and negatively impact on the satisfaction and retention of employees.

The large funding programs, such as ESA contracts and Jobs Fund, are highly complex and competitive to the extent that they are almost beyond the capacity of smaller NFPs to prepare a competitive bid and to establish the infrastructure within their timelines required if a successful bid is achieved.

A range of mid-range funding opportunities based on observed and demonstrable performance and outputs, rather than the ability to write sophisticated applications could improve funding and contractual arrangements to promote better outcomes.

With regard to the existing accountability and reporting requirements it appears in many cases that the smaller the funding allocation the more demanding the accountability, and especially the reporting, requirements. Many contractual obligations in relation to the reporting requirements are disproportionate to the scope of the funds and the project.

Reporting is undertaken for the sake of bureaucratic appeasement and continued funding, but in reality it does not appear to be utilized to evaluate and improve outcomes or





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change delivery and operations through adaptive management. Most reporting is based on compliance and disregards good practice and lessons learned.

Reporting that is informative and collects data (that is not merely statistics) would greatly improve programs, provide positive outcomes of the reporting processes and inform any variations which may be required. This should include reporting and measurements of social outcomes and the support/resources to do this.

A noticeable trend in recent contracts with government departments has been the changing of requirements and guidelines *within the life of a contract* regarding service delivery requirements. In some cases, this has required a higher resource and support level without additional allowances to address the increases. In other cases, the outcomes/KPIs have been changed without actually needing to modify the contract itself. Similarly, political decisions/stances/influences have introduced new guidelines that do not in essence change the contract or deliverables, but have a substantial impact on capacity to deliver the required outcomes.

The program can evolve into something quite different to the one for which the contract bid was prepared and agreed.

Conservation Volunteers Australia has been effective in trialing and piloting new approaches. In some cases an ongoing and expanded program has been developed and supported. This has been an excellent outcome, but has also been relatively short lived. In some examples, the result has been the effective program has been developed and then taken away from Conservation Volunteers Australia and put out to competitive tender. In other cases, the effectiveness of the trial has been recognized and acknowledged, however the continued and/or expansion funding has not been forthcoming.

Another major national program that proved highly effective and evolved over 5 years was placed under the umbrella of and consumed by a larger program in the interests of "streamlined" services. The subsequent changes effectively took the program outside our mission, Conservation Volunteers Australia withdrew and the program did not continue under the new arrangements. As a result, Conservation Volunteers Australia lost an outstanding program, many project partners and volunteers lost highly valued services on which they had developed high levels of support and dependence.

The support for trial and pilots depends very much on the individual politician/bureaucrat support, and usually more than on any policy directions. As such, when the individual moves on, the impetus and/or support of trials can falter.



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**Example : Green Reserve :** *Conservation Volunteers Australia developed and was the sole contract manager of the Green Reserve Program services for DEEWR. Green Reserve involved 6705 contracted places between March 2001 and June 2006, in all Labor Market Regions. Green Reserve was a complementary program under the Work for the Dole suite of options. The principles in effective delivery of Green Reserve are similar to Green Corps when addressing the needs of participants and partner agencies and addressing Key Performance Indicators. The conditions changed taking this program outside our Conservation Volunteers Australia's mission as a volunteering organization as attendance became compulsory.*

**Trends and Developments** (affecting NFP and influences policy environment and condition, community government expectations of the sector etc)

*Questions we may wish to answer*

*What are the most significant trends and developments that have impacted on the efficiency and effectiveness of the NFP sector? How has the sector responded to these? Are there emerging trends and developments which are likely to impact on the future capacity of the sector?*

Most of our responses to these issues have been mentioned above, however one which has not explicitly been commented upon is that skilled staff and volunteers at management level are also important for efficient and effective organisations.

Additionally with life expectancy increasing and the corresponding increased need to look after the health and well-being of retired / semi-retired people; opportunities exist for greater engagement with NFPs to provide socially engaging and physically active programs for older volunteers. Conservation Volunteers Australia already operates a number of Green Gym models and sees the potential to expand these depending on funding availability.

The increase in the retirement age (Budget 2009) to 67years will eventually impact on the number of people able to volunteer. There is a role for NFPs to assist with engaging people in programs as they make the transition to retirement to ensure they remain both physically active and socially engaged.



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**Part 3**  
**Conservation Volunteers Australia**  
**Capability Statement**

Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) is a national, not-for-profit community based organisation that is dedicated to involving the community in practical conservation natural resource management programs. Each year CVA will deliver in excess of 800,000 hours of conservation volunteering.

CVA has 23 offices throughout Australia and employs 129 full time staff, 37 permanent part time staff and 142 casual staff. We also have two offices in New Zealand.

CVA works in partnership with Catchment Management Authorities, Local Councils, community groups, conservation agencies, tourism organisations and operators, State Governments and Departments, the Federal Government, NGOs and individual land owners.

CVA is a registered training organization and delivers accredited training and capacity building workshops to hundreds of community groups each year. CVA provides accredited training in Conservation and Land Management, Frontline Management and Active Volunteering. Non Accredited training occurs in community capacity building programs. Topics included in community capacity building include Change Management, Team Development, Project Management, Volunteer Recruitment and Safety Management.

Our Safety Department has systems and practices that focus on the management of on ground work with volunteers – these tools are available to the general conservation sector.

Conservation Volunteers Australia has many long-standing and very successful relationships with a range of corporate partners e.g. BHP Billiton, Toyota, Shell, National Bank, Vodafone, Commonwealth Bank, Rio Tinto. Typically these partnerships include financial and in kind support to enable CVA to deliver support to conservation projects and, often, corporate staff involvement. Additionally pro bono support to assist our organizational capacity building has been provided to grow CVA's strategic planning and operational ability, IT capacity and ability and website development by Booz & Co, Hewlett Packard and News Digital Media.

Conservation Volunteers Australia seeks to develop long-term partnerships that have a strong identity and focus on involving the community in priority environmental issues. For example, Conservation Volunteers and BHP Billiton have developed the Revive our Wetlands program which aims to protect Australia's significant wetlands. Revive our Wetlands has been awarded the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Community



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Business Partnerships, the Australian Financial Review National Partnership of the Year and in 2007 the Banksia Award. Conservation Volunteers Australia is a member of the IUCN (World Conservation Union) and the Federation of Youth Travel Organisations.

Our conservation and volunteer programs have recently been awarded Ecotourism Certification, recognizing our commitment to maintaining high ecological standards in all aspects of our operations.

### **Key Capabilities/Capacities**

1. Community Engagement
2. Program design, development and delivery
3. Conservation Program / Project Management
4. Accredited and non-accredited training as a Registered Training Organisation
5. Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting
6. Communications
7. Land & Asset Management
8. Fundraising through Corporate, Government and Philanthropic sectors
9. Conservation and Tourism Partnerships
10. Project Brokerage/Consortium Management

### **1. Community Engagement**

Conservation Volunteers involves approximately 12,500 volunteers per annum in practical activities that benefit the environment.

2,500 of these volunteers travel to Australia each year to assist Conservation Volunteers Australia to provide support to local conservation projects.

All Conservation Volunteers Australia programs achieve this outcome via our standard operating model which is a team of up to 10 volunteers with a Conservation Volunteers Australia employee who is the team manager and supervisor. On the job training is provided to volunteers. All projects are suitable for unskilled participants. Volunteers must be over the age of 18 for overnight projects.

We offer a range of programs that suit our partners' needs. For example some projects will focus on remote area assistance such as turtle monitoring programs in remote areas or local heritage programs in urban areas.



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Volunteers can participate for a single day or for up to 4 weeks or longer.

We offer packaged volunteering programs to people wishing to participate in Australia or around the World.

Conservation Volunteers Australia conducts training workshops for the volunteer sector through a corporate sponsorship. This program provides valuable skills to managers of volunteers in volunteer organisations.

## **2. Program design, development and delivery**

Conservation Volunteers designs, develops and delivers conservation programs which help the community to connect to their environment in a positive way. Some examples of our successful programs:-

*Better Earth* – is our core business. Providing teams of up to 10 volunteers for projects that require manpower to complete. Projects range from one day to a week. Conservation Volunteers Australia completes in excess of 2000 projects each year. Projects are completed in urban, rural and remote areas.

*Green Corps* – Young Australians for our Environment, a nationally delivered Government funded program that provides 6 months work experience and accredited training volunteer on specific conservation programs for 17 – 20 year olds. This program has involved over ten thousand young Australians. See additional information below.

*Heritagecare* – Heritagecare is a partnership between Conservation Volunteers and Heritage Victoria, funded by the State Government's heritage strategy - 'Victoria's Heritage: Strengthening our Communities'.

*Green Gym* – Green Gym is a local program linking health and well-being benefits through volunteering and the environment. See case study Appendix B.

*Action for Climate Change* - Action for Climate Change is a new program managed by Conservation Volunteers. It is a range of initiatives to assist business and individuals to reduce their impact on the environment.

*Wild Futures* - Conservation Volunteers have made an amazing and worthwhile contribution to the health of special places in our landscape. Now, with the launch of the Wild Futures initiative, we are adding a special focus to our conservation work in key



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locations around Australia and New Zealand that are crucial for the survival of some of our most threatened wildlife.

Community Capacity Building – Training workshops are delivered throughout Australia to provide skills to the volunteer sector in management.

### **3. Conservation Program/Project Management**

Conservation Volunteers Australia has well developed operational policies and systems for all programs. Each program has a Conservation Volunteers team leader, with qualifications in OH&S, Defensive Driving, First Aid, and other relevant environmental skills/qualifications. We also provide a vehicle, trailer, hand tools, personal protective equipment and public liability insurance.

### **4. Accredited and non-accredited training as a Registered Training Organisation**

Conservation Volunteers is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with a national training team providing both non accredited and accredited training to individuals and community groups including:

- Certificate 1 in Active Volunteering
- Conservation Volunteer Management Course
- In Safe Hands – training and toolkit (safety management systems)
- Risk Assessment
- Change Management in Community Groups
- Motivated Volunteers
- Team Development for Community Groups
- Project Management in Community Groups
- Providing and monitoring a customer service program

### **5. Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting**

Conservation Volunteers is active in developing methodologies for involving the community in the economical monitoring and evaluation of Natural Resource Management projects. We have partnered with University Technology Sydney to develop a documented plan to implement robust environmental assessments for resource conditions that can be implemented by volunteers under team leader supervision.



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Additionally we are trialing the coordination of volunteer teams to map *Weeds of National Significance* and subsequently provide data that will assist effective decision making in regards to future control programs. We believe that Conservation Volunteers has the unique ability to engage the general community in environmental Monitoring and Evaluation leading to stewardship, education and capacity building outcomes.

## 6. Communications

Conservation Volunteers Australia has a high visitation website that offers information about all conservation programs that Conservation Volunteers Australia has been requested to assist. Conservation Volunteers Australia promotes programs via TV Community Service Announcements, and press releases.

Government ministers and corporate partners have commented on Conservation Volunteers' ability to generate positive media involving volunteers and good stories which can be told. The Conservation Volunteers website receives on average 10,000 unique hits per month. For example our website is a great place to share our stories from our programs such as Green Schools Connect in partnership with Vodafone or our Revive our Wetlands in partnership with BHP Billiton.

## 7. Land & Asset Management

Conservation Volunteers Australia is involved in land management programs on a long term basis. Conservation Volunteers Australia owns land and in some case manages property under: agreement in the form of an MOU or formal lease. Examples include:-

- **Chakola, NSW** - Voluntary Conservation Agreement (VCA) property and Wildlife Refuge in Kangaroo Valley NSW (80 acres), providing community facilities, meeting areas and accommodation for 40 people.
- **W James Whyte Island Reserve, VIC** – 204ha property owned by Conservation Volunteers Australia, backing onto Werribee State Gorge Park in Victoria which houses our first Action for Climate Change biodiversity carbon forest.
- **Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, ACT** – In partnership with the ACT Government Conservation Volunteers designed and now manages the Volunteer Interpreter Program (VIP) at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. The VIP sees trained volunteers act as interpreters and guides in the Nature Reserve to enhance visitor experiences.
- **Brookfield Conservation Reserve, SA** - Managed by Conservation Volunteers Australia under lease agreement with the Department of Environment and Heritage.



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## **8. Fundraising/income generation through partnerships with Corporate, Government and Philanthropic sectors**

Conservation Volunteers is not government funded and generates its income on a continuing basis through a variety of means including;

- Project partner contributions
- The design, development and delivery of programs which attract government support to help them deliver on their policy objectives
- Corporate partnerships ranging from entry level to multi million dollar themed program support
- Training design and delivery,
- Grants from government and philanthropic organisations
- Membership and tax deductible donations

## **9. Conservation and Tourism Partnerships**

Conservation Volunteers has a department of experienced staff dedicated to the delivery of volunteer and ecotourism programs. We offer extensive experience in developing, managing and operating tourism and conservation partnerships including;

- Over 25 years experience in packaging, marketing, selling and operating conservation 'holiday' programs around Australia
- Established on line booking systems and free call number for booking inquiries
- A web site receiving 10,000 unique visitors per month to site
- Well recognized safety standards
- A network of over 25 worldwide booking agents
- Product development and operation
- Experienced guides where necessary
- Staff expertise in volunteer and tourism management
- A large network of corporate clients and funding
- Comprehensive domestic and international marketing

The quality of our programs has been recognised through the receipt of numerous tourism awards and Ecotourism Certification. [Click here to view our awards.](#)





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## **10. Project Brokerage/Consortium Management**

Conservation Volunteers preferred approach is to work in partnership. More often than not we broker relationships across the corporate, government and community sectors with the aim of leveraging our shared resources to ensure greater conservation outcomes through community engagement.

Conservation Volunteers has significant experience in consortium management. The Great Barrier Reef Wetlands Protection Programme is one example where Conservation Volunteers worked in partnership with stakeholders, including WetlandCare Australia (WCA), Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research (ACTFR) and CSIRO, to highlight the importance of conserving and managing healthy coastal wetlands to a wider Queensland audience.

### **Additional Conservation Volunteers Australia programs/information which demonstrate social inclusion, social capital and social endowment:**

**Fire Recovery** – Linking Conservation Volunteers to fire recovery ‘community assist’ projects in NSW/VIC 2003/4 and VIC 2009, helping to rebuild communities.

**See report/Case study for 2003-4 Appendix A.**

**Green Gym** : Green Gym is a partnership between Conservation Volunteers and the Victorian Government linking health and well-being benefits through volunteering and the environment. Green Gym projects have also commenced in NSW during August 2008 with the support of the Australian Government’s Healthy Active Australia program. Green Gym targets previously disengaged people and draws volunteers from highly disadvantaged groups, which builds social connectivity and cohesion, and social inclusion.

**See Report/Case Study Appendix B.**

**LEAP:** Conservation Volunteers Australia was an integral partner in the formulation of program guidelines and administration procedures for the Landcare and Environment Action Program (LEAP) between 1995 and 1997. Conservation Volunteers Australia ran projects in all states and territories. Conservation Volunteers Australia was member of the National LEAP management committee.



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**Community Work Placements:** Conservation Volunteers Australia continues to host substantial numbers of job seekers on community work placements throughout Australia.

**South Australian Youth Conservation Corps :** 6 months work experience and accredited training volunteer program for 15 – 24 year olds which has involved over 700 young South Australians since 2002. The SAYCC continues to be managed by Conservation Volunteers. It has presented multiple options that will allow Conservation Volunteers Australia to develop alternative and responsive delivery models for Green Corps in the future.



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**Part 4**

**Conservation Volunteers Australia Regional Offices**

<b>NSW</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>QLD</b>
Sydney	Melbourne	Adelaide	Brisbane
Newcastle	Bendigo	Alice Springs	Maleny
Bathurst	Ballarat	<b>TAS</b>	Gladstone
Wollongong	Geelong	Hobart	Mackay
Chakola/Kangaroo Valley	<b>WA</b>	Launceston	Townsville
<b>ACT/SNSW</b>	Perth	<b>NT</b>	Cairns
Canberra	Broome	Darwin	<b>23 offices</b>

**Conservation Volunteers Australia's 'Dollar Note Story' - Expenditure Breakdown**

Item	2008-09	2007-08
Wages	53 cents	53 cents
Motor Vehicle Expenses	15 cents	15 cents
All insurances including workers compensation	3 cents	3 cents
Project Expenses – Better Earth	5 cents	4 cents
Telephone	2 cents	2 cents
Rent	4 cents	4 cents
Travel	2 cents	2 cents
Offices Expenses & Printing	2 cents	2 cents
Volunteer Expenses	2 cents	2 cents
All other expenses	10.2 cents	13 cents
Contribution to CVA reserves	1.8 cents	0 cents
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 cents</b>	<b>100 cents</b>



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**Environmental Outputs for 2008 for Conservation Volunteers Australia's (all CVA programs) contributing to Social Capital / Social Endowments such as biodiversity, cultural heritage and building more connected, cohesive and stronger communities.**

<b>2008 Results</b>	
Number of individual projects completed	4267
Number days on projects completed	22,250
Number of days volunteered by individuals	126,319
Number of stems planted	356,643
Area covered by stems planted	502,526 m <sup>2</sup>
Number of trees planted	610,582
Area covered by trees planted	1,521,488m <sup>2</sup>
Length of walking track constructed	27,712.2m
Length of walking track repaired	207,795.9m
Length of boardwalk constructed	102.71m
Length of boardwalk repaired	12,272.2m
Area covered by weed removal	8,348,036.2m <sup>2</sup>
Quantity of seed collected	2,648kg
Quantity of rubbish collected	90,046kg
Length of fencing constructed	40.067m
Length of fencing repaired	36,898m
Number of surveys undertaken	1,061
Total number of km traveled for projects	1,776,067km
Number of Project Partners engaged	900