



The State of Bushcare and Landcare in Greater Sydney 2017/18

Our landcare and bushcare volunteers are integral to the enhancement, maintenance and protection of Sydney's unique and beautiful bushland. Greater Sydney Local Land Services surveys Landcare and Bushcare groups in the region every two years. The most recent survey focussed on the 2017/18 financial year and targeted incorporated Landcare Groups, council and National Parks bushcare programs, as well as local and regional Landcare Networks.

About the survey

The survey asked groups their respective number of members, hours of labour invested, type of works undertaken and challenges. The survey attracted responses from

- 19 Landcare groups and networks
- 33 council or National Parks bushcare programs

Overall, the survey captured data from 97 per cent of all known groups and networks. Bushcare groups accounted for the vast majority of surveyed groups (98 per cent), with Landcare groups and networks making up the remainder.

What did the data tell us?

Our survey revealed in the 2017/18 financial year, about 890 groups were engaged in bushcare or landcare activities. These groups had more than 5,800 members regularly attend their events, with an additional 6000 one-off volunteers participating throughout the year. Together they carried out almost 126,000 hours of work. This equates to approximately \$4.4 million in paid labour costs (at \$35 per hour).

Landcare groups worked on both public and private land, predominantly in peri-urban landscapes. In contrast, bushcare groups worked solely on public land in both urban, suburban and some peri-urban settings. Groups (both Landcare and bushcare) reported their main activity as bushland conservation activities like bush land regeneration and tree planting. Groups also noted that much time was spent educating the community, campaigning about local environmental issues and managing grants.

Of the bushcare and landcare groups surveyed, 63 per cent participated in citizen science initiatives. Bird and other fauna surveys were the most common citizen science contributions, but vegetation and water monitoring activities (such as Streamwatch) were also included.

Bushcare groups were particularly interested in training to improve the dynamics of the volunteers, production of grant applications and media and communications training.

Landcare groups were interested in training around weed and plant identification. Further to training support, Landcare groups identified the need for more funding, more volunteers (especially younger people), better landholder and community engagement and funding from external bodies to support their work (e.g. funding for pest management contractors). The overwhelming workload was considered to be a substantial threat to the future of some groups.

- In the Greater Sydney region 890 groups are engaged in bushcare or landcare activities
- These groups support over 5,800 regular volunteers and almost 6000 one-off volunteers
- Volunteers undertook almost 126,000 hours of work in 2017/18 financial year
- This equates to approximately \$4.4 million in kind labour costs



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Landcare group well-being was mostly “stable” (63 per cent), with few groups identifying as “surviving” or “thriving” (21 per cent and 16 per cent respectively) and no groups identifying as “barely hanging on.”

Bushcare and Landcare group awareness and involvement with three major local Landcare networks overwhelmingly increased from the previous survey.

Support

There are a number of ways Greater Sydney Local Land Services supports environmental groups. Bushcare groups predominantly accessed grant funding, while Landcare groups accessed Local Land Services for a more diverse range of reasons including for events, site visits and communication with staff and information through newsletters and the website.

Greater Sydney Local Land Services provided \$704,762 in direct funding to volunteer groups in the 2017/18 financial year, enabling them to continue work maintaining our environmental assets. Funding was provided via the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program and Catchment Action NSW. Ninety-five percent of those surveyed indicated they had interacted with Greater Sydney Local Land Services. Of

these interactions, 94 per cent of respondents reported they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their experience.

In addition to Local Land Services, groups relied primarily on local council, followed by conservation groups, individual donors and other government support resources.

Comparison to previous years

Total volunteer numbers have diminished from the previous reporting period (2015/16) by 9 per cent. There has also been a disproportionate drop in the number of volunteer hours; 28 per cent less hours were invested during the 2017/18 compared to the previous period. There was also a shift towards higher numbers of one-off volunteers and against regular members (119 per cent and 75 per cent of the previous period respectively). Last period 90 per cent of Landcare groups reported they were “stable” or “thriving” compared to this period where only 79 per cent indicated “stable” or “thriving”. When asked what the biggest challenge for the longevity of their groups was, ongoing funding was of most concern. All indications point to a lack of funding security and this is likely driving the loss of capacity for groups to support their volunteers and maintain sites.

Table 1. Bushcare and Landcare volunteer hours and numbers by reporting period. *NB the periods 2005-2012 were based on different geographical boundaries and may not be an accurate reflection of on-going trends*

Survey Period	Total number of volunteers	Total volunteer hours
2005	14,060	169,981
2007	21,407	178,793
2009	17,119	180,189
2012	26,394	169,430
2016	13,152	173,723
2018	12,002	125,977

“A lack of funding security is likely driving the loss of capacity for groups to support their volunteers and maintain sites.”

