



The State of Bushcare and Landcare in Greater Sydney 2019/20

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 2019/20 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 numbers of members, hours of labour invested, type of works undertaken and challenges.

- 27 Landcare groups and networks responded
- 37 council or National Parks Bushcare programs responded

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

What did the data tell us?

The survey revealed in the 2019/20 financial year, about 964 groups and networks were engaged in bushcare or landcare activities. These groups had more than 8850 members regularly attend their events, with an additional 4723 one-off volunteers participating throughout the year. Together they carried out around 150,500 hours of work. This equates to approximately \$6.3 million in paid labour costs (at \$41.72 per hour*).

In the second half of the 2019/20 financial year, COVID-19 resulted in reduced numbers of work days and volunteer hours for most surveyed groups. It is estimated that COVID-19 reduced the total number of hours of volunteer environmental work across Greater Sydney by approximately 50,000. On average, Landcare and Bushcare groups reported that they suspended activities for three months during the reporting period. Many groups also reduced the numbers of volunteers present on work days. 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. Bushland conservation activities, namely bush regeneration and tree and shrub planting were reported as the main activities undertaken by both bushcare and landcare groups. Landcare groups also noted that just under 20 per cent of volunteer time is spent on administration such as managing grants.

Citizen science activities were undertaken by 54 per cent of groups surveyed. Bird and other fauna surveys were the most common citizen science contributions, but water monitoring (Streamwatch), vegetation surveys, biocontrol and climate monitoring were also reported.

*Rate based on ABS full-time adult average weekly earnings. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/average-weekly-earnings-australia/latest-release>

- In the Greater Sydney region 964 groups are engaged in bushcare or landcare activities
- These groups support over 8850 regular volunteers and 4700 one-off volunteers
- Volunteers undertook around 150,500 hours of work in the 2019/20 financial year
- This equates to approximately \$6.3 million in in-kind labour



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Landcare groups identified a range of areas of training that would improve their effectiveness. These include bush regeneration skills such as plant and weed identification, plant propagation, wildlife care, grant writing and first aid.

Around one third of surveyed groups have been active for less than five years (32 per cent) and similarly, 29 per cent of the groups have been active for more than 20 years. Landcare group wellbeing was largely “stable” (43 per cent) or “surviving” (39 per cent). Two groups and one network reported to be “thriving” and two groups reported to be “barely hanging on”. The biggest challenges facing the surveyed landcare groups’ future are loss of volunteers and volunteer motivation, ongoing funding, an aging volunteer base and an overwhelmingly large workload. In order to thrive, the groups identified the need for more volunteers and funding that facilitates support from contractors, councils and government agencies.

Support

There are a number of ways Greater Sydney Local Land Services supports environmental groups. Eighty-six per cent of surveyed groups (Bushcare and Landcare) indicated they interacted with Greater Sydney Local Land Services. The most common interactions were speaking with Local Land Services Officers and reading a Local Land Services newsletter. Most of the Bushcare group coordinators also attended Volunteer Coordinators Network meetings. Of all these interactions, respondents reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their experience.

Greater Sydney Local Land Services provided \$220,814 to Landcare and Bushcare in the 2019/20 financial year, supporting them to continue work restoring and maintaining environmental assets. Funding was provided via the NSW Landcare Program, the NSW Environment Trust Every Bit Counts Program, Catchment Action NSW and the National

Landcare Program.

In addition to Local Land Services, Bushcare groups are supported by other local councils, National Parks staff and Local Landcare coordinators. Landcare groups reported that they received support from local councils (67 per cent of surveyed groups) and the Greater Sydney Landcare Network (33 per cent of surveyed groups). Awareness of and interaction with the major Landcare networks in the region remained similar to the previous reporting period. Around half of the surveyed Landcare and Bushcare groups worked on projects together with one of the networks, received support (e.g. grant administration) or attended events organised by the networks.

Comparison to previous years

The number of volunteers increased from the previous reporting period (2017/18) by 13 per cent with the volunteers investing 20 per cent more hours than in the previous period. In 2019/20, regular volunteers made up 65 per cent of the total volunteer numbers and one-off volunteers made up the other 35 per cent. This represents a relative increase in regular volunteers compared with 2017/18 where the numbers of regular and one-off volunteers were about the same.

The fraction of Landcare groups reporting to be “stable” or “thriving” reduced slightly from 90 per cent (in 2017/18) to 82 per cent (in 2019/20). Funding security was identified in the previous reporting period as the major concern for groups’ future longevity. The critical need for funding to support volunteers and their environmental restoration efforts has again been reported. The survey results suggest that managing the interplay between funding, manageable workloads and attracting volunteers is again an important key to the future of Bushcare and Landcare in the region.

“The interplay between funding, manageable workloads and attracting volunteers is key to the future of Bushcare and Landcare in the region.”

Bushcare and Landcare volunteer hours and numbers



Image 1: Bushcare and Landcare volunteer hours and numbers by reporting period.

