

Bushcare and Landcare community survey, February 2019

1. **Introduction and background**

GLSN is an umbrella organisation representing Bushcare, Landcare and environmental conservation volunteers and their organisations across the Greater Sydney region. As part of our role in representation, we need to understand what is happening within our region, particularly at the ‘boots on the ground’ volunteering level. Surveying was chosen as the best method to tease out the current state of Bushcare, Landcare (inclusive of Coastcare) and environmental volunteering (collectively called “environmental volunteering” here on) in the Sydney region, and understand what challenges faced environmental volunteering in Greater Sydney.

1. **Methodology**
	1. Survey collection methods

Phoning was the first method of contact, followed by emails; emails were also chosen when a physical contact number was not available, and in some cases interviews were conducted face-to-face. In addition to an in-house directory of groups, councils and notable individuals, broad survey reminder emails were sent out through our newsletter subscriber list (230 subscribers), advertised to our social media following (1050 likes and followers on Facebook) and on our website. It should be noted that although this survey covered a broad range of geographical regions and demographics, not every Bushcare, Landcare or environmental conservation group was, or was able to be surveyed.

Contact emails and phone numbers were obtained via Facebook, the NSW Landcare Gateway, and Greater Sydney Local Land Services, GSLN and personal contact records.

Interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, allowing the participant to voice concerns and issues that mattered to them. Specific demographic questions were only discussed at the end of the survey. The rate of engagement and response, from a total of 124 participants, is shown below (Table 1).

*Table 1. Survey response rate*

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| **Category**  | **Potential participants** | **Number responded**  | **Response rate**  |
| Councils | 29 | 23 | 79% |
| Businesses, NGOs and other government | 41 | 26 | 63% |
| Landcare and Bushcare groups  | 54 | 52 | 96% |
| *Note that these values do not include the 24 participants who wished to remain anonymous.*  |

* 1. The survey asked:
* What challenges does your Landcare, Bushcare, council, business or NGO face?
* What is the story of your group?
* What are your perception(s) of the current state of Landcare and Bushcare in the Greater Sydney region?
	1. Challenges with the surveying method

Obtaining correct contact information was difficult, particularly for councils due to council amalgamations and high rate of staff turnover. Obtaining individual contact details of notable Bushcare and Landcarers in the Sydney Basin was also challenging, due to time constraints and a lack to publicly-available and up-to-date ‘contact database’ information.

This survey had hoped to incorporate the biannual LLS survey however due to the restructuring and shift from Regional Landcare Facilitator, to Regional Agricultural Landcare Facilitator, this click-based survey was not conducted. Inclusion of such survey results would give statistics and a more quantitative analysis of Bushcare and Landcare activities, demographics, and perceptions. These results will be included in an updated and amended version of this survey.

1. **Key findings**

Key findings have been de-identified and incorporate the feedback of those that were willing to be identified and those that wished to remain anonymous. The majority of groups in Sydney are Bushcare-related; Landcare groups are centred around rural and peri-urban fringes, with some groups travelling further afield or working under the ‘Landcare’ name on public land.

* 1. Main activities, demographic information
		1. *Age*

In general, a given region will always have a Bushcare and Landcare group where the median age is over 50, and a smaller subset of the group *may* belong to younger demographic. In addition, there may be one to two groups dedicated, or aimed at a younger demographic. Most volunteers are semi-retired or retirees, and most (but not all) Bushcare groups have a NPWS, council, or contracted supervisor. Some groups, such as The Mudcrabs (Georges River) incorporate a substaintial younger demographic, whilst others – because of council efforts – engage university and TAFE students, such as Randwick Council-run Bushcare groups working with UNSW students to gain real-world practical experience. Others such as the Inner West Council are trying to engage a younger demographic, actively establishing a Bushcare group at Ashfield High School and creating dedicated under-35 Bushcare groups.

* + 1. *Group size*

Most council groups are under 10 in number, with up to 20 people in regular contact as part of the broader local Bushcare network. Non-council groups tend to be larger; Cumberland Land Conservancy had a peak of 100 and currently hovers around 80, and The Gully Bushcare can number up to 30 on exceptional weekends. Landcare groups can vary substantially; Still Creek Landcare has a regular monthly volunteering base of just 2-6 people, whilst La Perouse Coastcare and St Kieran’s Creek Landcare averages up to 15 regular participants. Groups closer to the Sydney CBD and closer to the Blue Mountains tend to be larger, and more numerous than those in the Western and South-Western Sydney regions.

* + 1. *Income streams*

Most groups obtain small grants under $3000, if at all, with several funded from the pockets of volunteers or finite council resources. Larger groups have been able to obtain larger grants and funding, and some non-Bushcare groups such as the Cumberland Land Conservancy and Clean4shore engage corporate volunteering. Councils, NPWS and the Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust occasionally engage corporate (paying) volunteers, particularly in the Sydney CBD region. Others rely in in-kind sponsorship such as tools, donations or support from groups such as Greening Australia, or council-funded contractors and Bushcare teams. Funding for other groups, such as Centennial Parklands Bushcare and Botanic Gardens volunteers is only certain until July 2019, and this makes forward planning for these larger organisations (particularly when paid employees are required) difficult.

* + 1. *Self-perception*

Most Bushcare groups (approximately 80% of respondents surveyed) consider themselves low-key’, apolitical and just ‘plodding along’ at their local Bushland or Landcare site. They aim to do ‘one thing and do it well’ at a single location, and are very passionate about their home Bushcare or Landcare site. A minority of volunteers see it as an extension of their own private land, and believe they have a greater entitlement to land use, stewardship and a more negative attitude to public use – particularly if the public is damaging the result of their volunteering efforts and projects. However, most volunteers are keen to engage the public, and several have recruited and growth their local Landcare and Bushcare sites by engaging passer-byers.

A minority of participants (<10% surveyed) are active and engaging in workshops, conferences and reaching out to resources and groups beyond their local council or Bushcare groups, although many more cite a lack of awareness of workshops, and lack of central, connected and coordinated information sharing network as a reason they have been unable to connect with these resources. Many workshops are also offered exclusively for residents and local groups within the council LGA. The engagement of these groups and in part group enthusiasm is dependent on the resources available for Bushcare Team at a local council; often those councils who engage and train their Bushcare teams, and engage the wider public to connect to the local environment and parks have dedicated, more numerous and stronger local Bushcare and Landcare groups.

* 1. Key challenges identified by the survey

The survey identified numerous key challenges amongst Bushcare, Landcare, council and environmental volunteering respondents. Several respondents wished to remain confidential and anonymous, and their identifiable responses together with participation have been omitted from publication. Feedback from these participants has been de-identified and included in the text-based analysis of this report only.

Of those that responded, the following results were obtained:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Self-identified issue by the survey participant** | **% self identified by Council, NGOs and government agencies** | **% Issue self identified by eBushcare, Landcare and environmental volunteers** | **Total % of respondents that identified the issue as a matter of concern** |
| 2.2.1. Fear of development | 28% | 75% | **53%** |
| 2.2.2. Lack of support from volunteers and chief organisation i.e. council, NPWS | 35% | 50% | **56%** |
| 2.2.3. Confusion of heirachy structure of environmentalism, volunteering, Landcare and Bushcare in Sydney | 14% | 50% | **26%** |
| 2.2.4. Lack of financial and HR resources of paid support and supervisory staff | 21% | 50% | **56%** |
| 2.2.5. Conflict and disagreement between council and volunteers | 14% | 25% | **20%** |
| 2.2.6. Youth engagement | 29% | 63% | **53%** |
| 2.2.7. Older generational engagement | 29% | 50% | **40%** |
| 2.2.8. Bushcare and Landcare as a primarily social outing  | 29% | 25% | **26%** |
| 2.2.9. Ageing workforce and mobility/energy issues  | 14% | 25% | **20%** |
| 2.2.10. Adoption of different or new techniques | 14% | 25% | **20%** |

*Not all interviewed identified challenges; some reported no challenges or did not identify the above. Further statistics will be included pending the results of the LLS biannual Landcare and Bushcare community survey.*

* + 1. *The biggest identified challenge was the fear of development*

It was noted that there are substantial amounts of fear and apprehension at both the boots-on-the-ground and the council levels. There is an almost unanimous concern about the lack of top-down planning communication, and many are frustrated by the repeated perceived failure of the government and planning agencies to keep volunteers and the wider local community ‘in the loop’ about planning descisions. Many only find out once a development application has been submitted or approved. Many Bushcarers rely on their local councils and support from their Bushcare offices, and personal ‘word of mouth’ networks to keep them informed and help protect their volunteer sites.

Many volunteer groups also expressed concern at the lack of Bushland available to conduct habitat restoration, conservation and clean-up work particularly in the growth areas of Sydney. Many perceived the loss of farmland and private bushland on peri-urban and rural lots to be part of the challenge to Sydney-based conservation efforts; Still Creek Landcare near Arcadia noted that demographics are changing, as peri-urban average is subdivided for developments of higher density housing and industry, with a flow on effects for the local Bushcaring group. Older volunteers are selling up and moving away, and new residents are not engaging in their local environment as volunteers. The group also noted increased rubbish pollution, fewer and more fragmented native animal corridors and changes in how local residents interact with the environment.

The Cumberland Land Conservancy and Blacktown and District Environmental Group expressed concern about north-western Sydney development on Cumberland Plains. Bushcare groups in the Wollondilly and Camden/MacArthur region expressed concern about large tracts of Eucalypt woodland, the rushed process of planning approvals and the seemingly underhanded way in which government fails to inform and engage the public. Those operating on Crown Land such as Dundurra were unaware of the recent changes in legislation and are now concerned about the potential impact on their Bushcaring activities.

Several groups either do not wish to engage in politics or lobbying as it does not fit their ‘boots on the ground’ practical purpose, or they are concerned it will influence their ability to partake in Bushcare, Landcare and conservation efforts. Cumberland Land Conservancy as an organisation is quite concerned about public and political perceptions necessary to continue their private land conservation model; to the point that a perceived membership and alliance to GSLN may compromise their private-land conservation model (Wainamatta Regional Park was obtained under a $15m agreement with each of the major political parties as private conservation land).

More broadly, several Bushcare groups, council officers and business expressed concern about the lax environmental and climate laws in both NSW and at a federal level. Businesses such as Little Gecko Media are disenfranchised with the state of climate change and environmental policy and have withdrawn from active Bushcare and Landcare volunteering and the GSLN network because of “this depressing reality”. Others such as Windsor Bait and Tackle and Sydney Bass Fishing Club commented about the unregulated pollution and dumping of toxic contaminants into Western Sydney streams and the struggle to effectively control and eliminate this industrial pollutant.

* + 1. *There are clear geographical divisions, and Bushcare varies substantially from LGA to LGA*

There are clear differences across LGA boundaries in the dedication, role and degree (and nature of) community-council Bushcaring. Some councils work in collaboration with their local volunteer groups. At Impeesa Reserve, Parramatta, volunteers weed and maintain whilst the council team and contractors focus on tree planting.

Even in lower socioeconomic areas, councils actively engage and encourage volunteering and outdoor engagement. Campbelltown Council is incredibly supportive of Bushcare and Landcare, actively involved in volunteering efforts and supporting projects such as Green Drinks, Intrepid Landcare South-west and projects surrounding the iconic koala. In contrast, Fairfield Council is unwilling to increase current, limited Bushcare efforts due to the resident demographics (see below). However, in some exceptional circumstances, divisions in commitment/non-commitment can surpass financial resources and socioeconomic demographics, with more affluent areas such as Broken Bay Council pointedly disinterested in cross-LGA work, increasing Landcaring or Bushcaring, or following up or engaging with further support.

Bushcare and Landcare is reliant on the support and commitment of locals, and there were clear regional divisions across the degree of involvement. Council officers from lower socioeconomic areas with high rates of development, concrete jungles and limited aesthetically engaging Bushland noted low rates of public interest in Bushland conservation and volunteering (and cited these as a possible reason for low rates of volunteering). Conversely, communities with greater regions of nature and the inclusion of urban and natural landscapes, such as Ryde and the Blue Mountains had higher volunteer participation rates and a (generally) more engaged resident population. A quick look at the NSW Landcare Gateway also suggests a distinct lack of groups in the Western Sydney region when compared to the Blue Mountains, Central Coast and coastal Sydney regions. This may be a product of socioeconomic status, high overseas birth rates and the accelerating, rapid pace of urban expansion and development (Fig. 1, right).

Figure . A screenshot from the Landcare NSW ‘Find a Group Near You’ tool. Importantly, this map does not list all Bushcare groups. It does, however, indicate a concentration of groups in more densely populated inner Sydney, coastal and Blue Mountains area.

* + 1. *The power structure and hierarchy of natural resource management in the Sydney Basin in unclear*

Most Bushcare officers, volunteer groups, businesses and even notable individuals are confused, frustrated or just perplexed as to how government, NGO and representative organisations across Landcare and Bushcare fit together, and complement one another. More than 90% of respondents commented that a lack of clear hierarchy and structure made obtaining support and engaging more in grants and cross-region contacts difficult. Lynda from Lar Perouse Coastcare commented that a clearer hierarchy would be easier to navigate, organise around and be more accountable in grant applications. Several participants also commented about the lack of a coordinated Bushcare directory; feedback suggested Ku-rin-gai Council had operated a database, but no longer had the time, finances or resources to continue doing so.

* + 1. *Council, NGOs and volunteer Bushcare and Landcare do not always see ‘eye to eye’*

Numerous discussions with Bushcare officers, NGOs and volunteers revealed several notable trends:

* Older Bushcarers and Landcarers active during the ‘’golden days” pre-1990 have retained their old practices and are unwilling to adopt to current or best practice methods.
* The Australian Association of Bush Regenerators frequently encounters Bushcare officers who are not ‘up to date’ with current ecological theory and bush regeneration practices. Lack of certification and registration industry wide is AABR wishes to focus on in 2019.
* Volunteers do not always believe the actions of council are in the best interests of their group; a lack of communication with proposed developments was cited as a real concern to some locations, and these groups expressed both distrust and apprehension about working with (and relying on council) to responsibly undertake and protect conservation assets. Others considered council responses inadequate - such as Impeesa Reserve complained that no fox baiting or cat baiting was occurring, and yet native rat species, where once abundant have now diminished or disappeared.
* Numerous groups expressed disappointment at councils actively controlling weeds near their reserves, along roadsides, and a notable lack of coordinating privately-owned land with public land weed management. Groups believe this is a product of limited financial and human resources at councils; however no councils specifically identified weeds management or private-public coordination of land management as a challenge when surveyed.
* Whilst everyone is working towards the same goal, NPWS often wields power and restrictions over other conservation groups, and this can influence the ability these groups to conduct work, such as Clean4shore.
* Many volunteers feel that NPWS does not continue or support their work with on-the-ground efforts. Work that is perceived as being the responsibility of NPWS is often fundertaken by volunteers. Weeds management and a percieved lack of funding for weed control in National Parks is considered a real barrier between volunteers and the organisation.
* There is a perception that many government environmental agencies do not value the importance and role of volunteer work. However, NPWS Cumberland, and Greater Sydney Local Land Services was praised for their continued support of Bushcare and Landcare. The Environmental Protection Agency (NSW) was considered adequate in their role, whilst the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage was widely criticised.

It is important to remember that these trends reflect the sentiment and comments of survey respondents only, and do not fully address the individual situation at each LGA or necessarily reflect the views of GSLN.

* + 1. *Council, NGO and NPWS resources are stretched thin, and Bushcare groups are feeling the pinch*

Landcare groups in comparison run independently of the Bushcare groups. Although fewer Landcare groups were surveyed (reflecting the dominance of Bushcare in the Greater Sydney Region), these groups were larger and more independent of council interests. They had strong relationships with private land owners (many members themselves being land owners in the local region) and many had cross-LLS boundary connections with both other groups and other landowners.

Recent council amalgamations have further strained the council-Bushcare community relationship. The loss of notable and well-respected Bushcare officers with strong networks has had a substantial flow on effect to the volunteer base. Volunteer participation at events, and event turnouts in the Inner West has fallen substantially (anecdotally), as participants now only attend a few outings a year. Newly formed councils and their professional Bushcare staff now have an increased workload. For staff made redundant, networks and local knowledge built up over 20 years have been irreversibly lost. Younger replacements in a professional role are few and far between, with many positions not replenished once professional staff retire. Inner West council cited the well-respected Doug Anderson, whose role after retirement was filled by three new employees, all of whom lacked the connections and experience of Doug. Several councillors and notable members within the network mentioned that: (a) a forum providing frank answers on how to navigate forced amalgamations, (b) the generation of state government support and (c) wider education of the implications to the *Crown Lands Management Act* would be useful. Increased funding was also cited as a desired measure of assistance, as many who have experienced amalgamations are now operating across a larger area without a necessary increase in funding.

Such staffing and funding cuts have been felt with NPWS-run Bushcare groups too. Sutherland Shire participants (Michael Harrington) have commented that a decade ago, full time professional rangers were on hand to assist and supervise bush regeneration. Now, Bushcarers regularly turn up to outings with little to no support, a lack of tools, and only casual or part-time staff, new to the area who are yet to fully understand and integrate into the local Bushcare culture and community. Many attribute blame directly to the NSW state government, funding and staffing cuts.

Several groups are enthusiastic about conservation and documentation in their local Bushcare or Landcare site. Groups such as Impeesa Reserve are also keen to investigate and record local species occurring the region. However, volunteers lack the required botanical knowledge and council resources and staffing are unable to provide such a service. Impeesa has turned to the local Scout Group in the absence of council resources to create a species handbook for the area.

Movements such as Streamwatch and Landcare in Schools are of concern to groups (both volunteer and council) across Sydney, with many engaging in Streamwatch monitoring particularly concerned as to the future certainty and funding of the program.

Business and individuals that are dependent on Bushcare/Landcare operate on a ‘shoestring’ budget. Organisations such as Clean4shore are reliant on a team of behind-the-scenes volunteers to allow Jono to continue his youth engagement and coastal care work.

* + 1. *Youth engagement is a substantial challenge…*

Many Bushcare groups and council coordinators commented on the challenges of attracting the under-35 demographic. Several survey participants believed Landcare and Bushcare was not an attractive or engaging volunteering pursuit for ‘millennials’ and attributed this as reasoning behind their groups struggle to attract and retain a younger workforce. Many volunteers left to raise families and start careers; weekends have now become more precious and with limited family time, volunteering in Bushcare and Landcare now comes second. High Sydney mortgages and a more uncertain economy mean that overwork, limited free time and competing priorities pushes many younger and middle-aged volunteers away from engaging in Bushcare, Landcare or any broader volunteer work. Councils such as Randwick have a high supply, albeit a high turnover of young volunteers from Universities and TAFEs.

Inner West council is addressing this challenge by supporting Wild Wild Inner West in partnership with the National Parks Association, and lead by Adam Ward. The intention is to connect a younger demographic (many of whom are environmentally or climate-change aware) to their local ‘backyard environment’, with the flow on intention of joining an active environmental or Bushcare group.

Fairfield Council Bushcare also discussed the local demographic and changing population base as a key factor limiting engagement; this was mirrored across growth suburbs such as Liverpool, and Penrith. Fairfield residents typically have a sizeable mortgage, children and are more likely to identify as being of migrant background, with a lower socio-economic status backgrounds, with a diverse range of ethnicities represented across the LGA. For these groups, Bushcare and Landcare takes the form of singular planting days as part of larger council-community engagement with turnouts of up to 150 people, generally under the age of 40, such as with Ryde City Council and the Chinese community group. Notably, Fairfield Council – a highly diverse LGA - demonstrated limited interest or enthusiasm in sustaining a permanent Bushcare team, choosing to focus instead on engaging a multicultural local population.

Schools engagement is something many councils and Bushcarers are enthusiastic to pursue, but lack the resources, skills and knowledge to do so. Sue Martin of Riverview Sustainability, noted for helping bring St Ignatius into Bushcare and Landcare, mentioned that schools are already restricted by a tight curriculum and stretched teaching resources. Other districts such as Willoughby have responded to this challenge by producing books to be shared engaging local children in Bushcare. However, by and large resources are lacking to properly engage this younger demographic.

* + 1. *… As is volunteer willingness to take on and train younger or less-experienced volunteers.*

Inner West Council noted that the current Bushcare group meets 2-3 times per week. However, eager nearby University students together with younger families were particularly turned off by group dynamics that did not wish to invest in the next generation; certain members actively tried to dissuade younger participants from returning, in at times an almost overt way. Inner West Council addressed this challenge by forming groups and facilitating community organisations from the ground up, to give the audience base the most inclusive (age) start possible. Council Bushcarers also commented that not all groups are warm and welcoming to newcomers. The council representative predicts that these older, less welcoming groups will “cease to exist in 10-15 years”.

Older participants demonstrated resistance to change, reluctant to take on younger members and new methodologies. This feedback was notable in the response of some survey participants, and the comments made by council Bushcare staff. Such a culture is off putting to incoming, enthusiastic volunteers; such as the Cooks River Bushcare Group (see 3.2.9, below).

* + 1. *For many volunteers, particularly from older or ethnic communities, Bushcare and Landcare is a social outing*

For many volunteers, the social aspect of Bushcare and Landcare comes before the physical work. This appeared to be most notable in dense, multicultural areas. Cultural groups occasionally engage with Bushcare, with these events forming part of their larger ocial calendar.

Inner city groups combine social outings with Bushcare, if somewhat unintentionally. Inner West council remarked that these Bushcare groups meet several times a week, focusing on weeding with limited productive work. However, these groups provide a strong social and mental health benefits for participants, many of whom are at risk of social isolation.

Social outings are also reflected in areas with a high ethnicity. Groups in leafy Ryde are flourishing, retaining a high proportion of active members who are either retired, or part of an ethnic or religious social group. East Asian social groups are particularly active, and although there are some younger members, the average age is about 60. Chinese cultural groups, Mandarin and Cantonese speaking groups actively participate in Bushcare, tree planting, and litter collection weekends across the many reserves throughout Eastwood and Denistone. Translators and volunteers are also on hand to help with these weekends; the Suchi Foundation was cited as a notable, active and engaging group who are active tree planters and at council-run Bushcare events.

* + 1. *An ageing workforce is carrying significant challenges to Bushcarers*

Almost all Bushcare coordinators at local council commented on the challenge of working with and accommodating the needs of an ageing volunteer base. Physical abilities declined with age, and many of the older generation - Bushcaring since the peak of the 1970s, through to the 1990s - now unable to tackle challenges such as steeper terrain, woody weeding and heavy clearing work. There are insufficient numbers of younger people refilling the ranks, further adding to the already overburdened volunteer workforce at many sites.

Volunteer group members, particularly for the larger groups are struggling to accommodate their much-appreciated, but less able volunteering colleagues. Indeed, it was commented from a group in western Sydney and again in the Hills District that the investment, supervision and assistance required to enable older participants to contribute to Bushcare was viewed as more work than the volunteers returned to the group. Dundurra Falls Bushcare noted that due to accessibility limitations and a frail volunteer workforce, many Bush regeneration sites had wound down, and baseline volunteer numbers were declining. However, in a more positive contrast, other groups were able to divide tasks based on ability and age, with older participants cooking, planting or restricting themselves to lighter duties.

* + 1. *Adoption of new techniques*

The survey also highlighted, somewhat surprisingly, the disparity between trust in science and academics, and what is perceived as ‘best practice’. Many older Bushcarers retained their ‘tried and true’ methods of conservation, weed management and species selection, with many reluctant to consider engaging with or adopting new techniques.

Academics from the University of Sydney did also identify that communication to the non-scientific audience and general pubic - in an accessible and engaging manner - was a challenge faced throughout the ‘life sciences’ academic community. There was unanimous support from academics and Bushcarers alike for a conversational forum and best practice workshops.

The Australian Association of Bush Regenerators also expressed frustration at the challenges faced by professional Bush regenerators. Paid contractors (usually) employ best practice when conducting contract-based work for local councils. However, volunteer groups – whilst well intentioned, either undo the work of the contractor or complicate the measured, thought-out and productive efforts of regenerators. Representatives from AABR also identified that certification of professional Bush regenerators was haphazard and inconsistent, and the organisation is looking at a universal, standardised certification system in 2019.

Bush regeneration in more urban and inner-city areas was also likened to ‘gardening’ rather than active Bushcaring, with participants over-working natural reserves and spaces. Meanwhile, other volunteer participants are unwilling to follow the advice of council Bushcare officers, with these groups likened to a ‘monoculture gardening group’ rather than an active, conservation based Bushcare group. Such participants are unwilling to follow the advice and lead of council officers, often to the frustration of professional supervisors involved.

Matthew Keighery and officers at the Royal Botanic Gardens and Centennial Parklands commented that practices such as pest control, fire ecology and fire management, and managing the impact of drought on Bushland communities has not been given enough consideration in Sydney.

* + 1. *Many do not know the role of GSLN and are sceptical about the purpose and utility of a membership-funded based organisation*

All volunteer groups cited the lack of coordination and clear hierarchy in Landcare and Bushcare was confusing. However, many did not wish to be concerned or involved in what was perceived as politics outside of their local area. For many groups, participants wished to be left along ‘to do their own thing’ and did not show enthusiasm or utility in connecting with others.

Most councils were interested in connecting with other groups, learning from other Bushcare officers and were always looking for what funding opportunities GSLN or similar umbrella organisations could provide. Councils seemed excited at the prospect of join collaborative events, but cited a lack of time, funding and the perception of GSLN as constraints on taking a partnership event further. Some councils – notably Fairfield and Broken Bay – we outright disinterested in engaging with other networks and neighbouring groups, including GSLN. Notably, these councils also had limited engagement and involvement with Bushcare, with Bushcare officers appeared disinterested in community volunteering.

People from across councils and Bushcare groups commented on the confusion at the role, and differences between ‘Bushcare’ and ‘Landcare’. Concern was raised that the inclusion of ‘Landcare’ in the GSLN organisation name may distract from the purpose and direction of GSLN to represent *both* Landcare and Bushcare. The difference between GSLN, NCC, NPA and HEN was also raised by members in Western Sydney (Anthony Lewis of Blacktown Environment Group and Cumberland Land Conservancy).

Conversely, members who renewed and were active in the network supported the direction, role and aims of the group. They perceived the benefit of being a member to be worth the annual financial cost, enjoying the newsletter (with more frequent and more detailed updates) and keen to take up offers to share and cross-promote events via newsletter, social media and website. It allowed groups a sense of connectivity and contact with the bigger Greater Sydney Bushcare and Landcare community, and a central point of information on grants, events and news within the Landcare networks. However, it should be noted relatively few groups have actively emailed GSLN events to be advertised following these conversations.

* 1. Other points to note from Bushcarers and Landcarers
* Transport is a challenge due to the broad and vast nature of the Sydney landscape; not all Bushcare and Landcare sites are well serviced by public transport. Anthony Lewis of Blacktown Environment Group stated that this was a real challenge to volunteer commitment long term; something solved in part by having a rotation range of locations in which to conduct meetings.
* Some groups (3-4) ‘prefer to turn up and do the work’, with several groups reluctant to engage in politics, lobbying or collective representation. A notable example is the Blacktown Environment Group, who are ‘paddling along’ rather than advocating for change.
* In contrast, many groups (approximately 15) believe the current system of Bushland management and protection is insufficient and that a more collective, politicised and public approach to volunteer engagement and conservation is desperately needed. Several people commented that GSLN would be perfectly positioned to be the collective voice of Bushcare and Landcare and wanted to see more a more uniform approach with more leadership.
* Finances and grants are often difficult to obtain, and restrict a group’s ability to engage with contractors, hire equipment and finish projects.
* Funding, council amalgamations and high rates of staff turnover make keeping and leaning on networks difficult.
1. **Recommendations**
	1. For future surveys:
* Inclusion of a click-based survey to ascertain key demographic questions, key issues and relate these to geographic location to a follow-up survey.
* Inclusion of socio-economic and demographic data on a spatial scale including median age, income and degree of development, which can then be linked to group size, dynamics and areas of activities.
* With the provision of information available, determine what ‘hotspots’ in Sydney are forming groups and which areas are losing groups at an overall faster rate. These areas can then become key focal points for future activities and engagement.
	1. Workshops, training and community-led discussion to (a). improve networks and (b). break down the distrust of volunteers with academics and practitioners of best-practice Bushcare and Landcare.
	2. *Based on member feedback:* GSLN to take on a more political and engaging role to represent Bushcare and Landcare as an umbrella organisation.
	3. *Based on member feedback:* reduction or removal at the individual and volunteer group level of membership fees; many commented off-handed that the cost of joining was not reflected in the benefits obtained.
	4. Volunteering is dependent on a welcoming, warm and engaging culture which is inclusive. Groups that actively thrive are incredibly diverse in terms of age, background and experience. Groups that are winding down tend to have a restricted age range, and work across one or two sites.
1. **Further leads and acknowledgements**

This survey gratefully acknowledges the invaluable feedback of individuals, groups, councils, businesses and NGOs who took the time to participate. Many spoke “off the record”, and this trust and desire to see real change is greatly appreciated.

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This survey acknowledges the traditional owners of the land in the Greater Sydney region on which we, as volunteers, businesses, NGOs and councils conduct our environmental volunteering work.

1. **List of participating organisations and individuals**

Bolded groups indicate those participants who responded and actively sought out to engage with the survey. Those unbolded indicate participants who were directly contacted but failed to respond to both phone and email requests. Twenty four participants wished to remain anonymous in the survey. Their affiliation has been omitted from the list below.

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| Councils | *Government, NGOs and businesses* | Bushcare, Landcare, individuals and community volunteering groups  |
| **Bayside Council**Blacktown Council**Burwood City Council**Canterbury/Bankstown Council**Campbelltown Council****Cumberland Council****Central Coast Council****Fairfield City Council****Georges River Council****Hunters Hill Council**Hawkesbury City council**Hawkesbury River Council**  **Council****Hornsby Council****Hunters Hill Council****Ku-rin-gai Council****Inner West Council** **Liverpool City Council** **Lane Cove Council**Mosman CouncilNorthern Beaches Council **North Sydney Council****Parramatta City Council\*****Penrith City Council** **Ryde City Council****Sutherland Shire Council** **Strathfield City Council\***Sydney City Council**Woollahra City Council** **Wollondilly Council**  | **Amara Glynn, Botanic Gardens and Centennial Parklands**Apunga Ecological Management**Australian Association of Bush** **Regenerators**Australian Plants SocietyBonne Doo Golf ClubBundeena Coast Eco LodgeBush IT**Blue Mountains NPWS****Conservation Volunteers** **Australia****Cumberland NPWS****Cecil Ellis & Streamwatch****Centennial Park and Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust**Earthcare Centre, WSU**Earth Ministry****Eloise Chandle & Ocean and**  **Coast Care Initative**Green Living CentreJordan Scott, Mt Annan Botanic Gardens Good People Bush Regenerators**Kellie Leigh & Science for Wildlife**Kreative Koalas**Kylie Piper and the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife****Little Gecko Media & Virginia** **Bear****Lilly Pily Indigenous Landscapes &** **Richard Blacklock****Linda Roberts & Ocean and Coast** **Care Initative****Greens Party (NSW)****Macquarie University****NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH)**Picture You in Ag**Royal Botanic Gardens**Sydney Harbour NPWSSydney Metro Wildlife Rescue**Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation****Taronga Zoo****The Big Lift UTS**University of New South Wales**University of Sydney**We Are ExplorersWestern Sydney University**Windsor Bait and Tackle**Wooglemai EEC | **Alexander Mackenzie****Mulgoa Valley Landcare** **Impeesa Reserve Bushcare****St Ignatius Colleage & Riverview** **Sustainability****Antony Lewis** **Blacktown Environment Group****Blue Mountains Bushcare** **Network\*****Cumberland Land Conservancy****Clean4shore****Deb Atkins****Dundundra Falls Reserve Group and** **Bushcare Group****Elliot Connor & Sydney** **Naturalists**Enmoore Lin**Friends of Lane Cove National Park****Friends of Orphan Creek, Forest** **Lodge**Friends of Royal National Park**Glenn Vickery****Glideways****Helen @Bushcare Lane Cove****Intrepid Landcare****Lane Cove National Park** **Bushcare****Lyndal Breen** **Melanie Ward****Michael Harrington****Justin Bone****La Perous Coastcare & Lynda** **Newnam****Lachlan Garland****Malcolm Fisher****Magnolia Song & The Sydney** **University Landcare Society****Margaret Lai** **Martin Gauci****Michael Harrington****Michael Streatfield****Mobile Landcare****Murray Gibbs****Peter Ridgeway****Ryde Bushcare & Sandra****Scott Herring****St Anthonys/Keirans Creek****Still Creek Landcare & Nick Chartorisky****Sutherland Shire Bushcare****Sutherland Shire Cleanup Crew****Sandra Newham****Sharon Kinnison****Shelagh Kemm****Sue-Ellen Smith****Sydney Bass Fishing Club** **The Gully Bushcare, Katoomba** **Tullibah Landcare & Ruth** **University of Sydney Landcare Society****Western Sydney Intrepid Landcare****Willoughby Bushcare****Xuela Sledge** **Yellowmundee Bushcare** |