



**Submission to the  
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations'**

**Employment Services Review**

**May 2008**

### **Submission to the Employment Services Review, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations - May 2008**

Greening Australia has a strong commitment to a continued involvement as a service provider in the Green Corps program, and we are appreciative of this opportunity to engage in the consultation process and review of the current program.

Greening Australia has delivered Green Corps for the previous 6 years, and was part of the original consortium that assisted the government develop the program over a decade ago.

Greening Australia is currently contracted to deliver Green Corps 2006-09 for two regions - NSW/ACT and SA/WA.

At a time of full employment, but with the youth unemployment rate still well above the national average, Green Corps represents a unique and effective model for "youth transition" in the mix of employment services programs. Green Corps is ideally placed to assist in increasing workforce participation amongst youth, a key objective in the current period of high youth employment.

The young people targeted for Green Corps are typically in a stage of transition from education to work and may have little or no experience or formal training – the chance of moving directly into meaningful employment from this situation is low.

Greening Australia believes that Green Corps, as a universal access program, significantly promotes opportunities for youth by providing an experience unique to any other of the Employment Services programs through an integration of:

- Employment and training outcomes,
- Environmental outcomes, and
- Community benefit.

Green Corps is proven to effectively capture youth before they enter the welfare system and through a history of strong employment and training outcomes has significant in-direct value to the Australian community.

#### **Positive perception of Green Corps as a universal access program**

That participation in the Green Corps program is *not* based on mandatory requirements for welfare recipients is considered by Greening Australia to be one of the tenets of its continued success.

- As a universal access program Green Corps attracts a diversity of applicants leading to improved team dynamics, stronger leadership, and pride in the activity.
- Participants do not associate this program with welfare because not everyone on their team comes from a welfare dependent situation.
- Partner agencies, and the wider public, consider Green Corps to be an environmental training program, rather than associate it with welfare programs.

#### **Positive outcomes of Green Corps:**

1. Green Corps attracts young people who want to assist in achieving great environmental outcomes while obtaining training in best environmental practice.
2. Green Corps is able to attract support from a diverse group of partners within the community, which leads to a sense of ongoing ownership of projects leading to lasting environmental change.
3. Green Corps can contribute to the revitalisation of regional Australia through empowering youth and communities in regional and remote locations – leading to a sense of place and sense of community
4. Green Corps can provide linkages and networks for youth to industry and environmental organisations – leading to increased employment opportunities and maximizing their ability to find work in an area of interest.

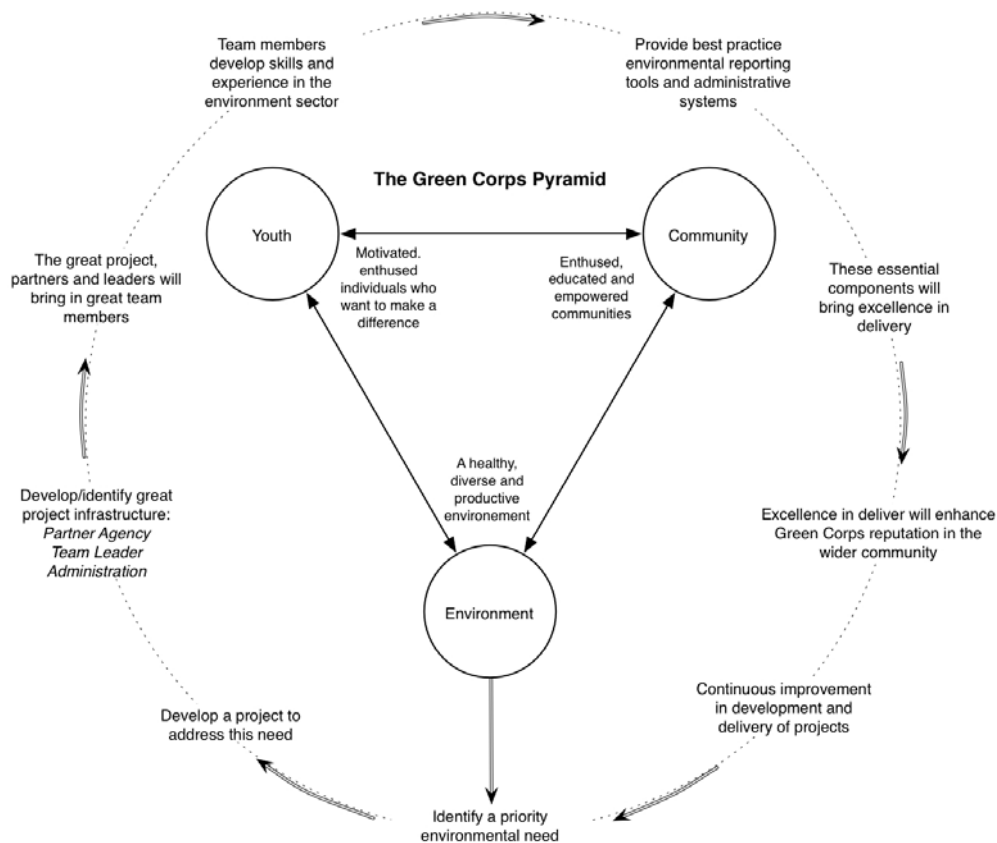
5. Green Corps empowers youth by providing management and leadership opportunities in real life work situations
6. Green Corps provides experience in working in a culturally diverse workplace
7. Green Corps can lead to positive workplace outcomes through increased confidence, skills and improved networks of local youth.
8. Green Corps can contribute to the improved productive capacity of enterprises (particularly in rural Australia) either directly through project work or indirectly through changing community awareness and increased ownership of environmental issues relating to regional Australia

### A positive Green Corps delivery model

The benefits of Green Corps outlined above come primarily from promoting and implementing the program from a positive situation. By providing projects that are developed from identified environmental needs, a Green Corps participant has an immediate sense of clarity surrounding the goals and ideals of the program.

The following diagram 'The Green Corps Pyramid' illustrates Greening Australia's delivery model for Green Corps. Using a priority environmental need to engage and motivate youth and partner agencies to work together to achieve substantial outcomes.

Surrounding the 'Green Corps Pyramid' is a cycle of continuous improvement outlining how identifying environmental priorities can lead to a program with an outstanding reputation within the community as a deliverer of lasting environmental change, a lasting impact on youth within that community and a sense of empowerment and ownership of activities undertaken within the community.



### **Prioritising outcomes for Green Corps**

Greening Australia believes the desired outcomes for Green Corps need to be more clearly identified. The Green Corps Guidelines identify the following:

The *principles* of the Green Corps Programme are:

- (a) The development of quality outcomes for young Australians, particularly in regional and remote areas, in the areas of youth development and employment opportunities for young people;
- (b) The establishment of strengthened connections with, and participation in the community; and
- (c) The achievement of high quality, genuine environmental outcomes, which aid in the conservation, protection and restoration of Australia's natural and cultural heritage.

The *objectives* of the Green Corps Programme are:

- (a) To provide young people, aged 17-20 years, with quality training and experience through structured and supervised projects that focus on areas where natural environmental conservation work and cultural heritage restoration is required;
- (b) To contribute to conservation projects and promote environmental, conservation and natural heritage outcomes and through this benefit the community and the environment; and
- (c) To contribute to Green Corps Participants':
  - personal development, including team work and leadership skills;
  - skill development and training through activities that are structured and sequential in their learning outcomes;
  - strengthened connections with the community through relationships, participation and contribution to the community; and
  - improved career and employment prospects through accredited and on-the-project training.

At present there are some perverse incentives for achieving these outcomes. The following issues are a discussion of these and have been presented by Greening Australia on several previous occasions<sup>1</sup>, to both the previous and current Government. Refer to these documents for details on previous communication with the Department and the Ministers Office.

### **Finding suitable Partner Agencies**

Greening Australia's analysis of what makes a good Partner Agency (Appendix A)<sup>1b</sup> illustrates the resources that must be delivered by a Partner Agency if they are to be successful in fulfilling the objectives of the Green Corps program. Given the level of input and resources required by a Partner Agency issues such as cost shifting, repeat Partner Agencies, and eligible Partner Agencies may create a disincentive for appropriate Partner Agencies to participate. The resource-intensive project application processes currently required, also add to this disincentive to organizations otherwise willing to engage in the Green Corps program.

The outlined Green Corps objectives are significant and positive from both youth development and a community perspective, and the fact that a Partner Agency may also benefit in a small way surely is of little consequence.

### **The perception of Cost Shifting, Duplicate Funding or Profits from Green Corps**

Nearly every environmental project in Australia has some component of government money attached to it, whether this is National, State or Local. All Partner Agencies deliver resources to a project, as the Green Corps Program contributes funding only to the administration and support of participants – not to on-ground activities. This is the basis of the partnership.

A Partner Agency must have an available budget to deliver a project, and with this budget comes a desired internal outcome that must be delivered. Projects are tied to current work programs of Partner Agencies for the following reasons:

- They are able to provide staff from current programs;
- There are allied resources for on-ground activities;
- There is already a focus of work that relates to Green Corps. This provides a great opportunity for youth development in Green Corps. Participants will interact with staff members who understand how the Green Corps project fits into a larger picture – i.e. they are not saving the world by themselves but are part of a much larger effort.
- They provide the greatest employment opportunities

### **Repeat Partner Agencies' and project capacity building**

Ideally a Partner Agency will have one or two staff members responsible for assisting with the delivery of a Green Corps project. Without a strong Partner Agency, a higher than acceptable additional burden is placed on the Service Provider (taking away from their other core responsibilities).

The requirement to continually partner with agencies that haven't previously worked with Green Corps, leads to a resource-intensive process associated with cultivating new partners. New partners may not fully understand the aims of the Green Corps program, the resources required, and the difficulties involved, in running a successful project. When there are highly competent, track-proven partners who are keen to continue to engage in the program, it seems counter productive to be constantly negotiating with new partners. Current restrictions on repeat PA's means losing capacity within organisations that have partnered (often brilliantly) with GC, and would be keen to do so again.

### **Effective linkages with Centrelink, Job Network Members' and other agencies**

#### *(i) More incentive for JN and JPET to place people to Green Corps<sup>1a p.5</sup>*

Incentive is lacking for these organisations to link with, and refer participants to, the Green Corps program.

DEEWR communication to other government agencies and service providers in relation to Green Corps could enhance outcomes for the target Green Corps client group through:

#### *(ii) Greater integration of Green Corps with other programs<sup>1a p.5</sup>*

Through greater integration Green Corps would be able to utilise the strengths of other programs - particularly job search and employment training expertise. While this is a requirement of Green Corps the program is focussed primarily on training and employment experience. Being able to access Job Network facilities and expertise for a couple of weeks towards the end of the program would be a real benefit for Participants. Participants coming into Green Corps from a welfare situation should not be classified as moving into full time work. This would be inconsistent, as a JN does not get an outcome payment for placements. Participants should retain all training credits from Centrelink (as well as any additional benefits they might have accrued), and maintain links with case managers or employment agencies.

Currently, Green Corps participants are unable to claim training credits for their participation in Green Corps, with participants actually losing credits or their eligibility for credits.

Increasing the opportunities for linkages between these employment services and training placements, would also increase the positive outcomes available from the Green Corps program.

#### *(iii) Flexibility in Green Corps for individuals with differing circumstances<sup>1a p.5</sup>*

Some flexibility in delivery of Green Corps to part-time Participants would be useful. While not necessarily workable in all situations, it may allow someone already studying to gain work experience from their participation.

If links to JN are retained after placement to Green Corps, then flexibility for Participants to undertake additional training organised through their JN – whether it is relevant to Green Corps or not – is essential.

#### *(iv) Flexibility to allow Participants to attend job trials, work experience or placements.*

Many Participants, particularly towards the end of the Green Corps program would find this a non-confronting way to determine the next steps for potential employment, a participant organising this type of arrangement should be encouraged and supported through Green Corps – as they are in other programs.

Ability for the Green Corps program to continue paying a participant allowance if this is an official placement is essential as the participant is not eligible for any other form of income support during this time.

### **Regional spread of Green Corps projects**

While Greening Australia understands the rationale for developing projects across a wide range of ESA's, there are several factors that limit this in reality. Particularly delivery into small regional areas:

- Limited potential Partner Agencies that fit the current criteria;
- Limited potential recruits for Team Leader positions, and
- Limited potential recruits as GC Participants.

While Greening Australia acknowledges that there is a place for Green Corps in these areas - in fact in most cases outcomes could be greater than in larger centres – there is limited flexibility in both the budget and the contract to enable Green Corps projects in small regional areas. Ideas such as smaller teams and longer or shorter project durations (depending on circumstances) all have merit to consider – however this is not possible under the current arrangements.

### **Recruitment and retention of skilled Team Leaders**

A broad set of skills is required in a good Team Leader, including youth development, conservation and land management experience, project management, conflict resolution, and administration and finance skills. The role of Team Leader is a very demanding role, and recruiting for suitably qualified Team Leaders can be difficult.

The possibility of refining/reducing the resource burden of the project application process, referred to earlier, could free up project managers' time (enabling increased levels of support to Team Leaders') and program budgets funds, that can be allocated towards Team Leader wages, to attract and retain quality Team Leaders'.

Another aspect of the recruitment issue is the inherent short-term nature of the employment contracts we can offer Team Leaders on our projects. Green Corps project approval processes, running every three months, do not allow for long term planning, and 6-month contracts are the only option for employing staff. This can compound difficulties in attracting and retaining staff over the course of our project rounds.

### **Expand the eligible Age range for participants' from 17-20 to 16/17-25 years of age**

While recognising the significance of the current age range Greening Australia is continuously inundated with requests from people *outside* these age ranges (and in fact often people *much further outside* the range). This is really due to the strong and positive perception of Green Corps in the community and the knowledge that being a Green Corps Participant is actually a positive step forward.

Expanding the age range would address recruitment issues experienced for projects in regional and particularly, remote areas, possibly allowing for a greater spread of projects into these areas than is currently possible.

Expanding the age range may also enhance the positive outcomes outlined previously regarding 'universal access'.

### **National IT Systems**

Under the current contract, there has been substantial duplication of resources across Green Corps Service Providers in developing database systems for program management. The costs for this work have come from the administration funds of each Service Provider. As a consequence, some of the systems have taken longer to develop and have been done on perhaps a smaller budget than desirable.

Streamlining administrative processes is an important step forward (for both the Department and Service Providers) if Green Corps is to be expanded beyond the current delivery level or an increased number of providers.

Greening Australia would be more than happy to discuss and present the system we have established which includes project details, online applicant and participant management, timesheet and payroll, and training information functionalities.

### **National Meeting of Service Providers**

Greening Australia has a strong commitment to a continued involvement as a service provider in the Green Corps program, and we are appreciative of this opportunity to engage in the consultation process and revision of the current program.

Greening Australia suggested a forum for Green Corps Service Providers to engage with the Department, in a consultation process across both current contract and future program development.

### **References**

Greening Australia's Submission is based on 6 years experience delivering Green Corps, previous communication with the Department and with the Minister's Office. Details of these meetings and a paper presented to the previous Government's review process are as follows:

<sup>1a</sup> Greening Australia Submission on the Future Directions of Employment Services, May 2007

<sup>1b</sup> Letter to Julie Rheese, Acting Assistant Secretary, Work Experience Branch, Job Search Support Group, DEEWR dated 30/1/08

<sup>2</sup> Meeting with Yvette Nash, Chief of Staff to Minister for Employment Participation, 23/4/08,

## Appendix A

### What makes a good Partner Agency?

An analysis of what makes a good Partner Agency further illustrates the shortcomings of excluding state agencies from eligibility. From its long and successful history of involvement with the Green Corps programme, Greening Australia is in a strong position to identify the attributes of a successful partner agency as follows:

- Defined budget and resources to deliver the on-ground activities outlined in a project proposal – not insubstantial for a 16-20 week program;
- Ability to develop a diverse range of activities for a project;
- A good understanding of environmental concerns, locally and regionally, as well as applicable legislation for conducting on-ground works;
- Good links and relationships within the local area;
- Ability to identify good youth development opportunities, as well as a culture of promoting personal development;
- A strong work ethic to pass onto Green Corps participants – giving 'real world' experience;
- Additional resources over and above those provided for project activities, to assist with youth development, provide for community venture activities;
- Capacity to incorporate/resource relevant in-house expertise into training curriculum;
- Capacity to engage in project development that leads to long-term community benefits; and
- Ability to monitor and look after on-ground sites post Green Corps activities, including good resources for data collection and recording of outcomes into the long-term.

*Ideally a Partner Agency will have one or two staff members responsible for assisting with the delivery of a Green Corps project*

While the above list is by no means definitive, Greening Australia believes that it includes the items that will have most bearing on the outcome of projects.

Analysis of the list makes it clear that there is a limited range of Partner Agencies that would be able to meet the criteria, with the most likely being:

- State Agencies
- Local Government
- Large Corporations – solely private and government contractors
- Large non-government organisations (there would be only a small handful of these with Greening Australia being the largest and most capable of delivering projects)