

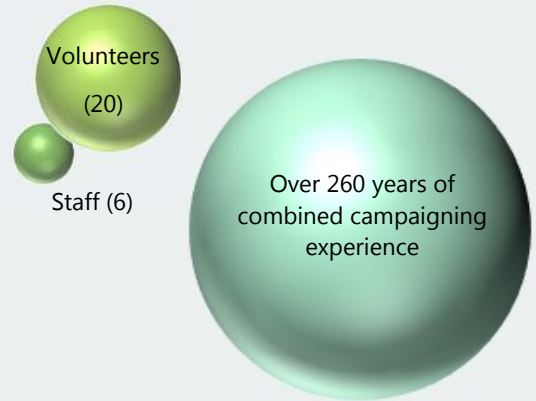
ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGNERS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES



This report outlines the findings from interviews undertaken with 26 environmental campaigners across Australia. The objective of this project was to identify patterns regarding campaigners' views on the challenges and opportunities they experience, and their perceptions of the success and failure of environmental advocacy.

Method

Twenty-six individuals involved in selected environmental groups participated in anonymous semi-structured interviews lasting for one hour. The interviews covered five key areas: strategies and tactics, resources, networks and volunteers, and personal experiences as environmentalists. Interviewees had experience right across Australia: from the Northern Territory and urban Brisbane to the south-western forests of Western Australia. Of the 20 volunteers, 11 were half- to full-time campaigners, all working for no remuneration. Of the 6 staff, 4 were either part-time or on short-term contracts.

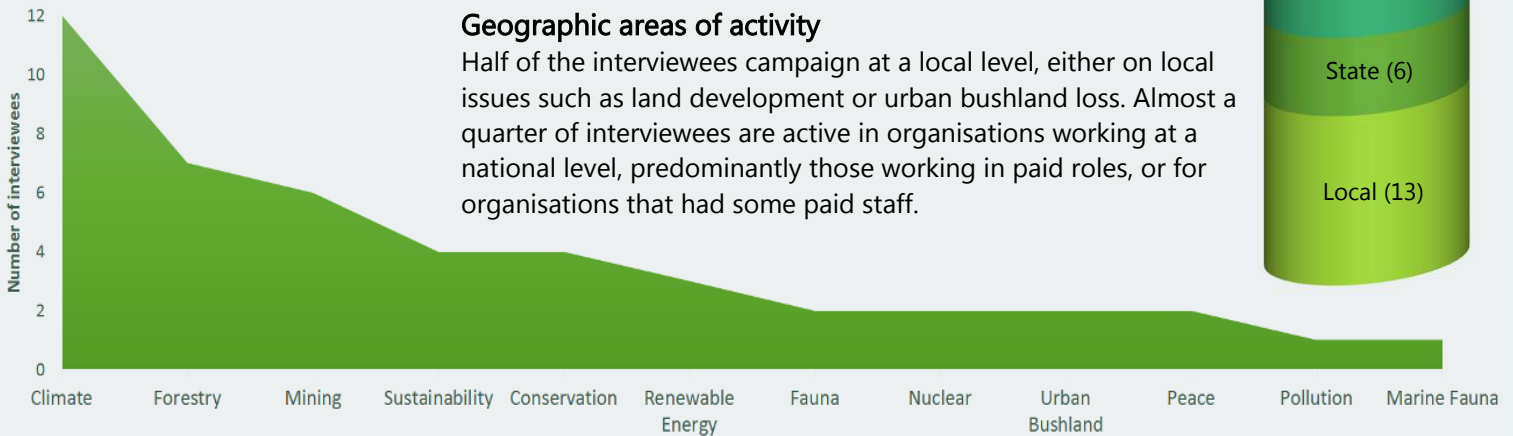


Number of campaigners active on environmental issues

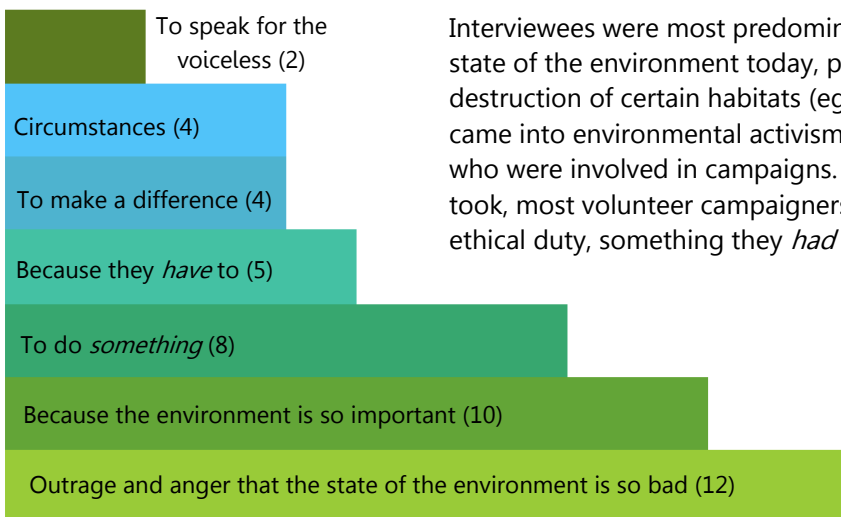
Interviewees often worked across multiple issues, particularly those working in climate change, mining and renewable energy. Together they campaigned on 12 different environmental issues, with 19 interviewees working across more than one. Two campaigners mentioned the connection between peace and environmental issues, and campaigned on both.

Geographic areas of activity

Half of the interviewees campaign at a local level, either on local issues such as land development or urban bushland loss. Almost a quarter of interviewees are active in organisations working at a national level, predominantly those working in paid roles, or for organisations that had some paid staff.



What drives people to become environmental campaigners?



Interviewees were most predominantly driven by negative emotions associated with the state of the environment today, particularly with regard to the day-to-day decline and destruction of certain habitats (eg forests) or species (eg whales). Some interviewees came into environmental activism by circumstance, such as through family or friends who were involved in campaigns. However, whatever path their journey to campaigning took, most volunteer campaigners explained their reasons for ongoing activism as an ethical duty, something they *had* to do or were *compelled* to do.

Many campaigners experienced and lived with a high level of emotional stress on a daily basis. As such, a number mentioned that they had to take care to manage their time and energy to avoid burnout. Many volunteers depended strongly on the support of family, friends and/or partners to enable them to dedicate themselves to their groups and campaigns.



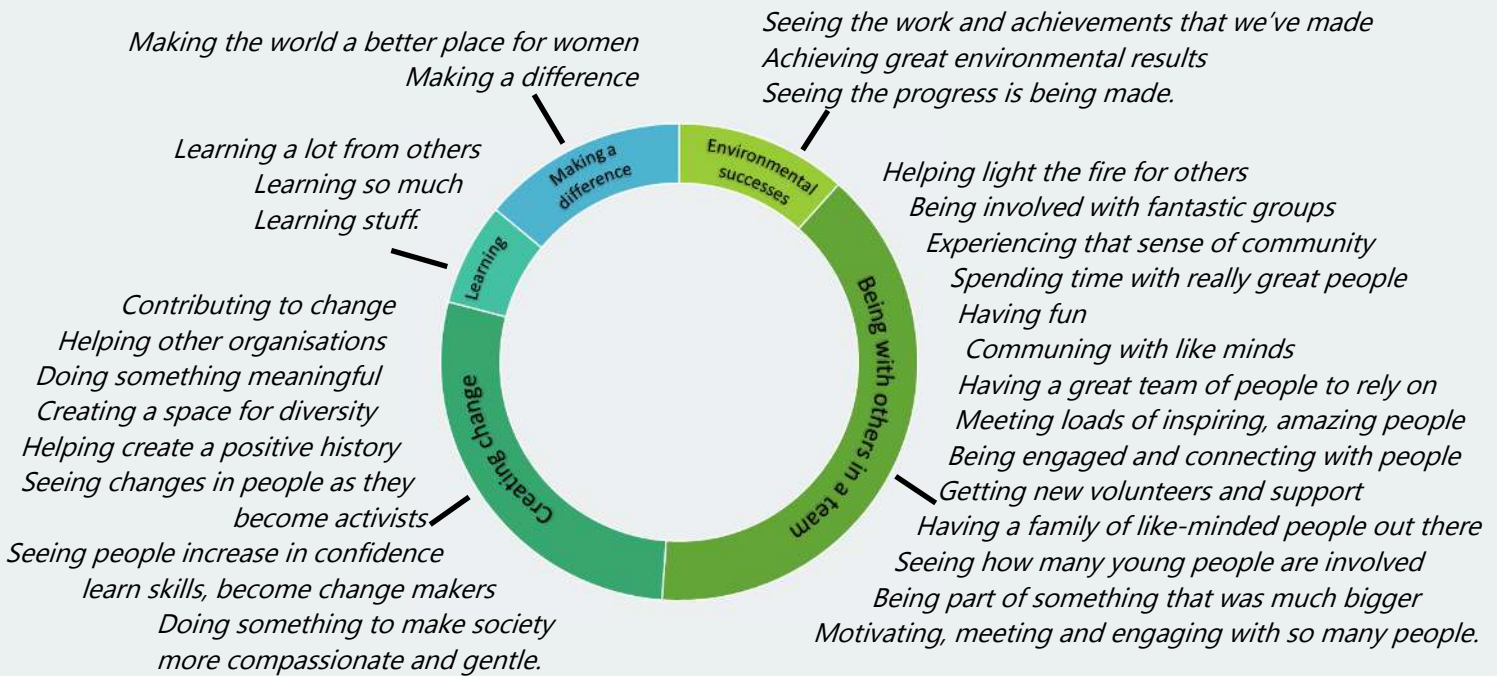
THE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES OF CAMPAIGNING



Interviewees were asked to identify the best and most difficult aspects of environmental campaigning. Achievements related to making a difference and meeting with likeminded people, while the challenges related to dealing with the emotions and stresses of seeing the environment gradually decline.

The rewards of environmental campaigning

The following sections provide an overview of the many comments campaigners made about their experiences of the rewards and challenges of being an environmental campaigner. The rewards fell into five general categories, with the most common positive experiences related to campaigners' relationships with others in their teams, as well as their efforts in creating change.



The challenges of environmental campaigning

Most challenges identified by campaigners were related to managing the stress of seeing environmental problems worsen, and coping with difficult emotional responses. Campaigning requires determination and resilience. All interviewees had established ways to manage the challenges and continue their work, often in the face of significant hostility and failure.

Having losses and feeling demoralised
Working with difficult people
Realising your limits
Warding off burn out
The relentless work of it
There is so much to do
Seeing the violence
Not having energy

How much of my time it consumes
Seeing the latest scientific updates
Feeling overwhelmed and depressed

Having really negative moments of depression and anger
Maintaining motivation and belief that there is some hope
Keeping momentum without a clear sense of purpose

Knowing that the political will is not there, which is frustrating and disheartening
Having the dark clouds follow you about because the world of campaign work is high energy and intense

Managing the grief and not being too cynical
How all-encompassing it becomes in my life
Knowing that it's not sustainable 100% of the time
To see and talk to the dismal politicians 'leading' us


Not wanting to do things but feeling guilty if you don't

Seeing the greed of the world



ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGNERS AND RESOURCES



 Being a campaigner requires individual and group resources. The following two pages outline what resources campaigners mentioned in their interviews as well as how important these resources were to their activities.

Resources

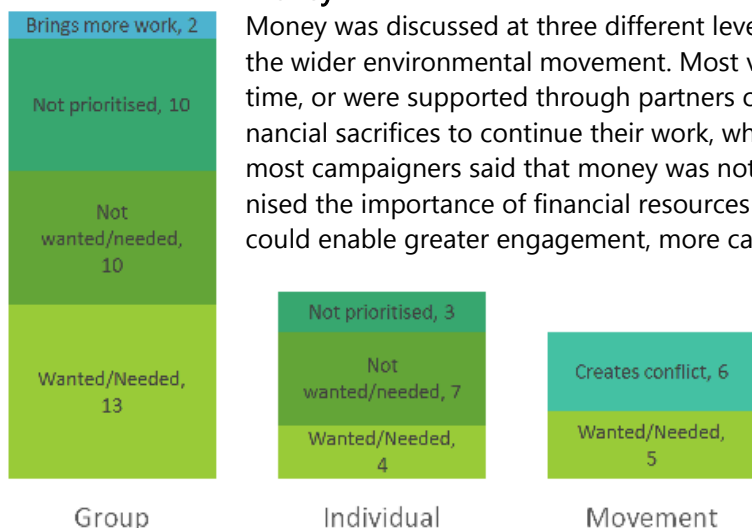
In every interview, campaigners mentioned resources that they either needed or wanted. Contrary to much theory on advocacy, material resources like money, members and volunteers were not always sought after by campaigners. Acquiring more funding or volunteers can take time and energy away from other crucial activities. While many campaigners said they did not necessarily need more money or volunteers, every campaigners said they needed more time.

The presence of a supportive, dedicated and steadfast core team appeared to be crucial for group longevity. This was particularly so for those groups that were entirely volunteer run. A group team able to share tasks and roles was described by volunteer campaigners as critical to their work in each of their environmental groups. The following sections discuss each of the resources highlighted most often by campaigners.

Money

Money was discussed at three different levels: individual and group needs and the influence of money on the wider environmental movement. Most volunteer campaigners that were interviewed either worked part time, or were supported through partners or previous earnings. These campaigners made considerable financial sacrifices to continue their work, which for some this was a great source of stress. At the group level, most campaigners said that money was not needed or prioritised. However, almost all campaigners recognised the importance of financial resources in building the power of the group. Great financial resources could enable greater engagement, more campaigns, and most particularly, the employment of staff.

At the movement level, the competition between groups over scarce pools of money was described as a cause of conflict. The value of funding for employing staff to build connections between groups, strengthen alliances, and improve communications, was noted frequently as something of great importance. However, the lack of funding availability to achieve this was often highlighted.



The challenges and opportunities of volunteers

Of the 26 interviewees, 12 campaigners would like more volunteers, and only two said their group did not require any more. One of these was a campaigner with a group which employed staff, and the other was a volunteer leader of a group that organises hundreds of volunteers at a time for large scale regular events. Many older interviewees lamented the lack of younger people in their volunteer teams.

It was widely recognised that volunteers are both a gift and a challenge. Effective volunteer management required thought and planning, and for some sectors such as renewable energy groups, volunteers with skills and expertise were both the most valued and the hardest to find.

The changing dependency on membership

Membership has historically been an important resource for environmental groups. However, this seems to have changed: only six campaigners mentioned membership. Of these, two interviewees stated that members are important for showing strength and support, and two stated that members could also negatively influence the priorities and campaigns of the organisations. Membership for income was generally seen as declining in importance as well.



The Australian Environmental Movement: An investigation into its characteristics and activities

TIME, TEAMS AND TACTICS: THE INFLUENCE OF RESOURCES



Time was highlighted by all volunteer campaigners as being the resource of most value and importance to their groups.



A reliable and steadfast team was the key characteristic of a successful advocacy group.



Problems associated with lack of time

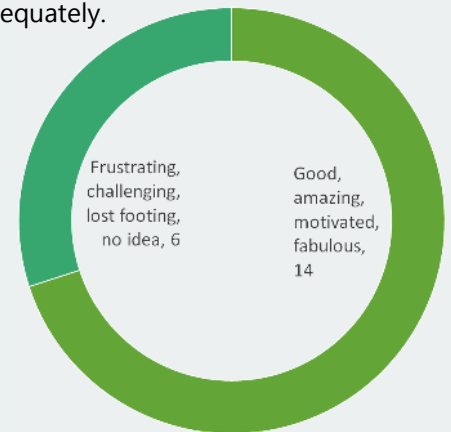
Time: The most important resource of all

All campaigners said they did not have enough time to achieve all their environmental goals. Many interviewees stated that they have had to learn to manage their time and not overcommit in order to avoid burnout. A number of campaigners also noted how the lack of time impacts their own personal activities, their environmental group activities, the strategies their group choose to use, and decisions around whether to actively invite new people to get involved.

Another source of worry for some campaigners was their own age: many volunteers of retirement age worried that a lack of younger volunteers would impact the ability of their group to survive and remain active. They also worried about their own capacity to continue to campaign as they age. For some staff, short-term contracts and part-time hours affected their ability to implement campaigns and support their volunteers adequately.

The challenges and rewards of teamwork

Through the course of each interview campaigners described their groups in a variety of terms. While the majority highlighted the positive culture of their teams, six interviewees mentioned times when their groups had been challenging. It was clear that working in teams can be challenging. Most interviewees discussed the demands of managing strong personalities and how they cope with unreliable team members. Many mentioned the stress of continually taking on more tasks than they wanted, in order to cover crucial roles. Groups often went through periods of conflict and then regenerated, or reduced in size over time.



Campaigners' descriptions of their groups

Choice of group strategies and tactics

The area which appeared to be most heavily influenced by resources was campaigner's choice of which strategies to use. These choices often depended almost entirely upon which resources were available to their group. For example, legal actions require significant funding; renewable energy projects require significant specialist knowledge; citizen science projects required volunteers; newsletters, websites and email databases required time, expertise and knowledge.



Type and number of strategies used by campaigners

As well as this, the choice of tactics depended on a range of factors: each campaigner's philosophy of change, the type of community they were active in, their access to media and the issue that they were working on. Some campaigners lived in hostile, conservative constituencies where the most successful tactic was legal defence; others lived in areas with substantial community support and shared goals across multiple stakeholders.

While collaboration and working with other environmental groups was acknowledged as challenging, this was also mentioned as a common activity and one of great value. More cross-collaboration with other groups was desired by most campaigners across all groups and issues.



ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

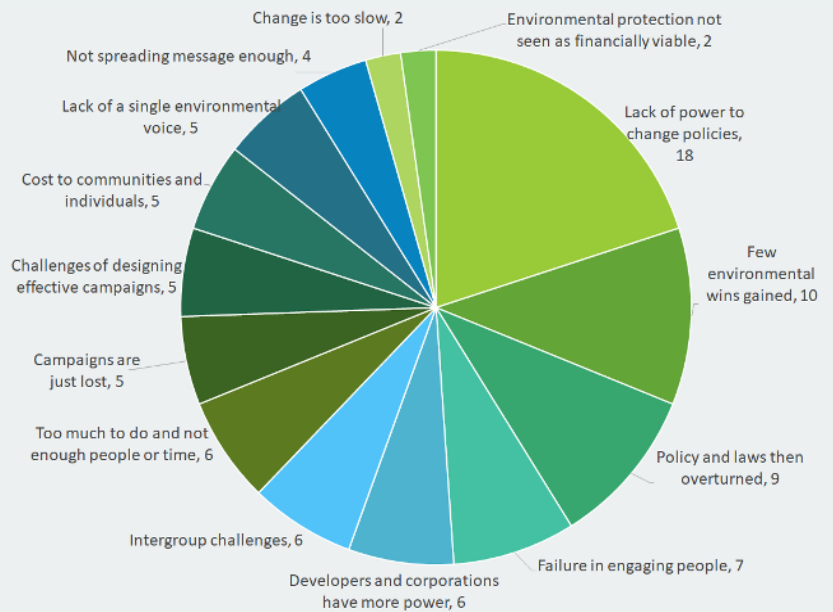


Across all 26 interviews, some form of failure was mentioned 90 times. In contrast, 165 successes were highlighted. While the outcomes of success and failure are almost impossible to measure in practice, campaigners were able to see positive outcomes from even the most divisive and stressful campaigns.

Why does environmental advocacy fail?

There were many reasons that campaigners gave to explain why some environmental campaigns have failed. However, no failure was seen as absolute. For example, a number of interviewees argued that the Lake Pedder campaign led to Franklin which then further inspired and galvanised generations of future activists. Similarly, an unsuccessful mining campaign was said to have helped create the community awareness that has led to subsequent successful resistance. Petitions with 10,000 signatures may not have altered policy outcomes, nor swayed fossil fuel companies, however numerous campaigners highlighted how they can grow supporter and volunteer resources which then builds power to fight the next campaign.

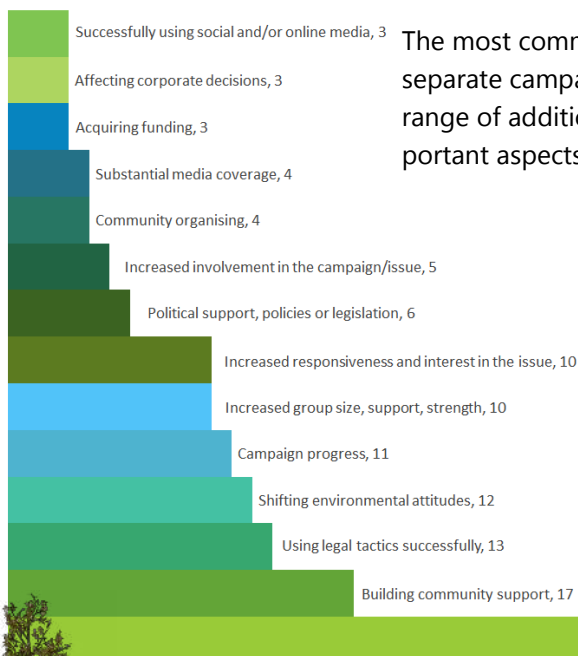
Some failures were argued to be about the environmental movement itself. These included the perpetuation of traditional gender roles, the problem of attracting younger people, challenges in reaching out to a broader range of communities, and embracing and supporting greater diversity. While many interviewees said things have improved, those campaigners who discussed these issues generally argued that there is still a long way to go in this space.



Reasons for failure identified by interviewees

Success: What does it look like and how does it occur?

Despite a predominantly negative perception of the future state of the environment, campaigners spoke far more of their successes than their failures. Groups are building community support, increasing involvement, and shifting environmental attitudes. Taken as a whole, these 26 campaigners have been highly successful in driving environmental change.



The most commonly mentioned experience of success was a winning campaign. In total, 64 separate campaign successes were mentioned by the 26 campaigners. In addition, a diverse range of additional successes were also highlighted, all of which were argued to be important aspects of demonstrating power and creating social and environmental change.

On a personal level, one of the greatest joys and achievements many campaigners mentioned was being with like-minded people, working together to save the environment. Group relationships appeared to make strong teams which endured and continued to wage strong campaigns over many decades.

These successes and failures could actually be an indication of how much power the environmental movement actually has. The challenge campaigners had was in harnessing this power, and having the time, energy, skills and supportive networks to wield it efficiently and effectively.

Type and frequency of success identified by campaigners

