



Natural  
Resources  
Commission

# Evaluation for the Environmental Trust of the *Grow Sustainable Nature Based Tourism Program*

- a. Young Adults Brand Campaign Project
- b. Commercial Tour Operator Grant Project
- c. WilderQuest Learning Project

June 2024





## Enquiries

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## Acknowledgement of Country

The Natural Resources Commission acknowledges and pays respect to traditional owners and Aboriginal peoples. The Commission recognises and acknowledges that traditional owners have a deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual, and economic connection to their lands and waters. We value and respect their knowledge in natural resource management and the contributions of many generations, including Elders, to this understanding and connection.

## List of Acronyms

CLIC	Curriculum, and Innovation Centre
CTO	Commercial Tour Operator
NBT	Nature Based Tourism
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OEH	Office of Environment and Heritage
The Commission	The Natural Resources Commission
Trust	Environmental Trust
Trust administration	Environmental Trust administration
WELE	NSW Waste and Environment Levy

Cover image: Warrumbungle National Park, October 2018. © Robert Mulally, Department of Planning and Environment – Environment and Heritage Group - NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

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# 1 Executive summary

## 1.1 Overview

The NSW Natural Resources Commission (the Commission) was engaged by Environmental Trust (Trust) administration to evaluate three projects funded under the *Grow Sustainable Nature Based Tourism Program* (the NBT Program, see [Table 1](#)). At the time of this evaluation, the fourth project *Immersive Learning* was still underway and was not evaluated by the Commission.

The objectives of the Commission's evaluation were to:

1. assess whether, and to what extent, the projects contributed to Trust funding priorities and the NBT Program objectives
2. assess whether the project design and approach were effective
3. provide recommendations and identify lessons for future Trust projects and future nature based tourism investments.

See [Attachment 1](#) for the evaluation framework.

The NBT Program was a \$4.8 million program approved by the NSW Government in February 2013 and funded from the NSW Waste and Environment Levy (WELE).<sup>1</sup> Funding was approved for National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to deliver nature based tourism projects. Trust was directed to establish the governance framework for overseeing the implementation of NBT Projects delivered by NPWS under the NBT Program.<sup>2</sup>

There was limited documentation available that outlined the NBT Program for this evaluation. Documentation available indicates there were three NBT Program objectives:<sup>3</sup>

- *growing demand*: to raise the profile of nature based experiences on offer in Parks
- *improving supply*: to develop new nature based experiences at iconic destinations
- *creating the nature tourists of tomorrow*: engaging children in nature.

In addition to these objectives, interviewees advised that Trust administration supported NPWS to also develop NBT Projects to focus on conservation and environmental education outcomes in order to align the NBT Program and NBT Projects with Trust Objects and the WELE funding requirements.<sup>4</sup>

This was also reflected in the detailed evaluation questions the Commission was asked to consider (see [Attachment 1](#)). For example 'did projects align with Trust objects, core funding policies and program funding priorities' and 'assess the extent NBT Projects achieved a measurable difference in environmental awareness and education.'

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1.....NSW Environment Protection Authority (2022) [Waste Levy](#).

2 NSW Environmental Trust (2013) *Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan, Environmental Trust Meeting, Agenda Item 4*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

3.....Please note the *Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan* provided to the Commission listed four NBT Program objectives. The 'Statement of Requirements' provided to the Commission for this evaluation included three NBT Program Objectives. We were unable to confirm which list of objectives was used for the NBT Program; however, the three listed in the 'Statement of Requirements' appear to be a revised version of the four original objectives listed in the business plan.  
NSW Environmental Trust (2021) *Statement of Requirements – NRC NBT evaluation*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

4.....interview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

Both NBT objectives and outcomes were considered in this evaluation to the extent monitoring data collected allowed.

**Table 1: Nature Based Tourism Program funded projects**

Project	Purpose	Funding
Young Adults Brand Campaign 2014 - 2018	Targeted communication and marketing campaign for young adults (aged 18-35) to connect with and inspire them to engage with nature in National Parks, nature based experiences, and foster involvement in conservation in the future	\$3,435,000
Commercial Tour Operator (CTO) Small Grant Project 2015 - 2019	Small grants to support commercial tour operators to expand the number and quality of experiences in National Parks (up to \$10,000 per grant)	\$512,537
WilderQuest Learning 2015 - 2018	Establishing an online learning platform with teaching units for schools to educate students about Parks, foster positive outdoor learning experiences and encourage conservation and biodiversity understanding	\$390,000
Immersive Learning* 2018-2020	The Immersive Learning in Western Sydney Project developed a suite of projects and inquiry based learning resources for teachers and students to encourage meaningful and authentic environmental education experiences in local natural environments and National Parks	\$462,463
		<b>Total \$4,800,000</b>

\*note the Immersive Learning Project was not evaluated by the Commission.

## 1.2 Nature Based Tourism Program findings and lessons learnt

Overall, our evaluation showed the NBT Program was overseen by Trust administration with strong governance and NPWS was a logical partner for NBT Projects. NBT Projects had an outcomes focus demonstrating alignment with key NSW Government, Trust and NPWS policies, and made unique contributions to nature based tourism in NSW. Whilst NBT Projects were well aligned with key policies and priorities, challenges raised by interviewees provide useful insights for Trust and NPWS if they considered developing future nature based tourism programs.

When Trust was directed to oversee the NBT Program, they were provided with limited information about its funding objectives or intended outcomes, and project funding guidelines and criteria were yet to be established.<sup>5</sup> This made the process of designing and developing projects challenging for NPWS, and the approval challenging for Trust as the NBT Program's key objectives and outcomes were unclear at the outset.

There was limited documentation available regarding the establishment of the NBT Program. The only evidence available for this evaluation was an early stage business plan that contained limited information about the NBT Program (see [Section 3.1](#)). There was a significant time delay between this early stage business plan and the final selection and

<sup>5</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

approval of NBT Projects. As such, the Commission had to rely on interview evidence regarding the program design and intent.

Interviewees indicated the delays in project approvals were in part due to lack of clarity around the intended objectives and outcomes for the NBT Program.<sup>6</sup> Trust in their governance role, focused on conservation and environmental education outcomes in order to align the NBT Program with Trust objects and the WELE funding requirements.<sup>7</sup> Whilst NPWS developed projects with this focus, they also focused on the growing nature based tourism experiences in National Parks which were reflected in the partially approved NBT Program objectives.

Whilst we cannot draw conclusions about which objectives and outcomes were the core priority for the NBT Program, it was evident from interviews this lack of program clarity made it difficult to reach consensus about the overall intent of the program and created tension at times. Evidence from interviews indicates that Trust made concerted efforts to ensure that the outcomes from projects aligned with Trust objects and policies, consistent with their program governance requirements. This meant nature based tourism projects designed by NPWS were required to demonstrate they contributed to an environmental education or conservation outcome. We understand from interviews many of the concepts that NPWS had for projects that aligned well with the three overarching NBT Program objectives did not as clearly align with the environmental outcomes required.

While there was a lack of overall program logic developed, there was considerable effort made for the individual projects to map out a project logic; however, these were somewhat constrained by the lack of overarching program guidance. Our evaluation showed all NBT Projects are likely to have contributed to the NBT Program objectives *'growing demand'*, *'improving supply'* and *'creating tourists of tomorrow'* and NBT Projects had an outcomes focus that included conservation and environmental education. Findings in relation to program objectives and outcomes are explored in individual NBT Project chapters in detail.

A key program design lesson from the NBT Program is the importance of establishing a program logic to provide clarity for the project design and selection process. This would assist to reduce confusion about the programs intent and avoid lengthy negotiations.

Our evaluation found in some instances identifying nature based tourism activities that led to conservation and environmental education outcomes was complex and nature based tourism activities were often quite different from traditional environmental education project activities. For example, building awareness with young adults through Brand Campaigns and providing education to participants that attended commercial tour operator experiences were quite different to delivering discrete education units to primary school students through WilderQuest. Significant effort was made by both Trust administration and NPWS to develop meaningful performance indicators to measure project contributions to environmental outcomes and their experiences are a resource for future projects.

For any future nature based tourism programs, mapping out how nature based tourism activities can contribute to environmental education outcomes in the program design phase is warranted to support project selection, development, monitoring and evaluation. Given there is a wide range of nature based tourism projects, including a definition of nature based tourism and examples of the types of suitable projects and activities in a program outline would help to clarify what projects are suitable for this outcome.

The NBT Program recommendations are presented in [Table 2](#).

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<sup>6</sup>.....nterviews: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022; NPWS, 17 August 2022.

<sup>7</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

### 1.3 Young Adults Brand Campaign findings and lessons learnt

The Young Adults Brand Campaign (Brand Campaign) was a communication and marketing campaign focused on engaging young adults in nature and the environment by raising awareness about National Parks experiences and increasing their appreciation and support for conservation in nature. Brand Campaign targeted ‘young adults’ in the mid to older range of people categorised as Gen Y (people born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s), particularly those in the 25-35 year old range.<sup>8</sup>

Our evaluation of Brand Campaign showed there was a sound rationale for the project and the original problem outlined in the business plan was effectively addressed. Brand Campaign was developed to align with NSW Government priorities and NPWS and Trust policies and also aligned with the NBT Program objectives to ‘grow demand’ by raising the profile of nature based experiences in National Parks. It also supported the objective of ‘creating nature tourists of tomorrow’ with a focus on encouraging young adults involvement in nature and conservation.

Overall, Brand Campaign made unique and positive contributions to the NBT Program, turning young adult National Park visitations around with a 19 percent increase for 18-24 year-olds and 33 percent for 25-30 year-olds between 2016 and 2018,<sup>9,10</sup> and increased the number of young adults engaged with NPWS through social media platforms. Further it established 30,000 database contacts over the life of the project (2014-18).<sup>11</sup> These achievements were significantly more than the performance indicator targets set for the project. Increased visitations by young adults and their increased level of engagement in social media content suggests young adult’s awareness about National Parks experiences and conservation increased over the life of the project.

The evaluation revealed NPWS used a range of strategies to achieve a high level of engagement with young adults through social media. NPWS advised the NPWS pre-campaign segmentation study that identified young adult market segments<sup>12</sup> and the TNS benchmarking research that identified barriers and drivers for young adults visiting National Parks<sup>13</sup> were both critical pieces of work for establishing a robust basis for the marketing campaign and to develop relevant content for the young adult segments.<sup>14</sup> Brand Campaign provides Trust administration and NPWS with many useful insights for how to achieve successful engagement of young adults through marketing campaigns and social media.

Our evaluation showed Brand Campaign had a clear focus on conservation and environmental education outcomes that were adopted for the NBT Program. However, demonstrating the extent the communication and marketing campaign contributed to these outcomes was complex. Establishing a program logic that mapped environmental

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<sup>8</sup> NPWS (2014) *Business Plan – NPWS Parks Brand Campaign*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>9</sup> NPWS (2019) *NSW National Parks Visitation Results – August 2019*. Internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

<sup>10</sup> NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>11</sup> NPWS (2018) *Visitation Figures – August 2018*, internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

<sup>12</sup> NPWS undertook the segmentation study which informed Brand Campaign marketing strategies for different young adult segments. NPWS and Instinct and Reason (2016) *NSW NPWS Segmentation/Experience Enhancement Research June 2016*. Internal report provided by Trust Administration.

<sup>13</sup> TNS (2016) *Optimising creative concept testing debrief NPWS May 2016 – Campaign to raise awareness of NSW National Parks – Youth Market*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>14</sup> TNS (2016) *Optimising Creative Concept Testing Debrief NPWS May 2016*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>14</sup> Interview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.



education outcomes to activities, and considered nature based tourism definitions would assist similar projects in the future.

There were many examples that Brand Campaign marketing content was designed to encourage conservation and environmental awareness amongst young adults throughout the communication and marketing campaign. The insights captured from performance indicator monitoring of young adults knowledge, perceptions, and motivations to experience National Parks and get involved in nature and conservation is a valuable resource to inform the development of meaningful performance indicators for nature based tourism projects in the future.

We observed whilst the use of quantitative performance indicators have their place, given the novelty of the project and complexity of monitoring increases in awareness, the collection of qualitative information about young adults perceptions about National Parks experiences and motivations to be involved in conservation was an important first step. If quantitative targets are established for performance indicators, they require flexibility to be adapted as new information comes to light.

The Brand Campaign design was appropriate and effective and underpinned the project's significant achievements. Brand Campaign design provides Trust and NPWS with insights on good project design for a marketing campaign project, which would be useful for designing similar projects. Key design features included:

- mapping project outcomes and performance indicators
- pre-campaign market segmentation and benchmarking research to inform campaign strategies
- regular monitoring of performance indicators
- establishing a marketing strategy, quality content material
- establishing social media platforms to increase young adults involvement in experiences in National Parks and interest in conservation and nature.

The Brand Campaign budget was significant; however, we found it was well scrutinised and the communication and marketing campaign provided value for money. NPWS took steps to ensure the project was cost effective. Funding provided a range of lasting social media platforms for NPWS to remain connected to the target audience after Brand Campaign was completed. The social media platform, visitor database and media content portfolio created during the project continue to provide NPWS with access to young people and NPWS continues to build their awareness about experiences and appreciation for conservation and nature. Brand Campaign recommendations are presented in [Table 2](#).

## 1.4 CTO Small Grant Project findings and lessons learnt

The Commercial Tour Operator Project (CTO Project) enabled NPWS to run a small grant program for commercial tour operators that supported them to provide new and enhanced nature based tourism experiences in National Parks. The project aimed to increase the number and quality of nature based experiences in National Parks, foster partnerships between NPWS and commercial tour operators and support tour participant environmental education and conservation awareness.<sup>15</sup>

Our evaluation of the CTO Project showed there was a sound rationale for the project and the original problem outlined in the approved business plan was addressed although the

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<sup>15</sup>.....NPWS (2015) *Approved Business Plan – National Landscapes Small Grant Program V2*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

number of grants taken up by commercial tour operators was less than expected. The CTO Project was aligned with many NSW Government priorities and NPWS and Trust policies, and the NBT Program objectives to ‘grow demand’ and ‘improve supply of experiences.’

Overall, the CTO Project successfully completed two rounds of CTO small grants which funded 26 projects and enabled commercial tour operators to improve the quality of nature based experiences in National Parks, with some seeing long-lasting benefits to their businesses. Many tour operators advised they were able to attract more participants as a result of the grant. Noting monitoring data was limited, our evaluation indicated that the CTO Project is likely to have contributed to increasing the number and quality of nature based experiences available in National Parks.

Our evaluation showed the CTO Small Grants process managed by NPWS was sound and the capacity building approach NPWS used to support commercial tour operators was a key strength of its design. We understand the CTO Project was a new type of grant program for NPWS to oversee and Trust administration provided support to NPWS to ensure grants process adopted best practice principles. The grant application process was rigorous and adhered to grants administration standards. Commercial tour operators did provide suggestions for how the small grants processes could be improved from their perspective which provides lessons if similar small grant programs are designed in the future.

Our evaluation showed that whilst the CTO Project was cost effective, funding allocations for grants to commercial tour operators were under allocated. Interviewees suggested several reasons for the lower than anticipated uptake, which provide useful insights for planning similar small grants processes in the future.

We understand aligning the CTO Project to support environmental education outcomes was challenging, which led to lengthy negotiations through the project business plan process. Recognising Trust administration and NPWS made significant efforts to ensure the CTO Project had an outcomes focus, a key lesson for future projects is to establish a program logic, to assist to reduce confusion about the programs intent and avoid lengthy negotiations.

Monitoring the extent commercial tour operator grants were able to support education of tour participants also presented challenges. Both NPWS and commercial tour operators advised the *Commercial Tour Operator Participant Survey* used to capture participant feedback had low uptake because it was impractical to use in the field. As a result there was limited data about participant experiences and changes in their education or understanding of conservation and nature. Recognising these challenges, our assessment of achievements towards environmental and education outcomes was inconclusive as monitoring data was limited. Limited monitoring data made it difficult for Trust administration to assess the CTO Project’s achievements over the project life, which reduced overall confidence in the CTO Project.<sup>16</sup>

The commercial tour operators interviewed were passionate in their belief that their experiences provided an opportunity to build an understanding of the surrounding natural and cultural values and the importance of conservation. Tour operator insights provide a useful resource for Trust administration and NPWS to consider how nature based experiences may have contributed to environmental education and conservation outcomes in National Parks.

We also found several performance indicators and targets could be improved to provide meaningful data for monitoring project outcomes. If NPWS were to design nature based tourism small grants programs in the future, the *NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines*:

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<sup>16</sup>.....nterviews: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022; Environmental Trust administration, 1 August 2022.

*Evaluation* would be a useful resource for designing monitoring and evaluation elements of a project.

CTO Project recommendations are presented in [Table 2](#).

## 1.5 WilderQuest findings and lessons learnt

WilderQuest was a four year project that established an education portal (WilderQuest Learning portal) and learning content for teachers and students to use in NSW primary schools. Teachers had access to a 10 week learning program and activities that included outdoor lessons and encouraged excursions to National Parks. WilderQuest aimed to increase the amount of time students spent on environmental education in the classroom, improve students understanding of environmental and biodiversity issues and encourage them to visit National Parks.<sup>17</sup>

Our evaluation of WilderQuest showed there was a sound rationale for the project and the original problem identified was effectively addressed. NPWS demonstrated there was a clear need to address the challenges associated with the disconnect between children and the natural environment and the NSW Science and Technology and Geography primary school syllabus created an explicit need for WilderQuest learning content.<sup>18</sup>

WilderQuest made unique and positive contributions to the NBT Program objectives and outcomes. In 2018 (peak of the project) 1,847 NSW schools (60 percent of NSW schools) signed up to WilderQuest, with 3,013 teachers and 17,097 students registered.<sup>19</sup> WilderQuest learning portal and content provided schools with tailored learning modules for teachers and opportunities to learn outdoors and in nature.

WilderQuest was well aligned with NSW Government priorities, and NPWS and Trust policies. WilderQuest aligned with the NBT Program objectives to ‘*grow demand*’ and ‘*creating nature tourists of tomorrow.*’ WilderQuest also demonstrated a clear focus on conservation and environmental education outcomes adopted for the NBT Program.

The WilderQuest learning portal and learning content were well designed and implemented and many elements were rated highly by teachers. Key strengths raised by teachers included the 10-week teaching program, Aboriginal education resources, professional development modules, and opportunities for nature based excursions and incursions. Teacher feedback indicated NPWS was seen as a leader and a trusted source in environmental education because of their specialist knowledge, which was also foundational to WilderQuest’s success.

NPWS experienced several challenges during the implementation of WilderQuest that were successfully managed by the NPWS project team. Key challenges included a change in the NSW school curriculum from a National Parks and conservation focus to agriculture, barriers for schools taking students to National Parks, and data monitoring limitations. How these challenges were managed provides useful insights for similar projects.

NPWS advised they were looking at decommissioning the WilderQuest learning portal as it was becoming difficult to maintain because of its age. The risk to WilderQuest is without a functioning portal, it may be difficult to access WilderQuest learning content, which could

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<sup>17</sup> NPWS (2016) *WilderQuest Learning Business Plan*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>18</sup> Interview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

<sup>19</sup> NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest All Pages Summary*. Internal document provided by NPWS.  
NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest in the Classroom Overview*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

reduce its use in classrooms. NPWS recognised this challenge and were looking at options like Google platforms to provide teachers with access to WilderQuest learning content at the time of this evaluation.

Overall, the project was cost effective, the budget was spent effectively, and stakeholders agreed that the significant reach achieved by the project justified the relatively low project budget. The potential risks of needing to shift learning content to alternative platforms and the costs of making this shift are worthy considerations in the design of similar projects in the future.

Increasing student visits to National Parks was a key project outcome and evidence suggests achievement towards this outcome was less than the expected. However, there were significant barriers to students visiting National Parks and targets were most likely ambitious. NPWS developed options for schools to reduce barriers and provided alternatives to visiting National Parks (e.g. school incursions, encouraging local National Park options), which was sound and an example of appropriate adaptive management by the NPWS project team.

Assessment of time students spend outside learning was limited due to a low response to the *Survey of Participating Teachers*. However given the number of teachers and students using the WilderQuest learning platform, it is likely this outcome was more than achieved. We suggest that if school incursions continue to be a focus for supporting students to learn about nature and National Parks, NPWS would need to explore if students are still able to build the desired understanding of experiencing nature and biodiversity without visiting National Parks.

A core outcome for WilderQuest was to educate students about biodiversity and the environment and also increase the number of students accessing Aboriginal Discovery Ranger activities. The *Survey of Participating Teachers* was a key monitoring data source for this outcome and we understand survey response rates were lower than expected as teachers were time poor. Accessing more responses from teachers would strengthen monitoring of learning outcomes. Given the quality of the learning modules, which were delivered by education experts in a school environment, there is confidence students increased their understanding and appreciation of nature and conservation through WilderQuest.

This evaluation revealed that there was high confidence that WilderQuest was able to achieve its education outcomes. WilderQuest is an example of a nature based tourism project that aligns well with Trust conservation and environmental education outcomes, which could inform other investments in nature based tourism for this purpose.

Whilst performance indicators provided an understanding of the number of students that were educated, NPWS may wish to consider how more meaningful data could be collected to understand how students' knowledge has changed as a result of being involved in WilderQuest. The evaluation of the *Environmental Trust's Environmental Education Grants Program*<sup>20</sup> may be a useful resource for NPWS for strengthening monitoring and evaluation aspects of WilderQuest.

WilderQuest recommendations are presented in [Table 2](#).

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<sup>20</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2022) [NSW Environmental Trust Education Grant Programs](#).

## 1.6 Recommendations

**Table 2: Recommendations**

Nature Based Tourism Program Recommendations	
<b>R 1</b>	If Trust or NPWS designed a nature based tourism program in the future, project development, monitoring and evaluation would be strengthened by establishing a program logic at the outset that maps links between project activities and program outcomes.
<b>R 2</b>	If Trust or NPWS plan to invest in nature based tourism projects that lead to environmental education outcomes in the future, it would be beneficial to draw on nature based tourism definitions and resources to inform the program logic and guide project development.
Brand Campaign Recommendations	
<b>R 3</b>	<p>If Trust or NPWS were to invest in a communication and marketing campaign in the future, Brand Campaign can provide valuable insights on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ effective project design and implementation</li><li>▪ strategies to achieve a high level of engagement through social media tools and marketing campaigns</li><li>▪ young adults knowledge, perceptions, and motivations to experience National Parks and get involved in nature and conservation</li><li>▪ developing meaningful performance indicators for conservation and environmental education outcomes from nature based tourism campaigns</li></ul>
<b>R 4</b>	<p>Trust administration and NPWS would strengthen future marketing campaign project design and implementation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ establishing a program logic that maps links between project activities and program outcomes to support project design and monitoring and evaluation</li><li>▪ for novel projects like Brand Campaign, consider capturing qualitative information about young adults' awareness and motivations to inform the development of meaningful performance indicator targets</li><li>▪ allowing flexibility to adapt quantitative targets as new information comes to light</li><li>▪ look for opportunities to reduce the number of performance indicators monitored if there are clear lines of evidence available for primary performance indicators (e.g. Park visitations versus frequency of visits), to reduce the reporting burden for grantees.</li></ul>
CTO Project Recommendations	
<b>R 5</b>	<p>If Trust or NPWS were to invest in a small grants program for nature based experiences run by commercial tour operators in the future, CTO can provide valuable insights on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ how to effectively support the capacity of small businesses like commercial tour operators to apply for and implement small grants</li><li>▪ commercial tour operator insights on how small grants can enhance the number and quality of nature based experiences in National Parks and support participant education</li></ul>
<b>R 6</b>	<p>If Trust administration or NPWS were to oversee small grants for nature based tourism in the future, project design would be strengthened by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ establishing a program logic that maps links between project activities and program outcomes to support project design and monitoring and evaluation</li></ul>

- given the complexity of monitoring environmental outcomes for nature based experiences, draw on CTO Project insights and nature based tourism definitions and resources to support projects that can contribute to these outcomes
- given the CTO Small Grants were new for tour operators, consider allowing more time to establish and call for grant applications to support higher uptake

**R 7** If NPWS were to design a small grants program for nature based experiences run by commercial tour operators in the future, monitoring and evaluation could be strengthened by:

- drawing on *NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines: Evaluation* to support design of outcomes monitoring
- including a clear outline in the project logic that maps links between performance indicators and monitoring data to support meaningful reporting on and evaluation of project achievements
- given the novelty of small grants in nature based tourism, consider qualitative insights to measure progress towards outcomes, alongside quantitative targets
- look for opportunities to simplify reporting processes for CTOs and participants to support higher response rates to support monitoring and reduce reporting burden for grantees
- consider opportunities to make timing of applications flexible to account for factors that can arise for small businesses like tour operators

### WilderQuest Project Recommendations

**R 8** If Trust or NPWS were to invest in a learning portal and learning content for NSW schools in the future, WilderQuest can provide valuable insights on:

- effective project design and implementation
- strategies to achieve a high level of engagement with teachers and students through a portal and marketing and promotion
- insights on the value of learning platforms and learning in nature and National Parks for students and teachers
- understanding barriers to excursions to National Parks and alternatives for supporting outdoor education
- an example of a nature based project that contributes to conservation and environmental outcomes

**R9** Trust administration and NPWS would strengthen project design and implementation of similar projects by:

- establishing a program logic that maps links between project activities and program outcomes to support project design and monitoring and evaluation
- considering how to collect meaningful data on how students understanding changed as a result of being involved alongside quantitative performance indicators
- looking for opportunities to simplify how teacher feedback is collected to support higher responses rates from teachers to support monitoring and evaluation
- considering the risks of technological redundancy of platforms and the associated costs at the outset to build in strategies to minimise this risk

## 2 Evaluation approach

The Commission delivered the evaluation in accordance with the methodology outlined below.

### 2.1 Evaluation objectives and key questions

The objective of the Commission's evaluation was to undertake a summative evaluation of each NBT project to determine the extent to which projects contributed to the NBT Program outcomes. The broad objectives of this evaluation were to:

1. assess whether, and to what extent, the projects contributed to Trust funding priorities and the NBT Program objectives
2. assess whether the project design and approach were effective
3. provide recommendations and identify lessons for future Trust projects and potential future nature based tourism investments.

The NBT evaluation framework was developed in consultation with Trust Administration which included these key evaluation questions and sub-questions, which were customised for each NBT project (see [Attachment 1](#)).

### 2.2 Evaluation methodology

The Commission's lines of inquiry, data sources and methods are outlined in [Attachment 2](#). The key evaluation methodology steps were:

#### Step 1: Designing the evaluation framework and stakeholder engagement plan

The evaluation framework was developed in consultation with Trust administration, drawing on project material provided, the *NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines*<sup>21</sup> and the project evaluation questions from each project's approved business plan. The final evaluation framework was approved by Trust administration in July 2022.

Concurrently, in consultation with Trust administration, the Commission developed a stakeholder engagement plan for the evaluation. To inform the evaluation (see [Attachment 3](#)), key stakeholders interviewed included:

- Trust administration staff
- Trust Nature Based Tourism subcommittee members
- NPWS project managers
- participants in the NBT Projects (e.g. participants in commercial tour operator experiences).

#### Step 2: Data collection

The Commission gathered evidence from the following sources:

- Program and project documents: 150 documents<sup>22</sup> sourced from Trust administration, NPWS project managers, project participants and other avenues, as appropriate. This

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<sup>21</sup>.....NSW Government (2016) *NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines*.

Please note since the completion of this evaluation the 2016 guidelines have been replaced with the [Premier and Cabinet Grants Administration Guide](#).

.....NSW Government (2022) [Premier and Cabinet Grants Administration Guide](#).

<sup>22</sup>.....Documents included project business plans, media releases, applicant information and assessment criteria, progress and final reports, market segmentation and campaign tracking reports, and participant feedback and reporting.

included a review of key funding and policy documents to inform key evaluation question 1 ([Attachment 4](#)).

- Interviews: 15 semi-structured interviews with identified stakeholders. Evaluation questions and preliminary document analysis informed interview questions.
- Surveys: a project achievements survey with customised goal attainment scales was used to elicit a better understanding of NBT project's achievements towards NBT Program outcomes and stakeholder perceptions about each project's achievement towards the intended outcomes.

### **Step 3: Analysis and findings**

We undertook a comprehensive analysis of evidence available in all datasets, using the evaluation questions to identify key themes, findings, and recommendations at the project level. We also identified overarching NBT Program findings that were consistent across all projects, which are presented in [Chapter 4](#) of this report.

### **Step 4: Draft and finalisation of the report**

This report provides an outline of all program and project findings and recommendations for Trust administration and NPWS project managers.

## **2.3 Evaluation limitations**

The following limitations should be acknowledged when considering the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

### **2.3.1 Limitations of assessing projects contributions to NBT Program outcomes**

Evaluating the extent NBT Projects contributed to NBT Program outcomes (key evaluation question one) was impacted by limited information about the NBT Program. There are a range of factors that resulted in this limitation including lack of availability of documents or knowledge due to the time passed since the NBT Program's completion. Also, when Trust was directed to oversee the NBT Program, there was very little information provided about program objectives, outcomes, and a program logic was not established. These limitations are discussed further in [Chapter 4](#).

We were advised there were three NBT Program objectives '*growing demand*', '*improving supply*' and '*creating tourists of tomorrow*' and interviews revealed there were two key outcomes – supporting conservation awareness and environmental education (See [Section 3.1](#)). Both objectives and outcomes were considered in this evaluation to the extent monitoring data collected for these objectives and outcomes allowed.

### **2.3.2 Monitoring data limitations**

At both the NBT Program level and the project level, insufficient and incomplete monitoring information limited the ability to draw definitive conclusions from the evaluation findings in some instances which are noted in NBT project chapters. Some information was inaccessible due to the time elapsed between the projects' completion and this evaluation; also a lack of detailed knowledge due to staff turnover and in some instances, also incomplete datasets collected for some projects created limitations.

### **2.3.3 Limitations of stakeholder engagement**

All primary stakeholders identified with Trust administration were interviewed for this evaluation, including Trust administration staff, NPWS project managers, Trust NBT subcommittee members and commercial tour operators. We were advised commercial tour operator grantees were time poor and undertook interviews with a sample of grantees



rather than using a survey to capture their insights as originally planned. The interviews formed the basis of qualitative data used in the evaluation.

The Commission attempted to interview additional stakeholders to provide insights on the NBT Program but was unable to secure interviews with a WELE contact, teachers that used the Wilder Quest Learning Program, NPWS Rangers, Department of Education and Communities, or key stakeholders for the Brand Campaign. It was not possible to survey young adults that used Brand Campaign material as initially planned. Instead we drew on comprehensive market research information generated by Brand Campaign monitoring and reporting.

## 3 About the NBT Program

### 3.1 Program overview

The NBT Program was a \$4.8 million program approved by the NSW Government in February 2013 funded from the NSW Waste and Environment Levy (WELE).<sup>23</sup> Funding was approved for National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to deliver four nature based tourism projects listed in [Table 3](#). Trust was directed to establish the governance framework for overseeing the implementation of NBT projects delivered by NPWS under the NBT Program.<sup>24</sup>

There was limited documentation available that outlined the NBT Program for this evaluation. An early stage business plan - *'Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan'* and meeting paper *'Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan, Environmental Trust Meeting,* provide a broad description of the NBT Program intent:<sup>25</sup>

*'In February 2013, the NSW Government approved funding of \$4.8 million to National Parks and Wildlife (NPWS) (a Division of the Office of Environment and Heritage) to support a new approach to encouraging higher levels of visitation by investing in promoting quality nature based experiences at iconic destinations in Sydney and surrounds and the four 'National Landscape' areas in the Alps, Coastal Wilderness, Green Cauldron and Blue Mountains as well as iconic locations across the NSW parks system. The program will also provide for improved visitor information services that link the vital nature based education that results in stronger understanding and appreciation for conservation and nature based experiences. This program is designed to fund collaboration across Government, community and the private sector.'*

Three NBT Program objectives were documented in the 'Statement of Requirements' provided by Trust to the Commission:<sup>26</sup>

1. *growing demand*: to raise the profile of nature based experiences on offer in Parks
2. *improving supply*: to develop new nature based experiences at iconic destinations
3. *creating the nature tourists of tomorrow*: aimed at engaging children in nature.

The *Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan*<sup>27</sup> listed four NBT Program objectives (called components in the document) which the Commission was advised was approved in principle by Trust in December 2013.<sup>28</sup> The 'Statement of Requirements' provided to the Commission for this evaluation included three NBT Program objectives. We were unable to confirm which list of objectives was used for the NBT Program; however, the three listed in the 'Statement of Requirements' appear to be a revised version of the four original objectives listed in the business plan.

In addition to these objectives, interviewees advised that Trust administration supported NPWS to also develop NBT Projects to with a focus on conservation and environmental

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<sup>23</sup>.....NSW Environment Protection Authority (2024) [Waste Levy](#).

<sup>24</sup> NSW Environmental Trust (2013) *Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan, Environmental Trust Meeting, Agenda Item 4*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>25</sup> NSW Environmental Trust (2013) *Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan, Environmental Trust Meeting, Agenda Item 4*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>26</sup>.....NSW Environmental Trust (2021) *Statement of Requirements – NRC NBT evaluation*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>27</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2013) *Major Programs Grant Project Business Plan Drive Nature Based Tourism version 3*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>28</sup>.....Environmental Trust administration, personal communication 23 October 2023.

education outcomes in order to align the NBT Program and NBT Projects with Trust objects and the WELE funding requirements.<sup>29</sup>

These outcomes were also reflected in the evaluation questions the Commission was asked to consider (see [Attachment 1](#)). For example ‘did projects align with Trust objects, core funding policies and program funding priorities’ and ‘assess the extent NBT Projects achieved a measurable difference in environmental awareness and education.’

The Commission evaluated three NBT Projects listed in [Table 3](#) including:

- Young Adults Brand Campaign (Brand Campaign)
- Commercial Tour Operator Small Grants (CTO Project)
- WilderQuest Learning (WilderQuest).

The fourth project listed in [Table 3](#), *Immersive Learning* was still underway and was not considered as part of this evaluation.

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<sup>29</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

**Table 3: Overview of NBT Projects evaluated by the Commission<sup>30</sup>**

Project	Duration	Objective	Key activities	Trust Funding	Payments
<b>Young Adults Brand Campaign<sup>31</sup></b>	4 years (2014-18)	Strengthen connections of young adults with National Parks, encourage sustainable growth in visitation, and build community support for nature and conservation through a targeted Brand Campaign <sup>32</sup>	Targeted communication and marketing campaign for young adults (25-35 years old)	\$3,435,000	Paid in 7 performance-based instalments
<b>Commercial Tour Operator Grants<sup>33</sup></b>	3.5 years (2015-19)	Assist commercial tour operators to deliver quality experiences that develop or enhance visitors' knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits that are consistent with NPWS and OEH values <sup>34</sup>	Small grants of up to \$10,000 for commercial tour operators to deliver new experiences (such as tours or equipment), enhance existing visitor experiences (such as upgraded equipment) or training to enhance educational outcomes <sup>35</sup>	\$512,537	Paid in 3 annual instalments based on reporting requirements
<b>WilderQuest Learning<sup>36</sup></b>	4 years (2015-19)	Develop a best practice education portal with a 10-week teaching program for teachers and activities for outdoor lessons and visits to National Parks	Development of an online learning platform with teaching units for schools to educate students about National Parks	\$390,000	Paid in 3 instalments linked to agreed project achievements
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$4,337,537*</b>	

\* Note the total NBT Program figure was \$4.8 million. The fourth project *Immersive Learning* is not included in the expenditure total as it was not evaluated by the Commission and the expenditure figures for this project were not available for this evaluation.

<sup>30</sup>.....NSW Environmental Trust (2021) *Scope of Works Nature Based Tourism Review*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>31</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by the Environmental Trust Administration; Interview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.

<sup>32</sup>.....TNS Consulting (2016) *Optimising concept testing debrief NPWS*, internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>33</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *Final Report - Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program*. Internal report provided by the Environmental Trust Administration.

<sup>34</sup>.....NPWS (2015) *Business Plan – National Landscapes Small Grant Program*. Internal document supplied by the Environmental Trust Administration.

<sup>35</sup>.....Extracted from NPWS (2016) *NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program 2016 – Information for applicants*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>36</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *Final Report WilderQuest Learning comments addressed*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

## 3.2 Trust governance and oversight

The *Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan, Environmental Trust Meeting* outlines Trust and NPWS roles in the NBT Program:<sup>37</sup>

- Trust was responsible for the governance framework and for overseeing the (NBT) program's implementation
- the NBT program was to be delivered by NPWS on behalf of Trust
- Subcommittees endorsed business plans for approval by the Trust Secretary ' *final approval of the Business Plan to the Trust Secretary, following incorporation of any comments from the Subcommittee and the Subcommittee's endorsement of the Plan.*'

In its governance and oversight role, Trust administration:<sup>38</sup>

- supported NPWS to develop detailed project business plans for the NBT Program
- established Trust (NBT) subcommittee to review business plans and provide technical advice on the program scope
- oversaw the NBT Program including monitoring, reporting, and administering funds to NPWS based on grant agreements and project progress
- prepared advice for Trust NBT subcommittee and Trust Secretary/Trust on approved projects.

The management of the CTO Project differed from the other two projects - Trust administration classified it as a 'devolved grant' because NPWS had responsibility for designing and administering the small grants to commercial tour operators rather than Trust administration administering the CTO small grants.<sup>39</sup>

Trust administration also supported NPWS to design the CTO grants application process and signed off on key elements to ensure grants adhered to best practice. [Table 4](#) shows a summary of commercial tour operator applications and grants by stage and funding round.

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<sup>37</sup> NSW Environmental Trust (2013) *Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan, Environmental Trust Meeting, Agenda Item 4*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>38</sup> NSW Environmental Trust (2013) *Drive Nature Based Tourism Business Plan, Environmental Trust Meeting, Agenda Item 4*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>39</sup> Interview: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

**Table 4: CTO Project - Number of applicants by stage and funding round<sup>40</sup>**

Grants administration elements	Grant Round		Total
	One	Two	
Attended information session	50	NA	NA
Expressions of interest	49	NA	NA
Accepted EOIs	22		NA
Full application received	16	24	<b>40</b>
Awarded grant funding	16	12	<b>28</b>
Delivered project	14	12	<b>26</b>
Funding expended	\$137,033	\$103,145	<b>\$240,178<sup>41</sup></b>
Funding returned <sup>42</sup>	\$15,000	-	
<b>Total CTO Grant funding expended</b>			<b>\$225,178<sup>43</sup></b>

### 3.3 Detailed project expenditure

[Tables 5-7](#) provide a breakdown of funding and expenditure for each NBT Project. Note columns for co-funding and expenditure variations are only included in project tables for projects that received co-funding.

The Brand Campaign and WilderQuest received co-funding:

- Brand Campaign – \$20,000 from NPWS and \$10,100 from Destination NSW for video content<sup>44</sup>
- WilderQuest – \$10,000 for project publicity in Year 1.<sup>45</sup>

The CTO Project had a significant underspend of \$149,527.<sup>46</sup> The reasons and implications of this underspend are discussed in [Chapter 6](#).

<sup>40</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *Final Report - Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program*. Internal report provided by the Environmental Trust Administration.

<sup>41</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *Final Report - Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program*. Internal report provided by the Environmental Trust Administration.

<sup>42</sup>.....*Ibid*. Two CTOs successful in Round 1 were unable to spend the funding (totalling \$15,000) and were directed to return the funds.

<sup>43</sup>.....This amount has been calculated using \$237,178 (total spend from both grant rounds)

<sup>44</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Financial Report – Environmental Trust Major Grants – Summary of all Years*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>45</sup>.....Project documentations indicates this co-contribution was provided by OEH marketing.

<sup>46</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *Final Report - Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program*. Internal report provided by the Environmental Trust Administration. This figure includes the \$15,000 returned by CTOs unable to complete their projects in Round 1. Note, this \$15,000 is not accounted for in the final financial report which shows a total underspend of \$149,527.

All Brand Campaign funding was expended and WilderQuest had minimal under expenditure (\$614). Both projects experienced delays which impacted the timing of expenditure:

- Brand Campaign - delays were due to sequencing of content with consultants, organisational changes, and minor budget line variations
- WilderQuest - delays were due to turnover of staff, changes to the project scope, and minor budget line variations. Variations were requested, and the project finish date was extended to 21 July 2019.

**Table 5: Brand Campaign funding and expenditure<sup>47</sup>**

Project costs	Total Trust funds (\$)	Other funding sources (\$)	Whole Project Budget (\$)	Actual Expenditure- Whole Project (\$)	Variation Project budget (\$)
Consultancies	2,469,383	10,100	2,479,483	2,492,752	13,269
Project Publicity	790,540	20,000 <sup>48</sup>	810,540	796,360	5,820
Administration	5,077	0	5,077	5,988	911
Other (evaluation)	170,000	0	170,000	170,000	
<b>Total budget</b>	<b>3,435,000</b>	<b>30,100</b>	<b>3,465,100</b>	<b>3,465,100</b>	<b>20,000</b>
<b>Total underspend</b>		<b>0</b>			

<sup>47</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Young Adults Campaign Financial Report 17-18 Final*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>48</sup>.....Note this \$20,000 was not originally budgeted for and is represented in the actual expenditure table in the final financial report. For the purposes of providing a summary for this evaluation, it is included in the whole project budget in this summary table.

**Table 6: CTO Project grants funding and expenditure<sup>49</sup>**

Project costs	Total Trust funds (\$)	Other funding sources (\$)	Whole Project Budget (\$)	Actual Expenditure Whole Project(\$)	Variation Whole Project budget
Grants	360,000	0	360,000	243,801	-131,199*
Salaries	0	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000
Consultancies	70,000	0	70,000	64,255	-5,745
Workshops and networking	45,000	0	45,000	19,549	-25,451
Other (detail)	0	0	1,600		1,600
Transport	9,000	1,000	10,000	6,010	-2,990
Materials	0	0	0	258	258
Administration	28,537	0	28,537	28,537	0
<b>Total budget</b>	<b>512,537</b>	<b>31,000</b>	<b>543,537</b>	<b>394,010</b>	
<b>Total underspend</b>	<b>- 149,527 (-29%)<sup>50</sup></b>				

Note: salaries \$30,000 and transport costs \$1,000 funded from other sources (actual expenditure, but not budgeted).

\*This figure includes the \$15,000 returned by CTOs unable to complete their projects in Round 1. Note, this \$15,000 is not accounted for in the final financial report which shows a total underspend of \$116,199.

<sup>49</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *CTO Small Grant Program - Final Financial Report*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>50</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *Final Report - Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program*. Internal report provided by the Environmental Trust Administration.



**Table 7: WilderQuest funding and expenditure<sup>51</sup>**

Project costs	Total Trust funds (\$)	Other funding sources (\$)	Whole Project Budget (\$)	Actual Expenditure-Whole Project (\$)	Variation Whole Project budget
Consultancies	99,860	0	99,860	149,846	49,986
Materials	36,755	0	36,755	49,511	12,756
Transport costs	27,725	0	27,725	16,579	-11,146
Project Publicity	69,708	10,000	79,708	73,330	-6,378
Other (training)	63,806	0	63,806	41,582	-22,224
Other (digital content delivery and production)	70,094	0	70,094	44,431	-25,663
Administration	22,052	0	22,052	22,052	0
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>390,000</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>400,000</b>	<b>397,331</b>	<b>-2,669</b>
<b>Total underspend</b>	<b>615*</b>				

\*We note WilderQuest reported a journaling error that created a recurring budget cost resulted in \$2,054.55 being added and we have represented this error based on the best information available at the time of this review.

<sup>51</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Wilder Quest Learning Financial Report 17-18 Final*. Internal report provided by the Environmental Trust Administration.

## 4 NBT Program findings and lessons learnt

In evaluating the NBT Projects, we observed consistent themes at the NBT Program level that provide useful lessons for designing future nature based tourism programs, which are presented in this chapter. Program level findings can support insights on the following key evaluation sub-questions:

- did projects align with Trust policies? (1a)
- to what extent did the project achieve its intended outcomes? (1b)
- was the project well planned and designed to deliver desired outcomes?(2a)
- Should the Environmental Trust consider unique aspects of the project in future investments? (3a)

Further information on these evaluation questions is provided in [Attachment 1 - Evaluation framework](#).

Our evaluation revealed that Trust administration established strong governance and accountability arrangements in line with the *Premier and Cabinet Grants Administration Guide*<sup>52</sup> and NPWS was a logical partner for the NBT projects. NBT Projects had an outcomes focus demonstrating alignment with key NSW Government, Trust and NPWS policies and achieved some unique contributions for nature based tourism in NSW. A summary of achievements is presented in [\(Section 4.1 and 4.2\)](#).

Whilst NBT Projects had impact and were well aligned with Government outcomes, the lack of information about the NBT Program objectives or outcomes at the outset presented challenges for both Trust administration and the NPWS.<sup>53</sup> There was limited documentation available about the NBT Program for this evaluation. The only evidence available was an early stage business plan that contained limited information about the NBT Program (see [Section 3.1](#)). There was a significant time delay between this early stage business plan and the final selection and approval of NBT Projects. As such, the Commission had to rely on interview evidence regarding the program design and intent.

Interviewees indicated the delays in project approvals were in part due to lack of clarity around the intended objectives and outcomes for the NBT Program. Trust in their governance role, focused on conservation and environmental education outcomes in order to align the NBT Program with Trust objects and the WELE funding requirements.<sup>54</sup> Whilst NPWS developed projects with this focus, they also focused on the growing nature based tourism experiences in National Parks which were reflected in the partially approved NBT Program objectives. Whilst we cannot draw conclusions about which objectives and outcomes were the core priority for the NBT Program, it was evident from interviews this lack of clarity made it difficult to reach consensus about the overall intent of the program and created tension at times.

Interviewees raised the project development process was drawn out and establishing methods for monitoring contributions towards NBT Program outcomes was difficult at times. A key program design lesson from the NBT Program for Trust administration and NPWS is the importance of establishing a program logic at the outset to support project development and project selection ([Section 4.3](#)).

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<sup>52</sup>.....Note we recognise that these guidelines have been updated since the NBT Program was undertaken. These guidelines provide a useful indication of the strengths of Trust administration's governance framework for the NBT Program.  
NSW Government (2022) [Premier and Cabinet Grants Administration Guide](#).

<sup>53</sup> Interview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

<sup>54</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

Also for any future nature based tourism programs, drawing on nature based tourism definitions and similar programs would also support the selection of nature based tourism activities that can contribute to environmental education outcomes ([Section 4.4](#)).

#### 4.1 Trust administration established strong governance

We reviewed the governance and accountability arrangements established by Trust administration in their oversight role of the NBT Program taking into consideration the *NSW Review of Grants Administration in NSW* and the *Premier and Cabinet Grants Administration Guide*.<sup>55</sup> Trust administration established appropriate and well-designed governance and accountability arrangements for the NBT Program.

Key strengths included:

- supported NPWS in a robust co-design process to develop project business plans that included project's alignment with policies and priorities, had an outcomes focus, and included performance indicators and key evaluation questions
- established a Trust NBT subcommittee to review business plans and provide technical advice to NPWS and Trust Secretary and Trust as required
- established Trust/Trust Secretary approval of NBT Projects
- supported NPWS to develop the CTO small grant processes in line with grants management best practice
- established approvals, grant agreements, achievements-based reporting, and payment processes for projects funded under the NBT Program.

The NBT Program is classified as a 'non-competitive grant'<sup>56</sup> as the NSW Government allocated funding to NPWS. In their governance role Trust administration established appropriate accountability arrangements for a non-competitive grant by establishing a rigorous co-design process to develop NBT Projects, appointing Trust NBT subcommittee who had technical expertise to scrutinise projects and successful projects were approved by Trust Secretary/Board (see [Section 3.2](#)).

Feedback gathered from NBT Projects showed NPWS was a logical partner for nature based tourism projects. NBT project participants perceived NPWS as a trusted source to provide information about conservation and environmental experiences:

*'NPWS is positioned as an organisation committed to conservation and protecting the environment (stronger for Adventurers). Socialisers are more likely to perceive NPWS as an organisation that inspires, encourages, and educates others.'*<sup>57</sup>

WilderQuest interviewees also advised NPWS was perceived as a leader and a trusted source in environmental education because of their specialist knowledge.

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<sup>55</sup>.....Please note we recognise that grants guidelines have been updated since the NBT Program was undertaken in 2014. These guidelines still provide a useful set of principles to review the governance and accountability arrangements established for the NBT Program.

NSW Government (2022) [Premier and Cabinet Grants Administration Guide](#).  
NSW Government (2022) [Review of Grants Administration in NSW – Final Report](#).

<sup>56</sup>.....NSW Government (2022) [Premier and Cabinet Grants Administration Guide](#).

<sup>57</sup>.....TNS Consulting (2016) *Brand and Campaign Tracking - Research Report, Benchmark*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

## 4.2 NBT Projects aligned with key policies and priorities and had impact

A key principle of good grants design is to ensure programs and projects align with key agency outcomes and government priorities. We undertook a detailed review of project documents to inform our evaluation of how NBT Projects aligned with NSW government priorities and Trust and NPWS policies as a part of key evaluation question 1a (see [Attachment 4](#)).

*'Grants should be designed with clear and specific objectives, including connection to identified needs, agency outcomes and government priorities. Officials should identify the outcomes and program measures to be used to evaluate the program against these objectives, consistent with existing policy requirements.'*<sup>58</sup>

It was evident Trust administration and NPWS put considerable effort into ensuring projects aligned with a range of Trust and NPWS policies and NSW Government priorities when co-designing business plans for NBT Projects. Key policies included:

- ✓ Trust objects and Trust funding principles
- ✓ NPWS Act, NPWS Delivery Plan 2014/15, NPWS Tourism Program and Tourism Masterplan 2015-2020
- ✓ NPWS Cultural Tourism Development Program, NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Policy and Parks licencing system
- ✓ OEH Corporate Plan (2014-2017)
- ✓ Environmental Waste Levy Audit
- ✓ NSW Visitor Economy Industry Action Plan and 2021 NSW State Plan
- ✓ Australia's National Landscapes Program.<sup>59</sup>

We also considered if NBT Projects aligned with Trust funding principles and found NBT Projects aligned with principles such as novelty, complementarity to agency core responsibilities, fostering coordination and supporting strategic collaborations.<sup>60</sup> Projects also supported NPWS responsibilities under Object 2A 1c of the Act to *'foster public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation.'*<sup>61</sup>

Evaluating the extent NBT Projects contributed to NBT Program objectives and outcomes was difficult given the limited documentation available about the Program (see [Section 4.3](#)) however, individual business plans showed NBT Projects were aligned with the partially approved NBT Program objectives *'growing demand', 'improving supply'* and *'creating tourists of tomorrow.'*

The Commission also undertook a rapid review of other nature based tourism programs (see summary [Attachment 5](#)) to support Trust and NPWS's if they consider investing in nature based tourism programs in the future. We found these programs typically invested in similar projects funded under the NBT Program. Examples included infrastructure to support nature based experiences, activities that encouraged visitor appreciation of environmental values and fostered conservation awareness.

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<sup>58</sup>..... NSW Government (2022) [Review of Grants Administration in NSW – Final Report](#).

<sup>59</sup>..... Australia's National Landscapes Program was initiated by Parks Australia and Tourism Australia in 2005 and encouraged stronger partnership between conservation and tourism. It was inspired by the need to make Australia's wealth of over 9,000 National Parks, protected areas and reserves "digestible" for our domestic and international visitors.

Australian Government (2023) [National Landscapes - a partnership between conservation and tourism](#)

<sup>60</sup>..... NSW Environmental Trust (2018) *Objects of the Trust and Trust Funding Principles*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>61</sup> ..... NSW Legislation (2023) [National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 No 80 \(NSW\)](#)

Conservation and environmental education outcomes were adopted for the NBT Program to align the NBT Program with Trust objects and the WELE funding requirements.<sup>62</sup> Our review of individual business plans indicated NBT Projects were designed with a key focus on conservation and environmental education outcomes.

Examples of conservation outcomes included in business plans for each NBT Project:

1. **Brand Campaign:** *'grow an engaged community of support for NSW National Parks, with young adults'* and *'increase appreciation of nature and adoption of conservation values'*<sup>63</sup>
2. **CTO Project:** *'Increased levels of environmental education by participants (of tours).'*<sup>64</sup>
3. **WilderQuest:** *'Increase in the number of teachers taking students outside and into nature for educational experiences'* and *'Improved student understanding of environmental and biodiversity issues among participating students.'*<sup>65</sup>

Whilst projects were designed to focus on these outcomes, interviewees raised developing projects and demonstrating their contributions to environmental education outcomes was challenging at times (see [Section 4.3](#)).

NBT Projects resulted in some unique contributions to nature based tourism in NSW, which are explored in depth in the individual NBT Project evaluations ([Chapters 5 to 7](#)), a summary of key achievements for each project include:

### Brand Campaign

- effectively developed media content targeted at young adults shared through innovative social media platforms (including Instagram, Facebook)<sup>66</sup> to promote and engage interest and involvement in nature based experiences across NSW
- dramatically increased the number of young adults engaged in social media platforms and information about National Parks over the life of the campaign
- increased National Park visitations by young adults by 19 percent for 18-24 year olds and 33 percent by 25-34 year olds between 2016 and 2018<sup>67, 68</sup>
- established a young adult database of 30,000, which NPWS have continued to share content material with after Brand Campaign was completed.<sup>69</sup>

### CTO Project

- completed two grant rounds which funded 26 projects for \$240,178 of grant funding
- enabled small nature based tourism operators improve the quality of nature based experiences, with some seeing long-lasting benefits to their business
- NPWS support improved the capacity of small nature based tourism businesses to apply for grants and improve the number and quality of nature based experiences.

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<sup>62</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

<sup>63</sup>.....Office of Heritage and Environment (2016) *Outcomes Hierarchy and Evaluation Framework Updated June 2016*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>64</sup>.....Office of Heritage and Environment (2015) *Approved Business Plan – National Landscapes Small Grant Program (includes project measures) V2*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>65</sup>.....NPWS (2016) *WilderQuest Learning Business Plan*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>66</sup>.....Brand Campaign developed media content (campaign videos, articles, posts and competitions which resulted in substantial social increases in social media following including Facebook followers (240% increase), 44 Instagram followers (43,900% increase). At the time of the project these social media platforms were considered innovative.  
Environmental Trust (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign* Internal document.

<sup>67</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *NSW National Parks Visitation Results – August 2019*. Internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

<sup>68</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>69</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

## WilderQuest

- in 2018 (the peak of the project) 1,847 NSW schools (60 percent of NSW schools) signed up to WilderQuest, with 3,013 teachers and 17,097 students registered<sup>70</sup>
- provided schools with tailored learning modules for teachers to access through an online portal
- provided teachers access to NPWS staff and knowledge, which was highly valued as NPWS was perceived as a trusted source for environmental education
- successfully delivered environmental education learning content to enable students to learn about the environment and biodiversity and Aboriginal Discovery Ranger activities.  
a total of 573 teachers, Discovery Rangers and coordinators were trained in WilderQuest.<sup>71</sup>

### 4.3 Program logic would strengthen project development and outcomes monitoring

Whilst approved NBT projects had impact and were well aligned with NSW Government Trust and NPWS policies ([see Section 4.2](#)), when Trust was directed to oversee the NBT Program, they were provided with limited information about its funding objectives or intended outcomes, and project funding guidelines and criteria were yet to be established.<sup>72</sup> This made the process of designing and developing projects challenging for NPWS, and the approval challenging for Trust as the NBT Program's key objectives and outcomes were unclear at the outset.

There was limited information available about the development of the NBT Program. Documentation available indicated the NBT Program had three key objectives 'growing demand', 'improving supply' and 'creating tourists of tomorrow' which were partially approved by Trust in an early stage business plan (see [Section 3.1](#)). In their governance role, interviewees advised Trust administration supported NPWS to develop NBT Projects with a focus on conservation and environmental education outcomes in order to align the NBT Program with Trust Objects and the WELE funding requirements.<sup>73</sup> We understand a program logic was not designed to outline how the NBT Program objectives related to the specific conservation and environmental outcomes aligned with Trust objects and WELE funding.

Establishing an outcomes focus for NBT Projects is in line with sound grants administration principles. Whilst we cannot draw conclusions about which objectives and outcomes were the core priority for the NBT Program, it was evident from interviews this lack of clarity made it difficult to reach consensus about the overall intent of the program and created tension at times. Interviewees shared reaching consensus about what type of projects would align with the NBT Program outcomes was at times difficult, and in some instances impacted on project start times.<sup>74</sup>

These challenges provide useful insights for Trust and NPWS if they considered developing future nature based tourism programs. A key program design lesson from the NBT Program is the importance of establishing a program logic to provide clarity for the project design and selection process. This would assist to reduce confusion about the program's intent and avoid lengthy negotiations. We note in this instance Trust administration and NPWS

<sup>70</sup> NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest All Pages Summary*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest in the Classroom Overview*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>71</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilder Quest Learning Final Report comments addressed*. Internal report provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>72</sup> Interview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

<sup>73</sup> Interview: Environmental Trust administration, 15 December 2022.

<sup>74</sup> Interviews: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022; NPWS, 17 August 2022.

made significant efforts to develop an outcomes focus for NBT Projects with minimal program level information.

One interviewee raised that in reviewing project business plans, NBT program linkages were lacking:

*'The projects seemed rather random, individually and as a group. They were all clear and strong in their merits in each regard, but it wasn't clear how they came about or where they were being driven from or how they were allocated.'*<sup>75</sup>

While there was a lack of overall program logic developed, there was considerable effort made for the individual projects to map out a project logic, identifying for example how the activities were expected to achieve the outcomes. However, these were somewhat constrained by the lack of overarching program guidance.

Interviewees advised it was challenging at times to demonstrate and measure the extent projects contributed to environmental education outcomes, and confidence that some project performance indicators demonstrated the level of education achieved with participants was low. In some instances, collecting data from project participants was challenging or impractical. These types of challenges also made it difficult for Trust administration to verify project progress and monitor achievements against intended outcomes.

Establishing a detailed program logic that maps relationships between high level objectives and outcomes and project activities may have alleviated some of these challenges. A program logic would also support the selection of meaningful performance indicators to monitor the extent projects contributed to NBT Program outcomes like environmental education.

Research has shown that demonstrating impact (cause and effect) for environmental education outcomes is complex. The University of Technology Sydney's evaluation of the *Environmental Trust's Environmental Education Grants Program*<sup>76</sup> provides useful guidance on strengthening conservation and environmental education programs, including:<sup>77</sup>

- developing a clear framework of how education activities lead to environmental outcomes, drawing on transformative learning theory and social practice theories to inform program logic
  - ensuring there is a realistic assessment of what outcomes are achievable and measurable within the life of a grant
  - relaxing requirements to demonstrate tangible environmental outcomes, given that it is difficult to measure such outcomes from education activities
- reducing the number of measures so grantees can focus their efforts on areas where outcomes are most measurable and likely.

#### **4.4 Consider nature based tourism education in program design**

We note significant effort was made by both Trust administration and NPWS to develop meaningful performance indicators to measure NBT Project contributions to conservation and environmental education outcomes in the NBT Program. Trust and NPWS experiences provide valuable insights for future nature based tourism projects, which are explored in depth in the individual NBT Project evaluations ([Chapters 5 to 7](#)). This section aims to provide lessons learnt for Trust and NPWS, to support design a nature based programs in the future.

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<sup>76</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2022) [NSW Environmental Trust Education Grant Programs](#).

<sup>77</sup>.....University of Technology Sydney (2018) [Evaluation of NSW Environmental Trust Education Grant Programs](#). Institute for Public Policy and governance and Institute for Sustainable Futures.

Our evaluation found identifying nature based tourism projects and activities that lead to conservation and environmental education outcomes was complex. Nature based tourism activities can be quite different from traditional environmental education project activities. For example, activities that build awareness with young adults through a brand campaign and educating participants that attend commercial tour operator experiences are quite different to delivering discrete education units to primary school students in the WilderQuest project.

Interviewees described when delivering education messages for some nature based tourism projects, a ‘hidden curriculum’ approach to education was appropriate.<sup>78</sup> This involves encouraging participants’ connection to nature through experiences first, and gradually building their awareness about nature over time which would result in them being more likely to be interested in learning and conservation:

*‘Educating people about conservation is like unpeeling the layers of an onion. For example, they might go into a Park, have a great experience, observe, and want to go back. Next time you might peel away another layer, you might want to find out more about what you see – deepen your understanding each visit. You cannot just talk at them.’<sup>79</sup>*

Brand Campaign (see [Chapter 5](#)) used market research to determine young adults motivations for experiencing nature and social media messages to attract their interest in National Parks. Once young adults were connected to NPWS social media platforms, NPWS was able to introduce conservation and education messaging to these young adults.

Given the wide range of nature based tourism projects and different types of activities that can be undertaken to support conservation and education outcomes, spending time in the program design phase to map out the type of projects and activities that are most likely to lead to conservation and environmental education outcomes may assist in guiding the project selection and development process. Defining nature based tourism and mapping activities to outcomes in a program logic would also support monitoring and evaluation.

Tourism and Events Queensland’s nature based tourism ‘spectrum’ provides a useful explanation of the types of education that different nature based tourism projects can provide. The spectrum highlights that people’s experiences range from ‘passive’ to ‘immersive’ engagement in nature (see [Figure 1](#)).<sup>80</sup> Immersive engagement is believed to provide opportunity for more transformative experiences (i.e., conservation and education) compared to wandering in nature for enjoyment. This spectrum would be a useful resource for Trust administration and NPWS. Consideration of similar programs could also help define any future program priorities to align with intended outcomes (see [Attachment 5](#)).

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<sup>78</sup>.....The glossary of education reform (2015) [Hidden Curriculum](#).

<sup>79</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 30 August 2022.

<sup>80</sup>.....Tourism Events Queensland (2021) [Tourism and Events Queensland’s Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2021–2024](#).





**Some examples**

Each stage of the spectrum has been articulated to reflect the level of engagement with nature across some common nature-based tourism experiences.



**Figure 1 Nature based tourism spectrum<sup>81</sup>**

<sup>81</sup>.....Tourism Events Queensland (2021) [Tourism and Events Queensland's Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2021-2024](#).

## 4.5 Recommendations

**Table 8: Nature Based Tourism Program Recommendations**

Nature Based Tourism Program Recommendations	
<b>R1</b>	If Trust or NPWS designed a nature based tourism program in the future, project development, monitoring and evaluation would be strengthened by establishing a program logic at the outset that maps links between project activities and program outcomes.
<b>R2</b>	If Trust or NPWS plan to invest in nature based tourism projects that lead to environmental education outcomes in the future, it would be beneficial to draw on nature based tourism definitions and resources to inform the program logic and guide project development.

## 5 Young Adults Brand Campaign evaluation findings and lessons learnt

This chapter outlines the Commission's findings and recommendations for the evaluation of the Young Adults Brand Campaign Project (Brand Campaign). Brand Campaign was a four year project (2014-18) implemented by NPWS. Through a communication and marketing campaign it aimed to:

- raise awareness of National Parks and experiences
- support sustainable growth and participation in National Parks
- encourage greater awareness, appreciation and support for conservation and nature.<sup>82</sup>

The communication and marketing campaign targeted 'young adults' in the mid to older range of people categorised as Gen Y (people born between the early 1980s and the early 2000's), particularly those in the 25-35 year old range.<sup>83</sup>

In evaluating Brand Campaign, we considered all key evaluation questions and sub-questions in [Attachment-1 - Evaluation framework](#). Our findings are presented in the following sections:

- need for Brand Campaign was sound and it aligned with key NSW Government policies and priorities and NBT Program objectives and outcomes-key evaluation question 1a ([Section 5.1](#))
- Brand Campaign was well planned and designed to deliver agreed project outcomes – key evaluation question 2a ([Section 5.2](#))
- Brand Campaign's achievements towards agreed project outcomes – key evaluation question 1b and 1c ([Section 5.3](#))
- Brand Campaigns cost effectiveness - key evaluation question 2b ([Section 5.4](#))

Within each of these sections (in line with key evaluation question 3), we have highlighted lessons for Trust and NPWS from Brand Campaign to inform future investments including identifying unique aspects of the project, key benefits or risks and aspects that should be adopted or avoided for similar projects.

### 5.1 Brand Campaign need was sound and aligned with key policies

Our evaluation of Brand Campaign showed there was a sound rationale for the project and the original problem outlined in the approved business plan was effectively addressed. In the business plan, NPWS outlined there was clear need to address the growing challenge of engaging young adults with nature.

Research NPWS referenced in the business plan showed:<sup>84</sup>

- younger people lacked knowledge of National Parks
- there had been a steady decline from 2011–2016 in younger groups visiting National Parks
- young adults had less exposure to nature and National Parks as children than older adults had.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>.....NPWS (2014) *Business Plan – NPWS Parks Brand Campaign*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>83</sup> NPWS (2014) *Business Plan – NPWS Parks Brand Campaign*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>84</sup> NPWS (2014) *Business Plan – NPWS Parks Brand Campaign*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>85</sup>.....This research found the reasons young adults were not visiting National Parks included they had a low awareness of Parks, were unaware what Parks offered, and had perceived access barriers e.g., Parks were too far away, hard to get to and expensive. They also were time poor and focused on life security. TNS consulting (2016) *Optimising concept testing debrief NPWS*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

This research also found nature plays an important role for young adults in promoting health and wellbeing, building communities, supporting participation, and learning and conserving nature. NPWS identified that a marketing campaign for young adults would help build awareness and a stronger ‘people-park’ relationship, which would benefit the broader community, and had potential to foster conservation values amongst young adults.

Brand Campaign was developed to align with NSW Government priorities (see [Attachment 4](#)), and NPWS and Trust policies. The approved business plan highlighted the following policies and priorities Brand Campaign contributed to:<sup>86</sup>

- NSW 2021 State Plan goals
- NSW Visitor Economy Industry Action Plan
- Australia’s National Landscapes Program
- Trust objects
- OEH Corporate Plan (2014-2017) and NPWS Delivery Plan 2014/15.

Brand Campaign also aligned with the NBT Program objectives to ‘*grow demand*’ by raising the profile of Nature based experiences in National Parks and in encouraging young adults to visit. Brand Campaign supported the objective to ‘*create nature tourists of tomorrow*’ with a focus on encouraging young adults involvement in nature and conservation.

As outlined in [Section 4.3](#), conservation and environmental education outcomes were adopted for the NBT Program to align the NBT Program with Trust Objects and the WELE funding requirements. Our evaluation showed Brand Campaign had a clear focus on these outcomes. The project outcomes hierarchy included conservation and environmental education outcomes - ‘*grow an engaged community of support for NSW National Parks, with young adults*’ and ‘*increase appreciation of nature and adoption of conservation values*’.<sup>87</sup> It was assumed by encouraging young adults’ interest and engagement in National Parks, Brand Campaign would also educate young adults about conservation and environmental protection.<sup>88</sup>

We also considered how Brand Campaign aligned with Trust funding principles. Interviewees advised Brand Campaign was innovative in its use of a range of social media platforms (for example, Instagram, Facebook, Young Adult Blog and advertising) to connect with young adults, which were novel at the time of funding.<sup>89</sup> Brand Campaign’s innovation aligns with Trust funding principle to ‘*advance investment in novel and niche ideas that provide a platform for further action*’.<sup>90</sup>

Brand Campaign also aligned with NPWS’ responsibilities under Object 2A-1(c) of the Act to ‘*foster public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation*’<sup>91</sup> and many NPWS strategic documents that prioritised encouraging communities to enjoy parks from a conservation and tourism perspective. Whilst NPWS had implemented small-scale marketing programs previously, NBT Program funding was a substantial injection of funds to run a targeted communication and marketing campaign for young adults at a significant scale.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>.....NPWS (2014) *Business Plan – NPWS Parks Brand Campaign*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>87</sup>.....Office of Heritage and Environment (2016) *Outcomes Hierarchy and Evaluation Framework Updated June 2016*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>88</sup>.....NPWS (2014) *Business Plan – NPWS Parks Brand Campaign*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>89</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 17 August 2022, Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

<sup>90</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2018) *Objects of the Trust and Trust Funding Principles*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>91</sup> ..... See Object 2A, 1c of the [National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 No 80 \(NSW\)](#).

<sup>92</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.

## 5.2 Brand Campaign was well designed to deliver project outcomes

The Brand Campaign design was appropriate and effective and underpinned the project's significant achievements towards agreed project outcomes (see [Section 5.3](#)). This evaluation and also Brand Campaign final reporting provide comprehensive insights on good project design for a marketing campaign project, which may be useful to Trust and NPWS if they developed similar marketing campaign projects.

Key strengths of Brand Campaign project design and approach included:

- a project outcomes hierarchy and evaluation framework that mapped project level outcomes, evaluation questions and performance indicators
- pre-campaign market segmentation study to identify young adult market segments so messaging could be tailored to appeal to different young adult segments.<sup>93</sup>
- independent benchmarking research at the outset that identified barriers and drivers for young adult visiting National Parks and key performance indicators to monitor change in young adults perceptions about National Parks and conservation which supported meaningful monitoring and evaluation ([Section 5](#))<sup>94</sup>
- established innovative social media platforms (including Instagram, Facebook) that enabled connection to significantly more young adults than initially expected
- established a diverse media content portfolio (e.g. videos, photos) to encourage young adults to try experiences in National Parks outside of Sydney
- leveraged interest from young adults through novel promotional marketing activities (e.g., user-generated content inviting participants to share parks related content, competitions, engagement of young adult influencers in PR activities).<sup>95</sup>
- engaged appropriate technical expertise to support marketing content, and engaged with Destination NSW, Tourism Australia, destination networks and commercial tour operators to leverage their networks and broaden the reach to the target audience.<sup>96</sup>

Brand Campaign experienced some delays due to the time taken to negotiate the project's approval, personnel changes and organisational restructures. These delays were managed effectively and did not significantly impact on Brand Campaign's achievements or project expenditure (see [Section 5.3](#) and [Section 5.4](#)).

Interviewees provided the following insights on Brand Campaign's key strengths:

*'Market research showed us how important it was to understand your audience, you can then maximise impact.'*<sup>97</sup>

*'We learned a lot about how critical good content was, for example videos and articles, content that is reusable maximises the return on investment.'*<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> NPWS undertook the segmentation study which informed Brand Campaign marketing strategies for different young adult segments.  
NPWS and Instinct and Reason (2016) *NSW NPWS Segmentation/Experience Enhancement Research June 2016*. Internal report provided by Trust Administration.

..... TNS (2016) *Optimising creative concept testing debrief NPWS May 2016 – Campaign to raise awareness of NSW National Parks – Youth Market*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>94</sup>..... Environmental Trust (2016) *Outcomes Hierarchy and Evaluation Framework – updated June 2016*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>95</sup>..... NPWS (2018) *Young Adults Brand Campaign PR Report* Internal document provided by Trust Administration.

<sup>96</sup>..... NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.  
Interview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.

<sup>97</sup>..... Interview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.

<sup>98</sup>..... Interview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.

*'This project has lessons beyond Gen Y (young adults), millennials would also be a good market to target as they are more interested in outcomes like helping local communities, and sharing their views with friends.'*<sup>99</sup>

*'The project was really successful in attracting followers, it went way past any expectations put in initial targets. A lot of traction for low cost.'*<sup>100</sup>

In [Section 4.4](#) recognised both Trust administration and NPWS put significant effort into developing meaningful performance indicators to measure; however, identifying nature based tourism projects and activities that lead to conservation and environmental education outcomes was complex. Nature based tourism activities can be quite different from traditional environmental education project activities. Brand Campaign, had to strike a balance between creating material that appealed to young adults interests and environmental education messaging.

The 'Get active and make friends' Case Study 2 illustrates how Brand Campaign used marketing content to appeal to young adults interests and also encourage their involvement in conservation activities in National Parks. Brand Campaign provides many useful examples of activities that can support conservation and environmental education outcomes if Trust or NPWS considered investing in similar marketing campaigns in the future. As raised in [Section 4.3](#), establishing a program logic that maps activities to outcomes would strengthen the ability to measure the extent marketing campaign activities contributed to these outcomes.

### 5.3 Brand Campaign achievements were significant

Noting there was limited information available about the NBT Program or a program logic to support the evaluation of NBT Projects ([Section 4.3](#)), we present our findings of Brand Campaign's achievements against agreed project outcomes and performance indicators listed in the project outcomes hierarchy. Our evaluation drew on project documentation, interviews and surveys undertaken as part of this evaluation (see [Section 2.2](#)).

Brand Campaign made unique and positive contributions to the NBT Program objectives and outcomes. Young adult park visitations had a 19 percent increase for 18-24 year-olds and a 33 percent for 25-30 year-olds over the life of the marketing campaign (2016-2018),<sup>101,102</sup> and increased the number of young adults engaged with NPWS through social media platforms to 30,000 (database contacts).<sup>103</sup> Given the increased number of visits to National Parks by young adults and the significant increase in the number of young adults engaged in NPWS social media platforms, it is likely that young adult's exposed to the marketing campaign had an increased awareness about National Park experiences, nature appreciation and conservation.

NPWS advised Brand Campaign also helped NPWS to shift public perceptions of their role in National Parks. The communication and marketing campaign allowed NPWS to offer a way to engage with young adults and the broader community in a more motivational and informative engagement style. Research also showed young adults perceived NPWS as a trusted source to provide information about conservation and environmental experiences:

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<sup>99</sup>.....interview: Environmental Trust Nature Based Tourism subcommittee member, 29 November 2022.

<sup>100</sup>.....interview: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

<sup>101</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *NSW National Parks Visitation Results – August 2019*. Internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

<sup>102</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>103</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Visitation Figures – August 2018*, internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

*'NPWS is positioned as an organisation committed to conservation and protecting the environment (stronger for Adventurers). Socialisers are more likely to perceive NPWS as an organisation that inspires, encourages, and educates others.'*<sup>104</sup>

NPWS put significant effort into developing performance indicators and monitoring increases in young adult's awareness of National Parks, appreciation of nature and adoption of conservation values and visits to National Parks with reputable independent sources. These sources and studies are listed below to support understanding of Brand Campaign achievements in the following sections.

TNS Consulting was engaged by NPWS to undertake pre-campaign market research with young adults, benchmark and monitor project performance indicators for Brand Campaign from 2016-2018. TNS reports included:

- TNS (2016) Optimising Creative Concept Testing Debrief NPWS May 2016
- TNS (2016) NPWS Young Adult Brand and Campaign Tracking Benchmark November 2016
- TNS (2017) Young Adult Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 2 March 2017
- TNS (2017) Young Adult Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 3 November 2017
- TNS (2018) Young Adult Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 4 March 2018 Topline Results

TNS Campaign tracking (including the benchmarking report and Wave 2-4 reports) informed our evaluation of Brand Campaign achievements against agreed project performance indicators in [Section 5.3.1-5.3.3](#). TNS Campaign tracking reports are a useful resource for Trust administration and NPWS for understanding young adult perceptions about National Parks, nature and conservation and can support development of meaningful performance indicators for marketing campaigns and nature based tourism projects in the future.

Biannually, NPWS engages the [Roy Morgan](#) market research company to undertake a telephone survey to monitor *Annual visits to NPWS managed National Parks in NSW*.<sup>105</sup> These survey results were used by NPWS to report on changes in young adult visitations to National parks in 2019 after Brand Campaign's completion (see [Section 5.3.1](#)).

### **5.3.1 Performance indicators for increasing National Park visitation**

Increasing young adult's visits to National Parks was a key project outcome that supported the NBT Program objective '*growing demand*' by raising the profile of nature based experiences in National Parks with young adults. Linking to the NBT Program conservation outcome the underpinning assumption for this project was '*increased visitation drives appreciation and support and value of nature and the environment*'.<sup>106</sup>

NPWS monitored changes in young adult park visitations, the frequency of their visits and changes in young adult visitor intentions to visit National Parks over the life of the marketing campaign which ran from October 2016 until August 2018.<sup>107</sup> The performance indicators had targets and results which are presented in [Table 9](#).

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<sup>104</sup>.....TNS Consulting (2016) *Brand and Campaign Tracking - Research Report, Benchmark*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>105</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *NSW National Parks Visitation Results – August 2019*. Internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

<sup>106</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2016) *Outcomes Hierarchy and Evaluation Framework – updated June 2016*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>107</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *NSW National Parks Visitation Results – August 2019*. Internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

**Table 9: Performance indicators for increasing National Park visits by young adults<sup>108, 109</sup>**

Performance indicator	Target	Result	
<b>a) Increase in park visitor numbers (18-24 year-olds)</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>19% More than achieved</b>	
<b>Increase in park visitor numbers (25-34 year-olds)</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>33% More than achieved</b>	
<b>Increase in park visitor frequency (18-24 year-olds)</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>Inconclusive</b>	
<b>Increase in park visitor frequency (24-35 year-olds)</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>Inconclusive</b>	
<b>b) Increase in visitor intention</b>	<b>29%<sup>110</sup></b>	<b>More than achieved 38-40% increased intention after exposure to specific campaign ads</b>	

The *Annual Visits to NSW managed National Parks in NSW* survey undertaken in 2019 revealed a significant increase in National Park visitations amongst young adults with an increase of 19 percent for 18-24 year-olds and a 33 percent increase for 25-30 year-olds from 2016 to 2018, which exceeded the project performance indicator targets. In numerical terms, the 25-30 year old young adult group equated to an extra 2,267,481 visits to NSW managed National Parks from 2016 to 2018. The 18-24 year old category increase was an extra 708,785 visits over the same period.<sup>111</sup> We note there was an overall trend of increased visits to National Parks prior to Brand Campaign.

The *Annual Visits to NSW managed National Parks in NSW* report notes factors that influence visits to National Parks include seasonal fluctuations, temperature, and significant and sustained weather events.<sup>112</sup> Roy Morgan Research who conducted the survey for this report, used a range of techniques to weight data and remove bias in survey responses. NPWS advised there were no obvious external factors that contributed to this increase (like increased visitation of natural areas during COVID-19).

Young adult's intentions to visit National Parks and the frequency of their visits was monitored using TNS Campaign tracking survey questions and young adult usage of #NSW Parks hashtags. Brand Campaign final report indicates that 37 percent of young adults were thinking of visiting a National Park at least once a month.<sup>113</sup> TNS Campaign tracking reports when young adults were asked if they thought more about visiting National Parks after seeing four specific NPWS marketing campaigns, they were more likely to consider visiting National Parks (ranging from 34-40 percent).<sup>114</sup> This suggests marketing campaign content can impact on young adults actively thinking about visiting a National Park.

<sup>108</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *NSW National Parks Visitation Results – August 2019*. Internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

<sup>109</sup>.....TNS (2018) *Brand and Campaign Tracking Round 3 Jan 2018*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>110</sup>.....Note the outcomes hierarchy target was 50%, the final report quoted 29% for which NPWS explained the reasons for different targets: 'Primary Research Baseline: 19% Intention to visit NSW National Parks. So increasing the baseline from 19% to 50% would mean: 19 x 1.5 = 28.5% (so a goal of 29%).

.....NPWS (2022) *NPWS Pers comms*, 1 November 2022.

<sup>111</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *NSW National Parks Visitation Results – August 2019*. Internal document provided by NPWS; Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

<sup>112</sup>.....Roy Morgan (2019) [Annual Visits to NPWS Managed Parks in NSW](#).

<sup>113</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>114</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 4 March 2018*. Internal document provided by NPWS.



TNS Campaign tracking (full list of TNS tracking available in [Section 5.3](#)) monitored the *'frequency that young adults actively think about visiting a NSW National Park*. TNS Campaign tracking asked young adults if they thought about visiting National Parks daily, weekly, once or twice a month, occasionally or rarely. Young adults typically responded once to twice a month (24-27 percent over the campaign period) and the largest percentage of young adults thought about visiting occasionally (40 to 44 percent).<sup>115</sup> The frequency that young adults thought about visiting National Parks for each time scale did not change significantly over the life of the marketing campaign with a small rise in the 'occasionally' by March 2018. NPWS advised the initial TNS Campaign Tracking question did not include the timescale, which made assessing changes in young adults frequency and intention to visit difficult.

Whilst significant changes in frequency and intention to visit were not confirmed, TNS Campaign tracking provided useful insights on the types of marketing campaigns that were most likely to influence young adults intentions to visit. For example, market research found communication and marketing campaigns that focused on natural imagery like picnic spots and weekends away were found to have the strongest recall and positive impression and considered more likely to influence young adults intention to visit National Parks or share information online.<sup>116</sup> Also the 'Adventurer' young adult segment was found to be most likely to consider day trips and overnight trips enabling messaging.<sup>117</sup> These insights enabled NPWS to customise marketing campaigns to maximise their impact with young adults.

NPWS advised the number of social media connections with young adults on platforms like Instagram #NSW Parks were another indicator young adults may be visiting NSW Parks more frequently:

*'In 2018 the #NSWParks hashtag is now used an average 500-600 times per week and this reflects actual visitation.'*<sup>118</sup>

This rise in the number of young adults following and sharing National Parks information provides a clear indication campaign marketing content generated young adults interest in National Parks and supported the NBT Program objective *'growing demand.'*

Given the novelty of Brand Campaign and the use of social media platforms at the time of this project, the frequency performance indicator and target seemed ambitious. Given the *Annual Visits to NSW managed National Parks in NSW* provides a clear indication of increases in park visits by young adults, the performance indicator targets for frequency and intention to visit appear to be less critical. Annual visits can be measured biannually, and can be monitored beyond the project life to verify a sustained change in visitation in a target group like young adults.

If Trust or NPWS were to develop similar projects, monitoring visitation alone may be adequate and would also reduce the administrative burden of monitoring requirements for NPWS or other grantees.

Regular TNS Campaign Tracking provided valuable insights into young adult motivations for visiting National Parks, and also revealed perceived barriers for young adults visiting National Parks. This information is useful to both Trust and NPWS in understanding how to

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<sup>115</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 4 March 2018*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>116</sup>.....TNS (2017) *Young Adult Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 3 November 2017*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>117</sup>.....TNS (2017) *Young Adult Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 3 November 2017*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>118</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

encourage young adults to visit National Parks through other projects. The ‘Skip Royal, head to stunning Heathcote NP- Case Study 1’ is an example of how marketing content addressed young adults perceived barriers to visiting National Parks.




### Case Study 1 – Skip Royal, head to stunning Heathcote National Park

Benchmarking research revealed time, distance and cost were key barriers to young adults’ lower visitation to National Parks. ‘Skip Royal, head to stunning Heathcote National Park’ is an example of how marketing content was prepared for young adults to address these perceived barriers. NPWS also used media content to encourage young adults to try less visited National Parks, of which there are 880.<sup>119</sup> This marketing campaign was supporting a dispersal strategy – encouraging young adults to visit less busy National Parks to reduce crowding in peak periods. Another example also created marketing content that encouraged young adults to take advantage of cheap train travel on Sundays to address the cost barrier of visiting National Parks.

### 5.3.2 Performance indicators for growing community and appreciation of nature and conservation

A key objective and outcome listed for Brand Campaign was to ‘grow an engaged young adult community of support for NSW, with young adults.’ This outcome supported NBT Program objectives to ‘grow demand’ and support ‘creating the nature tourists of tomorrow’ and the NBT Program outcome to encourage conservation awareness. The underpinning assumption for achieving this outcome was ‘NPWS can maintain an ongoing relationship and secure nature conservation advocates and foster likeminded people to advocate conservation values.’<sup>120</sup>

NPWS monitored young adult engagement in social media platforms used through the campaign (e.g. Facebook, Instagram and digital mentions) over the life of the project and TNS Campaign tracking was used to monitor conservation values in young adults from 2016-2018. These performance indicators had targets and results that are presented in [Table 10](#). Table 10: Performance indicators for growing community and appreciation of nature and conservation

Performance indicator	Target	Result	
A. Grow engaged community of young adults increasing:	400% (Facebook fans) 9-15% (engagement)	240% (Facebook fans)	
a) Facebook fans and engagement			
b) Use of #NSWParks on Instagram	25%	15,000% More than achieved	
c) Digital/word of mouth mentions	30%	7,542% More than achieved	
B. Conservation values	TNS benchmarking indicators	Inconclusive, no significant change over time	

<sup>119</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 30 August 2022.

<sup>120</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2016) *Outcomes Hierarchy and Evaluation Framework – updated June 2016*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

Brand Campaign was very successful at engaging young adults in NPWS media content and social media platforms and significantly exceeded most performance indicator targets set for this outcome. The strongest indication of growth in the young adult community involvement in NPWS social media platforms was the 15,000 percent increase in Instagram users of #NSW Parks hashtags (up from below 100 individuals prior to the marketing campaign), a 240 percent increase in Facebook fans, an additional 103,000 Naturescapes subscribers and 31,200 subscribers to the Young Adults Campaign blog. Digital word of mouth mentions increased by 7,542 percent as a result of Brand Campaign.<sup>121</sup>

The evaluation revealed NPWS used a range of strategies to achieve this level of engagement with young adults. NPWS advised the NPWS pre-campaign segmentation study that identified young adult market segments<sup>122</sup> and the TNS benchmarking research that identified barriers and drivers for young adults visiting National Parks<sup>123</sup> were both critical pieces of work for establishing a robust basis for the marketing campaign and to develop relevant content for the young adult segments.<sup>124</sup> Brand Campaign provides Trust administration and NPWS with many useful insights for how to achieve successful engagement of young adults through marketing campaigns and social media. In summary some of the key strengths we observed:

- customised messaging for young adult market segments that addressed barriers and appealed to their motivations to visit National Parks
- through marketing content, NPWS consistently maintained market presence on a range of social media platforms
- specific messaging in language that appealed to young adults
- established a database of quality content to draw on for campaign material (e.g., videos and images)
- used novel ways to engage young adults e.g. used influencers to promote experiences and gamified involvement in National Parks through competitions and events like ‘Day with a Ranger.’<sup>125</sup>

Evaluating the extent that Brand Campaign increased young adults appreciation of nature and adoption of conservation values was more challenging. Monitoring changes in conservation values may have been ambitious at the time of the project given the novelty of using communication and marketing campaigns in this way. Also as outlined in [Section 4.3](#), the extent projects contributed to conservation and environmental education outcomes was difficult to measure without a program logic that linked project activities to these intended outcomes. There were many clear examples Brand Campaign marketing content was designed to encourage conservation and environmental awareness amongst young adults throughout the communication and marketing campaign (e.g. [Why dogs aren't allowed in National Parks | #NSWParks National Parks Line - YouTube](#)). Whilst we could not measure the extent that Brand Campaign contributed to this outcome, it was evident it was a key focus for the project.

TNS Campaign tracking monitored change in twelve statements that asked young adults about their perceptions of nature, conservation, and the environment over the four studies

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<sup>121</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>122</sup> NPWS undertook the segmentation study which informed Brand Campaign marketing strategies for different young adult segments.  
NPWS and Instinct and Reason (2016) *NSW NPWS Segmentation/Experience Enhancement Research June 2016*. Internal report provided by Trust Administration.

..... TNS (2016) *Optimising creative concept testing debrief NPWS May 2016 – Campaign to raise awareness of NSW National Parks – Youth Market*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>123</sup>.....TNS (2016) *Optimising Creative Concept Testing Debrief NPWS May 2016*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>124</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.

<sup>125</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

they undertook for NPWS (see [Section 5.3](#)). TNS Campaign tracking provides useful insights into young adults' perceptions about conservation which could inform similar projects aiming to encourage young adults to get involved in conservation. In summary TNS found in the young adults surveyed in 2018 (at the end of the marketing campaign):

- 62 percent agreed '*conserving the environment was important*'
- 67 percent agreed '*everybody needs to do their part for the environment*' and that it was important to set '*a good example by conserving the environment*'
- 45 percent surveyed agreed that whilst outdoors was fun they now '*take more responsibility for the environment.*'<sup>126</sup>

For each of these statements, the percentage of young adults agreeing with these statements increased in the Wave 2 and 3 Campaign tracking studies, then returned within 2 percent of the 2016 benchmarking percentages.<sup>127</sup> These percentage increases suggest young adults perceptions about conservation may have been impacted by marketing campaign bursts. We understand a target was not set for the conservation values performance indicator and monitoring levels of change in conservation values as a result of the communication and marketing campaign was complex (see [Section 4.4](#)). NPWS had also planned to use a social listening tool to capture further insights on nature appreciation and conservation, but this was not purchased due to budget limitations.

TNS Campaign tracking also provided insights into young adults' perceptions of conservation volunteering:<sup>128</sup>

- around 2 percent of young adults surveyed joined a conservation volunteer group or were motivated to join conservation activities
- around 25 percent of young adults surveyed were not interested in volunteering which lowered by 1 percent at the end of the Campaign in 2018.

These findings suggest potentially 75 percent of young adults may have an interest in being involved conservation activities of some form, which is a useful insight for future conservation projects focused on young adults.

TNS ran focus groups that revealed the perceived barriers to volunteering, which could also inform other projects aiming to encourage young adults to consider conservation volunteering:

*'Although it was clear that young adults who attended the focus groups support nature and conservation, translating this sentiment through to action may be challenging due to time poor nature of this market and their strong focus of creating security for their own lives... encouraging action should be a longer-term objective that would be more successful if aligned with events and activities conducted in National Parks.'*<sup>129</sup>

TNS Consulting advised NPWS to use subtle approaches to encourage young adults to participate in conservation activities to have greater impact with this target group. For example, for marketing content, attach conservation activities to experiences young adults were interested in and encourage them to share experiences to leverage emotional connection to National Parks. This is a useful insight for both NPWS and Trust when considering how to encourage conservation values in young adults and how communication and marketing campaigns can be used to encourage involvement.

*'Get active and make some friends'*- Case Study 2 provides an example of how Brand Campaign media content was framed to encourage young adults to volunteer in National

<sup>126</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 4 March 2018*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>127</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 4 March 2018*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>128</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 4 March 2018*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>129</sup>.....NPWS (2016) *Final TNS Report PPT 16 May*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

Parks. The article includes the types of benefits to motivate them to be involved that were identified in market research.

### Case Study 2 – Get active and make some friends – volunteer in NSW Parks

NPWS advised Brand Campaign had a strong focus on motivating young adults to visit National Parks with a view to building in conservation experiences:

*‘It was very clear in our minds the project was not just about encouraging young adults to visit parks, it was also about the importance of conservation of these places for them and future generations.’<sup>1</sup>*

The ‘Get active and make some friends’ marketing campaign pitched key benefits of volunteering to young adults including:

- to improve health and wellbeing
- improve job prospects
- make friendships
- enjoy the beauty of National Parks whilst making a difference
- mix volunteering with a weekend away

Young adults experiences of volunteering around NSW were also included in the media article as well as links to current opportunities to volunteer.

### 5.3.3 Performance indicators for increasing awareness and advocacy

Increasing young adults awareness of NSW National Parks and experiences was listed as an intermediate project outcome. The underpinning assumption of this outcome was ‘awareness will drive intent to visit and positive engagement leads to advocacy and long term support for NPWS and the environment.’ The underpinning assumption that Brand Campaign would increase young adults advocacy for National Parks was ‘word of mouth and peer recommendations resonate strongly with the cohort and the campaign must leverage sharing of knowledge.’<sup>130</sup>

NPWS monitored changes in young adults awareness of National Parks and increases with TNS Campaign tracking (see [Section 5.3](#)) and monitored social media platforms to observe increases in mentions about National Parks. These performance indicators and results are presented in [Table 11](#).

**Table 11: Performance indicators for increasing awareness and advocacy**

Performance indicator	Target	Result	
a. Increase awareness of National Parks and range of experiences	49%	Inconclusive	?
b. Increase in mentions of National Parks in social media	25%	15,023% (Instagram) 7,542% More than achieved	✓
c. Increase in advocacy in social media channels pre and post-campaign (increase first 6 months, post-launch 10 percent increase every 6 months)	25%	Achieved	✓

<sup>130</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2016) *Outcomes Hierarchy and Evaluation Framework – updated June 2016*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

To understand if there was an increase in young adults awareness about National Parks, TNS asked young adults about their knowledge of National Parks. At the end of the Campaign 32 percent claimed they were *‘very/moderately knowledgeable’*, 52 percent claimed they had *‘little knowledge’* and 15 percent claimed they had *‘no knowledge.’* For each of these statements, the percentage of young adults agreeing with these statements increased in the Wave 2 and 3 Campaign tracking studies, then returned within 2-3 percent of the 2016 benchmarking percentages.<sup>131</sup> Levels of knowledge varied across different young adult segments with ‘Adventurer’ and ‘Explorer’ segments having the highest percentage (40 percent) that considered themselves *very/moderately knowledgeable*.

Brand Campaign final report reported a 32 percent increase in awareness, stating *‘in hindsight, this was an ambitious objective which will be reviewed as part of the new content marketing campaign.’*<sup>132</sup> We were unable to correlate the reported targeted achievement of 32 percent with Campaign Tracking benchmark findings; however, given the novelty of marketing campaigns to increase awareness about National Parks and conservation, it may have been more appropriate to collect qualitative information about young adult knowledge and awareness in response to the communication and marketing campaign and content rather than set a quantitative target of 49 percent.

As outlined in [Section 4.3](#) it was challenging to demonstrate how NBT projects educated participants (in this case young adults). Establishing a program logic that mapped environmental education outcomes to activities, and considered nature based tourism definitions would assist similar projects in the future. The insights captured from Brand Campaign tracking about young adults knowledge, awareness and motivations is also a valuable resource that can be used to consider appropriate performance indicators for similar nature based tourism projects in the future.

We surveyed Trust and NPWS stakeholders to capture their perceptions on what level of awareness. Brand Campaign was perceived to have:

- ✓ increased knowledge about National Parks
- ✓ generated a positive change in attitudes
- ✓ generated positive change in involvement in National Parks.

A social listening tool to capture NPWS and National Park mentions was not purchased due to budget constraints. However, achievements for growing community (e.g., Instagram social media mentions ([Section 5.3.2](#)) indicate the project achieved much more than expected for performance indicators (b) and (c).

TNS Campaign tracking provided detailed insights of the impact of different marketing campaigns on young adults throughout the project, allowing NPWS to tailor media content to have more impact with young adult segments. Some key Campaign tracking insights:<sup>133</sup>

- nearly 1 in 2 young adults recalled seeing NPWS marketing campaign bursts, with ‘picnic spots’ and weekends having the strongest recall, and positive impression and most likely to influence young adults thinking about visiting National Parks or sharing content online.
- marketing campaign bursts customised for young adult interests motivate them to actively look for more information about nature and conservation, National Parks or speaking to others after seeing media.

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<sup>131</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 4 March 2018*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>132</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>133</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *Brand and Campaign Tracking Wave 4 March 2018*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

- word of mouth was the most powerful way to have recall (confirming importance of young adults sharing media content)
- NPWS was strongly positioned to deliver conservation and environmental education messages as they were perceived as committed to these outcomes and an organisation that connects with young adults
- there was an increase in young adults wanting to learn more about National Parks from rangers while they're visiting
- 40 percent of surveyed young adults wanted authentic Aboriginal cultural and environmental experiences in National Parks
- diversity and protecting the natural world was a priority for 66 percent of young adults surveyed.

These insights are a useful resource for Trust administration and NPWS to inform a deeper understanding of young adults awareness of and needs from National Parks experiences in the future. The statements used by TNS Campaign tracking with young adults provide a useful base to consider future performance indicators for awareness about National Parks. We observed whilst the use of quantitative performance indicators have their place, given the novelty of the project and complexity of monitoring increases in awareness, the collection of a qualitative understanding of young adults perceptions about Parks experiences and motivations to be involved in conservation was an important first step. If quantitative targets are established for performance indicators, they require flexibility to be reviewed as new information comes to light.

NPWS also found monitoring with social media algorithms can be challenging if they are changed midway through the project by the social media platform. This was outside of NPWS' control and should be taken into consideration for similar projects.

## 5.4 Brand Campaign was cost effective

The Brand Campaign received the largest funding allocation from the NBT Program at \$3.5 million ([Section 3.3 Table 5](#)). Whilst funds were significant, our evaluation showed that the budget was well scrutinised by Trust administration and Trust NBT subcommittee to ensure Brand Campaign expenditure was cost effective and value for money.

NPWS took a range of steps to ensure the project was cost effective:<sup>134</sup>

- content production expenses (main expense) were evaluated to confirm price competitiveness
- additional expenditure on media content (to maintain quality) was balanced by reducing expenditure on media and usage of digital media options to remain within budget
- selected staff with the best skills and involved non-Trust funded staff in the project to maintain quality media content.

Budget variations were approved by Trust administration. Brand Campaign funding offered value for money for NPWS because it provided a range of lasting social media platforms for NPWS to remain connected to young adults after the project was completed. The social media platform, visitor database and content portfolio continue to provide NPWS with access to young adults (and other audiences) and NPWS has continued to build young adults awareness about experiences and appreciation for conservation and nature after funding finished.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.

<sup>135</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 17 August 2022.

..... NPWS (2018) *Final Report Major Grants – Young Adults Campaign*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

NPWS advised whilst the benchmarking research and monitoring performance indicators and targets were valuable, they came at considerable cost, which may warrant consideration when costing similar projects in the future.

## 5.5 Recommendations

**Table 12: The Brand Campaign Recommendations**

The Brand Campaign Recommendations	
<b>R3</b>	<p>If Trust or NPWS were to invest in a communication and marketing campaigns in the future, Brand Campaign can provide valuable insights on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ effective project design and implementation</li><li>▪ strategies to achieve a high level of engagement through social media tools and marketing campaigns</li><li>▪ young adults knowledge, perceptions, and motivations to experience National Parks and get involved in nature and conservation</li><li>▪ developing meaningful performance indicators for conservation and environmental education outcomes from nature based tourism campaigns</li></ul>
<b>R4</b>	<p>Trust administration and NPWS would strengthen future marketing campaign project design and implementation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ establishing a program logic that maps links between project activities and program outcomes to support project design and monitoring and evaluation</li><li>▪ for novel projects like Brand Campaign, consider capturing qualitative information about young adults' awareness and motivations to inform the development of meaningful performance indicator targets</li><li>▪ allowing flexibility to adapt quantitative targets as new information comes to light</li><li>▪ look for opportunities to reduce the number of performance indicators monitored if there are clear lines of evidence available for primary performance indicators (e.g. Park visitations versus frequency of visits), to reduce the reporting burden for grantees.</li></ul>



## 6 CTO Small Grants Project evaluation findings and lessons learnt

This chapter outlines the Commission's findings and recommendations for the evaluation of the Commercial Tour Operator Small Grants Project (CTO Project). CTO Project was a three and a half year project implemented by NPWS that aimed to:

- enhance partnerships between NPWS and commercial tour operators
- deliver new and enhanced nature and cultural based tourism experiences in National Parks in five priority landscapes in NSW<sup>136</sup>
- increase the number and quality of nature based and cultural experiences available in National Parks
- enhance the environmental education of participants in nature based and cultural experiences and their appreciation of National Parks and nature.<sup>137</sup>

In evaluating CTO Project, we considered all key evaluation questions and sub-questions in [Attachment-1 - Evaluation framework](#). Our findings are presented in the following sections:

- need for CTO was sound and it aligned with key NSW Government policies and priorities and NBT Program objectives -key evaluation question 1a ([Section 6.1](#))
- CTO Project design was sound with opportunities to strengthen
  - key evaluation question 2a ([Section 6.2](#))
- CTO Project was cost effective but grant allocations were under allocated
  - key evaluation question 2b ([Section 6.4](#))
- CTOs had impact but was limited by monitoring data – key evaluation question 1b and 1c ([Section 6.3](#))

Within each of these sections (in line with key evaluation question 3), we have highlighted lessons for Trust and NPWS from CTO Project to inform future investments including identifying unique aspects of the project, key benefits or risks and aspects that should be adopted or avoided for similar projects.

### 6.1 CTO Project need was sound and aligned with key policies

Our evaluation of the CTO Project showed there was a sound rationale for the CTO Project and the original problem outlined in the approved business plan was addressed although the number of grants taken up by commercial tour operators was less than expected ([Section 6.2](#)).

In the business plan, NPWS outlined the importance of partnerships with commercial tour operators were for providing nature based experiences in National Parks. NPWS had previously trialled a small grants program for commercial tour operators in 2014 and found grants improved their capacity to deliver quality nature based visitor experiences.<sup>138</sup> Also, being small businesses, commercial tour operators found it difficult to apply for larger nature based tourism grants as they could not match the funding of larger grants.<sup>139</sup> The CTO Project offered smaller \$10,000 grants to eligible grantees, which was more within their means to match grant funding.

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<sup>136</sup> Note the number of priority landscapes was expanded to 9 in the second round of grant funding.

<sup>137</sup>.....NPWS (2015) *Approved Business Plan – National Landscapes Small Grant Program V2*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>138</sup>.....NPWS (2015) *Approved Business Plan – National Landscapes Small Grant Program V2*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>139</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 30 August 2022.

A Trust NBT subcommittee member highlighted the value of supporting tour operators to provide experiences in National Parks:

*'The CTO program was a really good example of finding new opportunities within Parks and bringing in good business operators who were able to work with NPWS to interpret the stories for the respective visitors.'*<sup>140</sup>

The CTO Project was developed to align with NSW Government priorities (see [Attachment 4](#)), and NPWS and Trust policies. The approved business plan highlighted the following policies and priorities CTO Project contributed to:<sup>141</sup>

- NSW State Priorities (2015)
- Australia's National Landscapes Program
- NSW Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan (2013), NPWS Cultural Tourism Development Program
- NPWS Tourism Masterplan 2015-2020 and NPWS Tourism Masterplan 2015-2020
- Trust objects and NPWS Act and NPWS Partnerships Framework
- OEH Corporate Plan and NPWS Delivery Plan
- NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Policy and Parks Eco Pass licensing system.

The CTO Project also aligned with the NBT Program objectives to 'grow demand' and 'improve supply of experiences in iconic destinations' by supporting commercial tour operators to offer more quality nature based experiences in National Parks in iconic destinations. We also considered how the CTO Project aligned with Trust funding principles and found it supported additionality, fostered co-contributions and strategic collaborations with commercial tour operators, and complemented NPWS core programs.<sup>142</sup>

As outlined in [Section 4.3](#), conservation and environmental education outcomes were adopted for the NBT Program to align the NBT Program with Trust Objects and the WELE funding requirements. Our evaluation showed the CTO Project was designed to align with these outcomes, but demonstrating alignment and monitoring against these outcomes was challenging at times. The CTO Project business plan outcomes hierarchy included an environmental education outcome to 'increase levels of environmental education by participants.'<sup>143</sup> The CTO grant application process also included assessment criteria that assessed if projects included conservation and environmental education components and only commercial tour operators with Eco Pass accreditation could apply for grants.<sup>144</sup>

The CTO Project aligned with NPWS' responsibilities under Object 2A-1(c) of the Act to 'foster public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation'<sup>145</sup> and supported a range of strategic priorities to encourage communities to enjoy National Parks, and experience culture heritage and the environment.

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<sup>140</sup>.....interview: Environmental Trust Nature Based Tourism subcommittee member, 13 October 2022.

<sup>141</sup>.....NPWS (2015) *Approved Business Plan – National Landscapes Small Grant Program V2*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>142</sup>.....NSW Environmental Trust (2018) *Objects of the Trust and Trust Funding Principles*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>143</sup>.....NPWS (2015) *Approved Business Plan – National Landscapes Small Grant Program V2*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>144</sup>.....NPWS (n.d.) *Expression of Interest Assessment Criteria*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>145</sup> ..... See Object 2A, 1c of the [National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 No 80 \(NSW.\)](#)

## 6.2 CTO Project design was sound with opportunities to strengthen

Next we present our evaluation of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the CTO Project and CTO Small Grants program design.

### 6.2.1 CTO Project design

The CTO project design was appropriate, and effectively designed to enhance partnerships with commercial tour operators to deliver nature based experiences in National Parks. Whilst the project was designed to align with NBT Program conservation and environmental education outcomes, there were challenges experienced in the project design and monitoring phases for CTO Project that provide lessons for designing similar projects.

We understand from interviewees that aligning the CTO Project to support environmental education outcomes was complex. This led to lengthy negotiations in developing the project business plan for approval. Recognising Trust administration and NPWS made significant efforts to ensure CTO Project had an outcomes focus, a key lesson for future projects is to establish a clear program outline (objectives, outcomes, funding criteria) and a program logic. This would assist to reduce confusion about the programs intent and avoid lengthy negotiations. ([Section 4.3](#)).

Interviewees advised it was also challenging to identify the type of tour activities that could be undertaken to support education of tour participants at times. Our evaluation indicated nature based tourism activities can be quite different from traditional environmental education activities. The nature based tourism spectrum may be a useful resource for identifying nature based experiences that can support education of participants (e.g. immersive experiences) and contribute to environmental education outcomes for similar projects ([Section 4.4](#)).

Further, collecting feedback from tour participants about their experiences and what they had learnt was challenging making it difficult to monitor CTO Project achievements. Both NPWS and commercial tour operators advised the *Commercial Tour Operator Participant Survey* used to capture participant feedback had low uptake because it was impractical to use in the field, resulting in limited data about participant experiences and changes in their education or understanding of conservation and nature. We also found the survey questions used to monitor changes in participant education would need to be strengthened to provide meaningful data to measure CTO Project contributions to environmental education outcomes ([Section 6.4.2](#)). Limited monitoring data made it difficult for Trust administration to assess the CTO Project's achievements over the project life, which reduced overall confidence in the CTO Project.<sup>146</sup>

If NPWS were to design nature based tourism or small grants programs in the future, the *NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines: Evaluation* would be a useful resource for designing monitoring and evaluation elements of a project.<sup>147</sup> The University of Technology Sydney's evaluation of the *Environmental Trust's Environmental Education Grants Program*<sup>148</sup> also provides useful guidance for monitoring environmental education outcomes (see [Section 4.4](#)).

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<sup>146</sup>..... Interviews: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022; Environmental Trust administration, 1 August 2022.

<sup>147</sup>..... NSW Government (2022) [NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines: Evaluation](#).

<sup>148</sup>..... Environmental Trust (2022) [NSW Environmental Trust Education Grant Programs](#).

## 6.2.2 CTO Small Grants design

Our evaluation showed the CTO grants process managed by NPWS was sound and the capacity building approach NPWS used to support commercial tour operators was a key strength of the small grants process. NPWS' existing relationships with CTOs allowed them to support grantees to improve their capacity to deliver quality experiences through the grants.

We understand the CTO Project was a new type of grant program for the NPWS project team to oversee and Trust administration supported NPWS to ensure the grants process adopted best practice principles, which was valued by NPWS:

*'(Trust administration) were heavily involved in the grant criteria. Their help was good– they had expertise in grant programs, making sure we covered everything and helped to identify any gaps (in the process).'*<sup>149</sup>

The grant application process was rigorous and adhered to grants administration standards. Key strengths of the CTO Small Grants process observed included:

- grant objectives, eligibility criteria, application and assessment processes that were clearly defined at the outset and communicated in an open and transparent way
- grant accountability requirements established at the outset and communicated to grantees
- NPWS worked closely with grantees through an expression of interest process and provided them with support to apply
- grant amounts were considered value for money by grantees as they could match funds (\$10,000).

Commercial tour operators expressed NPWS support to apply for the CTO Small Grant was invaluable, building their skills and capacity to deliver nature based experiences (See [Section 6.4.2](#)). A Trust NBT subcommittee interviewee advised NPWS' support through the grants process was important for tour operators:

*'You need to recognise that some of them (commercial tour operators) are fledglings. It's going to take them more time, you need to give them more space to run, with check in support along the way, not just putting pressure on completing paperwork.'*<sup>150</sup>

Commercial tour operators also shared how the grant provided lasting impact for their businesses:

*'This grant was unique for providing support to small commercial tour operators. The scale of the grant, \$10,000, was an ideal size for micro and small businesses. It was a marvellous program. It enabled us to engage with environmental outcomes that were also meaningful to us.'*<sup>151</sup>

*'The NPWS Small Business Grant has been invaluable both in the financial assistance provided and the exceptional support and mentorship by the NPWS individuals partnering directly with Paddlecraft. The resources shared (by NPWS) have provided important insights to NSW tourism's trends and direction, and emerging and changing demographics that has helped us craft and shape our tour offerings to best suit the target audience.'*<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 30 August 2022.

<sup>150</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust Nature Based Tourism subcommittee member, 29 November 2022.

<sup>151</sup>.....nterview: Blue Mountains Adventure Company, 27 October 2022.

<sup>152</sup>.....Paddlecraft (2019) NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report. Internal document provided by NPWS.

Commercial tour operators provided insights on how the CTO Small Grants program could be improved, insights are included to support Trust and NPWS consideration of small grant programs with small nature based tourism businesses in the future.

Some tour operators found project grant application and reporting requirements onerous:<sup>153</sup>

*'My experience with this project and the amount of paperwork involved is similar to my experience with grants of \$40k and even \$100k.'*<sup>154</sup>

For a small-scale grant (\$10,000), NPWS could also look for opportunities to simplify the application process to ensure effort required is commensurate to the funding which is in line with the value for money principle: *'using processes and procedures proportional to the grant's value and risk.'*<sup>155</sup>

The *Commercial Tour Operator Participant Survey* was an important monitoring tool to capture participant satisfaction and changes in participant environmental education and conservation awareness. NPWS and commercial tour operators advised the *Commercial Tour Operator Participant Survey* had low uptake because it was impractical to use in the field. Challenges raised included:<sup>156, 157</sup>

- difficulty executing surveys in an online format in remote National Park areas with limited internet coverage
- participants preferred to provide verbal feedback over filling in forms
- it was difficult to get feedback from participants post-experience.

Interviewees suggested alternatives for collecting tour participant feedback to improve the response rate:<sup>158, 159, 160</sup>

- invite participants to provide media feedback (small videos or photos)
- provide participants with hashtags or QR codes as a quick accessible feedback tool
- grant managers could undertake a selection of site visit assessments
- grant managers undertake a six-monthly five-minute phone survey with a sample of commercial tour operators to capture their insights.

These approaches would also reduce the administrative load for commercial tour operators. Given both the limited capacity of small business owners like commercial tour operators and the remoteness of their operations, consideration of alternative data collection methods could help collect more data to monitor project achievements.

Commercial tour operators also advised allowing additional time to accommodate *'flexibility to respond to demand and changes in the market'*<sup>161</sup> would improve their capacity to deliver:

*'It is our experience that the tour products require a two year period from concept to actual offering in an initial season to begin to show measurable results. Because of the*

<sup>153</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 23 August 2022.

<sup>154</sup>.....nterview: Blue Mountains Adventure Company, 27 October 2022.

<sup>155</sup>.....NSW Government (2022) [Review of grants administration in NSW – final report](#)

<sup>156</sup>.....nterview: M8 Explorer, 17 November 2022.

<sup>157</sup>.....nterview: Alpine River Adventures, 10 November 2022.

<sup>158</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

<sup>159</sup>.....nterview: Grants Program Manager NSW Government, 14 February 2023.

<sup>160</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust Nature Based Tourism subcommittee member, 29 November 2022.

<sup>161</sup>.....nterview: Blue Mountains Adventure Company, 27 October 2022.

*role social media plays in promoting and establishing the authenticity and unique nature of the tours, the initial uptake on the product may be slow but bookings can increase exponentially after the initial season with a few good reviews.*<sup>162</sup>

Our evaluation also showed that commercial tour operators often experienced significant changes in circumstances out of their control (e.g., drought and fires) causing delays to implement their grants project. Flexibility in timeframes would also be beneficial when these circumstances arise.

### **6.3 CTO Project was cost effective, but grants were under allocated**

CTO Project received \$512,537 from the NBT Program ([Section 3.3 Table 6](#)). Our evaluation showed that the project budget was well scrutinised by Trust administration and Trust NBT subcommittee to ensure CTO expenditure was cost effective and value for money. In overseeing the CTO Small Grants, NPWS also established appropriate scrutiny for budgets.

The CTO Project had a total underspend of \$133,527 of which \$131,199 was unallocated grant funding to grant applicants. NPWS advised *‘the project did not receive as many applications as expected but the applications that were approved and operators that received funding were of high quality.’*<sup>163</sup>

To attract more applications in Round 2 of CTO small grant funding, applications from an additional four NSW destinations were invited to apply in as well as the original five NSW locations identified in the Australia’s National Landscapes Program.<sup>164</sup>

We understand an overarching target for the number of grants that would be allocated to commercial tour operators was not set at the outset. However, the initial CTO Project budget allowed for the award of \$360,000 in grants (of up to \$10,000 each), of which around 70 percent was allocated, leaving 30 percent unallocated at the end of the CTO Project. NPWS requested to retain funds to continue to assist commercial tour operators; however, given the project’s under expenditure these funds were returned to WELE.<sup>165</sup> We sought interviewees perspective if they observed any barriers to tour operators applying for CTO grants. They suggested several reasons for the lower than anticipated uptake.<sup>166</sup>

- delays in the CTO Project’s approval left less time to establish the grant application processes and call for applications
- tour operators as small businesses have limited time to apply for grants
- for some, the effort required to submit a grant application may not have been commensurate with the value of the grant
- some tour operators were not ‘application ready’, for example some had not secured their Eco Pass accreditation, which added additional time before they could apply for the grant
- project selection criteria may have limited the number of tour operators that could apply.

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<sup>162</sup>.....Paddlecraft (2019) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>163</sup> NPWS (2019) *Final Report – Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>164</sup> NPWS (2019) *Final Report – Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>165</sup>.....interview: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

<sup>166</sup>.....Interviews: NPWS, 23 August 2022; Environmental Trust Administration, 1 August 2022; Environmental Trust Nature Based Tourism subcommittee member, 29 November 2022, Interview: NPWS, 30 August 2022.

Given the CTO Small Grants were new, allowing a longer period of time to establish and call for applications could potentially support a higher uptake of grants over time.<sup>167, 168, 169</sup> Extending opening and closing dates of grant rounds may enable more grantees to apply e.g. allowing additional time/support for those that were time poor or were applying for Eco pass accreditation.

## 6.4 CTO Project had impact but was limited by monitoring data

Noting there was limited information available about the NBT Program or a program logic to support the evaluation of NBT Projects ([Section 4.3](#)), we present our findings of CTO Project’s achievements against agreed project outcomes and performance indicators listed in the project outcomes hierarchy. Our evaluation drew on project documentation, interviews and surveys undertaken as part of this evaluation (see [Section 2.2](#)).




Our evaluation showed the CTO Project successfully completed two rounds of CTO Small Grants which funded 26 projects and enabled small nature based tourism operators improve the number and quality of nature based experiences in National Parks, with some seeing long-lasting benefits to their businesses.

Next we present CTO Projects achievements towards key project outcomes – improving the number and quality of nature based experiences in National Parks, enhancing partnerships between CTOs and NPWS and increasing environmental education amongst tour participants.

### 6.4.1 Performance indicators for improving the number and quality of nature based experiences

Increasing the number and quality of nature based experiences offered by commercial tour operators were key project outcomes – ‘*there are increased opportunities for people to experience and enjoy national parks*’ and ‘*enhanced quality of visitor experiences.*’ These outcomes support the *growing the demand* and *improve supply* NBT Program objectives. The performance indicators used to monitor the number and quality of nature based experiences and the achievements for these performance indicators are presented in **Table 13**.

**Table 13: Performance indicators for improving the quality and number of experiences**

Performance indicator	Target	Result	
a. Increased in number of experiences listed on the NPWS website	120	10	
b. Landscapes listed in Best of Nature and Signature Experience lists	4 per landscape	1 (Indicator no longer valid)	n/a
c. Average number of participants to each experience, within each landscape	25	Likely, data limitations made it difficult to confirm	
d. Participants reporting satisfaction with experience	90%	Likely, data limitations made it difficult to confirm	

<sup>167</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 30 August 2022.

<sup>168</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 1 August 2022.

<sup>169</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 13 October 2022.

To verify the performance indicator (a) we reviewed the NPWS website and found 10 of the 25 grantees that received funding were listed on the NPWS website at the time of this evaluation.<sup>170</sup> NPWS advised listing grantees was delayed due to a lack of resourcing.<sup>171</sup> The original target of listing 120 grantees seemed ambitious given a total of 25 commercial tour operators experiences were funded over the life of the project (See [Section 6.3](#)). Performance indicator (b) was redundant because it linked to the *Australia's National Landscapes Program* which concluded.<sup>172</sup> We found one grantee experience listed on the Signature Experiences website.<sup>173</sup> Whilst there is merit in listing quality experiences on reputable websites, this performance indicator provides a limited understanding of increases in the number or quality of experiences as a result of the CTO Small Grants.

The *CTO Project Final Report* stated commercial tour operators largely met the 25 average number of participants (performance indicator c). We reviewed final reports submitted by commercial tour operators to verify how this performance indicator was measured and found it difficult to reconcile how tour operator reports of increases in participants correlated with the average number of participants reported in the *CTO Project Final Report*.

Many tour operators reported they were able to attract more participants and suggest that CTO Small Grants are likely to have contributed to increasing the number of nature based experiences available in National Parks. We note that several tour operators also reported weather impacted on their ability to provide tour experiences to participants and achieve their desired increases in number of participants. Examples of some of the reported increases in participants tour operators experienced:

*'(We) doubled number of booking for winter tours + nearly doubled tour bookings for Autumn, spring and summer.'*<sup>174</sup>

*'68% increase in tour participation from 2015-2016 season (87 participants) to 2016-2017 (147 participants)...100% increase in tour participation from 2015-2016 season to 2017-2018 (174 participants).'*<sup>175</sup>

*'We added 75 new people visiting the Kosciusko National Park in 2018 through AFF Guiding. We also ran the courses with high rates of attendance (20 per course).'*<sup>176</sup>

If NPWS were to establish performance indicators to monitor increases in participants in the future, documenting how project level indicators and data monitored in grantee reporting are linked would support the evaluation of achievements. Also considering a performance indicator that reflects increases in bookings and participants rather than average participants may provide more meaningful insights for this outcome.

The *CTO Project Final Report* reported participant satisfaction with tour experiences was met (performance indicator d). We understand the *Commercial Tour Operator Participant Survey* was the source monitoring data to evaluate participant satisfaction. We were unable to access a copy of this data. Also NPWS and tour operators advised this data was limited due to the survey being impractical (See [Section 6.2.2](#)). We reviewed final reports submitted by commercial tour operators to verify how this performance indicator was measured.

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<sup>170</sup>.....NPWS (accessed December 2022). [Things to do NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service](#).

<sup>171</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 23 August 2022.

<sup>172</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program Final Report*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>173</sup>.....Tourism Australia (Accessed October 2022). [Signature Experiences Australia](#).

<sup>174</sup>.....Light to Light Camps (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>175</sup>.....Australian Coastal Wilderness Adventures (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>176</sup>.....Aussie Fly Fisher (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal report provided by NPWS.



Many tour operator reports commented that participants provided positive feedback on experiences and a small number of reports included quotes from participants. Some examples of feedback provided in tour operator final reports:

*'Tristan and Brooke (the guides) were very organized and taught me a lot about hiking and camping and gave me the confidence to do this on my own in the future.'*<sup>177</sup>

*'Thanks again to Mickey and you for an awesome introduction to flyfishing that way surpassed my expectations! We will be sure to recommend you guys to friends and colleagues, though it sounds like you're pretty chockers already.'*<sup>178</sup>

*'100% of the 30 respondents also indicated they were 'highly satisfied with the overall experience.'*<sup>179</sup>

Tour operators also shared how participants shared positive feedback on social media:

*'Light Coastal Camps achieved 556 likes on Facebook and 297 follows, positive reviews on trip advisor.'*<sup>180</sup>

*'The tour received 95% 5-star online reviews from participants and the number of partnerships with local tourism and international agencies were doubled.'*<sup>181</sup>

*'Since receiving this grant, Emu Trekkers has grown exponentially and raised an additional \$50,000 for charity (from all walks). We have also doubled our exposure on Facebook to 1323 followers, and built new partnerships with other stakeholders.'*<sup>182</sup>

Our assessment of documentation available indicates the performance indicator for participant satisfaction was likely to have been achieved, noting data limitations.

Case Study 3 – 'M8 Explorers' provides an example of how grant funding improved the number and quality of nature based experiences for this grantee. A key lesson from M8 Explorers was when commercial tour operators had access to NPWS media promotions, they had potential to attract more participants which supports the outcome to increase opportunities for people to experience and enjoy National Parks and also highlights the benefits of a partnership between NPWS and commercial tour operators.

### Case Study 3 - [M8 Explorers](#)

M8 Explorers received grant funding to purchase a trailer to transport participants' belongings, and a projector and other educational materials to enhance tour experiences. They could then run new tours and increase the range of tours they could offer. Their tours sought to connect people to nature by offering an enhanced experience for small groups walking in the Royal National Park to key destinations.<sup>183</sup> The ability to promote this experience through NPWS platforms significantly accelerated the interest and number of participants.<sup>184</sup> M8 Explorers gave the following insights:

<sup>177</sup>.....Emu Trekkers (2018) NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>178</sup>.....Aussie Fly Fisher (2018) NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>179</sup>.....Australian Coastal Wilderness Adventures (2018) NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>180</sup>.....Light to Light Camps (2017) NPW Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program Final Report. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>181</sup>.....M8 Explorer (2018) NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>182</sup>.....Emu Trekkers (2018) NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>183</sup>.....M8 Explorer (2018) NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>184</sup>.....M8 Explorer (2018) NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report. Internal document provided by NPWS.

*‘With 900 percent increase in our general social media presence...the visibility we have been able to give the Royal National Park as a popular destination in Sydney has exceeded our expectations.’<sup>185</sup>*

The opportunity for M8 Explorers to work with NPWS though the grant helped raise the profile of experiences to attract more visitors and tour participants:


*‘What was a little initiative, escalated into something bigger. From the grant we developed the walk from Wattamolla to Bundeena, from there we added the Figure 8 pools and paddle safaris on the Port Hacking River is now an ongoing activity. Since the grant we have expanded to four areas.’<sup>186</sup>*

#### 6.4.2 Performance indicators for enhancing partnerships between CTOs and NPWS

NPWS outlined how important partnerships with commercial tour operators who had Eco Pass accreditation were for providing nature based experiences in National Parks. ‘Enhanced partnerships with commercial tour operators and NPWS’ was a key outcome listed for the CTO Project.

The performance indicators used to monitor partnerships was the amount of positive feedback from operators. Results are presented in [Table 14](#).

**Table 14: Performance indicators for enhancing partnerships between CTOs and NPWS**

Performance indicator	Target	Result
a. Positive feedback from operators regarding their interactions with NPWS	90% report positive feedback	100% 

The *CTO Project Final Report* states NPWS more than met the 90 percent target with 100 percent of tour operators providing positive feedback on interactions with NPWS. We reviewed CTO Final reports and asked interviewees about their interactions with NPWS to verify achievements towards this target.

Commercial tour operators advised NPWS support to apply for the small grant was invaluable building their skills and capacity to deliver nature based experiences. Some examples of their feedback:

*‘We found the webinars and application process to be very helpful in setting up this idea and seeing it through to this point. The allocated staff member (could have been an external appointment) that assisted us to think through our project in the early stages was also extremely helpful, particularly in giving us the confidence to believe in the idea and to see it through. Her communication and commitment to us was awesome. Unable to suggest improvements.’<sup>187</sup>*

<sup>185</sup>.....M8 Explorer (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>186</sup>.....nterview: M8 Explorer, 17 November 2022.

<sup>187</sup>.....Yuraygir Walking Experiences (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

*‘The initial workshops and support offered by National Parks was fantastic....knowledge gained from the expertise and supporting materials offered will have a long lasting positive effect on Australia’s Coastal Wilderness Adventures.’<sup>188</sup>*

*‘The whole process was very supportive and encouraging. To have NPWS invest in our business reaffirms the commercial partnership and demonstrates NPWS values the service of commercial operators enhancing the National Park experience.’<sup>189</sup>*

Whilst comments were overwhelmingly positive about NPWS’ support, some considered the grant application and reporting onerous (See [Section 6.2.2](#)).

Feedback indicates NPWS and commercial tour operator partnerships were enhanced by the CTO Small Grants program, and NPWS support underpinned tour operators’ capacity to apply for grants and use grant funding to enhance the number and quality of nature based experiences they offered in National Parks.

### 6.4.3 Performance indicators for increasing levels of environmental education by participants

A key objective and outcome listed for CTO Project was to ‘increase levels of environmental education by participants.’ Performance indicators for this outcome and results are outlined in [Table 15](#).

**Table 15: Performance indicators for environmental education and intent to learn**

Performance indicator	Target	Result	
a. Reported increase in personal education levels	85%	Inconclusive due to data limitations	?
b. Reported increase in intent to learn or take action to protect the environment	80%	Inconclusive due to data limitations	?

The *CTO Project Final Report* reports participants personal education levels amongst participants increased by 83 percent (performance indicator (a)) and 80 percent of participants of experiences reported an intent to learn and take action to protect the environment (performance indicator (b)).<sup>190</sup>

The key monitoring tool for performance indicators was the *Commercial Tour Operator Participant Survey* which commercial tour operators were provided to collect participant feedback from tour participants. Both NPWS and commercial tour operators advised the survey had low uptake because it was impractical to use in the field (See [Section 6.2.2](#)). We reviewed final reports submitted by commercial tour operators to clarify how reported increases were concluded. Tour operators were required to include measures to ‘Increase participant’s education, awareness and appreciation of National Parks and conservation.’

Tour operator final reports do provide useful insights for how tour operators incorporated environmental education and conservation outcomes into their projects. However, not all reports included results for these indicators making it difficult to reconcile the reported achievements for these performance indicators. Therefore, our assessment of achievements towards performance indicator (a) and (b) was inconclusive.

<sup>188</sup>.....Australia’s Coastal Wilderness Adventures (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>189</sup>.....Eco Treasures (2016) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>190</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Small Grant Program Final Report*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

Examples of how tour operators reported increases in education and awareness:  
*'Before visiting, the majority of visitors (estimated at 90+%) had no understanding of the significance of the southern Byadbo and Pilot regions of Kosciuszko NP – (We) received excellent feedback and proven increased visitor awareness. 90% of people leave with increased awareness.'*<sup>191</sup>

*'Target: Collect all rubbish found during walk.*

*Result: more than 50 bags of rubbish collected Mar-Dec 2018'*<sup>192</sup>

*'Target: Clients have a deeper appreciation and awareness of National Parks including education about flora and fauna in relation to trout, their habitat and eating habits.*

*Result: We had very positive feedback from clients about the new operation including specific feedback from our two Next Steps courses in the Snowy Mountains which included specific sessions on the flora and fauna within the National Park in relation to trout.'*<sup>193</sup>

Limited monitoring data contributed to challenges for this project demonstrating how it contributed to environmental and education outcomes. This made it difficult for Trust administration to assess the CTO Project's achievements over the project life, which reduced overall confidence in the CTO Project.<sup>194</sup>

If NPWS were to design nature based tourism or small grants programs in the future, the *NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines: Evaluation* would be a useful resource for designing monitoring and evaluation elements of a project.<sup>195</sup> The University of Technology Sydney's evaluation of the *Environmental Trust's Environmental Education Grants Program*<sup>196</sup> also provides useful guidance for monitoring environmental education outcomes (see [Section 4.4](#)).

The commercial tour operators we interviewed were passionate in their belief that their experiences provided an opportunity to build an understanding of the surrounding natural and cultural values and the importance of conservation. We reviewed the type of activities tour operators undertook that aimed to support environmental education and conservation awareness amongst participants. Examples of activities included:

- providing educational information and materials on tours
- materials such as maps or apps to support tours or self-guided exploration
- tour guides providing specialist knowledge and education messaging during tours
- immersive educational tours for participants and school children.

Commercial tour operators also shared insights on how they encourage conservation action amongst tour participants:

*'The tour sought to educate people on leaving things better than they were found, encouraging participants to collect any rubbish on the way by providing biodegradable bags, digital material with information on flora and fauna, geology, and vegetation, and educating visitors on the importance of conservation and safe exploration of the Royal National Park.'*<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>.....High Country Trails and Tucker (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>192</sup>.....M8 Explorer (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>193</sup>.....Aussie Fly Fisher (2018) *NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Final Report*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>194</sup>.....Interviews: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022; Environmental Trust administration, 1 August 2022.

<sup>195</sup>.....NSW Government (2022) [NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines: Evaluation](#).

<sup>196</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2022) [NSW Environmental Trust Education Grant Programs](#).

<sup>197</sup>.....NPWS (2017) *2017 assessment and reporting table*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

*‘The tour information makes you appreciate it more (the environment), you then give it value, and then give it the respect it deserves. Once the place has become precious to them they look after it better. It becomes precious to them once they learn about it. Such appreciation can be taken forward to others in the form of care, which can extend the benefits.’<sup>198</sup>*

CTO Project activities provide a useful resource for Trust administration and NPWS to consider how nature based experiences can contribute to environmental education and conservation outcomes in National Parks. *Case Study 4 - Alpine River Adventures expeditions* provides an example of nature based experiences that was able to offer immersive learning experiences. Such experiences can contribute to conservation and environmental education outcomes.

#### **Case Study 4 –Alpine River Adventures expeditions**

Alpine River Adventures received funding to purchase inflatable boats to deliver a customised nature based tourism experience in the Snowy Mountains.<sup>199</sup> As a result they were able to expand the quality and type of experiences they offered. This included unique 5-6 day tours in the Snowy Mountains for tourists and educational tours for school groups.<sup>200</sup> The tours emphasised scenic surrounds of the Murray River, as well as the history, Aboriginal perspectives, and environmental conservation of the Kosciusko National Park.<sup>201</sup> The tour guides provided information about the surrounding natural environment to increase participants’ understanding, awareness, and appreciation of the Kosciusko National Park.

Reviewing the project against the nature based tourism spectrum ([Section 4.4](#)) revealed it provided a nature based immersive learning experience for participants. For example, the tour’s time period (5-6 days) allowed commercial tour operator guides to provide detailed information about the area, aboriginal and cultural experiences, and messaging about the importance of conserving the area as described in the video link. The interview revealed the tour operators had substantial knowledge to inform educational messages. Alpine River Adventures gave the following insights into the tour operators perspectives on the benefits of the program and how it contributed to education:<sup>202</sup>

*‘The grant allowed us to expand our capacity with more boats, and that allowed us to cater to the education market, with bigger numbers of school groups.’*

*‘Every tour that Richard does has environmental and Aboriginal perspectives to it. We’re able to cater to the market – white water element or cultural perspective.’*

*‘Our tour changes how you look at landscapes, to think about the people that came before you and how it has changed in the last few hundred years.’*

While the Commission viewed that the interview supported the commercial tour operator’s contribution to environmental education outcomes, this assessment would have been strengthened if feedback was available from tour participants. For example, surveys from school children to determine whether tours improved their environmental awareness.

<sup>198</sup>.....interview: M8 Explorer, 17 November 2022.

<sup>199</sup>.....Alpine River Adventures (2019) *Final Report Alpine River Adventures*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>200</sup>.....NPWS (2017) *Assessment and reporting table*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>201</sup>.....NPWS (2017) *Assessment and reporting table*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>202</sup>.....interview: Alpine River Adventures, 10 November 2022.

## 6.5 Recommendations

**Table 16: CTO Project Recommendations**

CTO Project Recommendations	
<b>R 6</b>	<p>If Trust or NPWS were to invest in a small grants program for nature based experiences run by commercial tour operators in the future, CTO Project can provide valuable insights on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ how to effectively support the capacity of small businesses like commercial tour operators to apply for and implement small grants</li><li>▪ commercial tour operator insights on how small grants can enhance the number and quality of nature based experiences in National Parks and support participant education</li></ul>
<b>R 7</b>	<p>If Trust administration or NPWS were to oversee small grants for nature based tourism in the future, project design would be strengthened by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ establishing a program logic that maps links between project activities and program outcomes to support project design and monitoring and evaluation</li><li>▪ given the complexity of monitoring environmental outcomes for nature based experiences, draw on CTO Project insights and nature based tourism definitions and resources to support projects that can contribute to these outcomes</li><li>▪ given the CTO Small Grants were new for tour operators, consider allowing more time to establish and call for grant applications to support higher uptake</li></ul>
<b>R 8</b>	<p>If NPWS were to design a small grants program for nature based experiences run by commercial tour operators in the future, monitoring and evaluation could be strengthened by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ drawing on <i>NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines: Evaluation</i> to support design of outcomes monitoring</li><li>▪ including a clear outline in the project logic that maps links between performance indicators and monitoring data to support meaningful reporting on and evaluation of project achievements</li><li>▪ given the novelty of small grants in nature based tourism, consider qualitative insights to measure progress towards outcomes, alongside quantitative targets</li><li>▪ look for opportunities to simplify reporting processes for CTOs and participants to support higher responses rates to support monitoring and reduce reporting burden for grantees</li><li>▪ consider opportunities to make timing of applications flexible to account for factors that can arise for small businesses like tour operators</li></ul>

## 7 WilderQuest Project evaluation findings and lessons learnt

This chapter outlines the Commission's findings and recommendations for the evaluation of WilderQuest Learning Project (WilderQuest). WilderQuest was a four year project that established an education portal (WilderQuest learning portal) and learning content for teachers and students to use in NSW primary schools. The WilderQuest learning portal provided teachers access to a 10 week learning program and outdoor activities.

Wilderquest aimed to:<sup>203</sup>

- increase the amount of time students spent on environmental education in the classroom
- support students to learn about Aboriginal culture and heritage programs
- improve student understanding of environmental and biodiversity issues
- increase students and teachers visitation to National Parks and time spent learning outside.

In evaluating WilderQuest, we considered all key evaluation questions and sub-questions in [Attachment-1 - Evaluation framework](#). Our findings are presented in the following sections:

- need for WilderQuest was sound and it aligned with key NSW Government policies and priorities and NBT Program objectives and outcomes - key evaluation question 1a ([Section 7.1](#))
- WilderQuest was well planned and designed to deliver agreed project outcomes – key evaluation question 2a ([Section 7.2](#))
- WilderQuest was effectively implemented despite challenges - key evaluation question 2a ([Section 7.3](#))
- WilderQuest's achievements were significant – key evaluation question 1b and 1c ([Section 7.4](#))
- WilderQuest was cost effective - key evaluation question 2b ([Section 7.5](#))

Within each of these sections (in line with key evaluation question 3), we have highlighted lessons for Trust and NPWS from WilderQuest to inform future investments including identifying unique aspects of the project, key benefits or risks and aspects that should be adopted or avoided for similar projects.

### 7.1 WilderQuest need was sound and aligned with key policies

Our evaluation of WilderQuest showed there was a sound rationale for the project and the original problem outlined in the approved business plan was effectively addressed. In the business plan, NPWS demonstrated there was a clear need to address the challenges associated with the disconnect between children and the natural environment.

Research NPWS referenced in the approved business plan showed children are increasingly spending less time outdoors leading to a disconnection from nature:<sup>204</sup>

- young children spend around 6.5 hours a day engaging in electronic media, and less than four minutes a day in unstructured outdoor play.
- 1 in 3 children had never been bushwalking, 1 in 3 had never camped and 1 in 4 had never climbed a tree.

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<sup>203</sup> NPWS (2016) *WilderQuest Learning Business Plan*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>204</sup> NPWS (2016) *WilderQuest Learning Business Plan*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

The NSW Science and Technology and Geography primary school syllabus created an explicit need for WilderQuest learning content as it included key topics like ‘What is a National Park?’ and ‘Stage 3 Rainforest.’ This was an important ‘market’ driver for teachers using the WilderQuest learning portal and learning content.<sup>205</sup>

WilderQuest was developed to align with NSW Government priorities (see [Attachment 4](#)), and Trust and NPWS policies. The approved business plan highlighted the following policies and priorities WilderQuest contributed to:<sup>206</sup>

- NSW 2021 State Plan goals
- Trust objects
- OEH Corporate Plan (2014-2017) and NPWS Delivery Plan 2014/15.

WilderQuest also aligned with the NBT Program objectives to ‘grow demand’ and ‘creating nature tourists of tomorrow’ by creating learning content for teachers and students to learn with a focus on encouraging students to learn outdoors and visit National Parks. The project outcomes that reflect NBT Program objectives include ‘Teachers take their students into nature and visit National Parks’ and ‘Increased student and teacher participation in school incursions and excursions to National Parks.’

As outlined in [Section 4.3](#), conservation and environmental education outcomes were adopted for the NBT Program to align the NBT Program with Trust Objects and the WELE funding requirements. Our evaluation showed WilderQuest demonstrated a clear focus on these outcomes. WilderQuest was perceived by many interviewees to be in the best position to achieve environmental education outcomes:

*‘The fact that they were teaching WilderQuest in schools in a structured learning environment gave us confidence. It is likely the kids absorbed the information, and I would assume some retention and utilisation of that knowledge.’<sup>207</sup>*

Related project outcomes listed in the project outcomes hierarchy included - ‘Students spend more class time learning about nature because they have access to innovative environmental education resources,’ and ‘Improved understanding of environmental and biodiversity issues among participating students.’ WilderQuest also had cultural outcomes to ‘increase in number of students and teachers participating in Aboriginal culture and heritage programs.

WilderQuest was also aligned with Trust funding principles. A key principle the project aligned with was ‘must target actions that actually fix a problem or significantly change the way that those responsible do their business around that problem.’<sup>208</sup> NBT Program funding for WilderQuest, expanded and enhanced an innovative education platform to educate children about the natural environment, and had significant reach to teachers and students in classrooms. Furthermore, WilderQuest was novel, and the NBT Program funding enabled NPWS to deliver online educational content with innovative online tools that fell outside of their usual business. NPWS provided insights on the impact of NBT Program funding:

*‘The funding is just really valuable, allowing us to try different methods of environmental education outside of ‘business as usual.’ We have learnt and experimented with the ideas and now we can adapt them for future projects.’<sup>209</sup>*

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<sup>205</sup> Interview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

<sup>206</sup>.....NPWS (2016) *WilderQuest Learning Business Plan*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>207</sup> Interview: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

<sup>208</sup>.....NSW Environmental Trust administration (2018) *Objects of the Trust and Trust Funding Principles*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>209</sup> Interview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.



WilderQuest also aligned with NPWS responsibilities under Object 2A-1(c) of the Act to ‘foster public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation.’<sup>210</sup>

## 7.2 WilderQuest was well designed to deliver project outcomes

Our evaluation showed the WilderQuest Project and the WilderQuest learning portal and learning content were well designed and executed. WilderQuest expanded on and enhanced the capabilities of the original NPWS WilderQuest website which was being used by schools and had received positive feedback from the Curriculum Learning and Innovation Centre (CLIC). NBT funding enabled a tailored learning portal (portal) to be built for a three-stage teaching program covering a 10 week/one term period. Learning units included excursions to National Parks which also linked to existing NPWS programs including Discovery Schools, visitor centres and nature play.<sup>211</sup> WilderQuest also used an integrated online-offline approach with gaming applications, events, and tours, and encouraged children to observe and relate to nature in their local area.<sup>212</sup>

Trust NBT subcommittee members spoke highly of how WilderQuest was designed and implemented.<sup>213</sup> Trust administration also had confidence in the NPWS project team’s capability to implement the project:

*‘It was building on an already successful program. They had a teacher involved in the program who had a good network and was able to bring in the right people for designing the program and building on learnings. It really improved the existing program ... It was very well designed and implemented, it already had its own branding, and I was very impressed with the project manager.’<sup>214</sup>*

The WilderQuest learning platform was able to scale up quickly as WilderQuest branding already existed and the WilderQuest website was already successfully being used by teachers. Prior to its official launch in January 2016, over 400 teachers from 330 individual schools had already registered after being invited by NPWS to trial the portal.<sup>215</sup> Key design strengths of WilderQuest we observed are listed in [Table 17](#) to provide insights to inform future projects.

WilderQuest did experience minor delays due to organisational and staffing changes and variations due to changes to the NSW Science and Technology and Geography primary school syllabus ([Section 7.3](#)). These variations and associated delays were managed effectively and did not significantly impact on project achievements or project expenditure ([Section 7.4](#) and [7.5](#)).

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<sup>210</sup> ..... See Object 2A, 1c of the [National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 No 80 \(NSW\)](#).

<sup>211</sup>.....NPWS (2016) *WilderQuest Learning Business Plan*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>212</sup>.....NPWS (2016) *WilderQuest Learning Business Plan*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

IUS Nature for All (2023) [WilderQuest – New South Wales National parks and Wildlife Service \(Australia\)](#).

<sup>213</sup> ..... Interview: Environmental Trust sub-committee member, 13 October 2022.

<sup>214</sup>..... Interview: Environmental Trust administration, 1 August 2022.

<sup>215</sup>.....NSW Government (2016) [Award-winning environmental education program launches classroom version for teachers](#).

**Table 17: Key design strengths of WilderQuest**

Design strengths	Implementation strengths
✓ downloadable three stage teaching program covering a 10 week/one term period with linked teacher learning sequences and student workbooks	✓ timing of launch coincided with the start of the school year
✓ included Aboriginal education resources to deliver quality teaching and learning materials	✓ effective marketing campaign increased awareness of WilderQuest to support learning portal and teaching unit uptake quickly
✓ included online professional development modules to support teachers to guide learning experiences <sup>216</sup>	✓ adapted learning content to address barriers to National Park visitations
✓ integrated into the already trusted WilderQuest website	✓ teachers could access NPWS support and expertise for use within the classroom
✓ provided opportunities for nature based excursions and field trips	

Interviewees and teachers feedback highlighted the importance of good ‘easy to use’ learning content for the classroom. There were a range of examples from the content material, that allowed students access to nature and learning. WilderQuest Campfire 360 videos were particularly successful because they provided direct access to Aboriginal Discovery Rangers knowledge and experience (see *Case Study 5 – WilderQuest Campfire 360 Videos*).

Teacher surveys provided feedback on the content material that rated highly:<sup>217</sup>

- games and videos and WilderQuest environments
- ranger vision and campfire videos
- customised activity sequences.

### **Case Study 5 – WilderQuest Campfire 360 Videos**

The WilderQuest Campfire 360 Videos are a series of six freely accessible 360 videos (viewable using phone/headsets, tablets, interactive whiteboards, or computer screens) for students to learn more about Aboriginal cultures within NSW by listening to Aboriginal Discovery Ranger’s talk about what culture means to them from different National Parks across NSW. The Campfire videos won the ‘Innovation’ category at the 2019 NPWS Chief Executive awards.

NPWS undertook market research on teachers’ needs at the project’s outset, which was foundational to ensuring content was relevant for teachers and students. Market research helped to understand teachers’ planning behavior, highlighted issues and risks and opportunities to tailor the WilderQuest learning portal and learning content for teachers.<sup>218</sup>

<sup>216</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *Final Report, WilderQuest Learning Project*. Internal report provided by Trust Administration.

<sup>217</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilderquest March 23 Analysis*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>218</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest Post Marketing Campaign Report 2017*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

Marketing of WilderQuest was successful and provides useful insights on raising the profile of similar learning platforms. NPWS raised awareness about WilderQuest through paid advertising, promotion at NAIDOC week events and a range of educational events. The timing of the WilderQuest launch coincided with the start of the school year giving teachers an opportunity to integrate WilderQuest learning content into their yearly planning material.<sup>219</sup> The high uptake of WilderQuest by teachers suggests the marketing of WilderQuest was successful and this approach would be beneficial for raising the profile of similar projects.

NPWS interviewees provided feedback on the perceived value of WilderQuest. They indicated it raised investment in good learning content and provided opportunities for teachers and students to access NPWS staff knowledge, which was found to be invaluable. Given the value placed on NPWS knowledge and expertise, if NPWS were to consider future design of WilderQuest, exploring how NPWS staff can support teachers and students is warranted.

A suggestion raised in interviews was WilderQuest could work with Discovery Rangers to attend schools and deliver incursions to address the barriers to visiting National Parks, which would link with the already established NPWS Discovery Programs.<sup>220</sup> We were unable to interview Discovery Rangers to capture their insights on WilderQuest for this evaluation. However, given their local knowledge and networks, consideration of their involvement in future iterations of WilderQuest is likely to further support learning and visitation outcomes.

WilderQuest provides Trust administration and NPWS with insights on how a learning platform can be professionally designed, strategically implemented, and marketed well, which can inform similar investments in the future. It also highlights the importance of quality and easy-to-use learning content material and enabling teachers to have access to NPWS knowledge and expertise alongside WilderQuest learning content.

### **7.3 WilderQuest was effectively implemented despite challenges**

NPWS experienced several challenges through the implementation of WilderQuest that were successfully managed by the NPWS project team. How these challenges were managed, provides useful insights for similar projects.

Four key challenges managed by NPWS were:

- a) a change in the NSW school curriculum away from a National Park/conservation focus ([Section 7.3.1](#))
- b) barriers for schools taking students to National Parks ([Section 7.3.2](#))
- c) managing monitoring data limitations ([Section 7.3.3](#))
- d) technological challenges for WilderQuest ([Section 7.3.4](#)).

#### **7.3.1 Adapting to NSW school curriculum changes**

When WilderQuest was funded in 2015, the NSW Science and Technology and Geography primary school syllabus created an explicit need for WilderQuest learning content as it included key topics like 'What is a National Park?' and 'Stage 3 Rainforest' which was an important 'market' driver to interest teachers using WilderQuest.<sup>221</sup>

Partway through implementing WilderQuest with schools, the NSW Science and Technology and Geography syllabus changed with the curriculum shifting away from the

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<sup>219</sup>.....NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest Post Marketing Campaign Report 2017*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>220</sup> Interview: NPWS, 28 September 2022.

<sup>221</sup> Interview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

National Parks/conservation focus to agriculture.<sup>222</sup> This presented a relevance risk for teachers continuing to need WilderQuest or take students on excursions in National Parks.<sup>223</sup> NPWS recognised this risk and implemented strategies to maintain WilderQuest's relevance for teachers to use in classrooms:

*'The curriculum change was something we realised was going to happen and was going to continue to happen. We were still able to align the core outcomes we were hoping to achieve- – Aboriginal cultural engagement, environmental conservation, engaging with land management. We just had to refine those links but could keep the focus.'*<sup>224</sup>

To address this risk, NPWS reviewed the new curriculum, amended existing programs, and created new learning resources to align with the new curriculum so that teachers could continue to use the WilderQuest learning modules. We were unable to interview school teachers, but feedback from Trust administration and Trust NBT subcommittee members recognised NPWS managed this significant change well.<sup>225</sup> NPWS's approach is a good example of the projects team adaptively managing issues as they arose successfully.

### 7.3.2 Addressing barriers to National Park visitations

A key outcome for WilderQuest was to encourage teachers to take more students on excursions to visit National Parks and spend more time in nature. To support visitation to National Parks, WilderQuest learning modules provided options for schools to take students to six designated National Parks.<sup>226</sup> NPWS identified through teacher's feedback there were several barriers to taking students on excursions to National Parks and local nature based experiences. Many teachers advised they did not visit National Parks because transport costs were prohibitive, and some schools were situated too far from designated National Parks.<sup>227</sup> NPWS also advised that teachers found organising excursions is becoming increasingly difficult for teachers due to increased costs, school policies and safety considerations.<sup>228</sup>

NPWS had to adapt WilderQuest learning content to maintain outdoor learning outcomes trying to encourage schools to undertake education outdoors in nature through incursions within schools as an alternative. NPWS also recognised, whilst visiting National Parks was a goal, encouraging children to experience nature based experiences in schools was a more workable solution to encourage understanding about nature and conservation:

*'Bringing the park to them (students) is very important. Particularly for preschool/kindergarten – recognising it can be too hard to get them out. For some schools the distance to a Park makes an excursion difficult, and sometimes travel costs can be prohibitive. The Parks Education team identified a need to expand the number of incursions offered due to a high bounce rate on the incursions page on our website and we could also see that there was a demand for cultural incursions and excursions. This information was passed on to our wider Discovery team who have been developing a number of new incursions which are now listed on the website. Also, within each of the WilderQuest units, activities were included that could be conducted in their school grounds or local parks.'*<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>222</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

<sup>223</sup> NPWS(2018) 2017-18 Annual Report version 2, internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>224</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

<sup>225</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

<sup>226</sup> NPWS (2016) *WilderQuest Learning Business Plan*. Internal document provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>227</sup>.....NPWS (2019) *WQ Learning Survey 2019*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

<sup>228</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 28 September 2022.

<sup>229</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 13 February 2023.

NPWS also developed a discrete teacher training component to support teachers to lead excursions in their nearest National Parks, rather than travel to the designated WilderQuest/Discovery locations.<sup>230</sup>

For similar investments, considering ways to minimise costs for schools to attend National Parks will be an important consideration if increasing students' visitations to National Parks remains a priority. NPWS advised for a similar program that experienced a cost barrier, NPWS successfully partnered with Sydney Living Museums to secure an 'Unlocking Heritage' grant, which supplemented the cost of bus transport per student by \$20/head for NPWS excursions.<sup>231</sup>

With the innate challenges of taking students on excursions, and the curriculum changes, NPWS strategies to address barriers to National Parks were sound.

### 7.3.3 Managing monitoring data limitations

The *Survey Of Participating Teachers* was used to collect data on key learning outcomes and performance indicators. NPWS goal for seeking qualitative and quantitative data from participating teachers in the outcomes hierarchy was 10 percent. They achieved 7 percent over the life of the project.<sup>232</sup>

Both NPWS and Trust administration recognised the value of survey data, but it was an extra load for already busy teachers.<sup>233</sup> NPWS did try to incentivise survey responses; however, teachers are time poor which may explain the lower response rates. NPWS also advised collecting data on students' learning was impractical:

*'We did surveys with teachers, asked them questions about their students' learning and their experience using the website and resources. We didn't involve students themselves – amount of ethics involved is impractical.'*<sup>234</sup>

NPWS also collected data usage analytics, which provides solid evidence of WilderQuest's potential impact with students:

*'It's hard to answer the exact level of change achieved, but the level of interest even from schools overseas, number of visits to page etc, gave us confidence in the quality of the product and content.'*<sup>235</sup>

Teacher survey responses were an important data source for monitoring project outcomes, and higher response rates from teachers would have improved the reliability insights from the survey. However, data usage analytics were a good supporting data source to inform monitoring and evaluation of WilderQuest. In future, NPWS would benefit considering more time-efficient ways to capture teachers' feedback (e.g., 5-minute sample phone survey) to increase the level of feedback received.<sup>236</sup>

### 7.3.4 Technological challenges for WilderQuest

At the time of this evaluation, NPWS advised they were looking at decommissioning the WilderQuest learning portal as it was becoming difficult to maintain because of its age. The risk to WilderQuest is without a functioning portal, it may be difficult to access

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<sup>230</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

<sup>231</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

<sup>232</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilder Quest Learning Final Report comments addressed*. Internal report provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>233</sup> Interview: Environmental Trust, 2 August 2022, NPWS, 13 February 2023.

<sup>234</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 13 February 2023.

<sup>235</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 13 February 2023.

<sup>236</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilder Quest Learning Final Report comments addressed*. Internal report provided by Environmental Trust administration.

WilderQuest learning content, which could reduce its use in classrooms. NPWS recognised this challenge and were looking at options like Google platforms to provide teachers with access to WilderQuest learning content at the time of this evaluation.

*'We're at a point now, where we want to take the unit plans and videos, all those fantastic assets, and work out how we can continue to distribute it to teachers. Teachers have all been using Google sites through the pandemic. So we're looking at taking our assets off the WilderQuest website and bringing them to teachers through other methods so we can continue to get value from the assets we've built.'*<sup>237</sup>

Shifting WilderQuest learning content to another platform like Google will be important to retain the lasting benefits of the NBT Program funded WilderQuest learning content. Technological redundancy is a perennial challenge for technology-based projects and a major learning for NPWS has been the importance of ensuring the content is flexible and can be adapted to different platforms. When allocating project budgets, finding a balance between investing in content and establishing platforms to deliver learning content is an important consideration for future projects.

## 7.4 WilderQuest achievements were significant

Noting there was limited information available about the NBT Program or a program logic to support the evaluation of NBT Projects (see [Section 4.3](#)), we present our findings of WilderQuest's achievements against agreed project outcomes and performance indicators listed in the project outcomes hierarchy. Our evaluation drew on project documentation, interviews and surveys undertaken as part of this evaluation (see [Section 2.2](#)).

Overall, WilderQuest made unique and positive contributions to the NBT Program objectives and outcomes. In 2018 (peak of the project) 1,847 NSW schools (60 percent of NSW schools) signed up to WilderQuest, with 3,013 teachers and 17,097 students registered.<sup>238</sup> WilderQuest learning portal and content provided schools with tailored learning modules for teachers and opportunities to learn outdoors and in nature. Teachers had access to NPWS staff and knowledge, which was highly valued as NPWS was perceived as a trusted source for environmental education.

Next, we present WilderQuest's achievements towards key project outcomes - increasing students visits to National Parks and for achievement of student learning outcomes.

### 7.4.1 Performance indicators increasing visits to Parks and being in nature

Increasing student visits to National Parks was a key project outcome that supported the NBT Program objective '*growing demand*' by encouraging teachers and students to visit National Parks as part of the WilderQuest learning content. There were three project outcomes listed in the outcomes hierarchy relating to this outcome:




1. '*Teachers take their students into nature and visit National Parks*'
2. '*Increased student and teacher participation in school incursions/excursions to National Parks.*'
3. '*Increase in the number of teachers taking students outside and into nature for educational experiences.*'

The underpinning assumption for these outcomes was by promoting and providing the WilderQuest portal, learning tools and content to teachers time in nature and National Parks was likely to increase. The performance indicators and associated targets and results for these project outcomes are presented in [Table 18](#).

<sup>237</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

<sup>238</sup> NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest All Pages Summary*. Internal document provided by NPWS.  
NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest in the Classroom Overview*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

**Table 18: Performance indicators for increasing visits to Parks**

Performance indicator	Target	Result	
a) Increase in school bookings of WilderQuest excursions	10%	10% (3-year average)	
b) Student visitation number to National Parks increased above normal trending growth	Baseline* + 5% by year 3 of the project (81,594)	Total: 284,632 student visitation over 4 years Average: 71,158 visitation over 4 years	
c) Increase in time teachers take students outside in nature for educational experiences.**	75% of teachers report an increase in time	89.3% Likely to have been achieved	

\* NPWS noted 2012-13 numbers were used to calculate baseline of 76,939.<sup>239</sup>

\*\*Note the outcomes hierarchy listed the number of students as the target for performance indicator (c). NPWS advised the outcome of ‘teachers reporting an increase in learning time spent outside and in nature’ didn’t translate well into the survey questions. rather than asking teachers to report on the actual number of their students spending more time in nature as a result of WQL, we asked: ‘have your students spent more time learning in nature as a result of WQL?’. We have reported on percentage as reported in the final report to reflect this change, not the original student number target.<sup>240</sup>

The NPWS Discovery reporting system was used to monitor performance indicators (a) and (b). Monitoring data showed over three years WilderQuest excursion bookings did experience a 10 percent increase and the target for this performance indicator was met. Results for performance indicator (b) indicate the average number of students that visited National Parks over four years was 71,158, which was less than 2012-13 baseline thus the target was not met.

Given the barriers identified to students visiting National Parks, this performance indicator target was ambitious. NPWS developed a range of alternatives throughout the project to reduce barriers to National Park visitations and provided alternatives to visiting National Parks (e.g. school incursions, local National Park options), which were sound (see [Section 7.3.2](#)). We suggest that if school incursions continue to be a focus for supporting students to learn about nature and National Parks, NPWS would need to explore if students are still able to build the desired understanding of experiencing nature and biodiversity without visiting National Parks.

The *WilderQuest Final Report* states NPWS more than met the 70 percent target of increasing the amount of time teachers take students outside and into nature for educational experiences with an 89.3 percent increase - performance indicator (c). The *Survey of Participating Teachers* was used to assess this performance indicator. The survey response rates from teachers was lower than expected with 7 percent of the total number of participating teachers completing surveys. Higher response rates from teachers would strengthen this finding; however, teacher responses do provide valuable insights.

<sup>239</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilder Quest Learning Final Report comments addressed*. Internal report provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>240</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilder Quest Learning Final Report comments addressed*. Internal report provided by Environmental Trust administration.

Teachers survey feedback indicated the year-on-year trend showed that by 2018, 100 percent of teachers stated they had taken students outside for a learning experience. Teachers taking students outside once a week rose between 2017 and 2018 but dropped by 50 percent between 2018 and 2019, and the proportion of teachers taking students outside once a fortnight declined over the three years.<sup>241</sup>

NPWS reported if the 89.3 percentage is extrapolated to all teachers that used WilderQuest it is expected that 2,302 teachers took approximately 57,550 students outside and into nature for educational experiences suggesting the target was most likely to have been achieved.<sup>242</sup>

We observed project outcome 1 and 2 potentially duplicated each other and could have been combined to reduce the number of outcomes WilderQuest reported against. As outlined in [Section 4.3](#) developing the WilderQuest project logic would be strengthened if an NBT Program logic had been established to support outcome and performance indicator development.

#### **7.4.2 Performance indicators for achievement of student learning outcomes**

A key outcome WilderQuest aimed to achieve was educating students about biodiversity and the environment. This outcome supported the NBT Program objective ‘*creating the nature tourists of tomorrow*’ and the NBT Program conservation awareness and environmental education outcomes.

Three project outcomes were listed in the outcomes hierarchy related to educating students:

1. ‘*Students spend more class time learning about nature because they have access to innovative environmental education resources*’
2. ‘*Improved understanding of environmental and biodiversity issues among participating students*’
3. ‘*Increase in number of students and teachers participating in Aboriginal culture and heritage programs.*’

The underpinning assumption for these outcomes are listed in the approved business plans - in summary it was assumed if students engaged with WilderQuest they would have an improved understanding of environmental and biodiversity issues and increase their participation in Aboriginal Discovery ranger activities. The performance indicators and associated targets and results for these project outcomes are presented in [Table 19](#).




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<sup>241</sup> NPWS (2022) *WilderQuest Google Analytics 2022 Calendar year*. Internal report provided by NPWS.  
NPWS (2021) *WilderQuest Learning PowerBI December 2021*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>242</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilder Quest Learning Final Report comments addressed*. Internal report provided by Environmental Trust administration.



**Table 19: Performance indicators for achievement of learning outcomes**

Performance indicator	Target	Result	
a) Teachers report an increased amount of time spent on environmental education	75%	94.3% Likely to have been achieved	
b) Teachers report on improved learning outcomes for students	75%	100% Likely to have been achieved	
c) Increase in the number of students accessing Aboriginal Discovery Ranger activities	Average 23,450 <sup>243</sup> (22% increase)	Total: 69,768 students over 4 years Average: 17,442 students over 4 years Likely to have been met	

The *WilderQuest Final Report* states NPWS more than met the 75 percent target with 94.3 percent of teachers reporting time students spent learning on environmental education - performance indicator (a) and teachers reporting improved learning outcomes for students was higher than expected at 100 percent – performance indicator (b).

The *Survey of Participating Teachers* was used to collect data on performance indicator (a) and (b). As already discussed a higher response rates from teachers would strengthen this finding. However given the quality of the learning modules, which were delivered by education experts in a school environment, there is confidence students were exposed to concepts that increased their understanding and appreciation of nature and conservation. As NPWS indicated for the *WilderQuest Final Report*, given the number of teachers participating in WilderQuest, the likelihood of achieving this target is high.

NPWS also used data analytics to monitor subscription and use of WilderQuest, as access to an innovative platform underpinned the project learning outcomes. Key statistics from 2018 (at the peak of the project) show the WilderQuest portal had a wide reach in schools:

<sup>244</sup>

- 1,847 NSW schools (60 percent of NSW schools) signed up
- 3,013 NSW teachers registered
- 17,097 students and 6,009 active students with 291 active classes
- 33,545 users included Australia and New Zealand, United States and Canada, Asia, and the United Kingdom
- in 2018 there were 139,000 page views

<sup>243</sup> Note, we were unable to confirm if target for the increase in the number of students was an average number of students or a total number over the life of the project. If this was a total number the project more than met the target, if it was an average it was slightly under the target, we have therefore assessed this target as achieved.

<sup>244</sup> NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest All Pages Summary*. Internal document provided by NPWS.  
NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest in the Classroom Overview*. Internal document provided by NPWS.

- a total of 573 teachers, Discovery Rangers and coordinators were trained in WilderQuest.<sup>245</sup>

These analytics verify students and teachers had access to innovative environmental education resources through WilderQuest. We note that users did drop off significantly by 2022,<sup>246</sup> this is due to the platform technical difficulties, which NPWS hopes to resolve by transferring to the Google platform ([Section 7.3.4](#)). This drop off reflects the risks associated with platforms becoming outdated or incompatible with emerging technology.

The *WilderQuest Final Report* states an average of 17,442 students over 4 years accessed the Aboriginal Discovery Ranger activities, which is less than expected - performance indicator (c). Whilst this target was not met, NPWS advised 40,000 students engaged in Aboriginal and cultural heritage through the WilderQuest Campfire and 360 video offerings which suggests this the performance indicator target was likely to have been met.<sup>247</sup>

Teachers advised NPWS this was a highly valued component of the platform:

*'It was a great way to get the Aboriginal cultural content into the classroom. All teachers really had to do was set up the viewers and they could easily plan a lesson around engaging with these videos. It was easy for teachers and very novel and engaging for students.'*<sup>248</sup>

Teachers advised that they often did not feel confident in their knowledge to present this material and appreciated having WilderQuest learning content and NPWS staff support to support this learning outcome.

Another important insight about this outcome from NPWS was the importance of allowing adequate time to build relationships with Aboriginal groups to develop quality content:

*'Always allow considerable leeway time when developing Aboriginal culture content to respectfully and adequately consult....Ensure all Aboriginal protocols are followed as a priority over deadlines.'*<sup>249</sup>

NPWS sought a time extension to allow for this, which Trust administration supported. These insights suggest whilst quantitative targets are a useful indication of progress, the effective engagement of Aboriginal groups and adequate support for teachers to deliver learning content is a meaningful and valid indicator of success of achievement towards this outcome.

This evaluation revealed that there was high confidence that WilderQuest was able to achieve its education outcomes. Trust administration advised they were confident in WilderQuest's ability as they had previously invested in similar education-based projects and for the following reasons:

- it had clear education-based components drafted by education experts
- there was opportunity for seamless integration into the NSW and Australian curriculums
- it was expanding on an already successful, school-tested platform
- trained teachers delivered content.

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<sup>245</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilder Quest Learning Final Report comments addressed*. Internal report provided by Environmental Trust administration.

<sup>246</sup> NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest Google Analytics 2018 Calendar year*. Internal report provided by NPWS.  
NPWS (2018) *WilderQuest Learning PowerBI December 2018*. Internal report provided by NPWS.

<sup>247</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

<sup>248</sup>.....nterview: NPWS, 20 September 2022.

<sup>249</sup> NPWS (2019) *Wilder Quest Learning Final Report comments addressed*. Internal report provided by Environmental Trust administration.

*'We have a high level of confidence that the project achieved the desired impacts. I think it had a greater chance of achieving behavioural change. This is because teachers were empowered and interested and because it was in the school curriculum so it could be embedded rather than having a one-off experience in nature.'*<sup>250</sup>

WilderQuest is an example of a nature based tourism project that aligns well with Trust conservation and environmental education outcomes, which could inform other investments in nature based tourism for this purpose.

Whilst performance indicators provided an understanding of the number of students that were educated, NPWS may wish to consider how more meaningful data could be collected to understand how students understanding has changed as a result of being involved in WilderQuest. The evaluation of the *Environmental Trust's Environmental Education Grants Program*<sup>251</sup> may be a useful resource for NPWS for strengthening monitoring and evaluation aspects of WilderQuest (See [Section 4.3](#)).

## 7.5 WilderQuest was cost effective

WilderQuest received \$390,000 from the NBT Program ([Section 3.3 Table 7](#)). Our evaluation found that the WilderQuest project budget was well scrutinised by Trust administration and Trust NBT subcommittee to ensure expenditure was cost effective and value for money.

Minor budget variations took place and were approved by Trust administration over the course of the project including on one occasion, the transfer of funds from 'training' to 'contractors' in the 2016-17 financial year. In this instance, funds saved by training all of the rangers in Sydney was reallocated to engage contractors to create content for the WilderQuest Campfire learning module.

Both Trust administration and NPWS commented they perceived WilderQuest was cost effective:

*'WilderQuest definitely offered value for money. It was only around \$400,000 but it reached thousands of kids.'*<sup>252</sup>

*'The cost was not too much considering how much we invest in educational resources as a whole. If the lesson plans are developed well, they can be a lasting resource.'*<sup>253</sup>

Overall, the project was cost effective, the budget was spent effectively and stakeholders agreed that the significant reach achieved by the project justified the low project budget. However, the issue of WilderQuest's lasting impact if the WilderQuest learning portal was decommissioned and not replaced was raised. NPWS recognised this challenge and were looking at options like Google platforms to provide teachers with access to WilderQuest learning content at the time of this evaluation. The potential risks of needing to shift learning content to alternative platforms and the costs of making this shift are worthy considerations in the design of similar projects in the future.

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<sup>250</sup>.....nterview: Environmental Trust administration, 1 August 2022.

<sup>251</sup>.....Environmental Trust (2024) [NSW Environmental Trust Education Grant Programs](#).

<sup>252</sup>.....nterview, Environmental Trust administration, 2 August 2022.

<sup>253</sup>.....nterview, NPWS, 28 September 2022.

## 7.6 Recommendations

**Table 20: WilderQuest Recommendations**

WilderQuest Recommendations	
<b>R 9</b>	<p>If Trust or NPWS were to invest in a learning portal and learning content for NSW schools in the future, WilderQuest can provide valuable insights on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ effective project design and implementation</li><li>▪ strategies to achieve a high level of engagement with teachers and students through a portal and marketing and promotion</li><li>▪ insights on the value of learning platforms and learning in nature and National Parks for students and teachers</li><li>▪ understanding barriers to excursions to National Parks and alternatives for supporting outdoor education</li><li>▪ an example of a nature based project that contributes to conservation and environmental outcomes</li></ul>
<b>R 10</b>	<p>Trust administration and NPWS would strengthen project design and implementation of similar projects by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ establishing a program logic that maps links between project activities and program outcomes to support project design and monitoring and evaluation</li><li>▪ considering how to collect meaningful data on how students understanding changed as a result of being involved alongside quantitative performance indicators</li><li>▪ looking for opportunities to simplify how teacher feedback is collected to support higher responses rates from teachers to support monitoring and evaluation</li><li>▪ considering the risks of technological redundancy of platforms and the associated costs at the outset to build in strategies to minimise this risk</li></ul>

## Attachment 1 – Evaluation framework for the Nature based Tourism projects

**Table A** outlines the evaluation rationale classification (effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness, process), key evaluation questions and sub-questions, and key lines of inquiry for sub-questions to signify the focus areas for key questions. The table also includes a section for each NBT Project to signify the project-specific focus for evaluation questions. The Commission addressed each question and sub-question to the extent possible with available evidence and reported on any areas where data was insufficient to assess the question/sub-question fully.

**Table A: Evaluation questions for Nature based Tourism Program**

Rationale	Key evaluation questions (applicable to all projects)	Key evaluation sub-questions (applicable to all projects)	The focus of the evaluation question inquiry (applicable to all projects)	Project-specific evaluation focus		
				Brand Campaign	CTO Small Grant Project	Wilder Quest
<b>Appropriateness</b>	1. Did the project deliver on expected outcomes?	a. Did the project align with Environmental Trust policies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify if the problem/opportunity identified aligns with Trust objects, core funding policy and Program funding priorities, noting it was funded through the Waste and Environment Levy Envelope</li> </ul>			
<b>Effectiveness</b>		b. To what extent did the project achieve its intended outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the extent the project addressed the original problem/opportunity</li> <li>Assess the extent the project achieved the desired change and impact</li> <li>Assess if the project achieved a positive, measurable difference in environmental awareness and education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive, measurable difference in increased awareness amongst target audience in NSW National Parks</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in increased intention to visit and visit National Parks by the target audience</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in membership to NPWS social media communities and Naturescape program by the target audience</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference amongst target audience intending to volunteer on-park</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in reaching the target audience as a result of the campaign benchmark</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference around conversation in NSW National Parks online by the target audience</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of attributable online contact/centre bookings for NPWS tours, activities, events, and accommodation by the target audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of experiences available within identified landscapes</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of visitors participating in experiences as a result of the CTO grants</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in environmental education among the commercial tour operator participants and visitors due to the experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of school visitors guided to NSW Parks through the Wilder Quest portal</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of teachers using the platform, taking students outside for education experiences</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the amount of time students spend on environmental education and learning outside</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in students' comprehension of the environment, biodiversity issues and Aboriginal discovery activities</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in student visitation to NSW National Parks</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of teachers and students accessing Aboriginal discovery ranger activities</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of teachers reporting improved learning outcomes for students</li> </ul>
		c. Were there lasting impacts for NPWS or project recipients because of the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the extent that project activities and target audience engagement continued beyond the project life</li> <li>Assess the extent that participants' awareness/education increased because of the project</li> <li>Determine if there were any barriers to achieving continued benefits from the project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of target audience participating in visiting, volunteering, and learning about NSW National Parks post-project funding</li> <li>Barriers, e.g., difficulty accessing the target audience without continued funding for promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of participants of experiences reporting intent to continue to learn about the environment and protect it</li> <li>Barriers, e.g., commercial tour operator experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of teachers and students who continue to use the platform post-project funding</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in NPWS stakeholder and school relationships as a result of the project</li> <li>Education stakeholders (e.g., NSW Board of Studies) consider Wilder</li> </ul>

Rationale	Key evaluation questions (applicable to all projects)	Key evaluation sub-questions (applicable to all projects)	The focus of the evaluation question inquiry (applicable to all projects)	Project-specific evaluation focus		
				Brand Campaign	CTO Small Grant Project	Wilder Quest
					unable to continue beyond the grant	<p>Quest is an effective tool to promote in school the environment and aboriginal cultural experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barriers, e.g., lack of funding to maintain Wilder Quest Platform, lack of uptake from schools or lack of support from education stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Appropriateness/ Effectiveness /Efficiency</b>	2. Was the project design and approach effective?	a. Was the project well planned and designed to deliver desired outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify if the project was implemented within the expected timeframe and budget, as well as against key performance indicators, year on year and at the project's conclusion</li> <li>Assess if the methods/approaches chosen to implement the project were appropriate</li> <li>Assess the key strengths of the project design and implementation and identify any challenges that made achieving project outcomes difficult</li> <li>Determine if any material risks arose during the project delivery and if they were rectified promptly and appropriately</li> <li>Assess the extent that stakeholder engagement was adequate and appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriateness of the campaign program design</li> <li>Effectiveness of market segmentation as a tool to improve campaign design and implementation</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in target audience feedback on the Campaign and the improved ability to access information about National Park experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriateness of the CTO grants process managed by NPWS (including transparency and accountability)</li> <li>Positive feedback from participants in commercial tour operator experiences</li> <li>Positive feedback received from commercial tour operators that received funding from NPWS</li> <li>Assess the commercial tour operators' perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the grants program</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of experiences included in Best of Nature and Signature Experience lists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of school visitors guided to NSW Parks through the Wilder Quest portal</li> <li>Positive, measurable difference in the number of teachers providing feedback on Wilder Quest 'Learning' elements</li> <li>Effectiveness of developed resources for teachers and students to use</li> <li>Cultural content is appropriate and sensitive to Aboriginal stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency/ Effectiveness</b>		b. How cost-effective was the project in achieving outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outline the key components/drivers of the project costs</li> <li>Assess if the project had adequate funding and if resources could have been allocated more efficiently</li> <li>Assess the benefits of co-funding contributions by other parties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the adequacy of the grant to deliver the campaign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the adequacy of Trust grant and the devolved grants to deliver commercial tour operator experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the adequacy of funding to establish learning platform units and NPWS experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Appropriateness /Opportunities</b>	3.Are there key lessons for future nature based tourism project investment	a. Should Environmental Trust consider unique aspects of the project in future investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the appropriateness of Environmental Trust investing in project type to achieve environmental education objectives</li> <li>Assess the key benefits and risks of investing in a project for nature based tourism (versus do nothing)</li> <li>Highlight any aspects of the project that should be adopted or avoided in similar projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriateness of Environmental Trust investing in campaigns to target audiences' visitation and involvement in NSW parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the appropriateness of Environmental Trust funding grants programs to increase participants in Nature based experiences and involvement in NSW parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the appropriateness of Environmental Trust funding primary school education platforms to increase children's involvement in and comprehension of nature and cultural experiences through the school curriculum</li> </ul>

## Attachment 2 – Lines of inquiry, data sources and methods

**Table B** outlines the lines of enquiry and methods used in each evaluation. This table includes information for all three projects.

**Table B: Outline of lines of inquiry, data sources and methods for all three projects**

Key evaluation questions	Indicative lines of inquiry	Data sources and methods
<b>1. Did the project deliver on expected outcomes?</b>		
<b>a. Did the project align with Environmental Trust policies?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compare evaluation targets to evidence in project reports/documents</li> <li>Document and assess perceptions of relevant Trust staff and NPWS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Review of project documents</b> - project plans, progress and final reports, reviewer reports</li> <li><b>Interviews</b> with Trust and NPWS staff</li> </ul>
<b>b. To what extent did the project achieve its intended outcomes?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess alignment of original project scope identified in project business case with achievements</li> <li>Assess alignment of outcomes identified in project business case with achievements</li> <li>Document and assess perceptions of relevant Trust and NPWS staff, commercial tour operators, teachers, and visitor participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Review of project documents</b> - project plans, progress and final reports, reviewer reports, market segment report, website data, CTO grants documentation, target audience and participant and teacher feedback</li> <li><b>Interviews/survey</b> with Trust and NPWS staff, commercial tour operators, teachers, visitor participants</li> </ul>
<b>c. Were there lasting impacts of the project for NPWS or project recipients?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compare any changes in management pre and post-project funding</li> <li>Document and assess perceptions of Trust and NPWS staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Review of project documents</b> - project plans, progress and final reports, reviewer reports</li> <li><b>Interviews</b> with Trust and NPWS staff</li> </ul>
<b>2. Was the project design and approach effective?</b>		
<b>a. Was the project well planned and designed to deliver desired outcomes?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the adequacy of KPIs, monitoring and reporting as they relate to assessing outcomes and program impacts</li> <li>Review approach and design against NSW and Australian government standards</li> <li>Assess any challenges and material risks and how they were managed</li> <li>Document and assess perceptions of Trust and NPWS staff, commercial tour operators, teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Review of project documents</b> - project plans, progress and final reports, reviewer reports, market segment report, website data, CTO grants documentation, target audience and participant and teacher feedback, NSW, and Australian government grants standards</li> <li><b>Interviews/survey</b> with Trust and NPWS staff, commercial tour operators, teachers</li> </ul>
<b>b. How cost-effective was the project in achieving outcomes?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the total cost of projects</li> <li>Compare with NSW and government standards</li> <li>Document and assess perceptions of Trust and NPWS staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Review of project documents</b> - project plans, progress, and final reports</li> <li><b>Review</b> of NSW government guidelines and standards</li> <li><b>Interviews</b> with Trust and NPWS staff, commercial tour operators</li> </ul>
<b>3. Was the project design and approach effective?</b>		
<b>a. Should the Environmental Trust consider unique aspects of the project in future investments?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Synthesise findings from the evaluation</li> <li>Document and assess perceptions of Trust and NPWS staff</li> <li>Assess feedback from commercial tour operator grant participants and teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Review project documents</b> progress and final reports</li> <li><b>Interviews/surveys</b> with Trust and NPWS staff, commercial tour operators, teachers</li> </ul>

## Attachment 3 – Interviewee list for the Nature Based Tourism projects

**Table C** lists the Nature based Tourism project participants and stakeholders that were interviewed as part of the evaluation. At the project’s outset, we nominated 26 interviewees depending on availability. Interviewee contacts were added based on recommendations over the life of the evaluation. In total 15 were interviewed.

**Table C: Evaluation interviews for Nature based Tourism Program**

<b>NBT Project</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Number interviewed (intended)</b>
<b>All</b>	National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) project managers	5 (4)
	Trust administrators	3 (3)
	Trust Nature Based Tourism subcommittee members	2 (2)
	WELE Manager	0 (1)
<b>Brand Campaign</b>	Campaign stakeholders	0(2)
	Young adult participants	0 (3)
<b>CTO Project</b>	Commercial Tour Operators	3 (2)
	Small grants professional	1 (0)
	Tour participants	0 (3)
<b>WilderQuest</b>	Teachers using the portal	0 (4)
	NSW Board of Studies/NSW Dept Education and communities	0 (1)
	NPWS Educators	2 (1)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15 (26)</b>



## Attachment 4 - Key Government documents considered in NBT Program evaluation

**Table D** lists the key documents the Commission reviewed to inform evaluation of projects alignment with NSW Government policies. These policies were referenced in approved business plans for approved NBT Projects.

**Table D: NSW Government policies reviewed for NBT Projects**

Organisation	Document reviewed
Environmental Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Environmental Trust Objects, Environmental Trust Act<sup>254</sup></li> <li>▪ Environmental Trust Major Project Funding Principles</li> <li>▪ Environmental Trust Core business funding policy</li> </ul>
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ NPWS Objects National Parks and Wildlife Act<sup>255</sup></li> <li>▪ OEH Corporate Plan</li> <li>▪ NPWS Delivery Plan</li> <li>▪ NPWS Tourism Masterplan 2015-2020</li> <li>▪ NPWS Cultural Tourism Development Program</li> <li>▪ NPWS Commercial Tour Operator Policy and Parks Eco Pass licensing system</li> </ul>
Other key documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Environmental Waste Levy Audit<sup>256</sup></li> <li>▪ NSW 2021 state plan</li> <li>▪ NSW Visitor Economy Industry Action Plan</li> <li>▪ NSW State Priorities – Making it Happen</li> <li>▪ Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan</li> <li>▪ NSW Government commitment to IUCN 2014</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Australia's National Landscapes</a></li> </ul>

<sup>254</sup>.....See Clause 7 'Objects of the Trust' NSW Legislation (2022) [Environmental Trust Act 1998 No 82 - NSW Legislation](#)

<sup>255</sup>.....NSW Legislation (2022) [National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 No 80 \(NSW\)](#)

<sup>256</sup>.....NSW Audit Office (2020) [Waste levy and grants for waste infrastructure NSW Auditor-Generals Report](#)

## Attachment 5 – Examples of Nature Based Tourism programs in Australia

We identified three government programs that invested in nature based tourism projects. Programs varied in scale but a consistent theme was including tourism promotion and market advantage for local areas as ecotourism destinations (**Table E**). These programs provide insights for any future programs.

**Table E: Examples of Nature Based Tourism investments in Australia**

Funding Program	Objectives	Eligible projects	Assessment criteria
NSW Regional Growth - Environment and Tourism Fund   NSW Government <sup>257</sup> (\$300 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investing in regional environment and tourism infrastructure to grow jobs and economies Round 2:</li> <li>accelerate the development of high impact tourism and events infrastructure</li> <li>increase the international appeal of destinations in regional NSW</li> <li>boost the visitor economy in regional NSW through increased visitation and job creation</li> <li>develop visitor experiences that utilise universal design principles and are accessible and inclusive for all</li> <li>ensure all visitors to regional NSW have unforgettable experiences that encourage repeat visitation</li> </ul>	<p>Nature Based Tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>iconic walking and hiking trails</li> <li>aquatic and coastal projects such as over-water walkways and major viewing platforms</li> <li>adventure trails that cover land and water experiences</li> <li>adventure cycling such as mountain bike and BMX trails</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>strategic alignment and visitor appeal</li> <li>contribution to economic outcomes</li> <li>deliverability and affordability</li> <li>accessibility, inclusion, and community</li> </ul>
South Australia Experience Nature Tourism Fund (\$2 million) <sup>258</sup>	<p>Spur investment in nature based tourism experiences and make South Australia more competitive in luring domestic and international tourists</p>	<p>Examples could include the purchase of equipment for experiences such as snorkelling, kayaking, cultural tours, wildlife viewing, and other 'pop up' activities in National Parks such as camping. On land adjacent to parks, it could also include new or refurbished off-grid accommodation such as tiny homes, cabins and glamping tents, and infrastructure such as toilets and solar power generation.</p> <p>Grants range from \$10,000 to \$50,000 for new and improved nature based tourism products and experiences in or near a National Park, reserve, wilderness protection area or marine park.</p>	<p>Not available</p>
Queensland - Tourism Activation Fund Activate Ecotourism Infrastructure <sup>259</sup> (up to \$2 million dollar-for-dollar matched contribution)	<p>Collaborate to develop more sustainable ecotourism and nature based tourism in Queensland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increase Queensland's sustainable ecotourism and nature based tourism offerings to position Queensland as a leading destination for these experiences in a post-pandemic environment</li> <li>contribute to building economic resilience in regional areas</li> <li>create construction and support ongoing operational jobs for Queenslanders</li> </ul>	<p>The types of ecotourism or nature based tourism projects proposed to be supported under this initiative include development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unique and sustainable ecotourism accommodation that enhances visitor engagement and appreciation of environmental values</li> <li>nature based tourism infrastructure that fills known gaps or creates new opportunities to increase the diversity of experiences, including hands-on conservation experiences, opportunities, or access to public protected areas, world heritage areas, timber reserves or state forests</li> <li>sustainable ecotourism infrastructure that supports Traditional Owners' tourism aspirations to deliver on Country visitor experiences and cultural understanding.</li> </ul> <p>To be eligible, the project must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be situated on land adjacent to or near public protected areas, world heritage areas, timber reserves or state forests</li> <li>be situated on freehold or leasehold land and have owner's consent to develop and operate ecotourism infrastructure</li> <li>have relevant zoning that allows ecotourism infrastructure</li> <li>already have in-principal support where required from local government and Traditional Owners</li> <li>be substantially progressed towards gaining, or have gained, all relevant local, state and Australian Government environmental approvals, including resolution of environmental offsets, if applicable.</li> <li>be substantially advanced towards gaining, or have gained Development approval</li> <li>be substantially advanced towards Detailed Design for new ecotourism infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic alignment to Government priorities</li> <li>Economic value</li> <li>Risk and cost allocation</li> </ul>

<sup>257</sup>.....NSW Government (2022) [Regional Growth - Environment and Tourism Fund](#)

<sup>258</sup> .....Government of South Australia (2022) [Experience Nature Tourism Fund](#)

<sup>259</sup>.....Queensland Government (2022) [TOURISM ACTIVATION FUND Activate Ecotourism Infrastructure Guidelines 2022](#).

## Attachment 6 – Commercial Tour Operator Project – successful grantees

Table F lists the Commercial Tour Operators that received a CTO Project grant.

**Table F: Commercial Tour Operator Project – successful grantees**

Organisation	Project title
<b>ROUND 1</b>	
High Country Trails and Tucker	Wilderness Dining Experience
Eco Treasures	Nature on Sydney's Doorstep
Captain Sponges Magical Oyster tours	Bithicka Dreamtime Experience
K7 Adventures	Multi-trail cross country mountain bike tour and walk to Kosciuszko summit
Southern Cross Kayaking	Wollemi supported walk
Colourful Trips	GPS Insights
Australia's Coastal Wilderness Adventures	Bittangabee Bay Bounty Experience
Cape Byron Kayaks	Byron Classics tour
Life's An Adventure	Light to Light walk
High Country Trails and Tucker	Walk the Wilderness
Merimbula Coach Tours	Light to Light Coastal Wilderness Treks
Light to Light Camps	Light to Light Camps
Paddlecraft	Pittwater Discovery Tours
Sydney Coast Walks	Self-guided walks maps
Sydney Coast Walks	Self-guided walks e books
Blue Mountains Adventure Company	Self-guided bushwalk maps

Organisation	Project title
<b>ROUND 2</b>	
Alpine River Adventures	Murray Gates Day/Overnight white-water rafting adventure
Light to Light Camps	Enhancement to interpretive experience
Paddlecraft	Kayak and camp on Pittwater
Blue Mountain Bikes Australia	Mountain e-bike tours
Blue Mountains Ancestral Pathways	Overnight Aboriginal cultural experience
Aussie Fly Fisher	New Kosciuszko tour
Byron Bay Adventure Tours	Mountain biking experience
Yuraygir Walking Experiences	Kayaking experience
Bundeena Kayaks	Night kayaking
M8 Explorer	Bundeena to Wattamolla walk experience explore
Light 2 Light Coastal Walks	Tents
Emu Trekkers	First camp