

Annual Report 2019-20

Using the power of the law to
protect nature and community



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Image: Powerful Owl, NSW by Rosie Nicola; Cover image: WOTCH

About Us

Who we are

Environmental Justice Australia is a leading public interest legal organisation. We use our legal expertise to be a powerful force for change, to empower communities to safeguard health and protect nature, and to create a better legal system that delivers environmental justice for people, places and wildlife. We are non-profit, donor-funded, supporter-driven and reliant on backing from the community.

Our vision

We are creating a world where our laws help people and nature thrive. Where communities are empowered with legal and advocacy tools to protect their health and the places and wildlife they love. Where strong laws and independent governance resist the influence of big polluters and the courtroom holds government to account. A world where our legal system is fair and just for all.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay respect and to their elders, past, present and emerging, and pay tribute to the vital role First Nations peoples play in caring for country across Australia.

Why we do what we do

We are living in a pollution and extinction crisis. The laws designed to protect the unique places and the wildlife we love are failing. And so are the governments and agencies set up to oversee them. Communities who live near poorly regulated coal-fired power stations suffer serious health impacts from exposure to air pollution.

Ministers, influenced by the big polluter lobby, use weak laws to approve coal and gas projects that pollute our air, water and land and damage our climate. Legal loopholes and bad decisions allow our magnificent old-growth forests to be cut down. National protections for our threatened wildlife can't stop mining, logging and land-clearing from pushing them to the brink. Corruption and serious failures of government have left our life-giving rivers drying up and choking on pollution.

It's clear nature and community needs a legal team that can work inside and outside the courtroom to hold government and business to account and drive systemic change.

Communities empowered with legal representation and tools for advocacy, can take on government and business to win justice for the places and wildlife they love. Stronger laws and independent institutions can protect our forests, rivers and wildlife and systemic change can make our system fair and just for all. With a new generation of environment laws, innovative solutions and empowered communities, people and nature can thrive.

Our history

Environmental Justice Australia was formerly the Environment Defenders Office Victoria and part of a National Network of EDOs in each state and territory. But in 2014, the Abbott Government cut all funding to EDOs around the country.

We reached out to the community to help fund our organisation so we could keep fighting for environmental justice and the response was overwhelming. We couldn't do the critical work we do now without the support of incredible people and philanthropists. We also took the opportunity to rethink the way we work and recognised that the law can be both a powerful enabler of positive social change – and a powerful blocker.

We saw a need for a new type of organisation working inside and outside the courtroom to win justice for communities and nature. An organisation employing innovative tactics and solutions to drive systemic change.

So, we reimagined ourselves as Environmental Justice Australia – an innovative public interest legal organisation, dedicated to using our legal expertise to fight for environmental justice on issues and in areas of Australia where we can be the most impactful.

Since then, we have pioneered world-first climate risk litigation, become national leaders in protecting communities from the health impacts of coal pollution, been founding members of the Places You Love Alliance for national law reform, exposed Adani's shocking international track record of not complying with the law, run landmark forest litigation, worked closely with First Nations Australians to achieve water rights and care for our rivers, and so much more.

And, of course, we have also carried forward the proud legacy of EDO Victoria, providing vital legal support to the Victorian community and environment groups seeking environmental justice.

Message from our new Board Chair

As Chair of EJA, I am delighted to introduce our 2020 annual report in what has been a year of unprecedented change mixed with some big wins for environmental justice.

This year has no doubt challenged us all but I believe these challenges remind us how quickly things can change and new opportunities can be created. What we cared about before all of this remains important and achieving our goals comes through perseverance, holding true to what we care about and leaping towards those big changes when the opportunity arises.

With all that was going on in the world, EJA also underwent significant leadership transition in 2020. I started in February, taking over from Megan Utter who I would like to acknowledge for serving on EJA's board for more than 10 years providing steadfast support and leadership for a growing organisation.

Backed by training in engineering and law I have worked in the renewables industry for over 20 years and currently the Head of Renewable Infrastructure at Impact Investment Group, working with impact investors to build new solar farms and support the transition to clean energy.

I was drawn to joining the board at EJA after my own experience of taking a case to Queensland's Supreme Court over some ill-advised regulation. This experience reminded me that sometimes the best way of holding entities to account and achieving a fair and just outcome is via the law.

This year we also farewelled Brendan Sydes, who served as CEO of EJA for 15 years, growing the organisation from a team of one to the inspiring and dedicated team it is today. One of my first tasks as Chair was to undertake a rigorous process to recruit a new CEO, someone who could continue Brendan's impressive legacy and lead the organisation into the future.

We were lucky enough to be presented with a compelling case for not one, but two Co-CEOs, both with the passion and capability to provide the leadership that the organisation deserves and the protection our environment needs. In June we were pleased to appoint Nicola Rivers and Elizabeth McKinnon to the shared Co-CEO position.

Nicola has been with Environmental Justice Australia for 11 years, leading our law reform and advocacy work. Prior to joining us she worked in government and the Environment Defenders Office in Western Australia.



Elizabeth also has a long history with us, having worked as a public interest litigation lawyer for 6 years before working as in-house counsel at the Australian Conservation Foundation for the last 7 years. Both are wonderful leaders on their own but as a combination, I think they will be unstoppable.

I would like to acknowledge that the EJA board has embraced the Co-CEO model and are thrilled to see two accomplished women taking up well deserved leadership roles in the environment movement

As a public interest legal organisation, the work we do is all about ensuring change is for the better. Better for people, the planet and our future. The environmental challenges we face can be overcome by an incredible team effort and for that I thank the EJA board, staff, volunteers, clients, funders, donors, partners and collaborators for their encouragement and ongoing support for EJA.

I look forward to working with you all on the challenges ahead.

Lane Crockett
Chairperson

Image: Kate Baker



Meet our new Co-CEOs

This past year 2019-20 has seen the world go through some enormous challenges and adjustments. From the catastrophic summer bushfires to the coronavirus pandemic to a global push for the Black Lives Matter movement – environmental justice has never been more important.

Here at EJA, we farewelled our fearless leader Brendan Sydes in June, after 15 years of service and we took over the reins as Co-CEOs – an arrangement that allows us to be leaders in the environment movement at the same time as being parents to young children. The challenges of the bushfires and the COVID lockdowns meant we had to reorient many of our strategies and plans and adapt to working from home. Despite these challenges, we managed to achieve so much for our communities and for our climate, forests, rivers and wildlife.

The work we do ensuring our governments uphold the laws that protect our magnificent forests and threatened wildlife is more critical than ever. In January, we launched a new Supreme Court case to protect threatened wildlife in the wake of the bushfires that destroyed nearly three billion animals and burnt over 11 million hectares. And in May, we won a landmark Federal Court case to protect Victorian forests home to threatened native possums.

The bushfires brought the health impacts of air pollution sharply into focus as Australians from city to coast to bush choked on smoke for weeks. While we ramp up efforts to address the climate crisis, reducing major sources of air pollution, including from coal-burning power stations, is a matter of urgency to protect community health.

Throughout the year, we continued to lead the work to reduce the health burden of coal-burning power in Australia, applying significant political pressure for stronger national air pollution standards and stricter licence conditions for power stations. We also released groundbreaking research on coal ash that highlighted the health and environmental threats of this toxic waste issue.

Driving significant law reform remains a cornerstone of our work. As part of the Places You Love Alliance, we responded with fierce resistance to the federal government's plans to weaken our national environment laws to push through big infrastructure and mining projects under the guise of economic recovery from COVID.

We also saw hard-fought law reform that we played an integral role in, come into force with Victoria's reformed *Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act* and are at the ready to ensure those strengthened laws are enforced and abided by.

In addition to the work we do driving systemic change and law reform, providing communities with access to justice remains close to our hearts. This year, we provided hundreds of people and groups with legal support.

These are just a few highlights from a significant year of work using our legal expertise as a powerful force for change. Our unique model of community partnership and strategic advocacy and litigation continues to produce strong results across all of our areas of work.

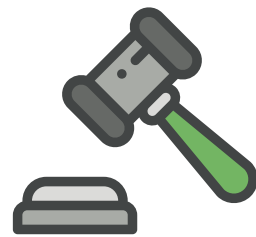
The issues we work on are hard and changing the law and winning court cases requires dedication and patience but we are in it for the long game. We feel lucky to have such a wonderful staff team, board members and other volunteers whose hard work and commitment to the cause makes us such a well-respected and impactful organisation. We are so grateful to all of those who share our vision and invest in our work, and thank our donors large and small, and our clients and collaborators. We couldn't do the vital work we do without your support.

In this annual report, you can read more about the progress we have made across all of our areas of work including some of the significant wins and positive outcomes mentioned above.

Nicola Rivers and Elizabeth McKinnon
Co-CEOs

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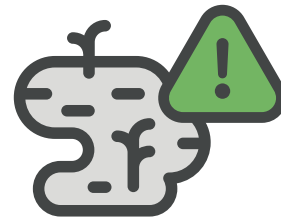
Our impact



Won a landmark Federal Court case to protect threatened native possums



Launched a Supreme Court case to protect forests and wildlife after the bushfires

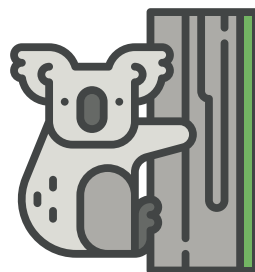


Released groundbreaking research on toxic coal ash waste



Made headlines about alarming increases in air pollution from coal-burning power stations

Brought the Australian government's failure to protect the Great Barrier Reef to UNESCO's attention



Helped strengthen Victoria's Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act

Provided access to environmental justice for **125** community members



Secured stronger conditions on a waste incineration facility

Hosted **12** community legal workshops empowering people with tools to advocate

Communities

Healthy communities have access to justice and to democratic and cultural rights. We make sure governments and companies are upholding the laws that protect these rights. We guide, support and empower communities to fight for environmental justice. And we advocate for stronger protections where our laws fail our communities.



Fighting for clean air

Coal-burning power stations are one of the biggest sources of air pollution in Australia and cause 800 premature deaths each year. Despite this, Australian power stations are poorly regulated and are not fitted with some basic pollution controls required in most other countries.

In addition to causing premature deaths, exposure to these toxic pollutants worsens existing conditions like asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis and other respiratory diseases; and can cause heart disease, stroke, asthma attack, lung cancer, low birthweight babies, and type 2 diabetes.

These air pollution impacts too often hit vulnerable people the hardest, including low-income communities, the elderly, people with chronic diseases, children, pregnant women and unborn babies.

There is no safe level of exposure as even small amounts can cause serious health issues if people are exposed for long periods of time.

In the middle of a pandemic that affects the respiratory system and after weeks of smoke pollution during the catastrophic summer bushfires, easing the health burden from existing sources of pollution has never been more important.

EJA's Clean Air Campaigner, Max Smith, and EJA Lawyer, Bronya Lipski, working with communities impacted by coal pollution in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria. Image: Garrett Eckerson



Strengthening national air pollution standards

This year, our coal pollution team continued to work closely with the communities most affected by air pollution from coal-burning power in the Latrobe Valley, the New South Wales Central Coast and the Hunter region. We also worked with a strong coalition of health sector groups to advocate for pollution control policy in Australia, jumping on a unique opportunity to influence our national air pollution standards.

Australia's national air pollution standards are not strong enough to protect human health. Many exceed the World Health Organization's recommended thresholds and lag significantly behind most other countries, including the U.S., the EU, and China.

Environment Ministers were due to make a decision on whether or not to vary national air pollution standards for sulfur and nitrogen dioxides, for the first time since they were adopted in 1998. More than 50,000 Australians have died from exposure to air pollution since they came into force.

We made a significant submission to the review and facilitated 18,000 submissions from civil society, community groups and the health sector. We then met with every state and territory environment minister in Australia to advocate for stronger standards on behalf of those who made submissions.

The review was initially delayed due to the overwhelming number of submissions made by civil society, and then again due to COVID, national cabinet and state and territory elections. We expect strong health-based standards to be considered by the National Environment Protection Council at its next meeting, anticipated before the end of 2020.

Raising the alarm on dangerous emissions

We made headlines with our annual analysis of the National Pollutant Inventory (NPI) data on toxic emissions from coal-burning power stations. Our analysis showed alarming increases in dangerous particle pollution from both Vales Point power station in New South Wales and Yallourn power station in Victoria's Latrobe Valley.

On behalf of a coalition of community, health and environment groups, we issued legal complaints to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPAs) in NSW and Victoria about the increases and called for an investigation. Over 800 community members signed onto the complaint. The NSW EPA has agreed to investigate the significant spike in deadly PM2.5 pollution from Vales Point power station.

Our analysis of the NPI received widespread coverage along with our subsequent legal complaints. We exposed the health impacts of pollution from Vales and Yallourn through a round of prominent media stories. Over 50,000 people viewed our online coverage.

We also gave evidence at the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the health impacts of exposure to poor levels of air quality resulting from bushfires and drought. We made sure the Committee understood that any efforts to address these issues were futile if the health impacts of pollution from coal-burning power stations were not considered. The committee will report and make recommendations about the suitability and possible reform of NSW government policy on air pollution in coming months.

There is no safe level of exposure as even small amounts can cause serious health issues if people are exposed for long periods of time.

Exposing the threat of toxic coal ash

When coal is burnt to make electricity, it produces tens of thousands of tonnes of toxic ash waste. At most coal-burning power stations in Australia, coal ash is mixed with saline wastewater and pumped into enormous dumps creating a lethal cocktail of toxic sludge including heavy metals and dangerous pollutants like mercury, lead, arsenic, selenium and chromium.

Coal ash is one of Australia's biggest waste problems and accounts for nearly one-fifth of the entire nation's waste stream yet it flies under the radar.

In July 2019, we released shocking new research that revealed communities across the country are at serious risk from poorly managed coal ash waste. Our report *Unearthing Australia's toxic coal ash legacy* unveiled shocking flaws in the management and regulation of coal ash dumps and was the first comprehensive national study of coal ash waste management in Australia.

Our research provides state and federal governments with a blueprint for national guidelines and recommendations to reduce the toxic burden of coal ash dumps on Australian communities and minimise the threat to human and environmental health.

For communities, this research gives them the tools to understand and advocate for improved coal ash dump management, rehabilitation, closure and post-closure planning to be used when engaging with regulators on coal ash dump matters.

Communities initiating a government inquiry

Our coal ash report received widespread coverage in the press, making headlines in local, state and national media and we cemented ourselves as Australia's most prominent coal ash regulation experts.

As part of this work, we visited affected communities on Australia's east coast hosting a series of community forums and meetings with politicians and experts. Joining us was Lisa Evans, a senior attorney from our counterpart in the US, Earthjustice. Lisa is a legal expert in hazardous waste law and advocacy, with more than 20 years' experience working on coal ash. It was great to have Lisa bring her knowledge and experience to Australia to share with us and the communities most impacted by toxic coal ash.

As a result of our report, submissions from the community and the excellent work of other organisations like the Hunter Community Environment Centre, the New South Wales Parliament launched an Inquiry into the costs for remediation of sites containing coal ash repositories.

The Inquiry hearings will take place in September 2020 where our lawyer and coal ash expert, Bronya Lipski will give evidence alongside representatives from affected communities.

This year we also made recommendations to the NSW Independent Planning Commission on a proposal to expand the Eraring coal ash dump on the NSW Central Coast. Some of the recommendations were adopted in the ash dam expansion approval conditions imposed on Eraring and will help protect the local community and environment.

Protecting community from toxic incineration

In January 2019, a proposal for a waste-to-energy plant in Laverton was approved by the Victorian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). The EPA's approval came despite community opposition, limited conditions in place to monitor and control pollution, and no assurances that recyclable waste would not be burnt.

We represented community group Zero Waste Victoria to launch a case with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to ensure that if this waste-to-energy facility went ahead, it was under strict conditions and not at the expense of community and environmental health.

In June 2020, with our assistance, Zero Waste Victoria settled its legal challenge after Recovered Energy Australia and the EPA agreed to a set of stricter conditions that secured better air quality, waste management, monitoring and reporting for the Laverton and surrounding communities.

The strengthened conditions are an important win for environmental justice, at a time when an increasing number of waste-to-energy facilities are being proposed in communities that are already disproportionately affected by pollution. They are also important in Victoria's transition to a circular economy.

The achievements gained in this case have already had positive flow on effects. The strengthened conditions for the Laverton facility were adopted and implemented in the EPA's approval of a waste-to-energy facility in Dandenong South.

Image: Vales Point power station coal ash dump, NSW



EJA's lawyers helped our group, Zero Waste Victoria, negotiate improved conditions which was a big win for the Hobsons Bay and Wyndham communities, and those with concerns about the health and environmental impacts of the proposed waste-to-energy facility in Laverton. I am grateful and appreciative of EJA's dedication and thoroughness, for all their support and for the outcomes we achieved.

To add to this, many of the improved conditions have since been transferred to a subsequent Works Approval which has amplified the win. A further testimony to the great work of EJA.

– KIRSTY BISHOP-FOX, EJA CLIENT



Providing Victorians with access to environmental justice

We continue to provide Victorians speaking out and standing up for our air, water and wildlife with access to environmental justice. This year, our lawyers provided 125 legal services to communities.

This included collaborating with community groups on a number of concerns relating to toxic waste, recycling and other waste management issues. We also assisted other community groups to access information about decisions relating to environmental matters through targeted freedom of information requests.

Our lawyers represented a community group throughout the environmental impact assessment of the North East Link Project, a major infrastructure project that will have significant environmental impacts for the Yarra River and urban ecology. This included giving evidence at public hearings alongside our client Yarra Riverkeeper and providing legal advice to Friends of Banyule, Warrigal Conservation Society and Friends of the Earth, empowering them to confidently self-represent at the hearings.

We are proud to report that the North East Link Project's Inquiry and Advisory Committee adopted many of our recommendations.

Reforming the Victorian Environment Protection Act

In 2015, the Victorian government commenced a major review of the Victorian Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and Environment Protection Act 1970 (Vic). The EP Act contains Victoria's key pollution control laws. An independent committee conducted an extensive review, including public consultation, and released their recommendations in March 2016.

In 2017, the Victorian government released its response to the independent inquiry, announcing its proposed reforms for the EPA over the next five years. EJA played a pivotal role in the development and implementation of the reforms to the EP Act, providing advice to the government and advocating for key features that would make the reform successful and safeguard the Victorian community and environment from pollution.

The reforms were due to come into force on 1 July 2020 but in April, the Victorian Parliament passed the Covid-19 Omnibus (Emergency measures) Act 2020, which saw a halt in the enactment of the Environment Protection Act 2018. Together with other community groups, we have been urging the Victorian government to immediately revoke the delay of the Environment Protection Act 2018 and will continue our efforts to ensure this important piece of reformed legislation is up and running as soon as possible.

Advancing First Nations water management

We continue our work with Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations: (MLDRIN), a confederation of sovereign First Nations from the southern part of the Murray-Darling Basin.

This year, we commenced a project in collaboration with local Traditional Owners and MLDRIN to explore legal and policy issues concerning design and implementation of cultural flows at a culturally significant wetland on the Murray River in northern Victoria. Cultural flows are a policy model developed by MLDRIN and other First Nations bodies that give First Nations control and influence over water on Country, advance self-determination and create positive social, cultural and environmental outcomes.

It is envisaged this project will assist Traditional Owners to advocate more effectively, understanding constraints and opportunities posed by the law, for the outcomes they are seeking for that Country. The potential for cultural flows programs to advance Traditional Owner control over water on Country as well as recognition is an important dimension of justice and reconciliation going forward.

EJA's expertise in environmental and natural resources law helps underpin these aspirations. It is work we are looking to expand in the future.

Cultural flows are a policy model developed by Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) and other First Nations organisations that give First Nations Peoples control and influence over water on Country, advance self-determination and create positive social, cultural and environmental outcomes.

EJA Lawyer, Bronya Lipski and coal ash expert, Lisa Evans, a senior lawyer at Earthjustice in the US spoke with communities in the Latrobe Valley, Lake Macquarie and Gladstone about the health and environmental threats of coal ash waste and what's needed to prevent them.



Image: Murray River, Mildura, Victoria /South Australia by Jacopo Werther



Nature

We are living in the midst of a pollution and extinction crisis and we will lose the places and wildlife we love if we don't start living in balance with nature. Our team at EJA uses the law to protect, restore and connect our natural world. With our clients and partners, we hold companies and government to account when they breach environmental laws. We pursue strategic court cases to stop devastation for generations to come. And, we help design and reform nature protection laws so they are strong enough to halt the degradation of our air, land, water and wildlife.



Strengthening our national environment laws

Driving significant law reform remains a cornerstone of our work - in particular strengthening our national environment laws - the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

This year, we won one of the most significant cases in the history of the EPBC Act - the Possums Case, which found that VicForests' logging operations in important threatened species habitat is unlawful.

Though we have used this legislation successfully to protect threatened species, the EPBC Act is far from perfect. Since the Act was established, 7.7 million hectares of threatened species habitat has been destroyed. That's an area larger than Tasmania. Meanwhile, the number of extinctions continue to climb, while new threats emerge and spread unchecked.

Over its 20-year existence, we have fought roll backs of the EPBC Act on numerous occasions, including recent attempts by the federal government to handover its powers to the states, which in many cases would result in states approving their own development interests. We also advocate to improve this key piece of legislation, particularly as the Act barely mentions climate change, the need to help wildlife adapt to climate impacts, or the need to dramatically reduce Australia's carbon emissions to help them survive.

Right now, the EPBC Act is under a 10-year review. The federal Environment Minister, Sussan Ley, appointed an expert panel to conduct the review and opened it up for public submissions. Our lawyers made a significant submission to the review to highlight that the Act is not properly protecting our forests, our threatened species, our water resources, and our pristine natural places.

We called on the federal government to strengthen the EPBC Act to ensure it addresses Australia's extinction and pollution crisis and to establish an independent federal Environmental Protection Authority and an independent National Environment Commission to oversee them.

And, as part of the Places You Love Alliance, we helped organise 248 scientists to sign on to an open letter to Prime Minister Scott Morrison calling on him to use the review as an opportunity to demonstrate national leadership and fix our federal environment laws in order to protect and restore nature across Australia.

Since the review began, the government has made some worrying comments about using the opportunity to wind back environmental protections to speed up approvals for mining and infrastructure projects. We'll be sure to respond with fierce resistance to any moves to weaken our national environment laws.

Image left: Red-tailed Black Cockatoos. Image below: Australian Alps



Landmark Federal Court win for threatened possums

In May, after a three-year David and Goliath battle in the Federal Court, on behalf of Friends of Leadbeater's Possum, we proved that VicForests' logging operations contravened federal law and failed to protect the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum and the threatened Greater Glider.

The community successfully sounded the alarm about the Victorian government (VicForests) driving these unique and fragile creatures closer to extinction.

The court granted final injunctions to protect the 66 areas subject to the case from logging and ordered VicForests pay Friends of Leadbeater's Possum's costs for running the case.

This historic win has huge implications for forest protection across Australia. It sets an important legal precedent applying federal threatened species protection law to the logging industry. The case also prompted Bunnings to stop stocking VicForest's products and inspired a number of challenges to forest practices across the country.

But instead of preparing to transition out of native forest logging, VicForests has appealed the court's decision, taking the volunteer-run Friends of Leadbeater's Possum back to court. With our client, we'll do everything we can to make sure this landmark court decision is upheld and our threatened possums remain protected.



MAIN: Critically endangered Leadbeater's Possums. Image: WOTCH

ABOVE RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM:
Citizen scientists surveying Victorian forest. Image: WOTCH
Leadbeater's Possum. Image: WOTCH
EJA Senior Forests Lawyer, Danya Jacobs
Steve Meacher, President Friends of Leadbeater's Possum. Image: Karina Goldfinch
Friends of Leadbeater's Possum and their EJA legal team celebrate their Federal Court win. Image: FLbP



Protecting threatened wildlife after the bushfires

Despite this year’s summer bushfires wiping out vast swathes of forest and so much of Victoria’s precious wildlife, logging has continued across the state.

In January 2020, on behalf of a community group of citizen scientists from Victoria’s Central Highlands (WOTCH), we launched a Supreme Court case against VicForests to stop logging in unburnt habitat for threatened species impacted by the bushfires – including the Greater Glider, Sooty Owl, Powerful Owl and Smoky Mouse.

The Victorian government’s own preliminary response to the bushfires lists these species among the “fauna species of most immediate concern”. And yet clear-fell logging continues in their habitat.

In this case we argue that logging where fire-affected threatened species have been sighted or their habitat exists is unlawful until the state and federal governments have concluded their bushfire biodiversity response and threatened species are protected in light of the findings.

This was the first court case to protect threatened species in the wake of the bushfires. WOTCH has been granted a series of injunctions to halt logging in areas of unburnt habitat for the duration of the case while we seek longer-term protection.

The full hearing of this case is likely to be in early 2021.

Logged native forest, Victoria. Image: WOTCH



Return to court to protect old-growth forest

In November 2017, we launched a Supreme Court case on behalf of the Fauna and Flora Research Collective (FFRC) initially to protect the ancient Kuark forest and expanded to include over thirty areas of old-growth forest earmarked for logging in Victoria’s East Gippsland. These forests are home to rare old-growth forests including rainforest found nowhere else on Earth, along with endangered owls, potoroos and gliding possums.

While the case was running, 34 forest areas remained protected from logging and as the case drew on, 21 of those areas were put into protection zones or removed from logging plans. However, the remaining 13 areas, along with many other areas of old growth forests in East Gippsland, were left out of protection and still needed protection when the case came to a close.

In November 2019, while awaiting judgement on the case, the Victorian government made a forest policy announcement that signalled an end to old-growth forest logging in Victoria. However, despite the positive headline, the devil in the detail showed that the government’s plans do not place the remaining old -growth forests in protection zones as the rules require.

The case has now been reopened and we are again working with FFRC to prepare the case to defend these ancient forests. The hearing is scheduled for November 2020.

Surveying old-growth forest. Image: WOTCH



Attending the Supreme Court for Flora and Fauna Research Collective v VicForests. From left: Kathleen Foley (barrister), Danya Jacobs (EJA lawyer), Peter Gray QC (barrister), Emily Giblin (EJA lawyer), Andrew Lincoln (of Fauna and Flora Research Collective Inc, client), Rowan Minson (barrister).

Improving the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act

EJA welcomed the release of the Victorian government’s response to submissions to the review of the state’s biodiversity protection law, the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

Our lawyers were pivotal in strengthening the Act after we made significant submissions to the process and provided expert legal advice. We provided the government with a five-point plan for the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act which set out why reforms that simply aligned the legislation with the current unsatisfactory approach to threatened species protection in Victoria would not be acceptable – and the government listened. Importantly, the government has retained the commitment to the Act’s ‘guarantee’.

The Act’s guarantee that all of Victoria’s flora and fauna can survive and flourish in the wild is the foundation of this law – to remove the guarantee would have been to concede defeat on the legislation’s aims.

The reforms came into force in June 2020 and mean public authorities in Victoria will now be subject to important new responsibilities to ensure protection of Victoria’s unique biodiversity. The changes reinforce biodiversity protection as a responsibility that needs to be taken seriously across the whole of government, including importantly local government.

We’ll be keeping a close eye on how the reformed Act is put into practice. A key test for these new laws will be whether they go far enough to address the current extinction crisis.

In October 2019 the Legislative Council of the Victorian Parliament resolved to establish an Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline, providing an opportunity to examine in depth what needs to be improved to address the extinction crisis in Victoria. Reporting on this is scheduled for April 2021.

Critically endangered Swift Parrot. Image: David Curtis



Co-creating stronger laws for the rivers of the west with community

We have been working in collaboration with advocates in Melbourne’s west on analysis of the impacts of rapid and widespread urban growth on the unique streams and waterways of western Melbourne. These include small ‘plains’ streams as well as the larger Werribee River. These waterways are subject to extensive impacts and re-engineering as a result of new suburb development. This work empowers community advocacy to make sure our urban waterways are recognised and protected in urban development.

We continued to advocate for strong outcomes for the rivers and creeks of Melbourne’s west. We commenced a project to scrutinise the impacts of rapid urban development in Melbourne’s west on the unique waterways there. The focus of our policy work was both on water management and on land-use planning issues, including how we treat waterways as priority ‘natural infrastructure’.

In addition to workshops, we held seminars on waterway issues, including restoration science and also helped community groups make their cases at public hearings.

This work empowers community advocacy to make sure our urban waterways are recognised and protected in urban development.

Members of Friends of Steele Creek and Friends of the Maribyrnong Valley who EJA works with through our urban rivers program. Image: Maribyrnong Leader.



Strengthening protections for the Barwon

We designed and completed a participatory design process with community groups Friends of the Barwon to consider options and policy proposals for protection and restoration of the health of the Barwon-Moorabool river system in southwest Victoria.

We hosted community workshops in Geelong to come up with a series of proposed law and policy reforms for better protection of the Barwon and Moorabool River systems. The community's contribution helped inform the work of the Ministerial Advisory Committee, appointed by the Victorian government to identify and implement such reforms. Central to our proposals were recognition of these rivers as 'living entities' underpinned by enforceable targets in order restore and protect their health.

Community at the heart of river protection

Collaborations with community organisations are essential to this rivers work. Waterway advocates are our partners and, sometimes, our clients. The meeting of their energies, skills and passions with ours has proved remarkably powerful in contributing to the space of protecting our urban environment.

Together with community, we have achieved so much for our rivers in the last year but there is still a long way to go in this work, as the health of our waterways still struggles. People certainly have a renewed appreciation for urban rivers, creeks and wetlands in the times of COVID. Citizen advocacy, science, and on-ground work for waterways has never been more important.

Enshrining long-term protections for the Yarra in law

In 2017, we were instrumental in getting the groundbreaking *Yarra River (Willip-gin Birrarung murrn) Protection Act 2017* passed through the Victorian Parliament.

The Yarra Birrarung Act is a landmark piece of legislation intended to recognise the river corridor as a 'living' natural entity, based on its bi-cultural Wurundjeri Woi wurrung-Settler character, with the ambition of achieving a 'healthy' river over the next 50 years.

Wurundjeri made an early and powerful intervention in the policy-making process for reformed Yarra River governance back in 2016 and have also proposed a model of decolonisation for management and protection of the river.

Law and policy reform to protect Birrarung has been a long process but this year we participated in the process to turn the hard-won Yarra Birrarung Act into practical action to protect the river.

The Act requires a Yarra Strategic Plan (YSP) to be prepared to include a 'land use framework' for the river corridor. More than a dozen public agencies and Wurundjeri Traditional Owners have to endorse it before it can be approved as this plan will be key to what happens on Birrarung over the next 10 years.

In late May and early June, a Draft YSP and Land Use Framework were considered at a public inquiry in order to make findings and recommendations on whether these planning documents are a sound basis for going forward.

EJA and the Yarra Riverkeeper Association (YRKA) jointly took up the challenge to make a case for a stronger plan and lead expert evidence on the draft Plan. Our aim was to ensure agencies people are bound by law to protect this vital waterway and the river's tributaries.

Representatives for community and friends' groups made articulate cases and presented compelling examples and insights into the care, experience and intellect communities bring to managing our waterways and public lands.

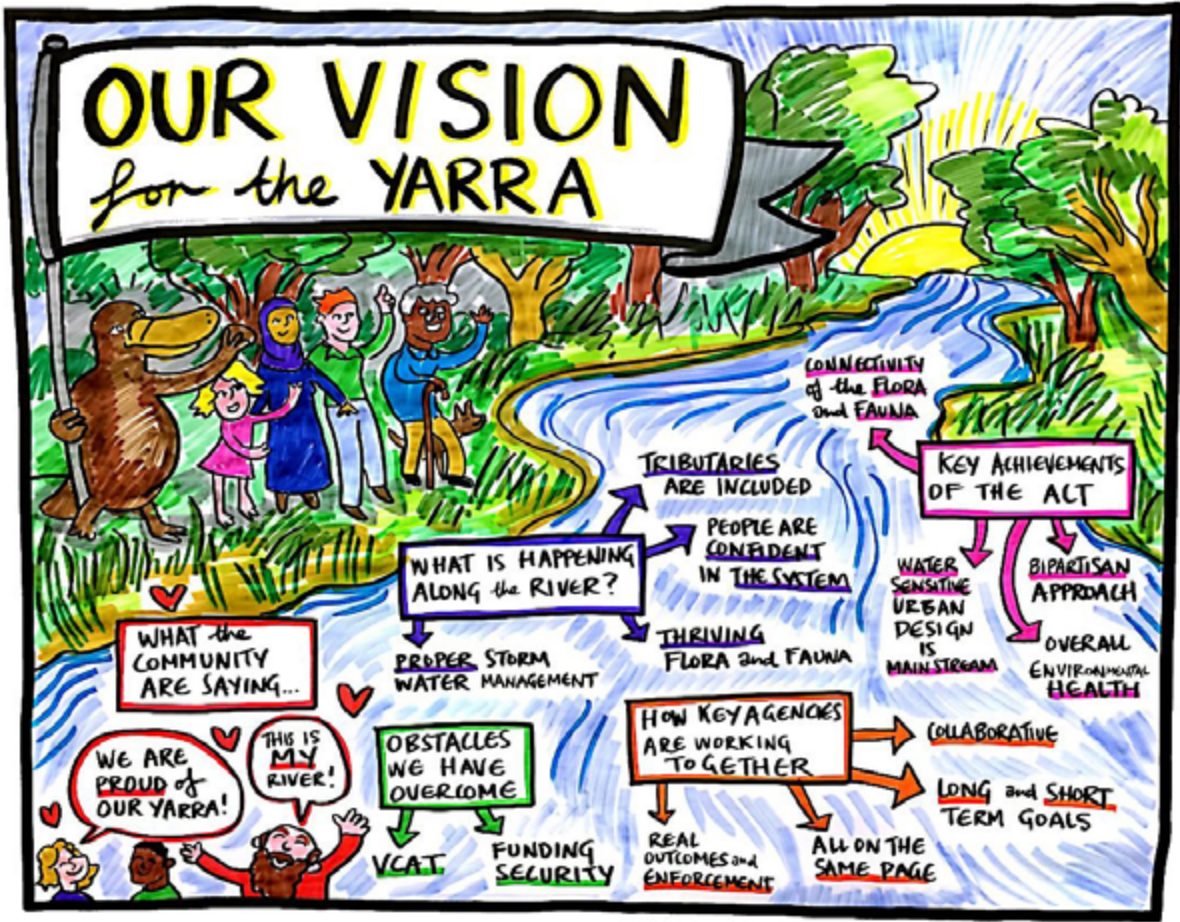
The process of preparation of the YSP continues and the Inquiry's panel report will be a crucial moment for the future of the Yarra. We look forward to seeing the finalised plan and framework due later this year and will ensure we engage in the process until we feel confident the Yarra river is protected for generations to come.



Dr Kaye Rodden, Chair of Friends of the Barwon and Bruce Lindsay, EJA Senior Lawyer releasing our 'Future of the Barwon' report - a blueprint for an innovative partnership approach between community and government to support the protection and rehabilitation of the Barwon River system.



EJA senior lawyer Bruce Lindsay spoke at the International River Symposium on the design and significance of the Yarra River Birrarung legislation and, by invitation, at a LegalWise seminar on water law in Sydney, outlining the role of water law in delivering water justice to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities especially in the Murray Darling Basin and in the context of the political economy of water in the Basin.



Climate

Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time. Without urgent action to slow dangerous global warming, what we stand to lose is unimaginable. EJA uses our legal expertise to stop projects that will make climate change worse, support the transition to clean, renewable energy and protect people and nature from the devastating impacts of rising global temperatures.

Holding government accountable for climate inaction

EJA continues to use our legal expertise to hold our governments to account for inaction on climate change. This year, we made a joint stakeholder submission, with Environmental Defenders Office and U.S. legal organisation, Earthjustice, to the Universal Periodic Review of Australia's compliance with international human rights obligations. Our submission highlighted Australia's failure to satisfy its obligations to prevent immediate and future human rights violations caused by climate change.

The lawyers in our climate program also brought important public scrutiny to the federal government's claims that they are doing enough to protect the Great Barrier Reef, refuting their claims with the latest science and facts about the failures of federal climate policy. In partnership with Earthjustice, we co-authored a report to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, calling on the body to take action over the Australian government's failure to meet its legal obligations to protect the Reef.

Exposing Adani's shocking track record

Our lawyers continue to ensure appropriate scrutiny is applied to the Adani Group's track-record of failing to comply with the law in multiple jurisdictions. It is not in the public interest for mining companies with a history of causing harm to the environment to be allowed to pursue high-risk mining projects without appropriate scrutiny of their environmental history. To date, there has been a failure at both a state and federal level to properly consider the Adani Group's corporate compliance record and hold them to account.

This year, we published a detailed legal analysis and made important legal submissions to the Queensland government about the law reform needed to take into account the Adani Group's track record of failing to comply with environmental laws in overseas jurisdictions. We are calling on the Queensland government to investigate whether Adani Mining Pty Ltd are a 'suitable operator' who should be allowed to undertake the environmentally risky Carmichael coal mine.

We worked in partnership with the Environmental Defenders Office in Queensland, to publicly call for law reform and an investigation into Adani Mining Pty Ltd's suitable operator status as Adani faced a fresh prosecution at Brisbane's Magistrates Court.

In partnership with the Environmental Defenders Office, we acted on behalf of a client to write to the CEO of Siemens about their provision of contracting services to the Adani Group, raising concerns about environmental compliance issues.

We cannot talk about sustainability, climate change and resilience, without talking about inequality and exclusion ...The wellbeing of the planet and the people on it are interconnected.

Justice, equality and inclusion

We believe environmental justice cannot be achieved without social justice. We cannot talk about sustainability, climate change and resilience, without talking about inequality and exclusion. It is an overwhelming fact that minority communities across the globe are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation. The wellbeing of the planet and the people on it are interconnected.

In solidarity with Black Lives Matter

The killing of George Floyd by a U.S. police officer in May was a catalyst for widespread attention on systemic racism in Australia. Sadly, many First Nations families have been protesting to address Aboriginal deaths in custody since (and long before) the Royal Commission Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody three decades ago.

As an organisation advocating for a legal system with equality at its core, we are incredibly disappointed that our laws and the police who enforce them have failed First Nations communities. The lack of accountability for the 437 deaths in police custody must be addressed.

As an environmental justice organisation, we recognise that systemic racism underpins environmental issues and that First Nations communities in Australia have had their land and cultural rights denied, decimated and degraded by environmentally destructive projects since colonisation.

Systemic racism continues to deny First Nations people opportunity, equality and dignity and we all share the collective responsibility to play our part in actively disrupting and dismantling it, especially those of us that continue to benefit from it.

We recognise that we must first confront these issues within our organisation and know that words alone are not enough.

We are committed to the following actions:

- Listening and learning from First Nations leaders to understand any issues of racism in our own organisation, in the environment movement we work in, and in the system we operate in.
- Continuing to work closely with Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) in their advocacy for water justice for First Nations communities in the Murray Darling Basin.
- Continuing to participate in programs like Democracy in Colour's People of Colour Placement Program to support emerging campaigners of colour.
- Rolling out our commitments from our Reconciliation Action Plan endorsed by Reconciliation Australia.

- Making sure all staff have completed anti-racism and cultural awareness training and actively champion diversity and inclusion in our workplace.
- Engaging our staff and supporters in conversations and reflection on racial justice and encouraging them to take action in solidarity with First Nations communities.

Reconciliation Action Plan

EJA is committed to using the law to protect the environment, build healthy communities and achieve environmental justice. There can be no environmental justice however, without addressing the past and current injustices Australia's First Nations endure, especially in relation to land, waters and culture. As we seek to achieve our overarching vision, EJA is committed to building stronger relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to providing culturally appropriate services, including through our first Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), endorsed by Reconciliation Australia in February 2020.

The aims of EJA's first RAP are to:

- develop a framework for EJA to realise our vision for reconciliation;
- build relationships both internally and externally, and raise awareness with our stakeholders to ensure there is shared understanding and ownership of our RAP within our organisation;
- develop a more culturally safe and inclusive workplace; and
- reduce barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and groups accessing EJA services and materials.

In the 2019-20 financial year, we got off to a good start by:

- Communicating our commitment to reconciliation to our members and supporters through our e-Bulletin and on our website.
- Providing face-to-face cultural safety in the workplace training for the majority of staff and some Board members in November 2019, through the Koorie Heritage Trust.
- Providing online cultural awareness training to staff members.
- Staff and Board members attending National Reconciliation Week activities remotely, including the livestream of "20 years on: Crossing Bridges for Reconciliation" and hosting our own Reconciliation Film Club virtual screening of Wik v Queensland.



Artwork: Brendan Kennedy. Image: Museums Victoria / Rodney Start

- Setting up processes for tracking RAP commitments and outcomes.
- Promoting EJA legal student volunteer roles through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks at universities, leading to two volunteers that identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in our summer internship intake.
- Updating our protocols for Acknowledgement of Country, and purchasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artwork and flags.
- Developing our understanding of the lands each staff member lives and work on (particularly through extended lockdown in Melbourne), and learning more about the Traditional Owners of those lands.
- Learning from the review conducted by Lidia Thorpe for the Australian Conservation Foundation "Protecting nature and First Nations culture: Lessons for the environment movement".

- Identifying organisations we can partner with on our RAP journey and beginning these conversations.
- Maintaining the RAP Working Group and regularly updating staff on RAP progress and activities.

Due to COVID-19 disruption occurring only a month after our RAP was endorsed, we have had to defer or change some of our RAP activities, including a planned visit to Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. These delays mean we have received an extension from Reconciliation Australia to August 2021.

We are continuing to advance our RAP commitments, and our next areas of focus are completing a cultural safety assessment, recruiting an external member of our RAP working group, and developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to gather their insights on our work.

Our People

Our Staff



Brendan Sydes
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
/ LAWYER



Thea Lange
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER



Nicola Rivers
DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY AND
RESEARCH / LAWYER



Nick Witherow
PRINCIPAL LAWYER



Ariane Wilkinson
SENIOR LAWYER



Danya Jacobs
SENIOR LAWYER



Bruce Lindsay
SENIOR LAWYER



Bronya Lipski
LAWYER



Virginia Trescowthick
LAWYER



Emily Giblin
LAWYER



James Whelan
RESEARCHER / COMMUNITY
ORGANISER



Mandy Johnson
OFFICE AND PUBLICATIONS MANAGER



Livia Cullen
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR



Greer Allen
DEVELOPMENT MANAGER



Anuska Batu
DIGITAL CAMPAIGNER



Sasha Brady
ENGAGEMENT OFFICER



Max Smith
CAMPAIGNER

Our Board



Lane Crockett
CHAIRPERSON



Andrew Cox
CHAIRPERSON



Elizabeth McMeekin
SECRETARY



Ricky Teh
TREASURER



Chiara Lawry
BOARD MEMBER



Sally Romanes
BOARD MEMBER



Kate Allsopp
BOARD MEMBER

Meet some EJA volunteers



Alexandra Valerio

What inspired you to apply to work with us at EJA?

I was searching for a firm that practiced predominantly public interest environmental law and EJA popped up as a perfect fit. I was inspired to apply for EJA because they have a broad variety of practicing areas, meaning I could gain experience in many different environmental law areas. I also think it's wonderful that EJA has a strong community focus; holding workshops to educate the public on environmental laws/protection and showing them how to get involved in submissions for improvement of our environmental laws. The work that EJA does, is the work I aspire to do when I am admitted as a lawyer.

What has been your favourite thing about the role?

It is difficult to pinpoint a favourite thing about the role as I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at EJA. One of the best things about the role is the opportunity to apply and improve the skills I have learnt in law school in a practical environment. I also thoroughly enjoy the variety in work; one day I might be working on something specific to a case the lawyers are working on and another day I might be completing a research task for a policy submission. I believe EJA has set me up very well for my future career as a lawyer and also introduced me to some incredible people along the way.

What does environmental justice mean to you?

Environmental justice means fairness for the environment. We need to work together to ensure we are respecting the environment and not exploiting the beautiful gifts it gives us. This means making sure everyone around us is doing the right thing and correcting those who aren't. Environmental justice is imperative, and it is so important to advocate for its rights.



Julian Grimm

What inspired you to apply to work with us at EJA?

I was inspired to volunteer at EJA because I saw it as a way of using my legal education to affect positive change in the world. I could contribute towards a worthy environmental cause which I was passionate about whilst gaining invaluable legal experience.

What has been your favourite thing about the role?

My favourite thing about volunteering at EJA has been seeing cases that I've worked on appear in the news and knowing that my small contribution was a part of the landmark victories achieved by EJA. It has been incredibly fulfilling to see EJA's efforts for environmental justice paying off and been an honour to be involved with the team.

What does environmental justice mean to you?

Environmental justice means that there is hope for the future. That we might prevail over short sighted profits and environmental destruction to pull the planet back from the brink. That is why the importance of EJA cannot be understated, holding companies and the government accountable and protecting the environment.



Yu Wang

What inspired you to apply to work with us at EJA?

I have a great interest in public interest law. As a law student with a background in ecology and botany, working with EJA matches my scientific skills with my passion in fighting for better environmental protection.

What has been your favourite thing about the role?

I love the fact that while gaining practical legal experience, my work is also making a positive impact on the environment. This makes the tasks meaningful and is a major source of motivation for me to do the best I can. The legal skills that I have learned through volunteering are also highly transferable.

What does environmental justice mean to you?

Environmental justice to me means to become the voice for the flora and fauna affected by human interference. We advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves. Through our work, we make their voice be heard and see justice done for them.



James Radlow

What inspired you to apply to work with us at EJA?

I didn't want to go straight into criminal law without experiencing other types of legal fields, and environmental law was the most interesting and varied as it combines various fields of law such as administrative law, public interest, and planning law.

What has been your favourite thing about the role?

My favourite thing about my time with EJA has been the fact that my work is different every week. I have worked on tasks ranging from researching the scope of the bushfire royal commission, to examining the effectiveness of the administration of environmental law, to researching the science behind environmental water sharing. In addition, I've really enjoyed the strong support I've received from everyone at EJA.

What does environmental justice mean to you?

I think environmental justice means ensuring people don't misuse the environment for their own gain, and impact on other people's enjoyment of the environment.

Appreciation and thank yous

Celebrating Brendan Sydes’ 15 years of service as EJA’s fearless leader

In June, we farewelled our wise and fearless CEO and leader, Brendan Sydes. For 15 years Brendan worked tirelessly to use the law to protect nature and wildlife. It was by sheer coincidence that we farewelled Brendan 15 years to the day when he first joined EJA (then EDO Victoria).

EJA is unrecognisable to what it was in 2005 – it has transformed into a powerhouse thanks to Brendan’s leadership. He was a leader who was unafraid to take on anyone and anybody.

During his time as CEO Brendan assembled a group of best and brightest legal minds and gave them the freedom to set about their work delivering environmental justice for nature and community.

Without Brendan’s leadership, EJA could not have become the institution it has. Thanks to his work, Environmental Justice Australia is a force to be reckoned with – using the power of the law to protect our forests, rivers and wildlife, clean up our air and water and secure a safe climate for our kids and grandkids.

During his time at EJA, Brendan oversaw and played an integral role in work that protected a number of threatened species – including the Leadbeater’s Possum, the Greater Glider, the Sooty and Powerful Owls, the Latham’s Snipe and the Glossy Black Cockatoo.

“We can walk amongst the forests you’ve protected and we can breathe cleaner air because you fought the big logging and energy industries.” – KELLY O’SCHANASSY, CEO, ACF

Brendan Sydes, EJA CEO & Lawyer to June 2020



Farewell and thank you to former Board chair, Megan Utter

This year we farewelled Megan Utter from the board after 10 years of service. Megan joined the board in 2009 and took over as chair in 2010.

Megan’s support for the work of EJA (and formerly EDO Victoria) actually predates her board service. Fifteen years ago, Megan, then a solicitor with Phillips Fox, provided extensive pro bono support to EDO Vic and Environment Victoria during the period of major reforms to Victoria’s Water Act. This commitment continued with Megan as Pro Bono Coordinator at her firm securing a series of secondments to EDO Victoria over several years which were crucial to our growth and increasing impact.

During her time as Chair, Megan played an invaluable role, supplying steadfast support and leadership to the organisation as we have grown and expanded, weathered the impact of precipitous withdrawal of Commonwealth government funding in 2013 and then re-launched as EJA in 2014.

We thank Megan (and her family!) for the time dedicated to EJA and our mission and wish her well for the future.

Volunteers and interns

Our work would not be possible without the dedicated support of our volunteers and interns. We are so grateful to you all.

Alana Ticchi	James Radlow
Alexander Baird	Joel Blashki
Alexandra Valerio	Julian Grimm
Ana Kantzelis	Katie O’Neill
Ashleigh Feurtado	Katy Morrison
Benjamin Edwards	Kenji Yamada
Catherine Nadel	Lucas Volfneuk
Clare Schuster	Lucinda Sheedy-Reinhard
Clarinda Allen	Madeleine Barr
Ellie Filkin	Matt Clare
Francesca Cutri	Mohamed Naleemudeen
Garrett Eckerson	Nicholas Bugeja
Hayden Walker	Nidhi Yogi
Helen Zournazis	Phoebe Cuttler
Henry Passaris	Rahul Ramesh
Imogen Gerraty	Sarah Fitzsimons
Isabella Fredheim	Temby Dodd
Jacob Atkinson	Yu Wang

Pro bono barristers

A huge thank you to the fierce barristers who have offered our clients their services pro bono or at a generous reduced rate. Adding the weight of your experience to our cases has been invaluable.

Robert Forrester	Marita Foley
Patrick Knowles	Myles Tehan
Geoffrery Kennett SC;	Peter Hanks
Matthew Gledhill;	Tanya Skvortsova
Natasha Hammond	Kathleen Foley
Rupert Watters	Rowan Minson
Jordan Wright	Jim Delany QC
Julia Watson	Colette Mintz

Our supporters

Thank you to our many generous supporters who invested in our team to fight for environmental justice. Below we recognise those who contributed \$10,000 or more in the 2020 financial year.

Our team is grateful to be funded by the community for the community. This generous and ongoing support ensures our independence and ability in stand up for a world where laws help people and nature thrive.

- Albert & Barbara Tucker Foundation
- Australian Communities Foundation
- B B & A Miller Foundation
- Gayle Osborne
- Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
- Isaacson Davis Foundation
- Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation
- Nick Dawburn
- Patagonia
- Pool of Dreams – Claire Eliza’s Gift, a part of the Community Impact Foundation
- Ross Trust
- Sally Romanes
- The NR Peace & Justice Fund
- The Regenerative Empowering Earth Fund (TREE)
- Victoria Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres Funding and Development Program
- Vilde Family Fund

Financial performance – summary

EJA delivered a financial surplus for the 2019–2020 financial year —this is a testament to the generosity of our supporters coupled with strong budget management by our team.

However, the majority of retained earnings (\$678,584) are funds that are already committed to delivering specific EJA projects carried over into 2020-21. Due to changes in the Australian Accounting Standards, the way we account for this income changed this financial year. We are now required to recognise the income from these grants in the year they were received, rather than as they are expended. Please see our full financial statements for more details. This makes our actual unrestricted reserves \$405,759, which is an increase from \$213,221 in the 2019 financial year.

Philanthropic grants continue to be a critical source of income and are comparable year-on-year. Renewed and multi-year funding commitments support our strategic and long-term approach to working with the communities, particularly in our coal pollution and river laws programs.

Revenue from fundraising and donations grew from \$482,164 to \$595,449, an increase of 23%, in part due to the appointment of a Fundraising Manager in February, a position that was previously vacant since September 2018. This vacancy also means temporary savings were made in fundraising expenses.

Our crowdfunding campaign this year not only allowed us to rapidly launch a case in the Supreme Court in the wake of the bushfires, it meant we reached new audiences supportive of our work. This campaign combined with supporter actions and a strong media presence increased our total supporter base by 18%.

With ever present threats to government funding, the growth in our community-based funding is all the more important. Our team is proud to be funded by the community for the community.

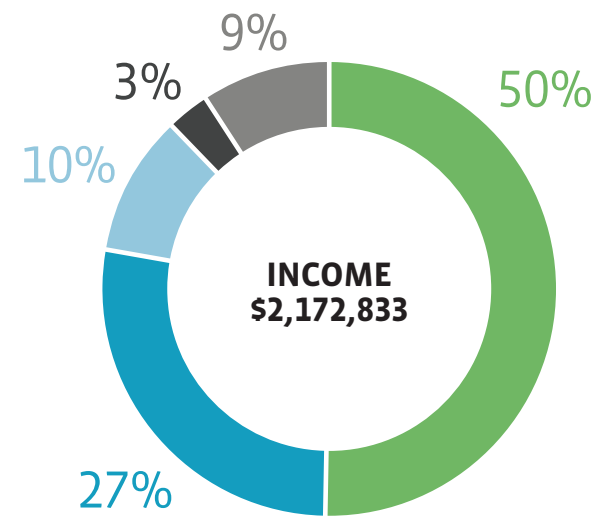
Government funding through Victorian Legal Aid has been ongoing for our community environmental legal service (CELS) program. We also received additional government funding for frontline services and IT support in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Other income includes membership fees, interest received and this year was supplemented by Commonwealth cash boosts and JobKeeper payments.

Our total employee expenditure grew as we appointed a new lawyer in our CELS program late in the previous financial year. We also appointed a Digital Campaigner to drive our supporter engagement channels, supported by a partnership with Democracy in Colour's People of Colour Placement Program.

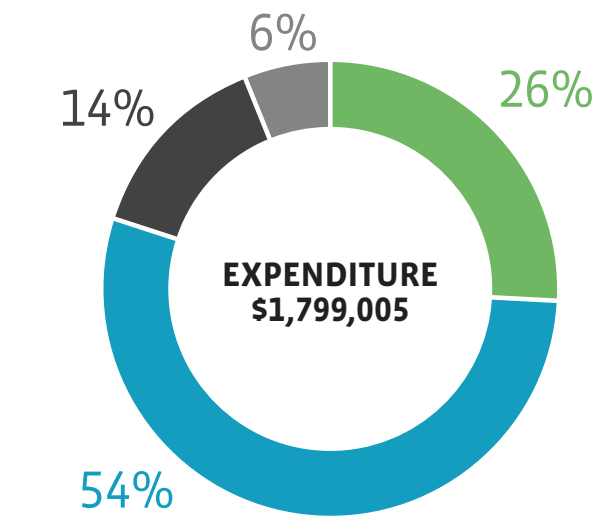
Other increases in costs were to support growing frontline services, including further investment in our IT systems and a move to a larger office in the 60L Green Building. Our legal practice expenses were up 46% due to an increase in delivery of programs.

As we enter our thirtieth year, we have renewed determination and resilience to be a powerful representative for community, nature, and our climate.

Thank you for your generous and continued financial support.



- GRANTS
- DONATIONS
- GOVERNMENT FUNDING
- LEGAL SERVICE FEES
- MEMBERSHIP & OTHER INCOME



- OPERATIONS & MANAGEMENT
- LEGAL PROGRAMS
- CAMPAIGNS & COMMUNICATIONS
- FUNDRAISING

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Report Design: Paoli Smith Creative
Printed on 100% recycled paper