

# Tide is Turning – Driving Weed Eradication on Lord Howe Island. Evaluation Report.

December 2024



## Contents

	Page
Executive summary	3
Introduction	9
1. Project context	11
2. Evaluation methods	19
3. Strengths and challenges	21
4. Project design	23
5. Project outcomes	28
6. Project delivery and administration	33
7. Value for money	38
8. Conclusion	42
9. List of recommendations	43
Appendix 1: Key evaluation questions and sub-questions	45
Appendix 2: Timeline of The Tide is Turning Project	46
Appendix 3: "Best practice" grants management checklist	52
Appendix 4: Consultation briefing paper and stakeholder consultation list	55
Appendix 5: Project outputs and outcomes map	57
Appendix 6: Project health check from Tide is Turning final report	62

### Disclaimer

This report was prepared by Nexus Management Consulting in good faith exercising all due care and attention, but no representation or warranty, express or implied, is made as to the relevance, accuracy, completeness or fitness for purpose of this document in respect of any particular user's circumstances. Users of this document should satisfy themselves concerning its application to, and where necessary seek expert advice in respect of, their situation. The views expressed within are not necessarily the views of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and may not represent department policy.

© Copyright State of NSW and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

## Executive summary

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) provides funding to a range of organisations to undertake projects that enhance the environment of NSW. In March 2015 the Trust provided a grant of \$508,946 to the Lord Howe Island Board (LHIB) for a weed eradication project, the Tide is Turning.

The project, which also included funding from other sources, was developed at the ten-year point of the overarching LHIB Weed Eradication Program. The project aimed to support established weed control efforts and investigate new technologies for weed eradication, including the use of Unmanned Automated Vehicles / Aerial Robotics (UAV/AR), Biological Control (BC) and Herbicide Ballistic Technology (HBT) which incorporates the use of paintball guns to deliver herbicide via specialised pellets. It also aimed to engage external experts to conduct an independent review of the first 10 years of the LHI Weed Eradication Program.





The Tide is Turning Project was a non-contestable project funded under the now retired unsolicited grant stream of the Environmental Trust. The business plan, which was approved in April 2015, specified eight intended outcomes. The project was intended to conclude in July 2017 and, following a number of approved variations to the timeline and budget, all final reports were submitted in November 2022 and endorsed in June 2023. In the project final report, eight milestones were reported against, including those that reflected changes made to the intended outputs over the course of the project:

- set up the Weeds Technical Panel
- 350 hectares of accessible terrain searched for target weeds
- release of Crofton weed BC agent *Baeodromus eupatori* on LHI
- trial of UAV/AR on LHI for weed control and / or surveillance
- 50 hectares of rugged terrain under surveillance and control for target weeds with UAV/AR (amended from initial milestone of 300 hectares)
- trial of new and / or current HBT on LHI by helicopter and / or UAV/AR
- independent expert review of the LHI Weed Eradication Program
- local and broader community, Natural Resource Management agencies and LHI restoration managers informed of project outcomes and trials of new technology.

## Evaluation terms of reference and methods

The Trust regularly undertakes independent evaluations of its projects to assess how well intended outcomes are met and how projects and programs could be improved. In June 2024 the Trust engaged Nexus to conduct an evaluation of the Tide is Turning Project's appropriateness, effectiveness, and efficiency. The evaluation had five key evaluation questions and 16 sub-questions and the following figure themes the five key evaluation questions into four focus areas – project design, project outcomes, project delivery and administration and value for money.

**Figure 1: key evaluation questions and evaluation themes**

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS		THEMES
 To what extent was the project design appropriate?	To what extent were learnings generated used and could these be applied differently in hindsight?	PROJECT DESIGN
 To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?		PROJECT OUTCOMES
 To what extent has the project operated efficiently? To what extent has the management of the project contributed to its success?		PROJECT DELIVERY AND ADMINISTRATION
 To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes? To what extent has the project operated efficiently?		VALUE FOR MONEY

The evaluation was a multi-method evaluation comprising:

- an in-depth analysis of all project documents and data provided by the Trust
- a technical review of scientific data by Professor Stephen Adkins, who was engaged by Nexus as part of the evaluation team
- development of a “best practice” grants management checklist derived from the NSW Government’s Grants Administration Guide (GAG) - 2024 update<sup>1</sup>
- development of a series of criteria for assessing the project’s value for money
- a series of consultations with key stakeholders.

The Tide is Turning Project was funded by multiple sources as part of a longer-term weed eradication strategy and it was difficult to attribute outcomes to Trust funding per se. The long time between the project’s inception and the evaluation also presented a number of challenges for the evaluation, including the significant reforms that the Trust’s and LHIB’s systems and processes have undergone since the project was first funded.

## Strengths

There was overwhelming support among stakeholders we consulted for the project, noting there has been significant collective progress towards the weed eradication goal (weed populations on LHI have reduced by 80%). Our technical expert, Professor Adkins, and stakeholder consultations concluded that the grid searching approach adopted in the Tide is

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/grants-administration-guide-2024\\_0.pdf](https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/grants-administration-guide-2024_0.pdf)

Turning Project was appropriate as the backbone of the Weed Eradication Program and there was widespread acknowledgement of the technical skills and passion for the project by the project lead.

## **Project design**

Our evaluation highlighted a number of significant concerns with the design of the Tide is Turning Project. There was insufficient agreement between different stakeholders as to the intended aims of the project. For example, the Trust was concerned that the Tide is Turning Project be its final funding contribution to support the Weed Eradication Program and therefore saw the independent expert review and the trialling of new weed control technologies as central to the project. In contrast, the LHIB had a strong focus on the project contributing its overall weed eradication efforts.

This lack of collective understanding of the project's aims was partly a function of the now retired unsolicited grants funding stream. Accordingly, the evaluation supports the decision to discontinue the unsolicited funding stream.

**Recommendation 1.** It is recommended that the Trust maintain its current practice of excluding unsolicited grants from funding.

The GAG emphasises the principle of co-design in developing a clear understanding of funded projects' aims and intended outcomes. Given the importance of this principle, it would be timely for the Major Projects team to review its co-design capabilities.

**Recommendation 2.** It is recommended that Major Projects assess their project co-design capabilities and, where necessary, arrange for capacity building around collaborative ways of working with grantees to support effective project co-design.

The Tide is Turning Project documentation created some confusion with the use of multiple terms such as milestones, outputs, deliverables and outcomes. The outcomes hierarchy adopted for the project contributed to the confusion. The subsequent use of program logic models, as stipulated in the GAG, is welcome.

**Recommendation 3.** It is recommended that, as per current practice, Major Projects continues to use a logic model approach in project business plans that clearly sets out how project activities will contribute to short, medium and longer term environmental outcomes and how these outcomes may be impacted by external factors.

**Recommendation 4.** It is recommended that, as per current practice, a logic model in project business plans continues to form the basis for measuring project achievements and clear milestones for reporting.

Our technical advisor questioned a number of the underpinning assumptions of the project design, including the rationale for trialling new technologies for weed eradication at this time and the selection of 68 identified weeds for eradication. A shorter list of the most invasive species would have resulted in a more feasible project. There was a lack of evidence that the project's Technical Review Committee (TRC) had considered the feasibility and appropriateness of the project's intended outcomes within the budget and time available.

**Recommendation 5.** It is recommended that the TRC has a clearly defined role in assessing and advising on the technical viability of project during the design phase, including an assessment of the proponent's underpinning assumptions and the feasibility of the project to be successfully completed within the proposed time and budget.

### **Project outcomes**

A major success of the Weed Eradication Program has been the reduction of invasive weed populations by 80%. The Tide is Turing Project has contributed to weed eradication efforts through grid searching activities that exceeded expectations by covering 404 hectares of accessible terrain compared to the planned 350 hectares. The Crofton weed biocontrol agent was released successfully contributing to significant reductions in the prevalence of this weed.

However, a number of intended outputs were not achieved or only partially achieved. Trials of UAV and HBT technologies were hindered by logistical, legal and environmental constraints, and the independent expert review, a critical component for informing future weed eradication strategies, was not conducted. Substantial lessons were still learned from these trials that will inform future weed eradication efforts. However, our technical advisor did question the appropriateness of conducting these trials at this stage of the Weed Eradication Program and suggested that funding these activities at a later stage may have been more appropriate.

**Recommendation 6.** It is recommended that the Trust maintains opportunities to fund innovative projects, however a dedicated rationale for "why now" should be included in project proposals.

**Recommendation 7.** It is recommended that LHIB make smaller pockets of difficult to access weeds the target for weed eradication efforts in the future when new, cost-effective approaches become available.

There were also challenges in measuring the sustainability of outcomes. While immediate reductions in weed populations were achieved, the long-term effectiveness of these efforts was uncertain due to a lack of monitoring data on weed resurgence and ecological recovery in treated areas.

**Recommendation 8.** It is recommended that the Trust consider sustainability of outcomes during the project selection phase and work collaboratively with grantees to incorporate sustainability considerations into the project design and reporting.

### **Project delivery and administration**

Our evaluation identified several inefficiencies in the delivery and administration of the Tide is Turning Project. The allocation of the full grant amount (\$508,946) at the project's outset went against standard grants management practice which recommends staged funding contingent on milestone completion.

**Recommendation 9.** It is recommended that, as per current Trust practice, grant funding be staged over the course of a project subject to completion of agreed milestones as reviewed by TRCs (where applicable) or Trust staff.

The governance and project management arrangements of the LHIB also presented challenges. The absence of a dedicated project manager and formal governance structures, such as a steering committee, meant the project lead bore the burden of both administrative and technical responsibilities. This arrangement detracted from the lead's capacity to focus on core scientific activities. Though it should be noted that since this time the LHIB has introduced a number of reforms, including the establishment of a Project Management Office.

**Recommendation 10.** It is recommended that LHIB maintain their efforts on uplifting project management capabilities for effective delivery of grant funded projects in the future.

**Recommendation 11.** It is recommended that criteria for selecting grant recipients include consideration of their project management systems, skills and experience.

The project's budget was another concern, with misaligned allocations for some specific activities. For example, the funds allocated for the independent expert review proved insufficient for these critical activities. To address this, project budgets should more closely reflect planned activities, outputs, and outcomes.

**Recommendation 12.** It is recommended that project budget line items are more carefully aligned with planned project activities and their intended outputs and outcomes.

Risk management challenges were evident in the project's significant delays and incomplete outputs. Insufficient escalation mechanisms within both the LHIB and the Trust led to missed opportunities for systematic review and mitigation of risks. A review of the Trust's risk management and escalation processes is recommended to address unsatisfactory project progress effectively.

**Recommendation 13.** It is recommended that in light of this evaluation the Trust review its risk assessment and management processes, including escalation mechanisms, in the case of unsatisfactory project progress.

Monitoring and evaluation of the project were hindered by ambiguous documentation of outputs, milestones, and outcomes. To enhance alignment between planning, reporting, and evaluation, it is recommended that the Trust's Major Projects team continually refine its monitoring and evaluation framework, potentially incorporating post-project evaluations with site visits for high-value projects.

**Recommendation 14.** It is recommended that Major Projects continually review its approach to monitoring and evaluating funded projects, to ensure there is alignment between the program planning and reporting requirements.

### **Value for money**

Our evaluation found significant challenges in assessing whether the Tide is Turning Project represented good value for money. Ambiguity in project objectives and inconsistent alignment of the budget with planned activities complicated an accurate evaluation of economic efficiency. For instance, Trust funding accounted for 47% of the total project budget, but the specific contribution of this funding to key outcomes remains unclear. To address such issues in the future, project budgets should be more closely aligned with their intended activities, outputs, and outcomes.



## Introduction

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) is an independent statutory body established by the NSW Government to fund a broad range of organisations to undertake projects that enhance the environment of NSW.

In March 2015, the Trust awarded a \$508,946 grant over two years to the Lord Howe Island Board (LHIB) for The Tide is Turning - Driving Weed Eradication on Lord Howe Island Project (the project). The aim of this project was to evaluate progress of the existing Lord Howe Island (LHI) Weed Eradication Program to date, continue weed control and trial new weed control techniques in remote terrain.

The project was originally due for completion by May 2017, however, due to a range of delays the project was extended five times over five years, finally concluding in June 2022. The submission of the final report was due on 31 July 2022; however, this was delayed until November 2022.





The Trust regularly undertakes independent evaluations of its projects and programs to assess how well the intended outcomes are met and how processes, projects and programs could be improved. These evaluations may also help to inform new funding programs. In June 2024, the Trust engaged Nexus to evaluate the Tide is Turning Project's appropriateness, effectiveness, and efficiency.

### Terms of reference

The Tide is Turning Project evaluation has five key evaluation questions and 16 sub-questions developed by the Trust (Appendix 1: Key evaluation questions and sub-questions).

Figure 1 summarises the five key evaluation questions into four focus areas - project design, project outcomes, project delivery and administration and value for money - noting that some of the questions cover more than one of these four aspects. These focus areas provide the basis for the report's discussion and recommendations in Sections 4 to 7.

**Figure 1: key evaluation questions and evaluation themes**

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS		THEMES
 To what extent was the project design appropriate?	To what extent were learnings generated used and could these be applied differently in hindsight?	PROJECT DESIGN
 To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?		PROJECT OUTCOMES
 To what extent has the project operated efficiently? To what extent has the management of the project contributed to its success?		PROJECT DELIVERY AND ADMINISTRATION
 To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes? To what extent has the project operated efficiently?		VALUE FOR MONEY

## Overview of this report

This report is structured as follows:

- **section 1** provides an overview of the Tide is Turning Project context
- **section 2** describes the evaluation methods
- **section 3** discusses the strengths and challenges of the project
- **section 4** discusses the design of the project
- **section 5** discusses the outcomes of the project
- **section 6** discusses the delivery and administration of the project
- **section 7** discusses the value for money of the project
- **section 8** provides a conclusion of the evaluation
- **section 9** lists the recommendations.

# 1. Project context

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) is an independent statutory body established under the *Environmental Trust Act 1998*. Its main responsibility is to make and supervise the expenditure of grants across a diverse range of programs, including Major Projects, Contestable Grants, and various NSW Government initiatives. The Trust is supported by NSW Environment and Heritage within the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. Trust programs are administered by department staff who are generalist program administrators.

Projects funded under the Major Projects Program are designed to tackle large-scale and / or complex environmental issues. The Trust identifies and designs these projects through consultation with key stakeholders. The goal is to maximise environmental outcomes in NSW by investing in projects that are high priority, cost-effective, collaborative, and designed in consultation with subject matter experts.

The Trust is required to establish committees of subject experts to make recommendations about applications for the grants it administers. These Technical Review Committees (TRCs), provide independent oversight for grants applications and have a role in ensuring good governance, supporting project outcomes and confirming the feasibility of project deliverables.

## 1.1 About The Tide is Turning

Lord Howe Island (LHI) is a World Heritage property<sup>2</sup> with high levels of endemism and the potential for weed invasion to compromise the integrity of these ecosystems is a critical concern in the conservation of LHI's unique biodiversity. The Lord Howe Island Board's (LHIB) LHI Weed Eradication Program is an ambitious, 30-year island-scale project that has been aiming to eradicate 68 weed species since its inception in 2004. This work has been funded by the LHIB, philanthropy, and State and Federal Government grants, including previous funding from the Trust.

In March 2015, the Trust awarded a \$508,946 grant over two years to the LHIB for the Tide is Turning - Driving Weed Eradication on Lord Howe Island Project. The project, which also included funding from other sources, was developed with the Trust at the ten-year point of the LHIB's LHI Weed Eradication Program and aimed to improve the success of the ongoing program and to protect the ten years of high-level investment that had already significantly reduced weed populations and weed threat at a landscape scale.

The Tide is Turning Project aimed to continue supporting established weed grid-searching efforts, while also investigating new technologies for the advancement of eradication goals to combat predicted eradication fatigue. As weed densities had significantly reduced in the landscape, the LHIB saw a need to seek innovative approaches to integrate into the Weed Eradication Program methodology and treat residual weed populations, particularly in the remote and hard to access areas of the island.

---

<sup>2</sup> Lorde Howe Island Bord website: <https://www.lhib.nsw.gov.au/>

The Tide is Turning Project planned to explore a range of new tools and techniques, including the use of Unmanned Automated Vehicles / Aerial Robotics (UAV/AR), Biological Control (BC) and Herbicide Ballistic Technology (HBT) which incorporates the use of paintball guns to deliver herbicide via specialised pellets. It also aimed to engage external experts to conduct an independent review of the first 10 years of progress of the LHI Weed Eradication Program.

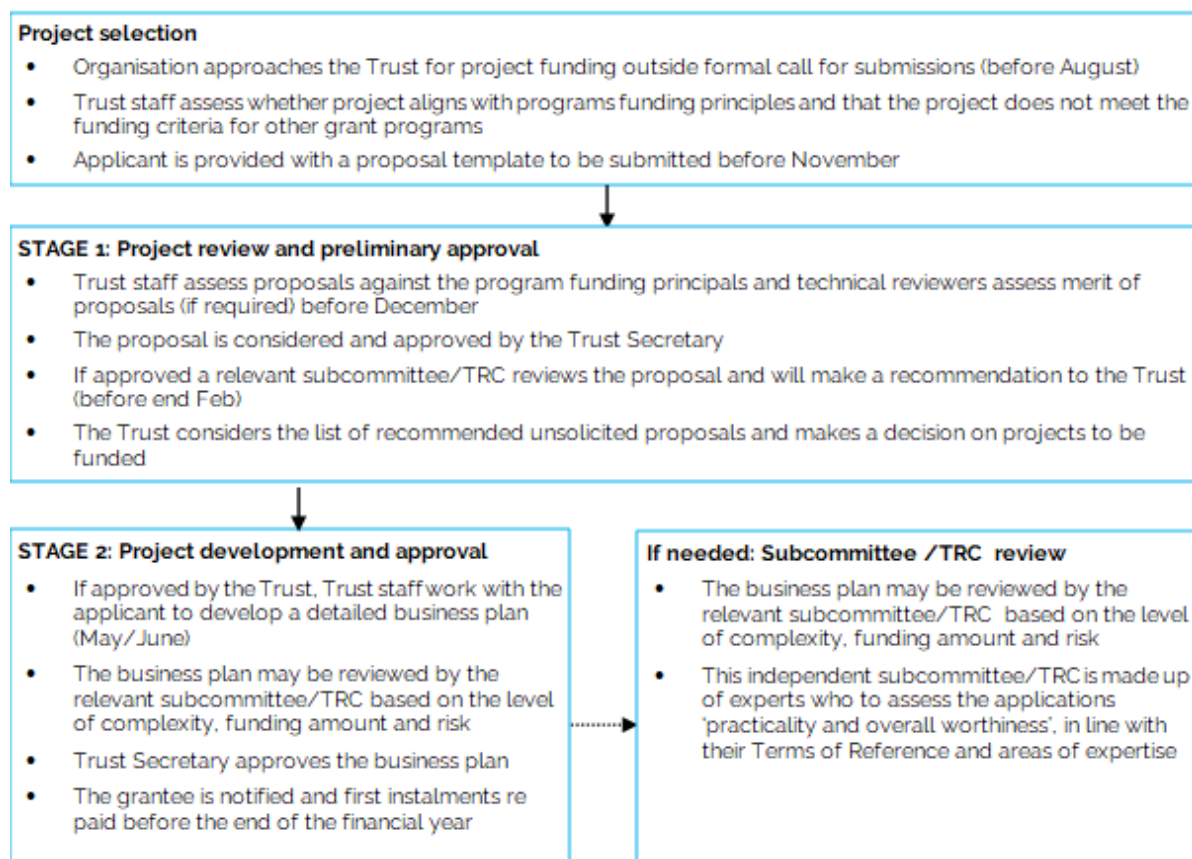
## **1.2 Project conception**

The Tide is Turning Project was administered under the now retired unsolicited grant stream of the Major Projects Program. Proposals for unsolicited grants would come to the Minister for potential environmental projects. Once a proposal was approved by the Trust, a process of project design began between the Trust and grantee before the project detailed business plan would be approved by the Trust and funding would be allocated.

Following preliminary approval of a proposal, relevant committees of subject experts (known as TRCs), review the proposal and make recommendations to the Trust. Depending on the level of complexity and risk, these TRCs may then also review the subsequent business plan. For The Tide is Turning Project, the relevant TRC involved in reviewing the project was the Biodiversity and Green Corridors Subcommittee.

Figure 2 summarises the typical process of planning and design that unsolicited projects would go through at the time this project was developed. However, for the Tide is Turning Project, there was no available documentation of the early project review and preliminary approval stage. Therefore there is ambiguity as to who and what was involved in the early stages of developing the business plan.

**Figure 2: planning and design process map for unsolicited grants**



### 1.3 Tide is Turning Project objectives and outputs

To align with Trust funding priorities, the Tide is Turning Project incorporated some more tangible, short-term outputs whilst still remaining focused on the long-term weed eradication efforts on LHI. In collaboration with the Trust, LHIB developed a 17-page outcomes hierarchy and evaluation framework that contained:

- ultimate and intermediate outcomes
- objectives / outcomes / activities / needs
- evidence / assumptions
- evaluation questions and timeline
- performance indicators
- performance targets
- baselines.

In addition to the outcomes hierarchy, the business plan identified four key objectives, which were also called ultimate outcomes:

- to ensure the LHI Weed Eradication Program remains effective in being able to provide protection to the LHI ecosystems from the threat of invasive weeds for the long term
- to reduce the impact of Crofton weed and improved regeneration of native species and improved condition of threatened species habitats
- to test remote area Unmanned Automated Vehicles / Aerial Robotics (UAV/AR) and Herbicide Ballistic Technology (HBT) methodology and practises endorsed for continued investment and application on LHI
- to show strong community support for continuation of the LHI Weed Eradication Program and adopting of efficient methods.

The business plan also specified eight intended project outputs, at times referred to as milestones, which were:

- reduced impact of invasive weeds across 350 hectares of accessible terrain
- surveillance and detection of invasive weeds from 300 hectares of rugged inaccessible terrain on LHI
- independent expert review of the LHI Weed Eradication Program
- trial of UAV/AR and HBT for weed surveillance and control on LHI
- control of known infestations of weeds in remote terrain through helicopter winch access in conjunction with UAV/HBT
- release of Crofton weed bio-control agent *Baeodromus eupatorii* on LHI
- maintain and raise community awareness and participation in achieving the eradication of weeds from LHI
- build and maintain networks with restoration / weed experts and island conservation programs using LHI project outcomes as a case study.

#### 1.4 Tide is Turning Project budget

As shown in table 1 the total approved budget for the Tide is Turning Project was \$1,085,798, of which \$508,946 (47%) was funded by the Trust with the remaining amount (\$576,820) funded from the LHIB (\$566,852) and the Friends of Lord Howe Island (\$10,000).

**Table 1: Tide is Turning Project budget<sup>3</sup>**

Item	Environmental Trust funding (\$)	Other funding	Total
Staffing	245,170	531,852	777,021
Administration	10,500	0	10,500

<sup>3</sup> This budget is derived from the provided C1 – Summary of Project Budget document attached to the business plan, which was approved by the Trust. However, it should be noted there are discrepancies in exact figures across the various tabs in the project budget spreadsheet.

**FINAL REPORT: TIDE IS TURNING - DRIVING WEED ERADICATION ON LORD HOWE ISLAND EVALUATION, December 2024**

Item	Environmental Trust funding (\$)	Other funding	Total
Consultancy / contractor costs	27,200	0	27,200
Materials	15,000	20,000	35,000
Transport	13,200	12,000	25,200
HBT/helicopter	63,000	0	63,000
UAV/AR	66,591	0	66,591
Crofton weed rust release	1,085	0	1,085
Expert panel	4,600	0	4,600
Project publicity	5,000	0	5,000
Independent expert review	32,600	0	32,600
Trust commissioned independent evaluation of the project	25,000	0	25,000
Volunteers	0	13,000	13,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>508,946</b>	<b>576,852</b>	<b>1,085,798</b>
	<b>47%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>100%</b>

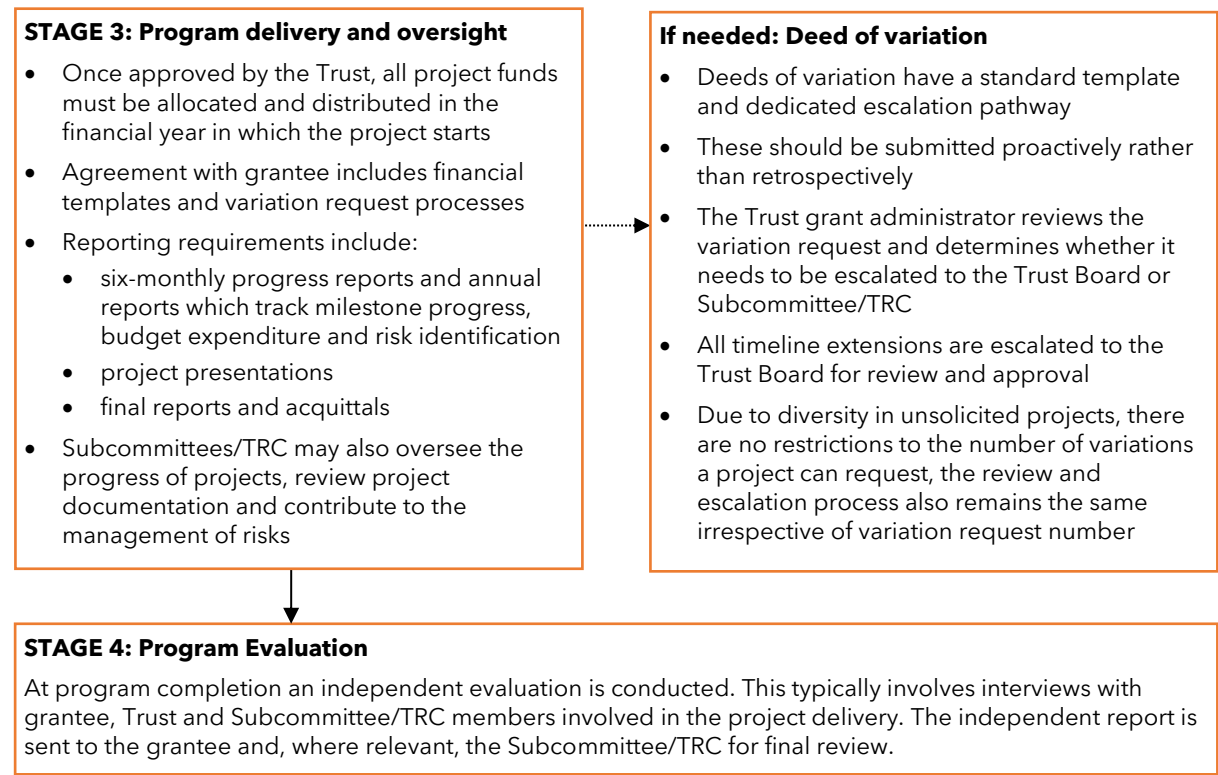
Some points to highlight from the table are that:

- funding was budgeted for several field officers, including bush regenerators from both the Trust and other sources (shown as staffing in table 1)
- funding was allocated for some specific project outputs including HBT/helicopter, UAV/VR, Crofton weed rust release and the independent expert review.

## 1.5 Project delivery and implementation

Figure 3 shows the project implementation process that approved unsolicited grants would typically go through at the time from the Trust grants administration perspective. This included regular progress and financial reporting, and technical review where required. Projects would culminate with a project presentation, final report and financial acquittal. Variation requests could also be submitted throughout project delivery, to reflect changes to project budget, timeline, activities or outcomes. This evaluation of The Tide is Turning Project is stage 4 depicted in figure 3.

**Figure 3: project implementation process map for unsolicited grants**



### 1.6 Project delivery team

LHI appointed an existing Team Leader as the project lead. However, this was not a dedicated position and the project lead was working on other projects on LHI alongside the Tide is Turning Project. Several LHI staff and volunteers also contributed to aspects of the project over its lifetime; this included temporary volunteers and staff contributions from roles funded through other sources. Project oversight for the Tide is Turning Project was provided by the LHIB CEO, though no formal governance structure for the project was documented. It is also unclear from documentation as to the reporting lines within the LHIB for the project leader, or the FTE contributions of other staff and volunteers to the project.

### 1.7 Project delivery timeline

As seen in figure 4, the project business plan was approved in April 2015, the project commenced later in 2015 and was initially planned to conclude in July 2017. Five variations were made to the project from 2017 to 2021, including variations to the budget and extensions of timeline. Table 2 provides an overview of the five variations that occurred throughout the project. The fifth extension planned for the project to conclude in July 2022 and all final reports were submitted in November 2022 and endorsed in June 2023. Appendix 2 provides a more



## FINAL REPORT: TIDE IS TURNING - DRIVING WEED ERADICATION ON LORD HOWE ISLAND EVALUATION, December 2024

detailed timeline of the project, including variations, and due dates and actual dates of completion for all project milestones and reports.

**Figure 4: project timeline**

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Business plan finalised (Apr)		Planned project end date (Jul)					Project final report (Nov)	Final report endorsed	Evaluation report (Dec)
Project planning										
	Project delivery									
								Final reporting		
										Project evaluation

**Table 2: project variations**

Brief description of variation	Submission date	Approval date
<b>1. Program variation and extension to August 2018</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extension to several milestones and overall extension of the grant to 31 August 2018.</li> </ul>	19/07/2017	24/07/2017
<b>2. Variation to budget and extension to 30 November 2018</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varied the details of the grant including targets in milestone 5 (reduced from 300 to 50 hectares) and milestone 7 (independent review of LHI Weed Eradication Program unable to be completed)</li> <li>Budget variation - \$32,600 for independent external review applied to Drone/UAV project work and \$33,000 from HBT budget applied to Drone/UAV work.</li> </ul>	6/03/2018	21/05/2018
<b>3. Vary the timeline of the grant up to the 19 June 2019</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extension was requested specifically for aerial weed detection and treatment measures for milestones 4, 5 and 6.</li> </ul>	01/11/2018	10/11/2018
<b>4. Vary the timeline of the grant up to the 30 June 2021</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extension was requested due to the delay of the Rodent Eradication Project and the prioritisation of LHIB staffing resources for this project and;</li> </ul>	24/05/2019	13/06/2019

Brief description of variation	Submission date	Approval date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unforeseen delays in obtaining the necessary firearms approvals for the HBT component.</li> </ul>		
<b>5. Vary the timeline of the grant up to the 30 June 2022</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extension of timeframe to assist with delayed HBT component.</li> </ul>	06/05/2021	30/06/2021

In the project final report, eight milestones were reported against, including those that reflected changes made to the intended outputs over the course of the project:

- set up the Weeds Technical Panel
- 350 hectares of accessible terrain searched of target weeds
- release of Crofton weed - bio-control agent *Baeodromus eupatori* on LHI
- trial of UAV/AR on LHI for weed control and / or surveillance
- 50 hectares of rugged terrain under surveillance and control for target weeds with UAV/AR (amended from initial milestone of 300 hectares)
- trial of new and / or current HBT on LHI by helicopter and / or UAV/AR
- independent expert review of the LHI Weed Eradication Program
- local and broader community, Natural Resource Management agencies and LHI restoration managers informed of project outcomes and trials of new technology.

## **2. Evaluation methods**

This evaluation was a multi-method evaluation comprising:

- an in-depth analysis of all project documents and data provided by the Trust, including the business plan, progress and annual reports, financial reports, the final reports, project variations and correspondence between the Trust and the grantee
- a technical review of scientific data by technical expert, Professor Stephen Adkins, who was engaged by Nexus as part of the evaluation team
- development of a “best practice” grants management checklist derived from the NSW Government’s Grants Administration Guide (GAG)<sup>4</sup> (Appendix 3 presents the checklist, which was used to inform the stakeholder consultations and frame recommendations)
- development of a series of criteria for assessing the project’s value for money, grouped into economy (i.e. inputs), effectiveness (i.e. outcomes) and efficiency (i.e. activities and outputs)
- a series of consultations with key stakeholders, including past and present Trust staff, TRC members, the past and present CEOs of LHIB and the two former Tide is Turning Project leads (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the briefing paper used to structure these interviews and a list of stakeholders consulted)
- presentation of an issues paper setting out preliminary findings and draft proposals with the Director, Grants; Manager, Major Projects; and Senior Project Officer, Major Projects.

### **2.1 Methodological challenges**

In assessing the project’s design, outcomes, delivery and administration, the following methodological challenges should be noted:

- the project began almost ten years ago and high Trust staff turnover during the project’s duration meant no one could authoritatively speak to the whole process - moreover, for those stakeholders who did have some involvement it was challenging for them to remember specific details of the project
- documentation and record keeping was less thorough in the earlier stages of the project
- other funding sources contributed over 50% of the total budget for the Tide is Turning Project, which was just one of a series of projects and grants that have contributed to the island Weed Eradication Program over many years - accordingly, it is difficult to attribute outcomes specifically to the Trust-funded component of the Tide is Turning Project
- the evaluation was desk-based and did not involve any site visits to ascertain weed eradication and weed control outcomes on-the-ground
- the evaluation did not have access to any data or evidence of the sustainability of the weed control efforts since the conclusion of the project in 2022
- there were inconsistent, and sometimes conflicting, views about the project’s design, achievements and administration among stakeholders we consulted.

---

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/grants-administration-guide-2024\\_0.pdf](https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/grants-administration-guide-2024_0.pdf)

We are also aware that several Trust systems and processes have undergone significant changes in the ten or so years since the project was initially conceived. Rather than applying modern standards in reviewing past practices, we have focussed on drawing lessons from this evaluation that are relevant in the current grants administration context.

### 3. Strengths and challenges

This section discusses some of the strengths of the Tide is Turning Project and the challenges that confronted its implementation and administration.



#### 3.1 Strengths

Our consultations and analysis of documentation reveal several strengths of the Tide is Turning Project:

- LHI's closed environment provides a rare opportunity for protecting an ecosystem from the threat of invasive weeds and there was overwhelming support among stakeholders we consulted for the project, noting there has been significant collective progress towards the weed eradication goal (weed populations on LHI have reduced by 80%<sup>5</sup>)
- our technical expert, Professor Adkins, concluded that it was appropriate that the overall LHI Weed Eradication Program be reviewed, as proposed in the business plan, after being in operation for some ten years prior to the Tide is Turning Project commencement
- our technical advisor and stakeholder consultations also concluded that the grid searching approach was appropriate as the backbone of the Weed Eradication Program
- there was widespread acknowledgement of the technical skills and passion for the project of the initial project lead.

#### 3.2 Challenges

While the project had these inherent strengths, it was also confronted by significant challenges.

Firstly, while there are benefits in a weed eradication project being conducted in a closed environment, managing the project on LHI presented several logistical obstacles. There are restrictions on the number of visitors to the island and there is limited access to people with the necessary technical skills and support. Moreover, NSW Government travel restrictions precluded Trust staff conducting monitoring visits to assess the project's progress.

Secondly, the Tide is Turning Project was faced with competition from other island priorities; in particular, stakeholders reported that the high profile (and at times controversial) rodent eradication program took centre stage at the expense of other initiatives, including the Weed Eradication Program.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lhib.nsw.gov.au/environment/weed-eradication-program>

Thirdly, while the project was intended to be completed before 2020, approved variations meant it was extended and was significantly impacted by the COVID pandemic and related restrictions.

Fourthly, the project was undertaken in the context of concerns about governance and resourcing on LHI which had led to the commissioning of an effectiveness and efficiency review of the island.

We are mindful of these challenges in considering the key evaluation questions which we address under four broad themes in the following sections:

- project design
- project outcomes
- project delivery and administration
- value for money.

## 4. Project design

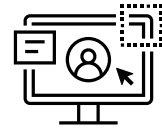
This section outlines responses to the following evaluation questions:

**Appropriateness:** To what extent was the project design appropriate?

- How appropriate was the planning process in the initial scoping phase?
- To what extent did the project address the identified need and was it the most appropriate thing to do?
- To what extent was the expenditure appropriate for the project?

**Effectiveness:**

- To what extent was the project appropriately planned and scoped to ensure delivery of intended outcomes and effective measurement of these outcomes?



In considering the appropriateness of the scoping, planning and design of the Tide is Turning Project, we identified three key issues:

- the unsolicited approach for funding
- the identification of intended outcomes
- the appropriateness, feasibility and technical review of the project design.

### 4.1 Unsolicited approach for funding

As noted in section 1, the Tide is Turning Project was partly funded under an earlier unsolicited funding stream in which project proponents approach the Minister for the Environment and / or the Trust for funding rather than being subject to a Trust-initiated contestable grants process. One of the risks with the now retired unsolicited stream is that it can lead to an in-principle commitment to funding a project before its potential and merits have been fully investigated by Trust staff and technical experts. Our analysis of project records, feedback from stakeholder consultations and our technical expert review indicates that the Tide is Turning Project did indeed succumb to this risk. The unsolicited approach contributed to the development of an unrealistic and fragmented business plan that attempted to reconcile an in-principle funding decision with the diverse perspectives of different stakeholders involved in operationalising the project via a business plan. These stakeholders included the Minister for the Environment, the Trust, Trust Administration, the TRC, the LHIB and the LHIB administration.

For example, our consultations suggest that the Trust was concerned that it had provided long-term funding to support the Weed Eradication Program, and it was keen for the Tide is Turning Project to be its final funding commitment to the strategy, as funding of core business is not the remit of Trust Major Projects. To this end, the Trust supported time-limited activities, including

the independent expert review that could provide direction to the LHIB on its eradication work, and the trialling of potential new eradication methods. In contrast, our consultations indicate that the LHIB was keen for the project to support some “business as usual” eradication efforts<sup>6</sup>.

Our review highlighted a lack of a collective understanding and alignment between all stakeholders of the intended aims and objectives of the Tide is Turning Project. Stakeholders emphasised how these unaligned priorities led to iterative development of the business plan, with each stakeholder group adding their priority activities and outputs, rather than co-designing one cohesive and feasible project. Ultimately there was a lack of clarity regarding the aims and objectives of the project that influenced the future delivery and achievement of intended outcomes. Our consultations indicate that the business plan development process was unduly focussed on gaining approval, rather than supporting the feasible design and ongoing delivery of a successful project once approved.

In short, the unsolicited funding approach itself contributed to some design issues from the project’s outset. It is acknowledged that this funding stream is no longer in place, and these findings reinforce the previous recommendations from the 2019 Major Projects Program evaluation to retire the unsolicited funding stream.

**Recommendation 1. It is recommended that the Trust maintain its current practice of excluding unsolicited grants from funding.**

While these project design issues were partly a result of the unsolicited funding approach, it is worthwhile noting that the NSW Government’s GAG, which came into legislation in September 2022, states that the detailed development of grant project requirements should involve co-design between the funding organisation, grantee and, where appropriate, other stakeholders. True co-design is more than consultation and involves collaborative and relational ways of working to shared outcomes and activities. Given the project design issues discussed above and the recommendation of this co-design principle in the GAG, which is underpinned by legislation, it may therefore be timely for the Major Projects to review its co-design capabilities.

**Recommendation 2. It is recommended that Major Projects assess their project co-design capabilities and, where necessary, arrange for capacity building around collaborative ways of working with grantees to support effective project co-design.**

## **4.2 Identification of intended outcomes**

The Tide is Turning Project lacked a clear set of intended outcomes to guide project delivery and accountability. As noted in section 1, the business plan used various overlapping terms across four objectives, eight (initial) outputs and an 17-page outcomes hierarchy (which is traditionally a one-page document). This resulted in conflation of critical terms such as milestones, activities, outputs, deliverables and outcomes. The complexity of language used is

---

<sup>6</sup> Compounding these different perspectives were the different funding sources for the project.



reflected in Appendix 5 where we attempted to map the relationship between the various terms used in the business plan.

The outcomes hierarchy and evaluation framework did not sufficiently support scoping and planning of the project in a way that guided the delivery of intended outcomes and their effective measurement. Additionally, the outcomes hierarchy was only documented for four of the eight project outputs, meaning intended project outcomes were not explicitly documented for the following project components during the design phase:

- reduced impact of invasive weeds across 350 hectares of accessible terrain
- trial of UAV/AR and HBT for weed surveillance and control on LHI
- control of known infestations of weeds in remote terrain through helicopter winch access in conjunction with UAV/HBT
- build and maintain networks with restoration / weed experts and LHI conservation programs using LHI project outcomes as a case study.

Stakeholder consultations indicated that this was one of the first times an outcomes hierarchy was incorporated into a business plan, and therefore it was acknowledged that this approach was not yet streamlined and has since improved. A Grants Branch-wide Monitoring Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework is now in place.

As recommended in the GAG, a program logic model approach is suggested for incorporation into future business plans and is now part of the Grants Branch's standard business plan template. Logic models contain a clearer line of sight between activities within the scope of control of project delivery and intended short, medium and long-term outcomes. Assumptions and external factors that may influence project delivery and achievement of outcomes are also included, encouraging grantees and the Trust to consider the impact of these important factors during the design phase.

**Recommendation 3.** It is recommended that, as per current practice, Major Projects continues to use a logic model approach in project business plans that clearly sets out how project activities will contribute to short, medium and longer term environmental outcomes and how these outcomes may be impacted by external factors.

**Recommendation 4.** It is recommended that, as per current practice, a logic model in project business plans continues to form the basis for measuring project achievements and clear milestones for reporting.

### **4.3 Appropriateness, feasibility and technical review of the project design**

While the business plan did demonstrate some alignment between the project and several NSW Government and Environmental Trust objectives, there was not evidence of a thorough assessment process of the appropriateness and feasibility of the project. This includes two main

components – 1) baseline assumptions underpinning the project design and 2) its feasibility within the allocated time and budget.

Strong evidence supporting underpinning assumptions of this project were notably absent from the business plan, impacting its overall potential for success. Our evaluation technical advisor highlighted some key assumptions, the first being the remote work using UAV/AR and HB. The business plan presents an argument that weed eradication from remote, complex terrains requires new tools and / or techniques to be effective. However, evidence was not provided regarding why these approaches and these terrains were the best point of focus at this stage of the overall 30-year Weed Eradication Program. Instead, evidence should have been provided regarding why weed populations in these difficult terrains needed immediate management.

A second key assumption was the identification of target weeds of interest. The LHI Weed Eradication Program contained an ambitious plan to eradicate 68 weed species, and this was cross referenced in the Tide is Turning Project business plan. However, considering the known difficulties in securing funding to resource these projects in the longer term a shorter list of the most invasive, major community disruptor species should have been created to underpin the prioritised objectives activities and outcomes of the Tide is Turning Project design.

Feasibility within the allocated time and budget was also a concern for the design of this project<sup>7</sup>. Our evaluation technical advisor and stakeholder consultations consistently reported that while the budget allocated was considered sufficient, or even generous, for a two-year project, the activities planned were not feasible to be achieved in a two-year timeframe. In particular, our technical advisor concluded that:

- the Crofton weed BC and other control objectives and activities were not considered to be achievable in two years and would typically require five years
- the assessment of remote area UAV/AR and HBT methodologies would take longer than two years due to the many steps involved in trialling and testing and complexity of the permits required
- the unique challenges of the LHI setting (particularly resourcing) would add additional time to typical timeframes for all activities.

It is acknowledged that these judgments about project appropriateness and feasibility are now made with the benefit of hindsight. However, the consistency in this feedback highlights some gaps in the assessment of the appropriateness and feasibility of the project, from both a project management and technical perspective. In reviewing the project documentation there was a lack of evidence demonstrating an explicit role of the TRC in assessing:

- the underpinning assumptions of the project's identified activities
- the feasibility and appropriateness of the project identified outcomes
- the feasibility of the project within the proposed time and budget.

---

<sup>7</sup> Further issues around budget expenditure during project delivery are discussed in section 6 on project delivery and administration.

It should be noted that the design of this project occurred almost a decade ago, and the TRC processes have evolved substantially since this time. However, consultation feedback indicates that a greater level of clarity and consistency could be incorporated into the role and remit of the TRC in the assessment of viability and feasibility of projects

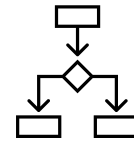
**Recommendation 5.** It is recommended that the TRC has a clearly defined role in assessing and advising on the technical viability of project during the design phase, including an assessment of the proponent's underpinning assumptions and the feasibility of the project to be successfully completed within the proposed time and budget.

## 5. Project outcomes

This section outlines responses to the following evaluation questions:

**Effectiveness:** To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?

- To what extent was the project on time and on budget?
- To what extent were the project's activities implemented as intended. If not, why, and what was the impact?
- Were the intended outputs delivered and do they represent value for money?



In assessing the extent to which the Tide is Turning Project was successful in achieving its intended outcomes, we identified three key issues:

- challenges in assessing outcomes
- extent of outcomes achieved
- sustainability of outcomes.

### 5.1 Challenges in assessing outcomes

This evaluation confronted several challenges in assessing outcomes. As noted above, the Weed Eradication Program is a long-term strategy and a number of projects were funded over the same time as the Tide is Turning Project, all of which contributed to the weed eradication goals. Additionally, as previously noted, Trust funding for the Tide is Turning Project activities contributed less than half of the total project budget. This makes it difficult to attribute any outcomes achieved to the Tide is Turning Project specifically and to Trust funding specifically.

As outlined in section 4 on project design, confusion over the use of numerous project terms (milestones, outputs, deliverables, outcomes etc), and the complexity of the outcomes hierarchy rendered considerable challenges in assessing the project achievements. Put simply, if there is ambiguity about what the project is intended to achieve, it is difficult to determine its success.

### 5.2 Extent of outcomes achieved

The project final report included a grantee self-reported summary project "health check", which concluded that the project achieved most targets relating to scope, milestones, budget, resources, risk and overall status (see Appendix 6 Project health check). It should be noted that the definitions used for achievement of targets in this template are vague, and have since been tightened in Trust report templates. The final report also summarised achievements against the eight project "milestones", however only some of which align with the eight outputs identified in the business plan.

Our analysis of achievement of the initial eight project outputs suggests only partial achievement, drawing on the table in Appendix 5 that maps agreed project outputs to intended project outcomes. It should be noted that several project outputs were varied throughout delivery, therefore an assessment against their respective initial outcomes hierarchy is no longer meaningful. As summarised in table 3 below, two outputs were considered achieved, two were partially achieved, two were not achieved and two were unclear. Moreover, our analysis of the project documentation demonstrates that 100% of outputs / milestones for the Tide is Turning Project either overran or were incomplete (see project timelines in section 1 and Appendix 2).

**Table 3: summary of Tide is Turning project outputs achievements**

Output / outcomes	Status
Reduced impact of invasive weeds across 350 hectares of accessible terrain	Achieved.
Surveillance and detection of invasive weeds from 50 hectares of rugged inaccessible terrain on LHI (50 hectares is an amended output from the original 300 hectares)	Partially achieved, while trials using UAV were conducted the imagery was not able to detect most priority weeds on LHI. Additional developments are needed for ongoing application.  No trials were completed using HBT in rugged terrain.
Independent expert review of the LHI Weed Eradication Program	Not achieved, the independent expert review did not occur and deliverable status is considered outstanding. Funding was reallocated to UAV/AR stream of work through an approved variation.
Trial of UAV/AR and HBT for weed surveillance and control on LHI	Partially achieved, trial of UAV/AR was completed, although imagery was not able to detect most priority weeds on LHI.  No trials were completed using HBT.
Control of known infestations of weeds in remote terrain through helicopter winch access in conjunction with UAV/HBT	Not achieved, while helicopter winch operations to facilitate access for field teams in remote terrain for weed search and control efforts did occur, control of known infestations was not achieved through helicopter winch in conjunction with UAV/HBT.
Release of Crofton weed BC agent <i>Baeodromus eupatorii</i> on LHI	Achieved.
Maintain and raise community awareness and participation in achieving the eradication of weeds from LHI	Unclear if achieved.

Build and maintain networks with restoration / weed experts and island conservation programs using LHI project outcomes as a case study	Unclear if achieved.
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------

In relation to those outputs that were achieved, there was consistent feedback during this evaluation that the on-ground grid searching activities were delivered and documented to a high standard. These efforts have been effective in reducing weed infestations across the island. A total of 404.16 hectares of land was searched as a result of the Turning the Tide Project, exceeding the intended output of 350 hectares. Quantitative data provided in reports indicates a clear downward trend in weed density. It is anticipated that continued removal of weeds using the grid system will contribute to local extinction of some of the 68 weeds of interest identified in the Weed Eradication Program, and in the very long term might lead to their eradication from the island.

The Crofton weed biocontrol (BC) agent, *Baeodromus eupatorii*, was released at six sites in 2016. Documentation review and consultation feedback concluded that release of this rust BC agent for Crofton weed was successful. The project outcome of a significant decrease in percentage cover of Crofton weed at the release sites was achieved. Between 2017 and 2019 the percentage of Crofton weed covering release sites reduced by between 16 and 99%, though this reduction cannot be solely attributed to the rust. The Tide is Turning Project team was not able to accurately determine the time taken to complete weed removal from blocks for project reporting, as this was influenced by several factors including initial weed density, terrain complexity and overall vegetation cover. Therefore, an assessment against this project performance indicator is not possible. Other assessments of ecological outcomes were not made. For example, the longer-term outcomes of the cleared areas are unknown, including whether weed reduction resulted in reestablishment of natives. Despite these limitations in the assessment of longer-term outcomes, overall, this aspect of the Tide is Turning Project is considered to provide a new way to assist in the management of this major weed on LHI and is expected to make a difference in how LHIB better manages weeds in the longer term.

Alongside these successes there were several project challenges and unachieved outputs. The independent expert review of the LHI Weed Eradication Program did not occur, primarily justified in documentation as because of the actual versus budgeted costs for delivering this independent expert review. This activity was replaced by alternative activities (Weeds Technical Panel and this independent evaluation) however the aims of these activities were fundamentally different and equivalent outcomes were not achieved.

The UAV and HBT related activities and subsequent outcomes were continually delayed due to technological, logistical and legal barriers. License issues, weather and higher than expected costs delayed the initial trials of UAV, and the contract with the initial provider was terminated. A second contractor was later engaged for the UAV trial, based on largely effective mainland trials. They surveyed 500 hectares of island terrain and provided analysis of 100 hectares. The output received from the contractor was successful in identifying some weed species that were ground truthed by field staff or clearly identifiable in imagery - Cherry Guava, Tobacco Bush and Ground Asparagus. However ultimately their imagery was not able to detect the majority of target weeds on LHI. These issues were compounded by weed densities that were

too low to offer multiple sample sites on LHI. Quotes for further work, including higher resolution imagery, were provided, which were too expensive for the Tide is Turning Project budget.

The changing nature of laws around the licencing for paintball markers across the duration of the grant posed complications in acquiring necessary permits for the HBT trials. While many steps were taken to obtain necessary licences and qualifications, these trials were ultimately not completed. It is understood that the LHIB intends to continue this work into the future.

It is acknowledged that weed eradication efforts require investment into trials of new technologies, at appropriate times, to facilitate long term eradication goals. Therefore, these “failures” to deliver stated outcomes are not necessarily synonymous with failure to deliver the intended objectives of trialling new technologies. Substantial lessons were still learned that will inform future weed eradication efforts. However, as discussed in section 4 on project design, our technical adviser did question the appropriateness and value for money of these trials at this stage of the Weed Eradication Program on LHI, and whether funding at a later stage would have been more appropriate.

**Recommendation 6.** It is recommended that the Trust maintains opportunities to fund innovative projects, however a dedicated rationale for “why now” should be included in project proposals.

**Recommendation 7.** It is recommended that LHIB make smaller pockets of difficult to access weeds the target for weed eradication efforts in the future when new, cost-effective approaches become available.

Due to the interdependencies between several project activities / milestones, the failure to progress the UAV and HBT activities had detrimental impacts on the ability to achieve other project outputs, and subsequent outcomes. In the future, establishment of mutually exclusive outputs will reduce the risk of multiple failed outputs.

Two of the project outputs were unclear as to their achievement status – 1) Maintain and raise community awareness and participation in achieving the eradication of weeds from LHI and 2) Build and maintain networks with restoration / weed experts and island conservation programs using LHI project outcomes as a case study. Community awareness activities / outputs were described as achieved in the final report. This included a number of communications activities to ensure the local community was informed of weed eradication activities and progress, including reactions on social media. Data on the number of weeds intercepted on private leases was also provided. However, no details or data of outcomes identified in the outcomes hierarchy were reported – including increases in community knowledge, interest or participation in weed eradication. Indeed, our stakeholder consultations highlighted substantial challenges in community engagement on LHI around weed eradication efforts, and this remains an area of ongoing work.

Relating to networks with experts, the Weeds Technical Panel was established which included experts on weed eradication, island conservation, threatened species and biodiversity management. This provided an opportunity to build networks and share learnings. Multiple conferences were also attended, presentations delivered, and network opportunities sought, however lack of a specific outcomes hierarchy makes assessment of these outcomes challenging.

### **5.3 Sustainability of outcomes**

Putting aside the challenges in identifying outcomes achieved, this evaluation is unable to make conclusions about the sustainability of outcomes achieved on the environment for two key reasons.

Firstly, while the project documentation demonstrated that the project was successful in reducing the number of weed plants on LHI, our technical advisor noted that there is a likely risk that these outcomes may not be maintained. Importantly there was an absence of reporting of the fate of the cleared areas, in particular if other major or minor weeds entered into cleared habitats. Additionally, even 1% of certain weeds remaining is enough to re-establish their populations and therefore continued efforts are required for outcomes achieved to be sustained.

Secondly, as noted in section 4, there was insufficient attention in the program design stage on the project's contribution to longer-term environmental outcomes, including the sustainability of any weed eradication efforts and its impact upon LHI ecosystems. Ideally, a consideration of these environmental outcomes should have been incorporated in the project planning and in any post project assessment of its achievements.

**Recommendation 8.** It is recommended that the Trust consider sustainability of outcomes during the project selection phase and work collaboratively with grantees to incorporate sustainability considerations into the project design and reporting.



## 6. Project delivery and administration

This section addresses the following key evaluation questions:

**Efficiency:** To what extent has the project operated efficiently?

- How well managed was the project?
- How efficient were the planned project activities?
- What were the project implementation costs, and were these efficient? To what extent could resources have been allocated more efficiently?
- To what extent were the methods for making decisions and managing the project appropriate and likely to ensure success?

**Process:** To what extent has management of the project contributed to success?

- Were the methods for making decisions and managing the project appropriate and likely to ensure success?
- What were the associated risks with governance, financial management and project planning and how were these managed?



One approach to assessing the project's delivery and administration would be to compare the processes implemented with the NSW Government's GAG. However, the Tide is Turning Project predates the GAG by some seven years. Furthermore, significant reforms, such as the discontinuation of the unsolicited projects stream in 2019, have since reshaped the Trust's grants administration practices.

Therefore, the focus in this section is less on how project delivery and administration conform with current requirements and more on those issues that are relevant in the current grants management context. These issues concern:

- the allocation of grant funds
- the LHIB's governance and project management
- project financial management
- project risk management
- project monitoring and evaluation.

### 6.1 Allocation of grant funds

Consistent with the practice of the former unsolicited funding stream, as depicted in figure 3 in section 2, the full amount of Trust project funding (i.e. \$508,946) was allocated at the project's outset (i.e. at the time of signing the grant agreement with the LHIB). This approach is inconsistent with standard grants management practice in which payments for grants of a scale similar to the Tide is Turning Project are paid on a staged basis according to satisfactory

progress. By releasing all funds at the project outset, the Trust surrendered its primary lever in ensuring accountability for the use of taxpayer funds.

It is understood that the Trust has abandoned this practice of allocating 100% of grant funds at project outset. Moreover, accountability has been strengthened by the requirement for TRCs to review progress reports so that milestone payments are only made upon satisfactory project progress.

**Recommendation 9.** It is recommended that, as per current Trust practice, grant funding be staged over the course of a project subject to completion of agreed milestones as reviewed by TRCs (where applicable) or Trust staff.

## **6.2 LHIB governance and project management**

It is understood that the project manager was not assigned to the Tide is Turning Project on a full-time basis and she appeared to operate without significant support:

- the senior manager she reported to appeared to have had a broad range of responsibilities and limited involvement with the project on a day-to-day basis
- no governance mechanism, such as a project steering committee, appeared to be established to oversight the project and monitor progress
- the LHIB only meets quarterly, and Tide is Turning Project reports would have been just one item of a very busy agenda of its meetings - we found no evidence of the Board raising concerns about the project's progress and long delays
- there appears to be an absence of administrative support to the project, despite an allocation for administration in the budget.

In the absence of strong governance mechanisms and administrative support, the project lead assumed primary responsibility for the full range of time and resource-intensive project administration. This administrative burden detracted from her ability to focus on the scientific and technical aspects of the project, for which she was eminently qualified.

These governance and project management shortcomings were compounded by reported difficulties in the LHIB's project administration systems and processes, including its record keeping and the absence of processes for project handover to staff. The current CEO of the LHIB stated that the Island had introduced a number of reforms, including the establishment of a Project Management Office, as a result of an effectiveness and efficiency review of the island conducted in 2020<sup>8</sup>. The CEO states that LHI is now better positioned to administer grants such as the Tide is Turning Project more efficiently. However, in light of this evaluation it may be timely to conduct a targeted review of these reforms in relation to these evaluation findings.

---

<sup>8</sup> The report of this review is confidential and was not available to the evaluation.

**Recommendation 10.** It is recommended that LHIB maintain their efforts on uplifting project management capabilities for effective delivery of grant funded projects in the future.

The success of projects like Tide is Turning Project is partly a function of the project management capability of the grantee project team. Therefore, assessments of proponents' project management resourcing, systems, skills and experience should be considered when reviewing grant applications.

**Recommendation 11.** It is recommended that Major Project processes for selecting grant recipients include consideration of their project management systems, skills and experience.

### **6.3 Financial management**

It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to conduct a detailed financial audit of the grant and acquittal of funds. However, our analysis of the available project documentation does raise issues with the financial management and reporting of the project. Firstly, it is not clear how the original budget for a two-year project was able to be extended over the five years until the project concluded.

Secondly, as noted previously, it is methodologically challenging to isolate the effects of the Trust's funding to the project which represented just 47% of the total funding.

Thirdly, where there is a clear relationship between the Trust funding and planned activities, it appears that some allocations were not realistic. For example, project documentation reported that the independent expert review, that was intended to guide the future Weed Eradication Program, was not able to be done for the allocated budget of \$35,000.

Finally, as noted above, the project business plan provided for a significant staffing presence that accounted almost three-quarters (72%) of the total program budget (see table 1 in section 1) and provided for a number of bush regenerators and other positions. It is not clear from the project documentation when these positions were filled, their FTE, their roles, responsibilities and contribution to the project and their impact on the financial management of the project.

Accordingly, the project could have benefited from more robust budgeting as part of the development of the project business plan. In particular, there could have been a better alignment of the budget to the intended project activities, outputs and outcomes.

**Recommendation 12.** It is recommended that project budget line items are more carefully aligned with planned project activities and their intended outputs and outcomes.

## **6.4 Risk management**

As noted in section 2, the Tide is Turning Project experienced significant delays and its final report was approved in 2023, some six months after being issued in late 2022 and some five years after the project was meant to be finalised.

Our analysis of the project documentation reveals a plethora of correspondence relating to the delays including emails regarding late reports and numerous discussions around possible variations, including formal approvals. However, there appears to have been a focus on the fine detail of the project rather than a more systematic, high level, review given the scale of the project's non-delivery of key outputs and the extended delays. That is, there appears to have been insufficient escalation of project reviews to senior levels of the Trust and the LHIB to identify and mitigate the risks the project was confronting.

While some of these risks, like COVID related restrictions, were unavoidable, the interdependencies between the program activities and outputs described in section 5.2 meant there was an inherent risk to project delivery if the UAV and HBT activities and outputs were not achieved, which is in fact what occurred. The flow-on effects to the other project outputs was predictable and a more fundamental review of the project was required.

The TRC could have played a critical role in this fundamental review. While there was evidence that the TRC reviewed available reports and variation requests, our consultations indicate the meetings tended to function as a forum for discussion of the technical issues and it appears that the TRC was unclear about its role in formal project monitoring and advising the Trust on possible remedial action.

This evaluation therefore endorses the reforms that the Trust has introduced around risk assessment and management, including the development of a new business plan template for Major Projects. The Trust has also strengthened its escalation mechanisms in the case of unsatisfactory progress, including TRC involvement in the review of progress reports before milestone payments are released.

However, in light of the experience of this evaluation of the Tide is Turning Project, it may be timely to review the Major Projects grants administration processes to determine whether risk assessment and management practices could be further strengthened. This includes the potential role of TRCs and expert advisors being engaged to advise on potential technical solutions or actions to address unsatisfactory project progress, or to even recommend the cessation of funding.

**Recommendation 13.** It is recommended that in light of this evaluation the Trust review its risk assessment and management processes, including escalation mechanisms, in the case of unsatisfactory project progress.

## **6.5 Project monitoring and evaluation**

As noted in section 6, the project design was hampered by the use of multiple terms – outcomes, outputs, objectives, milestones, deliverables – which hindered a clear understanding

of what the project was intended to achieve. Similarly, the outcomes hierarchy failed to unambiguously articulate the expectations of the project. This lack of clarity resulted in challenges in monitoring and evaluating the project.

In line with best practice grants management, the project would have benefited from a more transparent framework that set out:

- the outputs (deliverables) of the project and how they would contribute to environmental outcomes on the island (e.g. via a program logic model)
- the outcomes that the project would be accountable for achieving
- a reporting regime that aligned with these outputs and outcomes (with staged payments conditional on successful progress)
- a final report that summarised the achievements versus the initial expectations (subject to changes that have occurred following approved variations).

The Trust has progressively implemented several reforms since the start of the Tide is Turning Project that are consistent with the above framework and facilitate improved project monitoring and evaluation. These reforms include the development of the Trust's strategic plan and the establishment of the Branch-wide MERI (monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement) framework which includes specific program logic models for different program types, some standard indicators which are adapted for the specific needs of individual projects and a monitoring plan template.

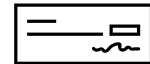
Nevertheless, in light of this evaluation it may be timely for Major Projects to assess its monitoring and evaluation approach and whether there is a sufficiently clear "line of sight" from project inception, planning, reporting and evaluation. This assessment could also consider the feasibility and appropriateness of incorporating post-project evaluations of project outcomes involving site visits for projects above a certain threshold of funding and / or longevity, such as Tide is Turning Project. These post-project evaluations, which could be conducted by technical experts on a contractual basis, would provide a firmer evidence base than a desktop evaluation such as the current one. Critically, they could also assess the sustainability of environmental outcomes and inform the possible future direction of funded initiatives.

**Recommendation 14.** It is recommended that Major Projects continually review its approach to monitoring and evaluating funded projects, to ensure there is alignment between the program planning and reporting requirements.

## 7. Value for money

This section addresses the following key evaluation questions:

- Did the project deliver value for money?



Judgments about value for money for a project like the Tide is Turning are inherently challenging. Firstly, different stakeholders may have different expectations of a project and can form different views of what has been achieved for the allocated funding; as noted, this is especially true for the Tide is Turning Project given the lack of clarity about what the project aimed to achieve.

Secondly, questions of value for money involve considerations of the opportunity cost; that is, what could have been achieved with alternative uses of the funding. As the Tide is Turning Project was funded through an unsolicited, non-contestable approach it is not feasible to consider whether the project funds could have been better allocated to other projects or initiatives at the time. Furthermore, a full financial audit was not within scope for this evaluation.

Therefore, to provide insights into value for money, we developed and applied a set of descriptive criteria that were adapted from the Oxford policy management approach to assessing value for money<sup>9</sup>. Table 4 summarises the criteria and their assessment.

---

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated\\_bolt\\_files/opm-vfm-approach-2.pdf](https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated_bolt_files/opm-vfm-approach-2.pdf)

**Table 4: assessment of the Tide is Turning Project against value for money criteria**

Criteria	Assessment
<b>Economy - i.e. inputs</b>	
How appropriate was the budget to achieve what was intended to be achieved?	<p>While the project budget was considered appropriate, or even generous, for a two-year project a number of substantial budget issues remain reducing its appropriateness.</p> <p>Trust funding accounted for just approximately 40% of the “total approved budget”, making direct attribution to project outcomes challenging.</p> <p>There was some ambiguity about what the project was actually intending to achieve (further weed eradication and / or testing new eradication methods and / or a technical review to guide further work).</p> <p>It is not clear how the funding was able to extend over the additional five years until the project concluded, particularly for staff salaries.</p> <p>There was poor alignment between some objectives and the budget allocation.</p>
How well was the budget managed?	<p>Budget management could have been improved.</p> <p>On the Trust side, all funding was allocated upfront thus negating the possibility of withholding funding in light of unsatisfactory progress.</p> <p>On the grantee side, there were several inconsistencies in budget and expenditure reporting, and a lack of alignment between key project objectives and their allocated budget.</p>
How much Trust staff time was required in supporting the project?	<p>Trust reported significantly more time supporting the project than typically required for projects of this scale (e.g. chasing up reports, advising on report structure and content and receiving variation requests).</p>
<b>Efficiency - i.e. activities and outputs</b>	
How clearly were the project outputs defined?	<p>As discussed in section 4, there was a lack of clarity over the project outputs, milestones, deliverables.</p>
Were the project outputs achieved?	<p>As discussed in section 5.2, two of the eight original outputs were achieved, and two was partially achieved.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
How efficiently were project variations managed?	<p>There were five approved project variations, largely necessitated by the delays in the project.</p> <p>During consultations project variations were reported as time consuming and not particularly efficient.</p> <p>Project variations as a whole could have been more efficiently managed through a higher level systematic review of the whole project.</p>
How much Trust staff time and resources were directed to supporting the achievement of project outcomes?	<p>Trust staff were required to devote more time and resources than typical to provide support for project administration. This included the completion of regular reporting and guiding the appropriateness of variation requests.</p> <p>While this support was seen positively by stakeholders, as noted above, a more systematic review (with the input of the TRC) could have helped refocus the project in clarifying and achieving its outcomes.</p>
<b>Effectiveness - i.e. outcomes</b>	
Did the project make a difference in the number of weeds on LHI?	<p>Yes, this project contributed to reducing the number of weeds on LHI.</p> <p>The project's grid searching approach removed weeds from an additional 404 hectares of land in its contribution to the island's long-term Weed Eradication Program.</p> <p>The introduction of the rust biological control agent was reported to be successful in reducing the prevalence of Crofton weed plants.</p>
Were any gains in weed control on LHI sustained over time?	<p>This is unknown.</p> <p>The key metric used to assess the project's weed control achievements was the number of weeds removed. There is no documentation of whether this reduced seed production and further weed establishment; nor was there reports provided on what species (e.g. native plants or other weeds) had replaced removed weeds.</p>
Did the project lead to the identification of new methods to eradicate weeds from remote terrain?	<p>While the project did test new eradication methods, the main lessons were that these were not successful.</p> <p>LHIB does intend to continue some of this work into the future as new methods continue to evolve.</p> <p>Our technical expert did however question the appropriateness of prioritising testing some of these methods at that time.</p>



Criteria	Assessment
Did the project effectively engage the local community in contributing to and sustaining the weed eradication effort?	<p>The project reported on some engagement activities, including the training and use of volunteers in weed removal, the establishment of a Facebook group, other communications on LHI about weed eradication efforts and professional networking.</p> <p>Evidence was not provided on ongoing community engagement that would sustain weed eradication efforts once Trust funding ceased.</p>

The analysis in table 4 reinforces many of the key themes discussed in the earlier sections of this report including:

- the lack of clarity of the project outputs and outcomes
- questions about how the Trust funding was contributing to intended outcomes above and beyond the funding from other sources which accounted for more than half of the “total approved budget”
- the need for better alignment of the project budget and the key activities linked to outputs
- the long delays in the project which contributed to a resource-intensive project administration burden on LHIB and Trust staff
- the need for escalation of the project to more senior levels at the Trust and LHIB given the numerous variations
- insufficient attention to the sustainability of weed control efforts and environmental outcomes beyond the time of the Tide is Turning Project.

Further, as noted in section 5, the failure to commission the independent expert review was a significant gap because that review was intended to take stock of the Weed Eradication Program to that point and inform the future strategy in light of new eradication methods. In the absence of that work, the sustainability of the overall program may be at risk, particularly since the Tide is Turning Project did not report on the sustainability of weed control efforts and environmental outcomes. Moreover, our evaluation did not have access to data or evidence on weed coverage since the final report was issued over two years ago in 2022, including the sustainability of its weed removal efforts.

In summary, while the project made an important contribution to ongoing weed eradication on LHI, program design and administration shortcomings have led to questions about the efficiency and sustainability of gains achieved. It is therefore difficult to conclude that the project represented good value for money.

## **8. Conclusion**

The Tide is Turning Project made contributions to the LHI Weed Eradication Program, particularly in its immediate reduction of invasive weed infestations and its successful use of biocontrol methods. However, the evaluation highlights some critical shortcomings in project design, delivery, and administration that constrained its overall effectiveness and value for money. The lack of clarity in project outcomes and outputs, and insufficient consideration of sustainability of outcomes underscore the importance of robust planning, monitoring and risk management in future projects.

Since the project's inception almost a decade ago, both the Trust and LHIB's grant administration practices have evolved significantly. This includes key reforms, such as the Trust's discontinuation of unsolicited grants, adopting staged funding tied to milestones, and enhancing risk management and monitoring frameworks. The LHIB's establishment of a Project Management Office has also strengthened the grants administration from the grantee's perspective..

Nevertheless, the recommendations outlined in this evaluation remain relevant for guiding future projects. Strengthening rigorous project design, ensuring alignment between inputs, activities and outcomes, and incorporating sustainability of outcomes are critical steps to maximising environmental and financial outcomes. By continuing to refine these practices, the Trust and LHIB can enhance their capacity to deliver impactful and cost-effective projects that align with strategic objectives.

## **9. List of recommendations**

**Recommendation 1.** It is recommended that the Trust maintain its current practice of excluding unsolicited grants from funding.

**Recommendation 2.** It is recommended that Major Projects assess their project co-design capabilities and, where necessary, arrange for capacity building around collaborative ways of working with grantees to support effective project co-design.

**Recommendation 3.** It is recommended that, as per current practice, Major Projects continues to use a logic model approach in project business plans that clearly sets out how project activities will contribute to short, medium and longer term environmental outcomes and how these outcomes may be impacted by external factors.

**Recommendation 4.** It is recommended that, as per current practice, a logic model in project business plans continues to form the basis for measuring project achievements and clear milestones for reporting.

**Recommendation 5.** It is recommended that the TRC has a clearly defined role in assessing and advising on the technical viability of project during the design phase, including an assessment of the proponent's underpinning assumptions and the feasibility of the project to be successfully completed within the proposed time and budget.

**Recommendation 6.** It is recommended that the Trust maintains opportunities to fund innovative projects, however a dedicated rationale for "why now" should be included in project proposals.

**Recommendation 7.** It is recommended that LHIB make smaller pockets of difficult to access weeds the target for weed eradication efforts in the future when new, cost-effective approaches become available.

**Recommendation 8.** It is recommended that the Trust consider sustainability of outcomes during the project selection phase and work collaboratively with grantees to incorporate sustainability considerations into the project design and reporting.

**Recommendation 9.** It is recommended that, as per current Trust practice, grant funding be staged over the course of a project subject to completion of agreed milestones as reviewed by TRCs (where applicable) or Trust staff.

**Recommendation 10.** It is recommended that LHIB maintain their efforts on uplifting project management capabilities for effective delivery of grant funded projects in the future.

**Recommendation 11.** It is recommended that criteria for selecting grant recipients include consideration of their project management systems, skills and experience.

**Recommendation 12.** It is recommended that project budget line items are more carefully aligned with planned project activities and their intended outputs and outcomes.

**Recommendation 13.** It is recommended that in light of this evaluation the Trust review its risk assessment and management processes, including escalation mechanisms, in the case of unsatisfactory project progress.

**Recommendation 14.** It is recommended that Major Projects continually review its approach to monitoring and evaluating funded projects, to ensure there is alignment between the program planning and reporting requirements.

## Appendix 1: Key evaluation questions and sub-questions

### 1. Appropriateness: To what extent was the project design appropriate?

- a) How appropriate was the planning process in the initial scoping phase?
- b) To what extent did the project address the identified need and was it the most appropriate thing to do?
- c) To what extent was the expenditure appropriate for the project?

### 2. Effectiveness: To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?

- d) To what extent was the project on time and on budget?
- e) To what extent were the project's activities implemented as intended. If not, why, and what was the impact?
- f) To what extent was the project appropriately planned and scoped to ensure delivery of intended outcomes and effective measurement of these outcomes?
- g) Were the intended outputs delivered and do these represent value for money?

### 3. Efficiency: To what extent has the project operated efficiently?

- h) How well managed was the project?
- i) How efficient were the planned project activities?
- j) What were the project implementation costs, and were these efficient? To what extent could resources have been allocated more efficiently?
- k) To what extent were the methods for making decisions and managing the project appropriate and likely to ensure success?
- l) Did the project deliver value for money?

### 4. Process: To what extent has management of the project contributed to success?

- m) Were the methods for making decisions and managing the project appropriate and likely to ensure success?
- n) What were the associated risks with governance, financial management and project planning and how were these managed?

### 5. Opportunities: To what extent were learnings generated by the project used and could these be applied differently in hindsight?

- o) What were the lessons learned and / or other opportunities related to the project?
- p) What could be done differently?

## Appendix 2: Timeline of The Tide is Turning Project

■ PLANNED 
 ■ ACTUAL 
 ■ INCOMPLETE

	2015						2016						2017						2018						2019						2020	2021						2022									
	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC										
Grant agreement signed			19 JUN 15																																												
Payment 1 scheduled			30 JUN 15																																												
Milestone set up technical weeds panel			30 MAY 15	30 SEPT 15																																											
Report 1 6-month progress report, financial report 1 and updated project measures spreadsheet																																															
Milestone release Crofton weed biocontrol agent				30 SEPT 15																																											

## FINAL REPORT: TIDE IS TURNING - DRIVING WEED ERADICATION ON LORD HOWE ISLAND EVALUATION, December 2024

	2015						2016						2017						2018						2019						2020	2021						2022													
	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC														
Milestone trial of UAV			30 JUNE 15					30 APR 16						30 APR 17										30 SEPT 19																											
Report 2 annual progress, financial report 2, updated project measures spreadsheet									JUL 16	31 JULY 16																																									
Report 3 6-month progress report, financial report, updated project measures spreadsheet [WAS NOT RECEIVED]												31 JAN 17																																							
Milestone 50 hectares of rugged terrain under surveillance and control of target UAV/AR (amended from initial milestone of 300 hectares)			30 OCT 15									30 JAN 17																																							
																											9 FEB 21																								
																														1 SEPT 21																					

**FINAL REPORT: TIDE IS TURNING - DRIVING WEED ERADICATION ON LORD HOWE ISLAND EVALUATION, December 2024**

[illegible]



## FINAL REPORT: TIDE IS TURNING - DRIVING WEED ERADICATION ON LORD HOWE ISLAND EVALUATION, December 2024

	2015						2016						2017						2018						2019						2020	2021						2022							
	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC								
<b>Report 4</b> final report, audited financial statement and complete project measures spreadsheet																																													
variation and extension to several milestone, overall extension of grant to 31 <sup>st</sup> August 2018, approved by Trust admin																																													
<b>Report 5</b> 6-monthly progress report, financial report, updated project measures spreadsheet <b>[WAS NOT RECEIVED]</b>																																													
variation to budget and extension to 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2018 approved by Trust admin																																													
variation and extension of timeline to 19 <sup>th</sup> June 2019 approved by Trust Secretary																																													
<b>Report 6</b> annual progress report, financial report, updated project measures spreadsheet <b>[WAS NOT RECEIVED]</b>																																													

## FINAL REPORT: TIDE IS TURNING - DRIVING WEED ERADICATION ON LORD HOWE ISLAND EVALUATION, December 2024

	2015						2016						2017						2018						2019						2020	2021						2022							
	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC	JAN/ FEB	MAR/ APR	MAY/ JUNE	JULY/ AUG	SEPT/ OCT	NOV/ DEC		
<b>Report 7</b> 6-monthly progress report, financial report, updated project measures spreadsheet <b>WAS NOT RECEIVED</b>																			JAN 19																										
variation and extension of timeline to 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2021 approved by Trust Board																					JUNE 19																								
<b>Report 8</b> annual progress and financial report, updated project measures spreadsheet (included 2017-19 years)																							JUL 19																						
<b>Report 9</b> 6-month progress report, financial report, updated project measures spreadsheet (included 2019-20 years)																																31 JAN 20													
variation and extension of timeline to 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2022 approved																																													
<b>Report 10</b>																																													

**FINAL REPORT: TIDE IS TURNING - DRIVING WEED ERADICATION ON LORD HOWE ISLAND EVALUATION, December 2024**

[illegible]

## Appendix 3: “Best practice” grants management checklist

### Robust planning and design

- ☐ Applications *must* be assessed against standard criteria<sup>10</sup>
- ☐ These criteria *must* inform briefing to the decision maker
- ☐ Applications *may* be assessed against additional developed eligibility criteria
- ☐ Clear explanation of why ad hoc grant was appropriate *must* be documented and *must* be approved by delegate
- ☐ Officials *must* ensure that grants administration processes identify and manage risks
- ☐ Complex, high risk or high value grants *must* include checks of potential grant recipients (e.g. conflict, police checks)
- ☐ Officials *must* document relevant information about a grant
- ☐ Project planning and / or design stage *should* include:
  - ☐ Rationale for the funded project and how it will meet government objectives
  - ☐ Consideration of the location or area in NSW the grant is targeting
  - ☐ Appropriate risk assessment and management
  - ☐ Active risk management plan for the grant life cycle
  - ☐ Potential for co-design with prospective grantees and stakeholders
  - ☐ Assessment of costs, benefits and value for money
  - ☐ Development of a logic model
  - ☐ Performance measures, including appropriate monitoring and evaluation approach

### Collaboration and partnerships

- ☐ Effective collaboration and partnership with grantees throughout the grants administration process *should* be achieved
- ☐ Interaction between the grant and other government or non-government funded activities *should* be considered, particularly where shared policy outcomes
- ☐ Longer grant agreements *should* be considered where possible
- ☐ Grant agreement *should*
  - ☐ Establish the basis for effective working relationship with grantees
  - ☐ Ensure a shared understanding of objectives and expectations

<sup>10</sup> Mandatory assessment criteria: • the project for which funding is proposed to be provided is deliverable within the proposed time frame and scope • the proposed grant recipients have sufficient capacity and expertise to deliver the project • the grant will provide community benefit • the grant will achieve value for money • alignment with NSW Government policy objectives.

### **Proportionality**

- ☐ Grant administration process *should* be customised to the scale, risk profile, value and complexity of the grant (including volume, detail and frequency of reporting requirements and acquittal process)
- ☐ Opportunities to reduce burden of reporting requirements while managing risk *should* be considered
- ☐ Considerations of proportionality *should* be documented

### **Outcomes orientation**

- ☐ Grants administration *should* be designed and implemented with a focus on achieving outcomes and benefits
- ☐ Effective monitoring *should* be implemented to track progress and assess whether funds are being utilised for intended purpose
- ☐ Identified outcomes are *recommended* to be:
  - ☐ Aligned with government objectives
  - ☐ Measurable and clear
  - ☐ Reviewed regularly
  - ☐ Clearly communicated
- ☐ A monitoring and evaluation framework *must* be developed in the business case
- ☐ Program logic *should* be documented – how inputs and activities are expected to lead to the desired outcomes and benefits
- ☐ A grantee’s responsibilities to collect and share data *should* be proportionate and clearly defined
- ☐ Appropriate performance measures *should* be selected and reported on
- ☐ Grant administration process *should* enable grantees to focus on achieving outcomes
- ☐ An outcomes evaluation *should* be implemented following a grant opportunity

### **Achieving value with relevant money**

- ☐ Officials *must* demonstrate at the planning and design stage how the opportunity will deliver value for money by identifying lifetime benefit and costs (this requirement may be satisfied in the brief to the decision maker on the merits of the grant)
- ☐ Value for money assessment *should* be proportionate to the value and risk of the grant
- ☐ Business cases and cost benefit analysis *must* be conducted for projects with an estimated total cost of \$10 million or higher (if business case and CBA is not feasible where timelines compressed to meet urgent community needs, officials *should* still consider their key elements)
- ☐ Value for money *should* be a key consideration across the grant life cycle, from design to implementation and evaluation

- ☐ Effective collaboration with stakeholders to develop and modify grant opportunities to achieve better value for money *should* be implemented
- ☐ Flexibility to response to changing circumstances *should* be maintained
- ☐ Grantees *should* be supported on how to capture data and identify benefits and costs where needed

#### **Governance and accountability**

- ☐ Record keeping obligations under the SR Act *must* be complied with
- ☐ Grant award and outcomes *must* be published
- ☐ Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for all stages of grant administration process *should* be clearly defined
- ☐ Officials involved in managing grants *should* have the necessary experience including grants management, stakeholder liaison and financial management skills
- ☐ Officials involved in assessing applications *should* be appropriately skilled
- ☐ Officials involved in assessing applications, including external subject matter experts, *should* have access to relevant instructions and training
- ☐ Grant agreements *should* be easy to understand and fit for purpose
- ☐ Effective ongoing communication and active grant management proportionate to the risks involved *should* be implemented
- ☐ Appropriate performance monitoring requirements proportionate to the risks involved *should* be implemented

#### **Probity and transparency**

- ☐ The grants administration process *must* be transparent
- ☐ All decisions *must* be appropriately documented and published
- ☐ Exceptions to competitive merit-based selected processes *must* be approved by relevant authorities
- ☐ A plan to identify and manage actual or perceived conflict of interest *must* be developed and implemented
- ☐ Appropriate fraud, unlawful and inappropriate conduct control processes *must* be in place proportionate to the value and risk of the grant
- ☐ Probity advice *must* be sought for grant opportunities that are complex, high risk or high value
- ☐ Information about the grant *must* be made available on the NSW Government Grants and Funding Finder
- ☐ Appropriate checks and balances at each stage of the grants administration process *should* be implemented

## Appendix 4: Consultation briefing paper and stakeholder consultation list

In March 2015, the NSW Environmental Trust awarded a \$508,946 grant over 2 years to the Lord Howe Island Board (LHIB) for the Tide is Turning – Driving Weed Eradication on Lord Howe Island Project. The aim of the Project was to evaluate progress of the existing Lord Howe Island (LHI) Weed Eradication Program to date, continue weed control and trial new weed control techniques in remote terrain.

Nexus have been commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the Project. The objectives of the evaluation are:

- to determine to what degree the project exceeded or met its intended outcomes and deliverables
- to identify any lessons learned, including but not limited to lessons around governance, financial management, project planning and design, and delivery of intended outcomes.

The evaluation involves:

- analysis of project reports and data
- a review of the program administration against the NSW Government's guidelines
- consultations with project managers, Lord Howe Island Board members, Trust administration staff, Technical Review Committee members and other stakeholders.

Firstly, as a key stakeholder, we thank you for taking the time to speak with us, and secondly, please be assured that any comments you make will remain anonymous unless you wish to be identified, so please be as candid as possible. Following our conversation, should you have any additional thoughts or comments please feel free to reach out by phone or email so we can include those too.

There are five key themes we would like to discuss for your feedback and insights:

**Appropriateness:** To what extent was the project design appropriate?

**Effectiveness:** To what extent has the project been effective in achieving its outcomes?

**Efficiency:** To what extent has the project operated efficiently?

**Process:** To what extent has management of the project contributed to success?

**Opportunities:** To what extent were learnings generated by the project used and could these be applied differently in hindsight?

**Many thanks, again, for your time and input.**

**Trust internal stakeholders:**

Leanne Hanvey, Senior Project Officer, Grants, in 2020

Evie Spice, Project Officer, Major Funded Projects, in 2016

Darya Gurinovich, Major Projects, in 2021

Rebecca Simpson, past Major Projects Manager

Peter Dixon, past Director, Grants, Strategy and Performance

**Trust External stakeholders:**

Sue Bower, Project Manager, The Tide is Turning Project

Nicola Fuller, Team Leader- Flora and Weeds, Lord Howe Island Board

Penny Holloway, past CEO, Lord Howe Island Board

Suzie Christensen, current CEO, Lord Howe Island Board

Susy Cenedese, Biodiversity and Green Corridors Technical Review Committee member



## Appendix 5: Project outputs and outcomes map

	Project output	Intermediate outcome	Performance indicator	Ultimate outcome	Performance indicator
1	Reduced impact of invasive weeds across 350 hectares of accessible terrain	Not specifically referenced in the documented outcomes hierarchy.			
2	Surveillance and detection of invasive weeds from 300 hectares of rugged inaccessible terrain on LHI	UAV/AR and HBT equipment trialled on LHI.  Improvements undertaken as required.  Monitor and report on outcomes / success.  UAV/AR technologies / providers is determined and investigated  HBT providers / research institutes determined and investigated  Costs for development and / or application of equipment understood.  Develop project brief and select provider/s for	Number of trials using HBT.  Area of surveillance undertaken  Number of new / outlier locations of weeds intercepted and treated.  Training in application of new technology undertaken  Approvals gained through CASA, Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (AVPMA)  Number of organisations / research institutes / businesses contacted re: HBT and UAV/AR.	Remote area UAV/AR and HBT methodology and practises endorsed for continued investment and application on LHI.  Best practice in rugged terrain weed eradication methodology is established.  Remote and rugged terrain remains free of target invasive species.	Number of weeds detected and removed.  Timeframe and costs to intercept and control weeds in rugged terrain is reduced.  Increased safety in accessing weeds in rugged terrain is increased.

Project output		Intermediate outcome	Performance indicator	Ultimate outcome	Performance indicator
		UAV/AR and/or HBT. Gain approvals as required.	Number of UAV/AR platforms identified.  Number of HBT applicators and chemical preparations identified.		
3	Independent expert review of the LHI Weed Eradication Program	Acknowledgement of good weed eradication practise.  Recommendations for improvement provided.  Quantitative assessment of eradication time frames and costs.  Eradication of future priorities confirmed.  Consultant / agency engaged to undertake review.  Stocktake of the LHI Weed Eradication Program undertaken and outcomes achieved over the past 10 years analysed.	Change in weed program methodology  Number of new weed risks intercepted and prioritised for eradication.  Identify number of areas for improvement and areas that are successful.  Identify the required treatment time frame to applying adequate pressure / treatments to deplete / eradicate target weeds.  Identify which weeds species drive treatment timeframes	LHI Weed Eradication Program remains efficient and effective.  To ensure the LHI Weed Eradication Program remains effective in being able to provide protection to the island ecosystems from the threat of invasive weeds for the long term.  Best practice weed eradication methodology and technologies will be adopted.  Adoption of improved methods and priorities.  Business case for future	Number of weeds removed decreases per weed management unit  Weed Eradication Program statistics

	Project output	Intermediate outcome	Performance indicator	Ultimate outcome	Performance indicator
		Feedback from program participants / stakeholders	Number of stakeholders interviewed and recommendations	investment and investors identified	
4	Trial of UAV/AR and HBT for weed surveillance and control on LHI	Not specifically referenced in the documented outcomes hierarchy			
5	Control of known infestations of weeds in remote terrain through helicopter winch access in conjunction with UAV/HBT	Not specifically referenced in the documented outcomes hierarchy			
6	Release of Crofton Weed bio-control <i>Baeodromus eupatorii</i> on LHI	<p>Reduced vigour and growth of Crofton weed recorded from monitoring plots.</p> <p>General observation in change in extent and density of Crofton weed infestations on the island.</p> <p>Improved capacity to detect and access target weeds in Crofton weed thickets.</p> <p>Approval sought from the</p>	<p>Reduction in time to treat weed blocks with dense Crofton weed infestations.</p> <p>Survey results from 4 monitoring plots.</p> <p>Steps undertaken to release the biological control agent on LHI.</p> <p>Number of release sites identified.</p>	<p>Introduction of Crofton weed bio-control agent to LHI.</p> <p>Reduction in the impact of Crofton weed and Improved regeneration of native species and improved condition of threatened species habitats e.g. <i>Calystegia affinis</i></p> <p>Reduce weed numbers in Crofton weed infestations.</p>	<p>% cover of Crofton weed</p> <p>Native plant species diversity.</p> <p>Reduction in hours of labour to complete search effort in weed management blocks infested with Crofton weed.</p> <p>Reduction in number of weeds following repeat Visitations after initial – post release treatment.</p>

Project output		Intermediate outcome	Performance indicator	Ultimate outcome	Performance indicator
		LHIB for release of bio-control agent on LHI			
		Action plan developed to inform its release on LHI.			
		Promotion of its release to the local community.			
7	Maintain and raise community awareness and participation in achieving the eradication of weeds from LHI	Good feedback from the community and participation presentations and  Follow-up noxious weed inspections showing compliance  Improved knowledge and awareness of weed issues.  New weeding technologies applied.  Understanding that weeds still pose a risk to the island even though they are less obvious along tracks or in the Settlement.	Number of complying noxious weed inspections.  Change in community attitudes since previous focus group meetings.  No new weeds intercepted on leases.  Improved understanding of the collective responsibility in managing invasive weeds on LHI.  Number of new weeds intercepted on leases.  Number of section 18 / non-compliance notices issued.	Community shows strong support for continuation of the LHI Weed Eradication Program and adopting of efficient methods.  Target weeds removed from lease hold land in the Settlement  Ongoing dissemination of information  Community control weeds from their lease and notify LHIB of locations on crown land	Number of weeds intercepted on leases and in the Permanent Park Preserve.  Number of people attending meetings/ educational activities.  Number of people showing support

Project output		Intermediate outcome	Performance indicator	Ultimate outcome	Performance indicator
		Ongoing support for its continuation and interest in new technologies to improve outcomes.	Number of communication and awareness programs and materials developed.		
		Participation in educational programs / presentations			
		Noxious weed inspections undertaken			
		Continue to collect weed control data for LHIB database			
8	Build and maintain networks with restoration / weed experts and island conservation programs using LHI project outcomes as a case study	Not specifically referenced in the documented outcomes hierarchy			

Appendix 6: Project health check from Tide is Turning final report

Scope	Milestones	Budget	Resources	Risk	Overall Status
Acheived Most Targets	Acheived Most Targets	Achieved All Targets	Acheived Most Targets	Acheived Most Targets	Acheived Most Targets

	Achieved all targets	Achieved most targets	Achieved few targets
Scope	The scope of the project remained the same	Some changes were made to the scope.	Significant changes to the project scope were required
Milestones	All milestones were on schedule	Some milestones were behind agreed tolerance	Many milestones exceeded agreed tolerance
Budget	Project budget remained at or below the original estimate	Project budget exceeded original estimates by \$50,000	Project budget exceeded original estimates by more than \$50,000
Resources	Project had sufficient resources available to complete the project on time.	Project required minimal additional resources for completion/timeframe	Project critically required additional resources for completion/timeframe
Risk	The project risks were within the acceptable risk profile	One or more aspects of the project were at risk	The risks impacted upon project deliverables
Overall Make an honest assessment of the project status using overall descriptions provided.	Project tracked well and no management intervention was required.	Project experienced some issues but grantee was still able to complete on time and within budget.	Project experienced significant difficulties; grantee required Trust assistance; The project was not completed on time or within budget.