ROOFTOP
SOCIAL

Summary report	Evaluation of Biodiversity Response Planning Phase 1
Date	19th December 2018
Prepared for	Department of Environment Land Water and Planning 8 Nicholson St East Melbourne VIC 3000

1 Introduction

Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037[1] is Victoria's new twenty-year plan for the future of biodiversity in the State. The plan seeks to reposition biodiversity management towards more strategic, collaborative and cost-effective planning and investment for biodiversity. It aims for more structured collaboration between stakeholders to strengthen alignment, accountability and measurable improvement. Priorities 12 and 13 of *Biodiversity 2037* are dedicated to collaborative biodiversity response planning:

Priority 12: Adopt a collaborative biodiversity response planning approach to drive accountability and measurable improvement.

Priority 13: Support and enable community groups, Traditional Owners, non-government organisations and sections of government to participate in biodiversity response planning.

The Victorian Government Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) convened more than 100 stakeholders over five days in October-November 2017 to co-design Biodiversity Response Planning (BRP). DELWP's Co-design overview report[2] outlines this new approach and how it is intended to work across 11 new geographic areas in which collaborative planning takes place, including six aspirational objectives for its success.

BRP Phase 1 involved an investment process and was implemented over the first half of 2018. It involved collaborative and participatory area-based biodiversity forums with representation from diverse stakeholders (known as Working Groups). These Working Groups engaged with stakeholders to develop a collective response to state-wide targets for each area and develop a prioritised list of on-ground projects for each area. The Strategic Management Prospects (SMP)[3] was used by the Working Groups to help guide more strategic decision making, specifically about priority biodiversity interventions, the location of these interventions and their relative cost-effectiveness There were typically 3-4 Working Group meetings in each geographic area (following the process outlined in Figure 1).
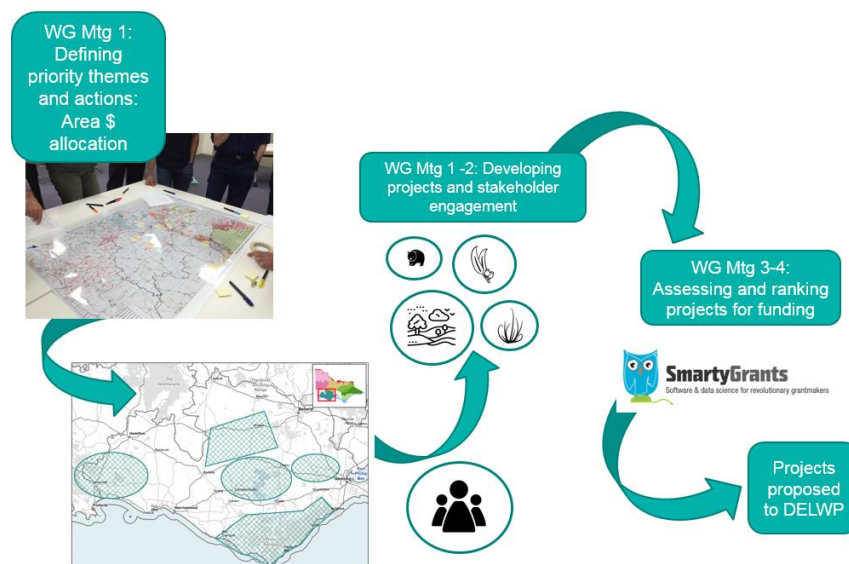

Figure 1: Overview of the BRP process (figure supplied by DELWP)

In June 2018, following completion of project recommendations by Working Groups, DELWP commissioned Rooftop Social to undertake an independent evaluation of BRP Phase 1, to inform BRP in the future. The evaluation covers the period from the finalisation of the BRP co-design process (November 2017) to when the project decisions were made by the Working Groups (June 2018).

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[1] https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-plan

[2] https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/119214/BRP-Co-Design-Overview-Report.pdf

[3] https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/natureprint

2   Evaluation Overview

This evaluation was guided by the five Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) in the box below (reflecting questions developed during the co-design process and expanded on by the multi-agency BRP steering committee and key internal stakeholders).

KEQ 1: To what extent did participants in the BRP process collaborate?

    a)   What was the quality of collaboration?

    b)   Is there shared ownership of the process and identified biodiversity response?

KEQ 2: To what extent were participants engaged in the BRP process?

    a)   How inclusive was the BRP process, was there sufficient representation?

    b)   To what extent were participants heard?

KEQ 3: To what extent was knowledge and information used to inform BRP?

    a)   What types of knowledge was shared and used?

    b)   How did SMP contribute to identifying priority projects, and how aligned are they?

KEQ 4: How effective were DELWP internal processes in delivering BRP? What are the opportunities for improvement?

KEQ 5: To what extent were Traditional Owner Corporations effectively engaged in the BRP process? If not, why not?

To answer the KEQs, we used a **"mixed methods" approach** and collected both qualitative and quantitative data through:

- semi-structured interviews (with external stakeholders and DELWP staff, steering committee members, and BRP participants including reviewing some transcripts of interviews conducted by DELWP);
- focus groups (with participants from two BRP Areas and a separate session with DELWP staff to specifically examine KEQ 4); and
- an online survey of BRP participants (both Working Group members and participants who submitted potential projects with 79 responses)[4]

Our approach was guided by work completed by the participants in the BRP co-design process. These participants established performance standards for four of the KEQs and we used these to guide our data collection and our approach to making evaluative judgements. We also facilitated a participatory "sense making" workshop with DELWP and members of the BRP Steering Committee to explore results and develop recommendations.

The scope of our evaluation did not include whether BRP Phase 1 was implemented as intended (or examine differences across BRP Areas in great detail). We also didn't explicitly examine alignment of priority projects with SMP (KEQ 3 b) There are also limitations associated with the cultural competency of the evaluation team in examining KEQ 5 (which we discuss in section 6 of this report).

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[4] Note, we also used DELWP's biodiversity email list to survey the broader public. We don't refer to the results of this survey in this public report, due to a low response rate (less than 10 people).

About this report: This document is a *Summary Report* of Rooftop Social's independent evaluation of BRP Phase 1. The intended audience for this report is participants in the BRP process and other interested stakeholders. The findings presented in this report are a summary of a more comprehensive qualitive and quantitative dataset that has not been presented here for brevity. DELWP staff and the BRP Steering Committee worked through this comprehensive data set, including direct quotes from participants, in a "sense making" workshop. Findings related to KEQ 4 have been reported to DELWP separately and opportunities for improvement are addressed in the DELWP response document available on the DELWP BRP website. Findings from the evaluation were also presented to BRP participants at a *Webinar* on the 6th December 2018.
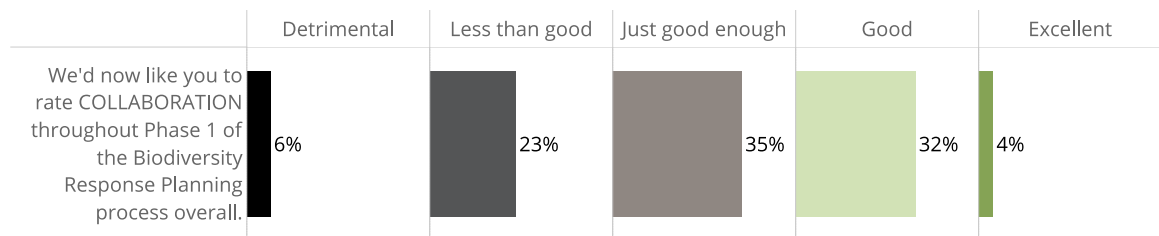
3 Extent of collaboration in BRP Phase 1

KEQ 1: To what extent did participants in the Biodiversity Response Planning process collaborate?

    a) What was the quality of collaboration?

   b) Is there shared ownership of the process and identified biodiversity response?

Summary of findings

We heard that the extent of collaboration amongst participants in BRP varied, with participants ratings of collaboration overall ranging from excellent to detrimental. About a third of participants considered collaboration was good or excellent, a third thought it was just good enough and a third considered it to be detrimental or less than good (Figure 2).

	Detrimental	Less than good	Just good enough	Good	Excellent
We'd now like you to rate COLLABORATION throughout Phase 1 of the Biodiversity Response Planning process overall.	6%	23%	35%	32%	4%

Figure 2: Survey respondent ratings for collaboration overall (from the online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, n = 79)

Perceptions about the quality of collaboration and the extent to which there is shared ownership of the process and identified biodiversity response reflect a similar spread of ratings (ranging from excellent to detrimental, Figure 3).

	Detrimental	Less than good	Just good enough	Good	Excellent
Quality of collaboration	9%	20%	28%	33%	11%
Shared ownership	4%	23%	21%	42%	10%
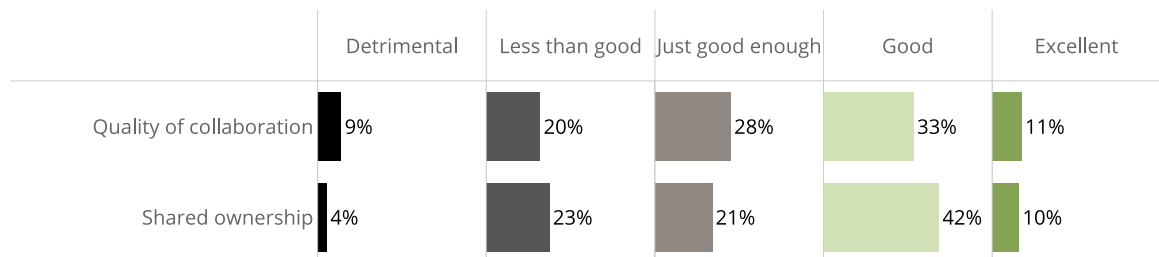
Figure 3: Survey respondent ratings for each KEQ sub-question for collaboration (from online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, n = 79)

There were some differences in ratings of the extent of collaboration between BRP Areas (indicating that collaboration in some areas was better than others). There were also some more-general characteristics about the design and implementation of BRP Phase 1 that influenced the extent of collaboration.

We heard that collaboration was impeded by the short BRP Phase 1 timeframes and the experience amongst many participants of "shifting goal posts" as the BRP process evolved during implementation.

Despite BRP Phase 1 having probity process in place, collaboration was further compromised by the design of BRP encouraging often competing roles of participants as both Working Group members (whose roles were intended to fostering collaboration across a given BRP Area) and also as Project Proponents (competing with other Working Group members as part of a competitive funding process).

4 Extent of engagement in BRP Phase 1

KEQ 2: To what extent were participants engaged in the BRP process?

    a)   How inclusive was the BRP process, was there sufficient representation?

    b)   To what extent were participants heard?

Summary of findings

Perceptions about the extent of engagement across BRP Phase 1 were mixed (Figure 4). Almost a third of survey respondents considered engagement in BRP to be good or excellent. Bringing diverse voices to the table was a common theme suggested as the most significant change to come out of BRP Phase 1.

At the same time, there was a sense amongst many participants that the extent of engagement was limited, or not delivered in the way it was intended. Almost a third of participants considered engagement to be less than good or detrimental.
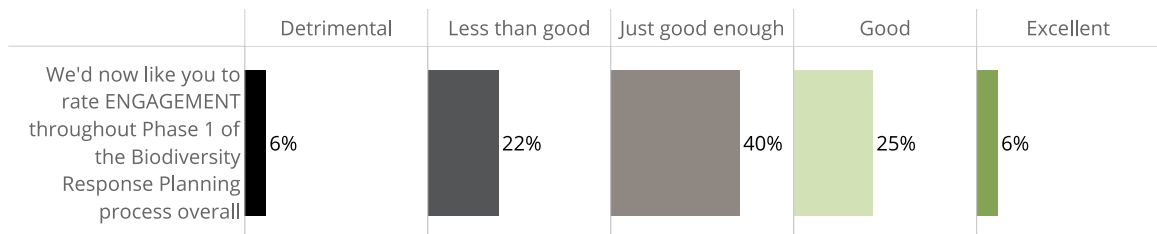
	Detrimental	Less than good	Just good enough	Good	Excellent
We'd now like you to rate ENGAGEMENT throughout Phase 1 of the Biodiversity Response Planning process overall	6%	22%	40%	25%	6%

Figure 4: Survey respondent ratings for engagement overall (online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, n = 79)

Perceptions about inclusivity of BRP Phase 1 and the extent that people felt heard reflect a similar spread of ratings (ranging from excellent to detrimental, Figure 5).
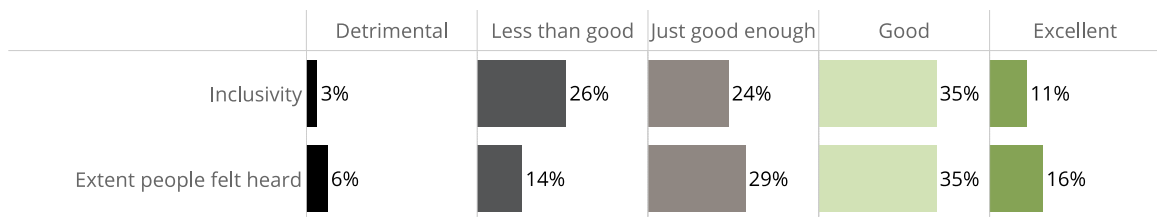
	Detrimental	Less than good	Just good enough	Good	Excellent
Inclusivity	3%	26%	24%	35%	11%
Extent people felt heard	6%	14%	29%	35%	16%

Figure 5: Survey respondent ratings for each KEQ sub-question for engagement (from online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, n = 79)

There were some differences in the ratings of the extent of collaboration across BRP Areas (again indicating that engagement in some BRP Areas was better than in others). We also heard some recurring themes about the design and implementation of BRP that influenced the extent of engagement, including:

- Short BRP timelines (with insufficient time for genuine engagement);
- a lack of clear expectations amongst Working Group members about their role in engaging with broader stakeholders; and
- the limited capacity of smaller groups, when they knew about BRP Phase 1, to fully participate in the process.

5   Knowledge and information use in BRP Phase 1

KEQ 3: To what extent was knowledge and information used to inform BRP?

    a)   What types of knowledge was shared and used?

    b)   How did SMP contribute to identifying priority projects, and how aligned are they?

Summary of findings

A wide range of knowledge and information was used to support decisions in BRP, including Strategic Management Prospects (DELWP's new decision support tool) (Figure 6)

Many survey respondents considered knowledge sharing and information use throughout BRP Phase 1 to be good or excellent and suggested that best practice knowledge was applied. At the same time, many participants thought that knowledge sharing and information use was not good enough or even detrimental.

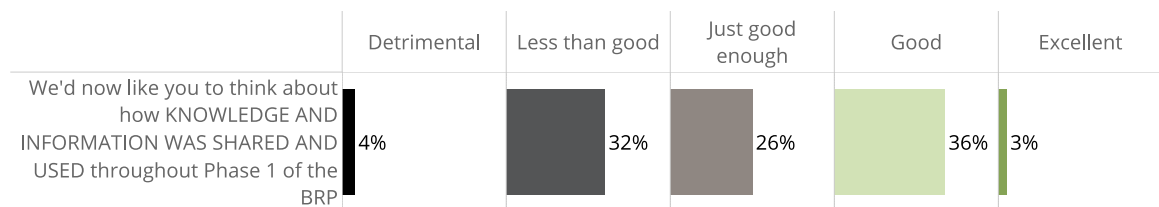|	Detrimental	Less than good	Just good enough	Good	Excellent
We'd now like you to think about how KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION WAS SHARED AND USED throughout Phase 1 of the BRP	4%	32%	26%	36%	3%

Figure 6: Survey respondent ratings for knowledge sharing and information use overall (online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, n = 79)

The SMP tool was extensively used and contributed to identifying priority projects, however there were issues in its implementation in BRP Phase 1.

We heard that there was a tension for many BRP participants between the approach to decision making using SMP during the BRP process, and the desire to develop a more-detailed, strategic plan for their area using regional knowledge and drawing on existing strategic instruments (such as Regional Catchment Strategies). This tension was further conflated by the short timeframes of BRP Phase 1 and due to SMP being new to many participants (both the concepts and the use of the tool).

The use of DELWP's SMP decision support tool in BRP represents a paradigm shift towards more cost-effective, landscape scale biodiversity actions. Participants told us that using the SMP tool as intended was hindered by:

- differences between local understanding and priorities outlined in SMP;
- a lack of understanding of SMP;
- some biodiversity actions not represented and a lack of understanding about how these could be addressed within SMP by the Specific Needs analysis process; and
- lack of confidence in SMP (through perceptions of poor data, regionally important biodiversity interventions not represented in the model or questionable assumptions about cost-effectiveness).

We heard from participants that they thought the role of SMP changed during the BRP process. Initially SMP was understood to be a decision support tool only and later it emerged as a project assessment criterion in ways that participants did not expect. This change experienced by participants was frustrating for them.
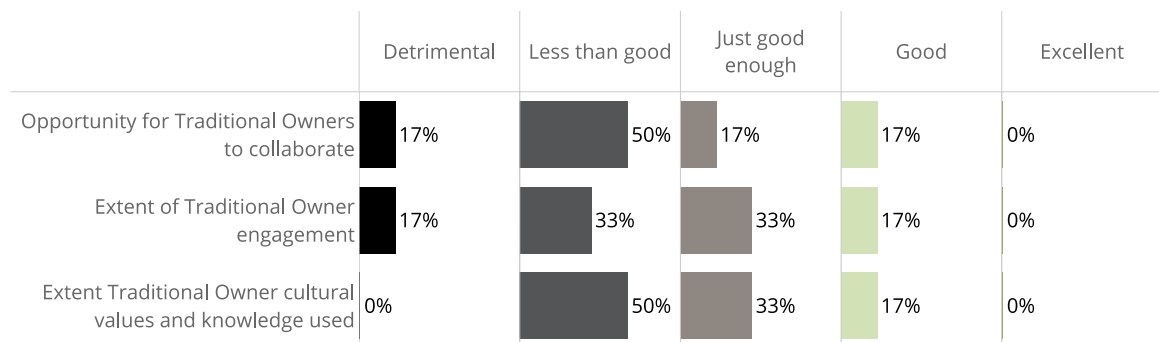
6   Traditional Owner engagement in BRP Phase 1

KEQ 5: To what extent were Traditional Owner Corporations effectively engaged in the BRP process? If not, why not?

A note on the cultural appropriateness of this evaluation:

This evaluation has been conducted by Rooftop Social and an Indigenous evaluator was not part of the team. We acknowledge that we are being asked to make judgements about the appropriateness and effectiveness of engagement with Traditional Owner groups. We undertook limited engagement with Traditional Owner groups about the design of this evaluation (in an effort to engage with Traditional Owner group representatives in the ways that they wanted to). Any observations and judgements we make are filtered through our non-indigenous perspective (noting the inherent structural and power imbalance in the design and conduct of this evaluation). This is important because BRP aspires to empower Traditional Owners as equal partners. In this section of the report, we emphasise Traditional Owner group representative views.

Summary of findings:

Sentiment amongst the Traditional Owner group representatives who participated in this evaluation was mixed with some BRP participants describing positive experiences and other participants describing experiences that could be characterised as less than good or detrimental across most performance measures representing collaboration, engagement and knowledge sharing and information use (Figure 7).

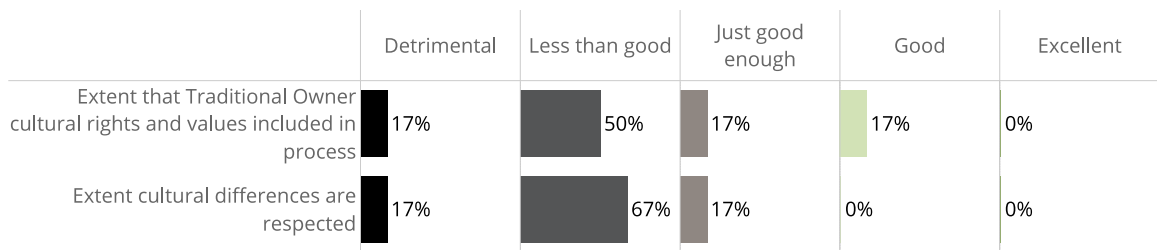|	Detrimental	Less than good	Just good enough	Good	Excellent
Opportunity for Traditional Owners to collaborate	17%	50%	17%	17%	0%
Extent of Traditional Owner engagement	17%	33%	33%	17%	0%
Extent Traditional Owner cultural values and knowledge used	0%	50%	33%	17%	0%

Figure 7: Traditional Owner Group survey respondent ratings for opportunity for Traditional Owners to collaborate, extent of Traditional Owner engagement and extent Traditional Owner cultural values and knowledge used (online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, Traditional Owner Group representatives only, n = 6)

The short timeframes of BRP Phase 1 were frequently noted as insufficient to appropriately engage with Traditional Owner organisations. While more time is necessary, just adding more time to BRP will be in itself insufficient to improve engagement. There appears to be a lack of understanding about what it means to engage with Traditional Owner groups, the expectations for appropriate engagement as part of BRP and we suspect, amongst some participants, a lack of understanding of culturally safe and respectful engagement.

BRP Phase 1 aspired to have cultural rights and values included in the BRP process and differences respected. Performance in this area is again mixed, with the majority of the Traditional Owner group representatives rating this as less than good or detrimental (Figure 8). There was the perception that an absence of information about Traditional Owner cultural values hindered its ability to be incorporated into BRP Phase 1. There was also a case where we heard that cultural knowledge was shared without permission (despite requests that this information not be shared) and we also heard examples where BRP was not culturally safe.
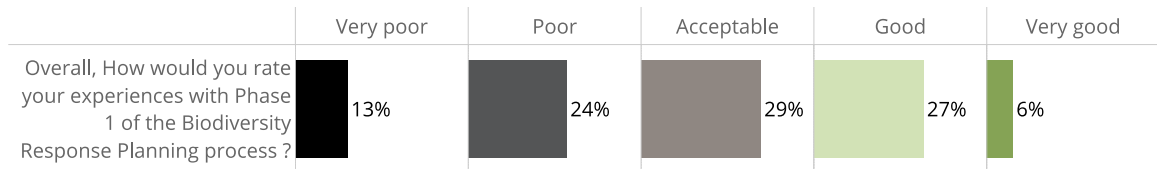
	Detrimental	Less than good	Just good enough	Good	Excellent
Extent that Traditional Owner cultural rights and values included in process	17%	50%	17%	17%	0%
Extent cultural differences are respected	17%	67%	17%	0%	0%

Figure 8: Traditional Owner Group survey respondent ratings for the extent that Traditional Owner cultural rights and values included in process and the extent cultural differences were respected (online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, Traditional Owner Group representatives only, n = 6)

These factors influence the extent that BRP can achieve its first aspirational objective and empower Traditional Owners as equal partners in BRP.

7   Perspectives of BRP Phase 1 overall

While the focus of our evaluation was the five KEQs, evaluation participants often provided feedback about the design and implementation of BRP Phase 1. In this section, we have synthesised what we heard about participants perspectives of BRP Phase 1 overall.

Perceptions amongst survey respondents of their experiences with BRP Phase 1 overall ranged from very poor to very good. About a third of respondents rated BRP overall as either good or very good, almost a third rated BRP overall as acceptable and just over a third of respondents rated BRP overall as poor or very poor (Figure 9).

	Very poor	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very good
Overall, How would you rate your experiences with Phase 1 of the Biodiversity Response Planning process ?	13%	24%	29%	27%	6%

Figure 9: Ratings of experience with BRP Phase 1 overall (online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, n = 79)

Survey respondents who rated BRP Phase 1 overall as good or very good overall did so because of:

- the level of investment in biodiversity;
- the transparency of the BRP process;
- that BRP ran smoothly and was a supportive and empowering process; and
- the diverse people "at the table" and the ability to develop a shared understanding across each region.
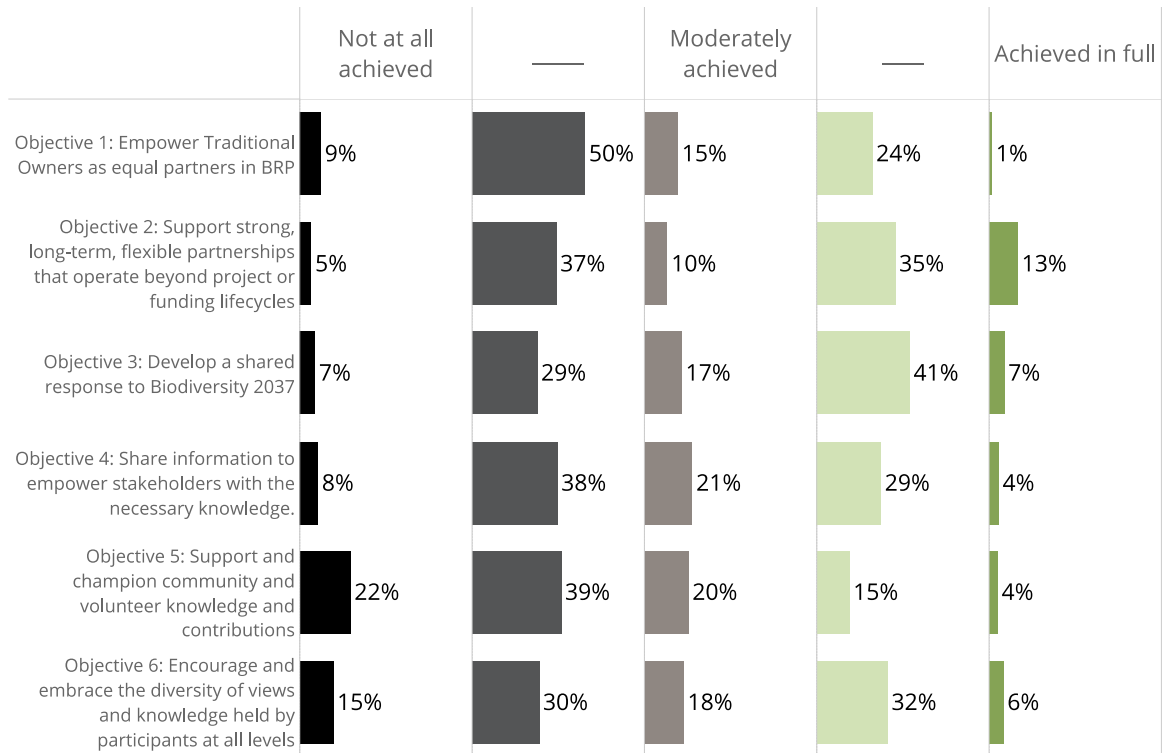
About a third of survey respondents rated their experience as poor or very poor. The following factors were nominated by BRP participants in interviews, focus groups and in the online survey that explain these ratings:

- the tight timeframes (and for some people, the stress these timeframes caused);
- changing goal posts;
- the ask of participants to resource the project (both Working Group members and Project Proponents);
- issues with conflict of interest and probity (including a perception that an advantage was conferred to Working Group members);
- an overly complicated process (especially given the amount of money available);
- inconsistency across regions;
- the misalignment between BRP Areas and CMA boundaries (and the challenges that these new boundaries posed to the ways that stakeholders worked together);
- the approach adopted in BRP Phase 1 (and the difficulty in using existing strategic planning); and whether DELWP were best to lead BRP (or if CMAs, with established relationships, should be leading).

BRP Phase 1 was an ambitious process designed to foster collaboration and encourage a shift towards more cost-effective biodiversity actions. The online survey participants were asked what they thought was the most significant change to come out of BRP Phase 1. The following common themes were identified in participants' responses:

- **a shift in focus:** including a shift towards different types of actions (from revegetation to pest plant and animal control), a focus on management at landscape scale (i.e. from a single species focus to landscape scale) and a shift towards tenure-blind decisions (focusing on highest priority projects)
- **collaboration and engagement:** including the need to properly engage with Traditional Owner organisations; bringing non-government experience into the assessment process and bringing a broad network to the table.

It appears that there is still some way to go for BRP to fully achieve its aspirational objectives for all participants. For some people, many of BRP's six aspirational objectives have been more than moderately achieved (Figure 10). For a small number of participants, BRP had not at all achieved its intended objective and for many participants, BRP Phase 1 had gone some way but had not yet moderately achieved its intended objectives.

	Not at all achieved	——	Moderately achieved	——	Achieved in full
Objective 1: Empower Traditional Owners as equal partners in BRP	9%	50%	15%	24%	1%
Objective 2: Support strong, long-term, flexible partnerships that operate beyond project or funding lifecycles	5%	37%	10%	35%	13%
Objective 3: Develop a shared response to Biodiversity 2037	7%	29%	17%	41%	7%
Objective 4: Share information to empower stakeholders with the necessary knowledge.	8%	38%	21%	29%	4%
Objective 5: Support and champion community and volunteer knowledge and contributions	22%	39%	20%	15%	4%
Objective 6: Encourage and embrace the diversity of views and knowledge held by participants at all levels	15%	30%	18%	32%	6%

Figure 10: Ratings of the extent to which BRP aspirational objectives have been achieved (online survey of Working Group and Project Proponents, n = 79)

8   Ideas for the way forward

The scope of this evaluation was BRP Phase 1 (i.e. a collaborative investment process). The ideas presented here are suggestions for DELWP to consider when planning the next phase of BRP and into the future. They are based on the evaluation findings and are informed by participants at the sense making workshop with the BRP Steering Group and Area Leads.

Future iterations of BRP will be more broadly focused and a subsequent investment phase by DELWP is not likely to occur before the current projects are complete (2021). Therefore, not all these ideas may be incorporated by DELWP in the short-term and some may be more relevant when an investment process is re-introduced.

Retain overall BRP process

Overall, there was agreement that the basic structure of the BRP process should remain the same (i.e. the Working Group structure, DELWP head office leading the process, devolved decision making to the regions and regional DELWP staff focussing on delivery with local stakeholders). There were some ideas about changing the basic structure, but these were not held widely by the participants in the evaluation:

- change the BRP Areas, as some areas were too large, the landscapes within them were too varied or the misalignment with CMA boundaries required staff to attend multiple BRP Areas; and
- resolve the probity issues by using an independent assessor to make the final judgements about projects.

Improve planning and communications

The purpose of BRP and the expected outcomes should be planned and articulated clearly. They need to be built into longer term planning processes and be viewed as stepping stones towards the goals in *Biodiversity 2037*.

Communication about a whole range of topics needs to be improved (including the fundamentals of the BRP process, biodiversity information, SMP and process guidance documents). Ideally communication collateral should be tested with the intended audience to ensure the language and style is suitable. And, once developed, it should not be changed frequently.

Improve integration with other planning processes

We understand that DELWP has already identified the need to improve integration with other planning processes and is mapping existing planning strategies. This should include agencies such as Catchment Management Authorities, Water Authorities, Landcare, Local Government Authorities, Federal government agencies, Trust For Nature and local Friends Groups. Integration with other planning processes will help prioritise projects and reduce duplication of effort between organisations.

Be realistic about timeframes and workloads

Timelines are always constrained by external factors (e.g. elections) but careful consideration should be given to increasing the timeframes during the next phase of BRP if possible. Many aspects of BRP Phase 1 were negatively impacted by the short timeframes (including the ability to collaborate and engage stakeholders, stress due to excessive workloads, project assessments that needed to be completed in a few days). The next round of BRP will not include an investment process, so this should alleviate the urgency that dominated people's experience in BRP Phase 1.

Any timelines that are set should be clearly communicated to stakeholders, so that they understand the requirements and the rationale for the steps in the process.

Focus on building and maintaining relationships

The success of BRP depends on strong and healthy relationships, which take time and effort to develop and maintain. Some relationships were strained and tested during BRP Phase 1, so it will be important to put significant effort into this area going forward. This was evident in relationships with DELWP staff and some external stakeholders. Early signals of relationships that are under pressure should be noted and acted upon in a timely fashion (and not ignored).

Create opportunities for other organisations to be involved

BRP Phase 1 was not conducive to participation by small organisations (e.g. community groups and other non-government organisations interested in biodiversity). Consideration should be given to providing multiple opportunities for these organisations to be involved in the future. This may be through simplifying the BRP process and focus (e.g. the type of projects considered), compensating organisations for being involved (e.g. for their time) or directing smaller organisations towards other more suitable grants programs.

Build trust in SMP and improve the way that local and Traditional Knowledge is incorporated in decision-support tools

SMP is a relatively new tool that aims to ensure evidence is used to inform action to protect biodiversity. Some people are sceptical about the accuracy of the data and its usefulness. And many were concerned that SMP was used in the process in favour of local knowledge. Training and mentoring in the use of SMP might be useful for BRP participants (and should continue), but there is also a need to implement a program of capturing feedback based on local knowledge in order to strengthen the analyses and build confidence. The extent to which this occurs may determine how much this addresses the problems with SMP that were identified by participants in this evaluation.

Seek advice about how to engage Traditional Owners in BRP

The way that Traditional Owners are engaged in BRP in the future needs to be reviewed and changed. A separate in-depth study may be needed to move this forward, including significant amounts of face-to-face engagement with Traditional Owners to deeply understand the issues and to develop solutions together. This study should examine the understanding and capacity of DELWP staff and Working Group members' to respectfully engage with Traditional Owners and how the BRP process can further enable this to happen. It may also be beneficial to seek advice from other organisations or areas within DELWP who effectively engage with Traditional Owners.

Adopt design-thinking mindsets and approaches

We encourage DELWP to adopt a design-thinking mindset and approach when considering any changes to BRP. Design thinking approaches encourage adopting a beginner's mindset and apply tools to encourage empathetic thinking and foster the ability to "walk in the shoes" of participants. These approaches are also known for rapid iterations of design (prototyping), testing and improvement (i.e. "fail fast" approaches). As DELWP considers how it might use the findings of this evaluation, we recommend considering how rapid prototyping and user testing could be brought to bear in the next phase of BRP (e.g. through understanding how SMP is implemented, use of the SmartyGrants application or the design of the BRP process overall).