



**Arid  
Lands  
Environment  
Centre**

# Annual Report

**2023**

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## Our Mission

Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) is Central Australia's peak environmental organisation, defending Australia's iconic desert country for over 40 years.

We empower people by sharing knowledge on how to live sustainably in the desert.

We inspire, engage and lead local people to take action for the environment, advocate for nature and strong environmental laws.

## Acknowledgement of Country

ALEC acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we work on and their vital role in caring for country for many thousands of years, now, and into the future.

We acknowledge First Nations Elders past, present and emerging and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded.

**WARNING:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that the following document may contain images of people who have died.





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**This report covers our activities for the 2022–23 financial year and aims to demonstrate the variety and impact of ALEC's advocacy, campaigning, policy and community education work**

**It highlights the incredible energy that ALEC and its members, alongside many other groups and organisations, bring to the challenge we face together - protecting people and nature in the arid lands and beyond.**

**ALEC is an accredited charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. In addition to private donors, ALEC has been fortunate to receive funding from the Northern Territory Government.**

**We welcome feedback regarding the content of this report and our activities generally. Responses can be directed to [communications@alec.org.au](mailto:communications@alec.org.au) or by calling (08) 8952 2497.**

# Our Purpose & Vision

To protect nature and support ecologically sustainable development in the arid lands.

**Healthy futures for arid lands and people.**



## Our strategies

- » Demonstrate and advocate for environmental protection and ecologically sustainable living grounded in social justice and desert wisdom.
- » Catalyse and mobilise community action on environmental issues.
- » Respect, work alongside and be guided by diverse communities, cultures and organisations; we are stronger when we work together.
- » Ensure that ALEC is a resilient and dynamic organisation operating in a professional and stable framework.

## Our 10 year goal

Australia's arid lands are biodiverse and resilient. These lands are our home and sustain a diversity of life and ecosystems.

Our goal is to protect our arid home and for ALEC to be locally and globally recognised as an enabler of sustainable living in a desert environment.

## Our values

### Innovation

New thinking, fresh ideas and creative solutions to transform livelihoods in the arid lands.

### Courage

We listen deeply and we act boldly.

### Collaboration

We cooperate, partner and collaborate to build relationships and achieve the best outcomes.

### Integrity

Our commitment is real and demonstrated by our actions – we walk the talk.



# Where we work

Australia's arid lands are ecologically abundant and unique. They are full of life and spectacularly complex. The arid lands Aboriginal custodians comprehensive knowledge of its resources and needs is central to this country.

From its beginnings in 1980, ALEC has grown as an organisation. ALEC aims to have a big impact in the desert region and nationally.

ALEC is made up of a network of local people and organisations who speak up and take action for the protection of water, climate, communities and desert country.



Our arid lands are increasingly under threat. ALEC campaigns to restore resilience to arid zone ecosystems by addressing threats such as the spread of invasive species including buffel grass, hard hooved animals and industrial-scale water extraction and promoting dingoes' role as a keystone species.



We are guided by its custodians. We advocate for investment in arid lands to sustain these nourishing terrains.



Central Australia is already experiencing climate change which disproportionately impacts Aboriginal people living in bush communities. A focus on equitable climate adaptation, hand-in-hand with emissions reductions, is critical to protect desert communities and ecosystems as life gets hotter and harder.

The Red Centre of Australia is a special place that is home to unique and diverse life **which needs to be protected for all our tomorrows.**





# Message From the Chair

With every year and the effects of climate change in particular hitting us all and our environments ever harder, the work of organisations like ALEC becomes more and more vital.

This year, ALEC staff and board again worked tirelessly to protect our arid environment despite our very limited resources.

After joining in court proceedings last year against the NT Government over its massive, free Singleton groundwater licence, we again kept up the water pressure. While awaiting the final Supreme Court decision on Singleton, we secured a major interim win, with a tier 3 environmental impact assessment set for the Singleton development consistent with ALEC's position. This is consistent too with wider public expectations in nearly 90 submissions made, many with ALEC's assistance.

We opposed the proposed Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan for the enormous groundwater volume it allocated and thus the likely environmental and cultural impact, and for its lack of enforceable details.

Our Water Justice Project generated great video material, which is contributing to a significant national discussion on water justice, while we began a weekly ABC Radio drive slot called 'From the Ground Up'.

This year, we have very much welcomed Adrian Tomlinson as ALEC CEO particularly but by no means only for his expertise and experience on water issues. Adrian has been great for the board to work with, out there on the campaigns front, consolidating behind the scenes at ALEC and supporting partner entities.

ALEC supported the Central Australian Frack Free Alliance in its Supreme Court action against the NT Government and Tamboran Resources over the government's decision to approve 12 new fracking exploration wells. Meanwhile, our partnership in

ALEC wrapped up its role leading community engagement activities for the Future Grid project, as part of the "Community Solutions" sub-project of

the Alice Springs Future Grid project, which will help bring more renewable energy in the town.

We upped the ante on the buffel grass scourge across the arid lands, as fires, largely fuelled by buffel, further imperilled already threatened species, and indeed burned close to Alice Springs homes. This, for instance, saw work on our major buffel position paper, since released, and ALEC support for a very well-attended (approx 100 people) buffel information and action night.

We continued to support the Eastside and Westside Gardens, working through the details of issues in our important relationship with the gardens. They continue to flourish, as does the Harvest Café at Eastside, and we thank all the gardens' members and Committees for their efforts.

We supported two well-attended Repair Cafés, a year that saw ALEC's Arid Edge land management consultancy complete its final several contracts. We thank Arid Edge for all its great work this year and in all those years passed.

ALEC has necessarily put much effort into fundraising this year, in the form of grant applications and appeals, enlisting strategic, specialist fundraising advice. Campaign appeals for Singleton/water and buffel grass both raised significant funds, though invariably never enough given the magnitude of such challenges. Appeals direct to ALEC members, some of whom had already given generously in years passed, supplemented such general appeals, and we are very, very grateful to those members.

We are of course grateful to all ALEC members. More and more members join ALEC every monthly board meeting, a strong endorsement and an essential underpinning of our work.

Further, this wide membership is a powerful collective message to the powers that be that the Central Australian public wants the arid environment protected. And sure enough, from that base we will continue to fight for its protection into the coming years.

David Jagger  
Acting Chair



# Highlights over the year

## **Arid Edge Environmental Services**

Finished its remaining contracts in grand style with great collaborations with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal land councils and community groups for a more liveable and food secure Central Australia.

## **ALEC had its day in court**

We challenged the Minister for the Environment in the Supreme Court over the Singleton water licence.

## **The Eastside and Westside Community Gardens**

Were a source of great learning, produce and wonderful community hubs. Not to mention cakes, coffee and company at the Harvest Cafe and an array of events including music evenings, workshops, and working bees.

## **Frack Free NT Campaign**

Central Australian Frack Free Alliance challenged the NT Environment Minister's decision to approve gas company Tamboran's plans to frack 12 exploration wells. It also scaled new heights of statistical robustness by door knocking 500 houses across Alice Springs, finding that at least 80% of people are opposed to fracking.

## **The War on Buffel Grass**

After three wet years with rampant buffel grass growth and spread, the inevitable serious fires arrived in March and April. People in Mparntwe and first Nations leaders spoke out. National momentum is building for action on buffel.

## **We celebrated some wins**

The Singleton proposal was assessed as needing the highest level of environmental impact assessment, testament to a deeply problematic project and the power of a united community.

The Minister for the Environment established the Buffel Grass Technical Working Group. Hopefully this sets us on the path to a buffel class A/B weed declaration.

We had a successful End of Financial Year Appeal which gave us some breathing space. Thanks to those generous donors, especially the donors who matched \$50,000 in donations.

Mparntwe rallied against the NTG's decision to greenlight fracking







## CEO Report

The year was marked by ALEC standing with the community in court opposing issues that were of existential environmental and cultural importance.

It started with the Singleton Supreme Court case. This was the first time that ALEC has sought justice through the courts. This unprecedented step was needed as the Singleton groundwater licence represents the intersection of massive environmental risks at the expense of traditional owners, at an industrial scale. We await the decision. Then in January CAFFA, supported by ALEC, lodged its court case challenging the Environment Minister's decision to allow fracking company Tamboran to drill and frack 12 exploration wells.

Through March and April huge fires burnt one-fifth of Tjoritja National Park, a place that Tanya Plibersek, the Federal Environment Minister, has called a 'priority place' for threatened species. In part fuelled by buffel, these fires are the intersection with climate change and the loss of Traditional cultural burning. Then further buffel-grass fuelled fires in Ross sadly burnt down dwellings.

Finally, in June 2023 the Earth experienced what was quite likely its hottest month in 120,000 years, with the Northern Hemisphere suffering unprecedented fires. Climate change is a global phenomenon, writ large in arid lands. With our most extreme conditions occurring in the summer months, we look towards the summer with extreme trepidation.

## Reflection on 2022-2023

**Resilience: the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties**

Our ecosystems and societies face extreme pressures, including climate change and burgeoning global demand for increasingly scarce resources. This demands resilience.

Unfortunately our ecosystems lack resilience. Key indicators are declining. Tragically, both the western arid zone, covering much of the arid lands and Georgina gidgee ecosystems to our east have been assessed as collapsing. The cause are not only climate change, but include invasive grasses, grazing and inappropriate fire regimes.

Our social systems too face incredible pressures. The world is hungry for the Northern Territory's "resources". Uneven power relations mean decisions are often not serving the public interest and selling the NT and the environment short.

The same pattern is evident in the NT Chief Minister's green-lighting fracking, the weakening and cheapening of water allocation plans and the NTG's persistence in implementing the Territory Economic recovery plan, doggedly pursuing economic growth over any measures of environmental or social well being. These firmly situate the Northern Territory as continuing the trajectory of its troubled colonial history.

This Annual Report describes ALEC's activities in the 2022/2023 financial year. These in large part all fit within the theme of resilience. Advocating for ecosystem resilience, supporting communities to be strong and heard and building our resilience as an organisation.

For ecosystem resilience our policy and advocacy work focused on landscape scale issues and addressing the underlying causes of ecosystem collapse. Stopping the elephant in the room, buffel grass invasion, but also precious arid zone water, groundwater dependent ecosystems and of course atmospheric emissions.

For social resilience we focused on bringing community organising principles to all our campaigns. In this we listen, connect and support people to build collective power. We have seen



how effective this approach can be with the sustained impact of the Central Australian Frack Free Alliance. In 2023 our communities are rallying around water justice, and buffer action.

The community gardens are already a connected community. Food security provides protection against the vicissitudes of global food chains and builds personal and community empowerment. The gardens are a sanctuary for humans and non humans alike. During 2023, both gardens reported busy years, but also work to consolidate their operations.

In the arid lands, physical and social resilience are not separate. These are cultural landscapes. Arrernte and other First Nations custodianship and knowhow are pivotal. First Nations people are too often not being listened to, nor their concerns acknowledged. We focused on listening to and supporting First Nations people have their environmental concerns acknowledged and ensure our advocacy is well targeted. The partnership with Running Water Community press on the Water Justice project was a highlight, albeit under the trying circumstance of the massive water allocations in the Western Davenport.

To be a resilient organisation, demands that we are well governed, with the resources to do the job.

In 2022 we placed an extra focus on fundraising. There were some good signs. In particular a successful end of financial year appeal, amplified by the wonderful donors who committed a total

of \$50,000 for matched donations, making a vital contribution to our end of financial year position. However, overall we still made a loss. Work continues to turn this around.

I urge you to consider becoming a Desert Defender, ALEC's regular donor program. This ongoing funding provides a measure of certainty which allows us to confidently plan ahead.

Another aspect of organisational resilience is our staff, members and volunteers. With 249 members and an impressive Board we are well placed. We have great staff, who over the year built their experience and displayed incredible tenacity, commitment and skill. We work as an ensemble. This makes us more resilient to changes and brings collective power!

In the last year we modified our organisational structure to better focus on how we engage with and making sure our members and stakeholders are supported and are able to contribute.

ALEC's strength is that we are place based and credible. In all our campaigns we aim to be evidence based and straightforward. An organisation that can be relied upon.

Thank you to the supporters, donors and volunteers who have enabled this to happen and also ALEC's staff and board. In challenging times with an ambitious vision, it truly takes an incredible team.

Adrian Tomlinson  
Chief Executive Officer

### That's a Wrap

During 2023 Arid Edge Environmental Services wrapped up its operations. I want to acknowledge the great work over many years and this year the work of Ra Sim and Mia Kelly-Johnson and others bringing its projects to fruition. The annual report highlights the very amazing work they do. We wish new venture Rattlepod well and look forward to future partnerships.

This year also saw completion of ALEC's role in the Future Grid project. Hayley Michener and Edan Baxter displayed immense professionalism and skill in bringing this project to fruition, embodying ALEC values, with their great focus on inclusion and social equity. Transitioning to renewables and an inclusive low carbon future has never been more urgent. Our advocacy for greater ambition in striving for a low carbon future will continue.



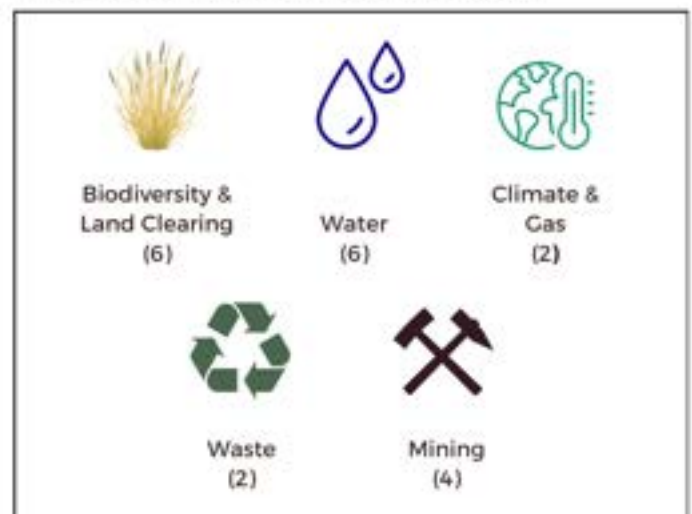
## Policy Advocacy

ALEC's policy work engages with the broad threats that are driving significant change to the arid lands. From Australia's largest groundwater licence at Singleton Station and proposed mining projects and industrial processing facilities near Ampilatwatja to advocating for better outcomes for Kati Thanda / Lake Eyre Basin and demanding action on buffel grass, the greatest invasive species threat to environment and culture across Central Australia. We seek to contribute wisdom and justice, for example calling for dingoes to be protected as keystone species.

As well as assessing development threats, ALEC also engages deeply with regulatory processes, such as policy development and law reform. We write submissions advocating strongly for better outcomes for the arid lands and its people, across a wide range of areas, water, mining, buffel and biodiversity, climate, gas, land clearing and circular economy.

This year we have focused on impact, hosting more submission writing workshops, developing more submission writing guides, developing more material for social media for awareness and engagement and partnering with Letters for the Environment Central Australia on key issues.

**ALEC completed 20 submissions in 2022-23 to territory and federal government:**



**To see ALEC submissions and learn more visit:**

[www.alec.org.au/policy\\_advocacy](http://www.alec.org.au/policy_advocacy)





## Frack Free NT

Fracking is a disaster for climate, water, our communities and our democracy, with the majority of Traditional Owners of the affected region and NT residents opposed. ALEC works collaboratively as part of a broad movement of individuals, grassroots groups and NGOs on the campaign to keep the NT frack free, including the dynamic Central Australian Frack Free Alliance. In recent years we have focussed on the Beetaloo Basin region, between Elliot, Mataranka and Borroloola, where the gas industry is already exploring and planning full scale fracking production.

- With CAFFA we door knocked 500 houses across Alice Springs, finding that at least 80% of people were opposed to fracking, and presented this information to new Lingiari MP Marion Scrymgour
- Supported CAFFA represented by the Environmental Defenders Office to launch a court challenge of the Environment Minister's decision to allow fracking company Tamboran to drill and frack 12 exploration wells, arguing that she needed to consider the full cumulative climate impacts of a future full scale fracking industry.
- Worked with Traditional Owners of the Jikaya/Lake Woods wetland System near Elliott to apply for their waters to be National Heritage listed.
- Worked with CAFFA and ALEC volunteers to organise a snap rally in front of the National climate and energy ministers meeting, with approximately 200 people attending.

As we face global climate breakdown fracking in the Beetaloo Basin, which would add at least 22% to Australia's net emissions, is transparently untenable. Next year is critical in stopping investment decisions from fracking companies in the Beetaloo Basin and much larger, production scale fracking going ahead in the NT.

We will support CAFFA in its court case, support work by Traditional Owners and continue building networks to enable more people from fracking affected communities in the Beetaloo region to speak out. Fracking will again be an election issue in the upcoming NT election. 2024 is shaping up as an absolutely crucial year.





## Buffel Grass

It has been a huge year pushing for progress and action on buffel grass, the greatest invasive species threat to environment and culture across the arid lands. Buffel grass poses an existential threat to the environment, culture and economy.

Our community continues to raise the profile of buffel grass as a political issue, strengthen relationships across the country and push for better conservation outcomes for the arid lands.

ALEC has pushed for action at the Territory and National levels participating in the Alice Springs Regional Weed Reference Group and the Interim Steering Committee for the National Established Weed Priorities Framework, advocating for better outcomes for the arid lands.

Significant progress on buffel grass is essential to ALEC's Vision of health futures for arid lands and people. ALEC seeks a dedicated campaigner.

This could support First Nations people to have the many powerful statements heard and appropriately Community-led advocacy will drive progress towards a Class A / B weed declaration and improved management of buffel grass across the arid lands.

## Buffel Grass Campaign

- In March ALEC supported the Buffel Information and Action Group to deliver the Buffel Information and Action Night, attended by approximately 100 people.
- Warning bells sounded around the growing fire risk and NTG inaction on buffel.
- Huge fires in March burnt one-fifth of Tjoritja National Park, a place that Tanya Plibersek, the Federal Environment Minister, has called a 'priority place' for threatened species.
- The buffel-grass fuelled fires in Ross in March sadly burnt down dwellings.
- In response to community pressure, the NT Government established the Buffel Grass Technical Working Group. The group will advise on management opportunities for buffel grass and whether to declare buffel grass a weed.
- We warned that delay is not an option, that the NT Government must do more on buffel and that we must think more strategically about the buffel.
- ALEC held its first buffel information session for tour guides and tour operators and developed a Buffel Grass Information Booklet for Central Australia.
- Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board, Indigenous Desert Alliance, QUT, CDU, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara and ALEC wrote a submission to Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek calling for action on buffel grass to halt and reverse biodiversity decline. ALEC has pushed for action at the Territory and National levels participating on the Alice Springs Weeds Advisory Group.

**This is creating momentum for long-overdue action to stem buffel grass invasion.**





## STANDING UP FOR ARID LANDS: BIODIVERSITY

### Dingoes

Biodiversity demands healthy, resilient ecosystems. Dingoes as a keystone species are the champions of biodiversity, helping to keep ecosystems in balance. They are a species of deep cultural importance. Dingoes are also subject to widespread baiting on cattle stations under the guise of killing wild dogs. This is an unjust practice that is not supported by evidence.

ALEC has been sharing evidence and calling for a humane, culturally sensitive approach to caring for dingoes. This recognises their essential place in arid lands ecosystems. We have highlighted the benefits and responsibility to pursue predator friendly animal husbandry and noted that the RSPCA considers 1080 baiting is inhumane.

We partnered with Letters for the Environment Central Australia, producing a case card calling on the Chief Minister to protect dingoes on pastoral leases. So far 167 online letters have been sent along with many handwritten letters.



## Water Resource Management

### Singleton Water Licence

The Singleton groundwater licence in the Western Davenport Water Control District gives Fortune Agribusiness up to 40 billion litres of groundwater each year for 30 years. This is manifestly unsustainable. It is predicted to lower parts of the groundwater table by nearly 50 metres. Tragically this is predicted to destroy huge swathes of groundwater dependent ecosystems over a stretch of land about 50 km long. It is deeply opposed by the Traditional Owners.

Represented by the Environmental Defenders Office, in September 2023 we challenged this decision in Court. We argued that the decision to approve Singleton was unlawful because it breaches key provisions designed to protect groundwater dependent ecosystems. The decision must be overturned.

We are thankful to the strong case that was put forward. These decisions take time and we await the outcome. Meanwhile we are continuing the Singleton fight. We are working to protect this wonderful country and support the Traditional Owner's through the ongoing environmental impact assessment and arguing the case for a decent water allocation plan.

### Water Allocation Plans

Water allocation plans establish the ground rules by which precious water resources are managed. This includes the amount of water available for extraction, and the amount to be set aside for cultural and environmental requirements.

Water is key to life in the arid lands. These plans are incredibly important but water planning is failing the Northern Territory.

In 2023 we opposed both the Western Davenport and Georgina Wiso water allocation plans. Both plans make too much water available for extraction, and ignore the public's concerns, especially the First Nations custodians. These plans also introduced a new format, gutted of key content, especially guidance on where and how groundwater could be taken. These are very simple and basic minimum expectations for water allocation plans right across Australia.

The failure to meet these basic standards is unacceptable for our precious resources. The central plains of the Western Davenport Water Control District contains vast areas of shallow groundwater which groundwater dependent ecosystems, including the distinctive and iconic ghost gums. The Georgina and Wiso Basins are part of groundwater flow systems that support dry season flows in the Roper and Flora rivers, respectively.



## Water Justice

The Water Justice Project is a community-led initiative by senior Elders and community members from Ali Curung. It is directed by Maureen Nampijinpa O'Keefe and is a collaboration between Running Water Community Press, Arlpwe Art and Culture Centre, Minotaur House and ALEC.

The Water Justice Project is working with the Ali Curung community to protect Country, promote cultural learning and stop the Singleton Station Water Licence.

In May, the Water Justice Project spent a week in Ali Curung listening to senior elders and community members talk about the importance of water to Country, people and culture. Filmmaker Pete Raftos accompanied the Water Justice Project to amplify the community of Ali Curung's unanimous opposition to the Singleton Station Water Licence.

In June, the first release of the Water Justice Project was published demonstrating the power and leadership of the Ali Curung community to stand up against Australia's largest groundwater licence.

The Water Justice Project will take its fight against the Singleton Station to national audiences and to the Federal Environment Minister, Tanya Plibersek.



The Water Justice Project is supported by Groundswell Giving Program





## Future Grid

Alice Springs Future Grid is a collaborative project focused on removing barriers to further renewable energy generation in the Alice Springs power system in order to achieve the Northern Territory Government's target of 50% renewables by 2030. It brings together local organisations and interstate experts to model, trial and investigate what may need to change in the Alice Springs electricity system, with ALEC leading the community engagement component.

ALEC is the link between Future Grid and the community, as the Community Solutions subproject lead. The Community Solutions team delivered engagement activities throughout the Future Grid project. The team worked closely with project partners, local installers and solar households in the participant enrolment process, working with households and installers to roll out battery storage and installers in building the Northern Territory's first Virtual Power Plant.

The Future Grid community solutions project has been completed. The project has made great steps and learnings for how Alice Springs can achieve 50% renewable energy by 2030. The project has shown residents of Alice Springs support strong action on renewables. Homeowners with access to solar or solar and battery systems have been willing to be involved in trials to support research and

action on renewables. Renters, particularly those in public housing are frequently locked out of accessing such programs.

Reducing emissions has never been more urgent. ALEC will advocate for an accelerated transition to renewables. In doing so our focus is on advocating for more equitable access to renewables, to ensure everyone in the arid lands can be part of a renewable future and access to the affordable energy needed to withstand the impacts of global heating.



**ALICE SPRINGS  
FUTURE GRID**

Alice Springs Future Grid is led by the Intyalheme Centre for Future Energy, on behalf of Desert Knowledge Australia (DKA). Intyalheme is proudly supported by the Northern Territory Government. The Alice Springs Future Grid project received funding from ARENA as part of ARENA's Advancing Renewables Program.



This project is also funded by the Australian Government Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources through the Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund – Microgrids Program.





## Westside Community Garden

The Westside Community Gardens was established in October 2020 and has flourished in the last two years. The garden is still in the growth stage of development with a small, but enthusiastic group of volunteers, who have established a wonderful garden.

Westside is made up of communal garden beds, without fences or individual plots. The design was based on community consultation and the shared vision of early garden participants. Membership is open to the whole community with regular working bees and events to enjoy this community space.

The Westside Garden Committee was established and continues to meet regularly to discuss issues related to governance, membership, garden design, community engagement, fundraising working bees and more. There's lots to do, but it's a very rewarding time for newcomers to get involved and see the garden grow. Become a Garden member or come along to a working bee: [westsidecommunitygardenalice.com.au](http://westsidecommunitygardenalice.com.au)



Not just a food garden, Westside has proven a wonderful place for events:

1. Desert Smart Ecofair - Propagation workshop - August 2022
2. Bushfoods Fest - October 2022
3. Rusty and the Infidels - a Saturday morning picnic - October 2022
4. Morning tea for Indigenous organisations

### Timeline of events and achievements:

- Established a propagation station thanks to Open Gardens NT grant
- Weekly working bees
- Planted 75 native plants
- Make own compost for garden
- Worm farm alive and well produce great fertiliser.





## East Side Community Garden

The Alice Springs Community Garden (East Side) provides a friendly, welcoming and safe environment for all who wish to utilize it. This space enables people to share their knowledge and help others to learn practical skills. The garden makes a valuable contribution towards sustainable living encompassing organic gardening practices, permaculture principles, water wise methods and minimization of waste.

Through goodwill and generosity, the gardens seek to be a supportive, inclusive environment where people feel valued, garden networks are formed and education is a priority. The ASCG helps to build community strength & resilience whilst modeling sustainable ways of living, including growing produce locally.

ASCG has been humming along this year with 130 members in total and more on the waiting list. 53 are general members with the remaining 77 members also gardening on 49 private plots.

A snapshot of what our Community Garden already is and what we aspire to be from the Draft Strategic Plan 2023-2026.

- We provide a vibrant hub for growing food, knowledge, community and sustainable practices in arid lands.
- We learn, participate, share and create a sense of belonging amongst all in the Community Garden.
- We engage and educate the wider community in gardening and sustainability whilst strengthening our connections and visibility within the community.

### Flourishing Community Garden:

Twice weekly working bees, plus the individual efforts of several highly committed members throughout the year has ensured that the Community Garden is thriving, productive and well maintained.

We have seen the expansion of communal plots, which along with the orchard are providing much bounty to share amongst members and beyond.

Some members' increasing interest in plant propagation is supplying the garden with an array of seedlings, with some left over to sell. Many thanks to all members, suppliers and supporters for their generosity and commitment to the Community Garden.



The Garden received ASTC Community Grant to install PlayZone. Sustainable Couture partnered with ASCG to run a Clothes Swap and Repair Cafe at the Garden in June 2023.





### **Community Garden Committee:**

The ASCG Committee underwent some significant changes after the November 2022 AGM when our inaugural Convenor, Bruce Simmons, stepped down after 10 years. The Committee decided to focus on upskilling ourselves in governance, strengthening membership participation and improving our systems. We also commenced a refresh of ASCG's Strategic Plan. We are keen to attract new members to the Committee at the next AGM as founding members continue to pass on the baton.

### **Saturday Mornings @ the Community Garden:**

Food for Alice (FFA) and Harvest Cafe delivered produce, coffee, cakes and community connection each Saturday morning. After FFA wrapped up in December 2022, the Cafe continued on a weekly basis up until the end of May, 2023. Much appreciation goes to Marilyn O'Keefe for her contribution as volunteer Café coordinator/manager over the preceding two and a half years.

The Harvest Cafe opened monthly in 2023 providing a perfect opportunity to run other activities to further enhance the Saturday morning community experience at the Community Garden. For example, in partnership with Sustainable Couture Clothes Swap and mending workshop

### **Looking ahead the Garden aims to:**

- Increasing garden membership and wider community knowledge of and skills in gardening and sustainability practices in arid lands
- Maintaining and upgrading garden infrastructure and systems
- Increasing members' participation and leadership in operations and governance to sustain the viability of our Community Garden
- Advocating for a Community Gardens Network Coordinator to enable ASCG to remain viable and achieve its aims of being a vibrant environmental community hub.





## Arid Edge Environmental Services

### Tangentyere Town Camp Garden & Cooking Programs

ALEC engaged Rattlepod Landscapes to continue the Tangentyere Food Garden program activities that were previously undertaken by Arid Edge Environmental Services.

In 2023, there are two new programs running through the Tangentyere Food Garden program. Firstly, the Tangentyere Town Camp Cookbook Project, which aims to build the knowledge and skills of residents across seven Mparntwe/Alice Springs town camps in using garden produce as well as accessible and nutritious ingredients to cook up healthy lunch recipes. Secondly, after completion of the landscaping works at Mpwetyerre/Abbotts and Karnte Town Camp Community centres in 2022, in 2023 Rattlepod Landscapes is running a garden programs at both of these community centres to build the knowledge and skills of town camp residents in food growing.

#### **Cookbook Project:**

- Facilitating cook ups with seven Tangentyere town camp community centres
- Documenting 15 recipes for publication in a cookbook
- Working with town camp residents to incorporate 5 languages into the cookbook

#### **Gardening Project**

- Facilitating workshops in gardening skills with town camp residents and community centre staff.
- Highlights at Karnte Camp include building, filling and planting a new garden bed and planting 3 new fruit trees
- Highlights at Mpwetyerre/Abbotts include staking up and cooking up the perennial tomatoes and the productive grapevine as well as testing new stew recipes with garden produce.

Program activities for the Tangentyere Cookbook and Garden program run until December 2023. The Town Camps Cookbook will be launched in December 2023.

"We do cooking for whoever comes to the community centre for the day. We made a lot of garden beds to plant veggies to use for cooking. Instead of going to the shop to buy groceries it is better to make our own healthy food from our own garden."

Tim McNamara  
Hidden Valley Town Camp

The Tangentyere Cookbook and Garden Program is funded through Alcohol Action Initiative as part of NT Health. The programs are supported by Tangentyere Council and organised in partnership with the Tangentyere Town Camp Community Centres. ALEC auspices these grants and Rattlepod Landscapes is the implementing partner.



# Yuelamu Community Masterplan

Arid Edge Environmental Services was engaged by the Granites Mine Area Affected Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) Committee to prepare a Masterplan to develop outdoor public spaces in Yuelamu, with the aim of completing a cohesive plan for community wide improvements in liveability, usability and amenity.

A key focus for committee members was to future-proof their community to be more resilient to climate change. This included looking at outdoor spaces across the community and in residential yards to consider what changes could be made to create more usable and accessible spaces that will offer respite from the, often harsh, environment.

In 2023, Arid Edge Environmental Services working in partnership with Fooks Studio delivered the final masterplan designs for presentation to the Yuelamu Community. This marked the last stage of the masterplan, and meant that designs could go to a quantity surveyor for a cost estimate.



Community Meeting



Steering Group Meeting

Moving forward the works for the principal design areas 1 and 2 will progress to design detailing for construction. Project partners will also start implementing works relevant to their portfolios.

**Arid Edge Environmental Services in partnership with Fooks Studio was contracted through the Yuelamu Granites Mines Affected Areas Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) Committee and Central Land Council to undertake this project.**

Arid Edge Environmental Services & Fooks Studio facilitated co-design workshops to ensure that Community Members were designing and approving the designs proposed in the final document. Steering Group included: David McCormack, David Stafford, Rosina Stafford, Doreen Tilmouth, Melissa Morton, Maitland Nelson and L Morton. The project would not have been possible without the support and the time of the Steering Committee.







## Arid Edge Environmental Services

### Thanks for joining us on the journey

Since 2016, Arid Edge Environmental Services has worked through a social enterprise model, engaging partners on a commercial level while utilising a strong community development framework as an engine for positive environmental and social outcomes.

Focusing on landscaping, design, land management and community development AEES has been a source of financial independence, provided a better than cost neutral pathway for appropriate development undertakings and been a source of employment and skills building for many First Nations people and environmental practitioners.

In early 2022, the ALEC Board made the difficult and heart wrenching decision to wrap up the AEES. This was largely driven by the difficulty in recruiting a manager and uncertainty around remote area

travel imposed by Covid-19 and associated risks on the organisation. In 2023 we wrapped up the vast majority of these projects.

Ra and Mia, former Arid Edge staff, now run Rattlepod Landscapes, offering some aspects of the work formerly offered by Arid Edge Environmental Services in Central Australia. We wish Ra and Mia all the best with their new business endeavour and encourage people seeking their services to contact them directly via:  
[info@rattlepod.com.au](mailto:info@rattlepod.com.au).

ALEC will continue to collaborate with people and organisations aligned with purpose and values of Arid Edge, albeit in alternative formats.

ALEC was fortunate over the years to have received the services of talented and committed staff.

We thank all of our former staff and clients and acknowledge and celebrate the legacy of many great projects.



We are stronger when we work together. Supporting and building a committed and engaged community engagement is at the core of ALEC's vision of healthy futures for arid lands and people. It is an integral part of the three public facing strategies in our strategic plan: advocating for environmental protection and ecologically sustainable living grounded; catalysing and mobilising community action; and working alongside and is guided by diverse communities, cultures and organisations.



ALEC has a regular presence at the Sunday Todd Mall markets. We listen to and connect with a wide section of the public about ideas and concerns; share information about our campaigns and provide opportunities to get involved or buy some great merchandise. Our market stall and volunteers also headed to the Alice Springs show, the Watch the Space makers market and the Harvest Cafe.



**August - September 2022: EcoFair.** With the uncertainty of COVID for event planning still present EcoFair this year was low key and local, showcasing some of the great work that is ongoing in our community. It included a propagation workshop, letter writing workshop on the 'Tandyidgee Station Land Clearing application', a Repair Cafe, a sunset soiree with music at WSCG, tour of ASCG Garden and an information night on the Singleton court case.



**March 2023:** For Clean Up Australia Day we worked on the Ilparpa Claypans with Alice Springs Landcare and the Outback 4WD club. Over 30 people laboured to collect litter from fast food wrappers to car bodies! Ilparpa Claypans are an incredible important place and this event was a chance to show some care, at an amazing place which is being damaged from an absence of management.



**March 2023:** The Buffel Information and Action Group hosted a Buffel Information Action Night. The event was emceed by ALEC Board member Que Nakamarra Kenny, and attended by more than 60 people who heard Traditional Owners, scientists and organisations including Central Lands Council, and Landcare, affected industries and representatives from the NTG.



**April 2023** ALEC partnered with Gurmat Parchar Sewa Society to celebrate Vaisakhi, the Punjabi spring festival at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. This day is becoming a highlight of our events calendar, attended by more than 100 people, with a tree planting workshop, a feast and a range of events for people of all ages.



**September 2022 & April 2023: Repair Cafes** - expert repairers volunteered their time to help fix broken bikes, mend clothes, sharpen your knives and more. These events are great for keeping things out of landfill, but with a focus on teaching attendees how to do the repairs themselves, Repair Cafes' impact lasts well beyond the event. Our thanks to all the volunteers and also to Pepe and Lili who time and time again, work tirelessly to make these happen.



**June 2023** ALEC attended the the Bustin the Grass event at Desert Knowledge Australia. We participated on the panel discussion with many esteemed knowledge holders, as well as sharing in a one stop market shop with Centralian Plants and Letters for the Environment Central Australia.



# Our Work in Pictures





# Our Governance

ALEC Incorporated is a not-for-profit incorporated association under the Associations Act 2003 (Northern Territory) operating in Central Australia. The principal activities of ALEC are to safeguard arid lands through advocacy and education, creating healthy futures for arid lands and people.

As at 30 June 2023, ALEC has 5,000+ supporters, 252 ordinary members, and more than 150 volunteers. The organisation is governed by a Board in line with the requirements of ALEC's Constitution. The Board is appointed by ALEC members at the Annual General Meeting, and are members themselves. Board Members serve for a minimum two-year term and do not receive remuneration for their role, but may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses incurred as part of their role on the Board.

The Board's primary role is to ensure the good governance of ALEC, including the development and monitoring of long-term directions and goals and the strategies and policies needed to achieve these goals. The Board also appoints and manages the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and ensures that the organisation complies with its contractual, statutory and legal obligations; remains financially viable; and proactively manages risks. Day-to-day management of the organisation is delegated to the CEO.

To maintain good governance, Board membership is diverse and includes key competencies such as environmental policy and strategy, finance, legal, fundraising, audit, risk, communications and engagement.

The Board operates sub-committees to investigate various issues and make recommendations to the Board. The Board currently operates four sub-committees, with membership consisting primarily of Board members with support from co-opted experts. The Board does not abrogate its responsibilities to sub-committee members. Sub-committees currently in operation are Finance, Audit & Risk, People and Safety, Gift Fund, Fundraising and Inclusion and Diversity. We welcome ALEC supporters contribution by participating on these sub-committees.

ALEC is a tax-deductible gift recipient registered by the Australian Taxation Office and subject to the regulatory oversight of the Commonwealth Register of Environmental Organisations and the Australian National Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. ALEC maintains a public gift fund, the ALEC Gift Fund. All donations received by the fund are used to support ALEC's charitable objectives.

## Healthy futures, for arid lands and people.



# Our People

**252**  
**Members**

**150**  
**Volunteers**

**<5000**  
**Supporters**

## ALEC Board



**David Jagger**  
Chair



**Deb Mason**  
Treasurer



**Emma  
Buckley Lennox**



**Que Nakamarra  
Kenny**



**Bruce Simmons**



**Barb Molanus**



**Damien Williams**



**Heather Smith**

## Our Staff



**Adrian Tomlinson**  
CEO

**Roz Walden**  
**Ace Goddard**  
**Alex Vaughan**  
**Hannah Ekin**  
**Sophia Willcocks**  
**Hayley Michener**  
**Edan Baxter**  
**Ra Sim**  
**Mia Johson-Kelly**

Operations Manager  
Operations Coordinator  
Policy Officer  
Campaigner - Frack Free NT  
Communications Coordinator  
Project Manager - Future Grid  
Community Engagement - Future Grid  
Landscape Designer - Arid Edge  
Project Officer - Arid Edge

Numerous other casual staff have also contributed to delivering ALEC and Arid Edge Projects in FY22-23.



# Our Donors

Whether you have thrown a few dollars in a tin at an event, clicked a donate link in a campaign email or as many did, contribute significantly during our end-of-financial-year appeal - your donations are deeply appreciated. We cannot emphasise enough just how significant these donations are. Working across an enormous area populated by a small number of people, our income is the fundamental limit to what we can do.

Public donations allow ALEC to take on issues and work that matter most to the our members and region - even when other funders won't!

## Become a Desert Defender

**In a world full of uncertainty and instability, Desert Defender donations give ALEC the financial confidence and security to reach further, aim higher and pursue long-term change.**



The spectacular arid lands of Central Australia need a strong independent voice, and the people of Central Australia who know, love and live in the region are the best ones to be that voice.

ALEC works to give voice to the people of Central Australia and amplify their calls to protect our arid lands and wildlife.

Our monthly Desert Defender donations provide vital reliable funds that help us to continue to strengthen our region's capacity for conservation and ensure the voice of our community and environment remain strong and independent.

Protecting the vast arid lands - is a huge challenge and needs resources. Whether you're a local, a new local or a visitor who fell in love with the beauty of Central Australia, you can help to protect our unique, arid landscapes and wildlife with a regular donation starting from just \$10 per month.

To our generous Desert Defenders who donate on a regular basis - thank you. Your consistent contributions enable us to be strategic in our work planning.

With your continued support we are able to make a bigger impact. So thanks for using your hard earned dollars to support local, grassroots environmental advocacy in the arid lands.

If you have not already, please consider setting up a regular donation so we can continue to independently advocate for better environmental protection of the arid lands.

## Donate Today.

[alec.org.au](http://alec.org.au)





# Treasurer's Report

This year ALEC appointed Basso Newman to conduct this year's independent audit of the organisation's finances, in line with the decision made at last year's AGM. ALEC again appointed Verve Group as bookkeepers for the 2022-23 financial year and to prepare our financial records for audit.

Our Operations Manager, Roz Walden, continues working closely with Verve to improve our financial management systems with some bookkeeping now brought back inhouse. Thanks to improvements made last financial year, the board and CEO have had more timely access to accurate and comprehensive financial information to inform strategic decision-making, though further work to improve reporting is still needed and underway.

The audited financial statements show ALEC's overall operating result to be a net deficit of \$47,000 compared with a \$166,000 deficit the previous year. Total equity has decreased from \$282,000 in 2021/22 to \$235,000 in 2022-23. Whilst this still has the organisation in a viable financial position, ALEC continues to face a challenging financial outlook.

Last financial year, the board made the difficult but necessary decision to close the doors on Arid Edge. The pandemic exposed some significant risks that its operations posed for ALEC as a not-for-profit organisation. Taking this decision has had a significant impact on finances. However, the risks associated with continuing Arid Edge operations, especially given ALEC's inability to recruit a new Arid Edge manager, warranted this tough decision.

All Arid Edge projects are now completed and most of Arid Edge expenses have been finalised in the 2022-23 financial year. The board and management are incredibly grateful to the Arid Edge team who worked tirelessly to complete and deliver outstanding contracts.

Following the turbulent COVID times, and with the closure and completion of two significant programs/projects (Arid Edge and Future Grid) at the end of the financial year, the time is right to review and realign ALEC's work with our strategic priorities and chart a new course to meet our organisational goals and objectives.

ALEC has the financial challenge of reduced funding and project income and rising costs. The Board and CEO have had a strong focus on increasing income by targeting fundraising and applying for a larger number of grants, some of which have been successful. We had a very successful end of financial year fundraising appeal which raised almost \$120,000 and helped our bottom line enormously for the 2022-23 financial year. We thank all of our generous donors who contributed to this.

We are continuing to work with a consultant to identify and target funding sources aligned with our goals and strategic priorities and we're aiming to further build on our fundraising activities and income in the 2023-24 financial year.

As ALEC works to realign and fund its work, the team will also be looking at what systems could be streamlined or eliminated to reduce costs as the organisation becomes more simplified in its structure.

As always, the board recognises and is grateful for the contributions made by our members and volunteers, many of whom give generously with both time and money. It is our members and volunteers that make ALEC a true success.

While the outlook for the 2023-24 financial year is still challenging for ALEC, now is the time to strategically prioritise our work, invest in our people, communicate our impact and embed fundraising into our activities.

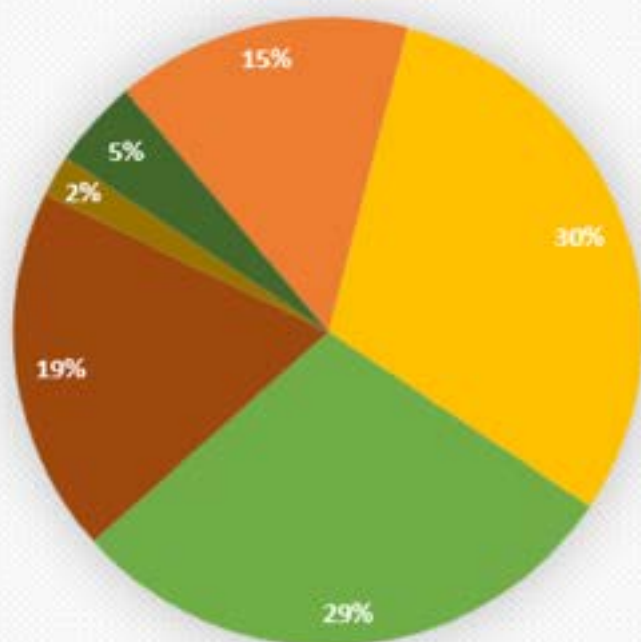
Deb Mason  
Treasurer





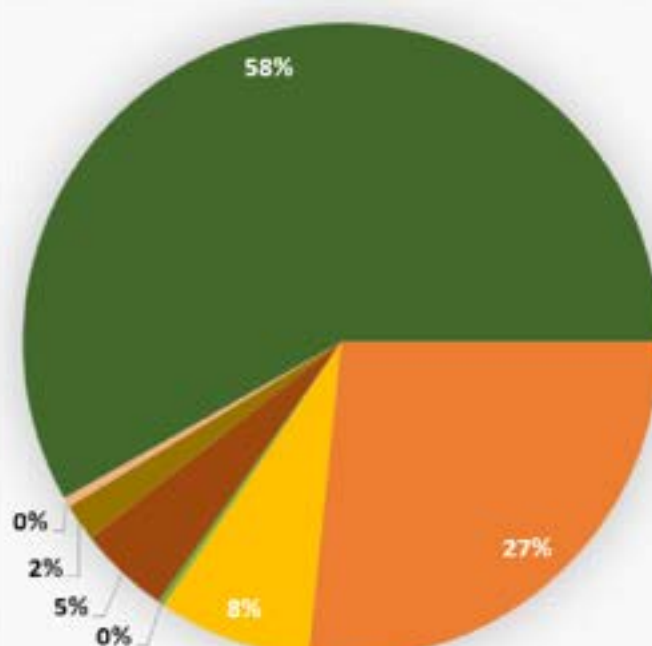
# Finances at a glance

## Total Income for FY22-23 \$909,949



- NT Government Grants | \$138,000
- Project Grants | \$276,113
- Earned Income | \$263,718
- Donations | \$171,471
- Membership and Fee | \$19,204
- Other Revenue | \$41,444

## Total Expenditure for FY22-23 \$957,120



- Cost of Service Delivery | \$255,199
- Management & Operational cost | \$74,425
- Campaigns, Events & Promotion | \$2,988
- Accounting & Audit | \$44,668
- Depreciation | \$18,301
- Motor Vehicle | \$4,640
- Staff Costs | \$566,899

### Statement of Assets and Liabilities

Current Assets	\$346,145
Non-Current Assets	\$119,650
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$465,796</b>
Current Liabilities	\$230,078
Non-Current Liabilities	\$ 0
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$230,078</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$235,718</b>

### Statement of Changes in Equity

Balance at 1 July 2021	\$448,914
Net surplus/deficit during the year	-\$166,026
<b>Balance at 30 June 2022</b>	<b>\$282,888</b>
Balance at 1 July 2022	\$282,888
Net surplus/deficit during the year	-\$47,170
<b>Balance at 30 June 2023</b>	<b>\$235,718</b>



# Looking Ahead

There is immense energy in our community. In May our community said enough is enough when it comes to buffel, the NT Government established the Buffel Grass Technical Working Group. In June when the Chief Minister gave fracking the greenlight, arguing the Pepper Inquiry into fracking recommendations were complete when they clearly were not, rather than deflation, our community responded with one of the greatest rallies in years.

In the year ahead we face existential environmental challenges. With a hot year forecast, fire conditions will be exacerbated by buffel and poor fire regimes. As well, there is unprecedented global demand for scarce resources, critical minerals, big agriculture and pressure to receive the world's wastes.

We will continue to oppose fracking in the Beetaloo Basin - which will be a carbon bomb, to play our part in stopping new gas. And push for urgent action to reduce greenhouse emissions.

For ecosystem resilience we will pursue the protection of key refuges like rare arid lands water places, including groundwater dependent ecosystems, a strong buffel weed declaration and focus on protecting dingoes. In this we will focus on humane and caring approaches, which respect the

complex relationships between species and the rights of individuals.

For resilient societies, we will be guided by and seek to elevate First Nations' voices, especially those in remote areas. We will seek to embed in all campaigns the organising principles that have proven so effective with the gas campaign.

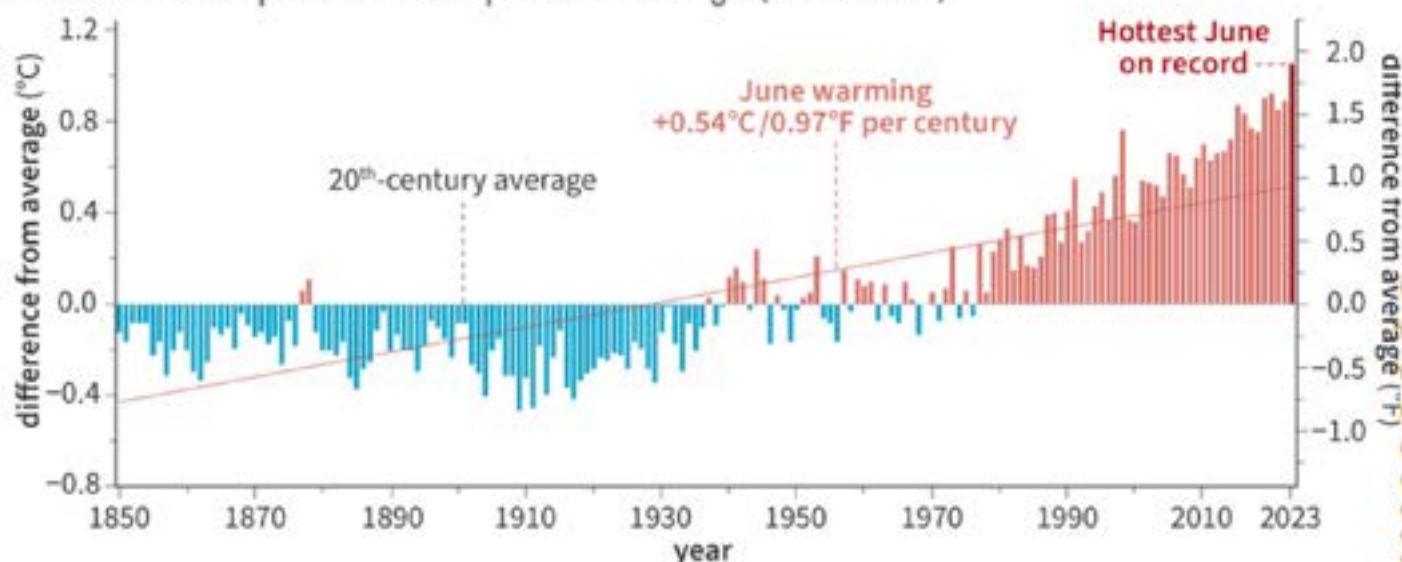
The gardens will continue to grow as hubs of learning and engagement, building both understanding and care for arid lands and bringing diverse communities together.

We will maintain and an approach which is evidence based and straightforward. We will not skirt around the hard reality.

Again we must improve the financial sustainability of our work. The significant impacts our campaigns offer, presents a value proposition to environmental grant-makers. However as a grassroots organisation it will always be the ongoing contributions of our supporters that drive ALEC.

It is a pivotal moment for many environmental issues. By working collectively we can have an incredible impact.

## Global June temperatures compared to average (1850-2023)



Graphics by NOAA Climate.gov, based on data from NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information.



# Partnerships & Alliances



The Protect Country Alliance is a strategic network of community representatives and organisations forming a united front against fracking in the Northern Territory.



The Lock the Gate Alliance is a national grassroots organisation made up of over 120,000 supporters and more than 450 local groups who are concerned about risky coal mining, coal seam gas and fracking.



The Central Australian Frack Free Alliance is a grassroots community group with the goal to protect our water, health, community and country by opposing unconventional gas extraction in the NT.



Environment Centre Northern Territory is the peak community sector environmental organisation in the Top End of the NT.



Places You Love is Australia's biggest alliance of environment groups, protecting the laws that protect the places we love.



The Boomerang Alliance, made up of 55 of Australia's leading community and environment groups, is driving the behavioural and systemic change required to deliver the social, economic and environmental benefits of a zero-waste society.



Not-for-profit community-controlled publisher centring First Nations storytelling and truth-telling from remote areas. Running Waters Press is author/storyteller run and committed to a range of copyright justice initiatives from repatriation of stolen stories to building greater protections for First Nations storytellers and their Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights.



Community organisation ensuring the Territory's Top End water, rivers, climate and eco-systems are protected for future generations.



Community-focused, Aboriginal organisation that builds the collective power of Aboriginal people by backing Aboriginal leadership, skills and capacity to genuinely achieve self-determination in communities and on country.



Letters for the Environment is an Alice based community network that meets to write letters to policy and decision-makers on environmental issues.





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