



The University of Sydney
Integrated Sustainability Analysis™



Sustainability Reporting Project

Case Study **The Australian Conservation Foundation**

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E n v i r o n m e n t a l
T R U S T



1 Introduction

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) is Australia's leading national not-for profit environment organisation and is funded almost entirely by individual membership and donations. For 40 years they have been a strong voice for the environment, promoting solutions through research, consultation, education and partnerships. They work with the community, business and government to protect, restore and sustain the environment. ACF is committed to inspiring people to achieve a healthy environment for all Australians. Since 1966, they have focused on the most important and urgent environmental problems, seeking change with lasting political, economic and social support. ACF has played a key role in increasing protection for some of Australia's most outstanding natural assets including the Franklin River, Kakadu, the Daintree Rainforest and Great Barrier Reef

ACF's President is Professor Ian Lowe AO, emeritus professor of science, technology and society at Griffith University in Brisbane, an adjunct professor at Sunshine Coast University and QUT, an honorary research fellow at the University of Adelaide and a consultant to the CSIRO Division of Sustainable Ecosystems. Don Henry has been Executive Director of ACF since 1998. Before that Don was the Australian Director of World Wide Fund for Nature.

ACF is governed by its 37-member Council. Every three years the members of ACF elect Councillors from their state or territory. Council meets three times each year to determine ACF policy and priorities. Councillors come from varied backgrounds and contribute diverse experience and skills. The Executive is a sub-committee of the Council, and is concerned with the day-to-day running of ACF. It is made up of the President, two Vice-Presidents, the Treasurer, and four other councillors elected by Council.

ACF is a democratic, membership-based organisation. It receives very little support from government and business. Members are its financial backbone. Members are also vital to ACF's campaigning strategies, lobbying politicians and councils, writing letters, modifying your own behaviour, and discussing environmental issues.

ACF has approximately 60 staff in five offices: Melbourne (head office), Sydney, Adelaide, Canberra and Cairns. ACF staff work in areas such as campaigns, administration, fundraising, communications, human resources, finance, information technology and customer service.

Every year many people help ACF to campaign and run its offices by volunteering their time, energy and skills. In 2000, in our Melbourne office alone, 116 volunteers contributed around 8,000 hours of support, which equates to over 4.5 full-time positions!

The Council, Executive, members, staff, volunteers and branches are all integral parts of ACF, and contribute to its effective running.



2 Background

ACF is an incorporated association registered in the Australian Capital Territory representing more than 15,000 members throughout Australia.

In accordance with the ACT Incorporated Associations Act and our Constitution ACF is required on an annual basis to prepare financial reports on its financial performance and position for members. The size and distribution of the membership base has led the organisation to prepare general purpose financial reports in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards.

ACF is also part of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and as a member must comply with the reporting requirements set down in ACFID's Code of Conduct, which aims to ensure consistent and detailed level of reporting for donors and the general public.

Each of these statutory and governance reporting requirements focus predominantly on the traditional financial aspects of the organisations activities.

3 Context for change

In November 2002 ACF moved its head office to the award winning green office building at 60 Leicester Street, Carlton. This move was the culmination of more than 5 years of research, planning and development that provided a tangible example of the changes organisations needed to make if we are going to live within the means of the planet and provide a viable future for our children.

The green building is a daily reminder to all ACF staff that as an organisation we must not just advocate for change, but also live the changes in our own day to day activities.

“Walking the talk’ brought many aspects of ACF activities under review and it was our annual reporting that was one of the next areas to change.

Since 2003 ACF has completed an annual report, encompassing sustainability measures on an annual basis. The sustainability report, a first for an environmental non-government organisation in Australia, provides details of ACF’s environmental campaigning activities from a social, environmental and financial perspective.

Although ACF has no formal requirements to report on sustainability measures, other than financial, it has taken the opportunity to provide leadership within the sector, walking the talk it promotes as part of its campaigning activities.



The report and its measures have been supported at all levels within the organisation and have provided ACF's council, management, members and supporters with a much broader and complete understanding of the organisation and its activities.

One of the key measures of the organisation's performance has been the ISA analysis of ACF activities. It was featured in our 2004 report and has provided significant new understanding to our management team of the direct and indirect impact of our activities through out the economy.

4 Process

The process of implementation at ACF was made easier by the support of one of our key managers. Our previous Strategies Director, Mike Krockenberger, was instrumental in developing the links with the ISA team and encouraging our participation as a pilot partner member.

This high level of support within the management team ensured that the approvals for the project ran smoothly and any challenges and concerns were effectively addressed.

Our Finance and Sustainability Reporting Manager, David Edwards, was the pilot project liaison, which ensured that the process of gathering the data for the analysis was streamlined for the organisation.

The process of gathering data for the project was simplified by an expansion to the accounting chart of accounts to more specifically track and break up some of the key elements of our activities. This process required the input of our external software consultants and the training of key staff on the importance of utilising the new codes

5 Product/s

ACF's adoption of the ISA analysis of its own performance, has strengthened our call to other organisations to look more broadly at environmental and social impacts of their organisations beyond the traditional factory gate or show room floor analysis. It is proving to be a useful campaigning tool in our efforts to protect, restore and sustain the environment.

Along side the development of internal accounting systems for ACF the organisation has also been working in partnership with the ISA team to develop materials which are proving to be central in our campaign work.

Consuming Australia is an analysis of the environmental impacts of consumption in Australia, showing us where in the Australian economy the consumption of water, creation of greenhouse pollution, land disturbance and material use occurs.



One of the key products to come out of the Consuming Australia work has been the GreenHome challenge calculation and information on the GreenHome website. ACF's GreenHome Program is a new initiative that is working with individuals to evaluate their lifestyle impacts and make changes to tread more lightly on the earth.

The GreenHome team have worked closely with the ISA team on a new web-based measuring tool to assist interested individuals to assess various environmental impacts of their activities. The program is interactive and seeks to help individuals to identify possible improvements and to track their progress on an ongoing basis.

A consumption atlas will be another product that will result from our work with ISA. The atlas will show us how which parts of Australia are unsustainable and why.

The Consuming Australia work will continue to inform ACF's campaign work and help us to achieve reductions in resource consumption levels, to establish more environmentally sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

7 Changes to practice

The results have provided significant new insights into ACF's activities. The ISA analysis has become the benchmark against which ACF measures our environmental impacts and tracks improvements from new initiatives.

The results have enabled a better understanding of the impacts of our spending patterns. It has also reinforced some of our practices, such as arranging multiple meetings when using air travel or utilising alternatives such as phone link ups.

It has been integrated as one of our key campaigning tools by better understanding the Australian economy we have been able to come up with tools such as the GreenHome Challenge and the Consuming Australia that assist us in advocating for the sorts of changes that can make the biggest impact on the environment.

7 Conclusions

ACF remains committed to sustainability reporting and the need for more holistic reporting right across the global economy.

The process of involvement with the ISA team has been extremely enjoyable and has assisted in the development of new tools for ACF, both internally and externally, to achieve a healthy environment for all Australians