Our Marine Parks Grants Round Two - General Feedback

General feedback for applicants

Summary

Interest in the second round of the Our Marine Parks Grants (the program) was high. With 110 applications received, the round was highly competitive and resulted in the full allocation of program funding being offered to successful applicants.

Following eligibility and compliance screens and assessment of eligible and compliant applications, 18 organisations were selected to deliver 22 projects under the program. The selected projects cover diverse activities by interested and capable organisations to engage in marine park management, and/or to improve knowledge and understanding of Australian Marine Parks.

A list of the 22 successful projects will be published on the Australian Government's GrantConnect website.

The selected applicants provided strong responses to all the assessment criteria. The proposed activities were eligible under the program, appropriate and effective to achieve the program outcomes and demonstrated their suitability for public funding and value for money as outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines.

This General Feedback document provides information to applicants on how applications could have been strengthened. Unsuccessful applicants are encouraged to consider how this feedback applies to their application and, should they wish to apply for any grant funding in the future, are also encouraged to use this information to maximise their chances of gaining funding from other programs.

Program overview

On 1 July 2018, new management arrangements for 44 Australian Marine Parks came into effect — increasing the number of Australian Marine Parks in waters around Australia to 58. Australian Marine Parks now cover around a third of Australia's marine territory and protect a diverse range of ocean habitats from the tropical north to the cool waters of the temperate south.

The program was announced as part of the Fisheries Assistance and User Engagement Package (the package) on 1 July 2018. This is a package to assist industries and communities in transitioning to the new park management arrangements.

The package, which was funded through the then Department of Environment and Energy, contributed to the departmental outcome to:

Outcome 1: Conserve, protect and sustainably manage Australia's biodiversity, ecosystems, environment and heritage through research, information management, supporting natural resource management, establishing and managing Commonwealth protected areas, and reducing and regulating the use of pollutants and hazardous substances.

In early 2019, a first grant round of the program was held and focused on projects which sought to improve the long-term sustainability of commercial fishing in ways that support the objectives of Australian Marine Parks. Twelve projects worth $5 million were selected for funding. These projects are being delivered by eight fishing industry peak bodies around Australia.

This second grant round is dedicated to the many groups and sectors having an interest in how our parks are managed which have the capability and capacity to assist the Director of National Parks with this important task. The objectives of this grants round are two-fold:

1. to support interested and capable organisations and community groups to engage in marine park management; and
2. to improve knowledge and understanding of Australian Marine Parks.

These objectives will be achieved by funding projects that best contribute to the desired vision, objectives and 10-year outcomes of the management programs identified in the Australian Marine Parks management plans (or for the South-east Network, the management strategies identified in the management plan).

The program is administered by the Department of Social Services' Community Grants Hub (the Hub), on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (the department) under a Whole of Australian Government initiative to streamline grant processes across agencies.

Selection process

Projects were selected through an open competitive selection process.

The submitted applications were screened for eligibility and compliance against the requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, including the provision of the required budget and project plan attachments.

A Selection Advisory Panel (SAP) considered the applications and made funding recommendations to the decision maker. The SAP comprised a Chair and four members from the department, with expertise and knowledge of the policy, program delivery and industry of the grant. The SAP was observed by a Probity Advisor on behalf of the Community Grants Hub.

The SAP assessed whether applications represented value for money and made final recommendations to the decision maker by considering the following factors:

- the initial preliminary score against the assessment criteria
- the overall objective/s to be achieved in providing the grant
- whether the proposed project is in scope (if applicable)
- the relative value of the grant sought and levels of co-contribution
- the extent to which the evidence in the application demonstrates it will contribute to meeting the outcomes/objectives of the Our Marine Parks Round Two
- the extent to which the applicant demonstrates a commitment to the Our Marine Parks Round Two
- the risks, financial, fraud and other, the applicant or project poses for the department
- distributions of grants across type of applicant, Australian Marine Parks and management programs.

The Minister for the Environment provided final approval of the successful projects including the grant funding amounts awarded.

General feedback for applicants

Details about what made a strong response to each assessment criterion is provided in the criteria-specific feedback section below.

Successful applicants proposed activities that were eligible, appropriate and considered effective for achieving the program objectives. They demonstrated their suitability for public funding, value for money and met the requirements outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines. Successful applications included strong responses to all assessment criteria.

This feedback is based on the information provided by the department's assessment team and SAP during the funding round.

Writing and providing details

Applications needed to clearly and concisely address the selection criteria. It was difficult to assess poorly written and verbose applications, so careful editing is advised. The proper and discerning use of sub-headings and dot points in some applications assisted in improving their readability.

Some applicants did not effectively adhere to the word limits, providing too much background information but not enough detail on the proposed project. Low scoring applications often lacked enough detail to describe:

- *The need for the grant activity* – applications providing limited or no details about the need for the project activities generally did not score well. Assessors need to be able to determine from the application why the proposed activity is needed and how it will address the need. Higher scoring applications provided quantitative evidence to demonstrate need for the activity and explained how the activities would address the need.

- *Project effectiveness* – applications that did not clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of project activities in achieving the program outcomes did not score well. Applications which clearly showed how the project will achieve the program outcomes were generally well rated by assessors. Higher scoring applications clearly articulated measures to monitor project effectiveness and explained how this would contribute to program outcomes.

Contribution towards program outcomes

To be awarded funding, applications needed to clearly demonstrate the project would deliver the program objectives.

In general, many unsuccessful applications did not sufficiently demonstrate how their project would contribute to program outcomes. In order to improve a project's relevance to the program should there be any future rounds, applicants should consider:

- checking the Grant Opportunity Guidelines to ensure the proposed project is a good fit for the program, including identifying clear and specific outcomes related to the relevant Australian Marine Parks management program or programs (or management strategies)
- justifying the delivery approach.

Capacity to deliver

Low scoring applications commonly did not strongly demonstrate the applicants had the capacity to successfully deliver the project. It was important to:

- demonstrate an applicant's ability to deliver projects of the nature, size and complexity outlined in their proposal
- ensure appropriate governance structures are in place
- ensure the project was adequately resourced and explain how those delivering the project were well qualified and suitable to do so
- clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of different organisations involved in the project (including project partners or co-contributors)
- include a strong focus on the capability to engage relevant expertise, including any technical expertise, required to achieve positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

Criteria-specific feedback

Criterion 1 (45%) – Demonstrate how your project meets one or more of the following objectives:

(a) facilitates the engagement of marine park users in activities to support the management of Australian Marine Parks, and

(b) assists in engaging marine park users in activities that contribute to the knowledge of Australian Marine Parks.

Sub-criterion	Sub-criterion feedback
Strong applicants: • referenced the relevant Australian Marine Parks management plan or plans • identified the clear and specific outcomes related to the Australian Marine Parks management program or programs (or management strategies) as they relate to their project and demonstrated how their project enhances the engagement of marine park users and the community generally • focused on clear, specific and achievable outcomes rather than trying to address multiple programs and outcomes.	Strong responses clearly described: • how the project supported management of an Australian Marine Park in Commonwealth waters • how the project supported the outcomes of one or more management programs • how specific activities would achieve actions related to the management programs • the activities to be undertaken, project outcomes, monitoring and evaluation, in-kind contributions, and risks and dependencies • the need for the project and/or the gaps the project will meet • how the proposed project does not duplicate other activities • how the proposed project leverages off existing knowledge (if available). Weaker responses did not clearly demonstrate: • how the project would support Australian Marine Parks and management program outcomes • how marine park users' engagement would be facilitated by the project.

Criterion 2 (15%) – Demonstrate your capability to deliver the project on time and within budget

Sub-criterion	Sub-criterion feedback
Strong applicants: • used examples to describe their organisation's experience with developing and implementing similar or like projects • explained the relevant skills, experience and qualifications held by key personnel and their role in managing the project • outlined the governance, management, financial and administration systems their organisation will use to support the implementation and delivery of the activity to achieve positive outcomes for all stakeholders on time and within budget.	Strong responses clearly described: • the experience of the key personnel and organisation in administering grants and securing outcomes • how partner organisations also had the capacity to successfully deliver similar projects • key personnel with the appropriate skills and experience, and how those key personnel were engaged in the project deliverables • established governance and administrative arrangements within their organisation and with key partners. Weaker responses did not clearly demonstrate: • how key personnel would be involved in managing the project and their capabilities • the organisational systems in place to support the delivery of the project as described in the project plan.

Criterion 3 (15%) – Demonstrate how your activity will achieve value for money

Sub-criterion	Sub-criterion feedback
Strong applicants: • explained how their organisation's activity will achieve positive outcomes for the wider community, targeted marine user groups or stakeholders that would not occur without grant funding • outlined how all costs associated with the delivery of their organisation's activity are competitive in the market • outlined how any major expenditure item (including capital) is justified to achieve the objectives of the project.	Strong responses clearly described: • how project outcomes would be additional to existing activities • a budget that was value for money, realistic and market value • how the project would benefit the wider community • that the budget is proportioned in an effective way to achieve project outcomes • the co-contributions of partners involved in the project • in-kind contributions. Weaker responses did not clearly demonstrate: • financial or in-kind contributions from the applicant or partners • reasonable budgeted costs in relation to the project, including administration and capital costs.

Criterion 4 (25%) – Demonstrate stakeholder and community engagement

Sub-criterion	Sub-criterion feedback
Strong applicants: • identified and described the involvement of key stakeholders in the proposed project (including expressions or support or commitment from project partners and contributors, if required) • demonstrated high levels of co-contributions (financial and in-kind) by their organisation and/or other parties such as external partners or state or territory funding schemes • outlined any Indigenous or community engagement achieved through the project objectives, including participation or support.	Strong responses clearly described: • involvement of key stakeholders, including Indigenous and community groups • the partnership arrangements with co-contributors • how stakeholder engagement would occur and how it would lead to improved activity outcomes. Weaker applications did not clearly demonstrate: • high levels of co-contributions from their organisation or other partners • how key stakeholders, community and/or Indigenous groups would be involved in the project.