Threatened Species Recovery Hub

National Environmental Science Programme

Key factors for effective partner integration and governance for threatened species recovery

Anja Skroblin[1,5], Kaye Currey[1], Jen Grindrod[1], Simon Nally[2], Rachel Morgain[3], Ram Pandit[4], Stephen T. Garnett[1]

Final Report December 2020

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA
Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Australian National University
THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

[1] Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory 0909, Australia

[2] Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Australian Government, Canberra, ACT, Australia

[3] Fenner School of Environment and Society, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, 2601, Australia

[4] Centre for Environmental Economics & Policy, UWA School of Agriculture and Environment, M087, University of Western Australia, Perth WA 6009, Australia

[5] School of BioSciences, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne VIC 3010, Australia

Cite this publication as: Skroblin, A., Currey, K., Grindrod, J., Nally, S., Morgain, R., Pandit, R., Garnett, S.T. 2020. Key factors for effective partner integration and governance for threatened species recovery. NESP Threatened Sprecies Recovery Hub Project 6.6 final report, Brisbane.

For more information contact Stephen Garnett (stephen.garnett@cdu.edu.au)

Acknowledgements

This project was led by researchers at Charles Darwin University, with support from researchers at the University of Western Australia and Australian National University. It was funded by the Australian Federal Government' National Environmental Science Program's Threatened Species Recovery Hub. We thank all the interviewees who gave their time and shared their expertise and experiences during interviews. This project interacted with people and projects that have taken place across many Indigenous Countries, we pay our respects to the Traditional Owners and Indigenous Groups that interacted with our case-studies and whose traditional lands we live and work on.

Cover image: Jaana Dielenberg from Charles Darwin University discussing gamba grass invasion within a National Park with a ranger from the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service. Image: Michael Lawrence Taylor

Contents

List of tables

List of Figures

Executive Summary

The common assumption that partnerships increase the effectiveness of threatened species conservation has never been tested. This question is complex, as there are many types of partnership, reasons to partner, and various costs incurred, and potential benefits received. Here we investigate the collaborative process of partnerships and how they can lead to better outcomes for threatened species conservation. We assess the conditions where partnerships have supported the solving of environmental problems, the activities carried out and the goals achieved, including whether ecological, economic and social objectives have been met.

We did so by interviewing people from a cross-section of partnerships across Australia that have focused on threatened species or threatened ecological communities. We conducted 44 interviews with partners from 24 partnerships focused on 23 threatened species or threatened ecological communities. We attempted to interview two or more organisation types involved in each case study to capture differing sentiments. The semi-structured interviews were carried out over the phone, recorded and transcribed. A deductive coding method was used to identify common themes within the interview data and NVivo was used to code the data.

The results of our thematic analysis of interviews provide an overview of the reasons why groups and individuals are embarking on partnerships for threatened species across Australia. We describe the aims and benefits of these partnerships, common challenges to be overcome and the key ingredients of partnerships if they are to achieve recovery objectives. We outline common pathways for partnership initiation, the roles and timeframes around which partnerships structure themselves and how these partnerships tend to be managed.

Our study describes the circumstances where a partnership is likely to increase effectiveness, the roles partners play in threatened species recovery, and the costs associated with establishing and maintaining partnerships. The results of this study can help both practitioners developing programs for threatened species and ecological communities, and agencies, governments, conservation organisations, and land managers who make decisions on whether to invest in establishing and servicing partnerships to support threatened species conservation.

Five main themes emerged regarding partnering for TS recovery

1. **Co-benefits: Partnerships are not only important for realising positive recovery actions but create additional benefits for the environment, partners and society**
   Recovery is rarely about just threat removal – the co-benefits are often equally important for sustained amelioration.
2. **Complexity: Partnerships are especially important for achieving complex recovery objectives**
   Many threatened species face 'wicked' problems that can only be solved with a variety of viewpoints and skills.
3. **Boundaries: Partnerships are almost always essential for working across jurisdictions**
   Reaching national recovery goals can rarely be achieved if jurisdictions work independently. The same is often true when species are present across multiple tenure types.
4. **Not a free ride: The benefits of partnerships outweigh the costs of going it alone**
   Partnerships take effort to establish and maintain. Communication, relationships and organisational management all take time. These are easily outweighed by direct and indirect benefits that would be impossible to achieve without collaboration.
5. **Governance and planning: Partnership cohesiveness, stability and motivation most often emerges when there are clear goals and transparent governance**
   Clarifying roles and responsibilities during participatory development of a plan for species recovery sows the seeds of successful partnerships, even if these change over time as needs evolve.

Successful partnerships were those that were both 1) functional and 2) meet recovery objectives

We found that, to achieve "functional success", partnerships needed to be cohesive and stable. This was supported by having good structures to facilitate working together which was, in turn, largely driven by the interactions among people who were involved – how well they worked together, and how purposefully they worked to create clear objectives and structures to foster participation and inclusivity.

To achieve "recovery success" required the additional ingredients of bringing together the right people with the right skills, and having strategic plans for species recovery, research to guide evidence-based recovery actions, secure funding and relevant stakeholders. The greatest strength of partnerships was that they brought together skill sets and capacity that single organisations did not possess.

We identified 14 key ingredients for creating functional partnerships that aim to meet recovery objectives

Ingredients for creating cohesion, stability and motivation

- Find a champion, leader or coordinator
- Assign adequate time and resources to establishing and maintaining relationships
- Establish clear objectives and understand each partners' expectations
- Set-up an appropriate governance structure
- Be inclusive and acknowledge contributions of others
- Plan for partnership time commitments and for potential risks
- Communicate clearly and often

Ingredients to achieve recovery success

- Bring together appropriate people with appropriate skills
- Establish clear recovery objectives and understand each partners' expectations
- Create strategic plans to guide recovery actions
- Undertake research to guide evidence-based management
- Secure funding and support
- Engage relevant stakeholders (landholders, community etc)
- Include advocacy on the importance of recovering the focal threatened species

Researchers at work at the nursery on Norfolk Island. Image: Noam Levin

Introduction

The assumption that partnerships increase the effectiveness of threatened species conservation is a challenging question that has never been tested. This is partly because there are many types of partnership, reasons to partner, and various costs and benefits incurred (Van Huijstee et al. 2007; Bjärstig 2017; Runhaar & Polman 2018). Many studies have investigated the process of partnering (structure, diversity, roles), but few have considered 1) whether partnering actually leads to what might be defined as success, 2) what aspects of partnerships lead to the derived benefit (Dowling et al. 2004), and 3) key success factors (McQuaid 2010).

Here we investigate the collaborative process of partnerships and how they can lead to better outcomes for threatened species conservation. We investigate this question in the four sections of this report:

1. **Overview of partnerships for threatened species and ecological communities in Australia**
   The context of partnerships which are occurring for conservation in Australia, the organisations involved, organisation roles, the processes groups use and recovery team linkages.
2. **Exploring the value of partnerships to threatened species**
   The benefits, aims, contributions, and costs of partnerships.
3. **Challenges to partnerships for threatened species**
   The challenges that arise for conservation partnerships and ways that these challenges can be overcome.
4. **Key conditions for building successful partnerships for threatened species conservation**
   The main dimensions of successful partnerships, and the ingredients identified for achieving positive outcomes.

For the purposes of brevity, the use of 'threatened species' in this report includes ecological communities.

For our study, we considered partnerships, as:

- a voluntary collaborative arrangement where partners from otherwise independent bodies (government, NGO, business, academia etc.) cooperate to achieve a common goal (in our case a direct benefit for threatened species and/or communities).
- partners as being separate from stakeholders (those impacted by actions but not guiding actions), funders and interested parties, although these groups or processes may be engaged by the partnership.

Our definition aligns with others within the sustainable development field (for instance Van Huijstee et al. 2007; Bjärstig 2017) .

Overview of methodology:

Reviewing literature to create a typology of partnerships and interview questions:

We carried out a review of literature to gather information on the various dimensions and typologies of how partnerships are classified. We developed interview questions (Appendix 1) through which we sought to gain information over the four key dimensions of successful partnerships (establishing relationships, achieving alignment, managing the partner interface, and generating benefits) (Murphy et al. 2015). We sought to gain information on the three broad categories of outcomes that are generally discussed in the partnership literature within the sustainability context: planned outcomes, process outcome and partner outcomes (Clarke & Fuller 2010), as these are viewed as having a positive effect on partnership success (Dowling et al. 2004; Bjärstig 2017).

Seeking case studies:

We sought a cross-section of partnerships that have focused, or are focusing, on threatened species or threatened ecological communities across Australia. First, we compiled a list of threatened Australian taxa based on EPBC and IUCN listings. For each taxon we approached taxon and regional experts (academics, state government agencies) to identify partnership activity for species occurring in Australia (see section 1.1).

We carried out 44 interviews with partners from 24 partnership focused on 23 threatened species or threatened ecological communities (see section 1.2). We attempted to interview two or more organisation types involved in each case study to capture differing sentiments. The semi-structured interviews (Appendix 1) were carried out over the phone, recorded and transcribed. We focused our effort on interviewing those actively involved in specific partnerships but to understand the benefits and challenges of a partnership arrangement over a single organisation's recovery actions, we asked interviewees to speak from their experience of working across a range of project types when considering their opinions of recovery action within partnerships.

Qualitative analysis:

For this study we applied qualitative thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun 2014) to identify, analyze and interpret patterns of meaning ("themes") within the qualitative interview data. We applied a deductive approach, where we came to the data with some preconceived themes that we expected to find in the data (based on theory and knowledge of partnerships literature). We built on these themes depending on the threads of underlying meaning we found in the interviews, and confirmed each step with the three researchers who were coding transcripts to compare, reappraise and verify the themes (following Vaismoradi et al. 2016). We created a coding book in NVivo (QSR International 1999), and used this software to identify themes and code the interview data.

Following this approach, we examined:

- people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences or values, attitudes, beliefs, motives and behaviours, including emotions, perceptions and actions
- the significance that participating in partnerships had for people's lives, environmental outcomes
- meanings that people attached to participating

With thematic analysis, patterns and themes in the data are assumed to capture something important in relation to research questions while recognising that the frequency that a theme is mentioned does not necessarily show how important it is. The significance of a theme is based on the extent to which the theme speaks to the research questions, and the emphasis that the interviewees place on these themes in their responses to questions (Braun & Clarke 2016). Our interview data was qualitative, aiming to develop a rich knowledge of partnership processes (sensu Wood and Welch 2010); we did not collect interview data in a manner that allowed us to perform statistical analyses or quantify the strength of associations.

Limitations

For several reasons, we were unable to include case studies where partnerships were led by Indigenous people. While initial project plans included a set of case-studies where Indigenous partners played a key role, and we had advanced planning on which case-studies to include and the ethics of the approach we intended to take, these plans were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic which made interviewing of Indigenous people and organisations unworkable. Unfortunately, due to the timing of the pandemic and project timelines, we therefore had to abandon the case-studies with key Indigenous partners. This represents a major limitation of this work as it is not possible to reach a full view of the nature of partnerships formed for threatened species recovery in Australia today without considering the contribution and approach of Indigenous organisations and individuals. However, we were able to include Indigenous partnerships within the case studies chosen (Section 1.7).

Ethics

Ethics approval to carry out this study was received from the Human Research Ethics Committee, Charles Darwin University (H19071). In this report we keep the interviewees names and threatened species names anonymous. Individual partnerships should not be identifiable.

Section 1: Overview of partnerships for threatened species and threatened ecological communities in Australia.

1.1 Identifying partnerships

We used a two-step method to find a cross-section of case-studies that were focusing on threatened species or threatened ecological communities across Australia. We first compiled lists of threatened Australian taxa based on EPBC listing, IUCN listing, a recent review of the status of Australian frogs (Gillespie et al. 2020) and a list of the most threatened freshwater fish (Lintermans et al. 2020). Lists were compiled for plants, birds, mammals (including marine), freshwater fish, squamates, freshwater turtles, sea turtles, frogs, invertebrates and threatened ecological communities. We included species with a conservation status of Threatened i.e. Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered (taxa recorded as extinct, extinct in the wild, approval disallowed, currently ineligible or data deficient were not included). As there are unequal numbers of taxa within the different conservation categories (more listed as Vulnerable than Critically Endangered), we randomly ordered the species within each taxon list in a pattern of CE, E, V, CE, E, V, etc., until each category is exhausted.

We attempted to capture most partnerships across Australia that are focused on threatened taxa and ecological communities (Table 1). To do so we provided taxon and regional experts (academics, state government agencies who have oversight over recovery of each taxon) with our definition of partnerships (see Introduction) and asked them to identify any partnership activities for any of the species in their area of specialisation and provide details of this partnership. We also complemented expert feedback about partnership activity by undertaking web searches. While our estimates inevitably under-represent partnership activity - for some taxon classes (lizards, snakes, frogs, invertebrates and plants) there were few experts with a wide overview of conservation action and limited documentation available through web searches – we believe we obtained a reasonable representation of major activity occurring in Australia at the time of our inquiry. Our methodology does not allow comparison of the extent of recovery action undertaken within and outside partnerships but this was never likely to have been possible because the diversity of context would have precluded comparison of like with like.

For each taxon class, we randomly sorted identified partnerships, and used up to 10 potential case-studies from the partnerships at the top of each list as a short-list from which to seek interviews. We created a separate list for potential case-studies that have significant input from Indigenous partners as a different ethics approval was needed for such interviews.

Table 1. *Partnerships identified by taxon list*

Life form	Total # species listed	Total # partnerships identified	Proportion of species within the life form with identified partnerships	Method of information gathering
Sea turtles	6	5	0.83	Internet research
Freshwater turtles	7	3	0.43	Internet research, Garnett et al. (2018)
Mammals (including marine)	107	33	0.31	National mammal expert
Frogs	42	13	0.31	National frog expert Qld frog expert Vic frog expert State governments: NSW and SA Internet research, Garnett et al. (2018)
Snake or lizards	71	8	0.11	Internet research, Garnett et al. (2018)
Birds	378	77	0.20	National bird expert
Freshwater fish	50	10	0.20	National fish expert State governments: SA and Vic, Garnett et al. (2018)
Threatened Ecological Communities	82	12	0.15	State government SA Eastern Australia expert Internet research
Invertebrates	67	9	0.13	National butterfly expert State government SA Garnett et al. (2018)
Plants	1371	48	0.04	Plant expert WA State governments: NT, NSW and Tas
TOTAL	**2181**	**218**	**0.10**	

1.2 Case-studies and interviews

We attempted to interview a cross-section of partnerships that represent: different taxa (Figure 1), locations (Figure 2), conservation status (Figure 3) and organisational type (Figure 4). To be included in the study, partnerships needed to be Australian, and have as one aim some form of benefit for a threatened species and/or threatened ecological community (though there may have been other goals).

From September 2019 to February 2020 we carried out 44 interviews with partners from 24 partnerships focused on 23 threatened species / threatened ecological communities. This represents 11% of the threatened species or threatened ecological communities recorded as being the focus of partnerships across Australia (23/218). An additional two interviews were discarded as the projects turned out not to fit the definition of partnership (the organisations or individuals were not working in collaboration with other independent bodies, but rather between individuals in one state government or liaising with stakeholders who had no independent decision-making power). To capture differing sentiments, we attempted to get two or more interviews with different organisation types involved in each case study. In total we analysed the interviews of 44 people who were actively involved in partnerships including researchers/ experts, project managers within governments, natural resource management groups (NRMs) or non-government organisations (NGOs), representatives from community groups, and employees of partnering businesses.

Each semi-structured interview consisted of a series of questions (Appendix 1) that aimed to capture perspectives from each interviewee on the:

- reasons for partnering for threatened species
- the value of partnering
- the challenges of partnering
- key aspects for success.

Interviews were carried out over the phone, recorded and transcribed. We used a deductive coding method to identify common themes within the interview data and used NVivo to code the data. We carried out a series of exploratory analyses (results described below) to investigate patterns and themes in the responses and how this relates to benefits, success (or challenges) within partnerships.

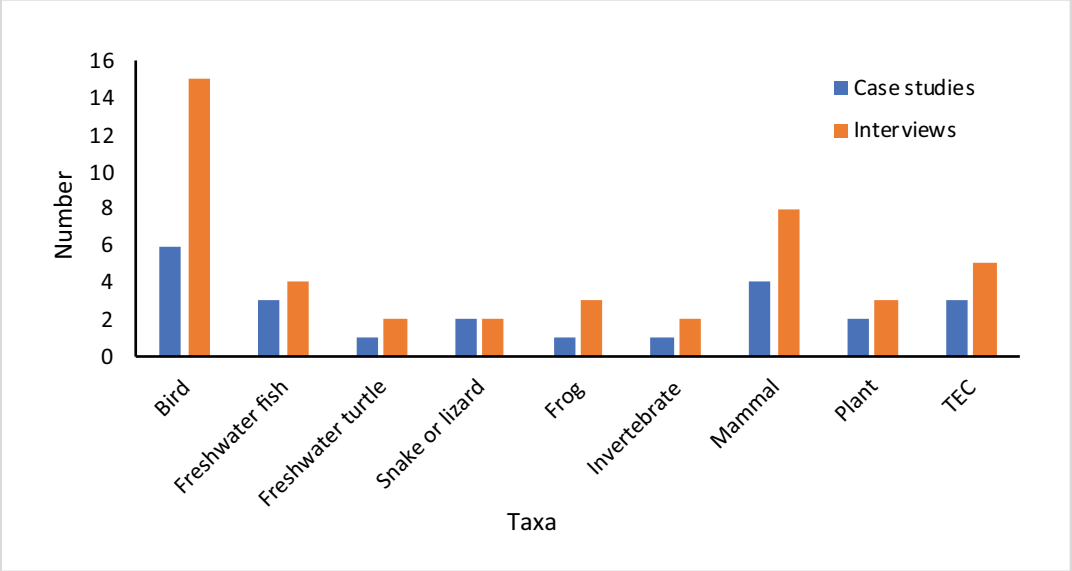

Figure 1. *Number of case-studies and interviews by taxa*

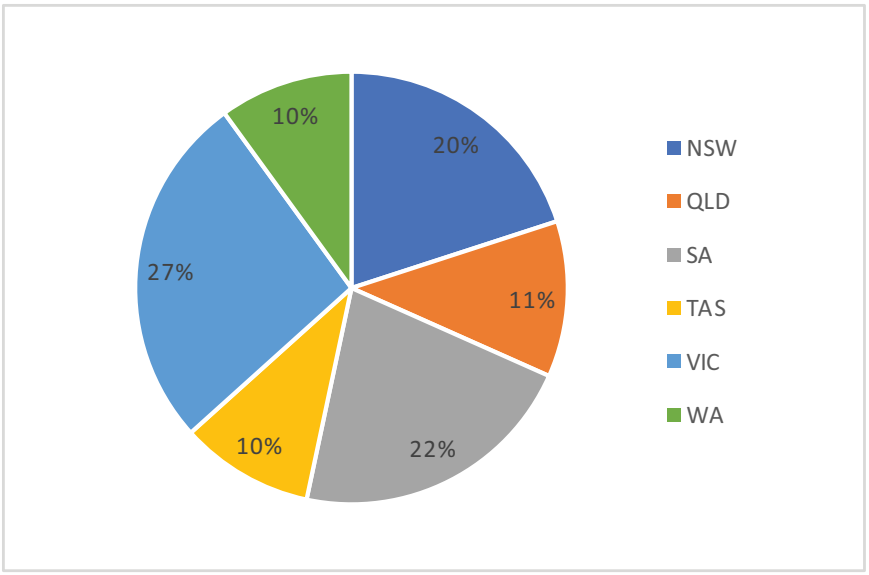

Figure 2. Percentage of the case-studies operating within each state. Where partnerships were operating across multiple states, each state was counted. Note: NT was to be Indigenous projects.

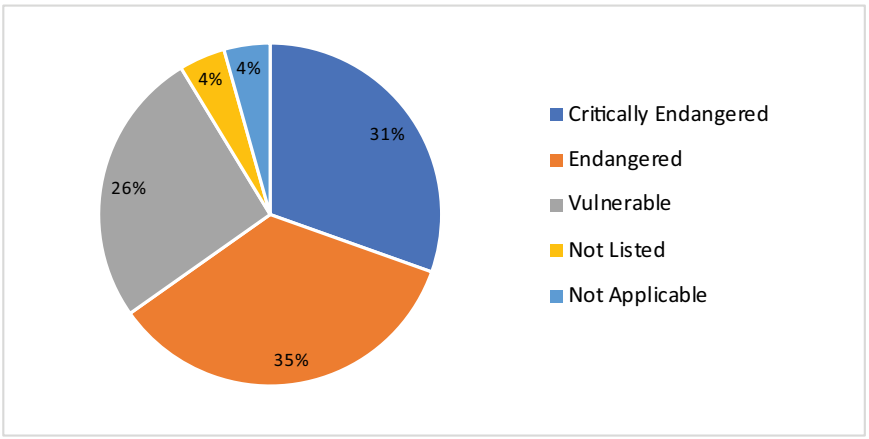

Figure 3. Conservation status of the case-study taxa.Note: Non-listed species were included where independent expert advice indicated that they qualified for listing but the listing process had not yet been finalised. Species were classed as "not applicable" where a partnership worked across a number of threatened and at-risk species.

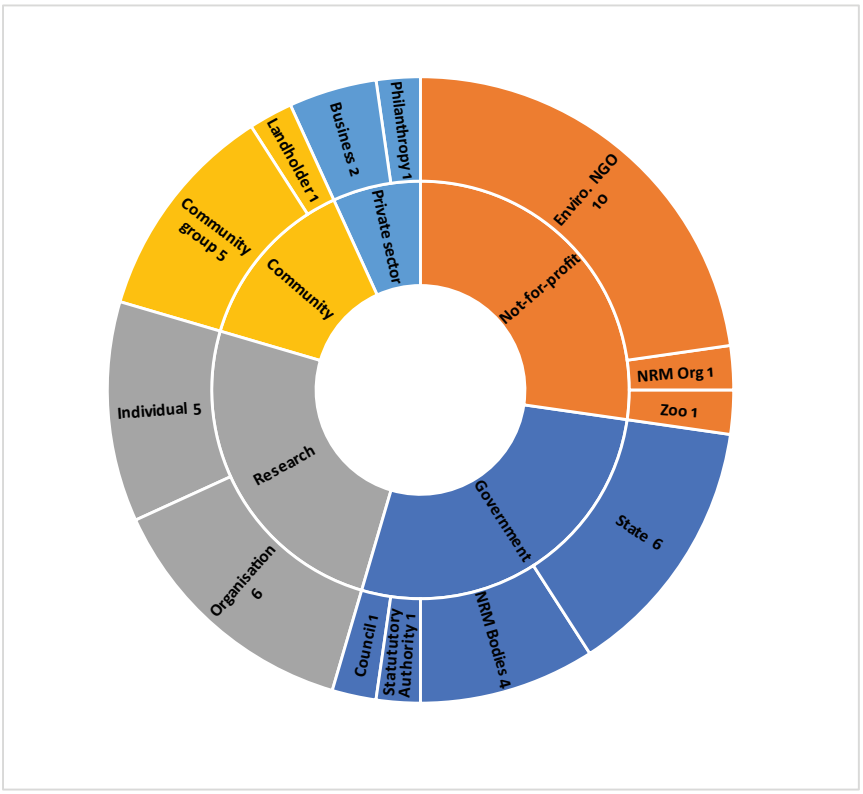

Figure 4. The organisation types that the interviewees represented. The first level of grouping shows the broad organisational categories, followed by more detail. Interviewees (n=44) were classified as representing research organisations when the organisation was listed as a partner (e.g. CSIRO), interviewees were listed as individual researchers when their involvement in the partnership was not affiliated with organisation (e.g. independent consultants).

1.3 Who is partnering and types of partnerships

The partnerships included in this study can be considered as one or a combination of:

Actors involved:

- Public-private partnerships - between government and other organisations
- Intra-sector - partnerships that are cross-organisational from the same sector

Objectives based:

- Project based – multi-stakeholder that are based around an issue
- Capacity-building - partnerships designed to build skills, capabilities and resilience
- Learning / research - partnering specifically for knowledge generation

1.3.1 Why groups are partnering

We found seven main reasons for why organisations formed partnerships for threatened species or threatened ecological community recovery rather than working alone (Table 2). Often groups had multiple reasons for partnering. They also identified numerous benefits that groups derive from being part of a partnership (explored in section 2).

Table 2. *Reasons for partnering for species recovery and the benefits derived by partners*

Why partner	Some benefits to partners
1. Synergistic benefits arising from amalgamating, coordinating or collaborating where many groups are working on the same threatened species (often at a large-scale and project too big for any one organisation)	Broad skills, approaches, knowledge Enhanced geographic spread Overcoming individual constraints Networks Accessing data Accessing funding
2. Align or unify around a shared responsibility where multiple actors are impacted, or share similar goals	Remove competition for resources when organisations have same threatened species aims Share the load Share resources, skills, capacity
3. Collective front to landholders or the community	Community buy-in and involvement Single point of contact Managing conflict Raising awareness
4. Partnering offers opportunities for new projects to be initiated or projects to be expanded	Useful products New insights and techniques Different perspectives Motivates other work, builds momentum
5. Complex conservation arrangements needed across multiple property tenures and jurisdictions	Working across boundaries Overcome organisational constraints Broader reach Accessing land Community buy-in
6. Opportunities that are only available to partnerships – requirement or grant of governing body	Funding Resource sharing Working across jurisdictions
7. Fill gap in conservation actions that were beyond the remit of governments	Community driven outcomes Novel recovery actions

1.3.2 How partnerships were initiated and established

There were many ways in which partnerships were established and the consortium of partners brought together. We found examples of internal partnership brokers (those working within one of the partner organisations), but no examples where partnerships were brokered by external people or groups that did not remain associated with the partnership (at least in the initial stages). Partnerships were often designed to bring together:

1. Governing bodies or responsible groups
2. Relevant landholders (private, Indigenous, government etc.)
3. Holders of specific skills or capacities to help meet objectives or on-ground actions
4. Key stakeholders
5. Previous partners
6. Interested parties

There were several common ways by which partnerships were initiated and established:

- Champion-initiated

  One common initiation practice was when a champion (person or organisation) came up with and promoted the idea of the partnership and its objectives and built the consortium. The impetus was often a funding opportunity linked to a partnership arrangement (such as Caring for Country, Threatened Species Fund, Saving Our Species or Linkage grants). Alternatively, the champion for the partnership had witnessed the need for collective conservation action and brought the consortium together separate to the timeline of a funding grant. Sometimes champions felt "alone" in their conservation efforts and therefore pulled together a partnership to create a "community feeling and support network".

  "I gathered a consortium of people around me as I wrote that grant application. They all had input into it and then we were successful and off and running since then." (I.21)

- Collective initiation

  Partnerships were sometimes spurred into action based on the collective realisation that a species was becoming more imperiled or for the need for coordinated action. Often conversations at regional or national meetings, or knowledge sharing through established networks, were the starting points for these initiatives. This was particularly true for species with broad distributions where multiple organisations were working independently for the species across regions, or there were multiple actors in the same region.

  "Collectively we saw that this species had gone from being Endangered to being Critically Endangered… we undertook a review of the monitoring data and that showed that there was a 93% decline… That rang alarm bells and so the key organisations and other stakeholder groups met to discuss the status of the species… collectively everyone saw the plight and said: "we've got to do something"… the partnership grew from there" (I.14)

- Previous partnership or relationship

  Current partnerships often grew out of historical partnerships or previous relationships. Either by the evolution and expansion of long-standing partnerships with increasing investment from partners and inclusion of new partners, or a shift in the objectives of a partnership based on priority actions identified by previous work. Often the existing relationships and communications provided the platform for new ideas and opportunities to be generated. Partners could also leverage off the momentum and reputation built by previous projects and connections to start new initiatives. Several NGOs reported having long-standing collaborations with other organisations that bring together complementary skill-sets, and these key collaborators are often involved in focused partnerships. Champions were sometimes pivotal in pushing previous partnerships to evolve into new remits.

  "Because there was an existing partnership there, working through that existing consortium, we saw an opportunity to try and apply for more funding to continue the work." (I.01)

  "Having an existing relationship made everything easier because it was ready made." (I.09)

- Funding opportunity

  Many interviewees stated that the partnership was originally initiated through a funding opportunity (for instance Federal Government's Threatened Species Fund, NSW Saving Our Species, or private donor) that allowed one organisation or individual (an enabler, not necessarily an on-going champion) to pull together a consortium. In some instances, these organisations or individuals remained the project lead, in other instances the partnership evolved from the initial funding with different partners and roles.

  "The organisations that were recruited, for want of a better word, were the ones that were the key to immediate actions that needed implementing." (I.27)

  "Yes, our NRM group was the lead. We got the funds and everyone else had agreements under that." (I.03)

- Community-driven action

  Partnerships were also initiated to fill gaps in conservation action that were beyond the remit of governments, such as creating systems for covenants and stewardship on private land, or to support community action (such as 'friends of' groups). In several instances the partnership grew out of small conservation initiatives started by 'friends of' groups or catchment management authorities that then snow-balled into larger partnerships as the project progressed.

  "about 15 years ago we just sent out a big invite to anyone and everyone that worked on the species group, saying let's have a workshop and work out what everyone's doing and how we can move forward so we're not all duplicating and we're all working together. And that was how the partnership was formed" (I.42)

  "the landholders are our partners because we can't do any of this without them. They're really key to everything that we do and it's their properties that we're working on. We're thankful that they allow us to go on there regularly and we do long-term monitoring" (I.30)

- Legislative requirements

  Several partnerships were initiated as part of mandated or government-supported governance requirements. In many cases these partnerships were created in response to legislative or program requirements or recommendations, government commitments, offsets or royalty agreements. The need to form partnerships as part of mandated program or legislative requirements sometimes overlapped with reputational considerations.

  "the work started with a requirement for the state government to fund some work to understand how the species was tracking... that was a specific project related to a gas pipeline... the community protested about that, and the Government responded by committing to doing some research" (I.26)

  "the mining company had a condition (relating to offsets) with the Commonwealth that they had to spend money on the species. They employed a researcher as a contractor to achieve that environmental condition, who got NGOs, local landholders and the University involved. That is how we came together initially" (I.10)

- Improving social license

  Partnerships by government, NGO or business groups were also created for reputational benefit, such as sustainability credentials or to improve public relations.

  "*If we don't take on partners, if the department was refusing to engage with any friends groups or anything like that, then clearly the department would be subject to accusations that we're just treating people like mushrooms and all that kind of stuff, which is not good PR."* (I.40)

  "One other partner is an energy partner and for them it's a "feel-good" project where they get some runs on the board in the environmental space." (I.12)

  "I think the biggest incentive for them really is their sustainability certification and wanting to be able to sell their product internationally. And part of demonstrating their commitment to the management of high conservation value is investing in research and management on important threatened species." (I.36)

1.4 Partner roles

In each interview we asked interviewees about the organisations involved in their partnership and the roles that each of these partners play. In general partnerships included from two to ten partners (Figure 5). Across our 44 interviews and 24 case studies, we classified organisations into 16 categories (Figure 6). There was a total of 186 partner organisations mentioned for our case studies, and on average seven organisations were mentioned as partners for each case study (minimum number of partners 2; maximum number of partners 17)

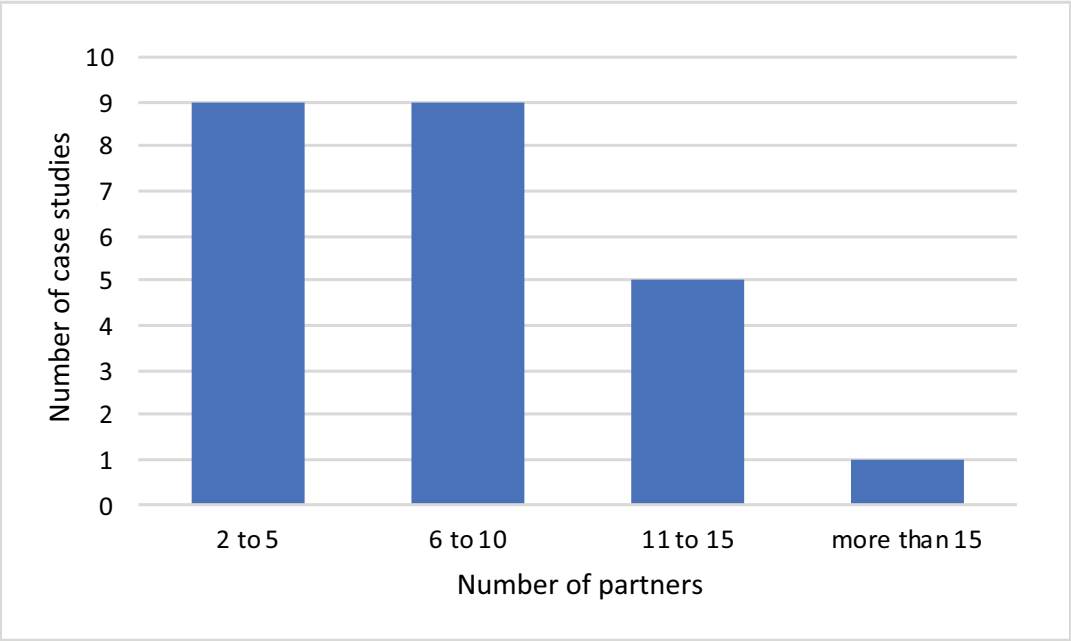

***Figure 5**. The number of organisations partnering across the 24 case studies.*

The organisation types that were most commonly mentioned as partners (which we therefore assume to be primary partners) were state government agencies, not for profit organisations, research organisations, NRM groups, and community groups. Relatively common were businesses, private landholders, local councils and Indigenous organisations. Least common partners in our case studies were industry bodies, philanthropic organisations (although they may be funders not partners) and schools (Figure 6).

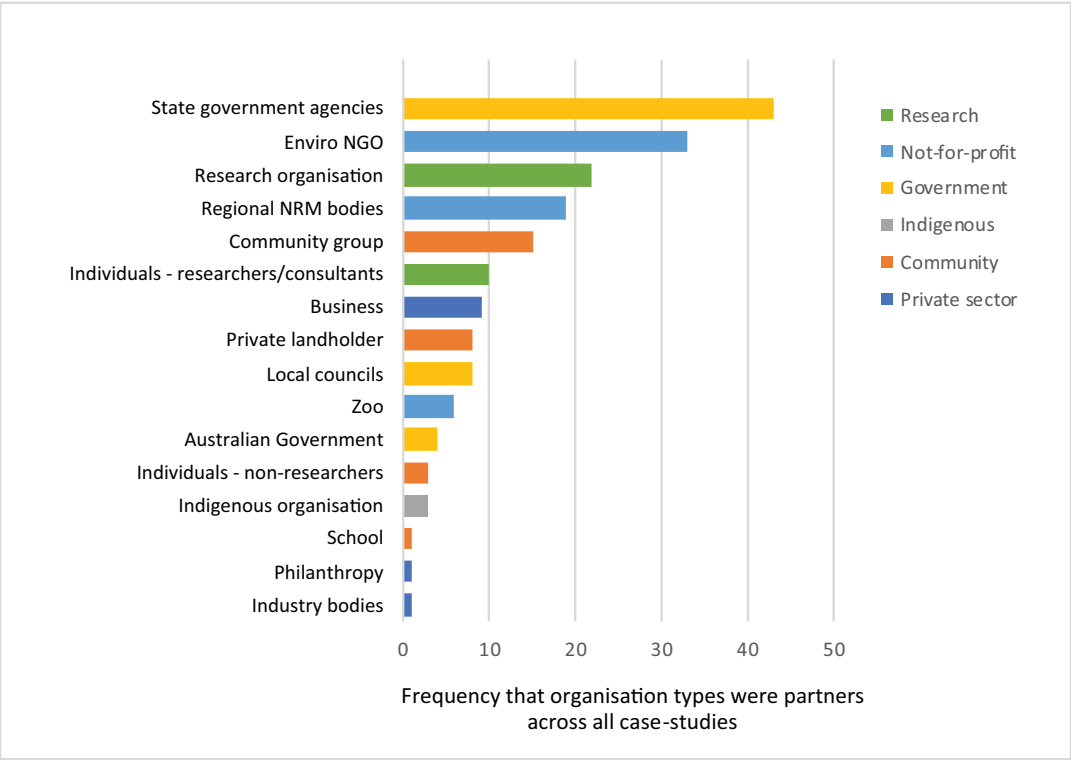

***Figure 6.** The frequency that different organisation types were partners across our 24 case studies.*

We used the interview data to classify the partners contribution into one or several of 14 different roles (Figure 7). Some organisation types tended to play many different roles within the partnerships (not for profit, regional NRM bodies, research organisations or state government organisations), whereas other organisation types tended to play a few specific roles. For example, local councils often provided land access, funding, management and community engagement, and individual researchers or consultants often played the role of champion, providing expert skills/ research, data, and brokership. Interviewees spoke of how partnerships defined roles based on the skill sets of their consortium, and that some partners took on multiple roles.

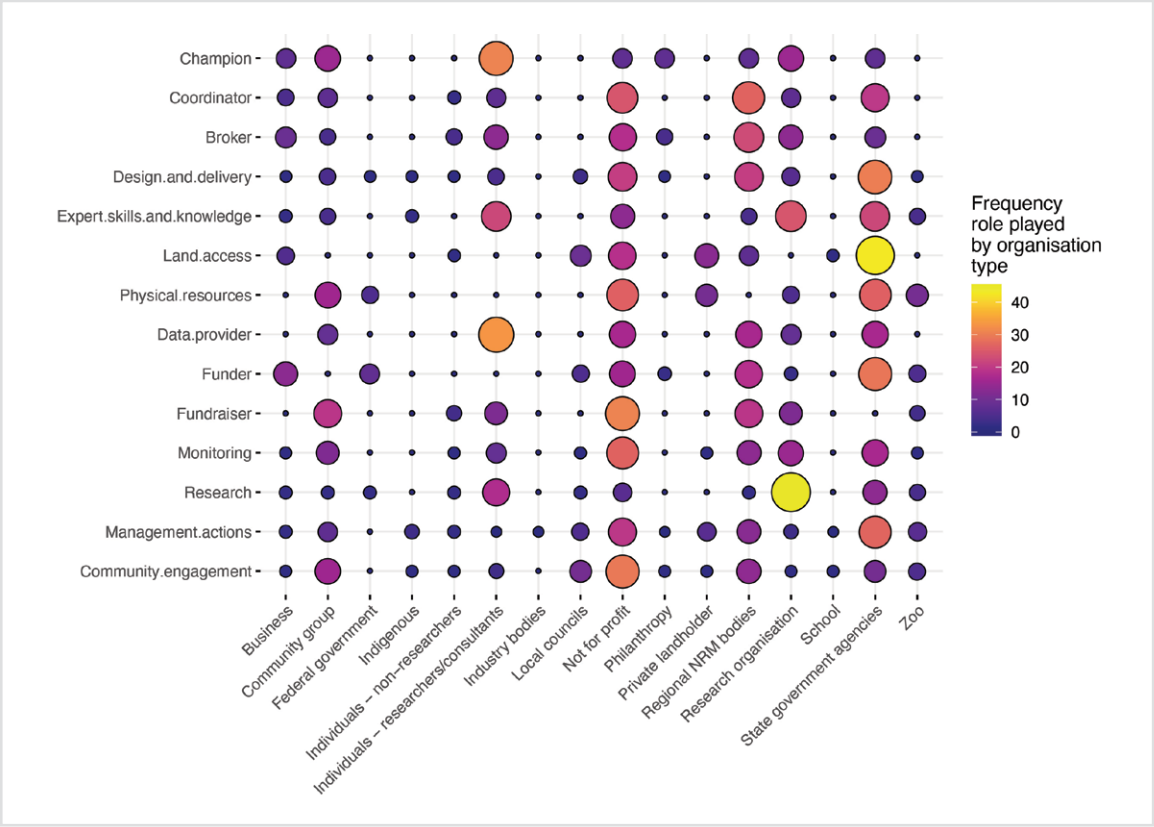

Figure 7. *The types of roles that partners played against the frequency that organisation types played that role*

1.4.1 The importance of enabling leadership

Many interviewees spoke at length on the importance of having a strong champion, coordinator(s) or key organisation who enabled the activities of the partnership. In some partnerships, the champion and coordinator roles (which we both define as part of leadership) were played by the same individual. In other partnerships, leadership was shared across people or organisations. Interviewees described the importance of a leadership role who keeps the partnership activities on track and coordinates the partner interface. This leader was either an individual (researcher or consultant) or a central organisation that had taken on the coordination role. Organisations were often identified as "lead" or "key" organisations because they held funding or played the coordination role. The central recovery team was often described as the leader of the partnership where they held the highest decision-making power or expertise.

"Our organisation has been the lead, in that we have been doing the species monitoring, collecting the data and, through the commencement of the funding program, had the availability of funds to then start up the project." (I.14)

"Our NRM coordinated the actions and made sure that they happened on time" (I.03)

"We have a coordinator and facilitator. He leads in that respect" (I.08)

"Because we put it in a grant and won it, now we're the project managers and we're accountable for meeting the milestones and expending the funds and so on" (I.21)

"The recovery team is the lead role, but the coordinator is based at the NRM who funds recovery actions" (I.35)

On the other hand, champions were described as spokespeople for the species, or were seen as passionate experts, with drive, resilience and bravery, who served as a role model for others to take on the champion role. Champions often went above and beyond their defined roles in their efforts to recover a species:

"He's like a terrier. He's passionate, he cares a lot about it... he'd do more than he should have or was paid for. But he was just out in people's faces. And not going away, just trying to get all those little grants that would keep his job going. And talking to the right people, he'd always fly to Canberra and talk to the federal government and try to get more money out of them. He was determined and passionate and personable and visionary - he was thinking ahead, he was talking to the right people." (I.31)

"I think it is probably a common theme having that one person who's passionate to help drive it and motivate for it. The champion, he's our contact and he's very enthusiastic and I think he helps drive that." (I.24)

"I think champions are one of the most important things in any of these programmes." (I.31)

However, being the champion for a species, was not without personal costs.

"It is my overwhelming experience that it really does come down to champions to keep pushing these things along and often it will fall over when that person can't do that anymore or decides not to. That's where a bit of cynicism creeps in at certain times - it really is left to one person to keep these things going. There is nothing strategic or formal in place to keep them going....it has just been me pushing it along and it would never have happened if it wasn't for me." (I.26)

Partnerships were described as ways for species champions to share the load with others, and interviewees provided positive sentiments about situations where multiple people felt like joint leaders for the recovery projects. Champions who can inspire others to act and take responsibility for the species can create harmonious partnerships that generate growing enthusiasm among interviewees.

"A lot of progress and how you achieve things comes down to personalities. And having, not just one champion, but champions, who get in and do stuff and who are respectful of other people." (I.13)

"I literally feel like equal champions. I don't walk in there and come out feeling like I'm not as important as everyone else in the room. Everyone's opinion is valued, everyone's actions are valued. It's quite unique. I've never been a part of something like that...how lovely it is to leave feeling uplifted, not feeling deflated." (I.44)

"Champions can create other champions. I think that's important for the younger generation coming through, that trickle feed effect of getting those leadership qualities with regards to that passion. And hopefully they can carry it on because you don't want it to just fall by the wayside. But we also have a recovery plan for 10 years, so it means some things will be done for the next 10 years. So that's helpful if I move on or whatever happens. But yes, I think passionate people have certainly played a part in having those connections with certain projects and partnerships." (I.24)

1.5 Length of time partnerships have been operating

The amount of time the interviewees had been involved in their partnerships varied; some interviewees had been involved in partnerships since their inception, others had joined at various stages during the partnership (Figure 8).

Nearly half of the interviewees (18/44) had been involved with their species for over ten years. Some had remained as part of a long-term partnership, while others had been involved in a range of partnerships for that species. Some had clearly acted as champions for the species, either by instigating partnerships or continuing to monitor or research the species even when no partnership existed.

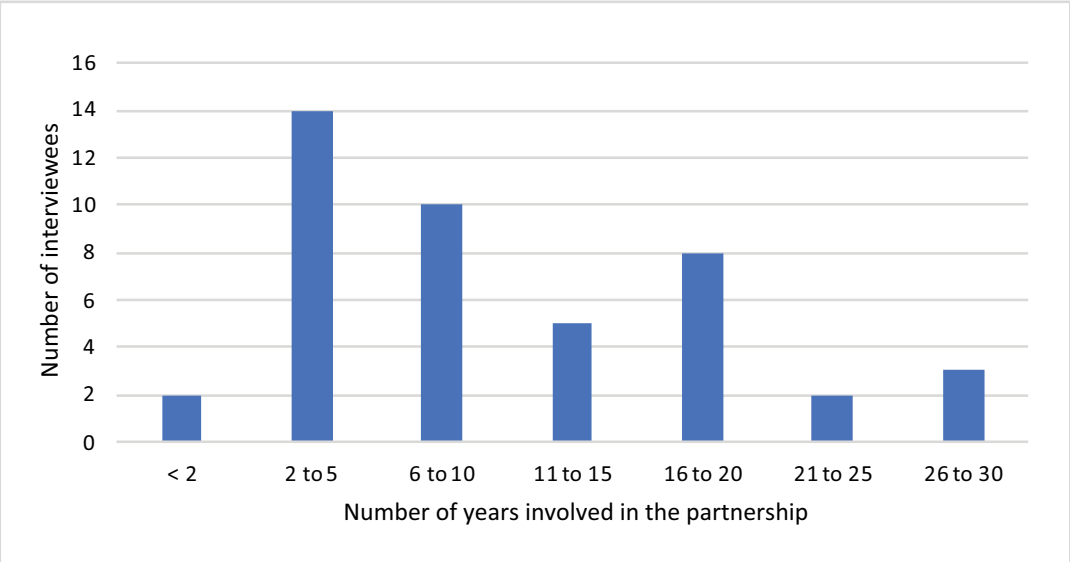

Figure 8. Period of time that interviewees have been involved in the partnership.
Note: These time lengths did not necessarily reflect the full duration of the partnership

We grouped partnerships into three classifications according to information provided by the interviewees as to their expectations of partnership duration:

- **Problem resolution:** Partnership had formed to deal with a specific issue, with limited plans to continue partnering beyond the problem resolution aim
- **Ongoing:** Partners had committed to long-term goals and funding was continually being sought; this included partnerships that had stalled due to a lack of funding but intended to keep going once further funding had been received.
- **Funding dependent:** Partnership had formed as part of a time-bound grant (there was often strong enthusiasm expressed to continue beyond the current funding if possible, but the eventuality whether that would happen was as yet unknown)

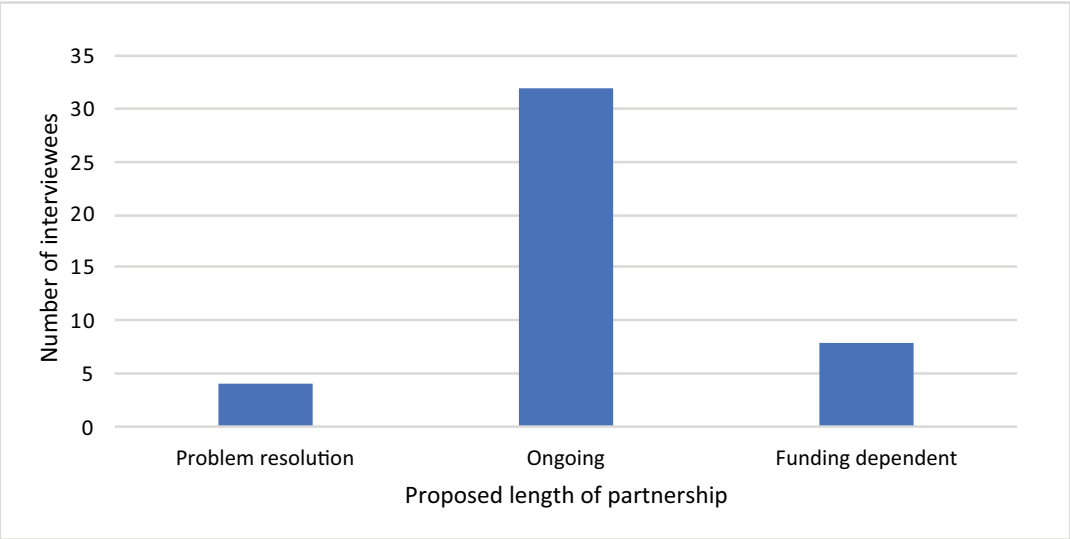

Figure 9. Intended timeframe of partnership as expressed by the interviewee.

The majority of partnerships were striving for long-term commitments and funding (32/44). One long-term partnership (a recovery team) that had been operating for more than 10 years was in the process of being disbanded (funding had dried up due to changing priorities of the state government who was a key partner). There were common themes between most of the partnerships that intended to operate long-term:

- the species was high profile or charismatic
- a recovery team existed
- State agencies were a key partner
- champions existed in the form of either an individual or highly committed 'friends of' groups
- there was interest in managing the on-going recovery needs of the species

Partnerships that had existed for less than five years either:

- were newly established but with funding beyond five years. E.g. two partnerships had formed as a result of the NSW Saving our Species funding (funded for 6 years, with the last 4 years constituted from in-kind contributions);
- had been established to resolve a specific issue or achieve a specific outcome. E.g. translocation of a species (1 case study);
- had primary aims associated with improved knowledge / research to support recovery that were funded by short-term grants (2 case studies).

1.6 Managing the partner interface

We consider the working arrangements between the partners under four themes:

- Achieving alignment between the organisations' missions, strategies and values
- Formality of agreements
- Decision-making processes
- Communication approaches

- **Achieving alignment between the organisations' missions, strategies and values**

  Some interviewees spoke of needing to find alignment between the priorities, cultures, timelines and approaches of the different partners. These differences were sometimes viewed as being positive and sometimes negative. Alignment was viewed as positive when diverse partners brought new opportunities, but as a hurdle to overcome when the negotiations to find a collaborative approach were challenging. Achieving alignment was difficult for some partnerships when the species occurred across jurisdictions, multiple state governments were involved and agencies had differing policies or approaches to carrying out actions or engaging with the partnerships. Interviewees described a need to negotiate alignment with researchers in particular, as researchers had different timelines and priority outcomes.

  Where there was an Indigenous partner, particular skills were required to bring together the approaches from both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders. As is the case with all case-studies, finding alignment was especially challenging where there was a lack of trust between the groups.

  "Everyone is obviously concerned about the species' survival, but they are also all wanting to get different things out of the relationship" (I.12).

- **Formality of agreements**

  There was a spectrum of approaches on how partnerships were governed (decisions made and leadership exercised/shared), from formal legal agreements to informal structures focused on collaboration. There was also a spectrum of perceptions on the importance of formal governance.

  Most interviewees indicated that the partnership had some sort of formal governance arrangement between partners that set out the involvement for each partner. Some named the arrangement (e.g. 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MOU), 'Terms of Reference' or 'Research Agreement'), but many simply referred to agreements or contracts (e.g. 'Outcome statements', 'Land Stewardship' and 'Access agreement'). Many interviewees felt that formal agreements were necessary:

  "When you've got such a broad cross-section of organisations and individuals, that's really important to have a formal agreement" (I.43)

Having a formal agreement created accountability between partners and transparency within organisations:

"That's the real risk of not having something like an MOU or a partnership agreement – you haven't got the basics of how you work together documented in a way that an upper level manager can see it" (I.02).

However, some governance structures were considered overly burdensome:

"In some ways I don't think the whole governance model is something we would do again. There are probably simpler and easier ways of doing it and it did cost us a lot of money and time trying to set that up" (I.08)

A quarter of the interviewees indicated that the partnership had an informal governance structure or none at all beyond verbal agreement of collaboration. Reasons for informal agreements included perceptions that agreements were unnecessary or it required too much time and effort:

"this was a practical action, it wasn't a planning thing, it was just let's get on with it" (I.34)

"I had originally hoped to put together some sort of formal partnership agreement … that all just kind of went to shit because I had to actually focus on doing the research" (I.25).

Furthermore, overly legal contracts can be off-putting for some partners who prefer to be involved in a more informal way:

"It's a shame when you have that sort of thing, I think. When it starts being a formal legal relationship that scares off a lot of community type groups. That's OK between government agencies. You shouldn't need that - we certainly didn't need it in this case" (I.34)

- Power equalisation and decision-making

  As with governance structures, our case-studies employed many different approaches to decision-making, transparency and sharing of power between the partners.

  The most common approach to decision-making was shared decision-making by seeking consensus at partnership meetings. These methods often allowed for the views of people or organisations that had the most knowledge or expertise to have more sway. Other partnerships employed a committee, board or sub-team to carry-out planning and decision-making. Voting and majority-based decision-making was uncommon and rarely enacted.

  "We use a panel of experts to provide advice on decision-making. We work with landholders to develop a proposal from the landholder then that goes to a panel of experts and then they provide advice to the Board. So, we call that the Evaluation Panel. All the decisions are really made by the board" (I.07)

  "the steering committee provides an opportunity for everyone to talk about the project, but it's not often that it has a vote that directs how the project progresses. And I guess partly that might be because I believe the project is being managed well and is exceeding milestones and expectations." (I.21)

  "The recovery team has a process of voting if you really required, but it's rarely needed to do that, so it's around consensus." (I.29)

  Often the actions of partnerships were directed by formal plans that were produced at the start of partnerships including recovery plans, business or management plans. Some plans incorporated conservation planning tools such as risk metrics to prioritise actions.

  "it's pretty simple. The recovery team itself has some general guidelines so it's great. You've almost got like a bible that you can refer to for recovery of this species. And then it can be manipulated from site to site because every site is slightly different depending on soil type and whatever else. There's no hard-fast rule as long as you're going through the guidelines and meeting the standard processes it's not that difficult." (I.23)

  Regardless of the plans being in place, often the actions that were carried out were ultimately dictated by the funding that was available or specifications for how funding could be used. Although some partnerships or recovery teams may have formal processes for decision-making, they are not necessarily followed:

  "There is a Terms of Reference for the recovery team, it probably does mention in some way how decisions are made – it's not a document that's revised too often" (I.29)

  "All agencies knew which way we wanted to head, and each agency took on the role that they thought that they could achieve. The plan has worked really well." (I.15)

All in all, most perceptions about the decision-making processes that were employed by the partnerships were positive.

"The National Recovery Team, it's pretty much a consensus decision-making process, but we're respectfully guided by what a particular State wants to do in their own jurisdiction. So, unless it was scientifically unjustified …. there wouldn't be much disagreement, we're a very happy bunch." (I.13)

"Well, the meetings I've attended they are pretty much by consensus. There's not really the need for a formal vote, you usually get agreement amongst the interviewees. It's pretty harmonious and collaborative." (I.20)

In most cases, different views on outcomes did not result in conflict when decision-making roles were well understood:

"In a general sense there's always challenges around getting agreement about what the best course of action is. Being clear about who makes the ultimate decision. When it's public land, in our case, it's pretty clear, the Department is charged with managing public land but when it's private land it's different. On private land there's nothing to stop us from saying what we think we should do and if the landholder agrees you can go ahead and do it, provided, of course, it's within the objectives of the recovery plan." (I.16)

However, different expectations of decision-making processes between partners sometimes created conflict. Within one case-study, one partner expressed frustration at the key partner organisation's lacking a formal-decision-making process, which they saw as central to good management and accountability of the actions and outcomes of the partnership:

"As an observer, there doesn't seem to be any process by which decisions get made and no document to guide decision-making. There seems to be an ad hoc, fairly dangerous process with regards to budgets … I think it's a lack of leadership within the organisation, no one has become a champion" (I.11)

While another partner within the same case-study preferred an informal and more organic decision-making process:

"There wasn't a formal decision-making structure, it's more about having a good relationship with the partners and communicating what's going on and trying to find solutions" (I.09)

This difference in opinions reduced faith in the partner's capacity, and developed a belief they were partnering for the sake of collaboration rather than conservation outcomes:

"The worrying thing that others and I have with respect to the partner, is that there is no well-articulated overarching guiding set of objectives… They have taken on responsibility as lead organisation….but seem to say: everyone's a friend, let's not upset anyone, we're not going to take a lead and be aggressive because that might offend people and we don't want to upset anyone, and yet nothing gets done" (I.11)

- Communication approaches

The majority of partnerships had structured arrangements regarding meetings. Where mentioned, the frequency of meetings between all partners was typically 2 – 4 times per year, with sub-groups or working groups generally meeting more frequently, sometimes on an as-needed basis. A few partnerships had monthly meetings. Most partnerships had face-to-face meetings but also used phone hook ups or emails to enable more frequent contact between partners. The timing of meetings often coincided with field seasons (either just before and/or after).

Often communication strategies were adjusted based on the stage of the partnership and requirements to make decisions or implement actions.

"It will be a matter of making sure that those partners are involved in the whole project … I haven't worked out a complete strategy of how to do that yet" (I.12)

"We are in-between arrangements at the moment because there is no funding" (I.02)

"It's probably more irregular meetings, mostly on the phone, sometimes in the field. When we were doing the planning stage of things we had regular structured meetings" (I.08)

1.7 Partnerships with Indigenous peoples

Across Australia, there are many projects where Indigenous peoples and organisations are leading or co-managing conservation actions for threatened species. Many of these partnerships and projects are well known and celebrated for their approaches and contributions to threatened species protection.

Although this study intended to include Indigenous partnerships as case-studies, this part of our study did not get underway. To uphold Ethics requirements of having thorough engagement with Indigenous organisations and individuals prior to approvals, we had intended to approach Indigenous partnerships after completing the interviews with non-Indigenous case studies. That stage of the project was scheduled for early 2020, but was interrupted by Covid-19. Due to these extenuating circumstances, we were unable to seek approvals or interviews with Indigenous parties before July 2020.

Consequently, Indigenous voices are absent from the data presented here, which we recognise as a major short-coming of this project. Not including case studies where Indigenous peoples or organisations are key partners creates a gap in knowledge, and ultimately prevents us from reaching a comprehensive understanding of the nature of partnerships for threatened species recovery in Australia today.

Indigenous involvement in case-studies through the lens of non-Indigenous partners

Although we were unable to interview Indigenous individuals or organisations, 27/44 of our interviewees discussed Indigenous engagement or involvement relating to their partnership. These perspectives on Indigenous involvement come from partnerships where Indigenous organisations or individuals were not leading or key partners. We acknowledge the limitations within this dataset as it only includes non-Indigenous viewpoints. We present these perspectives here to investigate the current practices and aspirations of these partners.

Half of the case-studies (12/24) reported that there was at least one form of Indigenous participation in the project (Figure 10). Three case-studies reported an Indigenous partner, in other cases Indigenous groups participated in partnership activities, either on an occasional or on-going basis, or as a stakeholder. In contrast, six case studies were reported to have no Indigenous involvement in the partnership activities and, for six case-studies, the involvement was unknown (either because interviewees did not know or did not discuss).

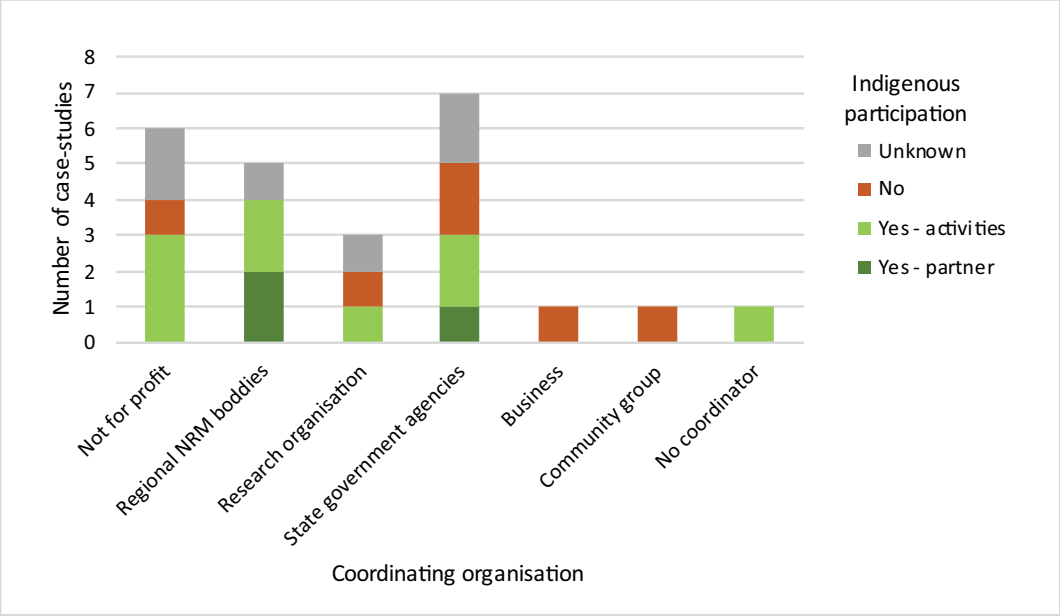

Figure 10. *Indigenous participation against the coordinating organisation for the partnership.*

1.7.1 Partnerships with Indigenous involvement

Three of the case-studies had Indigenous partners on the steering committee or with decision-making powers. Where Indigenous peoples were involved but not as partners with decision-making powers (9/24), the most common form of involvement related to land management, either as participants in project activities or as contractors. A few of the partnerships which included Indigenous engagement provided paid employment for Indigenous people undertaking land management practices or monitoring. This included activities such as weed control, feral animal control, revegetation, seed collection and water quality monitoring. In these few cases, working arrangements were described either attempting to engage Traditional Owners to find ways that the partnership can align and co-benefit with Traditional Owner aspirations for managing Country, or to keep Traditional Owners informed about the work the partnership is doing.

Where Indigenous groups were involved, there were several co-benefits that were discussed by the non-Indigenous partners, including:

- Sharing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge, which facilitated inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in the activities of partnership or capacity building and training for Indigenous organisations in western techniques
- Non-Indigenous and Indigenous organisations sharing their access to land
- Aligning work between recovery plans and Indigenous Country management plans
- Creating opportunities for cultural activities

Whether these co-benefits were also recognized by the Indigenous parties is unknown.

Some interviewees described that their partnership had included engaging with Traditional Owners through cultural heritage work, including cultural heritage assessments prior to recovery actions, but did not include working together directly on species recovery.

"The Local Aboriginal Land Council gets involved to do an assessment on-site to make sure that there's nothing that will be disturbed or damaged on the site, so they are involved in that part of it. But at this stage their involvement is fairly small." (I.14)

Indigenous inclusion in the projects was largely described positively by the non-Indigenous partners. Several interviewees suggested that they were attempting connection with the Traditional Owners to generate inclusive outcomes for all partners.

"We try our best. We use the local [...] land management bush crews that they've got now, which is fantastic.... We're obviously blessed with quite a few Indigenous artefacts and scar trees and things out at woodlands.... And for instance, we got the bush crew out to come and do a trapping event.... And from that there were great discussions...And it's a partnership that will be created and work both ways. And help both groups.... more involvement for me is always the better" (I.23)

1.7.2 Partnerships without Indigenous involvement

Six case-studies reported no Indigenous involvement. The reasons described included:

- **The partnership has not been proactive in encouraging Indigenous engagement:** as it may not have been contemplated or seen as a priority, or there is the belief by non-Indigenous partners that there are no Indigenous interests in the properties (due to current tenure) or lack of interest in the species.
- **The partnership was unable to find the right person / people to engage.** Either the interviewee could not find the right person with whom to engage or they thought the area they were working in was contested and they were worried about causing offence by approaching the wrong person or group. In these instances, it appeared there was a general sense that it was complicated to find the right people, rather than this being a result of detailed investigation. Several interviewees seemed to lack confidence in embarking on communication with Traditional Owner groups.
- **The partnership hasn't had the capacity to attempt to engage Indigenous people.** A small number of interviewees stated that their partnership did not have the capacity to attempt Indigenous involvement and that they therefore did not attempt it as they understood from other work they had undertaken that to attempt Indigenous involvement properly required considerable resources – particularly time.
- **An attempt at engagement was unsuccessful.** One interviewee described how they had attempted to engage with the local Indigenous people but that a collaboration had not resulted. They were unsure why but thought that there was a lack of interest amongst the Indigenous community in the work of the partnership at the location where they were working (the viewpoint of the Indigenous community about why the approach was unsuccessful is unknown).

Most interviewees expressed what appeared to be an understanding of the importance of engaging or partnering with Indigenous Traditional Owners. A couple of interviewees for partnerships where there was no inclusion expressed regret or embarrassment over the lack of engagement, and a few signaled that they wanted to address this.

"It's a noted omission and something that I'm really trying to reverse." (I.17)

1.7.3 Challenges in engagement

Many challenges in engagement were described by the non-Indigenous partners, many of which may be related to the level of cultural awareness or attitudinal barriers held by interviewees or the general partnership; that they didn't have the awareness or skillsets or resources to know how to reach out or follow culturally appropriate approaches.

Organisations and people involved in partnerships need the skills to be able to bring together approaches from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders. This was especially challenging where there was a lack of trust between groups; either because trust had not been established, or trust had been eroded during historical interactions. Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners needed to be strong enough to support honest communication about each partner's priorities and needs.

These issues were sometimes exacerbated when non-Indigenous people did not act in culturally appropriate and respectful ways.

"*Various Indigenous groups just don't have respect for the Recovery Team. What didn't help was [the partnership undertook a management action with] no engagement with the Traditional Owners whatsoever. The team went out there, completely flunked it, [there was a negative outcome], everyone knew about it, so Indigenous groups are scathing of the Recovery Team."* (I.11)

Interviewees suggested there were specific difficulties where threatened species span Country of many Aboriginal groups, and also the process of incorporating multiple Indigenous Peoples' voices in planning for recovery which is managed through Anglo-centric structures.

"the Recovery planning process and recovery teams do not fit well with Indigenous land management and Indigenous rangers, they just don't…Having many Indigenous voices from different regions, with different skills and different knowledge in a single document, it's almost impossible." (I.11)

The historic dislocation of Indigenous people from land was described as impacting on involvement in threatened species projects. In some places dispossession of Indigenous populations made it harder to find the right person with whom to engage.

"It's very difficult in [the region we work]. The links with the TOs out there are tenuous because of the history, which is unpleasant." (I.10)

Furthermore, some interviewees stated that there was a loss of Indigenous knowledge of the species and its ecology, but we were unable to verify whether this was the reality by speaking with Traditional Owners themselves.

1.7.4 Aspirations for future Indigenous involvement

While the project did not have a direct question asking about aspirations for future Indigenous participation in their partnership, interviewees described future plans for 11/24 case studies (Figure 11). Of these, over half were actively working to increase Indigenous participation, and the remainder stated they had aspirations for growing involvement but no plans as yet.

One interviewee discussed the benefit which they thought would be brought to their partnership, and to environment protection generally, if non-Indigenous people or programs were open to learning from Indigenous people, knowledge and approaches.

"We are also, more and more, getting better at involving Indigenous groups in the planning stages and not just saying: "this is the project we're doing, here you go". But they don't have a lot of capacity in our catchment, which is a bit of an issue. But they are building capacity and we need to learn from them about land management, which we are doing as well because we are starting to do traditional burns" (I.04)

On the other hand, negative sentiment was expressed a few times about high-level expectation of Indigenous engagement in projects from government or granting bodies. One interviewee shared strong negative sentiments on what they saw as a "box ticking" approach to requirements for grant funding which they believed detracted from the conservation aims. In this instance, the interviewee believed that the government asked for unrealistic or not-complementary Indigenous engagement beyond that which was already planned.

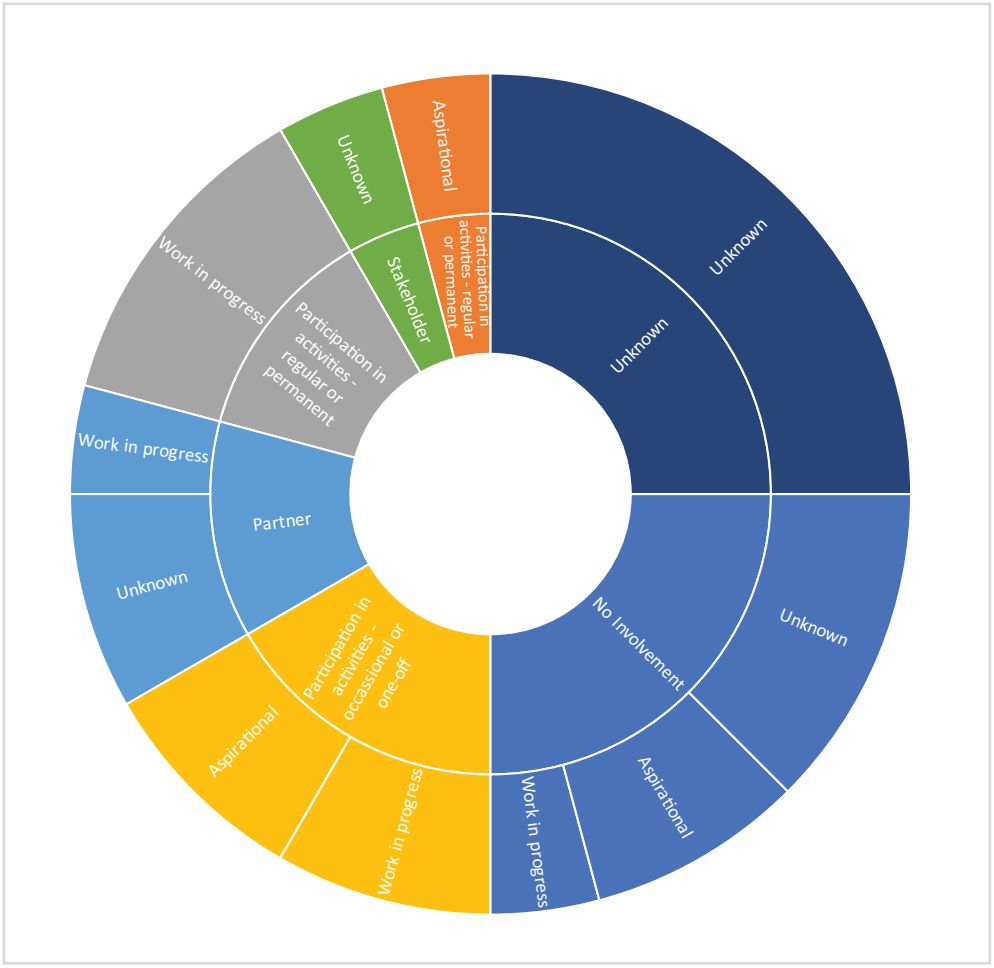

Figure 11. Indigenous inclusion in case-studies. Figure indicates whether there is work in progress (actively working to increase participation where there currently is none) or aspirational intent to increase Indigenous involvement (but there is currently no plan or action in progress) in the future

1.7.5 Conclusions on Indigenous involvement

Overall, most partnerships considered Indigenous inclusion as part of their partnership, and more than half of the partnerships interviewed were engaging or actively working towards engagement. Interviewees generally expressed positive sentiment towards Indigenous inclusion, but also identified challenges.

There seemed to be generalized practices or attitudinal beliefs among our interviewees that may have positive or negative impacts on Indigenous involvement in several of these case-studies. Identifying what worked well and shortfalls in practice can point to areas where partnerships for threatened species can attempt to improve their practices. While our findings suggest there is room for improvement, feedback is needed from Indigenous partners on the approaches and processes that result in the most successful partnerships from an Indigenous perspective.

Section 2: Exploring the value of partnerships to the environment, partners and society

In this section we explore 1) aims of partnerships and the types of achievements that have been secured; and 2) the benefits and costs of partnering. This section explores the following topics:

- Aims - the objectives that the partnership sets out to achieve (e.g. recovery, social etc.)
- Action - the steps carried out on the path to achieving aims
- Achievement - the objectives that the partnership has successfully achieved
- Benefit - advantages gained by partnering (rather than going it alone)
- Cost - the cost associated with partnering
- Risk - the chance of a negative impact on achieving objectives or a negative outcome for the partner organisations

2.1 Aims of threatened species partnerships

All the partnerships we considered had aims related to recovery of threatened species or ecological communities. The recovery objectives of the case-studies included preventing extinction, halting declines, creating secure populations and delisting of species. In addition to recovery objectives, most partnerships included aims for research associated with improving knowledge of the species and identifying the impact of management actions, as well as aims for social outcomes such as improved community engagement (Table 3).

Many of the partnerships had long-term objectives for recovery (often based on recovery plans), as well as short-term goals and actions (strategic plans), which had evolved as the partnership progressed.

Table 3. *List of aims mentioned by interviewees in conservation partnerships*

Themes	Aims
Species recovery	Long-term naturally-occurring populations with little intervention A larger population Current populations secure and protected Declines halted Extinction prevented
Administrative change	Listing reassessed based on status Recovery leading to de-listing of species to "Least Concern"
Improvements in knowledge	Research to understand species biology and requirements Better understanding of management needs and priorities Improved monitoring of distribution, decline and status
Improved processes and methods for protection	Building capacity Learning and training Rigorous approach to conservation
Improved resourcing	Funding Stewardship arrangements
Social outcomes	Increased community involvement, buy-in and trust Understanding of concerns of the public Promotion of organisation for sustainability credentials Engagement to change social behaviour Conflict managed Advocacy

2.2 Actions and achievements of partnerships

Most interviewees were positive about the actions undertaken by their partnership, the level of achievement attained, that objectives were being met, or that the partnership is likely to be pivotal to reaching recovery objectives. Partnerships were able to realise achievements by:

- forming a cohesive team or collective front,
- drawing on the strengths of the various partners,
- applying the collective and coordinated efforts of the consortium, and
- applying collective advocacy power.

Below we investigate the impact the partnership itself had on achieving these outcomes (Table 3). It should be noted that the actions and achievements of which the interviewees spoke were not always directly related to the stated aims of the projects.

2.2.1 Species recovery

While many interviewees described various achievements in improving recovery for target species, it was commonly acknowledged that capturing the real impacts of the partnership on the threatened species or ecological community was difficult, either due to a lack of monitoring and an inability to link recovery specifically to the work carried out by the partnership.

"We don't really know what impact the partnership has had on the species... we're not really collecting that type of information as a consortium." (I.01)

"It is difficult to say what it would be like without the partnership. It is hard to disentangle the partnership from the broader habitat program." (I.26)

The recovery achievements that could be measured or noted included:

- **A larger population**

  Several partnerships successfully increased population sizes through captive breeding, supporting in situ breeding and increasing distributions through reintroductions. Interviewees spoke positively and proudly about their captive breeding programs, the contribution that captive breeding had made to the overall species recovery efforts of the partnership, as well as the positive boost that successful captive breeding provided to the partnership.

  "Regarding the achievements, I suppose from the start we had [animals] in captive breeding that were breeding, and we feel that that is positive." (I.15)

  Several partnerships supported in situ breeding through supplementation from captive breeding programs and/or protections of nests.

  "last year that was 600-odd [juveniles] that we know that we've gotten past fox predation stage at least." (I.21)

  Interviewees often seemed proud and elated reporting successful reintroductions, plus introductions to novel areas and into predator-free enclosures. There was a strong sense of achievement related to undertaking novel approaches to increase population sizes.

  "So that's it in a nutshell, we basically brought them across, released them, we monitored them, 6 months later they'd bred, there were thousands of them, we monitored them again, they're doing really well. So, it's been a completely successful project at this stage" (I.34)

- **Current populations secure and protected**

  Partnerships often engaged in on-ground management to improve habitat such as weed and feral animal management, revegetation, destocking, hydrological restoration.

  "I think it's been quite positive. I think that we have increased both the quality and the quantity of the habitat." (I.16)

  At other times, habitat was secured as conservation land either through purchase by not-for-profit biodiversity conservation organisations, setting aside part of a farm for conservation by pastoralists through covenanting, incentive schemes or without agreement, or by improving the oversight of crown land areas where conservation goals had been left to lapse.

  Commonly, where habitat has been secured, interviewees talked with enthusiasm that these are significant achievements of their partnership.

  "In terms of impact on-ground, I think that getting changes in management on-ground is also very important." (I.08)

- **Declines halted**

  Some partnerships discussed having halted population declines. One interviewee mentioned that despite on-going threats that were occurring outside the control of the partnership, the partnership managed to maintain current populations levels of the species.

  "The main goal is just to halt the decline and hopefully reverse it, which we have done at one location. The decline is reversed but there is still a lot of work that is ongoing: maintenance of what has been done so that it doesn't just disappear or start dying off again." (I.03)

- **Extinction prevented**

  Many interviewees counted the prevention of extinction amongst the achievements of their partnership.

  "the species would probably be extinct if it weren't for the partnership." (I.41)

  This resulted in a large sense of achievement that increased the morale of the partnership, driving partners to continue and work hard. Interviewees appeared proud of preventing extinctions but also spoke of the work that there was still to be done to improve the situation or maintain current status.

  "It's critical I think. Without the partnership I think the [animal] would probably be extinct. Because each of those partners groups don't do it all, it's not their brief, or ability, to do it all." (I.29)

2.2.2 Administrative change

- **Listing reassessed based on status**

  There were several descriptions of how the partnership resulted in up-listing due to a better understanding of the status of the species but none leading to the down-listing of a species, despite this being a stated objective for many partnerships.

  "We have had two of the priority species which have now been listed as threatened and which we are still monitoring. And, we have another one which was put up in 2019 round for consideration for listing and I am in the process at the moment for doing another one which will be submitted to the 2020 round and this just wouldn't be possible without us being about to undertake the surveys of known populations and understand specifics and locate possible new populations, so it's really critical." (I.18)

2.2.3 Improved knowledge

It was a common aim of the partnership to improve knowledge of the species to guide recovery efforts. This included improved monitoring of species status and biological / ecological research.

- **There was strong positive sentiment surrounding research achievements.**

  Involvement of academic researchers was perceived by many of the interviewees (both researchers and non-researchers) to be important to improve understanding of the species, design programs, analyse data and design more effective management and monitoring techniques.

  "Because of the relationship between the [University] and the recovery team, we've been able to analyse all the data that's been collected. So without that relationship that data would have just sat there. And gone un-analysed."

- **Improving understanding of management needs is important.**

  Interviewees talked about the value of improved understanding of management practices and how it helps with recovery actions, and that this learning was realized through the range of expertise that the partnership had brought together as well as the opportunity to work on issues collectively.

  Usually this understanding had been gained collectively through trial and error. The information gained informed new management plans and practices.

  "The results of the research which have been done by me and [name] really lay the foundation of our understanding of this species…we're so much further down the track of being able to make informed decisions about the threats and how to manage those threats, and the distribution." (I.11)

- **Partnerships can reveal unexpected new knowledge**

  A few interviewees spoke of how they had assumed for a long time the problem for the threatened species was one thing but, through work in the partnership, they had discovered it to be something different. Several interviewees mentioned that the partnership also gained knowledge to conserve threatened species other than the target species.

  "We've been able to identify the critical threats to [the species], we know how to recover a population, we know what we have to deal with, the primary issue there is foxes. If we can establish fox free territory then we know that we can recover populations." (I.22)

- **Partnerships often provide avenues to improve monitoring of threatened species.**

  Improvements were ascribed either to greater expertise with monitoring design, or from providing the man-hours to carry-out the work.

  "I think that it [the partnership] has had a huge impact. The [species] was very rarely getting monitored or surveyed by the [government]... So, we have provided that valuable role in using volunteers to collect data on the lesser known species." (I.18)

2.2.4 Improved processes and methods for protection

Interviewees discussed how a more rigorous approach to directing species recovery was achieved by applying a thorough, collective process for decision-making. Interviewees spoke about these improved recovery approaches as being highly important to achieving the ultimate conservation goals.

"I suppose that the document behind day-to-day management of the species is a lot more pragmatic now and is certainly of benefit to us." (I.02)

"Without the partnership that has undertaken quite a rigorous approach to deciding the offsetting program then they might have ended up with something much more ad hoc and much smaller in scale." (I.26)

2.2.5 Improved resourcing

Many interviewees identified the benefits accrued when partners combined networks and effort to secure support, which came in many forms.

- **Funding**

  Some interviewees indicated that the partnership was able to attract greater funding than the individual partners would have been able to separately.

  "We have now been doing joint applications for funding for reveg and protection and giving philanthropic funders, and the like, a strong impression that we're a cohesive team - we're all working together, we plan together, we talk and discuss where the next priority areas are to work on and build on what each other is doing." (I.08)

- **Incentives for threatened species protection**

  Incentive schemes, such as payment schemes, were designed by several case studies to support farmers to set aside portions of their land for threatened species. Partnerships were viewed as pivotal as they brought together the skills both to engage with the community and deliver these schemes. There was a perception by interviewees that incentive schemes were a successful and equitable way of achieving protection on private agricultural land.

  "If the Australian community wants these farmers to put themselves out and manage one of their several paddocks preferentially for [species], and when its dry and their cows are really hungry and see that there's at least a weeks' worth of feed there, then they have to pay for that. And that's really what it boils down to. That has been quite successful." (I.13)

- **Increased staffing**

  The strength of the consortium had been used to advocate for staff members to be employed by the partnership agencies, which enabled the partnership to ensure that the aspirations of the partnership were carried out on that agency's land.

  "The first thing that we realised we needed was a dedicated Officer for Parks, somebody who understood what we were trying to achieve for the grasslands, so that was priority one." (I.15)

- **Increased government investment**

  The coordinated efforts of one partnership led to a greater commitment to habitat restoration for a threatened species.

  "We have also guided significant investment in wetland conservation over the next thirty years... The commitment is around ninety wetlands being constructed...Each of those wetlands could cost up to $600,000, so it is a significant amount of money that will be invested into species conservation over the next twenty years." (I.26)

2.2.6 Social outcomes

- Community awareness

  Many interviewees noted an increase in community awareness as an achievement of the partnership (although many acknowledged that community awareness was not quantified). The role of partners often included those who had the skills and avenues to engage the community and take opportunities to raise awareness. The perception of several interviewees was that community awareness created benefits, for example: because a 'friends of' group was consistently awareness raising, the community were prepared to donate money during a fundraiser.

  "we have had really great outcomes around awareness of the species, the key threats and the general benefits of the habitat type." (I.01)

  "The other component is the community awareness about the species is really increased. At the very start of the project, most people would never have heard of a [species]. Now, more often than not, people are aware of the [species] and it's endemic to the region and people are trying to protect it." (I.21)

- Building community trust

  Community trust was seen as a key achievement for some partnerships as it facilitated access to private land and increased community involvement in recovery efforts. Generally, interviewees described building community trust, particularly in rural communities, as being delicate to navigate, difficult to get right and disastrous if you get it wrong. Partnerships were thought to aid the building of community trust by:

  - Including partners who are already trusted by the community.
  - Making sure that the community feel like they have been "along for the ride" and part of the decision-making process and development of recovery efforts

  "You generally also do have to build that relationship with the farmer before you can start talking about an agreement. They have to know who you are and to know whether they can trust you to put an agreement in place. It's the same for all the State Government work, it's still the people who actually run the program that they need to know that they can trust and that they are not going to be short-changed with whatever incentive they're running and that the conditions there might be sweeping something under the carpet or not telling the full truth" (I.08)

- Community participation

  The effectiveness of the partnership was increased as more members of the community participated as it made work easier to do or spread the workload. Community participation was described as particularly important where threatened species were primarily on private land. Partnerships facilitated community participation or ownership where:

  - the community could see success in the project and if the issues and solutions were easily visible
  - staff and partnerships formed long-term relationships with the community to promote and continue community buy-in
  - staff or partner individuals were local and the community saw them as one of their own, bumped into them at school pick-up or the footy club.

  "The amount of interest from landholders and the fact that they're keen to do something has probably been the biggest positive outcome." (I.14)

  "I think you've got to have a local connection sometimes. When you're working in regional areas, it's not a big city, you've got to make those personal connections. Then you get the rewards from investing that time. When you've got local staff who live out there and are part of those communities, like [name] is, he works with people really well because he knows them personally because he lives in the area." (I.34)

2.2.7 Failure to achieve recovery actions or objectives

Many of the stated aims of the partnerships were long-term goals that had yet to be fulfilled, but the interviewees felt that the partnership was working constructively towards those goals. A few themes emerged

- Lack of funding

  Conservation aims sometimes had to be tailored to suit the funding available, or resources and time were diverted to find funding rather than being focused on the conservation aims.

  "I spend a lot of time running funding applications and wouldn't it be great if we could secure five years of funding so that we can just keep on going and then I'm not in the office so much then we could get out to the landholders sooner" (I.30)

- Lack of scale

  At least two interviewees acknowledged that the achievements of the partnership were insufficient to protect the species. This was because the partnership was not undertaking work at a big enough scale relative to the size of the problem and range of the species, and key threats to the species were outside the control of the partnership.

  "In terms of conserving the community, the work we are doing is a drop in the ocean." (I.04)

- Lack of partnership cohesion

  A few partnerships had a history of conflict that resulted in a partnership being disbanded, and one interviewee acknowledged that a period of friction had required considerable time and effort to manage and diverted resources from meeting recovery objectives. In a few instances, specific actions or activities were impacted by a lack of partnership cohesion or disagreement about priorities. For example, one partner viewed pest animal control as a vital component, but was unable to get full consortium buy-in to address the issue.

- Lack of appropriate staff

  In one case, having the wrong staff working on the partnership eroded community trust, after a staff member lost community trust due to an incompatible personality

  "We had to wait until he had left and then the right people came back into it and gained the trust and confidence of the community. They then proceeded to get back to the state prior to the different management." (I.15)

2.3 Benefits of partnering

Interviewees discussed many and varied benefits (advantages gained to partnering rather than working alone) that they had experienced by working in partnership for threatened species recovery. Most interviewees mentioned multiple benefits without being prompted and discussed these benefits in detail with examples. In summary:

- All interviewees stated that the partnership had been beneficial
- All interviewees stated that any costs associated with working in a partnership were outweighed by the benefit

2.3.1 Direct benefits to the species or ecological communities

Interviewees were generally positive when considering whether the partnership provided benefit directly to the threatened species or ecological communities, but responses were commonly quite general:

"We all work together to get better outcomes from what everyone is doing already." (I.04)

"It would have been a lot harder without having that partnership, without having that expert knowledge and all the different groups that have been able to come and assist with planting, fencing, weed control and different things. I don't think that the conservation outcomes would have been nearly as good, no." (I.03)

Specific examples of how the partnership provided direct benefits to threatened species included:

- Work wouldn't have happened otherwise

  Partnerships between organisations were needed before the recovery process could start because it required a combination of access to lands, funding opportunities only available to partnerships, and an organisational capacity to carry-out actions independently.

  "There is no way we could do this work alone; it just wouldn't happen without all those partnerships. For example, the community groups delivering on the project, doing the on-ground work... at the other end of the scale with the government agencies are like project managers in terms of delivering incentives... without their knowledge and support it wouldn't work at that scale either... we have to work with certain organisations to get things done on public land. You have to work with the community and farmers to get things done on private land." (I.04)

  "We can all see that by working together we can achieve much more than doing it on an individual basis" (I.22)

- Expanded conservation targets

  Reaching more people, particularly within local communities, helped expand the range of threatened species outcomes achieved on various land tenures.

  "It gives us lots of people that are independently promoting the project and all the relationships they have with land managers and other researchers." (I.21)

  For several interviewees, the area under conservation management was enlarged directly as a result of partnership processes.

  "In terms of delivering a project that targeted ... the species, there's no doubt that having the partnerships working together well, having everyone on the same page has led to a bigger area being managed for the species." (I.14)

- Creation of useful recovery products

  Some partners provided complementary skills to other members. For example, a partner with media skills created videos targeted towards landowners which resulted in landowners committing to manage their land for the threatened species.

- New insights

  New monitoring techniques, finding species in new locations (that can then be managed), better understanding of management needs, and improvements to efficiency that result in increased actions being undertaken were all mentioned as partnership outcomes. These benefits were generally attributed to having a multi-disciplinary team gathered as part of the partnership.

  "We took the knowledge that the other partners had developed to build on that project." (I.09)

2.3.2 Indirect benefits to the species

- Emergent properties of mixing skills

  Bringing together a broad range of skills and approaches helped address recovery issues that might not have been tackled by one partner alone.

  "I think that all of us pooling our knowledge and resources together, you just get so many ideas and some things work in some locations and obviously don't in others, and through those experiences we can cover just about every base and there's nothing that we can't sort of tackle." (I.23)

  Interviewees talked about how organisations can be complementary and bring together their individual strengths and overcome constraints by sharing information, teaching skills or taking on roles that require certain governance structures or flexibility.

  "Having so many different people involved means that sometimes others think totally differently, or they pick up different issues, so having that diversity of skillsets and ways of seeing things was a really good benefit." (I.03)

  "It is always better to collaborate with a range of people, there's no question. In a general sense, partnerships of this nature, where everyone has a slightly different skillset, a slightly different role, works really well." (I.16)

  For some of the researchers interviewed, having these different perspectives made or allowed them to approach their research in a way that would be more applicable to on-ground action.

  "I think in some ways it makes us less removed from the reality of what's happening on the ground." (I.25)

- Improved advocacy

  A couple of interviewees from State Government Agencies mentioned the benefits of partnering with 'friends of' groups or others who could take a politically active role in the partnership where State Agency staff could not.

  "I think it's really valuable to have those people from outside the department represented on the recovery team. To my mind and I'm sure others would say the same, it makes our decisions stronger, more defendable, and so there's that side of it." (I.40)

- Efficiencies of on-ground coordination

  Several interviewees considered the counterfactual of trying to work independently of other interested organisation without partnering

  "As far as us working as partners and working at a very close level, I think that there are huge benefits to both organisations in how we operate and share information." (I.07)

  "There are at least four or five different organisations which could be trying to do the same kind of thing independently, so we are at least sitting under a common umbrella. We are still doing it alone, we are not working too closely together, but there is still that opportunity to share lessons, share learnings and discuss through issues if required." (I.01)

  Partners discussed sharing resources (both human and physical resources) to ensure actions are both more efficient (because partners don't have to invest in the same actions or share the outlay) and more effective (expertise can be shared for a better outcome across all organisations).

  "they give me obviously huge assistance because I don't have machinery, or I don't have tractors and things like that. So, the partnership means that we operate cheaper and smoother using each other's skills." (I.23)

  "It's not my site but I went and spent the week up there because I'm good at trapping … I go up and give them a hand because that's what I can do really well… and the other partner in turn helped me trap at my location, not because I can't do it, but because it's so bloody big." (I.23)

- Collaborative fund-raising

  Having the partnership was described as allowing organisations to leverage opportunities, including funding opportunities.

  "There have been various funding opportunities over the years. Having these partnerships in place has meant that, whilst we have had no continuous funding, in many cases we have been able to tap into little bits and bobs of money that we can use for more strategic purposes. It has definitely had that benefit."

  However, only two interviewees mentioned gains in cost effectiveness, but weren't emphatic about it being a key benefit.

  "I think that what partnerships let you do is to get it done for a lot less money, a lot of the time."

- Reduced competition for land

  Several interviewees described how working in partnership removed competition between groups for the same resources including access to lands, as in some instances organisations with similar goals working separately on the same threatened species would be counterproductive to both.

  "It would have been a lot harder [if we were not in partnership]. If the partners were both working in the same area on the same landowners, I think that the landowners would have got a bit sick of "who it is this time?". We'd be shooting ourselves in the foot by competing over the same farmer." (I.08)

- Energising recovery efforts

  Some interviewees talked of their partnership reinvigorating the work that partners were already undertaking to improve the actions for the threatened species:

  "I think that partnerships have brought a lot of strength and vibrancy to it that has been needed. The organisation doesn't have a very strong track record of doing research and they needed partners to do that. The program needed it; it was critical." (I.11)

  "we'd been either dithering about it or ignoring the question of [a management action] for years and years, and then eventually the representative from the partner group, said the situation is so dire we've just got to do it. She wasn't trying to tell us what to do, she was just saying we need to address this question seriously now, and so we did." (I.40)

- Access to prior learnings or historic data

  For some interviewees, involvement in a partnership allowed access to a broader range of experience and institutional memory that would not have been available to outsiders. The result was improved overall efficiency as staff were not repeating mistakes, or recreating data.

  "they might have some influence or knowledge that might help me approach somebody or some sort of tactic. The government agency is a big organization, it's state-wide, so they've got lots of case studies as well internally that I could utilize. It's not just being polite. It's smart for me to be able to go, have you done this before? Did it work or should I try something else? Or do you want to have another go at it?" (I.23)

- Improved relationships with landholders

  Many interviewees discussed that the key to good engagement with rural communities was through a united approach (one organisation building good relationships on behalf of all, rather than each organisation individually trying to engage with the same community members) and building long-term relationships (requiring longevity of key partner individuals).

  "It engages the community and engages farmers. This is a good thing about having these Landcare Network facilitators because having these partnerships with them means that they can hit the ground running and they already have the relationship with the community, as opposed to an agency person going out and knocking on their door and they'd say: I don't want to work with government. So, there are those immediate benefits of that." (I.04)

2.3.3 Societal benefits

Interviewees were often passionate about the societal benefits to their organisations and the benefits to themselves that were derived from their involvement in threatened species partnerships. There were many, lengthy references describing and discussing this topic.

"Beyond just achieving some conservation gain, there's benefits in partnerships in terms of gaining skills and knowledge and contacts and access to resources - all of those benefits as well." (I.22)

"You are keeping each other accountable. You are working together for a common goal. It is clear to me that the advances we have made are in a large part a result of the good partnership." (I.10)

- Access to networks

  Networks were described as bringing access to expertise, prior learnings or historic data, introductions to potential funding sources, supporting the partnership message to have broader reach and be integrated into a broader network.

  Interviewees talk of a benefit of networks being that the threatened species/ecological community recovery message reaches a bigger audience. This leads to a number of other benefits such as greater awareness of the plight of the threatened species and with greater awareness - greater uptake of on-ground program activities by community members and landholders. Interviewees also discussed the value of having the message of threatened species' plight and the recovery work coming from multiple different organisations, as this gave more credibility to the cause.

  "It gives us lots of people that are independently promoting the project and all the relationships they have with land managers and other researchers." (I.21)

  Interviewees discussed several benefits of being aware of what else is happening in the region or in the area of threatened species or environmental recovery including learning from what others were doing, leveraging resources from other activities, being able to influence the activities of other organisations for mutual benefit and to reduce doubling-up.

  "I think that you tend to find out about things earlier, when you're involved at that level, you tend to find out bits and pieces more about what they're planning and you do have some ability to talk to them about that as well. You do get some offshoots of benefits hearing about other things that come up." (I.12)

- **Brings new opportunities** through the networks created and discussions that are undertaken as part of the threatened species partnership. Often this is described as 'one thing leads to another and you can quickly take advantage of opportunities'. This is a strong theme that comes through from a large number of interviewees. The new opportunities described were varied, including opportunities to:
  - address additional, follow-up or new research questions with the same partners
  - for staff to benefit through training and development on follow-on projects from another partner organisation
  - provide culled animals to Indigenous people for cultural use
  - for one organisation to benefit from unspent funds of another

  "In a place like Tasmania if you have a good working relationship with someone on one project, it's a pretty small world down here, so that usually leads to other opportunities in terms of collaboration." (I.02)

  "So, it just snowballs. That's the super important thing out of the project. The outcomes of the project are significant but the world that it opens beyond the project, for us to apply is huge. A total bonus." (I.09)

  "The basic premise for our existence is to monitor breeding, and we do that whatever else happens, that's our baseline operation. But opportunities come up to be involved in different other things and so we talk to different organisations about their plans and where we can help out." (I.32)

2.3.4 Personal benefits

Some interviewees discussed the personal benefits that they had experienced through their involvement in the partnership.

- Personal enjoyment and wellbeing

  Personal benefits discussed include feelings of happiness from being part of something good for the world, giving back, building friendships, enjoyment that was gained through carrying out the activities of the partnerships (e.g. snorkelling), and feelings that it was a privilege to be involved in such important work.

  "We might not get any monetary reward for a lot of the volunteer meetings that we go to, it is a weird saying but it is really good for our soul. It really makes us feel part of something. He wanted to protect this land for a long time so when we put a covenant on it, he was really relieved to know that that land was going to be protected forever from cropping. Sometimes financial rewards are nice but sometimes it's your personal feelings of satisfaction that are more rewarding." (I.15)

  "Not the least of which is I've made fairly good contacts who are such a pleasure to work with." (I.44)

- Success of the threatened species partnership

  Success of a partnership was often a strong motivation for partners to continue their efforts. The partnership also provided a means for efforts to be recognised, which brought personal and collective satisfaction and further drive to continue.

  "We would probably not have the species without that collaboration of different groups of people. And I think that really helps the team too, when you're putting all that work in over many years, and you're actually seeing progress, it's good for motivation, driving you to continue to try and improve. It is a really good team to work on." (I.28)

  "You get a lot of kudos for saving a threatened species. So, from that perspective it's good." (I.39)

  The downside was, where there was no response, one interviewee describing how depressing it was to put in a lot of work and still see the species going downhill towards extinction, as well as a lack of interest from politicians.

2.3.5 Off-target benefits

Several interviewees discussed how, by undertaking work for one threatened species, they saw benefit to other threatened species or to the environment in general. Or that by sharing information, organisations were "freed-up" to work on other species as well.

"By doing such a large area you also capture other threatened species. So, there are a range of other threatened species that benefit from the actions in that paddock." (I.14)

"So that's another unexpected benefit, the fact that we're out there doing the work means that you make other discoveries, like another threatened species. So now there's interest from the other Recovery Team and the Government to do further work out there. So that's a flow-on effect for other threatened species. It's benefiting multiple species in multiple locations." (I.09)

2.4 Costs

Three types of costs were mentioned in interviews as being associated with partnering for species recovery: 1) time, effort and resources to manage the partnership; 2) personal costs to the individuals who are participating; and 3) monetary costs to the organisations and individuals. The need to contribute time to maintain the partnership was the cost more commonly named by the interviewees.

- Transaction and opportunity costs

  The time and effort needed to manage relationships, coordinate partners and apply for funding was sometimes considerable. Coordinating a partnership can then reduce the time available for other projects and commitments.

  "Then there is general keeping in touch with people, meeting with them and going out on site with them to talk shop and try and nut out what to do and how it's all going. That's an investment in relationships with the people involved. I would say that we do invest a bit into that. We're a not-for-profit we're sometimes not really getting paid to do what we do but we do it anyway because it's our mission" (I.16)

  ".. building trust and respect – that's not luck, you've got to intentionally do that … Sometimes that means it's a fair bit of effort outside of working hours as well, because things do go wrong sometimes in everybody's life, so it does require effort which we've never quantified" (I.40)

  The amount of time and resources applied by the different partners, including in-kind contributions, was often specified by grants that had requirements for partnership arrangements.

  "And the other component in the original application, once again, if we had tried to put in a full-time position or a half-time even, then meeting the in-kind in the last four years of the project was going to be really hard. So once again, we might have underestimated the amount of time needed to coordinate that" (I.21).

- Personal costs

  Involvement in a partnership can sometimes be onerous for individuals. Often partnerships had limited funding and required unpaid labour or volunteer time from groups or individuals. This was especially true for people associated with community groups or 'friends of' groups which needed to be run as a business and had high administrative loads without providing remuneration for time. There was often a feeling of inequity between partners in terms of how much effort was given on a volunteer basis, particularly because large organisations and agencies often pay employees to attend partnership meetings, whereas community groups need to support their own attendance.

- Monetary costs

  Some costs were incurred in addition to direct funding, which included in-kind administrative or on-ground work, as well as the provision of physical resources.

  "I suppose you wouldn't have to have additional board meetings and you wouldn't need all these structures if a single organisation did it by itself, you could use the existing governance structure, and that's all additional work. Doing the governance is probably 25% of my work. You wouldn't need to authorise payments across organisations which can be a bit tricky. But it's a highly functional, good partnership with something to do and a good set of rules of how to do it. And I think that that's the nub of it. It's not a loose partnership" (I.07)

  In rare cases, partnerships enabled work to be carried out more cost effectively by pooling skills and resources across organisations, meaning that individual organisations did not need to outlay funds to increase their own capacity.

  "I think that what partnerships let you do is to get it done for a lot less money, a lot of the time." (I.02)

2.5 Risks

We asked interviewees whether they considered any risks when deciding to be involved in partnerships. A few interviewees could not identify any risks, and many interviewees described risks as challenges (something that is difficult to do successfully).

- Partners leaving

  The loss of partners was the risk mentioned most frequently, particularly in partnerships with longer-term objectives. Changes in a partner oganisation's priorities or resourcing was also a concern, and this highlighted the importance of gaining a commitment to the partnership from organisations.

  "*We knew that was going to be a risk in a ten-year project from the outset which is why we made a point in setting up these MOUs … All the MOU's were signed at Manager level or General Manager level, so we did get that initial commitment, but project ten years forward and whether or not that's still going to be an organisational priority is a question"* (I.01).

- Considering who to partner with

  Some interviewees were aware of political or reputational consequences of aligning with organisations that may have different values. For example, one partnership received much needed funding from a large corporation, but the mismatch between objectives was sometimes evident. There was the potential risk of excluding people or organisations from partnerships – one interviewee noted that if a government agency did not include a community group, they could be viewed as *"treating people like mushrooms"* (I.40).

- Risk aversion

  Perception of certain organisations as being risk averse and highly cautious about any adverse publicity was described as hindering recovery outcomes where there was reluctance to undertake necessary but potentially controversial actions. Other interviewees were aware that many actions to address threatened species carry some risk of adverse outcomes, but as noted by one interviewee: *"there's risk in doing something, there's also the risk of not doing it"* (I.40).

- Reputational risk

  A variety of risks can affect a partnership where partners act individually in ways that damage the whole. For example, interviewees described how some land owners can become discouraged from participating if there is confusion around what is required of them as a result of frequent government policy changes. Students not completing research projects, relationships turning bad, and losing leadership were also potential risks that can all reflect the reputation of the partnership as a whole.

2.6 Common perception: Partnerships are pivotal to success for complex recovery objectives

It was a shared view by interviewees that partnerships were pivotal to the recovery of the focal threatened species. Partnerships provided the conduit for collaborative recovery action or sharing of expertise across jurisdictions, organisations and experts, and provided avenues for recovery when no one organisation or group had the capacity to carry-out the actions that were required.

"partnerships have been vital" (I.12)

Without a partnership: *"No, there's no way it could be done"* (I.44).

"Everybody had a part to play and if you didn't have any one of those parts it wouldn't happen. It's a classic example of: if one spoke of the wheel falls off the whole thing fails." (I.34)

"It could be that I was the only person working on [the species] and that would be a disaster obviously because A) I wouldn't have enough time and B) I wouldn't have enough background and perspective to cover all the things that needed to be done." (I.40)

"It is always better to collaborate with a range of people, there's no question. In a general sense, partnerships of this nature, where everyone has a slightly different skillset, a slightly different role, works really well." (I.16)

There was a recognition that individual organisations were limited in their resources and what they could achieve independently.

"I'm all for these projects, because government can't do everything, we just don't have the resources. If you can pull together a bunch of players who can all contribute a bit of dough and expertise and make something like this happen, it's a great outcome" (I.34)

"We recognise how important those partnerships are. We are a small organisation in the scheme of things, so without those partnerships I can't even imagine what it would be like" (I.04)

Interviewees described that, where projects could have been achieved without partnership, there was generally a caveat signifying it would have been: slower, more difficult, it wouldn't achieve the added benefits or be unlikely to occur.

"It would have been a lot harder without having that partnership, without having that expert knowledge and all the different groups that have been able to come and assist with planting, fencing, weed control and different things. I don't think that the conservation outcomes would have been nearly as good, no." (I.03)

Conclusion:

We identified a common perception that partnerships were especially important for achieving complex recovery objectives. The benefits derived from engaging in partnerships for threatened species, ranged from enhanced recovery outcomes to social and personal benefits. And, in spite of costs and risks involved, many interviewees were adamant that the benefits of partnerships provided a more effective mechanism for species or community recovery than going it alone.

There was a resounding perception that: ***The benefits of partnering outweigh the costs and risks.***

Many interviewees were very confident that the benefits of partnering outweighed any costs incurred or resources required. Interestingly when asked "whether the benefits of partnering outweigh the costs" almost all agreed emphatically and positively. Most interviewees didn't seek to qualify their answers:

"Yes, definitely." (I.10; I.15; I.03)

"Absolutely (I.43)"

"No question about that" (I.13)

"Well, I don't think that anyone wants the species to go extinct, so yes." (I.02)

Section 3: Challenges to partnering for threatened species

Many interviewees stated that their partnership experienced few or no challenges and that partner interactions were largely harmonious and collaborative. Given the wide range of individuals and organisations that were involved in the partnerships, surprisingly few interviewees reported problems with governance issues, such as how leadership is exercised or shared, and how decisions are made. Issues surrounding equity between partners were rarely mentioned as most interviewees felt partners were making valuable contributions and that no one individual or organisation was bearing an inequitable burden or wielding power inappropriately.

There were nevertheless several challenges that interviewees described as having personally experienced or were aware of within their partnership. The most common challenges concerned the cohesiveness and unity of partnerships or the capacity of the partnership to carry-out actions. Additionally, some partnerships were challenged in meeting recovery aims due to external factors (outside of the control of the partnership).

Table 4. *Summary of most commonly experienced challenges experienced when partnering for threatened species*

Theme	Challenges
Cohesiveness and unity of partnerships	Differences in decision-making processes and styles Finding alignment between partners' priorities Differences in timelines Managing individual relationships Leadership Establishing and maintaining relationships
Capacity to carry-out actions	Structural or planning issues Funding availability
External factors	Policy limitations and barriers Lack of historical data Lack of knowledge of threats

3.1 Cohesiveness and unity of partnerships

- **Differences in decision-making process and styles**

  Organisational differences were most apparent between government agencies and smaller non-government organisations and caused some frustrations for partners that had more "flexible governance structures" than the cautious processes and formalities needed for government agencies and larger organisations to gain internal approvals, particularly where these had flow-on effects on timeliness of partnership agreements. A lack of transparency about the decision-making processes within government departments was also a concern and was in one instance referred to as a 'black box'.

- **Finding alignment between partners priorities and cultures**

  For some partnerships, particularly when different States were involved and their agencies had adopted alternate strategies for how species should be managed or monitored, it could be difficult to accommodate the individual interests and priorities of partners.

  "Everyone is obviously concerned about the species' survival, but they are also all wanting to get different things out of the relationship" (I.12).

- **Differences in timelines.**

  Timeline diversity was described for research-management partnerships, where research organisations were under pressure to publish novel research in academic journals, while managers sought research findings that directly addressed understanding to drive local on-ground activities. There was conflict around the timeframes that researchers and managers work to, with research often requiring much longer than managers expected (or required).

- **Managing individual relationships.**

  Both building and maintaining relationships required significant investment (including unpaid time), particularly when difficult personalities were disruptive and needed further effort to manage. Several interviewees reported how overbearing or egoistic personalities had detrimental impacts on conservation partnerships. Although none of the case studies explored in this study were currently experiencing high levels of conflict, periods of conflict had existed for many partnerships. In some, partnerships had dissolved and were reformed, in others the conflict had impacted on the conservation aims because time and effort were re-focussed into dealing with the relationship issues. Dealing with difficult personalities was clearly often frustrating and only resolved when the person in question left the organisation or partnership.

- Establishing and maintaining relationships

  In a few cases, there was concern that individuals or organisations had exaggerated their level of involvement in successful on-ground achievements or failed to acknowledge fully the work done by others. Community groups sometimes felt they were not 'treated with the same level of respect' as other organisations. A general lack of trust from landholders towards government agencies made some partnership arrangements more challenging, especially when landholders were major partners.

  Where relationships were functioning well, people expressed their considerable enjoyment about working with other passionate, like-minded individuals. As partnership cohesiveness was achieved through harmonious and collaborative relationships, staff turnover was strongly detrimental to continuity and momentum as *"there can be a greater slowing in decision-making when someone is re-learning"* (I.29).

- Leadership

  To bring together partners and coordinate actions, leadership is needed for partnerships to be truly collaborative and to meet objectives. Two case studies had experienced losing their coordinators, which resulted in noticeable changes in momentum and efficiency:

  "there wasn't anyone leading the project and pulling the project partners together, making sure the partners were on track, organising meetings and things like that" (I.03).

  The role of partnership coordinator was reported to be challenging, as the role required wrangling the individual partners, who often had many competing demands, into joint meetings and to participate in partnership activities such as planning, decision-making or management. Multi-state partnerships with large numbers of partners were particularly onerous to coordinate. Achieving the right level of engagement between partners meant a careful balance between *"trying to involve them while also not putting unreasonable demands on their time"*

3.2 Capacity to carry-out actions

Other challenges mentioned by interviewees related to the ability of the partnerships to carry-out the actions required to meet conservation outcomes.

- Structural issues

  Lack of an overarching or strategic plan, inadequate data management and the limited capacity to measure outcomes, restricted funding and difficulty with establishing the required workforce (paid or volunteer) all limited what could be achieved.

- Funding availability

  Funding was a major challenge for most of the partnerships and many interviewees stated they had experienced a general scarcity of funding for conservation. Acquiring funding was especially arduous for partnerships focused on less charismatic species. Interviewees described how short-term funding cycles resulted in ad hoc approaches to on-ground activities and continuously needing to apply for funding took time away from conservation efforts:

  "*the funding cycles are very short, so there's continual pressure to find funding to progress the objectives of the recovery. It can be hard to plan with certainty"* (I.29).

  Furthermore, there was at times competition for available funds between partners or other organisations working on the same issues.

- Organisational priorities

  A diversity of organisational objectives also influenced the desire and capacity for partners to contribute to common goals: *"their targets are different and we're working towards slightly different goals"* (I.17).

3.3 External factors affecting partnership and conservation outcomes

Other issues mentioned by interviees were often a significant hindrance to achieving good conservation outcomes but were outside of the control of the partnership.

- Lack of data

  A lack of historical and baseline data sometimes limited monitoring capacity to assess the effectiveness of conservation actions.

- Threats beyond the control of the partnership

  In some instances, interviewees described how the efforts of their partnership ultimately may not help the species as they were trumped by larger threats

  "all the other factors over-ride what we're trying to do anyway, like noisy mynahs, climate change, land use change, clearing, all that kind of stuff" (I.04).

- Organisational restrictions

  Government partners were particularly constrained from advocating for legislation or policy change relating to issues such as land use. Where this was an issue, the other non-government partners were in some instances still able to advocate for these types of changes. Government partners were also constrained in their leadership potential as they experienced more organisational restrictions on the types of activities in which they could participate.

Conclusion:

Despite some partnerships currently experiencing one or multiple challenges to partnership cohesiveness, none were attributed to causing partnership failure by interviewees, although previous iterations of some partnerships had been affected by personalities and difficult relationships.

While many of the challenges we discovered were in agreement with other studies (Behnken, Groninger & Akamani 2016), we did not find challenges that related to:

- Trade-offs between which partners benefit / lose out
- Ambiguities in regulatory frameworks meaning non-compatibility
- Lack of clear legal authorization of management actions
- Flexibility in budget to reallocate funds

Achieving on-ground outcomes was sometimes constrained by differing priorities of partners or the lack of a strategic plan that addressed all threats.

The resounding overarching challenge expressed by all partnerships was related to securing funding, both in the amount that was available or accessible and the duration of funding. Lack of funding had an impact on the cohesiveness and stability of some partnerships; this was particularly evident in a multi-region partnership where funding priorities meant some personnel were not funded to attend recovery meetings. Conservation outcomes can be significantly constrained by funding limitations as partnerships are not able to address some or many of the threatening processes.

Section 4: Key conditions to build successful partnerships for threatened species conservation

Our interview data suggests there is no one secret formula to overall success in threatened species partnerships. Interviewees described many factors which they considered had contributed to the success of their partnership and the outcomes of their partnership work. In some instances, interviewees attributed success to harmonious relationships and leadership, whilst others felt that particular partnership structures and clear objectives were paramount to success. One interviewee believed that success may be achieved through a careful balance between program coordination, relationships, research and active management:

"I have a strong belief that to make progress there has to be balance. I see the recovery plan progress as a 'three-legged stool'. Any substantial shortcomings in one area leads to program instability and potential failure. A recovery program has got to have good research taking place, it has to have good management and it has to have realistic community involvement. And I mean real involvement rather than community awareness raising." (I.13)

4.1 What does success look like?

From the interviews we identified two main dimensions (Table 5) of perceived success for our case-studies:

A) ***Partnership cohesion and stability:*** there was a high level of collaboration between partners who were performing well together

B) **Meeting recovery objectives:** the partnership was meeting recovery objectives and having a positive impact on the threatened species

Table 5. *The dimensions of success in conservation partnerships*

		Meeting recovery objectives	
		Low	High
Partnership cohesiveness	High	Failure to meet recovery objectives due to reasons external to the partnership. The partnership is cohesive.	The partnership meets its recovery objectives while achieving cohesive working arrangements and relationships between partners.
	Low	The partnership struggles to meet recovery objectives, or fails entirely, at least in part due to issues with internal partnership cohesion.	Recovery objectives are met despite significant challenges within the partnership.

We examine these dimensions of success here and key ingredients for success below.

4.2 Achieving partnership cohesiveness, stability and motivation:

The cohesiveness of a partnership leans heavily on the people who are involved and how well they work together. Personable and passionate leaders and champions were often fundamental to the cohesion and enthusiasm of the partners (Black et al. 2011). In other case studies a dedicated, funded coordinator provided the necessary cohesion between partners. Communication is also key to partners forging and maintaining relationships.

Furthermore, interviewees described how threatened species work often attracts highly passionate people who are united in a common goal. Others felt that good relationships were built, potentially over many years, and were enabled by personal contact, trust and good communication.

"it needs to be personal communication, just sending a newsletter around keeping everybody informed isn't enough." (I.33)

The importance of having clear objectives was discussed by many interviewees. This was sometimes achieved as a result of the working arrangements of the partnership, whereby the structure of the partnership promoted the ability for open discussions and transparent decision-making. Others attributed clear objectives to the creation of working documents, such as MOU's or recovery plans, which were regularly reviewed and updated.

Common themes to the success of the long-term partnerships included in this study, many of which had continued for more than twenty years, were continuity of involvement of key individuals including champions and a core group of experts.

Ingredients for creating cohesion, stability and motivation

- **Find a champion, leader or coordinator:** Personable and passionate people can be instrumental in inspiring participation and coordinating conservation actions. This person needs to have decision-making power, a threatened species background so they understand the actions that need to be taken and funding to support their efforts. The coordinator role is pivotal to the longevity and success of the partnership *"(he) has done an outstanding job of bringing everyone together and sustaining the project and creating that sort of collaborative and harmonious atmosphere that has helped this project to work so well"* (I.20).
- **Assign adequate time and resources to establish and maintain relationships:** Champions or leaders may take a primary role in establishing relationships, but all partners can play a role in this to establish harmonious working relationships. *"I say time and time again that communicating, networking, staying in touch with people, you've just to find out what the problems are before they emerge"* (I.33)
- **Establish clear objectives and understand each partners' expectations:** Partners are often united with a common goal to 'save' a species, but exactly how this is done requires clear understanding of the specific recovery aims. *"Be clear and prescriptive as to what you want to achieve and how you want it achieved" (I.37). "I think there is clarity of vision .. so what each organisation is doing is pretty clearly laid out and where their responsibilities begin and end"* (I.22).

  There should be transparency around the interests of individuals or organisations to develop realistic timeframes and establish what outputs will be useful. *"Even though we do have a mutual goal, which is protection of the threatened species, there are different expectations from each of the partners"* (I.09)
- **Set-up an appropriate governance structure:** What the appropriate governance structure should be is likely to be influenced by the scale of the project: Short-term issue-based projects may be hampered by complex governance arrangements which may also discourage participation by local community members. Long-term projects are likely to benefit from documents such as MOU's that clearly set out the objectives, how these will be achieved, and the roles and responsibilities of partners. All partners should have the capacity to have a voice and contribute ideas.
- **Be inclusive and acknowledge others contributions:** Recognise and acknowledge the efforts of all partners and the various essential skills and resources that are brought to the partnership. Respect all contributions regardless of size and recognise that individuals may be donating significant time and effort. Celebrate the small wins as well as the big ones so that people feel valued and included.
- **Plan for partnership timeframe and for potential risks:** Planning ahead for potential risks such as partner or co-ordinator turn-over plus change in funding arrangements can help minimise future disruption. Especially important is sharing or transferring roles and information and establishing 'back-ups': *"There may be some shift in personnel ... but the continuity has been kept up, information and roles have been transferred to keep that continuity going"* (I.20).
- **Communicate clearly and often** - Managing how, and how much information is provided to each partner is vital to generate cohesion between partners and developing a common goal. *"it's good to continue to feed information through to the different partners (as) not everything needs to be discussed by all partners up front because you have different levels of engagement and involvement and interest"*

4.3 Meeting recovery objectives:

Cohesion between partners often supported the meeting of recovery goals. Interviewees in this study regularly attributed success in the meeting of recovery objectives to simply having the right people involved:

"We might like to think of partnerships as being between organisations but really, it's individuals within the organisations." (I.11)

"getting the right people that know the stuff is really important" (I.02)

"We just have good people in key positions that understand the best way to go about this stuff. That's just how it happens." (I.10)

Partnering with individuals and organisations with a broad range of expertise, experience and resources was also reported to be a vital element for achieving complex conservation aims and a key benefit of partnering where an individual organisation would not be able to achieve the same breadth of expertise.

"I think it would have been difficult to achieve the same outcome without that sort of collaborative, inclusive approach. You've got the whole range, from government officials, to landowners, to researchers, to consultants that all bring a different range of skills and capabilities and knowledge and experience" (I.20)

Community engagement and involvement were often described as vital to achieving conservation aims: community involvement in volunteer capacity often provided the work force to carry-out on-ground work (no funding for employment), community buy-in was central to building social license to operate and facilitated access to private land. Partnerships for some charismatic or high-profile species had high levels of community involvement primarily via 'friends of' groups, and it was evident that good community engagement or inclusion of community members in partnerships encouraged community buy-in to projects. As well as on-ground works, community groups were identified as being important for fundraising, undertaking community education and awareness, and for advocacy.

Ingredients for achieving recovery success

- **Bring together the right people with the right skills:** Shared knowledge is vital for learning from mistakes and building the basis for making informed decisions. Think about the recovery needs for the species and who will be able to support those actions. *"Partnerships of this nature, where everyone has a slightly different skillset, a slightly different role, work really well"*.
- **Establish clear recovery objectives and understand each partners' expectations**
- **Create strategic plans to guide recovery actions:** Planning is key to achieving outcomes. Link to recovery plans or create strategic conservation action plans for the partnership. Planning should be an inclusive process where targets, actions and responsibilities are negotiated amongst the partners to create buy-in.
- **Research to guide evidence-based management:** Rigorous research to understand the biology of the species, response to management activities, as well as on-going monitoring to assess status is vital to understanding what the partnership has achieved. Partnerships between management agencies with research institutions (Universities, CSIRO etc.) and independent researchers provide avenues to improve knowledge specific for recovery.
- **Secure funding and support:** is key to meeting recovery objectives. Plan for how short-term funding cycles will impact on the recovery outcomes to ensure continuity in partnership activities, and ensure the funding includes employment of a coordinator. *"The funding cycles are very short, so there's continual pressure to find funding to progress the objectives of the recovery. It can be hard to plan with certainty"* (I.29).
- **Engage the relevant stakeholders (landholders, community etc.):** Lack of funding and other resources may mean that essential conservation actions are not able to be achieved without volunteers or involvement of landholders and local community. One case study achieved this by engaging local schools to help with the release of captive animals and the flow-on effect of this was that many families in the local community became interested in the project. Partnering with organisations that inspire trust in local communities may be important.
- **Advocate for the importance of recovering threatened species:** including the need for governments and councils to act on behalf of threatened species, and the involvement of the local communities to support action and participate in on-ground activities. Advocacy can lead to better threatened species protections or funding. *"We wouldn't have them in the wild if we didn't have the community keeping the profile of [the species] current in the minds of politicians"* (I.29)

4.4 Factors influencing less successful partnerships

Some of the partnerships had experienced, or were experiencing, a period of turmoil. Issues with in particular cohesion most commonly arose due to clashing personalities or insufficient funding. Multi-state partnerships generally had varying levels of cohesion within the partnership. Some State-based groups were experiencing conflict whilst others were harmonious. In some cases, differing policy mandates between States were affecting national cohesiveness. Another partnership was in hiatus primarily because of a lack of funding.

Despite these difficulties, partnerships were still able to achieve considerable conservation benefit. Although an official partnership no longer existed in one instance, the relationships that had been formed and specific funding enabled various organisations to continue to carry out conservation activities. In contrast, achieving good conservation outcomes was sometimes made extremely difficult by external factors, despite the partnerships being cohesive. Partnerships do not work in a vacuum and how much they can achieve can be strongly influenced by stochastic environmental factors, policies, and threatening processes that may be occurring in the landscape.

4.5 Case-studies examining success factors:

Four case-studies were chosen to exmplify the dimensions of success (Table 5). These classifications are based purely on the perceptions of the study interviewees and are not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of partnership success. The purpose is to provide useful insights into the factors that have influenced the cohesion and stability of partnerships and how well partnerships are achieving recovery objectives.

Case study 1: Cohesive partnership, achieving conservation aims

Species: Low profile

Tenure: Private land including pastoral properties

Scale: Regional

Length of partnership: 16 years

Partnership type: Multi-organisational, predominantly non-government, no recovery team

Species status: increase in habitat protected and total distribution

Success factors for partnership cohesion:

Two key partners had similar organisational cultures and approaches, they shared, and were equally committed to, a clear common goal set out together for the partnership. They had clearly delineated roles, each organisation bringing its strengths. Key personnel had been with the partnership from its inception and had a strong and friendly relationship with regular communication. The partners had significant rigour around the governance and working arrangements of their working arrangements. Other partners had been brought in to pursue actions outside of the expertise or reach of the key partners.

Success factors for conservation aims:

The partners had put considerable effort into planning - taking time to consider the best approach to resolving the issues facing the threatened species and had shaped their actions to meet these needs. As the threatened species is on private land, the partners had put considerable effort into engaging with landholders and gave themselves reasonable, long-term timeframes, for landholder involvement. The partners had the expertise required for recovering the species. The partnership had a well-structured monitoring program to inform them of the outcomes of their work.

Challenges:

- Designing governance structures was initially time consuming, but in the end had stood the partnership in good stead
- Gaining access to the threatened species on private land had required building trust with landowners which had taken considerable time.

Case study 2: Cohesive partnership, not achieving conservation aims

Species: Low profile, cryptic

Tenure: Public

Scale: Local

Length of partnership: 4 years

Partnership type: Multi-organisational, predominantly government, no recovery team

Species status: unknown

Success factors for partnership cohesion:

Partnership had a funded, dedicated coordinator who undertook to ensure all partners were kept informed, coordinated a regular schedule of meetings, coordinated reporting to funders and facilitated cross-collaboration within the partnership. Partners were contracted to the partnership through MOUs which clearly stated the role and responsibility of each partner. The work of the partnership was funded for ten years. Parts of the partnership had good links to community and landcare groups who assisted with on-ground works.

Factors impacting on conservation aims:

Partners had good access to much of the habitat of the species. Works focused on habitat protection and partners had good skills and teams capable of habitat protection works required.

Challenges:

- The key threat to the survival of the threatened species was identified by the partnership is outside of the partnership's control. Partners acknowledged that even with their best efforts they cannot protect the species from the factors which are most likely to lead to its extinction.
- The partnership did not have monitoring in place to give an indication of the success of actions carried out (could not access all distribution) or the status of the focal species.

Case study 3: Low-cohesion partnership, not achieving aims

Species: Medium profile, cryptic

Tenure: Private and public land

Scale: Regional

Length of partnership: 20 years (now in hiatus)

Partnership type: Recovery team and associated partnerships

Species status: Numbers are continuing to decline

Factors impacting partnership cohesion and stability:

Key personnel were originally housed within the same office but had been separated due to organisational structural changes. Funding declined over time and eventually ceased entirely.

Factors impacting conservation aims:

Various partnerships had existed for this species for many years and had achieved on-ground results such as identification of key habitat areas and fencing to prevent grazing. Achievements had been constrained by funding prioritisation between NRM regions resulting in inconsistent effort. Focus of incentive funding did not always address long-term aims such as linking habitat islands. Essential research had not received funding. Private landholders were engaged to carry out actions, but ongoing involvement had not been funded. It had been difficult to engage the public or politicians as the species is cryptic and rare and often in difficult terrain.
Even in areas where habitat improvement had been successful, species numbers had continued to decline, indicating to the partnership that they had failed to completely understand or support the needs of the species.

Case study 4: Low-cohesion partnership, still achieving aims

Species: High profile

Tenure: Private and Public land

Scale: Regional

Length of partnership: Varied

Partnership type: Recovery team and associated partnerships

Species status: numbers increasing, habitat protected

Factors impacting partnership cohesion and stability:

Historically there had been partnership conflict and recovery team had disbanded. Newly re-formed recovery team aimed to be inclusive of all interested stakeholders though had the potential to be unwieldy as there were many stakeholders. From the perspective of a regionally-based partnership there was a lack of communication from the Recovery Team, and a perspective that the recovery team was too science focused and not accessible to wider partners.

Success factors for conservation aims:

Recovery team was addressing a broad range of science-based recovery issues working with NRM's, NGO's and research organisations. Associated partnerships were also addressing social aspects such as education and awareness. The species attracted sponsorship and funding by private organisations, public interest and volunteers. Many groups were operating with a few key collaborators as "sub-partnerships" to achieve their aims.

Conclusions:

Strong and enduring partnerships among actors within the environmental sector appear to be at the heart of many successful recovery projects for threatened species, especially those with complex recovery needs. Personal relationships are a key component of partnerships between different sectors that are acting for natural resource outcomes (Gibbons *et al.* 2008). Overall five main themes emerged regarding partnering for threatened species recovery:

1. **Co-benefits: Partnerships are not only important for realising positive recovery actions but create additional benefits for environment, partners and society**
   Recovery is rarely about just threat removal – the co-benefits are often equally important for sustained amelioration.
2. **Complexity: Partnerships are especially important for achieving complex recovery objectives**
   Many threatened species face 'wicked' problems that can only be solved with a variety of viewpoints and skills.
3. **Boundaries: Partnerships are almost always essential for working across jurisdictions**
   Reaching national recovery goals can rarely be achieved if jurisdictions work independently. The same is often true when species are present across multiple tenure types.
4. **Not a free ride: The benefits of partnerships outweigh the costs of going it alone**
   Partnerships take effort to establish and maintain. Communication, relationships and organisational management all take time. These are easily outweighed by direct and indirect benefits that would be impossible to achieve without collaboration.
5. **Governance and planning: Partnership cohesiveness, stability and motivation most often emerges when there are clear goals and transparent governance**
   Clarifying roles and responsibilities during participatory development of a plan for species recovery sows the seeds of successful partnerships, even if these change over time as needs evolve.

References

Behnken, J.A., Groninger, J.W. & Akamani, K. (2016) Institutional Constraints to Collaborative Ecosystem Management within a Wetlands Conservation Partnership. *Journal of Contemporary Water Research and Education* 158, 19-33.

Bjärstig, T. (2017) Does Collaboration Lead to Sustainability? A Study of Public–Private Partnerships in the Swedish Mountains. *Sustainability* 9, 1685.

Black, S.A., Groombridge, J.J., & Jones, C.G. (2011) Leadership and conservation effectiveness: finding a better way to lead. *Conservation Letters* 4, 329-339.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2016) (Mis)conceptualising themes, thematic analysis, and other problems with Fugard and Potts'(2015) sample-size tool for thematic analysis. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 19, 739-743.

Clarke, A. & Fuller, M. (2010) Collaborative strategic management: strategy formulation and implementation by multi-organizational cross-sector social partnerships. *Journal of Business Ethics* 94, 85-101.

Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2014) Thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, 1947-1952.

Dowling, B., Powell, M. & Glendinning, C. (2004) Conceptualising successful partnerships. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 12, 309-317.

Garnett, S.T., Lach, P., Lindenmayer, D. & Woinarski, J.C.Z. (eds.) (2018) *Recoverying Australian Threatened Species: A Book of Hope*. (CSIRO Publishing , Melbourne).

Gibbons, P., Zammit, C., Youngentob, K., Possingham, H.P., Lindenmayer, D.B., Bekessy, S., Burgman, M., Colyvan, M., Considine, M., Felton, A., Hobbs, R.J., Hurley, K., McAlpine, C., McCarthy, M.A., Moore, J., Robinson, D., Salt, D. & Wintle, B. (2008) Some practical suggestions for improving engagement between researchers and policy-makers in natural resource management. *Ecological Management & Restoration* 9, 182-186.

Gillespie, G., Roberts, J.D., Hunter, D., Hoskin, C.J., Alford, R.A., Heard, G.W., Hines, H., Lemckert, F., Newell, D. & Scheele, B.C. (2020) Status and priority conservation actions for Australian frog species. *Biological Conservation* 247, 108543.

Lintermans, M., Geyle, H.M., Beatty, S., Brown, C., Ebner, B.C., Freeman, R., Hammer, M.P., Humphreys, W.F., Kennard, M.J., Kern, P., Martin K., Morgan, D.L., Raadik, T.A., Unmack, P.J., Wager, R., Woinarski, J.C.Z. & Garnett, S.T. (2020) Big trouble for little fish: identifying Australian freshwater fishes in imminent risk of extinction. *Pacific Conservation Biology* 26, 365-377.

McQuaid, R. (2010) Theory of organizational partnerships: partnership advantages, disadvantages and success factors. pp. 125-146. in *The New Public Governance: Critical Perspectives and Future Directions*. ed. S.P. Osborne (Routledge, London).

Murphy, M., Arenas, D. & Batista, J.M. (2015) Value Creation in Cross-Sector Collaborations: The Roles of Experience and Alignment. *Journal of Business Ethics* 130, 145-162.

QSR International (1999) NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software [Version 12]. Available from https://qsrinternational.com/nvivo/nvivo-products/.

Runhaar, H. & Polman, N. (2018) Partnering for nature conservation: NGO-farmer collaboration for meadow bird protection in the Netherlands. *Land Use Policy* 73, 11-19.

Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H. & Snelgrove, S. (2016) Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice* 6, 100–110.

Van Huijstee, M.M., Francken, M. & Leroy, P. (2007) Partnerships for sustainable development: a review of current literature. *Environmental Sciences* 4, 75-89.

Wood, M. & Welch, C. (2010) Are 'qualitative'and 'quantitative'useful terms for describing research?. *Methodological Innovations Online* 5, 56-71.

Appendix 1: Interview process and questions

Preamble:

- Thank interviewee for their time
- Acknowledge receiving the consent form
  - Or ask for verbal consent and confirm that they've read PLS and recording.
- Briefly describe the interview process:
  - Interviews will be recorded
  - Notes will be taken
  - Will take around 30mins – 1hr.
- Before we get started a little bit about the project:

  We are interested in understanding the long-term value of partnerships in threatened species recovery. We want to know what aspects of partnerships work best, what aspects have not worked well, and how partnerships can be designed to be valuable to on-ground recovery of threatened species.
- We'd like you to think about your involvement in project X to answer the questions.

	OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS	Options for follow up QUESTIONS to elicit more information	What do we want to know
1)	First of all, we'd like to get an overall sense of the partnership. Can you describe briefly, who the partners are and what role they play in the partnership? Have there been any Indigenous groups or peoples involved? Was there a lead or key individual or organisation? Why did the partnership come about? How long has this partnership been in action? How was the partnership funded? What do each of the partners bring to the program? Was there recovery team for this species? Have they been involved with the partnership?	What / who initiated the creation of the partnership? How were the partners identified? How did you/your organisation come to be involved in this partnership? How engaged has your organisation been in the partnership?	Confirm facts on the players involved Characteristics of the partners and the effort that initiated the partnership.
2)	What were the aims of the partnership, both in terms of the conservation aims and any other goals?	What were the specific conservation aims? Were there other aims?	Perspectives on the conservation goals of the partnership Interpretive information on the anticipated value of partnering versus not partnering in this particular case Degree of alignment of objectives, any compromises made in objectives
3)	What sort of working arrangements did the partners have to guide how they worked together?	Coordination Plans Meetings On-ground work What strategies were in place to assist the different partners to work together? (How did they communicate? How often? Who was responsible?) Brokers	Factual information on the organisational systems (formal and otherwise) put into place Perspective from the interviewee/ organisation on their role and how the partnership hung together

	OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS	Options for follow up QUESTIONS to elicit more information	What do we want to know
4)	Who makes decisions in the project? Is there a lead decision maker or are decisions shared? OR (How does the partnership make decisions regarding objectives and priorities?)	How did the partnership reach alignment between the organisations' missions? What planning processes were initiated? (to get response about action plans, budget plans, conservation targets etc.) Was the project attached to a recovery plan?	Factual – organisational structure, plans, power dynamics. Perspective on whether decision-making worked well. To what relative extent did the operation of the partnership rely on processes, systems, resources or people factors? Power, responsibility.
5)	We are interested in knowing about the various types of achievements that conservation partnerships can deliver. What impact did the partnership have for the threatened species?	How did the partners work together to improve conservation status? What was the outcome for the species? What other value/outcomes? Has the project reached the goals that it was aiming for?	Factual - achievements Perspectives on achievements Perspectives on program delivery and impact.
6)	Were there any other benefits, opportunities or any unexpected outcomes that came from the partnership?	Economic benefits, social benefits, other ecological benefits. Leveraging extra opportunities Program delivery benefits or impact benefits.	Perspectives on other impacts or project outcomes.
7)	Do you think these achievements would have been possible without the partnership?	What influence did the partnerships have on conservation of the threatened species or on other metrics of success, that you wouldn't have achieved alone?	Interpretative – factors to success.
8)	Can you describe any challenges, draw backs or risks of working with partners?	Were there any problems or conflicts, and how did you resolve them? Any risks involved? Were there external forces?	Interpretative – factors that influenced the partners ability to manage challenges. Perspectives: Other factors that decreased the effectiveness?
9)	Can you outline what resources, effort or other costs your organisation invests in this partnership? Did the benefits of the partnership outweigh any costs or efforts put into maintaining the partnership?		
10)	How important were personal relationships and attitudes of the people to the success of the partnership?	Themes to potentially ask about: Respect Leadership Risk Trust Decision-making How were these shared and evenly spread? How did the partnership invest in managing the relationships between people?	Interpretative – how important relationships were including arrangements around leadership, trust, conflict, risk. Whether this was evenly spread between partners.

	OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS	Options for follow up QUESTIONS to elicit more information	What do we want to know
11)	Can you think of any improvements or anything else that we didn't already cover that you are interested in sharing about partnerships and how they can assist with threatened species conservation?		Skip if already at the hour point.
12)	Who are the other people in this partnership we should be talking to, to learn more?		
13)	One last question. Not specific to this project we've been talking about, have you been involved in other partnerships that haven't been successful or failed to fully get off the ground, and anything you can share about why they didn't fully eventuate.		

A partnership between Mount Rothwell, the Victorian Government and the University of Melbourne has been instrumental in improving the genetic diversity of the eastern-barred bandicoot mainland population. Image: Nicolas Rakotopare

Further information:
http://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au

This project is supported through funding from the
Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program.

Threatened Species Recovery Hub

National Environmental Science Programme