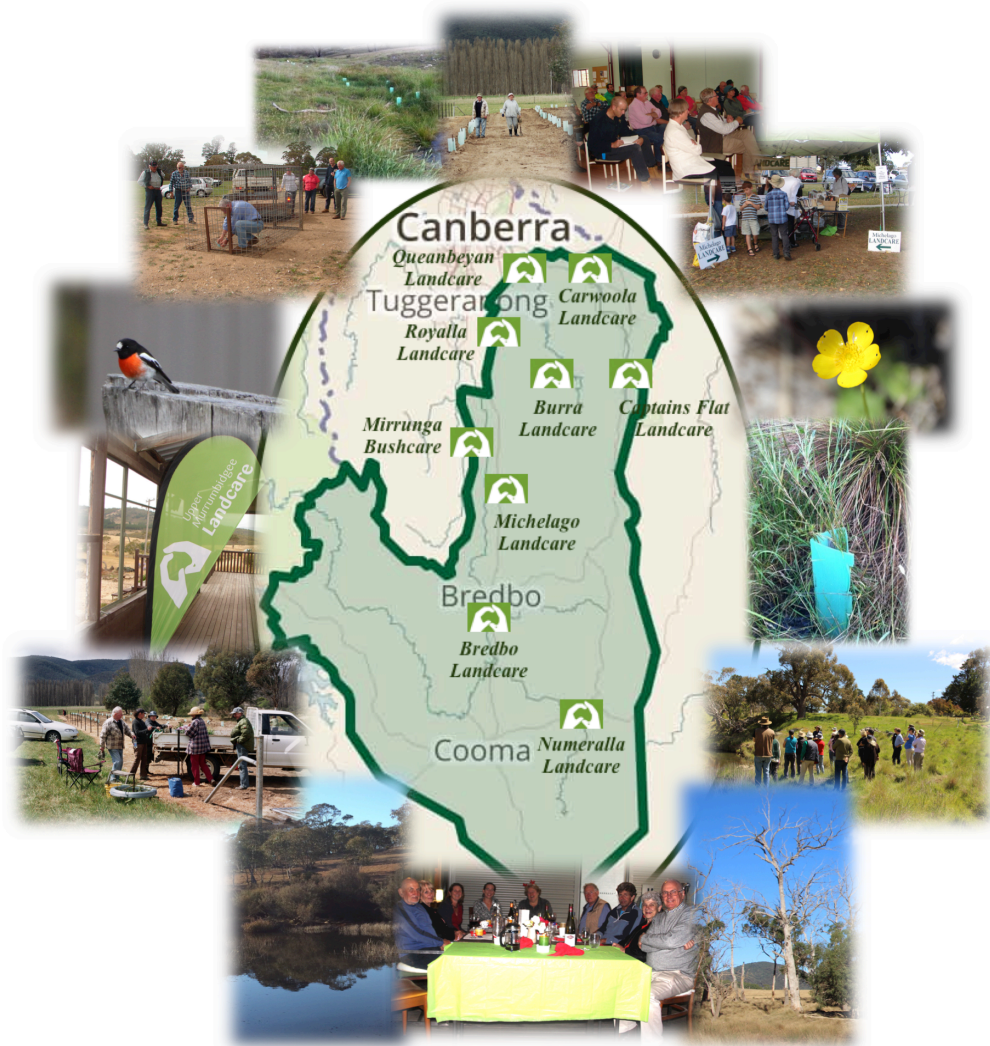


Report on the Health



Check of Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Groups

2016 Survey



Prepared by Georgeanna Story for Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare with support from Local Land Services Community, Industry and Landscapes Fund grant.

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1 Acknowledgements

The Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee would like to thank members of the Landcare groups who participated in this survey. Their time and effort is greatly appreciated. We will endeavour to use the outcomes of this survey to continue our support for local groups and target this support to the areas nominated by their members.

2 Summary

This report documents the results of a 'Health Check' survey provided to Landcare groups within the Upper Murrumbidgee Region. The survey aimed to assess the vibrancy of current groups and assess the level and type of support desired from a Landcare coordinator. The main points are summarised below and presented in greater detail in the report.

The Landcare groups within the Upper Murrumbidgee region have remained relatively stable over the past decade. They continue to be secure in their membership, however all interested in attracting new members. There are concerns over the aging membership and the ability of Landcare to appeal to the younger generation. To increase promotion of their group all groups engage with their local communities and collaborate with other NRM organisations. The requirements of good governance are well understood throughout the groups and each meets the necessary commitments, for group management, financial requirements and WHS responsibilities.

The interests of groups across the region were similar and dominated by revegetation and weed control activities. These types of activities are also considered by all groups to dominate future projects. Funding is considered a major impediment to group projects and external time commitments of members to group activity. Despite this, groups were very active in communicating and promoting their work throughout their community.

The vast majority of groups saw a role for the UML coordinator to support their members. The majority of this desired support was to assist with events, grants and project management. A clear outline as to the preferred communication tools was provided, with most options considered important.

3 Introduction

The Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee (UMLC) has for a long period been a group solely reliant on volunteer contributions to support and share Landcare news across the region. In 2016 the UMLC were successful in securing funds from the Local Land Services Community, Industry and Landscapes Fund to employ a Landcare Coordinator. The new coordinator position has enabled a questionnaire to be distributed amongst local groups to assess changes that have occurred since the previous survey in 2008. The current questionnaire aimed to identify information on group demographics and governance, the current level and type of activity, and desired support from the UMLC (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was sent out in May 2016. Six of the 9 active groups returned the completed survey. Where possible information from the 3 missing groups (Carwoola, Mirrunga & Queanbeyan) has been obtained from conversations and other documentation. Representatives from past groups that are now inactive were also contacted and engaged in discussion on Landcare issues. Particular emphasis was given to the reason for the group inactivity and potential support that the coordinator could offer.

4 Responses

4.1 Group information and Governance

We asked each group to report on the current status and membership of their group. Due to the known variation between active and inactive membership we asked for the two to be differentiated in the survey.

Table 1 demonstrates that very little change has occurred in the location and number of Landcare groups between 2008 and now. Two groups have been lost since 2008, Fernleigh and Little Burra, while Captains Flat and Smiths Road/Mirrunga have reformed. These new groups however, are very small in membership and remain unincorporated. The remaining active groups ranged from 14 to 40 total members, dropping to 9 to 32 active members. Discussions with inactive groups identified a common theme for the cause of the group remaining inactive. Most inactive groups were made up of primary producers who found that the time spent seeking funding opportunities for grants was too onerous and success rate too low. They felt that it was more efficient and cost-effective to fund their own property projects independently.

The demographics of groups across the region, while varied, are dominated by the older generation, many of whom are retired. In areas where lifestyle blocks dominate the landscape, younger people and families form part of the group. While in the more agricultural areas primary producers are also involved with their Landcare group. A consistent response across the region was the distinct lack of young members.

Good governance is essential for Landcare groups to ensure the effective operation and confidence of the group. It is also important that groups are managed in accordance with

the principles of legal compliance and accountability. We asked groups questions on the organisation and direction of their group and their understanding and compliance of financial management, insurance cover and workplace safety.

Table 1. Past and present groups of the Upper Murrumbidgee region. Groups active in 2016 shaded.

Group	Active in 2008	Active in 2016	Incorporated	Total members	Active members
Adaminaby	No	No			
Bredbo	Yes	Yes	Yes	30	10
Burra	Yes	Yes	Yes	32	32
Captains Flat	No	Yes	No	2	2
Carwoola	Yes	Yes	Yes	25	25
Cooma-Murrumbidgee	No	No			
Fernleigh Park	Yes	No			
Jerangle	No	No			
Kybean	No	No			
Little Burra	Yes	No			
Michelago	Yes	Yes	Yes	14	14
Nimmitabel	No	No			
Numeralla	Yes	Yes	Yes	20	9
Queanbeyan	Yes	Yes	Yes	20*	20*
Royalla	Yes	Yes	Yes	40	20
Smiths Road/ Mirrunga	No	Yes	No	1	1
Total Groups/members	9	9	7	194	133

* Estimate

Queanbeyan-Palerang Shire Council Snowy-Monaro Shire Council

All groups but Captains Flat and Mirrunga held regular meetings, at either monthly or bi-monthly intervals. Meetings for all groups are advertised by email or through community association platforms. All groups possessed a constitution or vision statement and ran meetings in accordance with that constitution. The minutes of meetings were distributed to the committees through email. Only three groups, Bredbo, Carwoola and Numeralla, had any group assets, comprising of water trailers, spray containers, brush cutters and seed harvester/blower. Each item is registered.

The understanding and compliance for financial management, insurance cover and workplace safety was sound across the region. All groups were aware of their legal requirements and had in place the necessary cover for group activities. All but Captains Flat and Mirrunga managed their own responsibilities. Captains Flat was a member of MCG and obtained financial management and insurance cover through them. Mirrunga does not currently conduct activities that require this level of governance.

4.2 Group planning and partnerships

We asked groups about their current and future planning. Two groups identified as having a basic plan for their group's direction, with the remaining nominating the desire for a planning structure. A prominent feature of current direction was the reliance on

external funding. All groups had a new project or a project to continue that was currently unfeasible without additional funds.

All groups within the Upper Murrumbidgee region were involved in partnerships with other community organisations. Every group was in partnership with each of their respective Community Association groups. All five groups within the Molonglo catchment partnered with Molonglo Catchment Group, while several groups worked with Waterwatch on water quality projects. Other partnerships were found with Friends of Grassland, Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach, Bush Heritage, Rural Fire Service, Frogwatch and Vegwatch.

4.3 Group communications

Communications within Landcare groups is often linked to the capabilities of their members. We asked groups which of the different forms of communication they used to manage and promote their group. Overall, Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare groups were sound in their internal communications and proactive in promoting their group. All groups with more than 1 member used email to communicate within their group. Three groups produced their own newsletter and another 2 supplied material for their local community newsletter (Figure 1). Five groups also had their own website or were part of their community association website. At the time of the survey NSW Landcare was in the process of establishing NSW Gateway, a free website option for Landcare groups. A number of the groups are known to have subsequently started using Gateway and now have their own Landcare group website.

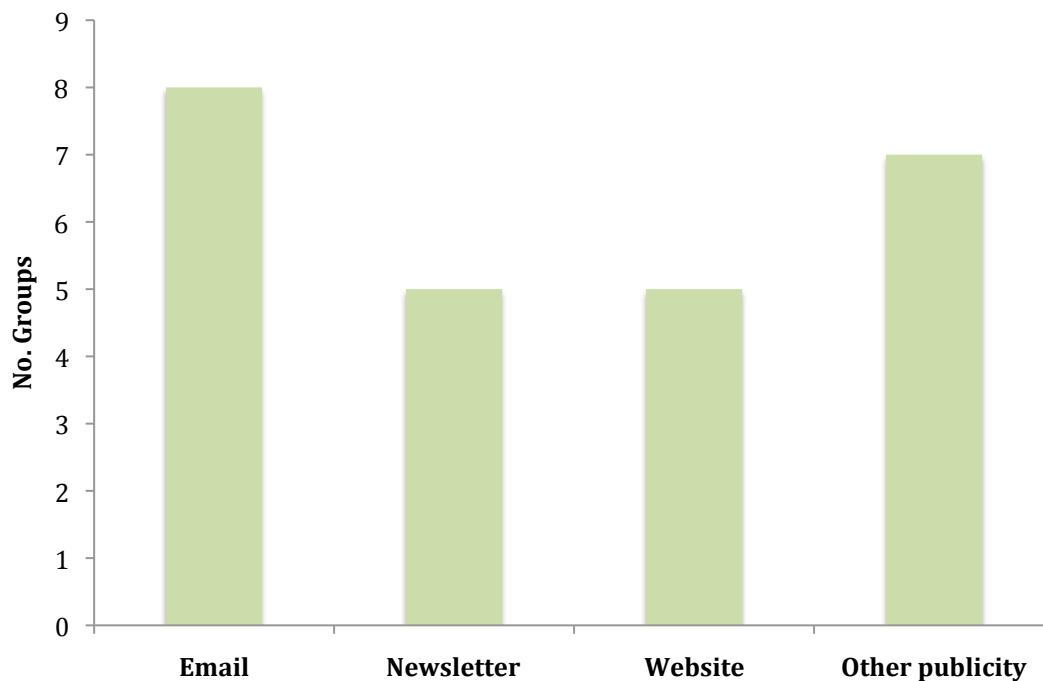


Figure 1. Communication methods used by Landcare groups.

All groups other than Captains Flat and Mirrunga utilised additional communication methods to promote their Landcare group and associated activities. Attendance through stalls at local community events was the dominant method, followed by activities open to the general community. Promotion of specific projects was also through media releases and a single group ran its own Facebook page.

4.4 Group activities

Each group was asked to list the types of activities their group currently participates in. Projects were pooled into broad categories based on the primary objective of the activity, for example revegetation activities, weed control or pest control. Each time an activity was raised it scored a point and the total count is used to represent the relative priority of each issue across the region. It is acknowledged that this methodology provides a relative guide only.

All groups reported current activity in revegetation and weed control activities. Figure 2 demonstrates that over 50% of all activities across the region fall into those two categories. Habitat management was categorised separately due to the projects stated objective, however does also include revegetation and weed control activities. Erosion and pest control were the next most common activities. Activities involving water quality and fauna survey were least frequently undertaken, and often in partnership with another organisation. All groups undertook activities on both private and public land.

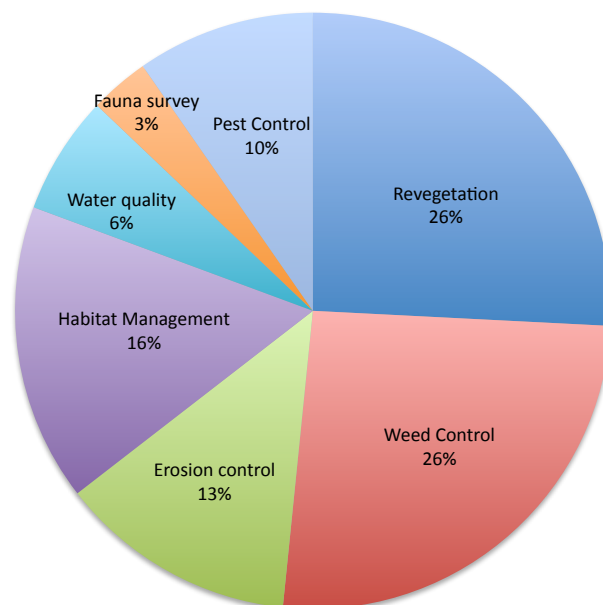


Figure 2. Current activities undertaken by Landcare groups.

When compared with activity priorities identified in 2008 the current emphasis has changed very little. Weeds were still the major concern for all groups however only half were participating in revegetation activities. Issues surrounding habitat management and erosion control have also increased in relative importance. The remaining categories were of similar interest as the current survey.

To assess which activities groups may be interested in the future we then listed a range of potential activities and training opportunities. We asked each group to nominate what activity they would be interested in, scored as yes, maybe and no. The results of the responses are presented in Figure 3. Responses followed a similar pattern as current activities with revegetation and weed control ranking highly. A broad range of other activities scored favourably, including riparian, water and soil quality, plant identification, pest control and biodiversity and habitat assessment. The noticeable difference were topics associated with farming techniques, management and organic alternatives were of less interest. Other categories not associated directly with on-ground management, mapping and grant writing, also registered less priority.

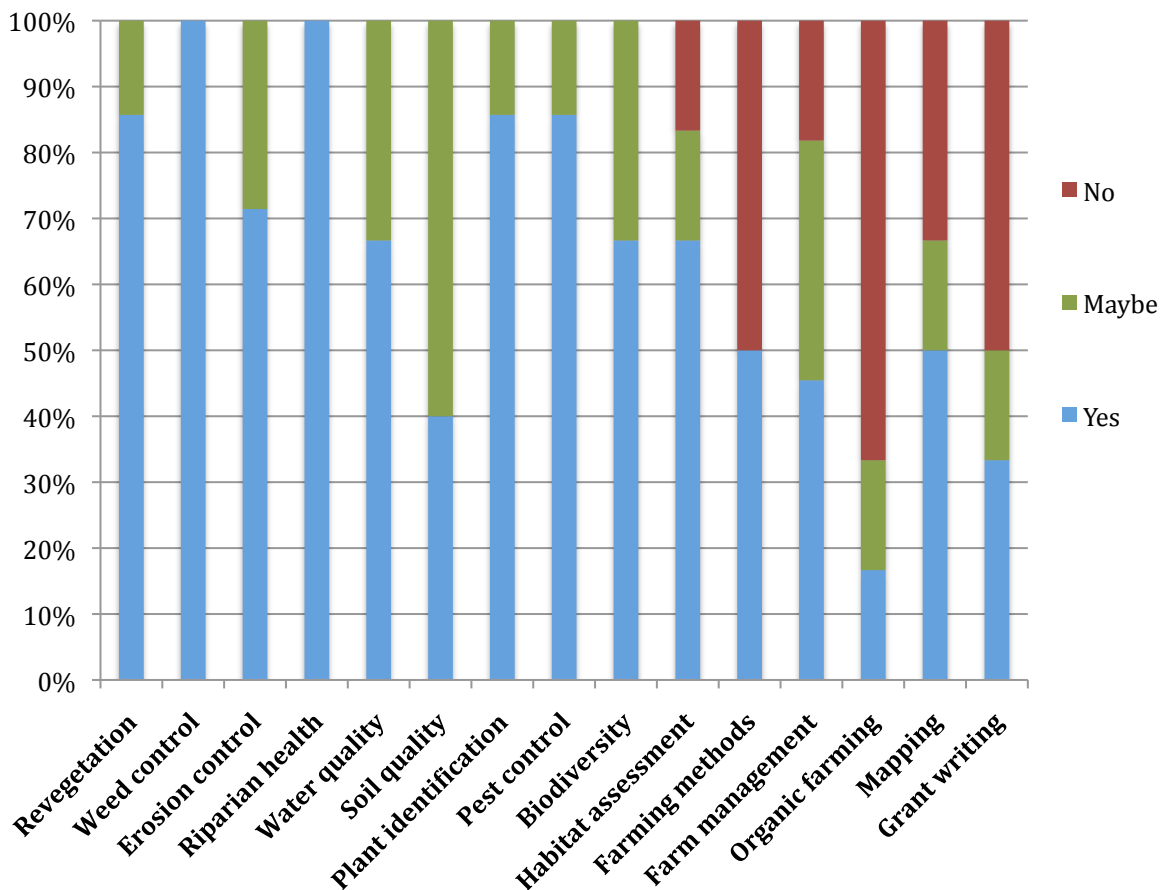


Figure 3. Future activities of interest by Landcare groups.

4.5 Group challenges

Each group was asked what challenges were facing their group. Maintaining membership and attracting new members was the consistent response. In particular, the aging membership and problems encouraging the younger generation to join Landcare was considered a major challenge. A second but still unanimous response was sourcing adequate funds to support projects. There was a consistent concern expressed over the availability and success rate of grants. Other challenges highlighted were the time constraints of members impacting on activity levels and issues surrounding the succession planning of groups.

4.6 Supporting groups

The UMLC has in the recent past had limited capacity to support Landcare groups within its region. The new coordinator position however, has the capacity to offer assistance and support. Groups were asked an open-ended question about how a coordinator could help their group and then specifically about which communication options from the coordinator would be useful. For communication options groups were asked to respond as yes, no or maybe.

The responses from the open ended question could be categorised within 5 topics; events, project support, membership, grants and unsure. No group identified more than two areas of desired support and one group was unsure (Figure 4). Managing events was the dominant area for support, followed by grant sourcing and project management. An interesting result was that despite every group nominating membership as an issue, only one group felt that the coordinator could assist in this area.

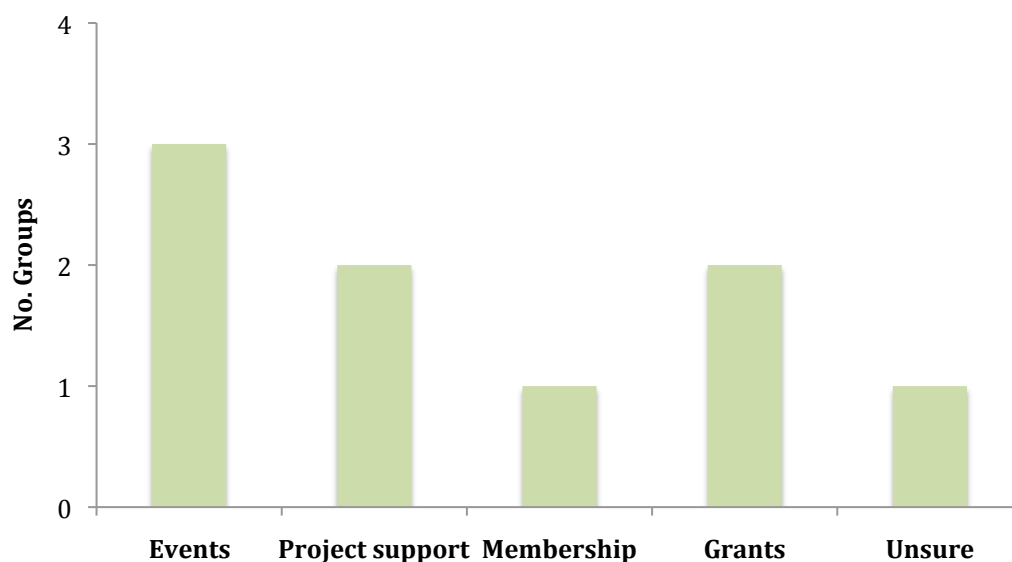


Figure 4. Areas of coordinator support nominated by Landcare groups.

In response to the usefulness of different communication methods by the coordinator, there was unanimous agreement that group emails, a UMLC newsletter and a UMLC website would be useful. Within the website all groups were interested in information concerning UMLC outline, Local Landcare groups information, area maps, events and contacts. Additionally, all but one group were also interested in the history of the UMLC, newsletters, project information and resources and links also being included on the website. In regards to social media, a UMLC Facebook page was felt to be useful by all but one group, however only two groups felt that Twitter may be worthwhile.

5 Conclusion

The results of this survey have identified that, while groups in the Upper Murrumbidgee have not changed considerably over the last decade, those established have remained relatively strong and active. The survey has also helped to identify areas in which the Landcare Coordinator can support these groups and the manner in which the support is preferred.

6 Appendix 1

1. About your group

Group name	
Group contact	
Contact phone	
Contact email	
Is your group formally incorporated?	
Total membership	
Number of active members	

What are the main demographics of your group?

What are the geographical boundaries of your group? See also attached map.

2. Group activities

What has been the main focus of your group in recent years?

Does your group focus on activities on private land, public land or both?

What are the activities that your group have participated in over the last 2 years?

Have any past or current activities received public funding? Are there reports available?

When are activities best suited to your group?

What are the challenges facing your group?

What type of activities would your group like to participate in? Please rank, with 1 the most preferred.

Activity	Response Rank 1-17
Revegetation	
Propagation	
Riparian health	
Soil assessment	
Water quality	
Weed control	
Pest control	
Plant identification	
Biodiversity	
Habitat assessment	
Erosion control	
Fire management	
Indigenous history & land use	
Organic farming	
Farming methods & management	
Mapping	
Grant writing	

4. Group direction

Does your group have, or would they like, a planning structure for future direction?

What type of partnerships or links would your group be interested in developing?

How can the UML Coordinator best support your group?

5. Communication and Social Media

Does your group produce a newsletter or support a website?

How can the UML use the different communication tools to meet the needs of your group?

Activity	Response Yes/No/Maybe	Comments
Group email lists		
UML newsletter		
UMLC website		
Social media		

We are looking to revamp the UMLC website. What would your group like to see on the UML website? Proposed pages are:

Activity	Response Yes/No/Maybe	Comments
About the UMLC		
History of UMLC		
Individual Local Landcare group information		
Area maps		

Events		
Newsletters		
Projects		
Resources & links		
Contacts		
Other		

Would communication through a UML Facebook page be useful for your group?

Would communication through a UML twitter account be useful for your group?

Are there other electronic forms of communication that would be useful for your group?

Are there any issues about sharing information or photos from your group on the UML website or other social media platforms?

6. Governance

When and how often does your group meet?

How are members notified of meeting dates and outcomes?

Does your group have a constitution or vision statement?

Are the financial obligations of the group routinely met?

Does your group understand and meet their public liability insurance obligations?

Does your group understand and meet their workplace health and safety obligations?

Does your group have any assets? If yes, are there adequate insurance and hire agreements in place?

Additional information

Are there any other comments about your group or their needs?
