

Evaluation of the Ministry for the Environment's Community Environment Fund (CEF) – Round 9, 2017.

Prepared by EnviroStrat Ltd for the Ministry for the Environment

May 2023

Contents

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	3
LIST OF TABLES.....	3
LIST OF FIGURES.....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
1. INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 BACKGROUND	7
1.2 ROUND 9 FUNDING ALLOCATION.....	8
2. EVALUATION SCOPE AND APPROACH.....	11
2.1 SCOPE	11
2.2 OUT OF SCOPE.....	11
2.3 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK.....	11
2.4 DATA AND METHODS.....	13
2.5 CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS	17
3. RESULTS	17
3.1 ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS	18
3.2 SURVEY INSIGHTS	20
3.3 INTERVIEWS INSIGHTS	32
3.4 CASE STUDIES	34
4. KEY FINDINGS AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS	39
5. CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	46
RECOMMENDATION 1: ENHANCE MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH SIMPLIFICATION OF PROJECT SELECTION AND OVERSIGHT, AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT APPROACHES.....	46
RECOMMENDATION 2: THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND RATIONALE FOR CEF NEEDS TO BE FURTHER AUGMENTED AND TIMELY COMMUNICATED TO COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.....	47
RECOMMENDATION 3: EXPLORE HOW MFE (CEF TEAM AND BEYOND) CAN LEVERAGE AND ENHANCE THE IMPACT OF CEF BY GROWING ITS ROLE BEYOND A FUNDING PROVIDER.....	47
RECOMMENDATION 4: INCREASE FOCUS ON IMPACT MEASUREMENT AT CEF LEVEL	48

RECOMMENDATION 5: UNDERTAKE INDEPENDENT FINAL EVALUATION OF THE TWO NATIONAL NETWORKS FUNDED..... 48

APPENDICES..... 49

APPENDIX 1: CEF THEORY OF CHANGE..... 49

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES 49

APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS AND THEMES 51

APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESULTS AND THEMES 60

APPENDIX 5: SURVEY STRUCTURE AND QUESTIONS 64

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared by Envirostrat Limited for the exclusive use of the Client and for a specific purpose, each as expressly stated in the document. No other party should rely on this document without the prior written consent of Envirostrat Limited. Envirostrat Limited undertakes no duty, or warranty, nor accepts any responsibility, to any third party who may rely upon or use this document. This document has been prepared based on the Client's description of its requirements and Envirostrat Limited's experience, having regard to assumptions that Envirostrat Limited can reasonably be expected to make in accordance with sound professional principles. Envirostrat Limited may also have relied upon information provided by the Client and other third parties to prepare this document, some of which may not have been verified. Subject to the above conditions, this document may be transmitted, reproduced or disseminated only in its entirety.

Acronyms and abbreviations

	Description
CEF	Community Environment Fund
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DOC	Department of Conservation
EHA	Environment Hubs Aotearoa
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NGO	Non-Profit Organisation
MfE	Ministry for the Environment
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

List of tables

Table #	Description	Page number
1	List of project-based contestable funding recipients	8
2	List of capability-based National network funding recipients	10
3	Evaluation Criteria (derived from the OECD DAC framework)	12
4	Overview of project co-funding by contribution type/source	19
5	Examples of key learnings from the projects	19

6	Types of survey respondents	21
7	Compilation of results from the survey semi-quantitative and qualitative responses and correspondence of results to the evaluation criteria	25
8	Comparative analysis of the two funding modalities against the evaluation criteria and MfE's value-for-money proposal requirements for CEF	42

List of figures

Figure #	Description	Page number
1	Breakdown of the direct linkage between project KPI's and CEF's goals	18
2	Breakdown of survey responses by respondent type (Total number of respondents = 14).	21
3	Answers to the survey question on number of years since the project has finished. (Total number of responses = 13.)	22
4	Other funding sources for survey respondents	22
5	Agreement with statements related to funding impact, coherence and relevance	23
6	Perception of respondents and comparison of previous project-based funding with CEF funding	24
7	Concept map compiling the main aspects from the analysis of survey, interview answers and document analysis	41

Executive Summary

This independent evaluation provides a review of the Community Environment Fund (CEF) focusing on the impact of, and comparison between the two main CEF funding mechanisms: small scale contestable funding and sustained network funding.

The evaluation provides observations and recommendations to inform the advice to the Minister of the Environment on where funding is best directed to deliver maximum impact for communities and environmental outcomes. The evaluation assesses the fund's overall purpose, coherency, impact, efficiency, efficacy and sustainability of each mechanism.

Two questions from MfE were addressed: what is the value of MfE's support for small scale, local projects, and would this value be better achieved in other ways?; and how is impact enhanced by funding capacity and capability building in nationwide network-based organisations?

Regarding the first, the evaluation shows that MfE's support for small-scale local projects through the Community Environment Fund (CEF) has created value in a range of ways, including enabling direct community action, acting as a catalyst for additional funding, enhancing planning and predictability, and promoting capability and innovation. However, there is high demand for project support, and only a few projects can receive support in each round – leading to significant resources being used for proposal preparation without the potential to convert into projects. While funding is scarce, funded projects were able to leverage more funding from other sources but managing different reporting requirements from different funding organizations put a strain on smaller organizations' capabilities. MfE's support through CEF has local or regional relevance and impact, but implementing MfE's overarching strategic goals through nationwide network organizations is more effective in enabling better integration of local initiatives and knowledge-sharing. Nonetheless, it is important to consider the significant local impact that local projects can have.

Considering the second question, funding capacity and capability building in nationwide network-based organizations enhances impact by promoting knowledge-sharing, exchanging lessons learnt, and replicating good practices among community initiatives connected through regional hubs. Workshops and training provided by national networks to regional hubs also improve the effectiveness of community action and implementation. Increased impact is achieved by transferring capacity and capability to regional hubs, allowing them to be more effective in their operations and leveraging funds from other sources to address local community issues. Regional hubs also have a role in advocating for social and environmental improvements through policy and governance and coordinating participatory processes for public debate on environmental issues. The impact can be measured through a compilation of regional hubs' accomplishments. Promoting public participation is aligned with the MfE's strategic agenda and represents value-for-money.

Finally, the concluding recommendations for MfE are:

1. Simplify project selection and management processes, including by adopting non-competitive grant allocation and reduce co-financing requirements for small projects. Also, employ a more trust-based approach to reporting requirements and allow for adaptive management for small community organizations.
2. Augment the theory of change of CEF and ensure its alignment with MfE's mission and strategic priorities. MfE should communicate this theory to community organizations and provide an opportunity for their participation in the process.
3. Explore the potential for CEF to grow its role beyond that of a funding provider, for example by focusing on scaling up solutions already tested within CEF or facilitating skills sharing among community groups.

4. Increase the focus on impact measurement at the CEF level and adopt a systematic and holistic approach to impact reporting (linked to recommendation 2).
5. Undertake independent final evaluation of the two national networks funded.

1. Introduction

This independent evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) to provide a review of the Community Environment Fund (CEF). This evaluation focuses on the impact of and comparison between the two main CEF funding mechanisms: small scale contestable funding and sustained network funding. The evaluation provides observations and recommendations to shape MfE's advice to the Minister of the Environment on where funding is best directed to deliver maximum impact for communities and environmental outcomes. Observations are also made in relation to the overall purpose, coherency and impact of the CEF.

1.1 Background

A. CEF Overview

CEF is described by MfE as empowering New Zealanders “to make a positive difference to the environment. It supports projects that strengthen environmental partnerships, raise environmental awareness, and encourage participation in environmental initiatives in the community.”

The CEF was established in 2010 with joint approval by the Minister for the Environment and Ministry of Finance, combining three previously existing funds. Since its establishment, there have been nine rounds of the Fund.

This evaluation focuses on the 2017 Round 9 of the funds. Funding rounds have allocated resources using two different models: a) contestable project-based funding and b) larger scale capacity and capability funding for national organisations (or network funding). The project-based funding invests in smaller-scale projects with specific foci that meet the goals and aspirations of the CEF. Funding is provided through contestable funding rounds. The latter focuses on larger-scale initiatives that build networks and capability for community-based environmental action. Support for these initiatives is ongoing and are operational funds rather than discrete contestable funds.

B. Eligibility and assessment criteria

CEF's stated purpose was to support projects and initiatives that can achieve one or more of the following overarching goals:

- Strengthen environmental partnerships.
- Raise environmental awareness.
- Encourage participation in environmental initiatives in the community.

Eligibility and merit of projects proposals were assessed with the support of an Assessment Panel and against a series of criteria: eligibility, a preference assessment, value-for-money and Ministry priorities. The Ministry priorities considered for this Evaluation come from the [Ministry for the Environment's Statement of Intent 2016-2020](#), which was current at the time of CEF's Round 9, and the report “[A generation from now: our long-term goals](#)”, indicated in the CEF's Application Form as MfE's priorities at the time.

1.2 Round 9 Funding Allocation

A. Contestable Project-Based Funding

In Round 9 of the CEF, contestable project-based funding was awarded to eleven organisations to the value of \$2.04m (in 2017 – some projects are still ongoing). Ultimately, ten of those projects received the funding and the total funds provided amounted to \$1.78m.¹ The grantees projects are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. List of project-based contestable funding recipients

Organisation	Project title	Region	Project description	Funding awarded	Project Duration
Hohepa Homes Trust Board	Lower Taipo Stream Environmental Enhancement Project- Stage 2	Hawke's Bay	Assist the restoration of the health and mauri of Te Whanganui-a-Orotu, by expanding the wetland resource available to capture sediment flows from key contributory waterways.	\$200,000	2 years
Te Runanga o Ngati Manawa	He Korowai o Papatūānuku (Reconnecting to our environment)	Bay of Plenty	Link, expand and enhance existing and proposed native forestry pockets along the Rangitāiki River, its tributaries and margins.	\$271,864	3 years
NZ Landcare Trust	Waikawa Stream Community Catchment Project	Manawatu-Whanganui Region	Bring together landowners, community members, and stakeholders to work towards improving the health and wellbeing of the Waikawa catchment.	\$170,000	4 years
Mountains to Sea Wellington Trust	Whitebait Connection Project	Wellington	Provide funding for 1.5 full-time equivalent and associated costs to ensure the delivery capacity of the Whitebait Connection Project across the greater Wellington region over the next three years.	\$200,000	3 years

¹ This arose as the organisation responsible for one of the funded projects (CEF 719: Te Mana o te Waingongoro Stream) was deemed not to be a legal entity. Moreover, there were some deviations in actual expenditure, due in large part to challenges imposed by Covid-19.

Organisation	Project title	Region	Project description	Funding awarded	Project Duration
Landcare Research New Zealand Ltd	Whangamaire Constructed Wetlands	Waikato	Decrease the amount of agriculturally derived sediment and nutrients entering the Whangamire Stream (near Taupiri) which eventually feeds the Waikato River.	\$153,000	2 years
Reconnecting Northland Trust ²	He Ripō Kau	Northland	Promote connections between agencies, projects, landholders, hapū and iwi with in South Hokianga, aligned upon a common set of values.	\$300,000	3 years
The Sustainable Business Network	Million Metres	National	Fundraise approximately \$2.2 million for at least 20 waterway restoration projects annually; supporting the planting of 150 kilometres of waterway riparian areas with 750,000 native plants and trees.	\$280,000	3 years
Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke and Canterbury Regional Council on behalf of the Whakapapa/Lyttelton Harbour Partnership	Whakaraupō / Lyttelton Harbour Head of the Bays: Reducing sediment and restoring cultural and ecological values	Canterbury	Reduce sediment and contaminant inputs to the streams and saltmarsh in the head of the bay project area; restore the cultural and ecological health of mahinga kai; enhance landowner and community engagement; and develop and implement with landowners, practical solutions to address sediment and contaminant issues.	\$150,000	3 years
Venture Southland	Zero Carbon Southland	Southland	Establish a Zero Carbon Framework for Southland to reduce carbon emissions across the region. The project will build awareness and enable advocacy for climate change, the development of key data and insights to support how the region can achieve net zero emissions by 2050, and the ongoing carbon accounting of the region's emissions on an annual basis.	\$191,637	3 years

² This project was selected as a case study for this evaluation, see Section 3.4

Organisation	Project title	Region	Project description	Funding awarded	Project Duration
The Common Unity Project Aotearoa	Urban Kai Network	Wellington	Support the expansion of the Urban Kai Network.	\$54,231	3 years

B. National networks

In 2020, the decision was made to extend network funding support to two organisations to the value of \$9.41m (started in 2020 and support is still ongoing). The two organisations that received network funding are also described in Table 2.

Table 2. List of capability-based National network funding recipients

Organisation	Project title	Region	Project description	Funding awarded	Project Duration
Para Kore	Whakapapa ki a Papatuanuku	National	To maintain and extend capacity and resources for delivery and impact of a Māori-based waste education programme that supports marae, iwi, kōhanga reo, kura and community organisations throughout Aotearoa.	\$3,008,068	4 years (but will be 4.5)
Environment Hubs Aotearoa ³	Capability and Capacity Building - phase 2	National	<p>The overarching strategic themes of this project are to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish EHA as the funding distribution agency for the EHA network. 2. Enhance the organisational capability and capacity of both EHA and its members nationwide. 3. Enhance the community reach and connectedness of EHA and its members to grow local environmental action and outcomes 	\$6.4m	4 years (soon to be 5)

³ This initiative was selected as a case study for this evaluation, see Section 3.4

2. Evaluation Scope and Approach

2.1 Scope

MfE seek an evaluation of the Community Environment Fund, with a focus on Round 9 and the 2020 CEF project-based recipients and national network recipients. Based on the scope provided by MfE, the two key questions for this evaluation are:

- What is the value of MfE's support for small scale, local projects, and would this value be better achieved in other ways (e.g., support from other funders)?
- How is impact enhanced by funding capacity and capability building in nationwide network-based organisations?

The information provided by this evaluation will help shape the MfE's recommendations to the Minister of the Environment on where the funding is best directed to achieve maximum impact for communities and environmental outcomes. To do this MfE need to understand the value of their support for small scale projects and the value achieved through funding the enhancement of capacity and capability in established organisations.

2.2 Out of Scope

This evaluation does not:

- Provide an in-depth assessment of whether every project funded by CEF Round 9 achieved its planned outputs and KPIs.
- Examine every possible alternative funding approach – this evaluation focuses on the two funding approaches deployed in Round 9 of the CEF.
- Assess achievements of long-term environmental outcomes (as the project timeframes are too short to understand this)

2.3 Evaluation Framework

The evaluation approach was informed and structured around the OECD/DAC criteria for evaluating (development) assistance.⁴ The criteria involve evaluation of programmes and projects through an assessment of effectiveness, impact, sustainability, efficiency, relevance and coherence. These criteria (and other qualitative standards, general principles and advice) are the outcome of collective OECD member experience for evaluating the results and effectiveness of policies and programmes and have gained broad international consensus and uptake.

The criteria framework adopted by this evaluation is presented in Table 3, with separate explanations for each of the criteria in the view of the context for the CEF. The sample of questions in the framework were part of the guiding questions prepared for interviews and consultations.

⁴ See OECD: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

Table 3. Evaluation Criteria (derived from the OECD DAC framework)

Proposed criteria	Explanation and adaptation in the context of the Community Environment Fund
Effectiveness	<p>The extent to which CEF or individual projects met objectives or are on track to achieve them.</p> <p>The following assessment and questions are considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the major factors influencing the achievement of the project/programme purpose and objectives? • To what extent were the objectives achieved or are on track to being achieved? (comparison between planning and results) • Is the CEF nationwide network-based funding addressing the obstacles to achieving the objectives?
Efficiency	<p>Measurement of the outputs - qualitative and quantitative - in relation to the inputs.</p> <p>This is an economic term to show if the project uses the least costly resources possible to achieve the desired outcomes. This is accomplished through a desk top effort (comparing data from existing monitoring and evaluation reports) but also as an enquiry for ideas from the organisations that delivered the project.</p> <p>Questions to guide this inquiry include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were activities cost-efficient? • Could funding be provided more efficiently through different avenues? • Were objectives achieved on time? Did they lead to stretched outcomes? • What is the value of MfE's support – and can the value be achieved through other ways?
Impact	<p>The positive and negative changes generated by the CEF, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.</p> <p>This involves the main impacts and effects resulting from the activity using as reference the impacts identified in CEF's Theory of Change. Potential questions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has happened as a result of the CEF? • What was the scale of impact achieved? (e.g., partnerships numbers, enhanced environmental awareness, participation in community initiatives)? • How is impact enhanced by funding capacity and capability of national networks (EHA)? • Is there a difference in the impact achieved depending on the funding approach (small grants vs capacity and capability)?
Sustainability	<p>Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue beyond project implementation – including the financial sustainability.</p> <p>When evaluating the sustainability of a programme or a project, it is useful to consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How likely will the beneficial impacts persist and for how long? • What additional inputs will be necessary to maintain the gained benefits?

Proposed criteria Explanation and adaptation in the context of the Community Environment Fund

- What are the major factors of the fund design influencing the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of projects?

Relevance	<p>Relevance refers to the extent to which the fund objectives and design is aligned with the projects needs and priorities even if circumstances change. Question that can illustrate the relevance criteria are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the value of small-scale project funding be achieved in other ways? • How much of the success of the project can be attributed to CEF's or the networks funding? Would it be possible for the project to achieve the same goals if it wasn't for the fund?
Coherence	<p>The coherence criteria address the synergy and interlinkages of projects objectives and results with MfE's mission, principles, strategies and goals. Questions that can highlight coherence are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the funding modalities fit into the broader MfE strategy or agenda? • How does the funds support the achievement of other complementary or synergic MfE goals and strategic objectives?

2.4 Data and Methods

The evaluation methods are participatory and based on the theoretical evaluation framework in the previous section. Robustness of findings is corroborated by a triangulation approach where information, data and insights are collected through different methodological approaches. There were three key methods and sources of data deployed to answer the evaluation questions and meet the scope outlined in the previous section. These include reviewing internal CEF documents and project reports, surveying relevant stakeholders connected to contestable funding recipients or the network-based funding recipients and in-depth interviews with stakeholders from a range of projects. Case studies were also used to inform the evaluation report.

These methods and sources are briefly outlined below.

2.4.1 Methods

Review of CEF documentation

The evaluation team reviewed internal CEF, projects and network organisations documentation, either provided by MfE or published as annual reports. The review included a high-level assessment including CEF's theory of change (Appendix 1), guidance for applicants, the project closure reports and internal project evaluation forms. The list of documents reviewed included:

- CEF Theory of change
- Guidance for applicants
- Internal selection criteria
- Funding applications
- Deed of funding

- Project management plan
- Project closure report (provided by the recipient)
- Project evaluation report from MfE (focused on reporting and KPI achievement)
- Projects and network organisations annual reports

Reviewing the CEF theory of change and guidance for applicants enabled an evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, relevance and coherence of the CEF's overall goals and objectives. This included the comparison between the CEF's stated goals and the theory of change and the level of funding required to achieve the CEF's ultimate objectives.

The project closure reports provided the recipients' own perspectives on their progress towards their goals and achievement of project KPIs. These reports also provided a space for recipients to give non-anonymized critical feedback to MfE about the CEF. The internal project evaluations provided insights as to how MfE perceived the recipient's progress towards and achievement of their project goals and KPIs.

Reviewing both sets of documents allowed for a brief evaluation of both the projects themselves and the overall impact of the CEF Round 9. As per the scope, this evaluation will not go into an in-depth evaluation of each project. Rather, information and examples were gleaned from individual projects and then aggregated to provide evaluation insights for the fund overall.

Survey

As part of the evaluation, a survey was sent out to recipients and stakeholders connected to CEF project-based funding recipients and those connected to CEF-funded network organisations (or stakeholders connected to both). The survey was designed carefully with the evaluation criteria in mind and the key questions for MfE. The survey included a broad range of both quantitative and qualitative survey questions relating to the areas in the list below (see Appendix 5 for the full survey questions and structure).

As agreed in the consent form for the survey and interviews, respondents and interviewees remained anonymous and referred by coded descriptors.

Survey Question

Questions were chosen to avoid replicating answers or insights from the project closure reports and other documentation. As such, the review process was a necessary first step before releasing the survey. The areas covered included:

- A. The evaluation criteria the response was connected to. Example of questions include:
 - With respect to your CEF funded project, will additional funds be needed to maintain the gains / improvement / impact of the project? - Sustainability
 - What was/is the value of the CEF to your organization and project? Examples could be: "the CEF helped develop new community relationships" or "without the CEF, we would not have reached certain goals." - Impact
- B. The effectiveness, efficiency, impact, coherence and sustainability of the CEF as a whole. Example questions include:

- Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements: The CEF reporting requirements were excessive. – Efficiency
 - Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements: The CEF funding has helped build capability for future environmental progress for our organization. – Impact and Sustainability
 - Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements: The CEF aligns well with the MfE as an organization. – Coherence
- C. The comparison between CEF project-based funding and other project-based funding avenues. Example questions include:
- What, if anything, differentiates the CEF from other funding sources? – Efficiency and coherence
 - Thinking back about previous project-based funding, please indicate whether the CEF funding is better or worse than other sources of funding at:
 - Enabling the delivery of impact. – impact and efficiency
 - Achieving value for money in terms of impact. – impact and efficiency
- D. The perceptions of the value of national environmental network organisations. Example questions include:
- “Overall, what are your perceptions of environmental network organizations?” - relevance
 - “For your organization, would you prefer to receive project-based funding through the CEF or receive support as part of a larger environmental network organization?” – efficiency and relevance
- E. Open-ended questions around how to improve the CEF going forwards. Questions included:
- “How could the CEF be improved in the future?” – coherence and efficiency
 - “Do you think there are better ways to deliver funding to local environmental projects? If so, what ways? Please keep in mind that there will always be limits on resources.” – coherence and efficiency

Survey ethics

The survey was fully confidential, and it was agreed that the individual responses would remain anonymized from MfE. Consequently, in the results section, any identifying information in qualitative responses were removed. Moreover, respondents were able to opt out of answering any given question and had the option of requesting their data be removed later.

Survey platform and distribution

The survey was designed and implemented in SurveyMonkey. The survey flow was largely the same for all respondents, however, irrelevant questions were not asked of individuals. For example, if a person stated that they had not received any other project-based funding, they were not asked to compare the CEF with other project-based funding.

A survey contacts list was established based on guidance from MfE and the project workstream reports. The survey was initially distributed to the contacts list using SurveyMonkey's in-built email

distribution mechanism. The survey was also sent out as an anonymous web link directly from MfE to project stakeholders. To promote and allow for diversity of feedback, survey participants (funding recipients) are also asked to share the survey with other stakeholders involved with their CEF-related project.

Analysis plan

As the survey contains both qualitative and quantitative information, the analysis of the results required a nuanced approach.

Qualitative insights from the “comments” and “enter text” questions are generated through an explorative, inductive approach where themes are coded and identified. The coding and themes are developed with the interview data in mind to help produce a set of insights and observations at the end of the report.

The quantitative results (which include results for variables measured on systematic Likert scales) are presented visually as graphs and as statistics. The small sample size for the survey prohibits the use of certain statistical tools (like hypothesis testing). However, the results nonetheless deliver useful qualitative insights about stakeholders’ experiences with the CEF.⁵

Interviews

Each interview was semi-structured and tailored depending on the role the interviewee had in project implementation and familiarity with the broader context for the project (policy and governance, resourcing, community engagement, fund establishment etc).

A Thematic Analysis approach was applied to interpret the content of interviews. As a qualitative method, thematic analysis was used to systematically identify patterns or themes within the transcripts and notes from interviews. The themes arising in the interviews were grouped under the main evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and coherence).

Case-studies

The case study method was utilized as an approach to conduct a thorough exploration and analysis of two specific initiatives. This involved gathering information from project documentation as well as conducting interviews with key project managers or implementers. The findings of the case studies are presented in fact-sheet summaries, which provide detailed insight into the projects' activities, challenges, innovative approaches, and lessons learned. These case studies supplement the results obtained from the survey, interviews, and document analysis conducted for this evaluation, and they reinforce the recommendations.

⁵ Having quantitative Likert-type questions also have the additional benefit of making the survey easier to fill out and prompting a higher response rate.

2.5 Constraints and limitations

A. Limited timeframes

The evaluation team operated within a tight timeframe and budget which constrained the possibility of site visits and number of interviews conducted. This means the project team had to rely significantly on desktop evaluation and documents readily available.

B. Staff changes as result of time passing since projects were funded and completed

The Round 9 contestable funding projects were developed and approved between 2017 and 2018, implementation started in 2018, and most projects were completed by mid-2022. On the other hand, since the two nationwide network organisations were funded in 2020 for a period of five years, funding and work by national networks (and connected local networks) is ongoing. This evaluation was conducted in February and March 2023. There can be a significant difference between the evaluation of ongoing work connected to the network organisations and the small-scale contestable projects closed about two years ago. One essential difference may be the inability to interview key people involved in project design and delivery or MfE staff no longer working for the projects or the fund.

C. Limited clarity regarding CEF's Theory of Change

The Community Environment Fund Guide for Assessment Panel does not position the project plans and implementation within the context of the Outcomes Framework for the Fund.

The Outcomes Framework was developed after the project selection and therefore it was not available as guidance for project design or in the development of the implementation plans. This is a significant limitation given that it is not reasonable or feasible to assess the projects against outcomes that were established after projects started.

D. Limited possibility of a counterfactual assessment of Fund's performance due to exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic.

All projects mentioned disruptions associated with COVID-19 and lockdowns. The evaluation results might be reflecting the extenuating circumstances caused by the pandemic and a counterfactual analysis was not possible within the scope of this work. However, any disruptions caused by the pandemic and mentioned by interviewees were noted and are part of the analysis.

3. Results

In this section, the results of four data and information collection methods is reported. It starts with the analysis of documentation and reports related to the funded projects and networks followed by the results from the elected quantitative survey questions, insights from the survey open-ended questions, the results from the thematic analysis of the interviews responses and finally an in-depth analysis of two case studies.

3.1 Analysis of documents and reports

The documents analysed provided information on projects and networks description, goals, structure, planning to deliver results, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and assessments and evaluations. Most documentation was complete with a few gaps of information for some of the projects. However, most projects and the networks presented consistent and robust information for an evaluation.

There was a set of 11 organisations and projects available for the analysis. Given the diverse nature of the funds, projects and network organisations, most projects' corresponding KPIs were not suitable for aggregations. Number of KPIs per project varied from 4 to 21, with an average of 12 KPIs per project or network organisation. CEF's Guide for Applicants for Round 9 - 2017 presented relevant and insightful guidance on how to select and establish KPIs.

For a comparative analysis, project's KPIs were assessed against the goals established in CEF's Guide for the Assessment Panel. This assessment provide insight on the level of coherence between projects and CEF's goals. Figure 1 shows the distribution of KPIs among the three CEF's objectives. Of a total 129 KPIs from all the available projects, 66 were considered to directly correlate with one of the three CEF's overarching goals. Of the 66 KPIs, 26 relate to strengthening of environmental partnerships. The least correlated objective was raising environmental awareness. The remaining KPIs were significantly correlated to the project's specificities.

EHA and Para Kore, as national network organizations, for example, established KPIs that relate to their role as enablers of activities and initiatives of the regional networks and, indirectly, are aligned with CEF's goals.

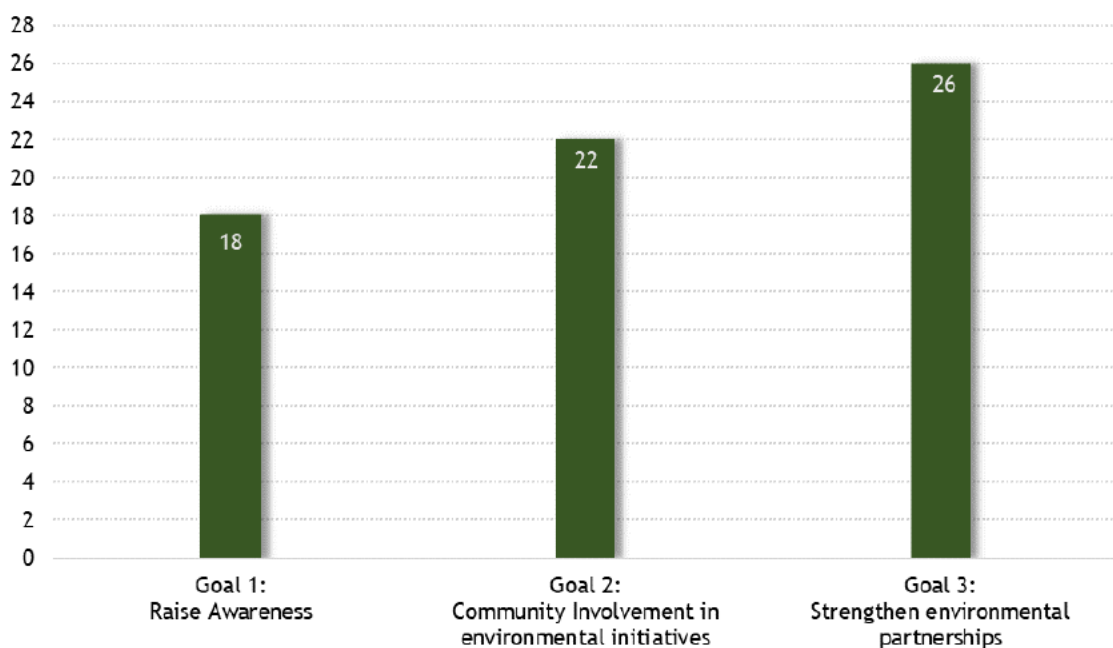


Figure 1. Breakdown of the direct linkage between project KPI's and CEF's goals

Given the diversity of projects objectives, only a few KPIs were similar enough to allow some level of aggregation. These were KPIs from projects involving:

- Restoration of wetlands or riparian forests (5 out of the 9 projects)

- Fencing (3 out of the 9 projects)
- Engagement.

All projects performed some level of engagement with diverse groups including community groups, schools, groups with special needs, local government, farmers and local businesses. The projects did not report on the number of people they engaged with but, instead reported on the number and types of engagement such as consultations, workshops or activities.

Selected aggregated indicators achieved by the projects include:

- 790 ha of replanted area, including wetlands and riparian forest
- 813,715 planted native species, with one project establishing an 80% survival rate as a threshold for efficiency
- 900m of fencing, including predator fencing and 3-wire batten fencing.

However, the results listed above cannot be exclusively attributed to the CEF funding due to the co-funding from other sources. According to CEF's co-funding model, the total budget for the projects comprised cash contributions from the recipients, external funding and the fund provided by CEF. (Table 4).

Table 4 Overview of project co-funding by contribution type/source.

Contribution type	Project average	Range
Organisation's cash contribution to the project	20%	0-45%
External funding	26%	0-81%
Community Environment Fund contribution	54%	18-98%

There were eight Project Closure Reports available for this evaluation. The reports consist of projects self-assessments with indication of achievement of goals, successes, key-learnings, relationships and partnerships established and endurance of the project. This last aspect speaks to the projects' sustainability by asking project implementers about "long-term sustainable outcomes of the project". There is no indication of information sharing among fund recipients so lessons-learned are replicated of scaled-up. However, six main themes around lessons-learned were highlighted in the Closure Reports (Table 5).

Table 5. Examples of key learnings from the projects

Key learning theme	Examples and quotes from the Closure Reports
Technical and procedural	<p>"Ensuring robust plants and controlling rabbits is vital to the survival rate for native plantings in the wetland environment."</p> <p>"Resource consenting was a sharp learning curve."</p>
Increment of initiatives impacts	<p>"Competition for funding is disruptive to a collaborative, collective effort. (...), the general central govt. funding regime creates a high degree of competition between local groups which creates a barrier to collaboration."</p>

Training and capacity building	<p>“Workshops and training programs provide the skills for employment in restoration activities.”</p> <p>“Community science program moved from one group at a time in-field to a monitoring night class series and modular training program later converted into an online resource and scaled up for national use. This transition revealed to be a lot more cost-effective.”</p>
Better stakeholder engagement	<p>“The early identification of iwi groups to be engaged with as part of Resource Consenting will allow for genuine engagement on the kaupapa rather than approaching iwi when a resource consent is required.”</p> <p>“Active engagement of primary industries requires a more direct mode of interaction. While there has been a good level of engagement in the project by community conservation groups, hapū and iwi, there has been a noticeable absence of landholders (agriculture and horticulture) and forestry groups.”</p> <p>“Environmental projects with private landowners take time to evolve – from the introduction of the idea, through the period of incubation on what that means for the individual landowner, periods of planning and compromise.”</p>
Leveraging collaboration and partnerships	<p>“Another key success of the project has been the development and enhancement of a network of regionally based groups and individuals acting in the low emission space. Awareness and contact with one another provide increased capacity for collaboration, knowledge sharing, support, and the influence of social norms.”</p>
Leveraging additional funding	<p>“We built groups/landowners fundraising skills, but it was challenging to keep them engaged in fundraising given their on-the-ground delivery work. (...) As a result, we are moving away from crowdfunding with groups and will focus on securing larger business investment.”</p>

3.2 Survey Insights

The survey was answered online during the period between the 24th of February and the 10th of March 2023. The survey was completed by people with varying positions within organisations: project managers, scientists, board members and administrators.

Recognising the fact that the respondents had very different experiences with the CEF at a fundamental level, the results are broken down by three groups (projects, national networks and local networks) as per Table 6.

Moreover, in Figure 1, the breakdown of survey responses by group is shown. Overall, nine of the fourteen respondents were associated with a national or local network and five respondents were associated with a CEF-funded discrete project. This breakdown is important to remember when interpreting overall statistics and results from the survey, as the overall results reflect the views and opinions of the sample described in Figure 2.

Table 6 Types of survey respondents

Group	Description
Projects	These are respondents who worked on or are connected to one of the discrete projects funded by the CEF.
National networks	These are respondents who work directly for/at one of the national network organizations funded by the CEF (EHA or Para Kore).
Local (regional) Networks	These are respondents who work for or are directly connected to a local network organisation that is part of a national network organization funded by the CEF (i.e., an EHA hub). These respondents do not receive funding directly from the CEF

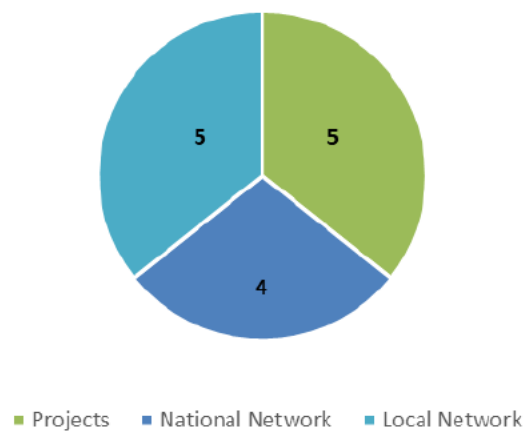


Figure 2. Breakdown of survey responses by respondent type (Total number of respondents = 14).

The results from the semi-quantitative and qualitative survey are compiled and summarized in Table 7. More detailed analysis and compilation of the survey responses is found in Appendix 3.

Out of the 13 respondents of the survey, 8 of the respondents stated their work is still ongoing, 4 has closed one or two years ago and one has finished for more than 3 years ago (Figure 3). All 8 of the respondents engaged in ongoing work are part of one of the national networks or local networks (since the national network funding program through the CEF is still ongoing). All project-based respondents had concluded their work at the time of being surveyed.

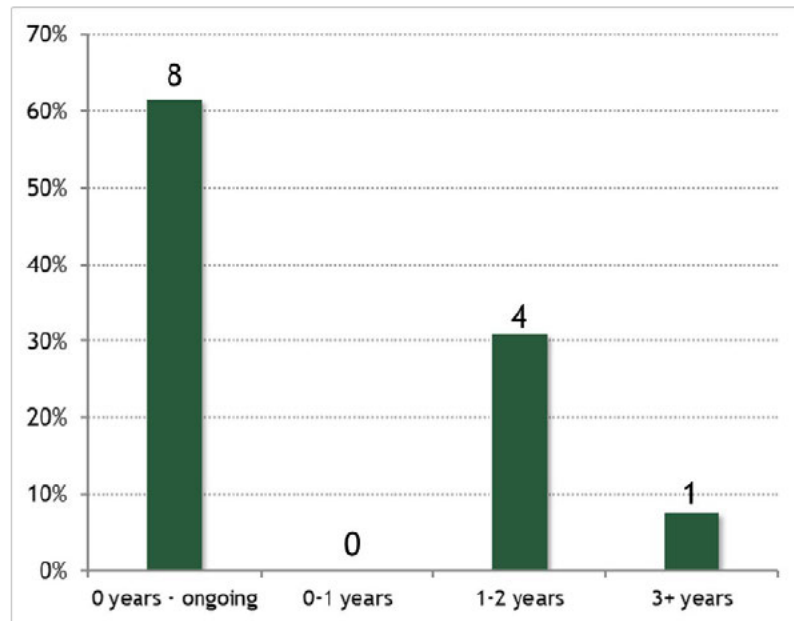


Figure 3. Answers to the survey question on number of years since the project has finished. (Total number of responses = 13.)

In Figure 4 there is a summary of the other sources of funding attained by the survey respondents. Over 90% of the respondents had received funding from local government, around 65% had received funding from not-for-profits, approximately 30% had received support from NGOs and just over 40% had received support from central government agencies (excluding the CEF). Furthermore, over 40% of the respondents had received funding from other sources (i.e., philanthropy). None of the respondents had received no other funding support in the past.

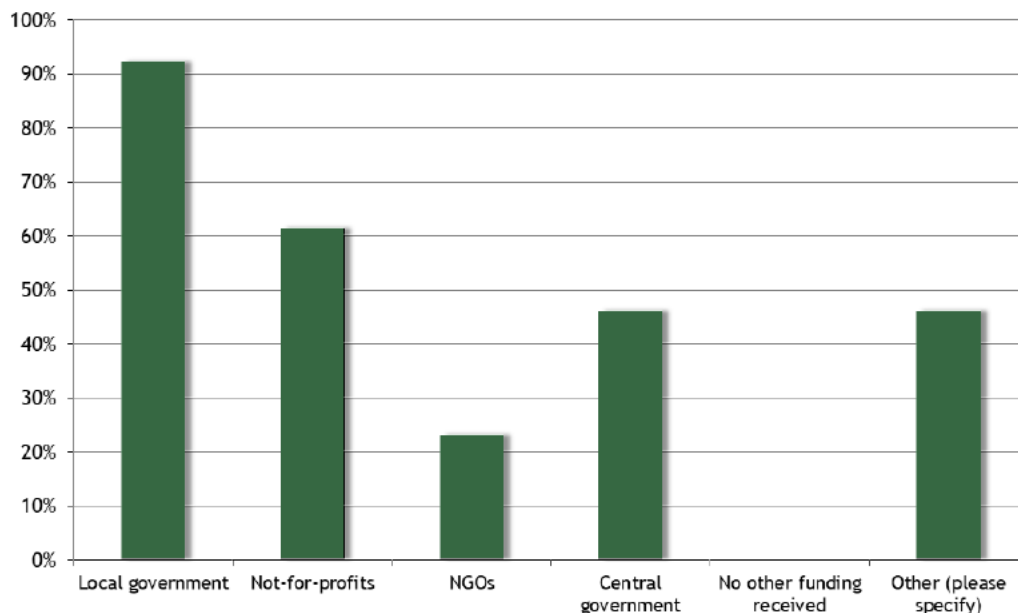


Figure 4. Other funding sources for survey respondents

Respondents were asked about their agreement or disagreement with statements related to funding procedures and perception of the value of the funding modality to their organisation or project (Figure 5). The statements relate to funding impact, coherence and relevance. The alignment of CEF's with MfE as an organisation relate to the alignment of the goals and objectives, as stated in the Theory of change and application documentation with MfE's strategic agenda. More than 60% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement, indicating that respondents see strong coherence between the fund's objectives and MfE's role and strategy.

Respondents showed overall agreement with statements indicating impact and relevance of the fund to their projects. Agreement (agree or strongly agree) with the statement "The CEF funding improved key outcomes for our project" was 64%. Agreement (agree or strongly agree) with the statement "The CEF funding has helped build capability for future environmental progress for our organization." was 73%; both statements relate to the impact of the fund to the projects. Agreement (agree or strongly agree) with the statement "Being funded by the CEF was worthwhile" was also 73% showing the respondents perception of how relevant the fund was to the objectives with their projects.

The respondents were split between agreement and disagreement about the fund's procedures and administration. There was no majority or consensus on questions regarding the application process or reporting requirements and the answers were distributed almost equally between strong disagreement to neither agreement or disagreement (neutral) and strong agreement.

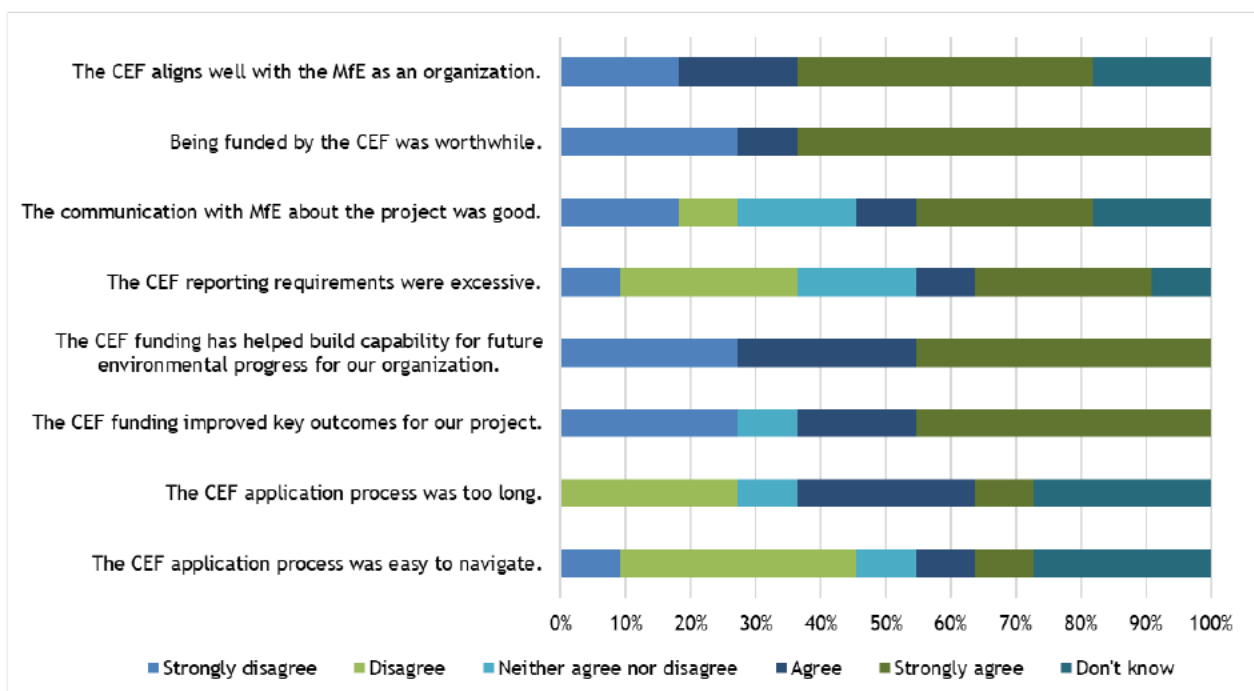


Figure 5. Agreement with statements related to funding impact, coherence and relevance

When participants of the survey were asked to compare their experience with CEF to other previous experiences with funding organisations the majority indicated that CEF was better or much better in being more flexible in the use of resources, building capability for the future, helping deliver long-term impact, achieving value for money in terms of impact and enabling the delivery of impact (above 60%).

Respondents were split between CEF being worse or better than other funding organisations in understanding the project's context, having manageable reporting requirements and, respondents were either indifferent or deemed their experience to be better with CEF when asked about CEF's provision of support (Figure 6).

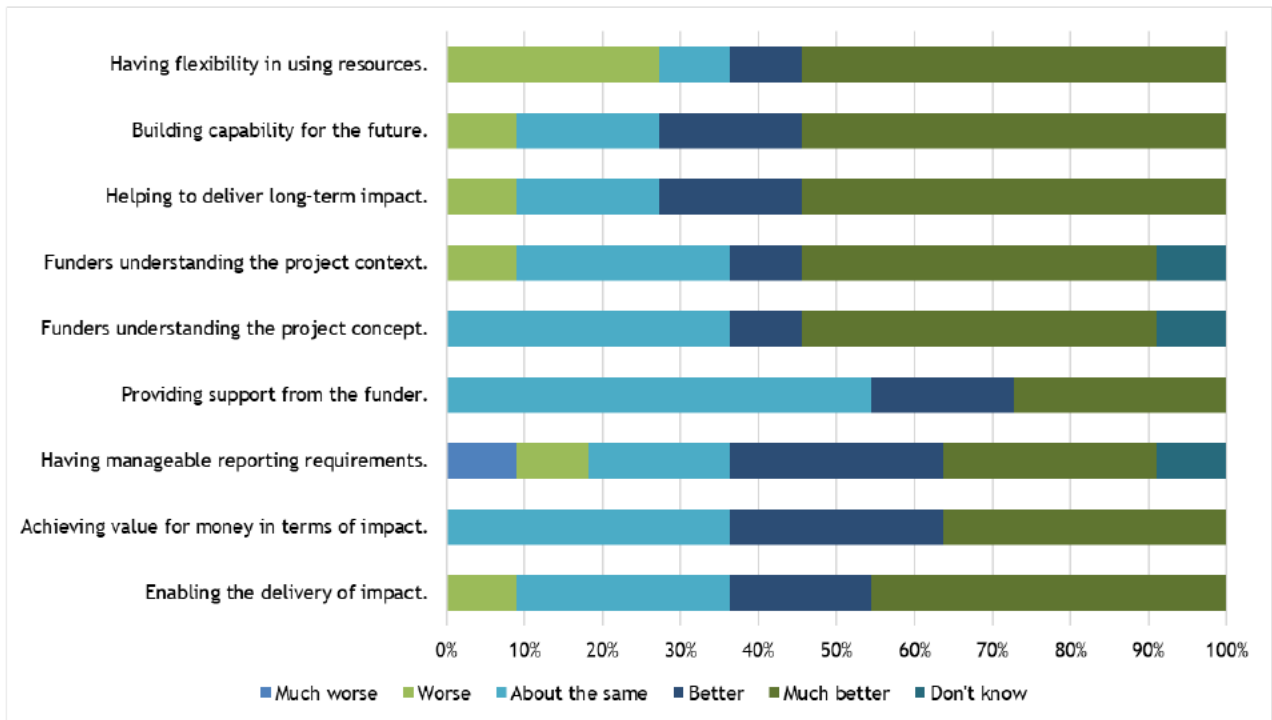


Figure 6. Perception of respondents and comparison of previous project-based funding with CEF funding

Table 7. Compilation of results from the survey semi-quantitative and qualitative responses and correspondence of results to the evaluation criteria.

Themes	Summary of results	Corresponding criteria
Delivery of impact (long-term) for environment and organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the local network respondents believe the CEF is better at delivering impact than other funds. Majority (67%) of the national network respondents think the CEF is much better at delivering impact than other funds. Only 25% of project-based respondents believe the CEF is better than other funds at delivering impact. 25% believe the CEF is worse (an impediment to impact) and 50% believe it is about the same. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact
Having manageable reporting requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the local network respondents think the reporting requirements are more manageable than other funds. Most of the national network respondents think the reporting requirements are about the same (67%), but some (33%) think reporting is slightly more manageable with the CEF than other funds. Only 25% of the project-based respondents think the CEF has more manageable reporting requirements, 50% think it the CEF is worse or much worse in terms of reporting requirements and 25% do not know. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency
Having flexibility in resource use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All local network organisations think the flexibility is better with the CEF than other funding sources. Most national network respondents also agree with that notion (67%). However, a majority (75%) of the project-based respondents think the CEF has worse flexibility <p><u>Example of quote:</u></p> <p><i>"Variations to stated outcomes requires a lot of explanation/justification - in reality these nature regeneration projects are dynamic, circumstances change, opportunities during the project change, some estimated outcomes are always either overestimated or underestimated because</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency Impact

Themes	Summary of results	Corresponding criteria
	<i>they are based on assumptions and best attempts. A more enabling flexible process with much more streamlined reporting would make the funding much more impactful"</i>	
Building capability for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All local network respondents believe the CEF is much better than other funds at building capability for the future. Most of the national network respondents (67%) also think the CEF is much better in this domain. On the other hand, 75% of the project-based respondents think the CEF is worse than other funds at building capability for the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability
Perceptions of network organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of those who gave their view, most respondents have positive perceptions (or strong positive perceptions) of environmental networks overall. However, one of the local network organisations reported a negative perception. <p><u>Example of quote:</u></p> <p><i>"Allowing hubs to support small ventures greatly enhances impact, rather than the big project thinking of central govt funding needs to recognise agencies that support many other to make change, often with little or no funding spread too thinly, the more centralised the funding to more admin is needed."</i></p> <p><i>"It's absolutely awe-inspiring to think of the difference that networks and organisations like Para Kore could make with on-going, long-term support."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevance Sustainability Impact
Demand for project-based funding vs support from a network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% of the local network respondents stated that they would prefer support from a national network organisation than support from the CEF for a specific project. On the other hand, most of the project-based respondents (75%) stated they would prefer project-based support. Some stated "other" and referenced ideas around providing operational support directly through the CEF or refining the scope of network-based support to allow for better measurement of impact and resources to be allocated at the right scale and scope. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherence Impact

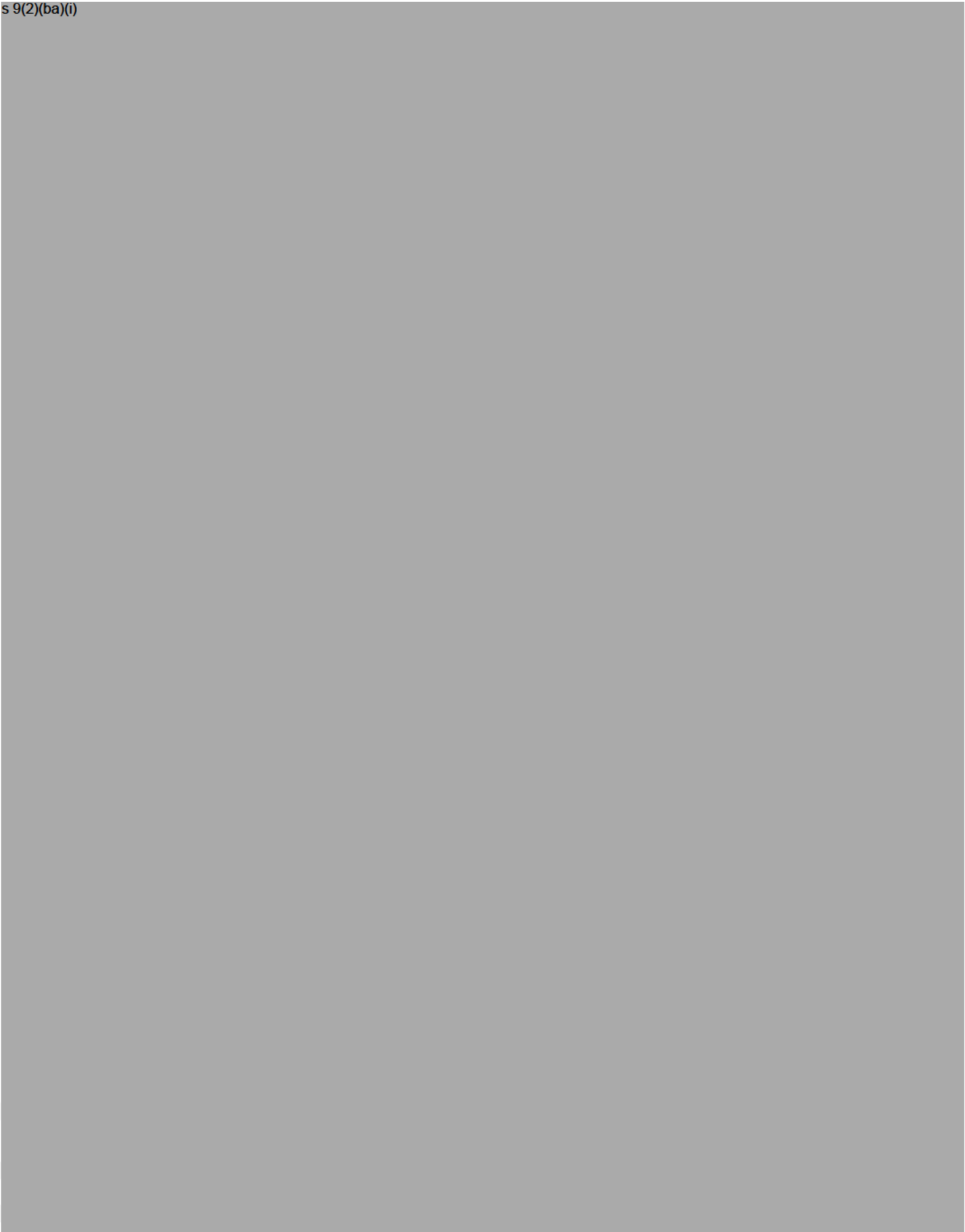
Themes	Summary of results	Corresponding criteria
CEF application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Half of the project-based respondents agreed that the CEF application process was too long. A quarter of the respondents stated that they disagreed that the application process was too long, and a quarter stated they did not know. Most of the project-based respondents (75%) disagreed that the CEF application process was easy to navigate. <p><u>Example of quote:</u></p> <p><i>"Applying to the CEF prior to the support via EHA was too complex for our small organisation to navigate."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency
Reporting requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% of respondents from local networks disagreed or strongly disagreed that reporting requirements for the CEF were excessive. The remaining neither agreed nor disagreed. 33% of the national network respondents strongly agreed that the reporting requirements were excessive. The remaining 67% disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. All the project-based respondents with an opinion (one said "I don't know") agreed or strongly agreed that the CEF reporting requirements were excessive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency
Additional funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 84.6% of respondents stated they needed further funds to maintain the impact of their project/operations. 15.4% stated they did not need further funds and all these responses came from project-based funding recipients. Funding is required to support people and staffing (building capability), expanding on existing work and to maintain the current levels of intervention or operation. <p><u>Example of quote:</u></p> <p><i>"If anything, our next step for us is finding ways to further increase operational resourcing. As the projects grow, in response to community needs and interest, so too does the need for additional expert back-office support, and space requirements!"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Impact Efficiency

Themes	Summary of results	Corresponding criteria
	<p><i>"Additional funds would mean we can keep focusing on the improvements and increasing the positive impact of the projects rather than constantly using our time to search for and apply for a variety of smaller funders or sponsors."</i></p>	
CEF overall objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly all respondents agreed that the CEF achieves its main objectives. All national and local network-based respondents agreed and most of the project-based respondents agreed (75% of them). Respondents believe the CEF has achieved goals around local engagement and awareness and goals around empowering communities. <p><u>Example of quotes:</u></p> <p><i>"The support the CEF has provided ... directly enables [us] to collaborate and support participation in many environmental groups in our community. It allows us to collaborate within and beyond the environmental sector in our region and has increased our ability to deliver local environmental education programmes."</i></p> <p><i>"The project sites have empowered our community to look after their environment, they utilise the trails and continue with native restoration along the awa, they also ensure visitors and locals are not dumping rubbish on these sites as these sites became a dumping ground of general waste, offal, vehicles etc. for locals and visitors."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherence Impact
Differences between the CEF and other funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framed in a positive light, respondents noted the uniqueness of the CEF's funding network organisations. The relationships and connections between MfE and recipients are different to other funds. Again, this was generally a positive statement, and something picked up on by the network organisations. Framed in a more negative light, the CEF reporting and application process was seen as different to other funds. In particular, the reporting requirements were more excessive for projects than is seen elsewhere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact Coherence Efficiency

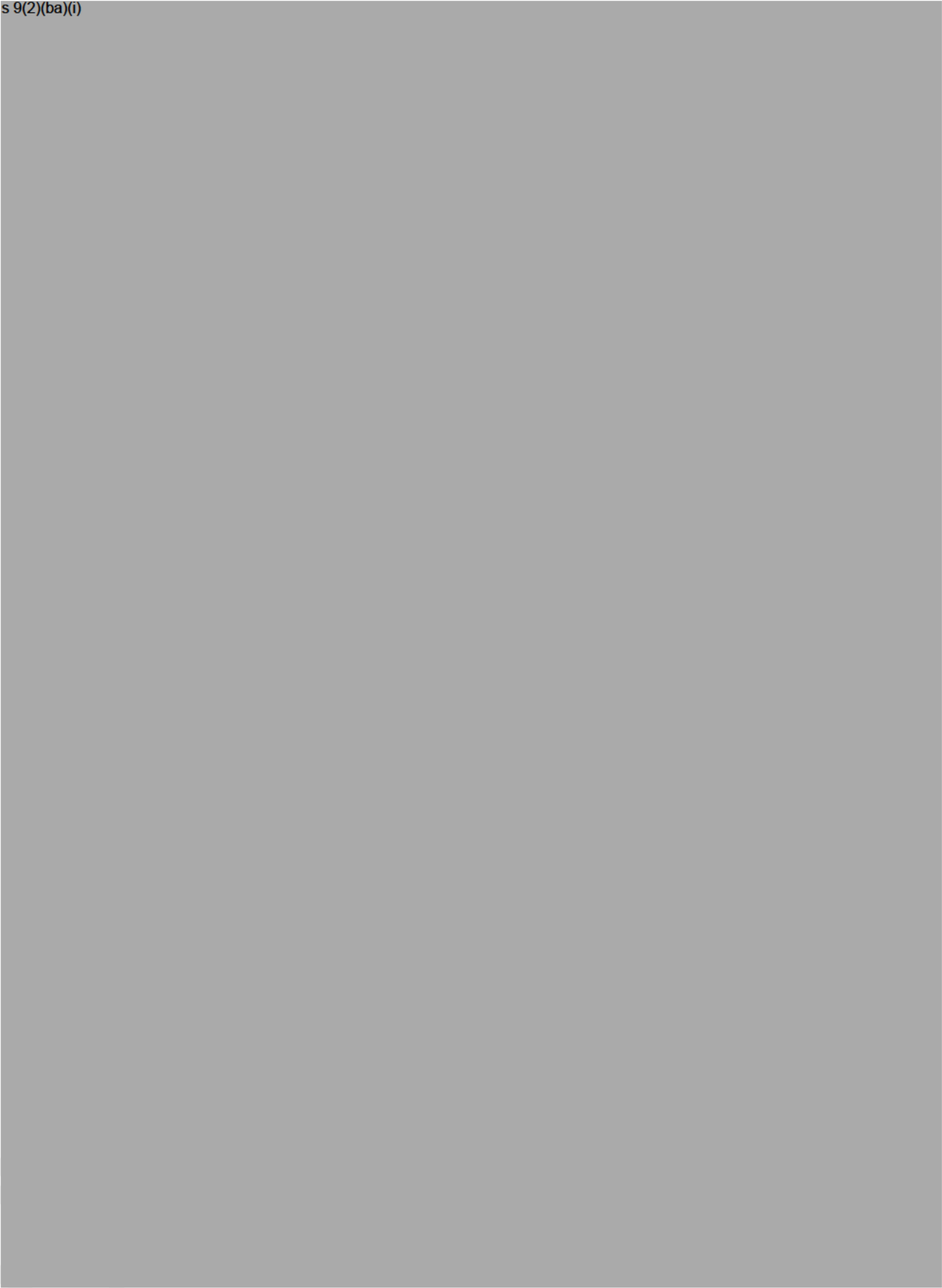
Themes	Summary of results	Corresponding criteria
	<p><u>Example of quotes:</u></p> <p><i>"The way we access the CEF fund directly through the EHA network is a very different model. Through the model, EHA really knows its hubs, and has engaged its members in the fair and equitable allocation of the funds right along the way."</i></p> <p><i>"The partnership. It's not just about here's the money to do this thing. From the very beginning we have felt trusted and respected and valued by CEF. We have a relationship with CEF - that's the big difference."</i></p> <p><i>"As a general response regarding MfE funding across multiple MfE grants, MfE requires excessive information, it's a bit of an exhausting process, and the reporting requirements are excessive for the quantum of funds received. Time is money for small NGOs trying to make maximum impact with funds received - excessively detailed application and reporting processes just NGO's less effective/impactful."</i></p>	
Value of the CEF to recipients	<p>Three general themes emerged around capacity, growth and public engagement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CEF helped organisations develop capacity for new long-term activities. • The CEF helped organisations expand or add to their current operations. • The CEF helped organisations increase their public engagement and awareness, as well as develop networks. <p><u>Example of quotes:</u></p> <p><i>"The value of CEF funding to us is huge - it ensures our core staff can have security in their roles and key programmes can have long term success."</i></p> <p><i>"Without the CEF we would not have grown or developed. CEF has changed everything for our organization."</i></p> <p><i>"CEF allowed us to outreach to more communities and provide more security to our contractors."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact

Themes	Summary of results	Corresponding criteria
Importance of sustained funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents talked about the importance of receiving support and resources over a longer period and that this was a point of difference in relation to the CEF network-based funding model. <p><u>Example of quotes:</u></p> <p><i>"The stability of multiyear funding opened doors/gave us the credibility we needed to be successful with other funders as well. Overall, this allowed our organisation to grow and increase our environmental reach substantially."</i></p> <p><i>"We already had long term plans and strategies - the funding helped implement them. The funding level received was gratefully accepted but we need longer term substantive partnerships to follow our nature regeneration journeys - we are building those with business and philanthropy."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Impact
A greater quantum of funding is needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A common theme was that the CEF is not providing enough money to meet its ambitious targets. This aligned with several other strands of results, including the quantitative survey results, project closure results and case study analysis. <p><u>Example of quotes:</u></p> <p><i>"[CEF could be improved...] If it was a bigger pot of funds, for a longer length of time, environmental work is ongoing, just like all other infrastructure funding should not hold an end date."</i></p> <p><i>"[CEF could be improved...] By providing more funding"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact Coherence
Administrative and capability costs are not recognised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many respondents talked about admin, management and capability (staffing) costs that the believed were not adequately recognized by the CEF. <p><u>Example of quote:</u></p> <p><i>"[To improve funding for community environmental projects] ensure that any project funding that is distributed is encouraged to have part of the budget set aside for organisational capacity/capability building. That support is provided to applicants to consider the wider costs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency Impact Coherence

Themes	Summary of results	Corresponding criteria
	<i>involved with running projects, and that back-office support, management, training and coordination expenses are seen as a valuable proportion of any project."</i>	
Opportunities exist to leverage network modality to better target and distribute project-funding (regional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities to leverage networks for project-based funding that provide better local support. <p><u>Example of quotes:</u></p> <p><i>"[Improve the CEF by...] Doing it through organisations such as EHA but regionally based as well."</i></p> <p><i>"Having EHA to mediate the process, along with supplying us with funding and additional support is the perfect way to utilize these funds."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherence Impact Sustainability Efficiency



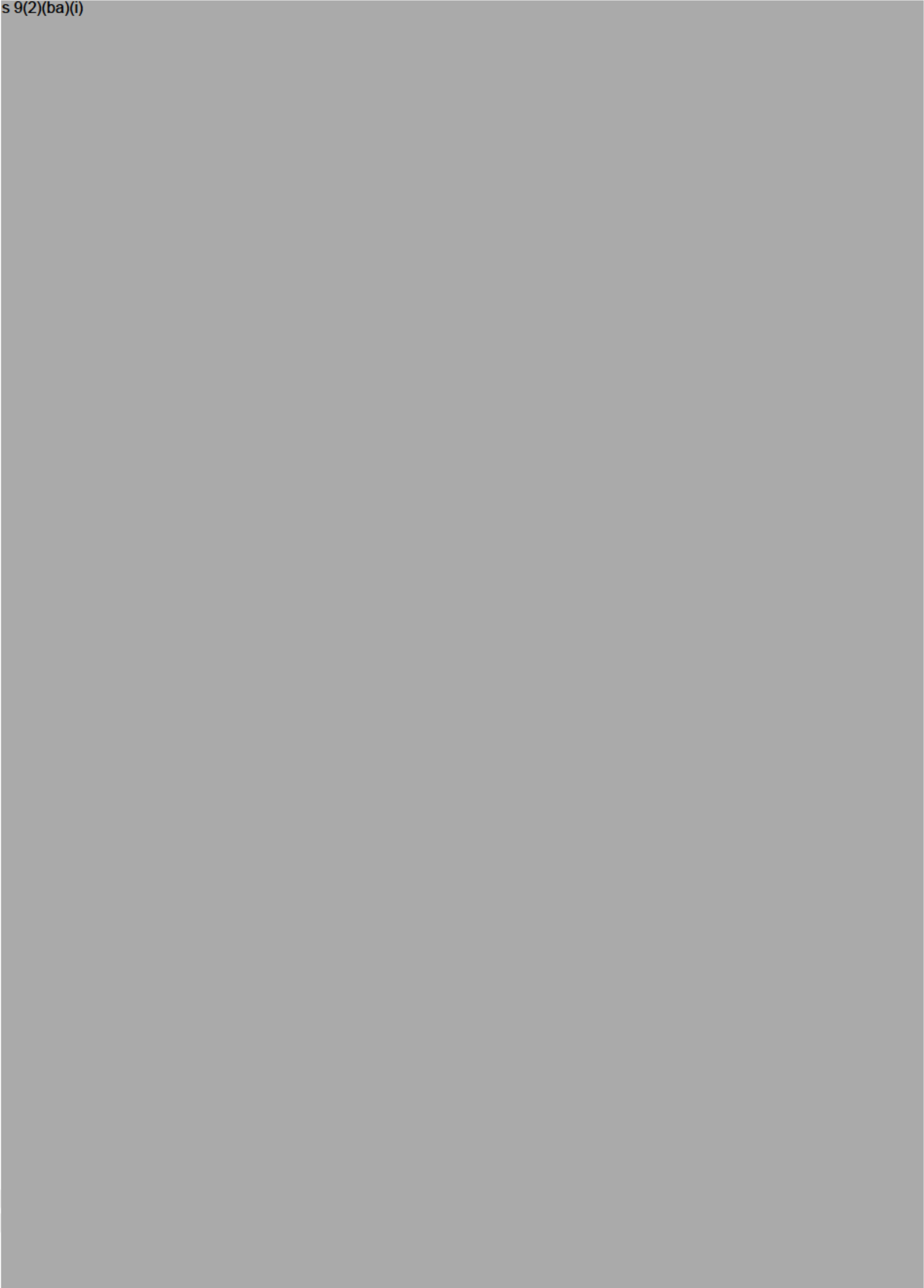
s 9(2)(ba)(i)



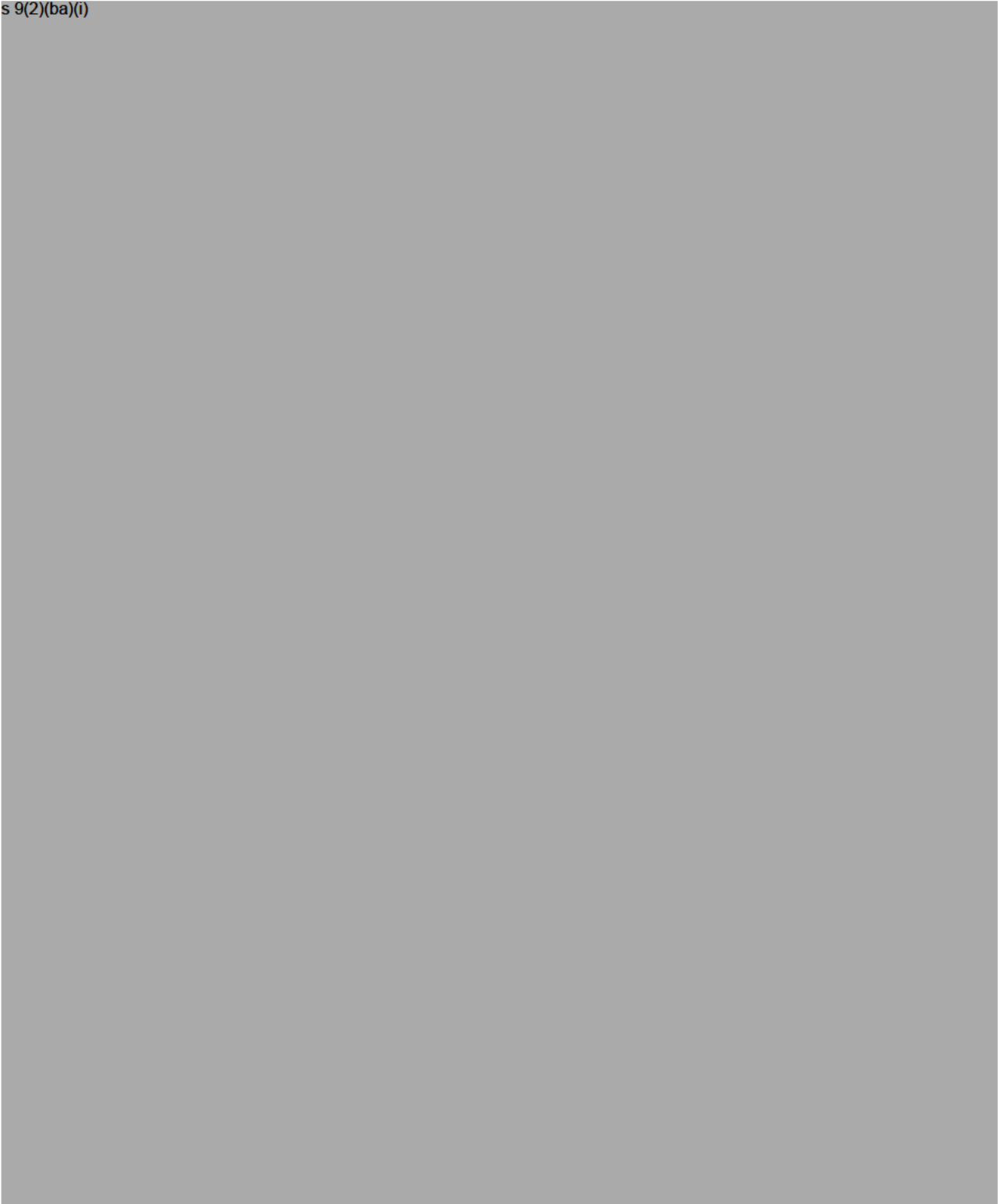
s 9(2)(ba)(i)

e


s 9(2)(ba)(i)



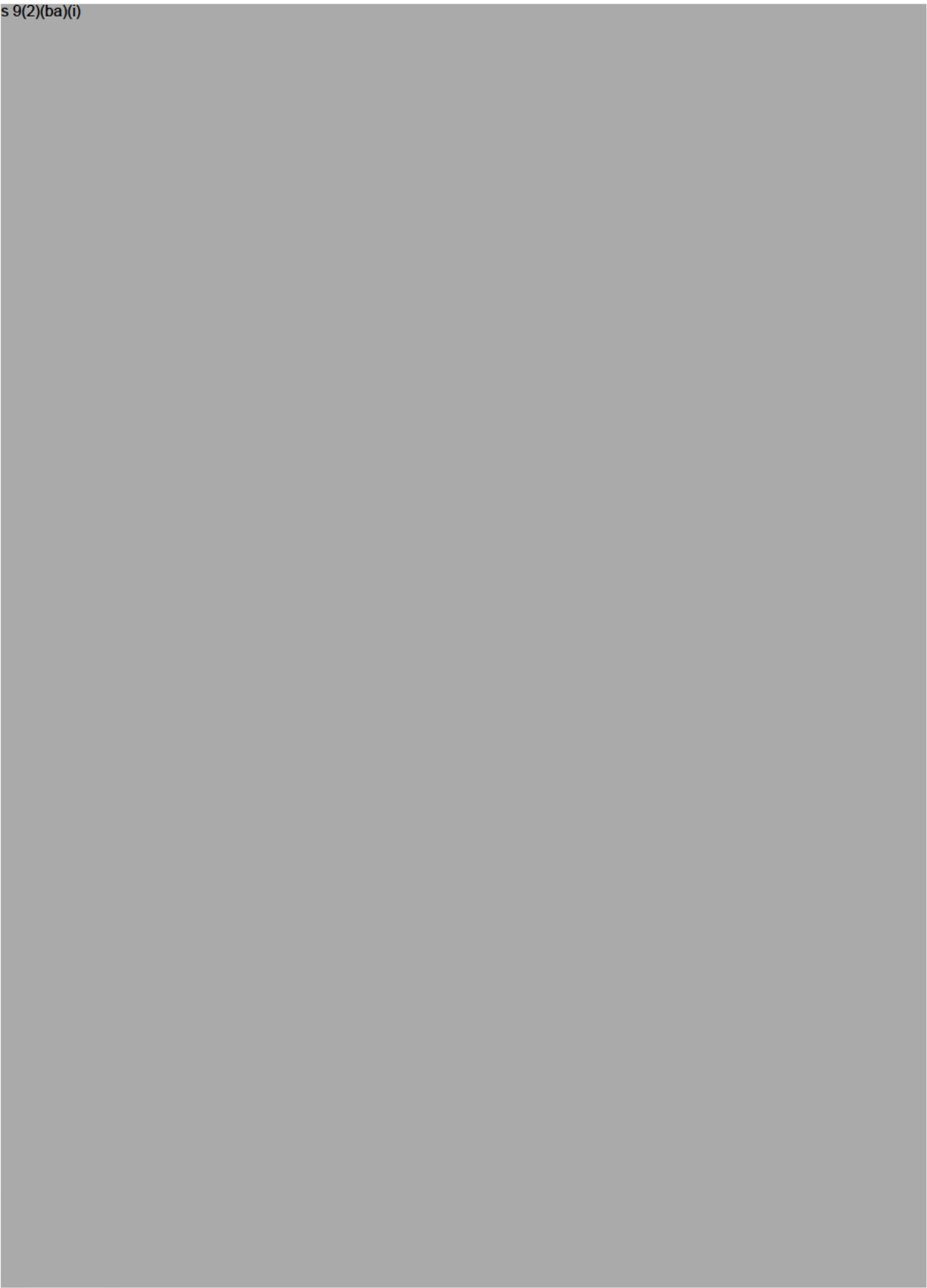
s 9(2)(ba)(i)




s 9(2)(ba)(i)




s 9(2)(ba)(i)



s 9(2)(ba)(i)



s 9(2)(ba)(i)



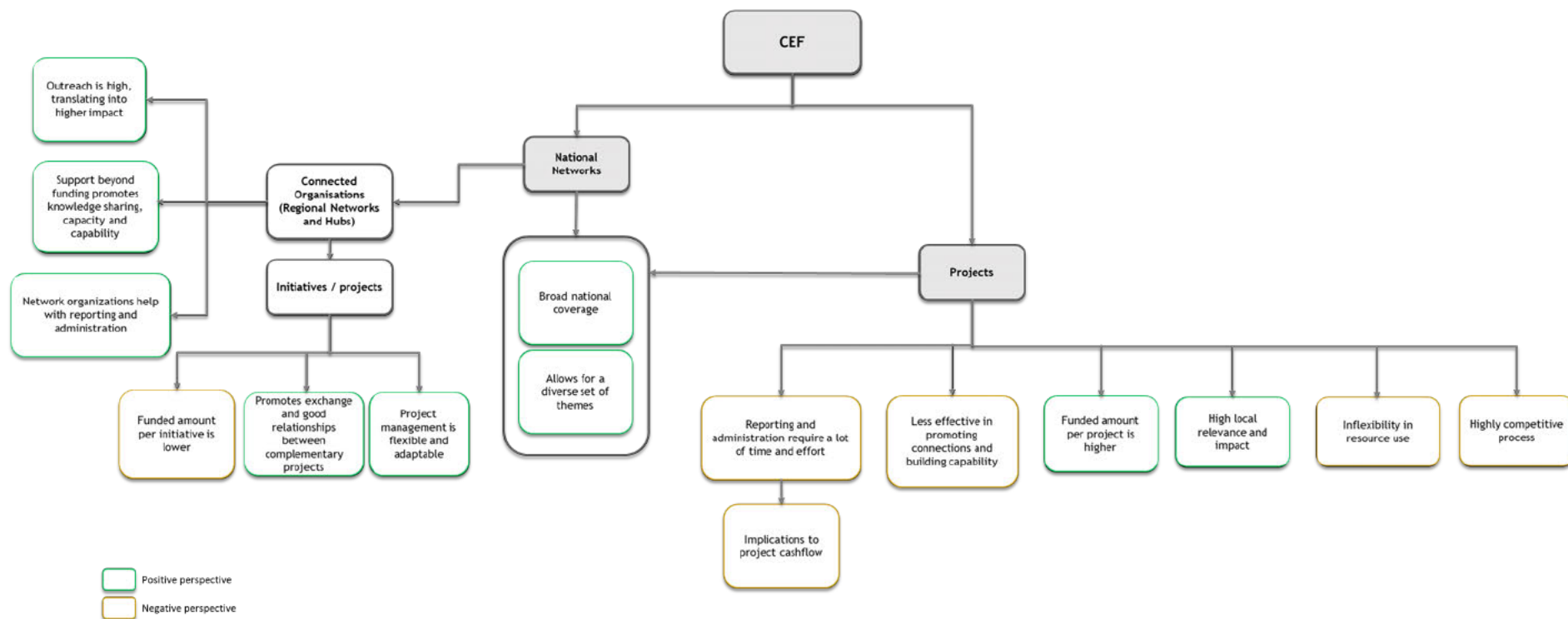


Figure 7 Concept map compiling the main aspects from the analysis of survey, interview answers and document analysis.

The results were also compiled and compared to the evaluation criteria and MfE CEF's value-for-money criteria. Table 8 provides a summary of the two funding modalities in relation to each of the six criteria.

Table 8 Comparative analysis of the two funding modalities against the evaluation criteria and MfEs value-for-money proposal requirements for CEF

Evaluation criteria	Value for money (as described in the application form)	Project-based funding	Funding of National networks
Impact	Focus on tangible outcomes (e.g., results that can be observed and measured)	Local impact is high as projects are designed to address specific priority issues for the local communities. Project's outcomes are measurable to the extent that the objectives and corresponding KPIs are well established.	Impact is high when considering the widespread outreach of the regional networks receiving funds and support through the national networks. Measuring impact of the local initiatives and aggregating this information becomes less practical at the National network level. Impact of the shared-learning and capacity building of the regional networks is tangible.
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it collaborate with, rather than duplicate and/or displace, existing activities? Demonstrate strong governance and involvement of key stakeholders 	Generally, there is strong connection of projects with local needs and participation of the community in projects design and implementation, either through volunteers or by projects communicating their achievements to the public. However, communication and sharing between projects with similar objectives or focus, within the same region (or beyond) do not appear to happen part of specific projects objectives.	Collaboration between projects and regional hubs is the purpose of a network design. Capacity building is leveraged by the exchange and knowledge sharing between the regional hubs. Governance is strengthened by a participatory model where regional hubs managers can be part of the National network board.
Coherence	Support government strategic priorities.	It is difficult to determine how project-based goals and accomplishments are connected to the strategic agenda of MfE or the objectives of CEF. This is because CEF's Theory of Change does not clearly outline the steps and assumptions needed to achieve its goals, which are also quite broad and not well-defined. However, projects can show evidence of community participation in	National hubs objectives are closer to MfE's strategic agenda and can demonstrate clearly how their activities promote environmental partnerships through network activities. However, aggregating the results of initiatives connected to regional hubs is not easily

		environmental initiatives and increased environmental awareness. It is less common for projects to demonstrate strong environmental partnerships, unless this was specifically planned as part of the project design. One example of a project that did demonstrate strong partnerships is Reconnecting Northland, which is described in Case Study 1.	accomplished by the National networks. Therefore, there is a significant gap between MfE's strategic goals and local initiatives focusing on communities needs and aspirations.
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will deliver clear and timely financial and outcomes reporting. Propose reasonable costs to effectively deliver resources and services 	Both projects and networks are efficient in achieving their goals, but they do so differently and therefore it is difficult to compare the two. Projects, because of their community proximity, can deliver more results if they are given sufficient funding. However, they are less efficient and require more support and resources to manage administrative tasks such as reporting. Therefore, it is essential to provide funding for operational activities to maintain project efficiency. On the other hand, networks are efficient in providing support, facilitating knowledge exchange, and providing streamlined assistance. This allows regional initiatives to focus on achieving their desired impact on the ground.	
Effectiveness	Demonstrate value for money from estimated project cash costs	Both projects and networks were effective in delivering their objectives in different ways. Most project objectives were reported as achieved with a few exceptions – mainly as result of disruptions from COVID-19 lockdowns. In aggregate, there are fewer projects supported by CEF than there are regional hubs supported through the National networks (11 projects vs 22 hubs ⁶). Approximately 20% of CEF was allocated to projects funding and the remaining to national networks. A comparative assessment of the impact of both funding modalities should take this difference into account. One specific issue that differentiates both modalities in term of their ability to be effective in delivering impact is that project-based funding instils competition among proponents of projects whereas, National network funding promotes collaboration and knowledge exchange among regional hubs and the initiatives they support.	
Sustainability	Will generate ongoing benefit after the end of the project period	Project-based and network-based grantees indicated that the sustainability of their results depend upon further financing (84.6% of survey respondents). This	The National networks are better equipped to plan for the long-term with the funds provided over a period of 5

⁶ This number only includes EHA regional hubs.

was also corroborated by interviews, regardless of the type of project and objectives.

Projects with strong ties to local communities and habitats can promote relevant changes that persist beyond the project implementation. However, lack of predictability in funding and inability to monitor the benefits of projects post implementation reduces the chances of project sustainability. Interviewees mentioned that continuous funding would allow for monitoring and maintenance of on-site interventions (i.e., replanting), increase capacity-building and training to compensate for staff turnover and promote better management of costs and budgets by maintaining adequate project cashflow.

years. Their support is designed to focus on capacity building and improving capabilities. As a result, the impact of their efforts is reflected in the ability of regional networks and their initiatives to manage funds better and leverage additional funding. This, in turn, allows projects to plan for continuous efforts, community engagement, and the maintenance of restored habitats.

In conclusion of the evaluation and analysis of the results and the comparative analysis presented in Table 6, key findings are grouped around the two primary questions this evaluation addresses.

A. What is the value of MfE's support for small scale, local projects, and would this value be better achieved in other ways (e.g., support from other funders)?

Value creation can be assessed through a comparison of projects' overall beneficial results and how CEF's objectives were achieved. CEF's three objectives (strengthening environmental partnerships, raising environmental awareness and encouraging participation in environmental initiatives in the community) are broad and allow for a variety of projects with very different objectives, implementation needs and capabilities. As shown by the analysis, most project objectives were achieved despite the disruptions with COVID-19 lockdowns.

Results of the projects cannot be easily aggregated for comparison (for example a wetland creation project vs. low carbon strategy development) and alignment with MfEs overarching Strategic Intentions⁷ is not straightforward without a clear Theory of Change indicating its logical framework. However, value-creation (of individual projects) is compatible and relevant to the local scale and community's needs.

The amount of support per project is significant when compared to the volume of support received by individual initiatives under the regional hubs (that, in turn, are supported by the nationwide network-based organisations). However, only a few projects can receive support by CEF in each round.

There is high demand for support and competition for support such as the CEF is high. There was a total of 61 applications for Round 9 and \$11.66m applied for through this contestable funding model. Hence, approximately 18% of applications and funding applied for were granted by the CEF. This reflects the over-subscription issues MfE has faced throughout the life of the CEF. Most project interviewees highlighted the importance of CEF's support for the viability of their activities. One important aspect refers to the multi-year characteristics of the fund which differentiates CEF from other local and regional funding sources. This longer-term funding aspect allows for better project planning and management as it increases funding predictability.

This evaluation shows that CEF support created value through the project-based model in a range of ways:

- a. It enabled direct community action resulting in increased social and environmental outcomes.
- b. It acted as a catalyst covering essential costs that allowed projects to raise additional funding to achieve project objectives and support community action.
- c. It enhanced planning and predictability of outputs through the multi-year funding.
- d. It promoted capability and innovation through development of new tools and practices, for example the written collaboration agreement developed by Reconnecting Northland (Case Study 1)

In terms of assessing if the same value would have been achieved or can be achieved through other ways, the analysis for this evaluation including the interviews, revealed that funding is scarce. However, in general, projects were able to leverage more funding from other sources to complement their budgets. A large majority of projects had co-finance from local governments (see Figure 4). Co-financing

⁷ Ministry for the Environment Statement of Intent 2016-2020

is an important aspect for covering projects budgets and allowing for larger impact, however, insight from interviews and the survey show that managing different reporting requirements from different funding organizations put a strain on smaller organizations capabilities. In this respect, the network organizations have the advantage of having dedicated staff and better capacity to manage funding reporting requirements taking the load away from the projects receiving support through them.

Coverage of operational costs is critical to better execution and sustainability of projects. There was wide agreement amongst those interviewed that capacity and capability to deal with project management and reporting, technical expertise and stakeholder engagement can be a challenge if costs with permanent administration staff is not fully funded.

MfE's support through CEF for projects has local or regional relevance and impact. Implementing MfE's overarching strategic goals through small grants to local projects is less effective than through nationwide network organizations. Channelling CEFs funds through networks promotes better integration among local initiatives and knowledge-sharing, which can amplify MfE's impact and reach. However, it is important to consider the significant local impact that local projects can have and, if not through MfE, then similar support should be available from other sources.

B. How is impact enhanced by funding capacity and capability building in nationwide network-based organisations?

Network organisations can promote knowledge-sharing, exchange of lessons learnt and therefore replicate good practices among initiatives connected through regional hubs. Workshops and training provided by national networks to regional hubs also enhance the effectiveness of community action implementation. However, objectives and goals of local community initiatives under the regional hubs are very diverse and difficult to aggregate for an overall evaluation of impact. Impact can be measured through a compilation of the regional hubs' accomplishments.

Increased impact is also achieved if capacity and capability is transferred to regional hubs allowing them to be more effective in their operations and enhancing their ability to leverage funds from other sources to address issues of importance in the local community.

Other important and relevant aspect of the support to regional hubs through the national networks is the regional hubs capacity to coordinate participatory processes for a public debate on issues affecting the environment. Regional hubs have a role advocating for social and environmental improvements through policy and governance through submissions to government. This promotion of public participation is aligned and coherent with MfE's strategic agenda and can represent significant value-for-money for its support through nationwide network-based organisations.

5. Considerations and Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Enhance management efficiency and effectiveness through simplification of project selection and oversight, and adaptive management approaches.

The ways that CEF projects are selected for funding and managed during implementation are cumbersome for community organisations – specifically for recipients of small grants.

A more effective selection processes can be put in place for small projects, for example by adopting non-competitive but transparent allocation of grant funding (similarly to the network capability funding approach), reducing co-financing requirements or pre-selection of project ideas that are invited to submit a full application (to reduce the high number of applications that cannot get funded, and the futile resources committed in the application process). Reporting requirements can also be simplified, and a more trust-based approach employed so that MfE is seen as a partner seeking outcomes for the community instead of a funder requiring justification of money spent. This would also better align to the goal of measuring CEF impact.

Lastly, a more adaptive approach to grants management can be used to recognise the rapidly changing context on the ground and support community organisations to adapt and respond e.g., for example the COVID-19 context, new partnership opportunities but also events like shifting local priorities and policies that require swift response from community organisations. Projects need more flexibility and allow for adaptive management in increasingly uncertain times – where scope changes can be accommodated by MfE without delaying payments (which can be very disruptive for small community organisations).

Recommendation 2: The theory of change and rationale for CEF needs to be further augmented and timely communicated to community organizations

The purpose of CEF has evolved and is currently quite broad, focusing on three high-level goals. The background documentation for CEF – and specifically the theory of change that was provided to the evaluation team – does not show how CEF contributes to the MfE mission, strategic priorities and outcomes.

The theory of change can serve as a guiding framework for projects (or networks) seeking funds and ensure their alignment and coherence with CEF goals. As important, it needs to make the connection between CEF and the strategic priorities and outcomes MfE is seeking.

MfE should make CEF's theory of change clearer, include assumptions and risks, make it available to projects applying for funding (not after the fact) – this would improve coherence and make projects more specific and more aligned with MfE strategic agenda.

To augment the theory of change, MfE can apply a participatory approach – engage internally (for example with the other funding instruments where overlap exists: waste minimisation, freshwater improvement) and externally. A brief overview of the evolution of CEF since its establishment in 2010 could be used as baseline for discussions and consultations that could involve community organisations but also representatives of other agencies providing funding to community groups, especially regional councils, DOC, philanthropy.

The upcoming national annual meeting of environmental hubs present an opportunity to kick start a participatory process to help clarify the theory of change and the long-term vision, goal and outcomes of CEF to benefit community organisations and MfE strategic agenda.

Recommendation 3: Explore how MfE (CEF team and beyond) can leverage and enhance the impact of CEF by growing its role beyond a funding provider

As a funding provider, MfE is one of the wide range of organisations that support community groups' environmental work by providing targeted funding. As a central government agency, MfE does not have a presence in the regions/locally and is somewhat distant from where community needs and issues

play out. On the upside, MfE has over 10 years of experience providing funding and engaging with community organisations on specific environmental challenges. It also has technical and policy expertise, and experience from other funding programmes that are focused on environmental solutions – like Te Mana O te Wai, Freshwater Improvement Fund or the Waste Minimisation Fund.

MfE (and CEF team) needs to explore CEF's point of difference (from other community funding programmes) and determine how it can use its influence and expertise to grow its role beyond a funding provider. Examples include:

- Scale up and replicate solutions already tested within CEF (for example for wetlands restoration on farmland which has been the focus of various MfE funding) - MfE should act as a broker of knowledge between projects to increase impact
- Incentivize innovation and adoption of new (environmental) solutions – with a view to climate adaptation, low carbon transition or biodiversity conservation, etc (link to MfEs strategic priorities)
- Focus on growing entrepreneurial capability and initiatives amongst community groups to tackle new issues and facilitate skills-sharing
- Seek synergies with other agencies that provide funding to community groups (regional councils, DOC, foundations) to scale up and replicate solutions at different scales
- Enable new networks to emerge at regional or national levels – including those focused on niche issues like wetland restoration, restoration of native biodiversity, nature-based solutions.

Recommendation 4: Increase focus on impact measurement at CEF level

The need for clarifying the theory of change for CEF notwithstanding, CEF should focus more on measuring and reporting the impact of the fund - in a systematic and holistic way.

The national networks funded by CEF have themselves developed and applied impact reporting frameworks as means of enhancing capacity and making the connection between projects, organisations and their outcomes – including in relation to Sustainable Development Goals. Systematic impact reporting is important for communicating the value of CEF externally and for making a robust and transparent case for future funds allocation to CEF.

Recommendation 5: Undertake independent final evaluation of the two national networks funded.

CEF has allocated approximately 80% of the round 9 funding to two network projects that are going to be completed in the near future. It is important to undertake independent evaluation of these two national networks as means for accountability and impact assessment.⁸ The evaluation should also provide advice on the need for continued funding and whether the direct allocation approach can be enhanced.

⁸ For example, the capacity building funding allocation for Para Kore appears to be justified on the basis that the Ministry has a 'long-standing' relationship with the organisation – and their application for another WFM grant was turned down.

Appendices

Appendix 1: CEF Theory of Change

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT FUND

Investment Logic

Long-term Outcomes 2025-	Communities are empowered to make and implement decisions that benefit society and the environment	The capacity of the environment to sustain itself is protected through collective impact <i>Indicator: observable benefits to the environment (change stories)</i>	Behaviour change toward more sustainable lifestyles <i>Indicator: Desired behaviour change: Number of projects reporting that the desired behaviour change has taken place</i>
Medium-term Outcomes 2021-25	Community awareness of the environmental challenges <i>Indicator: Educational reach: Number of people attending educational presentations or workshops</i>	Local environments are enhanced through community action e.g. planting days, clean ups	People make environmentally sustainable lifestyle choices e.g. energy efficiency, reducing waste, recycling
Short-term Outcomes 2020-21	Capacity and capability is scaled up <i>Indicator: New employment activities enabled: Number of roles created as a result of the funded project related to generating environmental outcomes</i>	People and community organisations take action to restore and preserve the environment <i>Indicator: Community action: Number of people attending restoration events</i>	Strong environmental partnerships and a better integrated network of knowledge sharing <i>Indicator: New partnerships and collaboration: Number of formal community / iwi / industry / government partnerships developed</i> <i>Number of projects with data collection programmes</i>
Outputs	Capability building workshops	Increased capacity	Waste minimization, energy efficiency, environmental restoration
Activities	Training and education	Employment of staff	Community led action e.g. energy efficiency, waste minimisation, environmental restoration
Inputs	Community networks, knowledge and good will, staff \$10.8 million from Community Environment Fund 5-year appropriation 2019/20 – 2024/25		

Appendix 2: List of interviewees

Project / Network	Organisation	Name	Current role
Capability and Capacity Building - phase 2	Go Eco	Jo Wrigley	Manager
-	Ministry for the Environment	Wes Patrick	Manager of the green investments team
-	Ministry for the Environment	Sarah Vaughan	Senior analyst

Million Metres	Sustainable Business Network	Pieter Tuinder	Programme manager
He Ripo Kau	Reconnecting Northland	Eamon Nathan	General Manager
-	Kaipatiki Project / EHA	Janet Cole	Kaipatiki project manager / EHA Board member
Whangamarie Constructed Wetlands	Landcare Research	Suzanne Lambie	Project manager
Nature in the City	Hamilton City Council	Matthew Vare & Rodrigo Teodoro	Programme manager & Monitoring and reporting lead



Appendix 3: Summary of survey results and themes

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
With respect to your CEF funded project, will additional funds be needed to maintain the gains / improvement / impact of the project? Why/Why Not?	People needing further funds to support staffing and expert skills.	<i>"We have employed people to carry out the work required so the funding is very important for us to retain those employees. We have spent time training them and have scaled up to enable this growth." – Respondent 3</i>
	Frequency of responses: 38.5% (5/13)	<i>"Because we are staffed to full capacity to achieve the greatest impacts we can." – Respondent 12</i>
	Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability • Impact • Efficiency 	<i>"If anything, our next step for us is finding ways to further increase operational resourcing. As the projects grow, in response to community needs and interest, so too does the need for additional expert back-office support, and space requirements!" – Respondent 10</i>
	Increasing and enhancing further funds required to upscale and expand on work.	<i>"Our organisation continues to focus on ... massively upscaling investment in nature work to combat climate change and biodiversity loss. Investment in addressing biodiversity loss and climate change is significantly below what is required to turn around biodiversity loss in Aotearoa and climate change is inter-related, so we need to work on both." – Respondent 14</i>
	Frequency of responses: 53.8% (8/13)	<i>"Landowners will undertake some work, but further funding needed to build on the work done." – Respondent 17</i>
	Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability 	<i>"Whilst we are always resilient and able to pursue alternative funding, the CEF fund has provided a stability that the other funders don't necessarily offer. Additional funds would mean we can keep focusing on the improvements and increasing the positive impact of the projects rather than constantly using our time to search for and apply for a variety of smaller funders or sponsors." – Respondent 1</i>

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact 	
	<p>Maintain further funds required to maintain work or retain staff.</p> <p>Frequency of responses: 30.8% (4/13)</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability 	<p><i>"Our organisation employed volunteers from our community to maintain these restoration project sites" – Respondent 9</i></p>
<p>Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:</p> <p>In your opinion, the CEF achieves its main objectives (as stated on the CEF webpage). Please elaborate on your answer.</p>	<p>The CEF has promoted local engagement and awareness in line with CEF objectives.</p> <p>Frequency of responses: 36.4% (4/11)</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact Sustainability Coherence 	<p><i>"The support the CEF has provided ... directly enables [us] to collaborate and support participation in many environmental groups in our community. It allows us to collaborate within and beyond the environmental sector in our region and has increased our ability to deliver local environmental education programmes."</i></p> <p><i>"That's exactly what we do. We are a voice for the environment, we raise environmental awareness and show people how they can make a difference, all whilst lobbying for systemic change which can exponentially provide positive impact."</i></p> <p><i>"The CEF contributes to the success of our organisations and make some big impacts for our communities."</i></p>

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
	The CEF has empowered people and communities to act, in line with objectives.	<i>"The project sites have empowered our community to look after their environment, they utilise the trails and continue with native restoration along the awa, they also ensure visitors and locals are not dumping rubbish on these sites as these sites became a dumping ground of general waste, offal, vehicles etc for locals and visitors."</i>
	Frequency of responses: 54.5% (6/11)	<i>"The partnership with [a Network Organisation] is a prime example of empowering NZ'ers to make a positive difference to the environment."</i>
	Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact • Coherence 	<i>"Without this funding we would remain in a poverty mentality, barely able to support projects which have far reaching positive environmental impact. Now we are empowered to grow and offer more support to our environmental agencies."</i>
	The CEF did not achieve its objectives.	<i>"The overall purpose of the funding was good however the process was extremely bureaucratic and impeded progress".</i>
	Frequency of responses: 9.1% (1/11)	
	Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact • Coherence 	
What, if anything, differentiates the CEF from other funding sources?	The CEF's funding of networks is unique and different to other funds.	<i>"As the funding was long term it enabled us to make longer term decisions for our organisation rather than short term/annual decisions."</i> <i>"Receiving CEF funding through EHA has added to the workload of our team. To receive the funding we need, EHA has many requirements, including attending EHA events, meeting and workshops. We are based at the other end of the country to the majority of EHA</i>

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
	Frequency of responses: 30.0% (3/10)	<i>events, and our Centre does not have the staffing capacity to attend meetings and gatherings, and our funding is decreased because of this. CEF is able to be used to fund our day-to-day activities of our Centre which supports us to focus on our projects and programmes."</i>
	Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact • Sustainability 	<i>"The way we access the CEF fund directly through the EHA network is a very different model. Through the model, EHA really knows it's hubs, and has engaged its members in the fair and equitable allocation of the funds right along the way. They have continually worked on ways to make the funding as accessible as possible and have also supported and strongly encouraged hubs to engage in learning and networking opportunities linked to the funding in order to building capability of all the hubs."</i>
	The relationships and communication between MfE and recipients are different to other funds.	<i>"The partnership. It's not just about here's the money to do this thing. From the very beginning we have felt trusted and respected and valued by CEF. We have a relationship with CEF - that's the big difference."</i>
	Frequency of responses: 40.0% (4/10)	<i>"The funding relationship between the hubs and EHA seems like a true partnership model. Additionally, it seems that MfE staff involved along the way have always had an enabling and positive attitude to checking in with how the funding is progressing."</i>
	Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact • Efficiency • Coherence 	<i>"The key issue for our project was staff changes that impacted as communication for someone new and understanding CEF funding process did not align with new staff member coming into a 3-year project. This was a frustrating process for us."</i>
	The CEF reporting and application process was different to other funds.	<i>"As a general response regarding MfE funding across multiple MfE grants, MfE requires excessive information, it's a bit of an exhausting process, and the reporting requirements are excessive for the quantum of funds received. Time is money for small NGOs trying to</i>

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
	Frequency of responses: 40.0% (4/10) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant criteria: • Efficiency • Impact 	<i>make maximum impact with funds received - excessively detailed application and reporting processes just NGO's less effective/impactful."</i> <i>"The reporting is better, based on narrative of change, which doesn't seem to be valued elsewhere" – Respondent 5</i>
What was/is the value of the CEF to your organization and project? Examples could be: "the CEF helped develop new community relationships" or "without the CEF, we would not have reached certain goals".	The CEF helped organisations develop capacity for new long-term activities. Frequency of responses: 46.2% (6/13) Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact • Sustainability 	<i>"CEF has to enabling staff professional development, implementation of automation and platforms to increase efficiency." – Respondent 12</i> <i>"The value of CEF funding to us is huge - it ensures our core staff can have security in their roles and key programmes can have long term success."</i> <i>"The CEF has enabled significant capability and capacity development in our organisation. We have moved out of a very small back-office lease, into a central city, publicly visible premises with showroom. The office space itself is also increased our capacity to onboard additional staff. Because of the fund, we have been able to increase the capacity of our core communications and support staff so that we are also able to deliver additional projects efficiently and effectively."</i>
	The CEF helped organisations expand or add to their current operations. Frequency of responses:	<i>"CEF has helped us grow our organisation and make more impact."</i> <i>"Without the CEF we would not have grown or developed. CEF has changed everything for our organization."</i>

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
	<p>46.2% (6/13)</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact 	<p><i>"CEF helped develop walking trails, native rehabilitation, work skills for our iwi and community."</i></p>
	<p>The CEF helped organisations increase their public engagement and awareness, as well as develop networks.</p>	<p><i>"CEF allowed us to outreach to more communities and provide more security to our contractors."</i></p> <p><i>"CEF funding ... supported community interactions with the local school."</i></p>
	<p>Frequency of responses:</p> <p>46.2% (6/13)</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact Sustainability 	<p><i>"Our visibility has further increased through a branding and signage exercise, which means the public knows how and where to access environmental support information."</i></p>
<p>Has the CEF enabled you to pursue long-term change and progress? Why or why not?</p> <p>Do you think there are better ways to deliver funding to local environmental projects? If so, what ways?</p> <p>How could the CEF be improved in the future?</p>	<p>Sustained funding and network-based funding is highly valued.</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact Efficiency Sustainability 	<p><i>"The stability of multiyear funding opened doors/gave us the credibility we needed to be successful with other funders as well. Overall, this allowed our organisation to grow and increase our environmental reach substantially."</i></p> <p><i>"Operational funding has been very valuable and contributed to our security and community resilience."</i></p> <p><i>"[With respect to long-term change abilities] we have a sense our organisation will not be reeling from small pots of funding to the next, offering no job security, and devaluing some of the most impactful people in our society."</i></p>

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
<p>If you have any other comments on the difference between project based CEF funding and receiving support through a network organization, please add them here.</p> <p>For your organization, would you prefer to receive project-based funding through the CEF or receive support as part of a larger environmental network organization? Please explain why.</p> <p>If you have any further thoughts on the comparison between CEF funding and other funding sources, please put them here.</p>		<p><i>"We already had long term plans and strategies - the funding helped implement them. The funding level received was gratefully accepted but we need longer term substantive partnerships to follow our nature regeneration journeys - we are building those with business and philanthropy."</i></p> <p><i>"I think working with EHA and Para Kore has been a great way to provide long-term, stable growth of environmental initiatives."</i></p>
	<p>It is important to recognize administration and organizational management costs and capability requirements.</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency • Impact • Sustainability 	<p><i>"[To improve funding for community environmental projects] ensure that any project funding that is distributed is encouraged to have part of the budget set aside for organisational capacity/capability building. That support is provided to applicants to consider the wider costs involved with running projects, and that back-office support, management, training and coordination expenses are seen as a valuable proportion of any project."</i></p> <p><i>"Project-based funding is usually linked directly to project deliverables - physical stuff and things - traps on ground, plants in ground, numbers of kgs of waste picked up etc. These are all good to have, but there is often very little scope in these project plans to fund back-office support and management, let alone the all-important collaborative conversations, and generative thinking and strategy building that has the space to occur when funding is focused on building overall capability and capacity."</i></p>
	<p>Flexibility is important to organisations.</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency • Impact 	<p><i>"[Improve the CEF by having...] Streamlined application and reporting processes with flexibility to recognise that things change, and applicants often discover better ways to deliver results as the project unfolds (or COVID-19 happens, or Gabrielle happens)."</i></p> <p><i>"Variations to stated outcomes requires a lot of explanation/justification - in reality these nature regeneration projects are dynamic, circumstances change, opportunities during the project change, some estimated outcomes are always either overestimated or underestimated because they are based on assumptions and best attempts. A more</i></p>

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherence 	<p><i>enabling flexible process with much more streamlined reporting would make the funding much more impactful. The feedback process being undertaken right now is a good example of it needing around 2+ hours of precious resource time to respond and feedback. Whilst capturing learning is really important it needs to be designed really efficiently and cognizant of time pressures on NGOs/applicants"</i></p>
	<p>The project-based admin was excessive and overly burdensome.</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency 	<p><i>"[Improve the CEF by employing a...] Less bureaucratic higher trust model".</i></p> <p><i>"Applying to the CEF prior to the support via EHA was too complex for our small organisation to navigate."</i></p> <p><i>"We are able to secure project-based funding more easily elsewhere, and project-based funding does not support feelings of job security for our staff and does not support us to grow in the way that operational funding can."</i></p>
	<p>More funding and resources are needed to achieve goals of the fund.</p> <p>Relevant criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact Sustainability Coherence 	<p><i>"I think you all do an amazing job. I guess things could be improved by stronger central government support for CEF/community. It's absolutely awe-inspiring to think of the difference that networks and organisations like Para Kore could make with on-going, long-term support."</i></p> <p><i>"[CEF could be improved...] If it was a bigger pot of funds, for a longer length of time, environmental work is ongoing, just like all other infrastructure funding should not hold an end date."</i></p> <p><i>"[CEF could be improved...] By providing more funding"</i></p> <p><i>"We know the environmental sector struggles to get the scale of funding it needs to turn around biodiversity loss. Philanthropy in NZ only allocates about 4% to environmental projects. Feedback from philanthropy is that the environmental sector is fragmented/not</i></p>

Question	Themes	Example of Responses (quotes)
		<i>joined up and they can't see the clear value to invest. Business also struggles to see clear value and what's in it for them - we need more compelling business cases with joined up large scale visions, and clear ways to measure impact and do compelling story telling"</i>
	There are opportunities to combine the network and project-based funding modalities to provide better local support. Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherence • Impact • Sustainability • Efficiency 	<i>"Allowing hubs to support small ventures greatly enhances impact, rather than the big project thinking of central govt funding needs to recognise agencies that support many other to make change, often with little or no funding spread too thinly, the more centralised the funding to more admin is needed."</i> <i>"[Improve the CEF by...] Doing it through organisations such as EHA but regionally based as well".</i> <i>"Having EHA to mediate the process, along with supplying us with funding and additional support is the perfect way to utilize these funds".</i>
	Project-based funding is still more valuable in certain circumstances than network-based support. Relevant criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact • Efficiency 	<i>"Outcomes via other organizations can be diluted. Also, when we receive direct funding, we can focus on the job, not spend a lot of time justifying overhead costs such as those present in CRIs."</i> <i>"We are best place to lead local partnerships to meet local needs" [Wants project-based support]</i> <i>"The goals of a project seem to be more attainable than the goals of a larger network that may not align with each other's values."</i>

Appendix 4: Summary of interview results and themes

Interview guiding questions	Frequent supporting ideas	Examples of responses
Theme 1 – Value Creation: Provision of opportunities and engagement for projects		
What are the most important aspects contributing to the success of the fund (value creation)?	Confidence in the project's financial stability contributing to the ability to apply for additional funding.	<i>'Projects could have the confidence that they could keep going. More credence to apply for other funding'.</i>
	Encouragement of community engagement and regard for nature, ensuring that projects maintain momentum.	<i>'Important value for community engagement and supporting communities to value nature and get involved'.</i>
	The provision of enduring, long-term benefits is a key element of the CEF's theory of change.	
	Opportunities provided to small-scale projects is uncommon amongst funding recipients. Often eligibility relies on being of a greater scale. The fund provides financial support to projects that may otherwise be overlooked.	<i>'Most other funds are very narrowly focused on what they will fund. Often you have to be a pretty big player to get funded. So, it provides relevance through this'.</i>
Theme 2 – Accessibility of the fund: Arduous processes and requirements		

Interview guiding questions	Frequent supporting ideas	Examples of responses
Can you reflect on the coherence of the selection criteria and application requirements – what is the extent of alignment to the ToC?	Arduous nature of the application and/or reporting processes. Required large amounts of time, costs, and skills to complete.	<p><i>'Don't have massive administrative requirements if you don't even fund administration'.</i></p> <p><i>'Small-scale projects often don't have the metrics or reporting ability to meet the criteria to get the funding'.</i></p> <p><i>'The detailed nature of the reporting was arduous...It was a combination of the level of detail required for the objectives, and the financial reporting. When asking [MfE] what happened to the reports, [they] were essentially told 'nothing'.</i></p> <p><i>'The idea of reporting is to help the organisation understand. However, this appeared to be a process of accountability rather than information gathering'.</i></p>
	Brings into question how accessible the fund actually is to small-scale community projects.	<p><i>'Bureaucracy in applications for funds.'</i></p> <p><i>'Money in theory is available to groups, but how available is it actually?'</i></p> <p><i>'Long application processes for around 85% of the projects applying for the fund, being rejected'.</i></p>
Theme 3 – Preference for project-based support or network-based support: Maximising scale and impact		
What is your perspective on the effectiveness of project funding versus capability funding?	Although survey insights showed a preference for network-based funding, some interviewees acknowledged that project-based funding provides value through encouraging community engagement (crucial element of CEF's Theory of Change).	<i>'Benefits in supporting small groups for conservation work, as it helps to activate communities and make them feel like they can do their conservation project in their neighbourhood'.</i>

Interview guiding questions	Frequent supporting ideas	Examples of responses
	However, their size and shorter funding time frames reduces the scale of impact.	<p><i>'But if we're trying to solve the biodiversity crisis they don't deliver much in that space, because of their smaller scale.'</i></p> <p><i>'Small community grants, they're good for social engagement but don't deliver much.'</i></p> <p><i>'Grants-based funding creates competition. It's short-term, and to achieve the ecological transformation, it's not going to happen in three years. These are a drop in the bucket, and everything falls apart afterwards.'</i></p>
	Project-based funding inherently poses greater risks.	<i>'Project funding is inherently hit and miss. You'll have some great successes and failures. Really reflects what we've seen through the CEF.'</i>
	Network-based funding developed as a catalyst for connecting smaller projects and enhancing the scale of impact with more certainty in the investment.	<p><i>'The hub model supports groups to build their capability, by connecting them in a catchment effort.'</i></p> <p><i>'Network funding, we are funding you to be a catalyst, not hoping it will be.'</i></p>
Theme 4 – Unforeseen challenges: Misalignment with adaptive management		
How well has CEF delivered on its stated outcomes and environmental impact?	The impact of the pandemic on the implementation of various projects was cited as affecting projects capacity to deliver on their goals. Most projects had to reassess their plans, relocate funds, and review their timelines and milestones to a certain extent. The administration of the fund did not easily accommodate these challenges. Despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic, interviewees agreed that projects could be planned for the first year with greater certainty, but	<i>'MfE reporting is exhaustive, detailed, hard to get variations, and has a reluctance to be flexible. Lots of things go wrong in environmental projects, and this rigid structure means you have to report that you failed. Good to have a more reflective reporting process that reflects the intent of the project and more understanding of the realities and wins of the projects. Plans change. You can't lock down a project for 5</i>

Interview guiding questions	Frequent supporting ideas	Examples of responses
	estimations for the second and third years could be challenging. Some interviewees suggested that an adaptive management approach could help address these challenges.	<p><i>years. Projects will often have the overall vision and aspirations, a good idea of what they are doing this year, some idea of next year, and are not sure beyond that.'</i></p> <p><i>'COVID-19 hampered everything. Ones that had ability to go online had a better chance.'</i></p>

Theme 5 – Collaboration: Need for meaningful relationships

In your opinion, are there other areas of impact / outcomes that CEF could target in future rounds to enhance impact?	Enhancement of collaboration and relationships between projects collectively, and with MfE, needs greater effort. Connecting projects can augment the scale of impact by sharing skills and knowledge, leading to greater effectiveness and efficiency in achieving objectives.	<p><i>The more you can connect the projects up, you can be more effective in achieving your outcome and using taxpayer money. Larger proportion of money should go to those that can make the connection between projects.'</i></p> <p><i>'Think it's important to build on these networks to talk about things, can we join together? Collective effort. Sharing skills. Working as a part of a bigger scale.'</i></p>
	MfE could play a greater role in facilitating the development of meaningful relationships between projects and MfE.	<p><i>'Difficult to have a meaningful relationship with a government organisation. Could achieve by having [MfE] people locally that are touch points and can convey information and hold a relationship.'</i></p> <p><i>'Not a lot of transfer of skills and knowledge between community projects. MfE could play a greater role in this.'</i></p>

Appendix 5: Survey structure and questions

Information sheet

Overview

Kia ora! We are EnviroStrat Ltd – A natural resource sector advisor and impact investment project developer. We have been contracted by the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) to evaluate the Community Environment Fund, focusing on round 9 of the fund.

As a project that received funding from the CEF, we are inviting you to participate in a survey that will help us understand your experience with the CEF. We would greatly appreciate if you could share this survey with other stakeholders relevant to your CEF project.

What will you have to do and how long will it take?

This is an online survey that will take roughly 10 minutes. **We would appreciate it if you could respond by the 8th of March 2023.**

The survey is best completed on a computer or tablet but can also be completed on your smart phone. Please use the forward and back buttons at the bottom of the page to navigate through the survey.

You do not necessarily have to finish the survey in one sitting. You may leave the survey and return using the survey link to finish your response.

What will happen to the information collected?

Participating in this survey is entirely voluntary. If you start the survey and decide you do not want to continue, you have the right to leave at any stage and we will delete your response from the dataset. Your responses will only be used for this evaluation.

As part of this survey you will be asked to provide your name and email address. Only EnviroStrat Ltd will have access to this information.

Before using the data in any reports or sharing with MfE, we will ensure the **data is completely anonymised** and that no personal information is disclosed.

Declaration to participants

If you take part in the survey, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question, and to stop the survey at any point.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Tahlia Bridger at EnviroStrat Ltd using the details below.

We very much appreciate your valuable input and we welcome any questions, thoughts, suggestions or comments you may have regarding this evaluation.

Tahlia Bridger
tahlia.bridger@envirostrat.co.nz

Consent form

* 1. I have read the Information Sheet for Participants for this survey. I clearly understand what will be involved in this survey, the risks and benefits of participation, and how my data will be protected and used.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the survey at any time or to decline to answer any particular questions in the survey. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet on the previous page.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Background questions

2. What is your name?

3. What is the name of the organization/entity that received CEF funding?

4. What was your role within the above organization/entity?

5. What is your best contact email address?

6. How many years has it been since your project finished?

☐ 0 years - ongoing

☐ 0-1 years

☐ 1-2 years

☐ 3+ years

7. What other (non-CEF) funding sources has your organization received funding from, besides funding for the CEF project you have been involved with? Please select as many that apply.

☐ Local government

☐ Not-for-profits

☐ NGOs

☐ Central government

☐ No other funding received

☐ Other (please specify)

Overall Assessment of the CEF

These next questions will ask about your general perceptions of the CEF. This includes questions about the application process, reporting requirements, support provided by the CEF and impact achieved from the CEF funding.

Please remember that your responses will remain completely confidential and will be anonymized before being shared with MFE or other parties.

8. What was/is the value of the CEF to your organization and project?

Examples could be: "the CEF helped develop new community relationships" **or** "without the CEF, we would not have reached certain goals".

9. With respect to your CEF funded project, will additional funds be needed to maintain the gains / improvement / impact of the project?

☐ Yes

☐ No

10. Why/why not?

11. Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:

In your opinion, the CEF achieves its main objectives (see below).

"The Community Environment Fund empowers New Zealanders to make a positive difference to the environment. It supports projects that strengthen environmental partnerships, raise environmental awareness and encourage participation in environmental initiatives in the community."

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

☐ I don't know

12. Could you please briefly elaborate on your answer above.

Overall assessment of the CEF

13. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
The CEF application process was easy to navigate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CEF application process was too long.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CEF funding improved key outcomes for our project.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CEF funding has helped build capability for future environmental progress for our organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CEF reporting requirements were excessive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The communication with MfE about the project was good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being funded by the CEF was worthwhile.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CEF aligns well with the MfE as an organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 14. Has your organization received any other **project-based** funding in the past (besides CEF funding)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Comparison with other funding

15. What, if anything, differentiates the CEF from other funding sources?

16. Thinking back about previous project-based funding, please indicate whether the **CEF funding** is **better** or **worse** than other sources of funding at:

	Much worse	Worse	About the same	Better	Much better	Don't know
Enabling the delivery of impact.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Achieving value for money in terms of impact.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having manageable reporting requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing support from the funder.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Funders understanding the project concept.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Funders understanding the project context.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping to deliver long-term impact.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building capability for the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having flexibility in using resources.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. If you have any further thoughts on the comparison between CEF funding and other funding sources, please put them here.

Perceptions of network organizations

* 18. How much do you know about local and national environmental networks? For example, Environment Hubs Aotearoa.

- ☐ A great deal
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A moderate amount
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Nothing at all

Perceptions of network organizations

19. On average, how much engagement do you have with local and national environmental networks? For example, Environment Hubs Aotearora.

- ☐ A great deal
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A moderate amount
- ☐ A little
- ☐ None at all

20. Please comment on your engagement with environmental network organizations.

21. Overall, what are your perceptions of environmental network organizations?

- ☐ Very positive
- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Negative
- ☐ Very negative
- ☐ I don't know

* 22. For your organization, would you prefer to receive project-based funding through the CEF or receive support as part of a larger environmental network organization?

- ☐ Project-based support from the CEF
- ☐ Support through an environmental network organization
- ☐ Other (please specify)

CEF project-based support and environmental network organizations

23. We notice you indicated that you would prefer {{ Q22 }} for your organization. Could you please briefly explain why.

24. If you have any other comments on the difference between project-based CEF funding and receiving support through a network organization, please add them here.

CEF project-based support and environmental network organizations

25. If you have any other comments on the difference between project-based CEF funding and receiving support through a network organization, please add them here.

Looking Ahead - Your Views

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this survey. Your responses are very helpful and much appreciated.

These final questions provide you with an opportunity to provide honest and constructive feedback about the CEF in response to some open-ended questions. Please put NA if you have nothing further to add.

As a reminder, your responses will remain completely confidential and will be fully anonymized before MFE or other parties see the results.

* 26. How could the CEF be improved in the future?

* 27. Do you think there are better ways to deliver funding to local environmental projects? If so, what ways? Please keep in mind that there will always be limits on resources.

* 28. Has the CEF enabled you to pursue long-term change and progress? Why or why not?

* 29. There may be an opportunity to participate in a confidential interview about your experience with the CEF. Are you willing to be contacted by EnviroStrat Ltd about such an interview?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this survey. Your responses are very helpful and much appreciated!