Executive Summary

This report examines the level of student engagement in sustainability issues at the Australian National University (ANU). The role that ANUgreen has in developing this engagement is particularly important to this investigation. Several strengths of the current student structure were identified, including the effective organization within the residences, the wide range of opportunities and substantial level of independent student initiative. However, weaknesses are still present. Many of the student groups lack a structure that encourages continuity, consistent participation and accountability. Additionally, the relationship between the organizations and ANUgreen is not as strong as it could be. In order to address these weaknesses, this report makes six recommendations. These changes intend to improve not only the level of student involvement but also the performance of ANUgreen.

Introduction:

The objective of this report is to recommend changes to improve the current level of student environmental engagement at ANU. The nature of these changes will be focused on modifying the interactions between ANUgreen and existing student groups. The relationship between ANUgreen and the student community should encourage, facilitate and support student actions aimed at improving on campus sustainability. To satisfy this responsibility, ANUgreen needs to improve its communication with the student body, to provide a measure of structure and continuity for on-campus student involvement, to offer resources for student initiatives.

Methods and Perspective
I chose to undertake this report largely due to my experience working with the Student Taskforce for Environmental Partnership (STEP) at Yale University. STEP is a student directed group that organizes much of the student outreach for the Sustainability Office at Yale. Utilizing the structure of the twelve residential colleges, STEP has approximately 30 student employees responsible for coordinating efforts aimed at the entire undergraduate population.

This is the perspective with which I have examined the student involvement in sustainability issues at the ANU along with ANUgreen’s role in that involvement. In order to better understand the current situation, I interviewed the Green Representatives from Burgmann and John XXIII Colleges along with those from Bruce, Burton & Garran and Toad Halls. I also interviewed the director of the Sustainability Learning Community, who is also the representative from Bruce Hall. Due to conflicting schedules I was unable to speak with students involved in other student groups on campus or those representatives from the other residences.

**Current Student Engagement**

Student involvement in sustainability is most effectively organized in individual halls and colleges. Out of the eight on campus residential options--Bruce Hall, Burgmann College, Burton and Garran Hall, Fenner Hall, John XIII College, Toad Hall, UniLodge, and Ursula Hall--all but UniLodge have students responsible for the management of the Green Portfolio. This enables sustainability issues to be addressed at a local level by a member of the student community. In many cases, this representative is a Senior Resident (SR) who receives a scholarship for fulfilling the role of an SR, which includes the work as a Green Representative. Furthermore, the Green Reps have a relationship with the administration of
the residence, which often yields financial and official support. The administration provides the student representatives with access to complete mailing lists along with further opportunities for outreach to the entire student population of the residence. Because they are intimately focused on green issues in particular halls, these Green Reps are a valuable locus for organization and knowledge at a local level.

Additionally, these individuals coordinate a group of interested students who live together. These peers collaborate to initiate, to develop and to implement unique environmental projects. Thus, each hall with a Green Rep has a framework in place—complete with an individual responsible for the coordination of a group of volunteers—through which improvements in sustainability can be implemented. This structure encourages students to instigate solutions to the sustainability problems they encounter in their everyday life.

Beyond these groups with relatively specific foci, the campus is also served by range organizations that serve broader communities.

- The Environment Collective (EC) is a department of the ANU Student Association (ANUSA). This group is run by the Environment Officer, a member of the ANUSA, and aims to act as a point of contact for environmental inquiries on campus, raise the general awareness of more political issues related to sustainability and organize and implement individual projects.

- The Sustainability Learning Community (SLC) is a group of students and staff from across the university committed to developing their understanding of sustainability. Like other Learning Communities on campus, the SLC uses the available resources on campus to enable personal education outside of the
classroom. This group has coordinated several inclusive on campus events and projects to promote environmental awareness.

- Groups focused more on specific issues than general outreach complement these more comprehensive groups. These entities provide the opportunity for more in-depth involvement with a limited scope. The Zero Emissions Society, Bike Co-Op, Food Co-Op, Fenner Student Society and other groups provide various forums for students to engage in an inclusive range of environmental issues.

Cumulatively, these several groups–Green Reps, EC, SLC and others–create a framework for environmental engagement by the student population. These organizations demonstrate the presence of student initiative independent of substantial administrative prompting or support. Involvement has been effectively organized at the residential level, the most intimate unit of organization with a critical mass of students necessary to sustain progress. Sustainability has been incorporated into student government, which ensures a level of campus-wide legitimacy and visibility. Students also interact with faculty and staff, creating a diverse community in which these issues can be confronted. Any changes that are undertaken should preserve these advantages, which are unique to ANU and make the university noteworthy in the area of student involvement.

Weaknesses of the Existing Structure

While the variety of student groups on campus represents an impressive array of opportunities, it also lacks one pre-eminent group that serves to unify, simply and direct student involvement. Without an extremely visible, accessible and consistent organization to lead the way in campus wide sustainability, for student becoming environmentally active can
be confusing. These uncertainties about where to become involved or through which avenue to implement an idea can consequentially encumber student involvement. Unless an accessible means for capitalizing on student enthusiasm is readily available, in many instances that enthusiasm will quickly wane.

Some consequences of this situation include uncertainty about the identity of the most effective environmental group, the inability of a single group to build a coherent reputation among students, and the uncertainty of the ANUgreen office about which group it would be best to support.

Additionally, the current framework does not allow for easy expression of the sustainable consciousness that ANUgreen is working to create on campus. As ANUgreen endeavours to improve the university's sustainability, a huge part of that is changing the perspective of the university community. Yet as this change is being achieved, the outlet to foster and to utilize the new enthusiasm is not itself clear. In order to sustain and amplify the effectiveness of ANUgreen's efforts, students need to be provided with an organized and wide-ranging student group to facilitate their participation.

Furthermore, because of the plurality, each group has difficulty developing its own legitimacy in the eyes of the administration. Student groups are often characterized by ephemeral enthusiasm and organization. Unless a group accomplishes series of successful campaigns, it is difficult to develop the kind of rapport with the administration that is necessary to receive support. Weak administrative backing makes it more difficult to institute new student inspired initiatives.

Finally, interaction between the ANUgreen Office and the various student groups is relatively limited. Each green group in a hall or college has an associated environmental officer at ANUgreen, but this is a loose association. ANUgreen provides assistance if
students make specific requests, but the proactive outreach from both sides is limited. The SLC has a unique relationship with the Green Office, but other groups meet infrequently, if at all, with the staff. Thus, an important disconnect exists between the expertise and resources of the Green office and the students who are in many cases the best ambassadors to communicate this message.

A corollary to this malfunction is the lack of awareness within the student body of the work that ANUgreen is doing. While the range of valuable services provided and vital improvements made by ANUgreen is inspiring, students are relatively unaware of these advances.

**Recommended Changes**

**Recommendation:** Improve the Visibility of ANUgreen in the Student Population

**Justification:** Despite the huge successes ANUgreen has had in improving the infrastructure, procedures and culture of the entire University so that each facet reflects a consciousness of sustainability, many of these achievements are unrecognized by the student body. ANUgreen can substantially increase the support and cooperation of students through simply making them aware of the many exciting initiatives present on campus. Publicizing the accomplishments and raising awareness of ongoing projects will create enthusiasm for improving sustainability in other areas. Students not only make up a substantial portion of the ANU population, but they also become ambassadors that move into every sector of Australian society. Thus, it is critical to create an enduring environmental perspective while the students are at ANU so that they transmit this understanding outside spheres.

**Strategy:** Visibility can be improved through:
1. Installing on-site explanations of infrastructural improvements. These might include signs explaining how the grey water recycling system works, why the ephemeral ponds are important, or how much waste the HotRot diverts.

2. Creating an internal advertising campaign aimed specifically at the student population. The placement of these materials is just as important as the way in which the message is delivered so that disengaged students are exposed to the information.

3. Making the website more accessible to students so that the opportunities for involvement are clear and those efforts that affect their daily lives are emphasized.

**Recommendation:** Standardize the Position of the Green Groups within each Residence

**Justification:** The discrepancies between the individual Green Groups in the several residences both hinder progress in those halls and colleges with a weakly supported sustainable presence and impede interhall cooperation. ANUgreen can provide a useful service as an advocate for institutionalizing these Green Groups in each residence. While this change should remain largely student driven, ANUgreen can be an invaluable advocate for the student representatives because of its position within the administration of the university. Through standardizing the role of the Green Groups in each college, ANUgreen can ensure that awareness of environmental issues is promoted at the most personal level available through a very effective peer to peer exchange.

**Strategy:** Such changes might include

1. Formalizing the presence of a Green Portfolio within the Senior Resident Council of every college
2. Ensuring that a Senior Resident is responsible for the Green Portfolio so that financial incentives and significant accountability are associated with the position

3. Establishing a baseline level of funding for the Green Portfolio so that minimum levels of activity are possible. This might require ANUgreen partially supporting these groups.

4. Providing assistance and advice to the Green Reps in residences that need to petition the administration to elevate or formalize the Green Portfolio in their residence

Recommendation: Strengthen Relationship between ANUgreen and the Green Groups

Justification: The presence of Green Groups in nearly all the halls or colleges is an invaluable framework and the substantial autonomy of these groups should be preserved. However, ANUgreen has a unique ability to improve the performance of these individual groups. The materials (posters, stickers, guidelines), knowledge of event planning and access to relevant data and statistics are only a sample of the resources that ANUgreen can supply the residential Green Groups. However, in many cases students are either unaware of these aids, unwilling to seek out the help, or unsure about how to ask for assistance. While the ANUgreen Office is not answerable for all of these barriers, it does have the ability to eliminate many of them. Ultimately, the most important benefit from improved communication will be the dialog between ANUgreen and the students. Through such interactions new and effective strategies will be developed and implemented to improve the sustainability of the ANU student body.

Strategy: The connection between the residential green groups and ANUgreen can be strengthened through:
1. Becoming more proactive in the outreach to the student representatives.

ANUgreen needs ensure that students are aware of the services it can provide. Such initiation on the part of ANUgreen is unfortunately necessary when dealing with university students who engage with these issues on a relatively irregular basis.

2. Making ANUgreen more accessible so that the students can reciprocate the exchange of ideas of assistance. Providing students with comfortable and expected access to ANUgreen will enable it to have an even more active role in facilitating student initiatives. Furthermore, as ANUgreen cannot recognize every difficulty that students will encounter, this will provide the opportunity to address additional questions and possibilities that might otherwise go unresolved.

3. Establishing a consistent forum for discussion between ANUgreen and the representatives from each college. Such a meeting would advance both of the above strategies.

4. Holding an introductory session at the beginning of the year in order to familiarize Green Reps with the members of ANUgreen (their roles and their expertises), introduce the many services ANUgreen can provide and to make known the many areas in which ANUgreen has made or is working toward improvements on campus.

**Recommendation:** Facilitate Dialog between Individual Representatives from Different Residences

**Justification:** Although the several Green Reps are working toward the same goal, the current level of collaboration and exchange does not reflect this commonality. Often times,
representatives do not build on the experiences of others, even though similar projects are undertaken in each college. Interhall meetings for the Green Shield program have begun, but the level of exchange is limited to interhall projects and generally does not include initiatives directed at individual colleges. ANUgreen's campus-wide involvement and perspective make it the perfect entity to facilitate such lateral communication.

**Strategy:** Inter-residence communication can be improved through:

1. Regular meetings that involve each Green Rep and a staff member of ANUgreen. The consistency of these meetings is crucial, especially considering the current informal schedule of Green Group meetings. Regularity will provide a structure that makes the meetings a higher priority for the students, demands accountability, maintains progress and addresses issues as they arise.

2. Providing a repository of materials, reports, suggestions, proposals, etc. that have been created by Green Reps in the past and might be adapted for current projects. This central collection of resources specifically related to residential sustainability efforts will make using past documents easier and will encourage and enable advances in every residence.

**Recommendation:** Coordinate a Campus-wide Student Sustainability Group Focused on Behavioural Change

**Justification:** The scene of student sustainability continues to lack a group dedicated to bringing together various organizations to encourage behavioural change on campus. Each of the existing entities has a particular weakness that inhibits effective communication with the student body as a whole. The SLC avoids an activist role, the EC is too political, Green Shield doesn't look at the whole campus, and the myriad other groups are too narrowly
focused. An additional group will serve a vital purpose as long as its mandate is to utilize the existing groups to promote sustainable behaviour in every aspect of student life. This entity would provide continuity from year to year, emphasize the interconnection of the various messages, make involvement by additional students more streamlined, maintain the focus on continued progress on campus, and provide an important measure of accountability and structure. Regardless, any changes must ensure that a new group does not simply clutter the landscape and hinder, rather than encourage, progress.

**Strategy:** Such a group could be organized by:

1. Utilizing, but also expanding, the existing Green Shield or SLC framework or as the overarching student sustainability organization. This will avoid having to create an entirely new structure but does not appropriate an existing organization and force it too far from its current objective. The Green Shield would provide an existing leadership structure but would also require a substantial expansion of scope. The SLC has an established relationship with ANUgreen and a campus-wide mission, but is a relatively new organization that has not focused as much on behavioural change. In both cases, adjusting either organization could incorporate the previous recommendations and improve the overall performance of the group.

2. Involving entities other than the Green Reps in the new Green Shield organization. If this group is to be truly focused on sustainability in the entire student population, it will need to expand its audience beyond the eight residences. While these students are not the responsibility of the Green Reps, and are largely unaffected by activities in the residences, by involving outside
groups (such as the SLC, EC, Zero Emissions, etc.) the Green Shield group will both expand its scope and gain important resources.

3. Maintaining a close relationship with ANUgreen. This type of connection, beyond the benefits of advice, resources and support mentioned earlier, provides an opportunity for increased oversight by ANUgreen. While student inspiration and guidance are critical aspects of any group aimed at changing student behaviour, those characteristics can also be problematic without some supervision. Ultimately, this will produce a more professional student group, and ANUgreen will have more confidence in the group's ability to achieve progress.

4. Ensuring that a high level of continuity is sustained within the organization from year to year. Learning from the shortfalls and successes of the previous year is essential for any group to be effective. Currently, many of the Green Groups and other student organizations suffer from an annual disconnect: leaders are typically in their final year of study and provide little guidance for their replacements. By facilitating a change over period for leadership, by organizing the creation of comprehensive manuals for the next representative, and/or providing some sort of training for new leaders, ANUgreen can improve the transitions from year to year and the overall performance of the student group.

5. Emphasizing the connections between the many messages and initiatives. This is a critical step in the process of educating students about sustainability. Instead of perceiving each event as a discrete measure, the interdependence of the complete body of green initiatives and behavioural changes ought to be emphasized. This helps minimize the sense of isolation that often hinders behavioural changes and allows students to realize the range of improvements
happening on the ANU campus. This can largely be achieved by a continuous and visible presence by a student group. The actions and initiatives are then perceived by casual students not as disconnected inspirations that are the product of an ephemeral enthusiasm for sustainability, but are instead the signs of a pervasive culture of sustainability that is a defining feature of the university. Ensuring that a high level of continuity is maintained between the various messages and initiatives of the group, along with a certain level of branding, is critical to achieving this holistic awareness in the student population.

6. Formalizing a strategy at the beginning of each semester for the upcoming weeks. Creating such a schedule, especially when done in close association with ANUgreen, will motivate forward progress and also provide a better way of evaluating the effectiveness of the organization and its projects.

7. Organizing a well planned and inclusive initiative that can serve as a model for later events or outreach programs. If ANUgreen makes this inaugural project of the new Green Shield as straightforward, complete and organized as possible, this will help the students understand how to plan an effective event, introduce another effective initiative the students can undertake, and will emphasize the value of ANUgreen as a resource for their efforts. Such an event might be a campaign before a holiday urging students to unplug all of the appliances in their rooms, to turn off all the lights and turn off the heating or air-conditioning. This would apply to the entire student population, not just on campus residences, does not involve substantial monetary investment on the part of ANUgreen or the students, encourages an important behaviour change, and can be directly measured in order to determine the effectiveness of the efforts.
Recommendation: Create Materials Specifically Aimed at International Students

Justification: The various backgrounds of the international students present unique barriers to understanding the environmental problems in Australia. As such, some of these students are not as receptive to the current messages of ANUgreen and counteract the improvements made by other students. Information tailored to these different perspectives, dismissing misconceptions and reaching out to these students, would be extremely effective in encouraging participation.

Strategy:

1. Creating materials that compare the issues in Australia to issues in certain common homelands. Through such a campaign the challenges the ANU community is facing will be set in a perspective that international students relate to.

2. Making a concerted effort to seem open to international students. Making sure that this segment of the student body knows that ANUgreen can address any questions students might have and can help them find solutions is essential to encouraging desirable behaviour.