

# Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust Annual Report



**2022-2023**

A report of the outputs, expenditure  
and governance of the Trust

August 2023

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## Message from the Chair

On behalf of the Management Panel of the Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust, I am pleased to present the tenth Annual Report on our activities. This report is a public documentation of the Trust's activities for the 2022-23 financial year, ensuring our accountability to the organisations that fund the Trust, to the key stakeholders in the Great Victoria Desert (GVD), and to the broader WA public.

The Trust's activities this year have included continuing the implementation of the integrated landscape scale management initiative focusing on fire management with the aim of providing landscape scale improvements to the desert biodiversity and habitats, in particular, those of the Malleefowl and Sandhill Dunnart. A key part of this work involves working with the Traditional Owners to draw on their extensive management knowledge and to assist in building their on-going management capacity. Strengthening these relationships will be a key objective of the Trust this coming year. However, this project was had to be put on hold as the sites for this work became subject to a Native Title claim, and we are required to get the consent of the Claimants to continue this work. A key project for 2023/24 will be to work with the Claimants to design the project so as to meet theirs and the Trust's objectives for on-going management of their land.

Two key initiatives were commenced last year. The first was to fund the fund Pulu Nguru Corporation representing the Spinifex People to carry out fauna survey on their land. Pulu Nguru would employ an experienced ecologist to design the survey and train Rangers to carry out that work. The second was to build a working relationship with Curtin University, where the Trust would fund projects that meet the objectives of the Trust and utilise the skills, knowledge and research interest of Curtin to improve the biodiversity of the desert. A significant project was defined, and funding agreed to but this project was also put on hold due to the Native Title claim.

The Trust respects the rights of the Claimants with respect to Native Title and will work collaboratively with the Claimants.

I would like to personally thank the members of the Management Panel for their continued commitment to the Trust's objectives and the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) for their high level and invaluable technical advice, all of whom have provided their time without being remunerated.

A special thanks to Kathryn Sinclair our Operations' Manager, and to Sean Tomlinson who joined the Trust this year on a part-time basis to develop a high resolution habitat suitability estimates for *S. psammophila*. They have both provided invaluable professional advice and support to the Management Panel, and Kathryn has expertly managed the various projects funded by the Trust. Sadly, Kathryn decided that it was time to pursue another career path and resigned in May. Kathryn has been with the Trust since its inception and been primarily responsible for building up the capacity of the Trust to deliver on its key objectives related to improving the biodiversity of the Great Victoria Desert. Kathryn was respected by all those she worked with as being dedicated, highly professional, a great communicator and a joy to work with. She will be missed.

In her place, we welcomed Ian Anderson from DBCA as the new Operations Manager who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in natural resource management, and is very well suited to the work of the Trust.

There was also a change in the membership of the Management Panel, with Nerilee Rockman stepping down as one of the AngloGold Ashanti representatives being replaced by Rose Lane. Nerilee was one of the founding members of the Panel, and during her time with us she has provided considered, balanced and invaluable input to all our decision-making.

Finally, I would like to formally acknowledge the strong and effective working relationship the Trust has with AngloGold Ashanti Australia, the DBCA, and with the WA Public Trustees who manage the funds for the Trust.

Dr Garry Middle



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## 1. Introduction

The Trust represents a unique model for an environmental offset in Western Australia, and Australia in general. It was established in 2014 by the Tropicana Joint Venture (AngloGold Ashanti Australia (AGAA) Ltd (manager and 70% owner) and Independence Group NL (30% owner) as the central part of an offset package for the Tropicana Gold Mine (TGM) in Western Australia under the Commonwealth *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*. As of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021, Regis Resources has taken ownership of the Independence Group NL portion of the Tropicana Gold Mine.

The Trust's main purpose is to deliver conservation benefits to nationally listed threatened species, at a landscape-scale, and facilitate indigenous involvement in land management and conservation activities in the region. The projects supported in the 2022-2023 financial year have focused on planning towards a large-scale land management trial to understand the benefits or otherwise of patch burning to threatened species in the region.

The Trust's purposes, region of focus ('Trust Area') and governance structure are outlined in more detail below for context.

### 1.1 Trust Purposes

The purpose of the Trust is to achieve the following objectives:

1. Develop a Bioregional Management Plan (also referred to as a 'Biodiversity Conservation Plan') for the Western Great Victoria Desert bioregions 1 and 2 (i.e., the 'Trust Area').
2. Facilitate and/or undertake priority research in the Bioregional Management Plan at the landscape level and into species considered to be of Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*, including the Sandhill Dunnart and Malleefowl.
3. Fund on-ground environmental and conservation management at the landscape level, with emphasis on net conservation benefits to threatened species, including those considered MNES.
4. Facilitate indigenous involvement in land management and conservation activities in support of the above objectives.

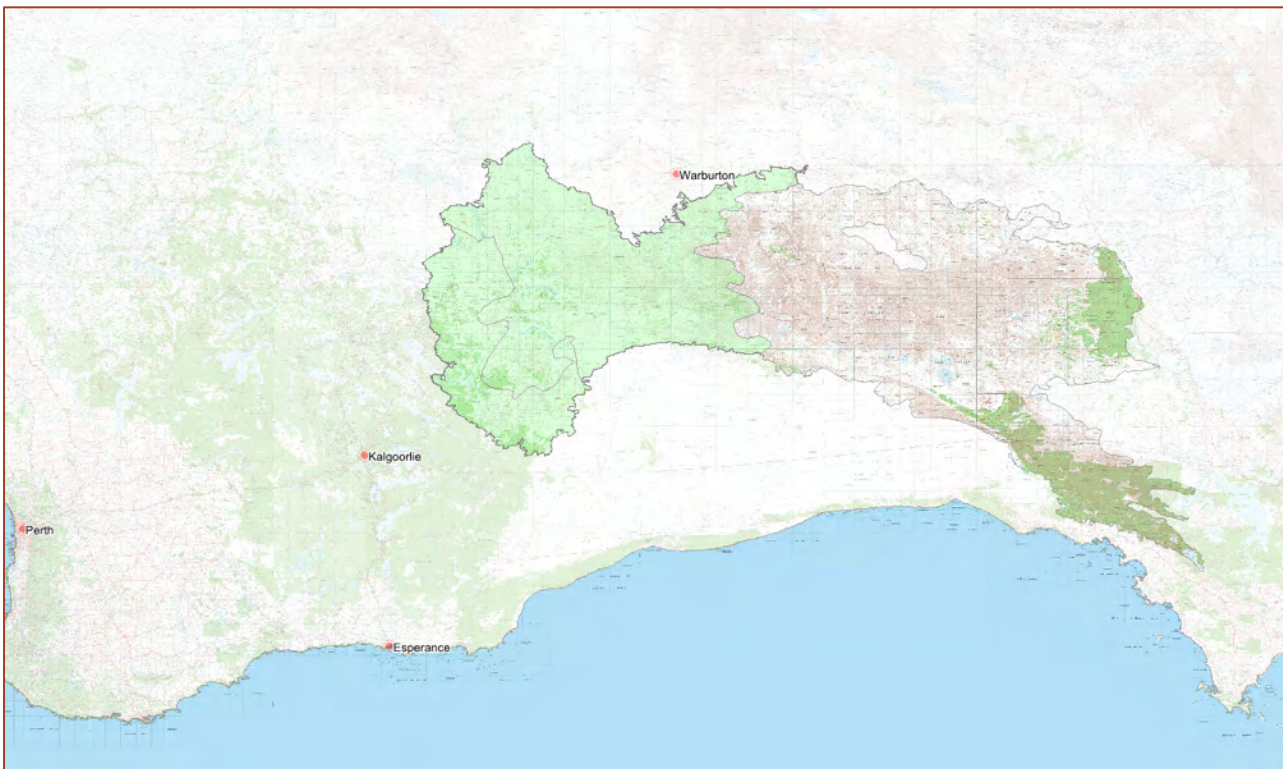
These objectives reflect those specified in Condition 6 of the *EPBC Act* approval 2008/4270 for the Tropicana Gold Mine.

## 1.2 Trust Area

The Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) classifies Australia's landscapes into 89 large geographically distinct bioregions. These are based on common climate, geology, landform, native vegetation and species information (DoE, 2015). The 89 bioregions are further refined to form 419 subregions. These are more localised and homogenous geomorphological units in each bioregion.

The GVD is one of the 89 IBRA bioregions. It is comprised of 6 subregions which extend from approximately 200km east of Kalgoorlie in Western Australia to cover large areas of South Australia. The entire GVD IBRA region covers 42,375,084 ha.

The Trust's area of focus ('Trust Area') is comprised of the two most western subregions of the GVD, known as Shield and Central, which are entirely located within Western Australia (Figure 1). These two sub-regions cover an area of 17,332,721 ha.



**Figure 1. The location and extent of the GVD (outlined) and the Trust Area (bright green)**

Whilst the Trust's activities are predominantly focussed on research and on-ground activities within the Shield and Central subregions of the GVD, they can occur outside this region if they meet the Trust's overall objectives. That is, they must be relevant and beneficial to species and biodiversity within the Trust Area, especially species and communities that are MNES as listed by the *EPBC Act*.

## 2. Governance

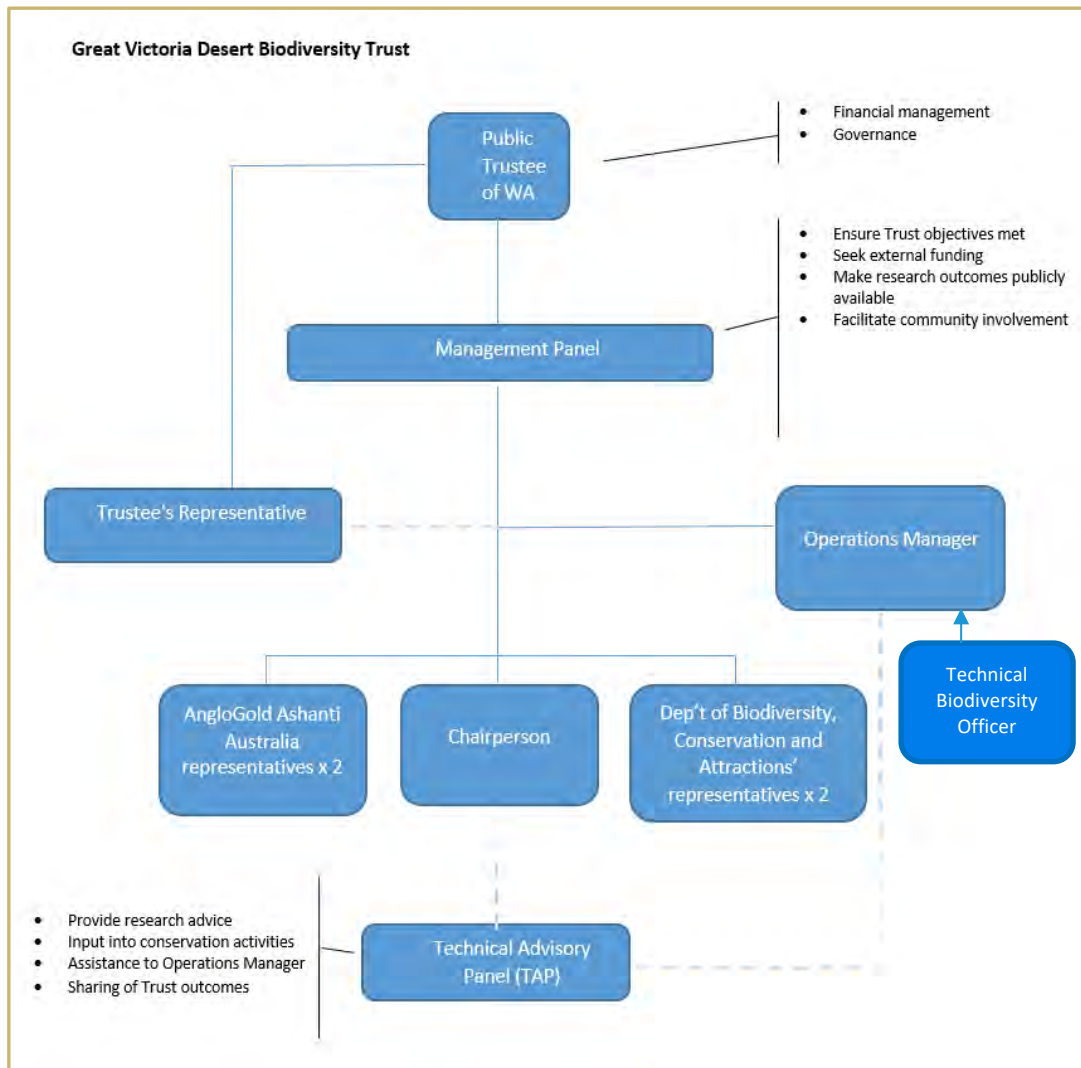
The governance structure of the Trust is a key component of ensuring stakeholder support and the delivery of activities that align with the Project Plan approved by the former DoE as part of the TGM *EPBC Act* approval (2008/4270). The governance structure of the Trust is outlined in Figure 2.

The activities and expenditure of the Trust are the overall responsibility of the Trust's Management Panel, which consists of representatives from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and AngloGold Ashanti Australia (AGAA), as well as an independent Chair.

The day-to-day management and operation of the Trust is the responsibility of the Operations Manager. The Operations Manager reports to the Trust's Management Panel via the Chair. The Operations Manager and the Management Panel are supported through the provision of technical advice from the Trust's Technical Advisory Panel (TAP). The TAP consists of six members with experience and technical expertise of the GVD and its landscape. The Trust's Operations Manager works as Chair of the TAP.

The Public Trustee of Western Australia maintains the financial accountability of the Trust, ensuring that all the spending of the Trust account aligns with the Trust Deed. The Public Trustee maintains a role on the Management Panel, having a standing invitation to attend meetings.

The Trust's funds, held by the Public Trustee, are allocated to various organisations and individuals according to anticipated benefit, value for money, and alignment with the Trust's objectives and priorities. The recipients may include Traditional Owner groups, researchers, not-for-profit environmental groups, and expert consultants.



**Figure 2. The Structure of the Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust**

The Trust, and all its activities and expenditure, is governed by an overarching Trust Deed. This document details the relationship between:

- The Trust’s Management Panel.
- AngloGold Ashanti Australia, as the founder; and
- The Public Trustee of Western Australia, as the financial manager.

The Trust Deed also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Management Panel, Chair, Trustee, Operations Manager and the TAP, and the purposes and scope of the Trust. Additional background information is located at [www.gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au/about-us](http://www.gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au/about-us) and in the Trust Deed (<http://www.gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/GVDBT-Trust-Deed.pdf>).



## 2.1 The Management Panel

The Management Panel met on the following dates during the 2022-2023 financial year to ensure progress was maintained on key priorities:

- July 4 - in-person meeting;
- October 25 - in-person meeting;
- May 12 – in-person meeting to develop a strategic plan;
- June 2023 – an out of session meeting;

Out of session meetings are held to expedite the timely turnover of project decisions and other matters where the matter being considered is non-contentious. These meetings are held using an email to send information to Management Panel members, and responses received back by email. Should the matter turn out to be contentious, a formal in-person meeting would be held.

## 2.2 The Operations Manager

The Operations Manager maintained communication and meeting with the Chair of the Trust, the Technical Advisory Panel, and Management Panel, throughout the year to ensure the Trust maintained steady progress on key activities and maintained a strategic vision of the objectives of the Trust. Kathryn Sinclair remained in this role throughout 2022-23, working three days a week before finishing in the position May 2023. Ian Anderson has been successfully recruited into the OM role effective July 2023.

### 2.2.1 The Technical Biodiversity Officer

Jaume Rusalleda Alvarez (JRA) left the Trust in late 2022 to pursue other career options, and was replaced by Sean Tomlinson, who is working on a projected titled “High resolution habitat suitability estimates for *S. psammophila*”: The project is describe in more detail below.

## 2.3 The Public Trustee

The Public Trustee’s representative provided assistance with financial documents to the Trust and project invoice payments. The Trustee has provided quarterly and annual financial statements.

As in previous years, the Public Trustee’s representative worked closely with Ernst and Young, the nominated financial auditors, to ensure that all of the Trust’s spending, accounting and financial reporting had been conducted appropriately. The Trustee continues to give strong oversight and guidance (as required) to the Trust to ensure it meets both financial and legal obligations.

## 2.4 The Technical Advisory Panel

The Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) was established in April 2015 to provide expert advice and support to the Trust, such as providing feedback on the scope of research proposals, on-ground environmental or conservation activities, and research reports. The membership of the TAP has increased, with Mark Cowan joining the TAP as a representative from the Management Panel and Dr Stephen van Leeuwen remaining on the TAP despite leaving the Management Panel.

# 3. Trust Activities

## Projects and Activities

In the 2022-23 Financial Year (FY) the Trust commenced and completed several projects, summarised briefly below. Full reports have been made available to the public on the Trust website (<http://gvdbiodiversitytrust.org.au/>).

### 3.1 GVD Landscape Conservation Initiative (LCI)

As a first stage, the aim of the project is to see if introducing fire management activities, in a culturally sensitive manner, into an area of the GVD could increase the biodiversity and abundance of species in that area relative to an area not managed for fire. A secondary aim is to increase the amount of suitable habitat for SHD and protect suitable habitat for SHDs. This project aimed to create a landscape with a mosaic of fire ages. A landscape with multiple fire ages creates diverse habitat and reduces the likelihood of large, hot, summer fires extending over massive areas as patches of more recently burnt areas can act as fire breaks, with their reduced fuel loads. As part of this project the Trust determined it was necessary to get a baseline understanding of the species in the management area (to be treated with fire) relative to a reference area (in which fire would not be managed in any way).

This project was put on hold as the sites for this work became subject to a Native Title claim, and we are required to get the consent of the Claimants to continue this work. A key project for 2023/24 will be to work with the Claimants to co-design the project so as to meet theirs and the Trust's objectives for on-going management of their land.

#### 3.1.1 LCI – Baseline Fauna Survey

The Trust had been attempting to continue the LCI fauna monitoring by going out to Eol in 2021 however the costs came as too expensive to make it sustainable for the Trust to enter into an agreement with any of the applicants. In 2022 the Trust and Curtin had discussions and determined that Curtin would be capable of delivering the fauna monitoring program for a suitable budget, including camera maintenance, malleefowl mound monitoring, pitfall trapping and eDNA analysis. In September the Trust were in the final stages of negotiating a contract. Curtin, in a gesture of good faith ahead of the contract being signed, started preparation for undertaking the fauna monitoring in early October. At the very end of September Central Desert (representing Upurli Upurli Nguratja) requested that the fauna monitoring trip did not take place. The Trust agreed to delay the trip.

#### 3.1.2 LCI – High Resolution Habitat Suitability Estimates for Sandhill Dunnarts

Sean Tomlinson, with input from Katherine Moseby, is developing construct models complementary to the work reported by Riley et al.(2021), to develop higher-resolution (1 arc sec; approx. 625 m<sup>2</sup>) SDMs that capture the dependence of SHDs on *Triodia* spp., edaphic and geomorphological drivers, fire frequency and climate to elaborate on the likely patterns and associations driving habitat suitability, and also to explore likely patterns of population abundance of *S. psammophila*. Sean proposes to use occurrence data collected from a series of longitudinal studies in South Australia (Read et al. 2015; Moseby et al. 2016)

to train the models, largely because these data have resulted from reliable, high-intensity, balanced survey design.

It is hoped that this model will produce detailed areas within the GVD where SHDs are likely/highly likely to occur. It is anticipated that the project will be completed by the end of calendar 2023, to be followed by field verification in 2024.

### 3.1.3 LCI – Vegetation and Soil survey (University of Adelaide - TERN)

As part of the LCI, TERN was contracted to undertake soil and vegetation sampling throughout the LCI project areas. There were several delays associated with this project due to COVID and difficulties for the TERN team to enter WA. The vegetation and soil sampling survey took place in May 2022. Samples have all been sent to the WA herbarium and all samples have recently been processed (March 2023). Training was meant to be delivered under this contract to learn how to take samples. The aim was that this training would also incorporate training for Indigenous ranger groups. TERN have indicated that they will provide training when requested (timing to be negotiated).

### 3.1.4 Indigenous Fire Management (Indigenous Desert Alliance, 2022 – Ongoing)

The Trust and IDA developed a partnership / funding agreement in January 2022 to build outcomes in the Indigenous Ranger groups in the GVD. The funding agreement has seen IDA officers spend considerable amounts of time on-country building the capacity of particularly the Yilka land management team and the Spinifex rangers. IDA has also begun to build stronger relationships with rangers in Warburton. The project was funded previously for one year for the amount of \$60,000. It was agreed to continue the funding of this project.

### 3.1.5 Spinifex Biodiversity Project (Spinifex Rangers)

The project facilitates the documentation of the traditional knowledge of Spinifex elders, allow rangers to visit and survey sites which were significant culturally and significant for their biodiversity based on traditional knowledge and employ an ecologist to work with the rangers and elders to undertake the documentation and the field trips. The second phase of the project would involve land management activities to protect the species. Sandhill dunnarts and malleefowl will be a significant focus of the project and cameras have already been established in areas where habitat has been assessed to be highly suitable.

This project commenced in April this year.

## 4. Finances, Administration and Allocation of Funds

### 4.1 Finances

The annual contribution from the Tropicana Joint Venture (TJV) to the Trust in 2021-22 FY was \$394,669.00 based on an annual fee of \$100,000 plus \$80 per hectare of cleared footprint for the TGM. The Trust also received \$23,921.16 interest from the funds held on its behalf by the Public Trustee (Table 5). An additional \$10,080.00 was received as a GST refund.

A total of \$155,496.50.66 was spent directly on projects in the 2022-23 financial year. This figure does not include the time spent by the Operations Manager or Technical Biodiversity Officer managing these projects, or costs associated with asset management fees, or administration-related expenses.

AGAA maintains an oversight of the Trust's day-to-day expenditure as part of its administrative support function, and all Trust expenditure is presented to the Management Panel in quarterly and annual statements provided by the Public Trustee.

The Public Trustee has continued to provide strong support and guidance in 2022-22 so that the Trust meets its financial and legal obligations. Financial statements are provided to the Trust by the Public Trustee on a quarterly and annual basis, which are subsequently tabled at Management Panel meetings.

Ernst and Young audited the Trust again this financial year and confirmed that the Trust's spending, accounting and financial reporting have been conducted appropriately. Table 1 summarises the key spending and income of the Trust for 2022-23.

**Table 1: Summary of income and expenditure for the Trust during the 2022-2023 financial year**

Item	Income	Expenditure
<b>Income</b>		
<b>Annual contribution (AGAA)</b>	\$394,669.00	
<b>Interest</b>	\$23,921.16	
<b>Expenditure: management and administration</b>		
Salary (Operations Manager and Technical Biodiversity Officer - project management and administration*)		\$108,662.56
Public Trustee asset management and transaction fees		\$11,814.16
Conference attendance and presentation delivery, including airfares		\$2,808.00
<b>Expenditure: Projects</b>		
Spinifex Biodiversity Project (Spinifex Rangers) - Pilu Nguru		\$6,633.91
Vegetation and soil survey		\$8,822.50
<b>Refund</b>		
Refund of GST on expenditure	\$10,080.00	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$428,670.16</b>	<b>\$138,741.13</b>

**Key:** \* = approximately 80% of time spent on project and contract management and 20% on Trust operations and administration.

## 4.2 Administration

AGAA continues to provide essential administrative support to the Operations Manager and Trust, including:

- Human resource services, such as payroll management, employment contract.
- General office administration and equipment, such as IT, mobile phone, office/meeting space.
- Flights, accommodation, and access to vehicles at TGM, as appropriate; and
- Legal services for contracts.

This substantial in-kind support represents a considerable reduction in the administration expenses that would otherwise be incurred by the Trust and ensures that the Trust maintains its administration cost below the 20% maximum outlined in the Trust Deed.

### 4.3 Funding

The TGM continues to be the Trust's sole financial contributor.

## 5. Future Direction

In May 2023, the Management Panel held a special meeting to develop a strategic plan for the next 5 years. Members of the TAP were also invited to attend. In summary, the Strategic Plan set the following priorities for action:

1. Communication our work better and more broadly. The Trust has produced some very useful data and documents, and these should be made more widely available, including as academic papers. Part of this should include demonstrating the effectiveness of our work.
2. Engage more directly with the Traditional Owners groups to build strong working relationships. This includes co-designing the Landscape Conservation Initiative. Explore other programs and projects that would meet the Trust's objectives and provide benefits for Traditional Owners.
3. For any new projects, the preference will be to work with, and build relationships with, research and other organisations who have a long term interest in the better management of biodiversity in the GVD rather than consultants. Consider partnership with Curtin for a major ARC grant.

As well, 2024 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Trust and a special event will be held to mark the milestone.

## Appendix 1: Statement of Transactions 2022-23 FY

### Statement of Transactions



MR . GREAT VICTORIA DESERT BIODIVERSITY TRUST FUND

Client Reference: 33111845 Contact: TM29

Public Trustee Activity TRST / 1

Statement of Transactions Number 13

Statement Period from 30/06/22 to 30/06/23

Date	Transaction Details	Payments	Receipts	
	<b>Opening Balance as per Statement of Account Dated 30/06/2022</b>		<b>1,928,708.90</b>	
	<b>OTHER PAYMENTS AND RECEIPTS</b>			
19-AUG-22	INDIGENOUS FIRE 2ND INSTA - INDIGENOUS DESERT ALLIANCE	16,500.00		
24-AUG-22	VEGETATION & SOIL SURVEY - THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE	8,222.50		
30-SEP-22	CR INTEREST 30/09/2022		4,845.74	
10-OCT-22	YERALY IRIDIUM DATA - ENVIRO PAUL	561.00		
10-OCT-22	CONFERENCE ACCOMMODATION - INDIGENOUS DESERT ALLIANCE	1,608.00		
21-OCT-22	CHARTER FLIGHT - INDIGENOUS DESERT ALLIANCE	1,200.00		
17-NOV-22	ANNUAL GST REFUND 2022		10,080.00	
22-FEB-23	FINAL FUNDING INSTALMENT - INDIGENOUS DESERT ALLIANCE	16,500.00		
23-FEB-23	THIRD FUNDING INSTALMENT - INDIGENOUS DESERT ALLIANCE	16,500.00		
02-MAR-23	SORTING & IDENTIFICATION - COLLINS MARGARET DR	9,174.00		
15-MAR-23	TERN SPECIMENS - SHIBI ULLAS CHANDRAN	600.00		
31-MAR-23	CR INTEREST 31/03/2023		19,075.42	
03-APR-23	AGA ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION		394,669.00	
17-APR-23	ADVERT FOR EMPLOYMENT - NRMJOBS PTY LTD	165.00		
24-MAY-23	CHAIR OUT OF POCKET EXP. - VISION ENVIRONMENT	768.34		
24-MAY-23	SPINIFEX PROJ MILESTONE 1 - PILA NGURU ABORIGINAL CORPORATION	88,000.00		
14-JUN-23	TRUST EXPENSES - ANGLOGOLD ASHANTI	108,662.56		
30-JUN-23	ASSET MANAGEMENT FEE	11,814.16		
30-JUN-23	TRANSACTIONAL FEE	2,661.00		
	<b>Closing Balance</b>		<b>2,074,442.50</b>	
	<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>Total Payments</b>	<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>Closing Balance</b>
	1,928,708.90	282,936.56	428,670.16	2,074,442.50



**Statement of Assets & Liabilities**



**MR . GREAT VICTORIA DESERT BIODIVERSITY TRUST FUND**

**Client Reference: 33111845 Contact: TM29**

**Public Trustee Activity TRST / 1**

Statement of Assets & Liabilities Number 13

Statement Period from 30/06/22 to 30/06/23

Description	Recorded Value	Valuation Date
<b>ASSETS</b>		
PT CASH ACCOUNT	2,074,442.50	30-JUN-23
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,074,442.50</b>	
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>Net Recorded Value</b>
<b>2,074,442.50</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>2,074,442.50</b>