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Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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Submission to the Federal Senate Standing Committees on the Environment and Communications Inquiry into History, Effectiveness, Performance and Future of the National Landcare Programme

Landcare NSW is the peak grassroots Landcare body in NSW, and has a Council of 21 endorsed regional representatives, who act to support the efforts of the 3000 Landcare type groups in NSW, operating across a wide spectrum of activities and interests, from rural farmer based groups, to urban environment focussed groups.

Landcare NSW was formed in 2007 as a result of concern within the Landcare community in the way Landcare was supported, and as such we welcome wholeheartedly the Senate inquiry into the history, effectiveness, performance and future of the National Landcare Programme.

Landcare NSW believes that it is important that all of the groups represented by Landcare NSW, have the opportunity to directly input their views to the inquiry. Accordingly we have circulated information so as to allow any of these groups to respond in the way that reflects the opinions of their individual members. Landcare NSW has also prepared a short submission, based upon on the terms of reference of the inquiry, and from input of members.

The key points to our submission are:

An enabled community is a prerequisite to engagement

An enabled community requires support

For engagement to lead to ongoing participation the participant must be valued

Being valued is achieved by collaborative processes, that acknowledges local knowledge, skills, and investment

Regional outcomes are built by supporting local activity, rather than supplanting it

Landcare refers to any community based group operating in the sphere of sustainable agriculture and natural resource management and includes but is not limited to groups that describe themselves as Landcare, Bushcare, Coastcare, Dunecare, Friends of groups, Producer groups

Landcare NSW also believes that the 25 year anniversary represents an opportune time to review the support structures that enable Landcare and community driven natural resource management (NRM). This reflects that what was set up over 25 years ago, and adjusted across several iterations of support programmes, may no longer adequately acknowledge the growth and increasing maturity of the grassroots driven infrastructure that exists to support onground Landcare operations.

Investing in the infrastructure that supports an engaged and valued community, that allows for innovation and supports co-investment, and that contribute to the development of public policy and programmes, offer much for the Government, and for their constituents.

Landcare NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide input, and we would appreciate the opportunity to address the Senate Committee on any points within our submission, and surrounding a review into the supporting mechanisms for Landcare.

Yours Faithfully,

Rob Dulhunty
Chair, Landcare NSW

Email: chair@LandcareNSW.org.au

Attachment: Submission to the Federal Senate Standing Committees on the Environment and Communications Inquiry into History, Effectiveness, Performance and Future of the National Landcare Programme

Prepared on behalf of LNSW by Sonia Williams
General Manager Landcare NSW

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Past Programmes and their effectiveness

The original National Landcare Programme provided government resourcing to support a programme based upon locality or topic based participatory involvement in the identification of issues, and the design and delivery of action to address them. This process led to ownership of both the problem and solution, which in turn facilitated high levels of co-investment, built capacity to adaptively manage and maintain the solutions, and strengthened linkages within and across local communities.

This approach saw the proliferation of Landcare groups, widespread involvement and support from the community, and a sense of joint ownership for the significant natural resource management problems faced. Group members felt their efforts and involvement to be valued by their neighbours, their community and by the government.

Various iterations of successive government programmes progressively changed the nature of government investment from supporting ownership of change in order to embed the changed practice and produce lasting outcomes, to the purchase of project outputs to meet targets that had been defined remotely from the audience to which investment was applied.

Compounding this, investment into the infrastructure which supported this involvement moved, in NSW, from being applied at the local and subregional level to being applied to the regional level, and the focus of this support changed in many regions from providing local/subregional scale community owned coordinators who acted as trusted and known change agents, to staff employed within government agencies to deliver biophysical output based programmes.

Some regions understood the need for retaining support for community and these regions weathered the change of programmes better than others. Where the importance of investing in a community, not just investing in NRM outputs, was not understood or valued, the social networks that provided the human and social capital that facilitated peer involvement and learning were no longer supported.

In addition the administrative burden and bureaucratic processes increased significantly with each change of programme, and with the removal of coordinators

volunteer group members were left to meet these obligations. The time and money invested by individuals contributing to and participating in NRM activities was no longer seen as being valued by government, and many in the community withdrew from active involvement. Participation waned, and group members removed their time, skills and co-investment from addressing these issues that had been identified from afar by others.

There exists a huge body of research which has looked at NRM investment and governance that supports the above statements – Landcare NSW commends to the enquiry the following paper, which is a summary of this research and the lessons learnt over the past 25 years.

The great experiment with devolved NRM governance: lessons from community engagement in Australia and New Zealand since the 1980s

A. Curtis, H. Ross, G.R. Marshall, C. Baldwin, J. Cavaye, C. Freeman, A. Carr & G.J. Syme (2014)

Australasian Journal of Environmental Management, 21:2, 175-199, DOI:
[10.1080/14486563.2014.935747](https://doi.org/10.1080/14486563.2014.935747)

In particular we draw attention to the following except from pages 185-6

The practice and outcomes of engagement through community-based NRM Australia's Landcare: engagement contributing to dialogue, learning and action Landcare has been able to engage a substantial proportion of rural landholders (about 30 per cent), as well as those in rural towns and cities (Curtis & Sample 2010). There is credible evidence that participation in Landcare activities, including meetings, workshops, field days, trials, property and catchment planning is a precursor to the accomplishment of on-ground work expected to lead to improved environmental condition (Curtis & De Lacy 1996; Alexander et al. 2000; ABARE 2003; Curtis & Mendham 2011). With support from government and industry, Landcare groups and networks have a track record of accomplishing large scale on-ground work in a cost-effective manner, including through partnerships with other CBNRM [Community Based NRM] organisations. For example, during 2009, for a relatively small median amount of government funding per group per year (\$5000), groups in Victoria planted a median of 2 ha of trees and shrubs per group and erected a median of 3 km of fencing to prevent and repair degradation of vegetation, soil and water resources (Curtis & Sample 2010). The examples of observable positive impact on resource condition are invariably for smaller catchments where there has been a large investment of public and private resources over a 10–20 year period (Curtis et al. 2008). There are also examples where that activity has made a positive impact on farm profitability and resource condition (Cullen et al. 2003).

The emergence of Landcare networks, an important tier of NRM governance, was not envisaged at the inception of Landcare. In Victoria in 2009, 56 per cent of all Landcare type groups were part of a larger Landcare network with other groups and NGOs, and there was evidence that these networks substantially enhanced the capacity of groups to engage other partners, including other CBNRM groups (e.g. CMAs), governments and businesses, access coordinators or project managers, and increase the amount of work implemented by groups. Compared to groups, networks of groups typically engaged more landholders and volunteers, developed partnerships with other organisations, operated across larger areas, managed larger budgets, and accomplished more on-ground work across a wider range of topics (Curtis & Sample 2010). In part, the willingness of organisations to partner in networks reflects the opportunity they provide to achieve landscape-scale outcomes.

The widespread belief that Landcare sprung up as a voluntary movement is misguided - a more correct view is that the original National Landcare Programme, guided by the Decade of Landcare Plan provided the resourcing that supported and enabled volunteerism to be mobilised to achieve results. The value of volunteerism should not be underestimated.

According to research done at the University of Adelaide on the value to the economy of volunteers:

“the economic contribution to Australian society outstrips revenue sources from mining, agriculture and the retail sector,”

*Dr Lisel O'Dwyer, a Senior Research Associate in the University's [School of Social Sciences](#) as reported in in a media release titled “**Volunteers worth more to***

***Australia than mining”** dated 28th August 2012 <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/news/news55621.html>.*

However to maximise the value provided by volunteers it is important that adequate infrastructural support exists to enhance and utilise their efforts and contributions, and provide a sense of value to them for their efforts, rather than be seen to use them to meet the aims and end purposes of others plans.

Since the end of the Decade of Landcare Plan, the infrastructural support to volunteers in the Landcare sphere has waned significantly, and has been replaced with government based staff delivering biophysical focussed programmes, rather than investment in valuing and supporting volunteer input and building community capacity. This is not to say that these programme officers are not important, rather the point raised is investment into positions and mechanisms that support the volunteer uptake of programmes is a key factor upon which the success of other programmes depend.

The Australian Framework For Landcare and its accompanying “Community Call for Action” developed by the Australian Landcare Council in 2010 and 2011, with input from grass roots Landcare, captured many of the points needed to rebuild support and participation in Landcare type activities, however since its development, scant resourcing has been applied by Governments into turning these words into action.

Some comments on aspects of recent programmes

Regional Landcare Facilitator Programme:

The reinstatement of a Regional Landcare Facilitator (RLF) programme, with overarching national guidelines, and operating as a state network rather than as a purely region specific programme, has been an important step in re-engaging with community based NRM, however the quantum of only 1 EFT per region is inadequate when this is the only source of Landcare support staff. Where Regional NRM Organisations (RNRMOs) have utilised other funds (be it federal, state, local or a combination of these) in providing internal employed (but community managed), or externally employed Landcare coordinators /Community support officers that work directly with the community, the

RLF programme has been effective at supporting regional networks and groups, in both capacity development, project development and application, and improved linkages to NRM bodies. In areas where the RLF is the only position working directly with groups, gains have been made but are more likely to be focussed on delivery of the community capacity component of the budget (eg field days etc) then developing networks and linkages to NRM bodies.

The support from the Australian Government for the operation of the RLFs as a statewide network has enhanced sharing, innovation, and awareness, thereby ensuring that the RLFs are not captured to any one culture imposed by a regional body.

Small grants programmes

Small grants - programmes such as Envirofund, the Community Action Grants (and more latterly changed to the Community Landcare Grants and Community Environment Grants) have been a vital co-investment for groups to meet needs identified by that group. However in all cases the effectiveness of these programmes were enhanced at the local level via access to localised support, be it via a Landcare network or a local officer of a regional body to assist in project design, application writing, implementation, and reporting. Small grants programmes should not be seen as an answer in isolation, but as tool in the suite of NRM arrangements available to build capacity the human and social capital that underpins successful community based NRM.

Competitive/Contestable grants

Under all previous programmes, large scale contestable grant rounds became the salvation for Landcare network operation, as this was the only way in which core support for Landcare networks could be received – factored in as project management. Many of the on-ground projects delivered by Landcare Networks have been highly successful in not only achieving on ground outputs, but in developing the human and social capital that underpins the outcomes from these projects.

Those networks that were successful in receiving these grants continue to operate but in a different manner than they were originally set up for, and in some cases were seen as competitors by other networks, rather than collaborators.

This has raised concern from both the Landcare community and the regional bodies. The Landcare community see their Landcare support has drifted to being programme deliverers, focussed on others objectives, rather than acting as community facilitators to encourage partnerships and innovation; whilst the Regional Bodies that believe that Landcare networks are operating in their space, and that there is competition to deliver the same outputs.

However in the absence of resourcing for the core operation of Landcare networks from commonwealth regional allocations, or state government funds, this source of resourcing remains an important one for the continued operation of Landcare networks. It would appear that the new NLP still does not provide this, with the majority of large scale funding to be delivered under regional arrangements.

Delivery by Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture

Successful profitable agriculture is contingent upon a healthy sustainable ecosystem; healthy environments are based upon understanding by the community of the importance of the ecosystem services provided by the natural environment. It is ecosystem services – natural processes - which underpin both productive agriculture and effective nature conservation. Landscapes, be they natural or man-made are influenced by the actions of people –hence the key factor that both Departments need to recognise is that to enact their programmes they are both dealing with people factors – not biophysical issues. In the early days of the original National Landcare Programme there was recognition of the need to ensure that each Departments programmes were, as far as possible, integrated.

Subsequent programmes which have been rolled out as separate streams, have been treated at best with scepticism, and at worst with contempt. A robust Australian Landcare Council should ensure integration of programme design and delivery so that this is seen as a co-operative, not competitive or patch protectionist approach by these government departments, and should be based on the understanding that it is people that are the key influencing factor in managing landscapes.

Timeframes

A common call from all involved in NRM delivery has been for long term investment programmes, with investment cycles that allowed for planning and delivery that build upon the knowledge gained throughout the delivery of the programme.

In the early days of the NLP, there were calls that an investment cycle of 3 years did not provide the planning time scale to allow for best delivery – and that 5 year programmes should be implemented.

Subsequent programmes have seen programmes contract to 18 month or 1 year funding cycles. This does little to engender long term commitment or co-investment, and leads to a cycle of continual startup phases – with staff moving on in search of job surety.

The current arrangements in NSW, were based on a 1 year investment cycle for 13-14, and a six month investment cycle to December 2014. These short time frames, along with uncertainty in future arrangements and diminished budgets have been detrimental to well-planned and well delivered programmes, and the development of partnerships. This has further eroded the confidence and willingness of community to be involved.

Reporting and ‘Red Tape’

The complexity and frequency of reporting has increased exponentially over the subsequent changes to programmes. It is now often the case of the “tail wagging the dog” with more effort and expenditure spent on compliance than delivery.

It is acknowledged that there needs to be monitoring evaluation and reporting, however 25 years of increasingly complex reporting formats, has given little in the way of accessible data sets and access to lessons of the past. Many reports are lost in archives, and never used other than to tick the box of acquittal.

There would appear at last recognition that investment in NRM programmes is slow to yield measurable results, and that given time the “patch work” of small scale programmes, when uptake is supported, do in fact achieve real landscape scale changes.

Some of the most powerful tools are the simple visual before and after shots - however even these do not adequately capture the change to socio-cultural practices that are the result of well-planned and delivered projects and programmes, that not only build and enhance local knowledge and practice change, but provide many unforeseen and unplanned benefits.

The report “The Multiple Benefits of Landcare”, conducted by GHD on behalf of the Australian Landcare Council give some examples of the results that investment in “Landcare” style programmes can bring.

National Landcare Programme 14-15

Landcare NSW welcomes the general ethos that underpins the direction of the new National Landcare Programme.

The guiding principles of ***simple, local and long term***, bring the Programme back into line with the factors that, drove the initial success of the original NLP. This, accompanied by the lessons of the past 25 years of investment into community based NRM, provide an opportunity to reset the compass of programme design and delivery.

Landcare NSW will be providing input to the consultation currently underway (launched 4th August 2014 and due by 29th August 2014) on the National Landcare Programme, and asks that the Senate Standing committee accept the content of that submission as a later addendum to this submission.

Landcare Network Support

The recognition of the role of and the requirement of support for the national and state level Landcare networks under the NLP is a significant boost in ensuring that community has a voice in, and has ownership of, the design and delivery of Programmes and building partnerships at the federal and state level, however the actual implementation of activities under the NLP occurs at the regional and subregional (local) level. What is not apparent from the Programme design is how and where the investment required in supporting Landcare networks to build and maintain the social networks that are needed to underpin simple, local delivery for long term outcomes is to be found.

Similarly the discussion around removing the requirement of a centrally managed RLF programme and allowing regions to design how this programme is structured and what it will deliver, is of concern to Landcare NSW. We are not of the belief that the Regional Body /community Landcare relationship is equal or robust enough at this stage in all regions to ensure that the critical support provided by this programme will be evenly maintained across regions in the absence of federal guidelines. We encourage the Inquiry to place value on a connected engaged network of Regional Landcare Facilitators to build capacity and community engagement within and across regions to connect and engage communities with the regional delivery process.

Regional Delivery

The new NLP stresses the importance of true community engagement into the design and delivery of the regional delivery stream.

Mandating a requirement of a percentage of small grants to be made to Landcare and other community groups, whilst welcome could also pose issues in that this may be seen as the only investment requirement by some regional bodies into Landcare. As mentioned above, the provision of capacity support to networks is critical in building an enabled community that not only delivers small grants programmes, but instead uses these to **build long term outcomes for regional improvement – one local step at a time.**

The provision of this small grants stream provides a welcome opportunity for smaller groups, however there still is a requirement to both assist groups with lower capacity to apply and acquit such grants, and to do so in a manner that enhances and builds their capacity.

The provision of this enabling support is crucial to ensuring the main game of medium and large scale investment meets the objectives of the NLP. Whilst in NSW our Regional Bodies have Strategic Plans or Catchment Action Plans, based upon **regional** community input and technical advice; this does not in and of itself ensure that there is **local** community buy in and that the projects and programmes that result will be designed to both meet local needs and regional priorities. A sound process which involves genuine upstream collaborative project development with the community is required, and this requires supporting mechanisms to be in place. **Projects need to be designed from the local level up in reference to regional plans, not the reverse.**

The principals of localism should be enacted, with regional bodies devolving to capable organisations that have the capacity to undertake collaborative design and delivery. Where capacity does not exist regional bodies have a responsibility to utilise their programmes to increase the capacity of the local organisations within their region so that over time devolution can occur.

Further, a robust mechanism, operating across the regional scale to collect local feedback and reporting back to both the regional body for adaptive improvement, and to State and Federal level bodies for quality control, is an integral part of any monitoring and evaluation process of regional delivery.

20 Million Trees and the Green Army

These programmes have been funded by redirecting of NRM funds from traditional programmes – they supplant rather than add to the existing NRM budget. That said there is potential for these programmes to augment the efforts of community and regional bodies in achieving local and regional outcomes, **IF** there is sufficient investment into the coordination needed to deliver these programmes **with** the community rather than **to** the community.

The intention of the programmes are sound, however their successful execution will rely upon utilising the knowledge and skills of practitioners involved in these type of programmes over the past 25 years in DESIGNING the way the programmes are to be delivered.

Other Matters

Landcare, as a brand, represents a reservoir of trust and goodwill. The Landcare brand, of Australia supported by the caring hands of ordinary people, is a powerful symbol of Australians working together to address issues of sustainability. It has been recognised as one of the most successful symbols in brand awareness in many marketing studies over many years. The brand, and more importantly what it represents provides opportunities for individuals, groups, schools, corporates, and governments to all “join forces” in looking after our country, for both current and future generations.

However Landcare is a crowded space - there are many organisations, programs, and structures that make up the complex picture that is Landcare. This confused and crowded space has impacted upon the delivery of programs over the past decades.

The 25 year anniversary provides an ideal time to review the structures that support landcare – what was set up 25 years ago may no longer be appropriate. A review provides an opportunity to ensure efficiencies and consistencies in delivery occur.

However it is also important in undertaking any review, that the views and needs of those on the ground, as well as those operating within the structures of Landcare and within government are incorporated into such a review.

Landcare NSW has, since 2007, undertaken a community based ‘Muster’ in which the views of the landcare community can be captured. The Musters have been held in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013 - they are a mechanism to hear the voice of grass roots Landcarers, and provide a longitudinal study of the issues of importance. We provide below a summary of issue raised across these musters.

Information from Musters:

- NSW Landcarers at the 2011 Muster wanted Landcare NSW to achieve :
 - “empowered Landcarers” with grass roots ownership,
 - focussing and building on past achievements,
 - Celebration rather than administration;
 - Socialise, rather than bureaucratise;
 - Change/flexibility, with new Programmes/training
- Consistent messages concerning
 - Communication with and across the Landcare community and Telling the Landcare story
 - Funding, particularly locally based support staff, focus on local issues, longer times frames, more small grants and funding for Network support
 - Attracting others, especially young people,
 - the representativeness of Landcare NSW;
 - Administrative and Technical Support (including insurance)
 - consistent working relationships between Landcare and Regional NRM bodies
- The most important issues for Landcarers include

- Funding issues,
 - including funding for local support staff, especially community support officers
 - Small grants
 - Funding for support for Landcare Networks
 - Access to support at the local level
 - Advocacy
 - Communication and the sharing of knowledge
 - Telling the Landcare story
 - Communication across and between networks
 - Community understanding of Landcare
 - Engaging the young
 - Working relationships and partnerships with Regional NRM bodies
- Review of the inputs from community Landcare into these ‘musters’ indicate that support for local staff and CSOs remains one of the top concerns, along with funding, communication and the sharing of knowledge, advocacy, Education and training, Landcarers and farmers, cultural awareness – working with traditional owners and engaging the young, with a message to Landcare New South Wales that it should be working on behalf of grass roots Landcarers, to advocate for and facilitate funding and support for local Landcare groups .