



Senate Inquiry into the National Landcare Program

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our thoughts to the Senate Inquiry into the National Landcare Program. To provide some context to the Southern ACT Catchment Group's (SACTCG) comments our submission includes a summary of the Landcare movement and how we believe the changes over the years has impacted the grassroots community groups.

Background of the Landcare Movement

Launched in 1989 Landcare soon spread across the country with farmers and various community groups working together to improve the environment and agricultural productivity and sustainability. Many thousands of people became involved and formed many thousands of Landcare groups across Australia and the government supported these activities by offering various Landcare grants in various forms from the Natural Heritage Trust grants to the more recent Caring For our Country grants

The introduction of Regional Bodies to the Natural Resource Management (NRM) mix after 2002 changed the dynamics of Landcare. Whereas previous to this, Landcare groups could apply for government grants, now much of the money was given to regional bodies and in many cases little filtered down to Community Landcare Groups. The relationship of NRM bodies to their local Landcare groups varied greatly throughout Australia. At one end, there was the ACT NRM who worked closely with Landcare in the ACT, but there are many other areas in Australia where local Landcare was ignored and not supported by their NRM leading to very poor relations.

With the introduction of regional bodies a lot of grassroots Landcare folded as many felt 'the NRM 'would do the work. As said above, the structure worked in some areas eg the ACT, where the NRM group and the local landcarers meet regularly and worked together to achieve common goals/projects. Unfortunately this was not the case in most of Australia and many local Landcare groups did not continue.

Additionally throughout this period, the Federal government specified targeted projects eg camels, cane toads, the reef etc and/or targeted areas and some areas were not eligible for funding at all. It has led to many successful projects eg Community Landscape projects, but it has also resulted in uneven funding and often did not allow for funding for locally identified projects. While it is important to target some important national environmental objectives it is also important to fund projects to rectify many locally identified environmental concerns.

The National Landcare Program

Consequently (d and e) the scope of the new model for the National Landcare Programme is welcomed by the Southern ACT Catchment Group in that it involves localism and aims to simplify application and the reporting process. This augers well for Landcare and hopefully will empower local Landcare groups. Unfortunately as the Landcare budget has been significantly reduced compared to the past, there is concern that there will not be enough funds to do what had to be done. Additionally while the idea of the Green Army could be helpful, this means cost shifting from general Landcare programs and while the community can support Landcare, they often need co-ordination and materials to do so and there seems to be very limited funding available to achieve these purposes. Volunteer Landcarers will be obliged to supervise the Green Army volunteers, which adds more on the shoulders of volunteers, who have often worked hard over many years.

(e) So while we like the policy and rationale in relation to the changes and the opportunities for local Landcare to be able to apply for funding (f) and understand the rationale on national, state, regional funding priorities there does not seem to be much money to go around. We currently have many significant environmental problems in Australia and need sufficient ongoing funding to do something about them. Often, short term funding, like for one year is unlikely to solve an on-going problem. Insecurity about ongoing funds and insufficient budgets are stifling much needed onground works. Community Landcare is there to help and it is known that \$1 of government investment can generate least \$4 to \$5 from Landcare groups through labour, volunteer time and expertise etc as well as help generate business co-investment..

We all need to work together for the future of Australia and in particular (g) it will be critical for the Departments of Environment and Agriculture to work together to help facilitate NRM actions throughout the country. Additionally it is important that (h) all NRM bodies throughout Australia should work more closely with their local Landcare communities and empower local Landcare to come up with innovative ideas to further this ideal and to thus to achieve, according to the old economic saying, "maximum satisfaction from limited financial resources that have alternative uses".

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