



National Landcare Network

Submission to the Australian Landcare Council's Australian Framework for Landcare Action Plan

13th June 2011

Introduction

The National Landcare Network (NLN) is the advocacy and representative body for Landcare at the National Level. It consists of the representatives from Peak Bodies for Landcare from each State and Territory. Where no Peak Body exists an appropriate process has been put in place and a representative from that State or Territory has been agreed upon to be the NLN members.

Background to submission

For clarity purposes it is best to define the meaning of the word Landcare. From the perspective of the NLN, Landcare includes community Landcare groups, landholder Production Groups, Coastcare, Bushcare, Rivercare, Waterwatch, Catchment Management Committees/Associations, and Friends of groups. Thus Landcare is not only sustainable farming. A 'Landcare culture' has been developed which includes not only environmental works, and learning about sustainable farming practices, but a form of social support to our communities through the Landcare groups.

The National Landcare Network, through its respective State or Territory representatives, contacted on-ground Landcare groups to ascertain their thoughts and feelings on the proposed Action Plan. This was followed with a meeting/workshop between the Australian Landcare Council Chair, the National Landcare Facilitator and the National Landcare Network to discuss the Action Plan and the responses from the Landcare movement.

Submission

Funding/Resources and Landcare

The use of volunteers for environmental land management is extremely cost effective. However, their potential contribution to the well-being of their respective regions can only be realised if there is a base level of funding which is guaranteed over time. Transitional phases between funding programs (NHTI, NHTII, and CFoC) have shown that uncertainty and withdrawal of resources has resulted in a reduction in volunteer numbers as they choose to spend their discretionary time in other ways.

Currently the Australian Government, through its various funding programs, place the finances and associated decision-making in the hands of regional organisations (Regional NRM bodies, Catchment Management Authorities) that are not representative of volunteers. While this has worked where regional organisations have a strong link to their community and to Landcare thus acknowledging its value, it has been spectacularly unsuccessful in regions where community trust in such bodies has been severely eroded.

One way to overcome this situation is to have Landcare funded programs, and Landcare Officers become the responsibility of State or Territory Landcare Associations. This base level funding should be sufficient to support 2 Landcare Facilitators (in addition to the current Regional Landcare Facilitator positions) in each of the 56 regions with additional funding to support and operate a State Landcare Association in each State. In States or Territory where no such body currently exists, the funding should be used to support the establishment of a State Landcare Association. Given the significant contribution (and financial savings) made by using volunteers, this proposal represents a cost effective approach to sustainable land management.

Landcare Structure

Over the last twenty years the Landcare movement has grown from an array of thousands of local community groups with a focus only on local issues, to a recognised movement with a multi-layered structure to achieve landscape change.

The key to Landcare and the driving force behind the movement is still the volunteers. The structure of the Landcare movement is on-ground groups at the local level, Landcare networks (in some States), Catchment Management Associations and Landcare Consortia (in some States) at the Regional level, State Landcare Peak Bodies (in most States) and the three organisations at the National level (the three pillars). This structure gives an avenue for the on-ground community Landcare groups to have a voice at all levels of Government.

The three pillars (support structures) of Landcare are the three National organisations:

1. Australian Landcare Council - the advisory body of Landcare
2. Landcare Australia Limited - the corporate body of Landcare
3. National Landcare Network - the volunteer advocacy body of Landcare.

General comments

Community Landcare has been overlooked in Australian Government planning and funding for many years. Nevertheless the Landcare movement has endured, changed and matured. While Landcare is perceived as a complex amorphous being it does have a structure that enables community Landcare to

be represented from the local to the national level. More recognition of and interaction by the Australian Government with the various layers of the Landcare movement would assist to strengthen the movement and dispel the impression that Landcare is too complex to be effective.

This Action Plan document along with the Australian Framework for Landcare (Framework) are being portrayed as coming from Landcare, along with the rhetoric that it is a grassroots document. The fact is that neither document is grassroots driven and the Landcare movement, while supporting the Framework document, is generally disengaged from the Action Plan.

One of the major reasons for this disengagement is the lack of connection between the Australian Framework for Landcare and the ALC Action Plan. This can be addressed by more closely linking the 'goals' in the Action Plan with the 'elements' in the Framework document.

The use of the term Landcare 'pillars' in the Action Plan document is confusing. The word 'pillars' suggests inflexibility and permanence: clearly not an apt description of the changing environment in which Landcare operates. The Honourable Tony Burke MP, the then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry spoke at the Landcare Forum in Adelaide in 2010 of the three 'challenges' for Landcare - food security, climate change, and the changing nature of how people volunteer. These are the same challenges mentioned in the Action Plan as the three pillars of Landcare. The NLN distributed a paper at the Landcare Forum in Adelaide, outlining the three pillars of Landcare, emphasising that Landcare is about the people, and it is essential to support "the people" pillars of Landcare, which were the Australian Landcare Council, Landcare Australia Limited and the National Landcare Network. Accordingly, we have changed the mention of the Landcare Pillars in the Action Plan document to Landcare Challenges. We have also added an extra one - water security.

Elements/ Goals

The NLN has addressed the Action Plan in terms of the Elements in the Australian Framework for Landcare. We have ensured that all the Goals of the ALC Action Plan are incorporated in the elements. This keeps the message between the two documents consistent.

Element 1 - Opportunities to be involved - equates to Action Plan Goal 3.

Element 2 - Effective information and knowledge sharing - equates to Action Plan Goals, 2, 4 and 5.

Element 3 - Acknowledging Change - equates to Goals 2 and 5

Element 4 - Links to plans at all levels - equates Goal 1

Element 5 - Succession Planning - equates to Goal 6

Element 6 - Celebrations - equates to Goals 2 and 7

Element 7 - Professional credentials established - equates to Goals 6, 7 and 8

Keeping consistency between the two documents is a good way to keep the Landcare community engaged in the process. The NLN would be willing to work with the ALC if they wish to consider the proposed changes outlined below.

Implementation

While commenting on, and making changes to the Action Plan is important, the most important issue has yet to be addressed. How will this be implemented? What is the process of taking this to the next stage of implementation? The NLN would be willing to work with the ALC to ensure the Action Plan is implemented.

David Walker
Chair

Element
ALC Goal
Background
Action
Whom

ELEMENT 1

Opportunities to be involved

3

All people are inspired to participate

In order to create effective operating partnerships, and a climate in which partnerships can be developed between all levels of government, individuals, communities, and the corporate sector there needs to be a recognition by all parties that large and complex issues such as those encompassed by the Landcare challenges require long-term, effective partnerships based on mutual respect and a commitment by all parties to an effective partnership approach.

1. The Landcare challenges are incorporated into local and regional planning and natural resource management projects. – It is important that the community is consulted and involved in the decision making process, and that adequate resources are made available to facilitate this.
2. Opportunities and resources are developed for increasing volunteers and recognising the changes to volunteerism.
3. Better alignment of, and work to address the gaps in research, development and extension programs that relate to the five challenges.
4. Australian Government policy staff develop a closer connection to community and Landcare by annual visits to see what is being done on the ground.
5. Regional NRM bodies should draw together the science relevant to future landscapes to ensure mechanisms are in place for formal consultation between regional and local levels.
6. Base level funding for Landcare State Peak Bodies such as that for regional bodies, to ensure they are able to support the continuity of on-ground Community Landcare groups.
7. The Aust Landcare Council should keep track of and report to Landcare groups and Networks policy developments and emerging opportunities for Landcare.
8. Landcare Networks and groups should facilitate dialogue within communities to find common ground across differences.
9. To ensure the Australian public has a clear understanding of the Landcare community's capacity to respond to key sustainability challenges a communication plan needs to be developed.

ELEMENT 2

Effective information and knowledge sharing

2, 4, 5

Mechanisms are available for generating and sharing knowledge and information

In order to achieve better outcomes on the Landcare challenges of food security, responding to climate change, protecting the environment, water security and volunteerism, the following actions are required:

1. A national working group be formed to discuss issues between Federal, State, NRM organisations, Landcare, with State and Federally funded coordinators, to ensure mechanisms are in place for formal consultation between regional and local levels.
2. Better alignment of, and work to address the gaps in research, development and extension programs that relate to the five challenges.
3. The Australian Landcare Council should keep track of and report to Landcare Network and groups about policy developments and emerging opportunities for Landcare.
4. Landcare Networks and groups should facilitate dialogue within communities to find common ground across differences, and to support collaboration.

ELEMENT 3

Acknowledging Change

2, 5

The differences landcarers make are measured and acknowledged

In order to achieve better outcomes on the Landcare challenges of food security, responding to climate change, protecting the environment, water security, and volunteerism

And

to ensure the Australian public has a clear understanding of the Landcare community's capacity to respond to key sustainability challenges, the following action is required:

1. Promotion of the Landcare approach.
2. Develop a Landcare Communication Plan to ensure the Australian public has a clear understanding of the Landcare community's capacity to respond to key sustainability.
3. The Australian Government should develop indicators and measures of NRM social and institutional capacity, and funding bodies should use these measures to acknowledge and track Landcare's social impacts.

4. Commit to, and develop a process for, community learning for future landscape change. Landcare can be the facilitator of community learning and can influence through design and delivery of service and policy development, and assist to influence the community not yet engaged.
5. Regional NRM bodies should draw together the science relevant to future landscapes; Landcare Networks and group should be supported as a platform for community learning on future landscapes; Local Government should put in place the land use plans that move toward those future Landscapes.
6. Landcare Networks and groups should facilitate deliberation within communities to find common ground across differences.

ELEMENT 4

Links to plans at all levels

1

The Landcare approach is intrinsic to the big picture of sustainable resource management in national, state, regional and local planning

In order to ensure a mutually open, clear and consultative relationship between the regional and local community delivery levels, the following actions are required:

1. Develop mechanisms for formal consultation between State, regional and local levels to link plans at all levels.
2. Recognise Landcare structure at national, state, regional and local levels, as a vital component of any consultation mechanism.
3. All facilitators, coordinators and landcarers enable effective consultation to take place.
4. Proposals relating to project funding and natural resource management planning clearly demonstrate how regional and local Landcare communities have been, or will be involved in decision making and implementation. Applications should include a statement of support from community Landcare partners.
5. In assessing the value of skills in skill-based appointments to regional natural resource management bodies, the possession of local knowledge is considered as a high skill level in its own right.
6. Regional NRM Organisations/CMAs should use either Landcare Networks or Landcare State Peak Bodies as the entry point for understanding community priorities.
7. Regional NRM Organisations/CMAs should engage Landcare Networks, Landcare State Peak bodies, and Landcare groups in joint design of integrated programs of action for landscape change.

8. Government funding bodies should set standards for community engagement, to provide a basis for feedback on consultation by regional NRM bodies, Landcare organisations and government agencies.
9. State Governments support improving Landcare organisations.

ELEMENT 5

Succession Planning

6

The vitality of people involved is maintained into the future by engaging the younger generations and cultures

In order for the Landcare movement to build community resilience and expand its capacity, capability and sustainability, the following actions are required

1. Develop and support educational and training programs to encourage and support young Landcarers
 - a) Develop greater links with educational institutions.
 - b) Landcare becomes part of the curriculum for all Education institutions.
2. Funding from Landcare partners continues.
3. A high proportion of grants to Landcare and other community groups reaching the ground is ensured.
4. Government agencies and other Landcare partners are more proactive in making information available and easily accessible on key emerging issues; for example, the CSIRO regional climate change projections.
5. Funding is provided to enable community Landcare groups, individual Landcarers and support staff to develop skills and knowledge in specific areas of need including governance, professional development and improved management practices. This includes funding to engage on-ground service delivery providers on an ad-hoc basis.
6. State and regional Landcare staff assist Landcare Networks, and groups to assess the capacities they need to develop, and broker development activity.
7. Learning programs are developed for Landcare staff and committees of management drawing on the existing knowledge and skill of experienced staff, committees of management and community members.

ELEMENT 6 - Celebrations

2, 7

The achievements of landcarers are recognised and celebrated by all Australians, together with the potential of the Landcare approach to meet future environmental challenges

In order to achieve better outcomes on the Landcare challenges of food security, responding to climate change, protecting the environment, water security and volunteerism

And

In order to maintain strong accountability and collect important information while reducing the burden of costly and time-consuming reporting compliance for the Landcare community, the following action is required:

1. The Landcare challenges are incorporated into local and regional planning and natural resource management projects.
2. Better alignment of, and work to address the gaps in research, development and extension programs that relate to the five challenges.
3. Promotion of the Landcare approach and Australia's capacity to provide leadership, services and information in the field of land rehabilitation and management, to other nations through International Landcare, Australia's Aid Program, international development agencies and service providers.
4. An exchange in land management knowledge and expertise is considered in our relationships with other countries.
5. The Australian Landcare Council should keep track of, and report to The Minister responsible for Landcare on, the achievements of Landcare across the Nation.
6. All reporting mechanisms require only the minimum level of project information necessary to meet accountability and program evaluation requirements.
7. The Australian Government should develop indicators and measures of NRM social and institutional capacity, and funding bodies should use these measures to acknowledge and track Landcare's social impact.

ELEMENT 7

Professional credentials established

6, 7, 8

Individuals, groups, support staff and networks involved in the Landcare approach achieve high standards of professionalism

In order for the Landcare movement to

- *build community resilience, expand its capacity, capability and sustainability, maintain strong accountability and collect important information while reducing the burden of costly and time-consuming reporting compliance for the Landcare community, and*
- *make sure the achievements of Landcare are well-recognised and acknowledged, to ensure Landcare's future investment and viability the following actions are required:*

1. A National Business Plan for managing Landcare is developed with NLN.
2. A National Landcare Funding Program is instigated.
3. Funding is provided to enable community groups, individual landcarers and support staff to develop skills and knowledge in specific areas of need including governance, professional development and improved management practices.

4. Government agencies and other Landcare partners undertake Landcare cultural training - this would include the structure and governance of Landcare, who the main players are, and how and where Landcare fits in the natural resource management arena.
5. State and regional Landcare staff should assist Landcare Networks and groups to assess the capacities they need to develop, and broker development activity between Landcare Networks with similar goals.
6. Learning programs for Landcare staff and committees of management should draw on the knowledge and skills of experienced staff, committees of management and community members.
7. Development of Standards of Engagement which are driven by community steering committees at local level, with Landcare and community as the authorising authority.
8. Reports require only the minimum level of project information necessary to meet accountability and program evaluation requirements.
9. Use economic modelling to judge value- added benefit for Landcare projects.
10. A five-year (mid-term) review of the Australian Framework for Landcare be undertaken, with the development of methodology for the measurement of Landcare's multiple outcomes as an initial step.
11. The mid-term review should use the Landcare business case to measure outcomes achieved and resources provided to Landcare, identify factors supporting and inhibiting achievement, and rework the Action Plan.