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SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL LANDCARE FRAMEWORK PROCESS

The Victorian Landcare Council (VLC) is the representative body for the 30,000 volunteers in the Landcare community in Victoria. It comprises 20 delegates from the ten CMA regions in Victoria who have been selected by their respective communities. These 20 delegates have a responsibility to be engaged with their communities and to bring to the Council the communities' issues and concerns.

In response to the five specific questions raised in the discussion paper "Community Landcare Speaks" the following responses and comments are submitted by the VLC on behalf of our members, the Landcare Groups and Networks across Victoria.

1 ASSISTING COMMUNITY LANDCARE

The founding premise of Landcare in Victoria was the historic partnership between the representatives of the managers of most of the privately owned land in the state and the environmental managers of the Crown land to work together to improve the sustainable outcomes for both rural production and biodiversity. The strength of the partnership lay in the engagement and empowerment of the community to participate in the planning and implementation of improved management practices.

Over the twenty plus years since this partnership was formed, Landcare has grown and adjusted as governments have developed different policies and programs. Landcare has been flexible in working with multiple levels of government and multiple departments at the same time. Any new framework will need to ensure this flexibility is maintained. Landcare is not a "one size fits all" government program. This applies to differences between states and regions, with differing histories of Landcare development resulting in a range of models of Landcare organization and delivery which best suit the conditions and culture of the state. The framework must not attempt an Australia wide "standard" version of Landcare.

Government involvement with the Landcare community is seen in two distinctly differing ways. One is the provision of financial support through various programs covering some of the administration and coordination costs through to complex project implementation. The other is in the form of regulations and laws, and enforcement of them, which impacts on land management. In both cases Landcare seeks to be a partner with government.

SUMMARY:

- **Landcare is based on three equally important 'legs'; sustainable productive land, sustainable biodiversity and healthy sustainable and engaged communities – anything less is not Landcare.**
- **The proposed framework must be flexible to allow for state and regional, cultural and historical variation across Australia.**

2 MAIN ELEMENTS

Landcare in Victoria is based on a regional delivery model which is grounded in community engagement in the planning and implementation process. This model provides support and continuity to the community through locally employed facilitators and coordinators to enable real engagement (as distinct from notional) between the community and agency/government/corporate partners. This regional model has been developed over twenty years and provides the most effective form of structure to deliver the investment leverage which Landcare offers. Landcare has shown an ability to work constructively with a range of partners to deliver the essential on-ground outcomes within regional strategic plans.

The proposed framework must provide a reporting and recognition pathway which credits Landcare with the on-ground and community engagement outcomes it delivers. Too often the outcomes which Landcare delivers have been submerged in the reporting and recognition of Landcare's partners, thus reducing the ability of Landcare to build on its successes.

One of the great strengths of Landcare has been the ability to leverage the public investment through the volunteer contribution. Estimates of the value of the leverage depend on the type of project but generally indicate returns of two to five times the public investment. The volunteer contribution comes from both the community voluntarily assisting in on-ground works and the land owner voluntarily providing land, equipment and labour and in some cases forgoing income earning potential in the interests of biodiversity. The framework needs to recognize that these two distinct groups of volunteers are engaged through different processes and are motivated in different ways.

A National Landcare Framework must address the problem of continuity in support and delivery to communities engaged in natural resource management. Annual funding cycles, changes in programs, changes in priorities and major changes in policy direction tend to undermine the ability of the community to deliver the outcomes that it has shown it can deliver. Unpaid managers and administrators in community groups are certainly available in many communities some of the time but for certainty and continuity it is essential that Landcare groups and networks have access to professional support through facilitators and coordinators. This has been shown to be the lowest cost guarantee of performance and outcomes.

The strong community base of the Landcare movement is correctly seen as a great strength but it can also weaken the Landcare message. A National Framework would greatly assist the Landcare community if it addressed the issue of representative leadership and explored the organisational options available to provide responsive, transparent and accountable leadership while respecting the community base.

SUMMARY:

- **The regional delivery model in Victoria has produced strategically planned NRM outcomes through partnerships between Landcare and other players. The regional model supported by facilitators and coordinators is best suited to the needs of Landcare in Victoria.**

- **Landcare’s outcomes and success need to be recognized as delivered by Landcare, not captured by partners and agencies.**
- **A framework must recognize the various ways in which volunteerism leverages the public investment and the value of that leverage.**
- **The framework must address the issue of continuity of funding for the provision of managerial level staff to support community input.**
- **Landcare facilitators and coordinators have been shown to increase the effectiveness of both the public investment and the volunteerism.**
- **Landcare requires a representative leadership structure which meets the needs of the community base.**

3 WHAT TO PRESERVE

The central unifying tenet of Landcare across Australia has been the strong community base and involvement. It is this “bottoms-up” organizational structure which gives Landcare its powerful position in the eyes of the polity. Landcare is an organization dominated by thousands of voters and this tends to attract the attention of elected members. This structure must remain and must be enshrined in the framework.

Although Landcare has always had political recognition and support, indeed it was initiated by politicians, it has maintained a bipartisan stance throughout its life. Although this has sometimes been seen as apolitical or non-political it has in fact been bipartisanship. This ability to claim and obtain support and respect across the political spectrum is essential for both its ongoing relationship with government and its diversity of membership. This is an essential element for preservation in the national framework.

Since its inception Landcare has shown leadership in flexibly adapting to new challenges, new opportunities, changing demographics and many changes in policies and priorities. Landcare is flexible, adaptable and has shown an ability to reinvent itself to meet new challenges. Flexibility relates both to the organization itself and the outcomes delivered to the community. This aspect of the Landcare model must be retained and nourished.

SUMMARY:

- **The key elements which have been essential to the success of Landcare are its empowered community base, its bipartisan political engagement and its flexible approach to change and challenge.**

4 NEW AND EMERGING ELEMENTS

Landcare has been fortunate in that over most of its life the community engagement and capacity building has been monitored by a team led by Professor Allan Curtis. This work has shown that the community engagement can be measured and valued. Although some of these social and community development measures are challenged by some economists, recognition of these tools for objectively assessing the value of the volunteer community contribution must be an essential element of the framework.

The emergence of markets for environmental goods and services (MBIs), particularly the potentially immense market for carbon sequestration represents opportunity as well as challenge. There is a strong belief in some policy areas that a pure economic approach to the delivery of environmental outcomes is the most cost effective policy. Trials of MBIs with rural land managers have shown that this approach will not necessarily deliver efficiency or effectiveness and there is a need for community engagement, education and awareness raising if these new economic tools are to be successful. Landcare has a major role in bringing the community engagement process to the delivery of MBIs.

Climate chaos looms as the greatest challenge ever to face humanity. Over time it will stretch the ability of policy makers and bureaucrats to respond to the multiplicity of concurrent problems ranging from food security to water supply to health and disease and rising sea levels. Historically, democratic governments have not been particularly successful in dealing with very complex problem solving. While governments flounder the community, through its day to day decision making, moves on and gradually solves the problem. Governments make the simple decisions (some of which are huge but they're simple, eg carbon tax or emissions trading) and tend to follow, tidying up the laws and regulations to meet the community's problem solving. Landcare's close linkages with the community place it in an ideal position to be a leader in working with the community in adaptation to the chaotic climate. The National Framework could help prepare Landcare for this leadership role through the development of the representative leadership organization proposed above.

SUMMARY:

- **The science of community development measurement must be respected and accepted.**
- **The need for community engagement in the introduction of new economic tools must be recognized.**
- **The framework will need to support and enhance the opportunities for Landcare in the adaptation to climate chaos.**

5 THE LANDCARE VISION

A Landcare which has been sufficiently resourced and managed to deliver the support, education and on ground work to provide the community with a solid, respected and responsive platform from which to adapt to the challenges which are ahead.

A Landcare which has the resource security and capacity to be a true partner with government and agencies, one which is recognised as delivering outcomes on time and on budget.

A Landcare which continues to respect the diversity of needs, cultures and expectations in the community. One which is prepared to confront the difficult issues and work through the diverse community to develop broadly acceptable answers to the coming challenges.

A Landcare which is prepared to fight for and obtain the recognition it deserves for its achievements.

SUMMARY:

- A strong Landcare will be one which has built on its ability to represent community aspirations in NRM to be entitled to security of its resources and recognition of its natural place as a partner with government and agencies.

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE VICTORIAN LANDCARE COUNCIL

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