

Victorian Landcare Council

Briefing Note 9 *Policy*

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The VLC is community Landcare members and staff working to put the interests of community Landcare to policy makers and managers—a strong voice for landcare is how we think of it. This Briefing, however, isn't about what we are saying to policy makers, but what they are saying to Landcare. Here is important breaking news from Canberra, nicely timed as you get organised for the new year.

The Prospectus

(<http://www.nrm.gov.au/resources/index.html>)

The Commonwealth's Caring for Our Country funding program (CFOC) has been through a review and a *Prospectus* announcing intentions for 2013-18 was released late in 2012. CFOC has two streams: Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Agriculture, but because the focus of the *Prospectus* is biodiversity, you'll have to go elsewhere to get detail on the Sustainable Agriculture stream.

What we get is the objectives for CFOC's Sustainable Environment stream, and for the Biodiversity Fund from the Clean Energy Future's Land Sector Package. The document gives target geographic areas, investment themes and grant funding guidelines, making it required reading for Landcare committees of management and staff developing project proposals in the 2013–14 round.

Because it looks at several different programs, each with their own objectives, it's a difficult read at times, but nonetheless it puts a lot in one place, and provides web links to detailed information on the various funding programs it describes. Go to page 11 for a useful diagram for all the programs.

Where might there be opportunities for Landcare? We'll do our best to reduce the 96 pages to 2 pages, starting with highlights from the Sustainable Environment stream.

Community Environment Grants will fund local groups to conserve and protect their natural environment. Business as usual here. The **Environmental Stewardship Program** will pay landholders to protect, rehabilitate and improve ecological communities identified as matters of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act. **Target Area Grants** are for big projects that deliver landscape scale management, integrating conservation and NRM in ecosystems of national environmental significance. Those landscapes are the Central Australian Connection, Cape York, the Kimberley, Tasmania, south-west Western Australia, South Australia-Victoria Connection, Greater Border Ranges Region, urban waterways and coastal environments, the National Reserve System, and (last but not least) the Great Barrier Reef.

"Urban waterways and coastal environments" get a mention in the Minister's introduction, so this good news for CoastCare groups and for Landcare in urban and peri-urban areas of Melbourne and (we hope) regional centres. The drivers for this interest are not just the increasing pressures on urban waterways (nutrients and sediments, urban expansion, changed water regimes, the spread of exotic weeds and pests, modification of coastal habitats and increasing marine debris) but the fact that most Australians live in cities located on river systems, and like going to beautiful beaches.

Right through the Sustainable Environment investment themes there's reference to "*building natural resource management community skills, knowledge and engagement*". What does this mean, given that community capacity building was explicitly not able to get direct funding in the first five years of CFOC? "Providing communities with the information and social infrastructure to sustainably manage their local environment" (p. 34) is one pointer.

Mention of the use of Community Environment Grants "to support groups to develop the required skills, knowledge and capacity to continue to actively manage their environment" (p. 45) is another indication that Landcare's educational, training and partnership building may win direct funding.

Sitting alongside the CFOC Sustainable Environment stream is the **Land Sector Package Biodiversity Fund** in the "Clean Energy Future" plan, which commenced in 2011, making available \$1.7 billion over six years to landholders to reduce greenhouse gases and store carbon through the large scale restoration of native vegetation where habitat has been cleared or become degraded. Here, think three words: connectivity, carbon and landscape-scale (ie. big). By the way, if you've wondered what *connectivity* means, there's an excellent definition in the glossary:

"The location and spatial distribution of natural areas in the landscape to provide species and populations with access to resources (food, breeding sites and shelter), increase habitat availability and facilitate population processes (dispersal, migration, expansion and contraction) and enable ecological processes (evolution, water, fire and nutrients).

On the other side for the fence, the **Sustainable Agriculture stream** will deal with food security, sustainable management of natural resources and issues that impact on agricultural production, such as weed and pest management. It will also invest in "building the capacity of the natural resource management community to ensure that it continues to deliver successful outcomes for sustainable agriculture and healthy, productive landscapes".

Why, might you ask, is there no detail on the Sustainable Agriculture stream in the *Prospectus*? Well, this is a *Prospectus* for *biodiversity*, handled by Minister Tony Burke and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC). Agriculture matters are handled by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (known to its friends as DAFF).

If you want a snapshot of what CFOC *might* offer in the Sustainable Agriculture stream, go back to the document before the *Prospectus*, "CFOC: an Outline of the Future" (<http://www.nrm.gov.au/about/caring/review/pubs/c4oc-outline-future.pdf>). Have a look at pages 19-21. Landcare did get a special mention here, with one of five objectives for the Sustainable Agriculture stream a "*Skilled and capable Landcare community*". That sounds good to us—when we find out more, we'll let you know.

The Victorian Landcare Council is here to speak to policy makers and senior NRM managers about the issues important to community landcare, and to keep you informed about what is going on at policy level. *Let's not take the current flush of funding and policy support for granted.* We must continue to communicate to decision makers what Landcare does, and to improve the way government programs work with Landcare.