

Victorian Landcare Council Policy Briefing Note 4

The Australian and Victorian Governments are both moving towards new policy commitments to Landcare—the VLC is pressing the case for support for community action through Landcare groups and Networks.



VLC speaks out on the Caring for Our Country (CFOC) Program. In July 2008, CFOC replaced the previous NAP and NHT programs. It substantially reduced funding through regional strategies and targeted a limited number of landscapes of national significance. It also withdrew the Commonwealth's funding for Landcare staff. The VLC, and Kaye Rodden in particular, developed a Landcare appraisal of how CFOC has been operating (see http://www.vlc.org.au/assets/files/20110620_submission_supporting_doc.pdf). Our main points were these:

Support community action. Government needs community investment in NRM, and Landcare encourages and focuses those private dollars on what is important locally. As a centrally planned approach, CFOC discourages community investment and action. Its annual funding means engagement of communities, stops, then starts, then stops. *The community is the asset that restores landscapes.* A “whole-of-landscape” approach that ignores the community is short-sighted. The pursuit of national targets developed in isolation from community-based regional plans has effectively disenfranchised regional and local communities. Put local and regional at the top of the pyramid, not the bottom. At the same time, *balance attention to conservation and production.* Our landscapes must meet both needs, but CFOC concentrates on conservation.

Support long-term partnerships. Stop approaching NRM in terms of purely bio-physical targets, top-down planning and contractual relationships conducted at a distance. Support planning by CMAs and Landcare at local level, and support the collaborative relationships which develop trust and long-term commitment to NRM goals. That means supporting the capacity of Landcare groups *to take action around their own goals*, and giving CMAs *base funding to maintain continuous engagement with the community* and pursue regional strategies.

VLC argues for visionary action in the national Action Plan for Landcare. The Australian Landcare Council (ALC) advises the ministers for the environment and agriculture, and is developing an Action Plan that will put the wheels under the Australian Landcare Framework. The draft Action Plan said nothing about base level funding for local Landcare groups and networks—with the Victorian Landcare Network, we argued that *base level funding should be the first priority*. Underpinned by a business case, this would secure Landcare's role as a *facilitator of community action and learning*.

We agreed with the draft that consultation with the community on NRM plans needed to improve, but argued that *Landcare should also be part of planning of programs of action at landscape scale*, where Landcare understands what local communities want and will respond to. Landcare is too often used and abused as government's gateway to the community, without being brought in to participate in the decisions. We also argued that on the big issues of food security and climate change, Landcare groups are places where communities think and plan for their futures—Government can use Landcare as a *platform for community thinking*, a place where government and community can reach agree on what these big issues mean for local landscapes. Our submission has had very positive feedback—read it at http://www.vlc.org.au/assets/files/VLC_response_to_ALC_Action_Plan_120611.pdf.

Renewal of Landcare Policy Victoria. DSE is developing new policy for Landcare in Victoria. The VLC wants to see this renew the Victorian Government's longstanding commitment to Landcare. The targeted investment approach that dominates NRM spending has pushed aside the principle of community action, which needs to be affirmed and backed by funding. In fact, as you know, the Baillieu Government has committed to 60 new Landcare facilitator positions. The VLC has helped this along by continuing to reinforce to Minister Smith the importance of that funding. We anticipate an announcement soon from the Minister on implementation, with a starting date for engaging facilitators around November. One scenario is that facilitators are embedded in and directed by Landcare groups and Networks, with admin support from CMAs or local government. Keep talking locally so that when the money is available, new staff can hit the ground running.