

# ***THE AUSTRALIAN LANDCARE COUNCIL'S DRAFT ACTION PLAN FOR LANDCARE***

**A COMBINED RESPONSE FROM THE  
VICTORIAN LANDCARE COUNCIL  
AND THE  
VICTORIAN LANDCARE NETWORK**



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Victorian Landcare Council (VLC) is the peak body representing the diverse community of landcare volunteers which numbers in excess of 30,000 active participants across Victoria.

It is a democratic and independent voice for all landcarers in the state as well as seeking to be a proactive “think- tank” for landcare policy.

The Victorian Landcare Network (VLN) is again an independent body, that represents the interests of professional coordinators and facilitators engaged at the Group, Network, regional body and government levels across Victoria.

The VLC and the VLN strongly support the creation of a single representative peak organisation to speak with a “single voice’ for landcare in Victoria and moving towards that objective both organisations have publicly declared their intention to merge in the immediate future.

One of the key objectives of both the VLC and the VLN is to advocate for landcare and encourage cooperation and partnerships across all government and non government organizations to achieve a sustainable landscape and a healthy community.

That is the foundation stone of this submission.

Twenty five years ago, Landcare provided a way for community members to act on land degradation and for government to mobilise landholders to improve their land management. Fifteen years ago, Landcare brought the policy priority of biodiversity into local communities. Now, Australian communities and landscapes face the challenges of climate change and food security. The foundation of Landcare’s contribution is its facilitation of action and learning within communities. While land management practices have improved, we need to maintain the momentum of change in communities and reach out to those who have been slow to adopt new practices.

Flexible core funding for Landcare groups and networks will maintain that momentum. It is not sufficient for government to only fund service delivery projects. The provision of public good outcomes by Landcare is underpinned by staff who have the time and skills to facilitate community action and learning beyond the bounds of specific projects.

Landcare can also play a stronger role in Australia’s NRM governance arrangements. Landcare groups, and Landcare Networks in particular, provide an effective decision making structure at landscape level. They understand priorities within local communities and are able to mobilise and focus community resources for landscape scale change. They understand the way government works.

Regional NRM bodies should use Landcare Networks and groups as one entry point for understanding community priorities. Standards for community engagement are needed, to provide a basis for feedback on consultation by regional NRM bodies, Landcare organisations and government agencies. Regional bodies should also engage Landcare in joint design of integrated programs of action within specific landscapes and communities. Landcare is not simply a provider of local services: it brings social knowledge of how to mobilise community action, knowledge that can make government investment more effective.

Landcare can also provide a platform within communities for negotiating the issues raised by climate change and food security. For these deep challenges to Australian landscapes, planning alone will not be enough. Landcare's facilitation of learning through action provides a way for communities to build understanding of what is happening and agreement on what needs to be done.

We invite the Australian Government to commit to a process of community learning on pathways to future landscapes. The Australian Government can provide direction and the macro-economic settings, but many solutions will develop at local level. Regional NRM bodies should draw together the science relevant to future landscapes, and Local Government should put in place the land use plans that move toward those landscapes. Landcare's contribution can be to provide a platform for community learning.

If the Landcare partnership is to act on these opportunities, there needs to be agreement on the roles Landcare will play, and the resources and institutional relationships that will support these roles. The ALC needs to develop the Business Case for Landcare, and show how Landcare can contribute to policy objectives. The ALC also has a key role to play in highlighting opportunities for Landcare in portfolios outside NRM, and in brokering connections between policy staff and what Landcare is doing on the ground.

Landcare's impact on community capacity has been comprehensively researched, but needs to be measured as part of NRM monitoring. We need indicators, measures and measurement processes for the social asset, not just for biophysical assets. Together, this will provide a comprehensive picture of the outcomes of public investment in NRM, fine-grained enough to know where investment is most effective.

Eighteen recommendations are made for the Action Plan (see Appendix A). The task of creating sustainable landscapes presents an enormous challenge, for individuals, for communities and for governments. With whole-hearted support from government, Landcare will make a difference.

Terry Hubbard

Chair - Victorian Landcare Council (VLC)

## INTRODUCTION

The Australian Government has committed itself to develop policy and programs in support of Landcare. The Australian Landcare Framework is a step in that direction, and the draft Action Plan, developed by the Government's advisory group to the Ministers for the environment and agriculture, the Australian Landcare Council (ALC), identifies actions needed to implement that Framework. The draft has eight goals:

1. Involvement in planning and implementation
2. Addressing the Landcare pillars
3. Partnerships
4. Flexibility in decision making
5. Articulating Landcare's contribution
6. Building Landcare's capacity
7. Effective and efficient reporting
8. Framework review.

The Victorian Landcare Council (VLC) has developed this response to the draft Action Plan. The recommendations have been tested, strengthened and confirmed in a day-long workshop with input from the Victorian Landcare community, CEOs of CMAs, DSE Landcare and Community Engagement and a member of the ALC. We comment on the actions proposed by the ALC, and make a case for additional actions at national, state, regional and local levels. Appendix A provides a summary of our recommendations.

We also take this opportunity to express our collective gratitude to DSE Landcare and Community engagement for funding the workshop and in particular to Jenny Pequignot and Jo McCoy.

Our proposals are made with the Victorian context in mind, but are relevant across Australia. The first Landcare group was established in Victoria, and the formation of Landcare groups was particularly rapid in Victoria. What is less well known is that this growth built on a history of agency engagement with community groups and the support of the Victorian Government of the day at Ministerial level. Since the mid-1990s, Victoria has seen strong growth of Landcare Networks, where local Landcare groups form to pool expertise and develop larger projects. Landcare Networks<sup>1</sup> have grassroots membership, but a wider scope than local Landcare groups, and are able to support local action across member groups and connect local action with regional priorities. Victorian Government support for Landcare has been on-going, with the 2002 *Action Plan for Second Generation Landcare* supporting community Landcare with funding at community, regional and State levels. Regional Landcare Coordinators have linked community Landcare with regional planning, and a series of State-wide projects have developed the capacity of Landcare Networks and groups.

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<sup>1</sup> These groups of groups go by many names, but here we refer to them by the generic title "Landcare Networks".

The Landcare Framework raises the question not simply of resourcing for Landcare, but the roles it can play into the future. Landcare needs a compelling value proposition to put to government, and to its local communities.

## **LANDCARE'S VALUE PROPOSITION**

We believe Landcare can play four roles:

- *facilitator of community action and learning*,
- *provider of environmental services* to regional NRM programs and other government programs,
- *NRM planner at landscape level*, and
- *a platform for engagement* between communities and government on the issues of climate change and food security.

Landcare is at its foundation a *facilitator of community action and learning*. Sustainable practice has become a common expectation in agricultural industries and rural communities. Landcare has led this shift in practice, but there is still much to do to motivate those who have not yet changed their practice and to continue innovation in practices. An unintended consequence of the regional delivery model has been to reduce financial support for Landcare's facilitation of community action and learning. We argue that Landcare needs to be funded as a facilitator of community action and learning.

Some Landcare Networks and groups have handled loss of base level funding by becoming *providers of environmental services*, developing and managing on-ground projects that deliver on regional, State and National priorities. Such projects stimulate community action, but in the absence of dedicated funding for community facilitation, groups and Networks struggle to initiate action outside these funded projects. Groups and Networks in areas that do not fit biophysical priorities are forced to wind back their activities dramatically.

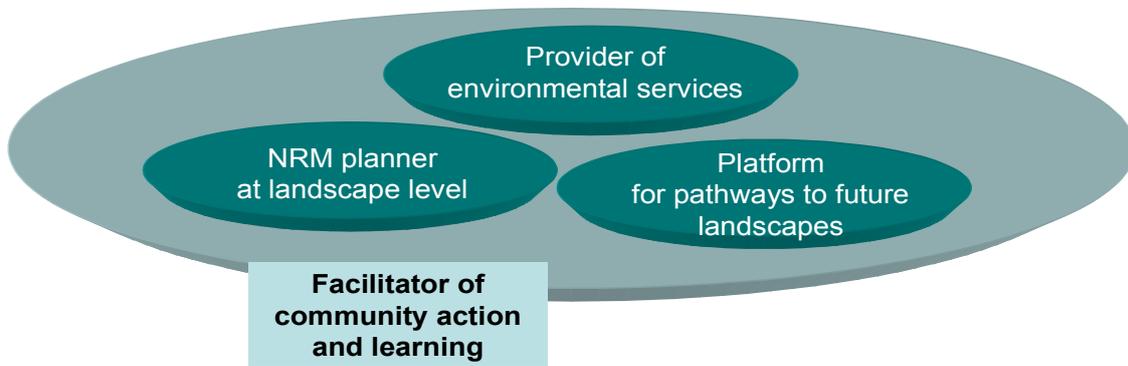
If resourcing for facilitation of community action and learning is in place, Landcare can make other contributions. First, Landcare can be *an NRM planner at landscape level*, negotiating a fit between the priorities of government and those of communities. Landcare Networks are a maturing decision making structure at landscape level, with knowledge of what will and will not work in communities. We believe they are an appropriate point to connect community and government priorities, and can work with regional NRM bodies<sup>2</sup> to design programs of action for specific landscapes.

Second, the Action Plan signals that environmental issues must now be addressed in the context of climate change and its cascading economic, environmental and social impacts. Landcare can provide *a platform* for developing pathways to future landscapes. By a platform, we mean a setting for dialogue, within communities, and between communities and government, where people

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<sup>2</sup> In Victoria, these regional bodies are known as Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), but we refer throughout to "regional NRM bodies" to make recommendations relevant across Australia.

can reach agreement on how their communities can adapt to change. Australia needs astute government initiatives on climate change and food security, but it also needs a way to build common ground at the grassroots.



### **Landcare's new roles grow from facilitation of community action and learning**

The pathways to future landscapes are ill-defined, and will only emerge as we tread them. Planning alone is not enough: we will need to take action even though things are uncertain. We will need to *learn* our way to future landscapes. Landcare is a credible, trusted place where people can take on the issues of climate change, food security and community well-being. What should future landscapes look like, and what is the best way to move towards those futures? Landcare can locate this debate within a tradition of learning in action.

**Summary:**

*Twenty five years ago, Landcare was a way to mobilise landholders to improve their land management. Fifteen years ago, Landcare took up the policy priority of biodiversity protection and enhancement.*

*Today Landcare remains a facilitator of community action and learning and operates as a competent provider of environmental services.*

*Landcare's emerging roles are as a planner at landscape level and a platform for pathways to future landscapes that can take on critical issues such as climate change and food security.*

## ***THE MISSING GOAL:***

### ***Resourcing Landcare as a facilitator of community action and learning***

In recommending how Landcare's four roles can be supported, we follow the Action Plan's eight goals. However, we begin with a first goal that needs to be stated explicitly and as a foundation for the rest of the Action Plan. Landcare as an ethic is a way for people to take responsibility for the landscape they share with others. As an organisation, Landcare facilitates collective action and the learning that goes with it.

Central to the effectiveness of Landcare is that each local group and Network starts where local people themselves want to take action on local problems. Influence extends beyond Landcare members, as others see what members do and access the knowledge they generate (Curtis et al., 2008). Behind that information and knowledge sharing is the slow growth of relationships within which people take responsibility for their landscapes. As trust develops between people, it lowers the transaction costs of collective action, reduces individual's perception of the risk of doing something new, and reinforces the expectation of reciprocity in relationships. Individuals invest more in NRM activities, and they learn more as they take action.

This virtuous cycle has the power to change landscapes. However, it does not happen by itself. It requires facilitation. Local groups and Networks raise awareness and develop individual's skills in dealing with land degradation through information sessions, field guides, farm walks, demonstration and trial sites and field days. They organise on-ground works to reestablish native vegetation in critical locations on public and private lands, erect fencing to manage stock access to creeks and streams, establish wildlife corridors, build salinity and erosion control structures, and coordinate local pest plant and pest animal control. They monitor land and water quality, develop plans for local action and contribute to wider catchment planning. Many facilitate the development of individual property plans. Groups keep members and non-members informed about all these activities through community newsletters, and act as a point of liaison for staff of regional bodies, State government programs and Local Government.

Through the 1990s, government funding for Landcare staff secured facilitation of community action and learning. However, since 2002, targeting of investment to biophysical assets has led to a steady reduction in this funding, threatening the effectiveness of groups and Networks. The immediate knock-on effects have been a slow-down in landholder contributions to NRM work. Historically, the average ratio of private cash equivalent contribution by Landcare groups to Government funding has been about 3:1 or 4:1 (AFFA, 2004). Landcare Networks and Local Action Planning (LAP) groups in SA have recorded ratios of community mobilisation of 7:1 to 12:1 (Networks, Sobels et al 2001) and 3.3:1 to 7.7:1 (Sobels and Clarke, 2008). Curtis et al (2008) suggest that 75% of landholder NRM work in catchments is unfunded. The quantitative data are not yet in, but the anecdotal evidence from grassroots Landcare is that landholder contributions are slowing as government withdraws its support.

The VLC appreciates the in-principle support of the Australian Government: it wants that principle implemented through support for Landcare groups and Networks. In the last decade, NRM investment in Australia has taken the social asset as a given. It isn't. The long-term effects of Landcare's marginalisation in NRM funding will be a weakening of the local relationships that support collective action and learning, at a time when communities across Australia face profound challenges to the integrity of their landscapes and farming systems. Landcare is an investment in communities taking responsibility for their landscapes. It should not be perceived as a cost.

***What actions will maintain Landcare groups and Networks as facilitators of community action and learning?***

1. *The Australian Government should fund Landcare groups and Networks to facilitate community action and learning, responsive to local issues and interests, focused on sustainable landscapes.* This investment will:
  - maintain on-going voluntary action in local communities across Australia, to improve land management and repair degraded landscapes;
  - organise community action around regional and national NRM priorities;
  - organise community participation in NRM planning, and Landcare participation in policy and program development;
  - maintain and extend relationships at local level, and between communities, government programs and industry bodies, committed to creating sustainable landscapes;
  - maintain the resilience of communities as they grapple with escalating challenges to the integrity of landscapes and farming systems;
  - enable organisational knowledge with Landcare to be retained.

These outcomes cannot be delivered by investment in Regional Landcare Facilitators or (in Victoria) Regional Landcare Coordinators. Community Action Grants deliver a trickle-feed of support for landholder action. Caring for Our County projects are possible within priority landscapes, but not outside them. Landcare Australia Limited resources projects attractive to its corporate sponsors. Combined, these sources leave most Landcare Networks and groups without the human resources to organise community action and learning.

Government investment in secure base level funding for Landcare groups and Networks is essential. This funding should be flexible. Landcare groups may direct this to community-managed Landcare staff, but they might also choose to invest in recruitment of volunteers, community planning, staff and management development, or recording community achievements. Continuity in funding enables staff and community management to build a working relationship that is not disrupted by stops and starts in funding. Community management of staff ensures staff selection fits local needs.

**Summary:** *Landcare facilitates action and learning within communities. It maintains the momentum of investment and innovation by landholders and reaches out to those who have been slow to adopt new land management practices. It builds commitment to responsible action by communities. These outcomes warrant public investment in flexible funding that secures the operation of Landcare groups and Networks.*

**ACTION PLAN GOAL 1:  
INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION  
ACTION PLAN GOAL 4: FLEXIBILITY IN DECISION MAKING**

The end point of NRM planning is not target-setting, but programs of action that change landscapes. Goal 1 seeks greater involvement of Landcare in NRM planning and implementation; Goal 4 seeks flexibility in the way regional programs are applied to local conditions. In our view, both goals will be achieved by engaging community Landcare as a planner at landscape level.

The VLC and VLN view regional NRM bodies as the appropriate point for deciding regional targets and investment plans, for drawing together the scientific knowledge and expert opinion that guides those decisions, for negotiating a fit between regional priorities and those of State and national governments, and for managing systems of monitoring and reporting. We support CMA Chairs in their call for greater integration between NRM goals at local, State and national levels of government and across policy sectors. We also support their call for devolution of authority to the lowest level at which people can take responsibility (Ryan et al., 2010), and believe this should continue beyond devolution to regional NRM bodies.

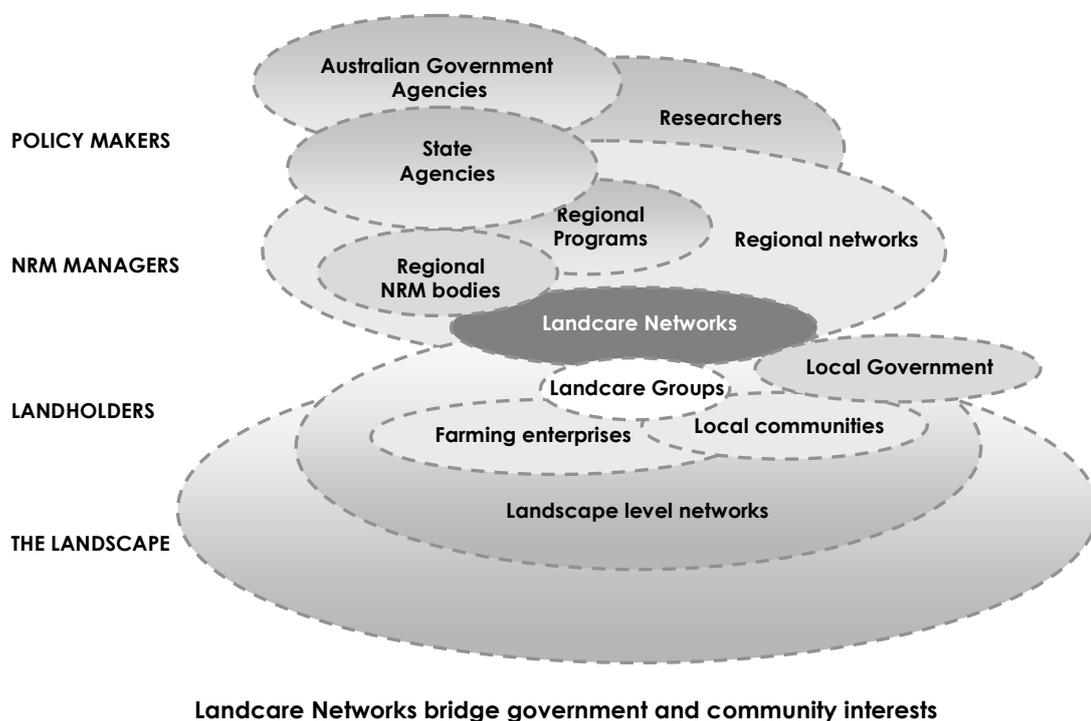
The dream of a nested hierarchy of planning that stretches seamlessly from individual property to national level is driven by technical rationality embedded in hierarchies of administration, where higher level goals direct lower level activity. Landcare organisations do not fit neatly into this schema. Their first accountability is to their members and the communities of place and practice in their landscape. Their planning seeks to maintain and build the momentum of change in communities. Dependent on voluntary contribution, their success depends on mobilising relationships of mutual responsibility, not on the contractual relationships that government programs can in the end fall back on.

However, community and government priorities do need to be better connected. We suggest landscape level is the place to do this, and Landcare has a critical role in speaking for community interests. In the spatial hierarchy of NRM governance, 'landscapes' sit somewhere between local and regional levels as large areas where ecosystems and land uses are repeated in similar form and share similar geomorphology, climate and disturbance by human activity (Forman, 1995). Landscapes are also social and ecological systems intertwined in a process of mutual influence and adaptation—social-ecological systems (Walker et al., 2006). They are areas *recognised* as landscapes by those who live and work there, with wider reach than local places, but still familiar to residents and seen as consequential for their futures.

Landcare Networks and active local groups are able to facilitate agreement between competing interests at landscape level. They maintain the momentum of change in communities by targeting support where there is readiness for change. As government programs come and go, they maintain continuity in community aspiration, action and learning. They encourage landholders to invest more of their own resources, and by connecting community and government priorities,

maintain trust in government. They provide access to the 50% of farming families (Curtis and De Lacy, 1996) and the 37% of broadacre and dairy farmers who are members of Landcare (Nelson et al., 2004), and beyond that, to many other households who trust Landcare.

While happy to use Landcare Networks and groups as service providers, regional NRM bodies and other government programs have been slow to work with them as planners in their own right. In part, this is because regional bodies have been busy developing their own planning processes, and their accountabilities upwards have had priority over their accountabilities downwards to communities (Wallington and Lawrence, 2008). This has left a gap in NRM planning at landscape level that needs to be remedied.



### What actions will bring Landcare into NRM planning?

1. *Regional NRM bodies should use Landcare Networks and groups as one entry point for understanding community priorities.* Landcare organisations offer credibility in communities and have the social networks to call in interests around NRM planning. They are not the only way regional bodies will solicit community views, but they are an important channel. Regional NRM bodies should use Landcare Networks and groups not just to give an opinion on regional priorities, but to negotiate appropriate consultation and organise community discussion of local and regional NRM priorities. Organising and facilitating that consultation is a difficult task that needs staff time, and should either be purchased or accounted for in funding to Landcare.

2. *Regional NRM bodies and Landcare Networks and groups should jointly design integrated programs of action for landscape change.* Planning at landscape level is the missing piece in NRM planning. Program design takes regional priorities as a given, and works out how to achieve those priorities within each particular landscape. This is the place to integrate actions targeting different assets, to integrate government-initiated change with community-initiated change, and to integrate action across public and private land. Landcare's contribution is not just its local knowledge of landscapes, but its *social knowledge* of readiness for change in communities, that indicates when and how to initiate and when to wait and let interest develop. Landcare Networks and groups are also wired for feedback from communities, feedback that is essential to adaptive decision making.
3. *Government funders should set standards for community engagement, to provide a basis for feedback on the consultation of regional NRM bodies, Landcare organisations and government agencies.* Community engagement in NRM planning means participation in setting NRM targets, designing programs of action and assessing actions. To date, it has been left to regional NRM bodies to set their own standards for engagement, but action has fallen short of aspiration. While specific methods cannot be prescribed, standards for due process and for participant assessment of consultation would bring rigour to this aspect of interaction between regional NRM bodies and community interests. Recent European work indicates a way ahead (Stefano, 2010). We are not seeking to impose onerous requirements, but to provide a basis for feedback and discussion about appropriate consultation.
4. *The Victorian Government, through its State Landcare program, should continue its support for improving Landcare planning.* Landcare in Victoria has benefited from sustained State Government support not just for on-ground action, but for improving the effectiveness of Landcare Networks and groups. That support should continue. Landcare Network staff and committees of management should be given opportunities to work with their peers to improve their planning and management. The ways Networks and groups assess community readiness for change need to be investigated and articulated, so that Landcare's social knowledge is more explicit.
5. *Landcare organisations should negotiate a stronger role for community action and learning in government programs, in research and in corporate support.* Landcare needs to reach out and show supporting organisations how community action and learning can further their objectives. Landcare Australia Limited (LAL) does this with large corporate business; the ALC proposes to take this role with Australian Government programs. Some Landcare Networks negotiate with local businesses and R&D organisations working in their landscapes. However, Landcare peak bodies need to give more attention to State and Australian Government policy and programs that affect communities and landscapes, and make the case not just of on-ground works projects, but for engaging communities around policy objectives.

**Summary:** *Landscape level is the missing piece in NRM planning, the appropriate point to design programs of action for landscapes. Landcare provides effective decision making structures at landscape level, attuned to readiness for change within communities, and to government priorities.*

*Regional NRM bodies should use Landcare as an important and meaningful point of engagement with communities. They should work with Landcare Networks and groups to design programs of action for specific landscapes. The principle of community engagement should be underwritten with standards that provide a basis for feedback on consultation with communities.*

*At State and National levels, Landcare peak bodies should make the case for community action and learning in policies and programs that affect landscapes and their communities.*

## **GOAL 2: ADDRESSING THE LANDCARE PILLARS**

The ALC suggests that the Landcare movement can play a significant role in participation by the community in four issues: food security, climate change, protecting the environment and volunteerism. These are indeed matters on which Landcare can make a contribution, but are better cast as national priorities, not simply Landcare priorities. Nor are they necessarily priorities of all Landcare groups; rather, these are issues which many Landcare groups and Networks are taking on, and on which they could do more if engaged more effectively by government. Goal 2 might be better framed as “Landcare’s contribution to national policy priorities”.

The Action Plan also highlights the lack of integration in policies and research for food, climate and the environment. The ALC proposes integration: we think an achievable goal is to track emerging policy across portfolios, advocate for the potential contribution of Landcare, and inform Landcare groups and Networks of opportunities. A business case for Landcare’s contribution needs to underpin this, and we address this in *Goal 3: Partnerships*.

We welcome the broadening of focus provided by the four pillars. Climate change and increasing energy costs reignite the question of sustainable landscapes. We believe that communities and government cannot rely on planning alone, but must take action and learn as events unfold. Landcare offers a platform for that learning. The default for government action has been centralised expert management—policy informed by science-based expertise administered top-down through administrative hierarchies (Brunner and Steelman, 2005; Nelson et al., 2008). We see the need for greater use of networks, linking like-minded individuals and organisations.

People often talk about local knowledge and learning as if it happened in the heads of individual farmers. It’s more complicated—local knowledge lives in local networks, laced together across geographic and institutional space. Networks learn by drawing in information and ideas from diverse sources and pushing new insights out. Talking about the lack of consultation in the Murray-Darling, Andrew Campbell puts it this way:

... no matter how many extra people are employed at the Federal level to work on water policy, or how committed and technically proficient they are, the majority of the relevant knowledge for making wise long-term water allocation decisions and translating those into fine-grained, workable local solutions resides in regional communities, industry, NGOs, state agencies and scientific institutions. A process that fails to engage meaningfully — and in many cases disenfranchises — the people with most of the relevant knowledge, is fundamentally unsound. (Campbell, 2010)

The great challenge of climate change and food security will be to keep technical innovation, adoption and governance itself evolving in parallel. Local solutions and innovations will need the clearing away of institutional and regulatory barriers.

Policy itself will need to start learning from successful change (Brunner, 2010). Government needs to create an enabling environment for networking of knowledge, and stop seeing communities and their own on-ground staff as simply implementers of solutions invented by distant experts.

Firm policy direction and innovation at local level need to work hand-in-hand. Landcare groups and Networks provide a credible platform from which communities can engage with the complex, contested and boundary-crossing issues associated with climate change and food security. Landcare is a platform from which communities are initiating action. This is what we mean by *learning for future landscapes*.

### **What actions will mobilise Landcare as a platform for pathways to future landscapes?**

1. *The Australian Government should commit to a process of community learning on pathways to future landscapes.* Landcare has been a vehicle to mobilise local action on land degradation—it can now be a vehicle for rethinking landscapes. Communities need a space where they can absorb scientific information, reflect on trends in agriculture, debate alternatives for their landscapes, and initiate pathways toward those landscapes. Now is the time for a commitment from government, and the agricultural and conservation sectors, to use Landcare to mobilise learning for future landscapes.
2. *Regional NRM bodies should draw together the science relevant to future landscapes; Landcare Networks and group should be supported as a platform for community decision making and action on future landscapes; Local Government should put in place the land use plans that move toward those landscapes.* Expertise about climate change and food security is spread widely across government agencies and academic institutions. Regional NRM bodies have the expertise to engage these organisations and negotiate for regionally relevant information. They are also in a position to draw in research and best practice of landholders in their region.

Landcare Networks and groups have the local standing to help communities consider scientific information, apply this to their landscapes, and debate desirable and workable pathways for change in their landscapes. Local Government has the mandate to adapt current planning for land use and local infrastructure to open the pathway to changed use. Government commitment to learning for future landscapes means mandating and resourcing each of these roles.

3. *The Australian Landcare Council should keep track of policy developments and broker opportunities for Landcare.* The National Landcare Facilitator has been a valuable broker of information on policy in the environment and agriculture portfolios. The ALC would assist by following policy as it develops in portfolios such as regional development, water, land use planning, communities and health. It should report on new programs where Landcare groups and Networks can make a contribution, and broker connections between new programs and on-ground Landcare activity. Landcare peak bodies and staff at regional, State and national level should communicate new

policy and programs to community members. Landcare members should themselves pay closer attention to policy, rather than seeing it as irrelevant to what is happening on the ground. They should highlight to government barriers to communities taking responsibility.

4. *Landcare Networks and groups should facilitate deliberation within communities to find common ground across differences.* A core belief of community Landcare is that each person has a contribution to make and that each voice needs to be heard. That is deliberation—‘thoughtful examination of issues, listening to others’ perspectives and coming to a public judgment on what represents the common good’ (Roberts, 2004: 332). Climate change, food security and associated environmental issues present choices between *competing* interests and social values. Landcare will need to push out from its circle of long-time landcarers to people whose values and beliefs differ. Skills for deliberation are therefore one priority for *Goal 6: Building Landcare’s capacity.*

**Summary:**

*Landcare provides a platform for engagement with the difficult issues raised by climate change and food security. Landcare’s facilitation of learning through action provides a way for communities to wrestle with the uncertainties and create pathways towards future landscapes. Landcare is also a point where innovating policy can talk with innovating local communities.*

*The ALC, perhaps through the National Landcare Facilitator, should broker connections to programs where Landcare groups and Networks can make a contribution in portfolios outside environment and agriculture, such as regional development, water, land use planning, communities and health.*

*Landcare organisations at all levels should pay more attention to policy and its impact on landscapes and communities.*

## **GOAL 3: PARTNERSHIPS**

In *Goal 3: Partnerships*, the ALC has proposed that the partnership needs recognition in policy, that the Australian Government should play a leadership role in strengthening the partnership, and that the specific roles of contributors be made clear at national level. *Goal 5: Articulating Landcare's contribution* recommends action to communicate Landcare's contribution and build community understanding of the value of Landcare. Developing accurate measures of Landcare's contribution will help that communication, and support Landcare's case for investment.

We believe that the central thrust of Goal 3 is securing specific commitments to Landcare's contribution in the partnership with government. Effective partnerships have shared goals, but they are also clear about the role of each party, and commit resources to the partnership. The VLC supports engagement of government, corporate and NGO sectors, but proposes several other actions.

### **What actions will make secure specific commitments to Landcare's contribution?**

1. *The ALC should work with Landcare peak bodies to develop the business case for Landcare.* The ALC is in a position to command the information and expertise to make this case. The specific contributions of Landcare, the anticipated outcomes, the resources needed, the financial and other resources provided by the community, and the critical institutional relationships around Landcare's work, all need to be concisely presented. The Business Case should connect to policy objectives in NRM and other portfolios, and to the objectives of corporate Australia.
2. *The Australian Government should facilitate communication of best practice in partnership formation across the NRM community.* Landcare groups and Networks are opportunistic, forming partnerships when the time is right. Some, however, initiate partnerships to meet their long-term goals. They invest time in understanding their potential partners' goals, and making sure these parties understand Landcare's goals. They negotiate agreements on shared goals to underpin their collaboration in delivery of services. Effective regional NRM bodies do the same. We need to learn and hear more about effective partnerships in NRM, and challenge barriers to participation by government and private sector partners in Landcare work. In the same way that best practices in land management and conservation have been spread through the NRM community, partnership practice needs to be documented and communicated. The Australian Government is in a strong position to establish learning networks between regional NRM bodies and Landcare.
3. *Policy staff of Australian and State governments should make direct connections to community action, and Landcare groups and Networks should invite them to see what is being done on the ground.* When pathways to the future are uncertain, and management options less clear cut, a direct connection between policy and local action offers rapid testing of policy

intentions, feedback on their acceptability in local communities, and ideas on how to improve implementation. Policy staff need to follow their policies out the door and into the community, and Landcare is one place where they can engage directly with communities. The ALC can play a role in brokering these connections, and Landcare organisations should themselves invite policy staff to look at what policies mean on the ground.

**Summary:**

*The Landcare partnership needs agreement not just on goals, but on roles, resources and institutional relationships. The ALC needs to develop the Business Case for Landcare, and show how Landcare can contribute to policy objectives.*

*Because NRM is a partnership business at every level, the Australian Government should consider taking a lead role in disseminating learning about effective partnerships in NRM.*

*One connection with a high pay-off is the direct connection between Landcare groups and Networks and policy staff, so the latter see what is happening on the ground, and Landcare members hear first hand about the policy process.*

**GOAL 5:  
ARTICULATING LANDCARE'S CONTRIBUTION  
GOAL 7:  
EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT REPORTING**

***Developing Metrics for Landcare's contribution***

Goal 5 of the Action Plan calls for a communication plan that demonstrates Landcare's "social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes" and digital exchange of learning between community projects. In Goal 7, the weight of the actions emphasise simplification of reporting by Landcare groups.

The VLC believes we also need to improve the way the impact of Landcare activity is measured. Development of indicators, measures and measurement systems for biophysical assets has proceeded apace since government auditors found:

... little evidence that there has been any substantial movement towards landscape scale repair and replenishment of natural resources as envisaged by the NHT. Nor was there evidence of significant progress towards preventing, stabilising and reversing salinity trends as envisaged by the NAP. (Auditor-General, 2008: 24)

Monitoring of native vegetation and stream condition has improved in Victoria, but soil condition needs more attention. There have been forays into the metrics for social aspects of NRM, by the National Landcare and Water Audit and others, but we do not yet have a baseline assessment of community or institutional capacity, and the assumed relationship between capacity to take action and improvement in resource condition has had little research. As a consequence, Landcare's social impacts are poorly accounted for in NRM reporting systems, and social assets do not figure in NRM targets.

Early Landcare policy put community development and environmental outcomes on an equal footing (Poussard, 2006), and the 1989 National Landcare Program gave communities scope to initiate their own learning and action. The 1997 Natural Heritage Trust focused more on on-ground works, but retained community influence on the direction of those projects. In the late 1990s, Landcare's social impacts began to be appreciated in terms of social capital—Landcare created relationships of trust and reciprocity, and built networks around environmental action (Sobels et al., 2001). In NRM policy, capacity building became an objective (Australian Government, 2002), and this is now understood as an intermediate outcome and precursor to change in resource condition (Curtis et al., 2008).

The call for resilient communities (see for example Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2009) assumes that communities that maintain strong relationships internally and with wider society are more likely to innovate, collaborate and adapt to crises. In a similar vein, the Regional CMA Chairs have asserted, "relationships are as important as organisations" (Ryan et al., 2010: v). Landcare also has impacts beyond community, on institutional capacity (Webb

and Cary, 2005)—the network of relationships between agencies and between agencies and communities within which projects can be developed and mounted. These relationships don't materialise out of thin air. Landcare staff and community leaders invest time and attention to build up these relationships so that community goals can be understood and resourced, and build cooperation at landscape level between differing interests in communities (Sobels et al., 2001).

Many regions have developed innovative ways to capture and report Landcare's impacts, but it is still the case that the reporting demanded by funders fails to make good use of this, relying instead on counting trees planted and kilometers fenced. There is limited attention in NRM measures to the capacity to get things done in relationships. We can do better than this.

### **What actions will develop metrics for Landcare's contribution?**

1. *The Australian Government should work with researchers and community Landcare to develop indicators and measures of Landcare impact on NRM social and institutional capacity at local and landscape levels. Agreement on key indicators of national interest, with an associated bundle of measures, would allow Landcare to choose measures appropriate to local activity. Measures of individual capacity to implement NRM practices (Nelson et al., 2005) need to be complemented by measures of the relationships within which NRM business gets done. As with biophysical data, baseline assessment is essential to measuring impacts.*

Quantitative measures at State and national levels should not crowd out qualitative measures. Landcare groups and Networks need to communicate to funders the difference they are making, but they also need to understand what is working and not working in their strategies, and to communicate results to their communities and local partners. For these purposes, stories and first hand accounts of change provide a rich picture of change in communities.

<p><b>Summary:</b> <i>A comprehensive picture of NRM investment is incomplete without measures of Landcare's social impacts. Landcare builds the capacity of individuals and communities to improve land management and organise collective action to remediate land degradation, and the institutional relationships within which NRM activity is organised. We have measures of individual capacity; we now need measures of community and institutional capacity.</i></p>
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## **GOAL 6: BUILDING LANDCARE'S CAPACITY**

### **Supporting learning within Landcare organisations**

The Action Plan's *Goal 6: Building Landcare's capacity* canvases funding to community groups, making scientific information more accessible, and developing the skills of individuals and the management practices of Landcare organisations, for example, their planning processes. We support all these actions, and reiterate that core funding for groups and Networks is needed to underwrite this learning.

The Action Plan suggests that flexible funding be available for Landcare groups and Networks to engage service providers to develop capacity on an as-needs basis. We agree. Funding that provides only for positions and on-ground works leaves out the development of staff and committees of management. However, individual Landcare organisations can struggle to recognise what they need and to find relevant providers. The other reality is that individuals and Landcare organisations learn a great deal from hearing what others are doing in their Networks and groups. The social knowledge and skills in Landcare activity are particularly difficult to absorb through training room activity alone.

We propose actions that address these aspects of Landcare capacity development.

#### **What actions will develop Landcare capacity?**

1. *State and regional Landcare staff should assist Landcare Networks and groups assess the capacities they need to develop, and broker development activity between Landcare Networks with similar goals.* In Victoria, assessment tools for Landcare groups and Network Profile can be used for self-assessment of development priorities, and are a jumping off point for contracting service providers. Development activities will be more effective when sited within clusters of groups and Networks with similar learning goals. State and regional Landcare staff should assist in forming peer groups between Landcare Networks with similar learning goals, mentoring, and sourcing learning providers
2. *Learning programs for Landcare should draw on the knowledge and skill of experienced staff, committees of management and community members.* Landcare requires expertise in facilitation and community development—skills such as running management committees, allocating responsibilities between management committee and staff, assessing community readiness for change, working within social networks, developing partnerships and running community meetings and discussion. New coordinators and facilitators, and new members of committees of management, need to be connected to experienced staff and members. For skills training, experienced staff should be used to define the relevant competencies, as mentors for individual staff, and within peer groups of new coordinators and facilitators, to explore critical moments and teach specific skills. In similar fashion, experienced members of

committees of management should be assisted to mentor new members of committees.

**Summary:** *Flexible funding should be available for Landcare groups and Networks to develop capacity on an as-needs basis through engaging appropriate service providers or facilitating peer to peer learning.*

*Skilling individuals and improving management within Landcare organisations requires more than training programs. Learning needs to be strongly connected to the Landcare workplace and draw on the knowledge of experienced coordinators and committees of management.*

*State and regional landcare staff should broker connections between community Landcare organisations with similar learning needs.*

## **GOAL 8: FRAMEWORK REVIEW**

The Action Plan recommends a five year review by the ALC of the Framework. We support this, and only suggest more specific action:

1. *The ALC's 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. We think the Framework should stay in place, and that the Action Plan should be reviewed. The business case sets the parameters. Resources need to be measured alongside outcomes (including landholder contributions), and the causes of success and failure need to be understood, to inform a new Action Plan.*

## Conclusion

Regional planning is in place, and is linked to state and national goals. NRM planners now need to reconnect to community understanding and action on environmental problems. We argue that a relatively small investment in Landcare groups and Networks will ensure they continue to facilitate local action and learning. The emergence of climate change and food security as pressing national concerns makes local ownership of problems and solutions essential to Australia's future.

It is too easy to polarise top-down and bottom-up approaches. We need higher levels to set broad direction and provide the legal and regulatory frameworks that guide and give legitimacy to action at lower levels. We need to devolve authority and resources and then build capacity at each level (Marshall, 2008). This is the kind of nesting the CMA Chairs have argued for, and it is what community Landcare also seeks.

The deep challenge of NRM governance is to find a way to combine the legitimacy provided by hierarchies, with the deliberation and innovation in the networks that link community and government. Government and community action need to be tuned into each other, not run as separate enterprises. The Victorian Landcare Council believes Landcare can play a strong role as a planner in the NRM system, linking communities and government. We also believe it is time to build a broad engagement within communities across Australia around challenges such as climate change and food security.

These are not challenges around which Australian society has yet reached a consensus. We must work our way towards sustainable landscapes, as individuals, as communities and as governments. Landcare is ready to make its contribution.—with whole-hearted support from government, it can make a difference.

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## Appendix A.

### Victorian Landcare Council response to the ALC Action Plan: Summary of recommendations

<b>Landcare as a facilitator of community learning</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Australian Government should fund Landcare groups and Networks to facilitate community action and learning, responsive to local issues and interests, focused on sustainable landscapes.</li></ol>
<b>1. Involvement in planning and implementation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Regional NRM bodies should use Landcare Networks and groups as one entry point for understanding community priorities.</li><li>2. Regional NRM bodies and Landcare Networks and groups should jointly design integrated programs of action for landscape change.</li><li>3. Government funders should set standards for community engagement, to provide a basis for feedback on consultation by regional NRM bodies, Landcare organisations and government agencies.</li><li>4. The Victorian Government, through its State Landcare program, should continue its support for improving Landcare planning.</li><li>5. Landcare organisations should negotiate a stronger role for community action and learning in government programs, in research and in corporate support.</li></ol>
<b>2. Addressing the Landcare pillars</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Australian Government should commit to a process of community learning on pathways to future landscapes.</li><li>2. Regional NRM bodies should draw together the science relevant to future landscapes; Landcare Networks and group should be supported as a platform for community decision making and action on future landscapes; Local Government should put in place the land use plans that move toward those landscapes.</li><li>3. The Australian Landcare Council should keep track of policy developments and broker opportunities for Landcare.</li><li>4. Landcare Networks and groups should facilitate deliberation within communities to find common ground across differences.</li></ol>
<b>3. Partnerships</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The ALC should work with Landcare peak bodies to develop the business case for Landcare.</li><li>2. The Australian Government should facilitate communication of best practice in partnership formation across the NRM community.</li><li>3. Policy staff of Australian and State governments should make direct connections to community action, and Landcare groups and Networks should invite them to see what is being done on the ground.</li></ol>

<b>4. Flexibility in decision making</b>	(see Goal 2)
<b>5. Articulating Landcare's contribution</b>	1. The Australian Government should work with researchers and community Landcare to develop indicators and measures of Landcare impact on NRM social and institutional capacity.
<b>6. Building Landcare's capacity</b>	1. 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. 2. Learning programs for Landcare should draw on the knowledge and skill of experienced staff, committees of management and community members.
<b>7. Effective and efficient reporting</b>	(See Goal 5)
<b>8. Framework review</b>	1. The ALC's 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.