

Victorian Landcare Council

Briefing Note 8 Activities

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2012 has been a very productive year for the VLC. With recognition of our broad-based representation of grassroots Landcare, we are providing sound input into many issues affecting community Landcare. We are now represented on the Riparian Advisory Group, the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce, the Commissioner for the Environment Expert Reference Panel, and the Two Million Trees Project. We have established clear lines of communication with DSE's Landcare Program, and are continuing our discussion with the FTLA about creating one voice for community Landcare in Victoria.

We are community Landcare members and staff working for the interests of community Landcare. As President Terry Hubbard observed at the AGM in September:

The strength of the VLC lies in the enthusiasm, passion and commitment of its delegates and Committee of Management, the incisive and intelligent submissions and responses on strategies, plans and programmes affecting Landcare, and the fact that it is all achieved by volunteers who give up a great deal of time, often at considerable personal cost, to ensure that Landcare is recognised and supported for its achievements and its potential.

Victorian Landcare Forum. Corangamite CMA with the VLC organised and hosted the Landcare Forum in Geelong in late October. A diverse program provided a great opportunity for Landcare staff and volunteers to share knowledge and learn together through workshops, field trips and key-note speakers. After merger with the Victorian Landcare Network (Landcare's professional staff), the VLC has taken up looking after their interests, and we look forward to more events where professional staff and volunteers meet as equals to share their knowledge and skills.

The Induction Workshop for new Landcare Facilitators ran in June, organised by the VLC, with funding support from DSE's Landcare Program. Experienced facilitators handed on their knowledge in 4 sessions that repeated through the day. Over 90 people attended, and they left inspired and with a better understanding of the depth of experience and resources in the Landcare community. Special thanks to Geoff MacFarlane who headed the organising committee for the VLC, along with Sue Hayman-Fox, Matt Stephenson and Neil McInnes.

The Victorian Landcare Program Strategic Plan was released in August, committing to support Landcare to: **operate** effectively and efficiently; **engage** communities in environmental stewardship; **collaborate** to enhance skills and possibilities; **do** on-ground works that make a difference; and **tell** people about the success and lessons.

The VLC welcomes the recognition in the Strategic Plan that engaging communities and building collaboration is *work* that takes as much time (more) as putting trees in the ground. Amongst other comments on the draft strategy, we said there needed to be support for landcare groups as much as networks, for groups interested in sustainable production not just biodiversity protection, and for groups and networks taking on issues like climate change and food security.

By locking the five elements above into a logic that leads to public benefits, the Landcare Program has cleared the way for making a case for resources to support Landcare. The next step will be setting year-by-year priorities for the Landcare Program: this needs discussion with community members of landcare through the VLC.

The Australian Landcare Council provides advice to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests. In 2010, it published the [Australian Framework for Landcare](#), then the draft of an action plan, to which the VLC made a vigorous submission. After some 12 months, the action plan, renamed [The Community Call for Action](#) has recently emerged. It sets out what needs to be done by all parties – government programs, regional bodies and landcarers – to support a strong Landcare movement. It puts on record at national level many things that have been forgotten or disregarded in NRM programs, for example:

"Local people also provide much of the resources invested locally in natural resource management, including through contributions to community-based groups. Strategies that take into account local knowledge and experience, and give the local community responsibility for identifying problems and designing and implementing solutions, are likely to be most effective, not only in producing results but also in encouraging people to take part."

As a statement of principles, the Framework was never going to lead directly to funding, and the Community Call for Action is framed as a statement of what *the community* expects of the various players in NRM, without commitments by government. Nonetheless, it is useful have the principles on record. If you are arguing the case for greater involvement of Landcare in decision making or deeper support from government, don't hesitate to restate the principles!

On a more practical note, the VLC submission had argued for development of a comprehensive business case for Landcare, showing the multiple benefits of community-based NRM, and we are pleased to see this has been picked up by the ALC. Consultants have been engaged to do a multiple benefits analysis on a number of case studies around the nation. In Victoria, one of these is the Upper Goulburn Landcare Network fire recovery program, and another is the "Web of Trees" built on the Yan Yan Gurt Creek's rehabilitation by the local landcare communities.

The National Landcare Network, the advocacy body for community Landcare at the national level, has reached agreement with the National NRM Regions' Working Group on a [Statement of Common Purpose](#). Catchment Management Authorities (as they are in Victoria) have sometimes pursued their own interests at the expense of community Landcare. The Statement acknowledges Landcare's strengths (for example, developing local ownership of issues and solutions, informal structures that enable flexibility, and the capacity to quickly respond and adapt to emerging issues and changed circumstances) alongside the strengths of regional bodies (such as their regional perspectives of landscapes and communities, and the engagement of communities and other stakeholders in developing and implementing regional plans for landscape enhancement). A useful document to have in your back pocket as you work with your CMA.

And briefly.... thanks to Roger Hardley, who has stepped down as VLC Secretary, for his astute advice and long nights helping to create a voice for community Landcare. The National Landcare Facilitator has finished a survey of [the health of the Landcare movement](#). The Commonwealth Department for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is beginning a major [re-assessment of risks to Australia's food security](#) and wants your views. Landcare Australia has a new public campaign called "Landcare is for everyone", see [their ad agency's view](#). Work is underway on Victoria's next State of the Environment Report, see the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability for [background papers](#). The Regional Landcare Facilitators program is currently being evaluated by [Clear Horizon](#). North of the border, the NSW government has decided to drop CMAs in favour of [Local Land Services](#) that will deliver agricultural advice, plant and animal pest control, and natural resource management. And finally, ["Making Environmental News"](#) remains our best single source of what's happening (good and bad) in the environmental action space, and it's free. Try it.

The Victorian Landcare Council is here to speak on behalf of 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.* It's a chance to communicate to decision makers what Landcare does, and to change the way government programs work with Landcare.