

Victorian Landcare Council

Policy Briefing Note 11



In this Briefing, we look at changes to the Commonwealth's Regional Landcare Facilitator program, and at the role of Regional Landcare Coordinators. In each case, the take-home message is simple: *if you say what you want, you're more likely to get it; if not, someone else's agenda will take over.*

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Changes to the RLF funding model

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The funding and guidelines for Regional Landcare Facilitators (RLFs) have changed considerably under the second phase of the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country (CFOC) commencing on July 1st 2013. RLFs were first funded at the Minister's initiative, one per region, in response to protest from landcare across Australia after funding for landcare facilitators was cut in 2008, an austerity measure brought on by the global financial crisis.

83 RLFs were hosted in the 56 NRM regions across Australia, and their role was to "establish adaptable, self reliant and appropriately informed networks of community Landcare and production groups in each NRM region". They were expected to contribute to two national priorities—Sustainable Farming Practices and Community Skills, Knowledge and Engagement.

From a landcare point of view, their effectiveness depended in large measure on how actively the landcare community in a region negotiated with them about what was needed and what they would do, either informally, through steering committees or by directly employing the RLF themselves.

A review of the RLF Initiative conducted in late 2012 (see <http://www.daff.gov.au/natural-resources/landcare/facilitators>) found that the program was producing "an improvement in the servicing of Landcare and other regional community needs", but had "unclear lines of accountability between program (DAFF) and hosting responsibilities, inconsistent guidance by steering committees for RLF positions and inconsistent employment arrangements."

As a result, there are now quite prescriptive guidelines for the new program in relation to the role of the RLF and the responsibilities of the hosting organisation, including budget allocation, recruitment, terms of employment and the operation of project steering committees. Program details can be found at www.nrm.gov.au/funding/regional.

There's been a shift in where the money comes from. For the next five years, RLFs will now be funded through the Sustainable Agriculture component of the Regional Delivery allocation (commonly referred to as base funding) to Catchment Management Authorities. Regional delivery will be administered by SEWPaC (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) on behalf of DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry).

Previous funding for the RLF Initiative was additional to Regional Delivery allocations and the new arrangements represent a Commonwealth budgetary saving of approximately \$8.1 million a year. The layers of management have increased: DAFF to SEWPaC to CMAs to community.

It remains to be seen how these new arrangements will be implemented. However, given the strong focus on Sustainable Agriculture, in the RLF program and in funding more broadly from the Commonwealth, there is a genuine risk that we are seeing the image of Landcare at the regional level being pushed into something far narrower than actually exists today. I encourage you to discuss with your CMA how you can be involved in steering the RLF Project.

Role of Regional Landcare Coordinators

The VLC met in July with the Landcare program of what is now DEPI—Department of Environment and Primary Industries. One issue we raised was the lack of involvement of community landcare members in setting the direction for Regional Landcare Coordinators (RLCs), and their limited time spent on-ground with landcare groups and networks. Who appoints the RLCs, and who sets their work agenda? we asked.

DEPI funds an RLC in each region, and has since government commitment to that funding by the *Second Generation Landcare Taskforce* in 2002. However, DEPI's Landcare Program has had to make the case for support in each year's round of internal funding program by DSE/DEPI, and they are doing well to maintain the commitment as money evaporates in many other NRM programs.

Currently, CMAs *employ* the Coordinators, and set their work responsibilities. DEPI has recently developed a draft work plan for CMAs as an indication of the activities it expects of the RLC roles. These activities include

Implementation of the Regional Landcare Support Plans	Supporting the Landcare Gateway
Preparation of report cards for regional landcare achievements	Supporting State Landcare Forums
Support for landcare awards	Working towards adequate spatial mapping tools across the regions
Roll out of Victorian landcare grants	Increasing use and adoption of social media
Securing additional investment in landcare	Increasing volunteerism

Regional Landcare Coordinators meet as a group quarterly with the DEPI Landcare team, as the Statewide Landcare Team, to discuss business coming down from DEPI, to share developments in each of their regions, and to manage development work relevant to landcare in all regions. For example, the Landcare Report Cards were designed here, and though each region does their report card differently, the data is similar enough that it can be summed at State level for an annual Victorian Report Card.

If you want to see more of your RLC on-ground, look at the fine print of your region's Landcare Support Plan. You'll find commitments there that you might want to follow up. Invite your RLC out to talk with group/network members, and while they are there, show them what you're doing.