

Victorian Landcare Council Policy Briefing Note 12



The new Federal Coalition Government promises to place Landcare back at the centre of land management programmes. National Landcare Program will be based on three principles—*simple, local and long term*—with a promise that funding will be allocated "at a local level", with landcare at the table, something we look forward to. In this Briefing, we bring to your attention the proposed Emissions Reduction Fund, invite your comment on landcare participation in funding allocation, and put on record VLC observations about the impact of changes to the regulations governing removal of native vegetation on farms.

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Direct Action Plan begins

The incoming Coalition government is determined to change the approach to reducing carbon emissions. Alongside abolition of the carbon tax, a key plank has always been support for direct action by those who generate carbon or who can abate its presence in the atmosphere.

An **Emissions Reduction Fund** is proposed, to buy action by businesses, farmers, households and other organisations that will reduce emissions at lowest cost. The Government seeks views on the **design** of the Emissions Reduction Fund, that will be considered in the development of an Emissions Reduction Fund Green Paper to be published in December 2013, with an Emissions Reduction Fund White Paper to be published in early 2014, and the Fund operational July 2014. Funding is proposed over the next three years at \$300 million, \$500 million and \$750 million. In the [Terms of Reference](#) is consideration of:

- the likely sources of low cost, large scale abatement to come forward under the Emissions Reduction Fund;
- how the Emissions Reduction Fund can facilitate the development of abatement projects, including through expanding the Carbon Farming Initiative and drawing on the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme;
- the details of auction arrangements to deliver cost effective outcomes;
- the details of the monitoring, verification, compliance and payments arrangements for successful bidders at auction.

Ecologist Penny van Oosterzee [said recently](#) *you don't just buy emissions, you buy resilient landscapes*. Landcarers understand this. They have been part of tender processes. Some are starting to design workable landscapes to a 50 year horizon. Some have kept track of the Carbon Farming Initiative. If landcare speaks up early, it is more likely to be heard. Submissions are due 18th November.

On another front, Ross Colliver, VLC delegate from Port Phillip and Westernport, is putting some ideas together on how to develop a workable approach to the idea of "funding

allocated at local level". In practice, this will probably mean at regional level (Canberra's version of "local"). Are there workable models for landcare as a participant in regional investment allocation? What have been the barriers to landcare participation to date? If you have thoughts on this, talk with Ross on 0411 226519, sooner rather than later.

Impact of changes to regulation of clearing of native vegetation

Kay Rodden, VLC Secretary and Corangamite region delegate

The focus of the new regulations, released in May 2013, is on streamlining the planning process to make it easier to establish the "value" of native vegetation and hence calculate how much it is going to cost to replace it so that there is "no net loss" of native vegetation in Victoria. We believe that the focus should always be on "net gain" and the reforms actually trivialise the need to retain, protect and enhance native vegetation.

The process is based on a new Native Information Management System. This model purports to determine the relative environmental value of native vegetation in the landscape, but does so in the absence of other key natural assets such as arable land and water resources, or the "non-biodiversity" benefits of native vegetation. Hence we believe that the outcomes will be seriously flawed, and any predictions will have questionable relevance to practical land management. This will make it difficult to engage land managers and promote sustainable landscape change.

The calculation of the "quality" of the vegetation is based on the erroneous premise that "pre-european" biospheres should be the sole bench mark. This devalues individual paddock trees and new landcare plantings and effectively ignores the role that these are having on enhancing the biodiversity of Victorian landscape and building their resilience to catastrophic events and climate change.

Comment from Ross McDonald, VLC CoM and Wimmera region delegate

The changes to the native vegetation clearance regulations will alter the look of Victoria's farmland. The majority of agricultural land has been given the lowest value classification, with isolated paddock trees having no ecological value at all.

These trees are a feature of the Victorian farming landscape and recognised as being of huge importance in the landscape. They have an ecosystem of their own and provide stepping stones for the movement of birds and animals to and from isolated remnants. They host predators including bats and birds of prey that feed on pest plant and animals. They provide shade and wind protection for stock. These benefits are under-appreciated by land managers.

Under the new regulations up to 15 mature trees will be able to be removed without an approval process with a plant back requirement of 1.2 anywhere in the same CMA region. With the increasing width of agricultural machinery and the popularity of GPS-guided steering systems, many farmers will use the new regulations to remove trees that are an inconvenience to them.

The Landcare community has the ability to explain the value these trees to farmers, the environment and the way our State looks. Try to imagine our landscape without paddock trees.