

Victorian Landcare Council

Policy Briefing Note 15



It's the start of a busy year: a Federal Government implementing new policies, and a State election. It's time to talk with your local member. A few pointers in this Briefing, and we update you on discussions with CMAs and the VLC's recent moves to improve training and learning for Landcare volunteers and staff.

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Time to talk to the candidates

It's a State election this year, and the VLC's big ticket item is that major parties promise to re-fund the 68 (part-time) landcare facilitators. We're talking with senior figures in the State's political parties, and you can do your bit by talking with your local member and other candidates.

At the start of this term, the Coalition Government honoured an election promise and committed \$12.5m to support employment of 68 community-based part-time Landcare facilitators. Those facilitators have *made a big difference to local communities* right across Victoria.

They are *preparing the ground for action by communities* by doing the legwork community volunteers don't have time for, *supporting communities to achieve real change*, by helping to turn good ideas into projects, with a plan of action and funding, and they are *maintaining Landcare as a platform for long-term change*. Sustainable land management works to a 10-20 year horizon; viable landscapes are a 50 year proposition.

Landcare's been around for 25+ years: with investment by governments, it will be around in another 50 years. And why not? Landcare groups and networks provide a place for learning and action by landholders who care about the future. The movement has stayed viable through very trying times, and the basic numbers remain good— every \$1 of government investment triggers around \$5 of private investment by private landholders.

But it's local stories, not numbers, that matter when talking to local members. What difference has your facilitator made? Talk first to your local member, and get specific.

West Marong Landcare Group started with Peter Walsh, Minister for Primary Industry. As full-time farmers, they said they were all relatively time-poor, and their one day a week facilitator makes a whole lot of the things happen they otherwise wouldn't organise; use of infrared satellite imagery to assess crop and pasture growth, more about soil health and how to improve it, looking at developments in seeding, and working out how to link up areas of native vegetation between properties. There's a plan for Minister Walsh to visit them, but word through their local member is that Walsh is right behind funding for facilitators, and isn't about to change anything. Sustainable agricultural production &/or increased employment are what government is looking for. Their facilitator has made sure the local member

understands that facilitators also nest local group activity inside larger landscape-scale projects. Private action for sustainable agriculture, delivering public benefits—that's community Landcare.

Our agenda with CMAs

In early December, the VLC met with the Chair of the CMA Chairs, Karen Douglas, the Chair of the CMA CEOs, David Buntine, and Executive Officer to both groups, Danny O'Neill. We briefed them on what the VLC is doing, and talked through several opportunities for Landcare and CMAs to work together more closely.

There is Federal Coalition interest in devolving a measure of decision making on funding allocation "to the local level", and a promise to make landcare "simple, local and long-term" We wonder whether it might be useful for CMAs and Landcare to look at the ways in which planning at local level and at regional level fit together. The local/regional interface is where what communities want to do connects to what governments want to do. Does that interaction make the most of what each bring to planning and what each can do by way of action? How can the goals of landcare members in local communities be better articulated and sit alongside regional goals?

CMAs and Landcare Networks have been working at this for sometime, and it might be useful to pull together an understanding of the different models that have developed across Victoria. We also raised the question of how landcare and CMAs are giving and receiving feedback on their relationship. Would quantitative measures of engagement add rigour to face-to-face feedback? We look forward to continuing to discuss these issues with CMAs.

Development support for landcare volunteers and staff

Imagine you are a Secretary or President on a Landcare CoM, or perhaps that you are the facilitator, and you are facing a challenging issue in leading your group, your network or your community. Now imagine being able to pick up the phone and be recommended to an experienced landcare person willing to listen to you and talk you through that issue, sharing their experience, but helping you find your own solutions.

The VLC is proposing to develop a mentoring process that will draw on our networks to find Landcare people with experience in getting communities organised to take action. We'll talk with them, find and record what they've learnt about organising in communities, and then invite them to mentor CoMs and staff who want a sounding board with whom to talk. We've pitched this idea to the RE Ross Trust, for 3 years support to develop a mentoring process in landcare.

In December, the VLC also put a proposal to the Wettenhall Foundation, under its Small Environmental Grant Scheme, to develop workshops with community leaders and staff from landcare that would look at successful ways to manage planning at the local level, and how to link this with regional NRM planning. We'll let you know how these two proposals develop.