

Victorian Landcare Council

Policy Briefing Note 16



The Federal Government wants to "place Landcare back at the centre of our land management programs", and has rebranded Caring for Our Country as the National Landcare Program. This is a golden opportunity to show government how to support community action from the grassroots. In this Briefing, we up-date you on the state of play, and invite you to a VLC workshop for those hardy souls sitting on Landcare committees of management who want to speak out for Landcare interests. More soon on how to respond to the Commission of Audit's recommendation to halve the national NRM budget.

VLC CHAIRMAN, Terry Hubbard, terjan.hubbard@gmail.com
SECRETARY, Kaye Rodden, nidgee@reachnet.com.au
Editor, Ross Colliver, ross.colliver@ttdg.com.au

The promise

Minister Greg Hunt has promised to "[place Landcare back at the centre of our land management programs](#)", giving farmers, Landcare groups and local conservation groups access to a significantly greater proportion of Federal funding. The Coalition Government is now the process of merging Caring for Country and Landcare programs to create a single National Landcare Program that will be "*simple, local and long-term*".

Under previous Labour Governments, more resources had been allocated to environmental assets of national significance, such as the Great Barrier Reef and threatened species programs. That meant less funding for regional and local priorities. The Coalition Government now has a clear commitment to "[give Landcare a greater say in setting local and regional priorities](#)".

Just what "local" means in the new arrangements is currently being worked out, and right now is the time for Landcare within each region to be talking with their CMA to discuss the options.

Devolution of Federal NRM funding

Landcare Networks and groups have in the past been able to bid directly for funding to Commonwealth programs, in NRM and agriculture. Some have been very successful in winning funds and managing large projects, demonstrating that Landcare can bring together national goals and local priorities.

In a recent submission, the VLC argued strongly to leave in place direct Federal funding of Landcare Networks and groups. We argued that giving CMAs control of funding allocation would concentrate the influence of technical expertise at the expense of local social knowledge, fail to engage with what communities are ready to do and damage the established social infrastructure of Landcare groups and Networks.

There is a view that Federal funding for local priorities be devolved to CMAs, with decisions on allocation of amounts below a certain level (say \$250,000) made jointly between the region, Landcare Networks and groups, and other community environmental groups.

The VLC view is that arrangements for funding allocation are part of the long-term partnership between Landcare and CMAs, and that CMAs need to develop this relationship to the point where Landcare participates as an equal in decisions about allocation to local priorities.

Ramping up the Landcare/CMA partnership

The impending devolution to CMAs of some level of responsibility for allocating Federal NRM funding, and the Coalition's commitment to giving Landcare a say in how funds are allocated, puts the spotlight on the partnership with CMAs.

How Landcare and CMAs work out their partnership is up to each region, and each CMA goes about its business in its own way, with a long history to its relationship with Landcare. But one thing is constant across Victoria—the need to have regular discussion between a regional Landcare community and a CMA.

The VLC has developed a policy that offers direction on the kinds of issues that need discussion, and the kinds of forums that are needed to strengthen the Landcare/CMA partnership. It's a draft for comment—[have a look here](#). We're particularly interested in other issues that need discussion in your region.

It's timely to work out how the planning that Landcare does at local level fits with regional planning. Landcare gets the views of an informed section of landholders, and taps into local knowledge that understands the history of a landscape. Even though Landcare membership is a proportion of the community, the priorities that rise to the top reflect what the motivated are ready to do, and that leads change in a community.

The other critical issue is the *design* of programs. Decisions here lead directly to the criteria used to choose what wins funding. Local knowledge of what has worked and hasn't worked in supporting change in each particular landscape needs to be on the table when programs are designed, as well as when funds are allocated to projects.

If we want to shift land management practices, we need the right mix of incentive, education and involvement with peers. CMA staff have their ideas on this, because they're paid to bring technical expertise to bear, but Landcare members have knowledge of what will be effective at the local level and sustainable after a project finishes.

Support for Landcare's community leaders

Are you a Secretary or President on a Landcare Committee of Management? Do you feel your group or Network is limping along without a sense of direction? Do you think it is taking on too much and not getting the backing it needs locally? Do you want funders to take more notice of your project proposals?

The VLC has secured funding from the Wettenhall Foundation to develop workshops in regional locations for Landcare community leaders and staff on ways to improve planning at the local level, and its link with regional NRM planning. The workshops will run in late August, and we want you to say what questions you'd like tackled in that workshop. [Go to the VLC website](#) for an introduction and to register your interest.