

Victorian Landcare Council

Policy Briefing Note 18



The new Australian Government NRM program is kicking into gear. Re-badged as the **National Landcare Programme**, it is short on cash but intent on putting Landcare back in a stronger position in NRM, and making NRM "simple, local and long-term". Sit down with a strong cup of your favoured brew, as we briefly describe the new Programme, and signpost two elements of the VLC response to the Consultation Paper, which asks some good questions about the 'how to' of NRM and Landcare. Then read our full response to the Consultation Paper [here](#). The keen readers can also pick up a copy of the VLC submission to the Senate Inquiry on the National Landcare Program, from the same web page.

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Policy. The "Clean Land" pillar of the Coalition's Cleaner Environment Plan is the main policy to which the National Landcare Program (NLP) will contribute. The NLP will also take account of the Department of Agriculture's White Paper "[Competitiveness of the Agricultural Sector](#)", under development and due end of 2014.

National Stream. In the National Stream the following programs are relevant to Victoria:

- 20M trees . Grants of \$8M over 4 years (\$2M per year) between \$20-80K per grant. Tenders will be issued to engage national [service] providers. Service Providers will deliver large scale revegetation projects.
- \$1M for 'Landcare Networks' (Landcare peak bodies, including National Landcare Council, Victorian Landcare Council), allows for strengthening links between NRM regional bodies and Landcare networks. The status of the Australian Landcare Council is being reviewed following the resignation of the National Landcare Facilitator.
- 25 year Landcare anniversary grants, 2014-15, \$5 m. To be called mid September. Up to 20k per project. 'Typical' Landcare activities will be funded.
- Green Army. \$525 m. Approved Service Providers will work with regional NRM bodies. [196 projects](#) have been announced so far. Some see the Green Army as [trading down from Landcare to a less effective conservation model](#).

Regional Stream. The NLP Regional Stream is \$454m annually for 4 years, over 56 NRM regions, substantially less that under the previous CFCO program. The Regional Stream will support projects developed regionally and in consultation with the public. At least 20% of Commonwealth funding will be expected to go to community projects. Increasing community understanding of NRM priorities and participation in NRM activities is a priority:

"The National Landcare Programme will focus on increasing participation by local natural resource management communities, including landcare, in:

- natural resource management planning and prioritisation;
- local natural resource management priorities' role in delivering national outcomes (e.g. threatened species and other matters of national environmental significance);
- natural resource management governance and decision making; and
- on-ground natural resource management through small and medium scale projects.



..... It is expected that natural resource management investment decisions will be informed by regional natural resource management plans that have a strong scientific basis and community support." ([from NLP Consultation Paper](#))

Strengthening Landcare in the NRM system

Asked "How can regional natural resource management organisations strengthen Landcare and community networks within and between regions?" we said:

Regional NRM organisations should work with their communities to develop processes for strengthening Landcare and community networks. Neither they, nor the State Landcare network, should by themselves attempt to decide what will be best – grassroots landcare knows best. However, in our experience as an advocate for Landcare in Victoria, the following issues are the start of an agenda for discussion between regional landcare communities and their regional NRM organisation:

1. *Baseline funding.* Give Landcare Networks a permanent, responsive presence in communities.
2. *Roles in planning and service delivery.* The rhetoric about participation needs to be turned into practice. Negotiate clear expectations of Landcare Networks and CMAs in relation to planning and service delivery, and set up and use feedback mechanisms that inform all parties in a timely about effective and inadequate performance.
3. *Planning by Landcare.* Support Landcare Networks as they set their own goals for building their capacity, and assist them in sourcing the knowledge, skills and the systems they need.
4. *Measuring participation and engagement.* Jointly build simple measures of community participation in NRM, agree on the appropriate mix of engagement (partner, collaborate, consult or inform, for each relevant stakeholding) around projects, and use the measures to assess participation.
5. *Assess the partnership with Landcare.* Jointly assess all aspects of the CMA/Landcare partnership at least bi-annually, with discussion of matters with unusually high and low assessments.
6. *Learning across regions.* Share improvements in any of the above mechanisms between regions.

Accountability for community engagement and participation

The Consultation Paper accepts that each region will develop arrangements for participation that suit its circumstance, but asks how the Commonwealth can set expectations community engagement and participation. We said:

Expectations need to be negotiated between informed participants on a case-by-case basis, but it would be helpful if the Commonwealth developed guidelines for the process through which expectations are set, and developed these in collaboration with practice leaders in NRM engagement and participation. Those guidelines should cover the following dimensions of management of engagement and participation.

On the question of how to measure regional performance on community participation, we said:

A simple measure, and one responsive to governance and engagement activity, is to ask people— "how is the relationship going?" Using a quantitative scale that captures the qualitative dimensions of the relationship that matter to people will deliver information that people find relevant, and which they can use as a starting point for discussion to improve a relationship.

Information on each party's perceptions of a relationship can be used to start discussion about what is and isn't working in the relationship. Averaged across a type of stakeholder (all dairy farmers engaged by a program, for example), or across a program (all stakeholders engaged by the soil health program), such a measure provides an assessment of regional body performance.

See more at <http://www.vlc.org.au/reports-submissions>.