

Victorian Landcare Council

Activity Briefing Note 21



The VLC has just completed a project funded by the Wettenhall Foundation to trial approaches to helping Landcare groups and networks improve their planning. What did we do and what did we discover?

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Strengthening Landcare's place in NRM planning

How can we make Landcare planning stronger and better integrated with regional planning and government priority-setting, able to argue for its priorities and win greater devolution of responsibility for planning to Landcare? With less funding around, but with funders committed to investment decisions made "at the local level", the VLC project *Taking Landcare Planning to the Next Level* set out to support community landcare leaders taking a more active role in improving planning in their own groups and networks, and connecting local planning with regional NRM planning.

The project trialed two different approaches. In the North Central region, the project worked directly with Landcare facilitators and their groups to identify interest in improving planning, and this led to trial of a workshop on planning skills with Donald and District Landcare Group.



In the Goulburn Broken region, the project worked through the established Chairs and Coordinators forums to negotiate an agenda, then ran two consecutive workshops with staff and committee members from nine groups and networks, assessing strengths and next steps in Landcare's planning. They settled on *questions without easy answers* that really needed attention to strengthen Landcare, questions like:



- How can local Landcare groups be encouraged to share and participate beyond their boundaries, contributing to the work of Landcare networks?
- How can Landcare develop new and maintain current services that are worth paying for, so that it remains sustainable?
- How do we engage people so they want to contribute at committee level?

So what's needed to strengthen Landcare planning?

Landcare groups and networks need access to five kinds of support:

1. Planning guides that offer templates and stepped processes, with illustrative examples of planning used by groups and networks. Now available at the VLC website (go to <http://www.vlc.org.au/landcare-resources-for-groups-networks-and-staff>).
2. Training workshops to build skills. Offered from time to time by local government and through the State Landcare Program, these usually target staff and need to be available to committees of management.
3. For a Landcare Network or local group, a simple diagnostic ("How are we going?") that leads to agenda-setting ("What do we need to improve?"). *Taking Landcare Planning to the Next Level* has produced a self-assessment tool for Landcare Networks, and the VLC's CLEA project will introduce this to Networks and their facilitators.
4. Landcare members need to hear about good ways of getting organised—face-to-face, with web-based access as a back-up. The VLC's Regional Landcare Forums, and occasional CMA-sponsored forums are a start, but we need more ways for Landcare to get together and talk about how they are running their committees of management.
5. Mentoring to support specific changes a group or Network wants to introduce.

Here are the next steps needed:

Help community Landcare get better organised. "Planning" isn't something most Landcare people get excited about—but most of them know they could be better organised. Better mailing lists, better ways to track project spending, clearer priorities, clarity about the roles of committee and staff, or running meetings better are the bricks-and-mortar of running a group, and all these elements connect back to good planning.

Help Committees of Management set their agenda for getting better organised. Committees of Management need to review what is working better in the way they organise and decide what they want to work on. They need to not take on too much, improve in small steps, and get connected to the resources in their region.

Support Landcare groups and networks to help each other. Landcare groups/networks can learn a lot from other groups and networks. Committees of management can mentor other committees on specific systems and tools. We need Chairs and facilitators making connections between CoMs.

Get buy in across Landcare in a region. There are several layers to Landcare in a region—Chairs of Networks, Landcare staff, and committees of management. If each layer buys into the idea of improving the way Landcare is organised, they can support each other.

Get someone on the ground to help groups and networks. Groups/Networks will improve the way they operate when it's high profile for them. You can't force them into it, but you can be ready to provide support when they need it. They need a person they can go to who they trust. This is a job Regional Landcare Coordinators and Landcare Facilitators can pick up more strongly.

Our thanks to the Norman Wettenhall Foundation for funding this project. Developing capacity at community level to plan projects and organise action is vital, and the Wettenhall Foundation is one philanthropic getting alongside community groups to help them do this (see their work at www.nwf.org.au/.) Read the full project report on *Taking Landcare Planning to the Next Level* at <http://vlc.org.au/improving-landcare-planning>