

Victorian Landcare Council Activity Briefing Note 10



In this Briefing, the VLC partners with Australian Landcare International to set up a new fund for small grants to overseas projects, we up-date you on merger talks with the FTLA, and we raise some questions about sharing of project information.

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VLC backs Overseas Landcare Fund

\$500 Aussie dollars go a long way when planting trees in Tanzania or improving water quality in Sri Lanka. And especially when the money is spent by locals on community-driven projects backed by their government and Australian Landcare know-how.

This is the beauty of the new Overseas Landcare Fund launched recently by the Victorian Landcare Council and Australian Landcare International. ALI chairman Rob Youl said the fund would be run with the Victorian Landcare Council to provide grants of up to Au\$500 for overseas projects. *"It's amazing how far A\$500, to us a modest amount, can go to help small overseas communities improve their farming and local environment."*

From its beginnings in central Victoria in the 1980s, Landcare has spread across Australia and internationally. Landcare operates in Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Fiji, the United States of America, Canada and 12 African countries. Japan, Jamaica and the Democratic Republic of Congo are next on the agenda.



Terry Hubbard, Kaye Rodden, Albert Park MP Martin Foley, and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade, Kelvin Thomson MP at the launch of the new Overseas Landcare Fund

Parliamentary Secretary for Trade, Kelvin Thomson MP, who helped launch the fund, said nine projects were ready to receive support from the new Overseas Landcare Fund. These included revegetating land in the Congo, enhancing food security in Tanzania and the Philippines, extending a tree nursery in Java, wetland conservation in Nigeria and soil conservation in Jamaica.

VLC chairman Terry Hubbard said a key goal of the OLF is to encourage donor Landcare bodies to develop a sister-group relationship with their overseas counterparts. *"That way we can learn from each other,"* he said.

To find out more, contact Rob Youl, Australian Landcare International: 03 9699 2725; 0407 362 840; robmyoul@gmail.com

Possible merger of VLC and FTLA

The VLC has been in discussion with the FTLA on how the two organisations might merge. We have jointly agreed that the purposes of a merged organisation can include the VLC's advocacy for landcare and the FTLA's services to Landcare Groups. We have also agreed on many aspects of the structure.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to agree on the purpose and power of a Council. The VLC remains committed to Council as a regionally representative structure with five landcare volunteers and one professional staff person from each of the 10 regions. In the VLC approach, this body sets policy and elects the Committee of Management. In the current FTLA proposal, the Council is convened by the CoM, and gives an opinion on policy, but does not set policy itself.

The VLC believes that, after many years of landcare being 'done to' by distant decision makers, a Council of volunteer landcarers needs to be given real power to set the agenda. Decision making in NRM has gradually shifted to government priorities and programs and lost connection to community priorities and action. Now, with government programs starved for funding, government needs a strong collaborative relationship with local communities. A sustained State-wide discussion between landcarers can empower the efforts of groups and networks to make landcare a stronger force in NRM.

The VLC will keep talking with the FTLA to see if we can find common ground on this important matter. In the meantime, we are working with the FTLA where we can.

Access to project information—what's happening in your region?

The VLC has been asked what is happening across CMAs on access to information on funded landholder projects. Landcare groups and Networks need this to take account of new activity in their area as they plan new work.

In some regions, access is restricted by CMAs, even for projects funded under Victorian Landcare Grants. Privacy restrictions are the reason given, though as one correspondent has noted, CMA signage beside project sites is a big hint as to who is getting funded. Melbourne Water (MW) projects do the same – landcare links people to MW, then gets locked out of project information because of privacy issues. Funders demand lots of information in project reports, then lock it up.

DEPI sets requirements for CMAs to report against Standard Outputs, but leaves it to CMAs to set up their own data management. So it's up to landcare to sort things out region by region. One development we've heard of is for a CMA to fund a single software system for reporting project and property information, along with hardware to record this.

What's the situation in your region? What is working and what is not? Do we need better sharing of project information so that we all have the ammunition to plan for the future and lobby for investment?

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