

Planning with Purpose:
Landcare Network
Strategic and Operational Planning

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Landcare Network planning maintains the momentum of change at landscape scale, that is, across whole catchments or large parts of catchments. Networks offer local Groups more efficient project administration, better technical support for landholders, and more influence in their funding bids. Funders' preference for landscape-scale projects is also a powerful incentive to form Networks.

Landcare Networks are able to take on more complex projects, making decisions on priorities not just for a single local area, but across the differing needs of their member Groups. In Natural Resource Management (NRM) planning, Networks link regional plans, local Landcare plans and landholders, and bring together government NRM programs and other government agencies with community interests.

To succeed in these tasks, Landcare Networks need clear strategic intent.

What is in a strategic plan?

Strategic plans set a course through uncertain terrain.¹ They provide a road map that says where the Network wants to head, and the best way to get there. Strategic planning sets the scene for business planning or operational planning, by naming the results the Network wants to achieve in its programs and projects.

The Network Strategic Plan:

- commits to long-term goals (vision), describes the roles the Network will play (mission), and may also say how the Network will do business (principles);
- identifies the Network's strengths and weaknesses;
- identifies obstacles and opportunities likely to limit or enable the Network to achieve its goals;
- decides on pathways to goals (strategies);
- identifies priorities at landscape scale to guide activities and investment for the life of the plan (3-5 years), and aligns Network priorities with priorities at regional, state and national levels;
- describes how the Network will govern itself, clarifying for example roles of the Network and its member Groups;
- identifies what capacities in the Network need developing.

¹ Rouson, B. (2005) Business Planning for Nonprofits: Why, When — and How It Compares to Strategic Planning. Alliance for Nonprofit Management, Washington DC.

What are the benefits?

A thoughtful strategic planning effort, and the plan it produces:

- reaffirms your purpose as a network;
- helps you anticipate opportunities and dangers into the future;
- puts your long-term thinking on record, to guide day-to-day activity;
- gives your member groups a road map they can use as they plan their activities;
- lets your partners know what your priorities are, and the strategic thinking behind them;
- puts you in a stronger position to negotiate funding and new partnerships.

The process of developing a Strategic Plan for Landcare Networks is similar to that outlined earlier for Landcare Group Action Plans, with some minor differences. Some of the following steps are therefore a repeat of the Group Action Planning process and some steps are new or modified. The ten steps are:

- Step 1. Create a purpose for planning
- Step 2. Decide how to get people involved
- Step 3. Get everyone on the same page
- Step 4. Our Network's vision and mission
- Step 5. What are our strengths and weaknesses?
What are the opportunities and threats around us?
- Step 6. What will make or break our success?
- Step 7. Objectives and theories of change
- Step 8. Partnerships and resources
- Step 9. Governance and capacity
- Step 10. Monitoring, evaluation and review

With that under your belt, you can step straight into

The Operational Plan.

Step 1. Create a purpose for planning

Discuss and seek agreement at the Network meeting the need to develop a Network Strategic Plan. As the first step in your planning process, write down the benefits the Network wants out of developing a Strategic Plan.

This will help you maintain focus and communicate to others what you are trying to achieve.

Step 2. Decide how to get people involved

Involve others including Landcare Group representatives, members and interested partners from the very beginning, to get their ideas and so they know their input is valued. **Develop a one page communication strategy** to let people know of the planning process and invite their involvement. Here's an example

Type of communication	Message	Location(s)	Timing	Who will do it?
Poster on display	"Have your say on the long-term future of our landscape and Network" "Here's the first event."	1. Notice board outside town Supermarkets	4 weeks before first event and update after each stage is complete, with new opportunities to be involved	Develop poster at a Network meeting, then one person manage each site

Consider the following:

- **Personal contact** (door-to-door, phone calling) from an active Group member or support staff. Personal invitation is usually the best method; however, it can be time-consuming. Committee members and any staff could take responsibility for inviting 2 - 3 people each from a cross section of members and partners.
- **A physical display** in public places, across your Landcare Network area, where people will stop and read about the development of the Network Strategy and where updates can be posted as the Strategy develops. Displays should be located in high-traffic, high-visibility areas, such as notice boards in supermarkets, produce stores or the main street in town.
- **Flyer/advertisement** announcing the plan development, its purpose and opportunities to be involved, in the Network newsletter and local papers, potentially with an editorial.
- **Utilise other networks** of community organizations, such as schools and community health centres. An announcement about the plan development, its purpose and opportunities to be involved can be made in the form of an ad or a flyer in their newsletters.

- **Promote upcoming meetings and events** where the plan will be developed. Local newspapers, radio stations and internet service providers often have a community noticeboard section or paid advertising at reasonable rates.



Make it easy for people to get involved:

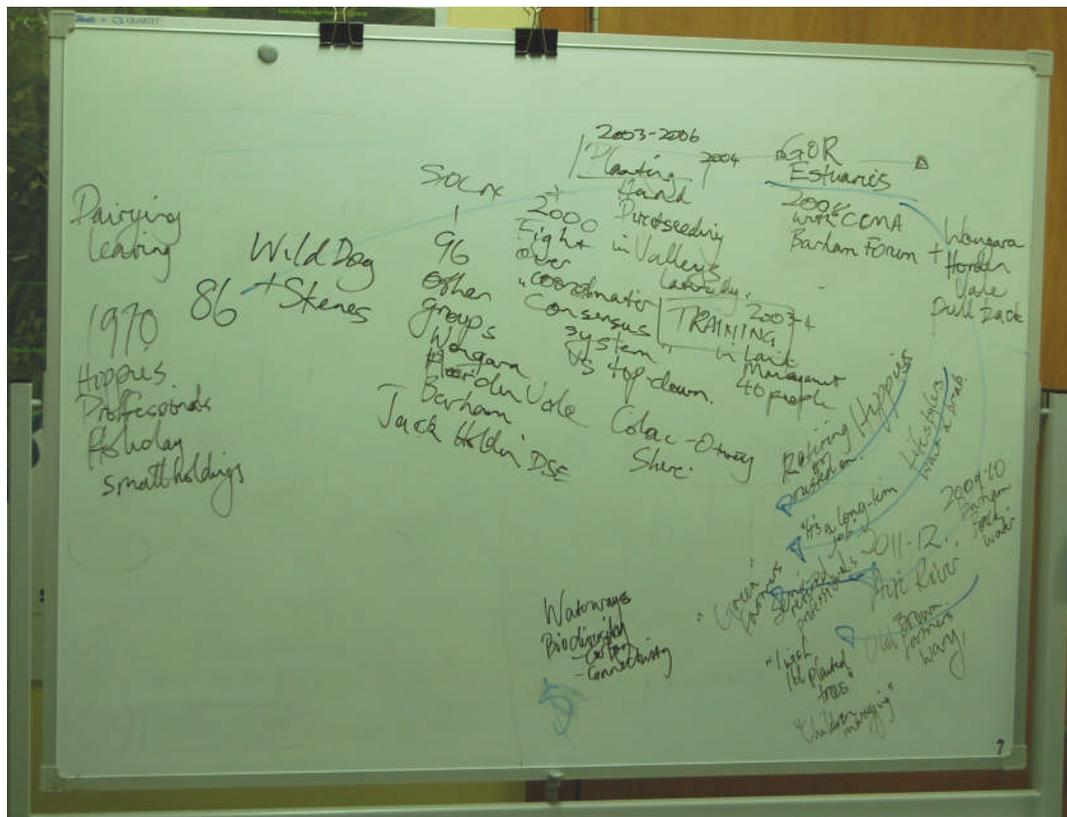
- **Hold planning session(s) on a day that suits most people** – ask people in advance about days of the week, night or day etc that suits them
- Use a survey or interviews to collect ideas and information from people who are interested but can't attend the sessions
- **Avoid other meetings and event dates** in the local area and avoid those if possible
- **Include food** - a pizza night or shared meal of some sort is often a highlight in people's memories of good events
- **Include a farm walk or bus tour** to see something new or interesting – this could be held in the middle of the session to re-invigorate people's minds
- If the plan is being developed at ordinary Network meetings, **break up the process** into smaller more manageable bits, and complete the plan in sections.

Step 3. Get everyone on the same page

Some Landcare members were in Landcare when it began, and some joined last week. For most Networks, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge. A lot of things have worked well, some things have been disasters, and a lot has been learned.

People have all this in the back of their minds when they start planning—it's good to get it out in the open where it can be part of the shared memory. Use the **timeline exercise**:

- Draw a timeline from when Landcare started in the area till now.
- Invite people to say when they joined Landcare, why, and one significant event for them in the life of the Network.
- Add these events to the timeline. Make sure people hear what was significant about the major events.



- If there's a big crowd, put up a few events from early in the timeline, then give people cards to write on and post up themselves. Then go over the big events and ask: "What was significant about this event?"

Step 4. Our Network's vision and mission

Your **vision** is the future you want to see. A vision statement is a picture of your landscape and its communities in the future, that answers the question, "**Where do we want to go?**" and "**What do we hope to create?**"

A vision is the Network's hopes for its community and region, to which its programs will make a contribution. Capture the passion and imagination of those involved in the Network. To help people picture the future and inspire them to be involved, go beyond one or two years, to 10, 20 or 50 years into the future. Don't worry about precisely how you are going to get there.

Your **mission** is what you will contribute to making the vision a reality, a brief description of a Network's fundamental purpose. A mission statement answers the question, "**Why do we exist?**" The mission statement articulates the Network's purpose for members, for partners and investors, and for the community. It should be practical, concise and capture the heart.

How to create a Mission Statement

1. *Make a list of all the things your Network does.* For example....
Host field Days/ Manage projects/ Facilitate training courses for farmers
2. *Ask "why"?* Why do we do those things and operate in that way? We do what we do *so that* ?
3. *Describe how you do it.* What principles and values guide the way you operate as a Network?
4. *Pick out the activities, the "whys" and the principles that feel most important,* and try drafting some statements of purpose. Begin with several. For example

"Engage member groups and partners in a collaborative effort to protect our environment and farming." and

"Manage projects professionally and ensure equal access to resources for all member groups."

5. *Make it concise and heartfelt.* Pick the best of what you've got, then put **heart** into it.

From "Our Network's purpose is to manage projects professionally and ensure equal access to resources so the vision and mission of all our member groups are achieved."

To this: "Western Plains Landcare Network distributes resources and provides professional project management to ensure all member groups feel valued and supported."

Principles communicate *how* you propose to work with others. If you put them in the strategic plan, they are a commitment that all the choices and behaviour of the Network will be guided by those principles. They send a message to potential members and partners, saying “*This is how we operate.*” This makes it easier for people to decide if they want to work with the Network and for the Network to see how they align with others.

Stephen Covey proposes that principles are universal and timeless and include such things as trust, fairness, service, courage, humility, integrity, human dignity. Values, he suggests, are more personal and subjective, and govern people’s behaviour. Covey is adamant that it is principles that ultimately guide action and shape consequences.

List the principles and values that are important in how your Network conducts its activities, for example:

Principles	Values
Build trust and collaborate effectively	Honesty in business dealings
Ensure equal access to resources	A healthy environment
Serve the needs of our member groups	Innovation in land management

Pick the most important, then check that these are expressed in your mission statement. If the mission statement is good as it is, add your principles after your mission

Principles need to be agreed upon by those involved, universal in the context of the Network and timeless too – the way you will operate whatever happens. Adding the timeless aspect helps to limit subjectivity from influencing the choices. In a strategic planning workshop, small groups can each work on the wording of one or two principles.

TIP: Don’t get carried away – limit the number of principles to no more than four. If they are going to guide the way you operate, they have to be easy to recall.

For more on vision, mission and principle, see The Enterprise Foundation (1999b) *Effective Strategic Planning: Getting Your Organization Focused and Directed*. Go to <http://www.setoolbelt.org/resources/740>

Step 5. What are our strengths and weaknesses? What are the opportunities and threats around us?

Take an honest look at your Network and its groups. What are your

- **Strengths** - the things that make your Network stand out, including skills, attributes and people
- **Weaknesses** - the internal factors that reduce the likelihood of success, including skills, attributes and people.

Take a long range view of the world in which the Network operates and will operate in the future. Consider economic, environmental, community and policy trends. What are the

- **Opportunities** – forces and changes that offer potential for the Network to improve or expand what it does
- **Threats** - the external factors that could impact negatively on the Network and its ability to succeed in its mission.

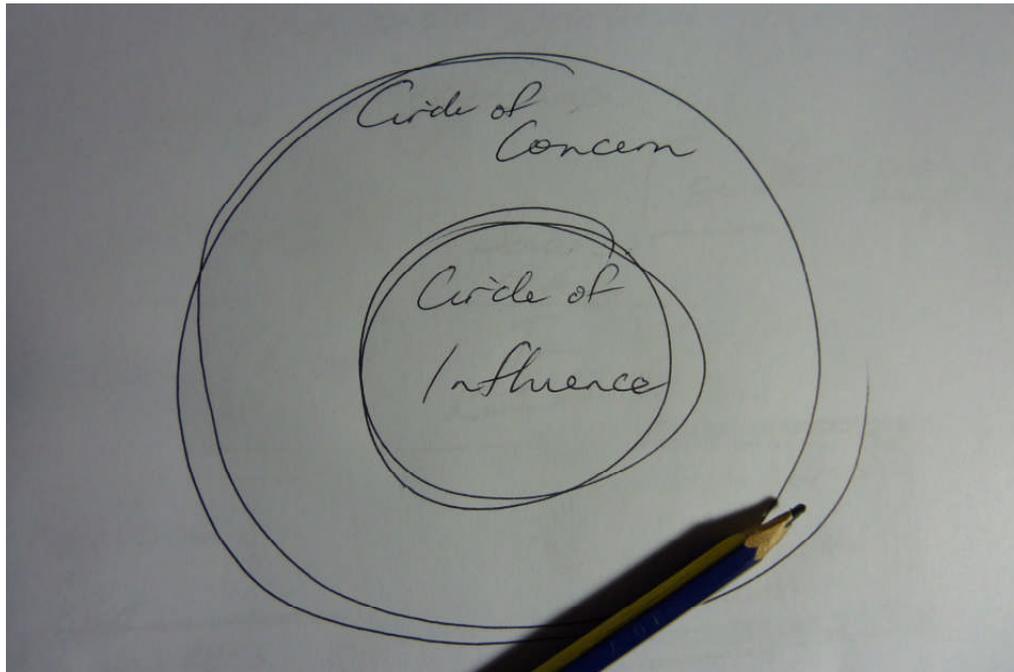
A sample SWOT assessment completed during a Strategic Planning workshop

Strengths – What makes our Landcare Network stand out?	Weaknesses – How is our capacity limited?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Introducing landholders to new sustainable concepts and ideas. <input type="checkbox"/> Engaging farmers in new practices. <input type="checkbox"/> Providing high quality education and training programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Valuing diversity of ideas while maintaining respect for individuals. <input type="checkbox"/> Lobbying and obtaining funding. <input type="checkbox"/> Completing projects while maintaining the passion. <input type="checkbox"/> Staff expertise and their ability to learn. <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluating and monitoring programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not having security for our programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating the complexity and depth of who we are and what we do. <input type="checkbox"/> Employment security – Staff retention and succession planning. <input type="checkbox"/> Realistic and logical project implementation – strategic planning tools. <input type="checkbox"/> Promotion of our programs and engaging volunteers.
Opportunities – Where do opportunities lie for our Network to fulfil its mission?	Threats – What factors will limit or inhibit our ability to succeed?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Foster sustainable behaviour in the community through our projects and programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous engagement in programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Commercialise our successes. <input type="checkbox"/> Market activities to the community, targeting non-members and non-active members. <input type="checkbox"/> Expand our training program. <input type="checkbox"/> Improve use and relevance of the Catchment Management Framework. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a weeds education program. <input type="checkbox"/> Participating in carbon markets. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide environmental services to other organisations. <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing Board development and succession. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of grass roots involvement and people drifting away. <input type="checkbox"/> Governance – financial, HR, organisational; making sure the organisation is solvent and safe. <input type="checkbox"/> Committee burn out <input type="checkbox"/> Balancing linear and innovative thinkers. How do we get them to work together? <input type="checkbox"/> Changing environmental conditions: Our understanding, community perceptions and capability of reacting to these changes. <input type="checkbox"/> Holding onto our core purpose while adding new business opportunities.

Step 6. What will make or break our success?

Being strategic means choosing the pathway that will be most likely to lead you toward your vision. It might take a while to reach the results you want, but if you're on the right pathway, your effort will pay-off in the long-term.

Look at your SWOT analysis, and put aside things you might be concerned about, but that the Network cannot do much about – the state of the rural economy for example. Ask “What's in our circle of *influence*?” – the things we can do something about.



Then ask:

- What strengths can be made more of or expanded?
- Improving which weakness will yield the greatest benefit?
- What opportunities are most promising?
- Which threats will harm us most, but can be turned around?

Allow for plenty of debate here around the question *What will make or break our success as a Network?* Aim for 4 to 6 factors, around which you will build your strategies.

Keeping it to a maximum of six ensures that what you set out to do is achievable. Remember, each strategy will have several objectives sitting beneath it and actions to deliver on the strategy.

Then frame each factor you choose as a strategy. For example

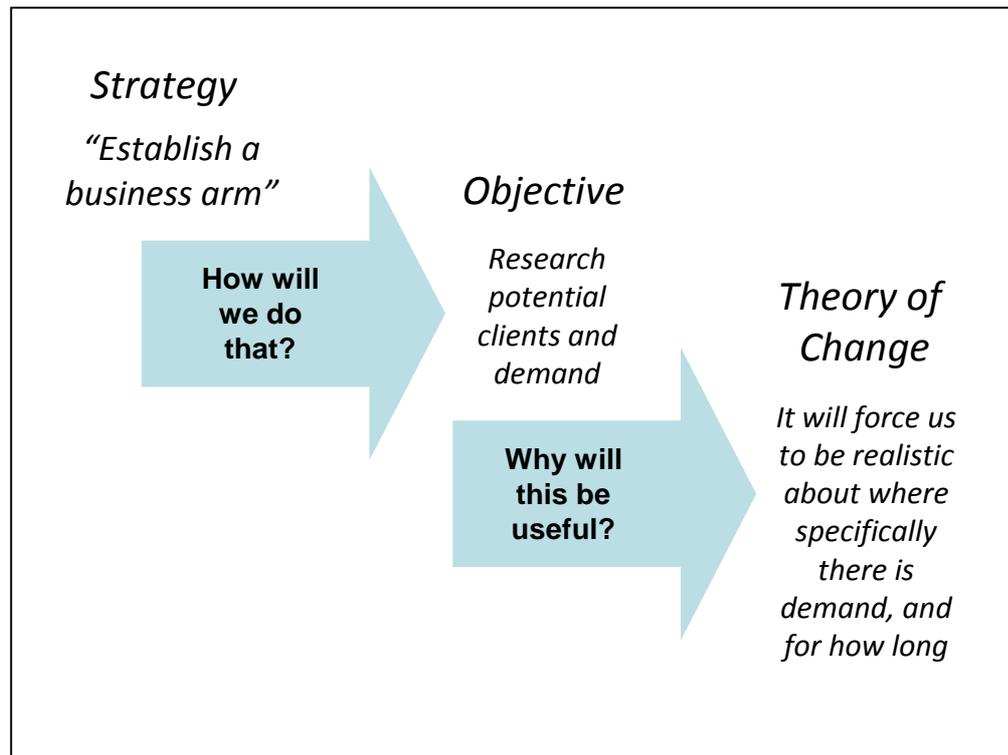
From the SWOT analysis	The Strategies
<i>Strength:</i> Providing high quality education and training programs	Develop a training framework that meets the knowledge and skills development needs of our diverse rural community and which underpins our sustainable agriculture program
<i>Weakness:</i> Communicating the complexity and depth of who we are and what we do	Improve our communications to promote what we do through consistent messages and methods, leading to better engagement with members and volunteers
<i>Opportunity:</i> Commercialise our successes.	Establish a business arm to the Network which can commercialise our successes and take advantage of burgeoning markets in the environmental services sector
<i>Threats:</i> Loss of grass roots involvement and people drifting away/ Holding onto our core purpose while adding new business opportunities	Ensure our mission, which includes servicing the needs of our member Groups, is reflected in all that we do

TIP: A regular review of the Strategic Plan will enable you to adapt strategies to changes that have occurred, or drop some and add new ones as you achieve them. So keep the full list to refer to as you progress.

Step 7. Objectives and theories of change

The next step is to develop objectives that will lead to the fulfilment of the strategies above. It is important to reflect here on what approaches are being proposed and why.

For each strategy, ask ‘how’ will you achieve this strategy. Then for every “how”, ask ‘why’ this will be useful. This will generate methods and explicit theories of change.



Record objectives to reflect the methods and theory of change and list them beneath the relevant strategies. Each strategy can have several objectives.

When you have all your objectives, you can illustrate them in a **Program Logic**, showing how objectives lead to achieving strategies, and in turn to delivering on your mission and visions. That will test first, whether the objectives work well together, and second, whether you’ve bitten off more than you can chew. If it all looks too much - maybe it is!

A guide to using Program Logic is provided in Part 4 – Project Planning for Landcare Groups and Networks.

Step 8. Partnerships and resources

It can be useful at this stage to identify potential people or organisations who can work with the Network on each Strategy (*how* to engage them will be in the steps detailed in the Operational Plan). If you have existing partners collaborating with the Network, these could be listed under the relevant strategies. Potential partners could be listed separately and kept as an internal document.

Write one or two short paragraphs on your approach to securing and using resources and funding. This description needs to reflect the Network's principles. A list of resources and funding opportunities relevant to each strategy can be listed beneath the partners and opportunities to collaborate.

For planning for financial success of the Network, see Part 4, Business Planning Options for Landcare Networks.

Step 9. Governance and capacity

Landcare Network governance is the process of managing the Network through consistent processes, cohesive policies and agreed decision-rights for office bearers, members and staff.

Many Networks have developed policies and procedures which outline their governance and compile them into a **Governance Manual**. There are several helpful **Landcare Notes** on the Landcare Gateway site that provide the basics of Network governance, such as incorporation, risk management and committee function and roles.

Additionally, there is now a **Certificate IV in Governance**, especially designed for Community Organisations and through doing this course a nominated representative of the Network could compile a governance manual.

In the Network Strategic Plan, the decision making structures and the roles of committees, staff and member Groups in the governance of the Network need to be covered. This can be done very effectively as an organisational chart - a diagrammatical representation of how each part of the Network relates to the others.

The Strategic Plan should also consider ***what capacities need to be developed to deliver on the Strategic Plan***. Some of this will already be written into the strategies and their objectives. But there may be capacities that are being taken for granted, but in fact will take time and resources to develop, like internal management systems, monitoring and reporting processes, and staff skills.

Step 10. Monitoring, evaluation and review

Monitoring. The following is a suggested process for monitoring the fulfilment of Network Operational and Strategic Plans.

1. Annual Operational Plans are written to fulfil strategies and objectives.
2. Quarterly work plans are written and reviewed to enable staff or nominated person(s) to undertake steps in Operational Plan.
3. Reports that highlight progress against items in the Operational Plan are presented to the Network Committee and feedback sought if necessary.
4. A sub-committee or nominated representative is called upon to provide guidance to staff on the implementation of the Operational Plan.
5. Network Committee or a sub-committee evaluate the progress and success of the Strategic Plan and adjust any details as needs be once a year.
6. Strategic Plan is completely reviewed every five years, going through all the steps.

Evaluating the progress and success of the Strategic Plan requires setting up evaluation questions. Ask questions such as:

- What sort of guidance did the objectives provide to the Operational Plan and has this led to fulfilment of the Strategies?
- Have the achievements under each strategy over the past 12 months contributed to the fulfilment of our mission?
- What changes, if necessary, will we make to how we fulfil the strategies?
- Is the fulfilment of our mission helping to achieve our vision?

Reviewing. A good life span for a Strategic Plan is five years. If a plan is actively used, monitored and evaluated as outlined above it will be much easier to review and update at the five year mark.

To review and update your plan it is beneficial to ask people to first assess the benefits of action achieved from the previous plan. Ask questions such as:

- Did we achieve outcomes that fulfil our strategies?
- What have been the results and benefits?

Then consider whether to continue focussing on the strategies of the previous plan or modify that focus somehow:

- Do we still have work to do on each strategy?
- What new objectives should we set?
- Do we need to adjust our activities from being problem to solution focussed?

- Do we need to seek expert advice or undertake research to fill knowledge gaps to better inform our actions?
- Can we let go of this issue now and move onto other opportunities?

A review is also an opportunity to celebrate. If your Network has used your plan well, there is likely to be a lot of achievement to recognise.

A workshop could be designed to review and celebrate achievements, then progress into planning the next iteration of the Network Strategic Plan. Most of the steps outlined in this guide are relevant, however for each component of the new plan you will be asking people to compare it with the elements of the plan under review.

The Operational Plan

A Network Operational Plan is similar to a Landcare Group Action Plan. It sets out the steps that can be taken to fulfil each objective of each strategy, and include resources, who will be involved and when each step will happen, usually over one year. ***These steps need to be realistic in terms of the capacity of the Network.***

Creating the Operational Plan is really the realm of staff with potential input from a sub-committee of the Network. If the Network has no employed staff, ideally a sub-committee, member of the Board or co-opted member of the Network will be nominated to take responsibility for creating an Operational Plan.

The Operational Plan in turn guides the work plans of any staff and the achievement of the steps. It is the principle reference point in Co-ordinator reports to the Network. These reports should avoid going into too much detail so the Network Committee can maintain its strategic focus and not get bogged down in the nitty gritty of the operational steps.

Focus on a few successes and or any limitations relevant to the fulfilment of any of the strategies being worked on. If there are no staff, then the person(s) responsible for undertaking any steps in the Operational Plan can report to the Network on how the plan is progressing.

If staff do need more guidance in working on particular Strategies, then perhaps the Chair, a sub-committee or another Network representative can be set up for the staff to call on as a reference Group.

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This Guide is current as of May 2013, and downloadable from www.basscoastlandcare.org.au/resources .

References, useful web sites and templates for use in planning processes are provided in a separate, alphabetically listed document . These will also be revised from time-to-time.

We value your thoughts about the Guides, and your experiences as you use them. Send a note to moragh@vic.chariot.net.au .