



SUBMISSION on the Australian Government Consultation Paper “Help Shape the National Landcare Program”

28st August 2014

The Victorian Landcare Council (VLC) was established in 2008 to represent the interests of volunteer landcare in Victoria. In 2011, the Victorian Landcare Network, the organisation representing landcare professionals, merged with the VLC.

The Council is governed by delegates elected from each of Victoria's 10 NRM regions.. Council meets at least three times a year, with the day to day activities being overseen by an elected Committee of Management of 12, meeting bimonthly. VLC is a member of the National Landcare Network.

This submission has been authorised by the Committee of Management of the Victorian Landcare Council. The submission is NOT confidential

Contact Name: Dr Kaye Rodden

Position: Secretary

Organisation: Victorian Landcare Council

Address: “Belvedere” 160 Kahls Rd Gnarwarre 3221 Victoria

Phone: (03) 52651241

Mobile: 0438317499

Email: nidgee@reachnet.com.au

1a) *What opportunities are there for greater partnerships within the natural resource management community, including landcare, and what is the best way to foster/encourage these partnerships?*

Opportunities

Trust and respect between regional bodies and Landcare.

Participation by Landcare Networks in decision making at regional level, that finds a place for Landcare as a self-organising, volunteer effort, alongside government NRM programs.

To foster this :

1. Secure baseline funding for Landcare Networks that assures their presence in communities as facilitators of action and learning, and their participation in NRM planning at local, landscape and regional scale.
2. Improve engagement and planning by Landcare Networks with their local communities.
3. Develop robust mechanisms for joint decision making with regional bodies, specifically for *articulating local priorities, resource allocation, joint design* of programs of action and projects, and *evaluation* of programs and projects.
4. Talk regularly with Landcare, to build understanding of each others' perspective and priorities, and to develop trust, which is often low.
5. Discuss the respective roles of Landcare Networks, landcare groups and their CMA under different delivery mechanisms.
6. Agree on purposes and data to record NRM change, resource this collection, and make available the tools for using it at any point in the region, by any NRM contributor.

1b) *How could support for state and national Landcare networks best underpin the objectives of the programme and support the activity of all landcare-type groups?*

1. Provide support for Landcare organisations of each region to develop their own agenda for a) building their capacity for engagement and planning, b) improving collaboration with CMAs, c) understanding policy and giving their opinion to policy makers.
2. With Landcare Networks, assess current capacity and areas for development, and develop and cost models for capacity building of Landcare.
3. Support knowledge sharing between Landcare Networks, within a region and across regions, about best practices in organising community action, influencing decision makers, and collaborating in partnerships.
4. Participate with CMAs in development of simple and powerful measures of engagement and the practices that generate engagement at local and regional level.
5. With Landcare Networks, assess what is working and not working in Landcare participation in the Green Army and 20 Million Trees programmes, and provide feedback to the Commonwealth.
6. Build State Landcare network capacity to advocate/negotiate with all stakeholders, and to support the development of processes of discussion and consultation with regional landcare communities that enables landcare members to contribute to policy discussion, feedback to policy makers, and the creation of policies and procedures that do in fact make Landcare simple, local, and long-term.

1c) *How can regional natural resource management organisations strengthen Landcare and community networks within and*

1. 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 attempt to decide what will be best by themselves. 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

between regions?

their regional NRM organisation

2. Baseline funding. Give Landcare Networks a permanent, responsive presence in communities.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. Learning across regions. Share improvements in any of the above mechanisms between regions.

1d) What opportunities are there for actively including Indigenous people in decision making and delivery of natural resource management?

1. Encourage landcare communities to partner with indigenous communities in planning and implementation of landscape change is a win-win situation. Indigenous communities can provide extraordinarily valuable expertise in managing native flora and fauna for the long term benefit of the communities that live there and for the landscape itself.
2. Consult with Indigenous communities in planning for local priorities that affect Indigenous interests.
3. Share knowledge with indigenous groups and corporations involved in planning for country, learning about the challenges they face and what they have found works in organising community action, influencing decision makers, and collaborating in partnerships.

1e) What methods work best for sharing information and lessons learned with others engaged in landcare?

1. Support Networks to facilitate discussion about what is working and what needs to work better in their organising of action, their influencing of decision makers within communities, and their collaboration at local and regional level.
2. Support community leaders and staff in Landcare and other NRM community groups forming the peer relationships they can use for on-going support and learning, and support mentoring by experienced leaders and staff.
3. Document stories that exemplify practices, in rich media (text, images, video, audio), giving as much space to the person and their context as to the practices, so that other landcarers can see and feel the potency of those practices in that person's life.
4. Make stories available on the web and in print, and take the stories on the road to spread lessons learned across regions, breaking down the constraints of distance that currently block learning within the Landcare community.
5. Support communities of practice specific to different aspects of Landcare and NRM (by asset type, by landscape type or by agricultural industry), linking volunteer landcarers with paid staff in government programs. Get their honest assessment of what is working and what

needs to work better in NRM.

1f) How can regional natural resource management organisations better promote the achievements and outcomes of landcare?

1. At regional level, put Landcare and community capacity into program logics, and measure, qualitatively and quantitatively, the impact of Landcare on intermediate and long-term outcomes, for biophysical assets, and for community and individual health.
2. Ask landcarers for their own stories of success and struggle to improve landscape health while managing properties and enterprises profitably, and create platforms (print, web and face-to-face) where landcarers can present their own stories to members of their local community, and to others in the NRM industry.

2) What are the best mechanisms to achieve greater participation by the community, including landcare representation, in:

Victoria has support mechanisms for community participation at several levels in its NRM system:

2a) regionally-based natural resource management planning?

- State level Landcare policy;
- Regional level Landcare coordinators and regional Landcare Support Plans;
- CMA policy on engagement and participation;
- CMA engagement of communities in development of asset-based and regional strategies;
- in some regions, regular forums between landcarers and CMAs, and partnership agreements between CMAs and their Landcare Networks.

2b) setting local and regional priorities and aligning them with national outcomes?

2c) decision making on natural resource management investments?

Engagement of and participation by the community, across the four aspects of NRM described at Q2a to 2d, will improve not through further statements of principle, which are already well articulated (with the exception of definition of core concepts), or of overly specific guidelines from the Commonwealth, but through workable mechanisms, resourcing of those mechanisms, regular assessment of their efficacy, and further improvement based on that assessment, within each region. Specifically, what is required is:

2d) delivery of National Landcare Programme projects?

1. Clarify, in dialogue with thought leaders in NRM, of what the terms "community", "engagement" and "participation" each refer to.
2. Review by CMAs and Landcare Networks of what is currently working well to support community engagement and participation, and what needs to work better, so that all parties within a region build on what is working.
3. A commitment on the part of paid NRM staff, evidenced in behaviour, to listen to and make use of community knowledge and opinion, and so to build up trust and respect between community members and government programs.
4. Strengthening planning at landscape scale, the scale at which community members identify with large areas of catchments, and feel themselves to have a stake in what happens.
5. Joint planning between community Landcare and regional NRM bodies, of specific improvements to engagement and participation mechanisms, and resourcing of those improvements, so that regionally-relevant mechanisms can be developed, and one-size-fits-all solutions are avoided.
6. Financial support for Landcare members who travel long distances to workshops and regular meetings to contribute to NRM planning alongside paid staff.
7. Design of simple and robust measures of participation and

engagement, and use of those measures to provide feedback on the effectiveness within a region of current mechanism of engagement and participation.

3a) What expectations should regional natural resource management organisations be required to meet in terms of community engagement and participation, including with Indigenous groups, landholders, landcare and other community groups, and local governments?

Expectations need to be negotiated between current 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:

1. Identification of relevant stakeholders and their interests;
2. Decisions as to the depth of engagement and participation of various stakeholders (for example, partnering, collaborating, consulting or informing different types of stakeholder);
3. An explicit understanding of where engagement and participation sits within a program logic and how it contributes to outcomes;
4. Communication to stakeholders of the planned engagement process for a decision, program or project, and communication of where that engagement process sits within regional and government decision making;
5. Design of participation processes in collaboration with experienced community members, such as those active in Landcare groups and Networks;
6. Support to participants to develop the capacity to participate, including their understanding of policy, technical information and history, and the practical arrangements, such as the timing and child care, that will enable them to participate;
7. Processes through which participants can understand each others' interests, their common interests, and their areas of difference, and negotiate a level of agreement on directions and actions needed;
8. Assessment of the effectiveness of engagement and participation.

3b) How could the governance and community engagement performance of regional natural resource management organisations best be measured and communicated to their communities?

Given the limited resources for assessment of all aspects of NRM, and the levels of ignorance and mistrust of regional NRM bodies in many communities, measures need to be simple.

Governance and community engagement can be measured at the level of activities and outcomes, with outcome measures the most informative. Outcomes are manifest in the relationships between NRM contributors, the social networks and norms of a community, and the biophysical outcomes of projects, with outcomes slower to appear along this chain.

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.

5a) The Australian Government will take

See above for measures of governance and community engagement

more of a 'hands off' role in relation to setting regional priorities and making decisions on projects. How can we make sure the programme is still accountable with respect to natural resource management outcomes and community participation?

5b) How can regions and the Australian Government best use simplified reporting to demonstrate the on-ground benefits of natural resource management investment to the broader public?

performance.

As to demonstrating the benefits of NRM investment to the broader public, we observe that systems for monitoring environmental condition are fragmented across different assets and jurisdictions, that the *purpose* of monitoring systems is split between accountability for public spending, and development of scientific knowledge of ecosystems, and that systems contain little accountability to resource users like farmers. Monitoring also focuses too much on activities, or on resource condition, and not much on the links between activity and condition. There is little orientation to reporting the results of investment to the broader public.

The development of better accounting of outcomes of NRM investment will be facilitated by reporting requirements that:

1. Spell out in broad terms the information needs of different users of environmental accounts (government funders, NRM managers, farmers and other land managers and urban residents);
2. Devolve to regional level responsibility for developing those environmental accounts which vary according to regional conditions and stakeholders;
3. Require regional NRM bodies to understand the purposes for which specific stakeholders and community segments will make use of environmental accounts in their region, and to show how their environmental accounts serve these purposes;
4. Require regional NRM bodies to measure intermediate outcomes that indicate progress toward long-term outcomes, and to measure improvement in social and biophysical outcomes.