



## **SUBMISSION**

To

**The Hon. Mr Greg Hunt MP**

Federal Member for Flinders  
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and  
Heritage

November 2012

## COVER SHEET

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](mailto:nidgee@reachnet.com.au)

**This submission is NOT confidential**

### **About the Victorian Landcare Council**

*The Victorian Landcare Council (VLC) was established in 2008 to represent the interests of volunteer landcare in Victoria, in pursuing an healthy and sustainable environment.*

*In 2011 the organisation representing "landcare professionals" voted to merge with the Victorian Landcare Council.*

*The Council is now made up of six delegates selected by each of the 10 CMA regions in Victoria, 5 volunteers and one paid support person. The Council meets at least three times a year, with the day to day activities being overseen by an elected Committee of Management of 12, which meets bimonthly.*

*The VLC is recognised as a peak "landcare organisation" by both federal and state agencies.*

*Two VLC delegates represent Victoria on the National Landcare Network.*

The Victorian Landcare Council (VLC) thanks the Federal Member for Flinders for his invitation to contribute to the Federal Opposition's policy entitled "Blueprint for Australia" and in particular how this policy can be used to support and enhance the key role that the landcare movement plays in the sustainable and productive management of the Australian landscape.

The landcare "army" is a formidable resource of over half a million volunteers Australia wide. From urban landscapes, such as the Merri Creek and West Gate Bridge, to the Wimmera, this force is knowledgeable and respected by the communities it represents and conservatively contributes at least 400 million dollars to the Australian economy. Landcare established in communities provides a network of volunteers ready to respond to emergencies and a framework for the next generation of leaders to develop a volunteer ethic with the capacity to leverage each public dollar invested by a factor of at least five dollars or more.

The role that the landcare movement has played over the last 25 years in the rehabilitation of the Australian landscape is well documented. The landcare of the future however will be called on to play a much more significant role in creating a landscape which is resilient under pressure from changing climatic, social and economic conditions.

- A landscape which contains healthy ecosystems, so essential to providing clean water and air to the broader community.
- A landscape which is productive, to meet the global challenge of feeding the world in the future.
- And, most significantly, a landscape which is sustainable. Managed for the long term for multiple benefits.

The healthy productive Australian landscape of the future needs a federal policy which will.....

- Recognise and give priority to natural resource management issues, including soil health, and water quality and availability, that enhance the resilience and sustainability of Australia's capacity to produce food in the face of a global food crisis in the next 50 years.
- Increase support and funding for improving the capture and storage of atmospheric carbon in the soil and increasing agricultural production, through the use of deep rooted species and grazing management.
- Provide more reliable and predictable funding support for local landcare group leadership by allocating 10% of project grants for co-ordination and 5% for administration.

- Provide funding for landcare professionals supporting landcare networks on a triennial basis to enhance job security and encourage career pathways.
- Ensure that landcare practitioners at both local, network and peak body levels, such as the VLC and National Landcare Network, are supported so that they can have input into the setting of priorities, to ensure a bottom up approach to landcare projects, policy and support.
- Minimise the bureaucracy and prescriptive restraints that landcare practitioners experience through having to meet the compliance requirements set by government departments and natural resource management authorities

In a meeting with representatives from the VLC , Mr Terry Hubbard (Chair) and executive members Mr Sandy MacKenzie and Dr Kaye Rodden, on 15<sup>th</sup> June in Melbourne, Mr Hunt discussed a number of reforms to the way natural resource management would be supported by a future coalition government. Mr Hunt later announced these reforms in parliament during Landcare week in September. In summary these reforms are:-

- Simplification of landcare bureaucracy
- Target investment to local level
- Investment cycle lengthened

In response to Mr Hunt's request for further input, the VLC make the following comments related specifically to these reforms.

1. Landcare cannot be pigeon holed into "conservation", "resource management", community engagement or agricultural production.

If we are to achieve a "cleaner environment" then community, urban and rural, need to be actively engaged in the planning and implementation of the strategies associated with all four of the key priority areas identified in the flow charts which were used by Mr Hunt to illustrate his environment policy .

- Direct action to reduce emissions
- Land health
- Water health
- Natural heritage

The landcare army is already established and working. What is needed is an integrated approach to landscape management. Pigeon holing "landcare "into "clean land" will not achieve the outcomes required. Government policies that give separate attention to each aspect of the environment always run up against the problem of how to integrate these within the actual landscape. This is not a simple problem to solve. Giving a policy area a clear focus on one aspect of the environment does bring specialist knowledge to bear, and clarifies accountability. However, we need an equally strong mechanism to integrate the pieces of environmental action as they play out in real communities and living landscapes.

Landcare groups see day-by-day the reticence of government bureaucrats to "share" resources to provide an integrated approach, leading to duplication of administrative and reporting requirements and rejection of projects which attempt to cross policy boundaries.

Landcare provides a low-cost, highly credible mechanism through which the different streams of government action can be integrated, but only if each distinct program engages with landcare in designing how best to implement its goals on the ground, only if landcare is resourced with staff who can build relationships and negotiate with the programs working in their landscapes.

**Give policy and programs a clear agenda, but use Landcare to integrate action at local level.**

2. The VLC strongly endorses the commitment by Mr Hunt to increase investment in local initiatives and priorities, with an emphasis on lengthening the funding cycle. The associated step is not just to start-up new projects, but to finish them off. That's a long-term proposition. Replanting waterways for cleaner water, for example, requires maintenance once the plants are in the ground.

**Landcare is community members with a long term commitment to caring for our landscape—let's have government funding making a long-term commitment.**

3. The increased recognition by senior policy bureaucrats of the significant role that the landcare movement plays in achieving sustainable and productive natural resource management across the nation is almost entirely due to lobbying by a group of persistent landcare volunteers.

The VLC strongly endorse the role of the National Landcare Network (NLN), the peak national body which represents landcare volunteers from across Australia. It operates on a shoe string, and there is no formal process for the NLN to be heard by government. The VLC would like to see this rectified, with formal representation on the Australian Landcare Council (ALC or equivalent) which is the current ministerially appointed advisory group.

**Bring community landcare into national policy discussions by giving the National Landcare Network a seat at the table.**

4. For every dollar invested from the public purse, the Landcare community invest at least \$5. One of failures of the current asset based system of prioritising investment is that it does not view “an healthy community” as an ASSET. In hindsight this seems quite remarkable, similar perhaps to omitting productive arable land from the equation to achieve food security. The Landcare community

is recognised across the scientific community as pivotal to achieving NRM outcomes.

**Support the community as an asset that builds a clean environment, build it into the investment framework, and you will drive other investment further.**

5. Most of the time, the rewards from volunteering outweigh the costs. Being able to achieve significant landscape change and enhance the long term productivity of our scarce resource base, soil, water and biodiversity, is a long term challenge, and landcare volunteers keep going despite the difficulties.

The expectation that these same volunteers also need to become bureaucrats and satisfy the onerous reporting, auditing and governance guidelines of government and also travel extensive distances to meetings, all at their own expense, dampens the volunteer spirit.

**Reduce the administrative burden placed on the landcare community, and provide administrative resources to meet the costs of reasonable accountability.**