

Speech by Rob Dulhunty
To open the 2017 NSW Landcare Conference
25 October 2017

Good afternoon everyone, it's great to be here.

For those I haven't yet met, I got involved in Landcare 28 years ago on my family property in Glen Innes. I helped to establish my local Landcare group and I was present at the meeting where it was decided to form Landcare NSW as a statewide peak body and voice for Landcare. I have been voluntary chair of Landcare NSW since 2012. I am also on the board of the National Landcare Network.

I begin my address by thanking Aunty Denise McGrath for her welcome and acknowledging that we meet on the land of the Wiradjuri people.

I pay my respects to the Wiradjuri nation and recognise their elders, past and present.

In acknowledging the traditional owners, we recognise the unique identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – they are the original owners and continuing custodians of the land.

We thank you for looking after the land, and for generously sharing your knowledge and culture.

We also acknowledge the heartache of our history and re-commit to the process of reconciliation and renewal.

All of us are here today because we care about the land...we are connected to the land...and we want to look after it for future generations.

This is something we share, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal...and I hope it will be a strong and unifying theme for this gathering.

May I also recognise:

- The Deputy Mayor of Albury City Council, Councillor David Thurley
- Richard Bull, Chairman of Local Land Services
- Other senior Government and community Landcare representatives
- Keynote speakers and eminent Australians Stan Grant and Dr Karl
- I also acknowledge the conference organising committee and all those who have put in the hard work to bring us together in this wonderful event.

Finally, I acknowledge each and every person here today.

You are all Landcarers...whether you are a government officer, a community Landcare worker, a volunteer, a student, a business person, or a member of the record contingent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates.

Whether you are one of the original Landcarers who helped found the movement 28 years ago, or a young person starting out in your Landcare career to everyone, I extend a warm welcome to the *NSW Landcare and Local Land Services Conference*.

It is an honour for me to officially open the Conference along with my colleague Richard Bull, chairman of Local Land Services.

I would like to acknowledge the support Landcare has received from Richard and Local Land Services – and also from Minister Blair who has portfolio responsibility for Landcare.

Managing the vast landmass we have in NSW...looking after our soils and water...creating conditions to support biodiversity...working across all land tenures...is a big and complex job.

Too big for government; too big for community.

The only realistic way of looking after the land and tackling the myriad problems we face, is through collaboration.

The essential ingredient to making the partnership work is commitment. And we have seen that in abundance from Richard and his team.

Thank you, Richard, for your support and leadership. It is genuinely appreciated.

Collaboration requires us to understand and appreciate what each of us brings to the table, and to learn how to work together to make progress and survive the inevitable bumps in the road.

At the state level we have a Landcare NSW/Local Land Services *Joint Management Committee* co-chaired by Richard and myself. It is responsible for co-governance and co-management of the *Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative*.

As community Landcarers our message to Government has been: don't take us for granted.

We are willing to be a partner in caring for our land but we can't do it without support...every volunteer movement needs coordination, administration, training, information, recognition and funding.

Landcare is no different.

These structures must be built and they must be maintained.

Landcare has been around for nearly 30 years. We know the model works and we know it is resilient – but we also know Landcare has barely clung on during lean times.

Our job at Landcare NSW is to provide a conduit from the grassroots to Government.

That's what we've been doing and I'm pleased to say that the Government has been listening.

Of course, as community Landcarers, we also need to listen to our partners in Government.

And what they've told us is that we need to gather evidence...we need to continue to improve our operations at all levels and we need to find ways to reduce our reliance on government funding.

We have heard those messages, and we're acting on them. We recognise that like all movements, Landcare needs to adapt and change.

This year Landcare NSW celebrates its 10 year anniversary. While the work never ends, we are proud of what our organisation has achieved and we look forward to the challenge of continuing to serve the Landcare community.

Strengthening the partnership between Landcare and Local Land Services is one of our highest priorities.

The partnership can't just be at the level of the *Joint Management Committee*, it can't be only in regions where there is a history of working together. We must build this partnership in every region and every district of NSW based on mutual respect, co-governance, co-management, and co-delivery.

The theme of our Conference this year is *Sharing our Stories*, in agriculture, biodiversity, water and Aboriginal Landcare.

I think everyone will relish the opportunity to share their stories and learn from each other...because that's what Landcare is about.

Landcarers are the ultimate peer educators. Whether it's a conversation over the fence, at the pub, at a field day, or through an organised program or activity.

It's through groups learning, talking and demonstrating that Landcare changes attitudes, practices and social norms.

We are innovators.

It's in finding a path through a wicked problem – and we have plenty of those in natural resource management – that we find a new way of doing something. The innovation then becomes normal practice.

It may be in conservation or sustainable agriculture but it could be in delivering social capital and economic benefits.

Think of how many people – especially in rural and regional communities – have acquired leadership skills through Landcare.

Think of the support networks and social fabric we have created in local communities. The instances where we have brought together local government, schools, businesses and farmers.

The rural jobs we've created – often part time, often occupied by women looking for some off farm income or for part time work to balance family commitments.

Landcare has so many stories to share.

And while we have excelled at sharing our successes with each other, we are only beginning to realise the importance of sharing them with a wider audience.

As Landcarers we need to find our voice.

And we need to share our stories – not only with other Landcarers – but with Members of Parliament, with donors, investors, potential Landcare members, the media and the whole community.

We cannot expect people to understand and appreciate the work we do if we don't let them know.

So when you are doing outstanding work in your community – whether you sit in government or a community organisation – don't be modest.

Take the time to shout your good news from the rooftops. Measure your impact, report on your results. Show the difference you've made to the land, to the agriculture, to your local community.

Before handing over to Richard, I would like to wish you well during the conference.

We have a very interesting program of speakers, field trips, workshops, a gala dinner and some time to get together over a drink and a meal.

Because we believe passionately in what we do, it can be exhausting working in Landcare!

So I encourage you to take this opportunity to be inspired and return home refreshed.

Thanks again for the honour of addressing you today.

And I now declare the conference 'almost open'.

Thank you