

MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF LANDCARE AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

GHD | Report for the Australian Landcare Council - Multiple Benefits of Landcare

FINAL REPORT 7 JULY 2013



Executive summary

Our understanding of Landcare in Australia is missing a vital component. Although the environmental and agricultural outcomes have been well-explored, the many other benefits of Landcare and natural resource management (NRM) beyond these domains have, for the most part, been only anecdotally acknowledged.

Recognising this, the Australian Landcare Council commissioned an investigation of the benefits of Landcare and NRM that exist beyond the biophysical domain. The research was intended to establish the extent of the evidence base and to build this into a stronger case for investment in Landcare and NRM, both to ensure ongoing levels of funding and to gain support from outside the primary industries and environment sectors.

The findings of this research reveal an impressive array of multiple benefits. The literature review, interviews and case studies that underpin the findings identified six main categories of benefits, incorporating 21 sub-categories of benefits. These main categories, over and above the environmental and agricultural sustainability outcomes, are:

Lifelong learning - well established and understood

The report makes a compelling case for a range of positive educational outcomes for individuals (for example, continuous learning and skill development) through to the broader community (for example, spreading awareness and delivering innovation). Landcare and NRM were seen to offer both formal and informal educational mechanisms, and often extended to areas of society that are traditionally difficult to reach.

The Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon case study, where northern Sydney residents worked to ensure the local catchment was properly and sustainably protected, highlighted the potential reach of these educational benefits through its awareness raising among the community and policy makers (which resulted in changes to government policy).

Social–community health and wellbeing - complex but considerable

Landcare and NRM not only provide an avenue for a very real connection with the natural environment, but also lead to increased social networking and participation—both of which can contribute to physical and mental well-being. The agricultural and environmental outcomes of Landcare and NRM—a healthier living environment—also contribute to healthy individuals and communities.

The Upper Goulburn Landcare Network and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority case study—a fire recovery project—demonstrates the capacity for Landcare and NRM to contribute to community health and well-being. In addition to directly aiding in the disaster recovery, this project allowed individuals to have meaningful contact with the environment and increased social connectedness and participation in community activities (including from urban dwellers and those not previously involved in Landcare or NRM).

Social–political and social capital - a vital part of the social fabric

The dynamic social relationships and cohesion developed through Landcare and NRM can form an intrinsic part of the social fabric, in many cases filling gaps in the community beyond the agricultural and environmental domain. The benefits—particularly for regional and rural communities—include enhanced social capacity and cohesion, stronger local governance, the increased recognition of women in rural communities, and self-empowerment and fulfilment.

For example, the Naturally Resourceful workshops case study (run by the Queensland Murray Darling Committee and Mitchell Landcare) often had a profound impact on the way women operated in their local communities and catalysed representational opportunities for workshop graduates on local boards, councils and a range of community organisations.

Economic - a considerable set of numbers

The report draws out that Landcare and NRM can generate an economic return in the order of 2-5 times the original investment. This economic benefit arises through access to labour, equipment, expertise and training, financial assistance, and increased farming profitability. The scale of the economic return is also important, with Landcare contributing to individuals as well as regions (including Indigenous communities) and providing a framework for investment and support on a larger scale.

In addition to increasing the productivity of the land, the case study exploring the Web of Trees farm forestry project (developed by the Otway Agroforestry Network) demonstrated economic benefits in the form of an alternative and diversified source of income as well as an increase in land values.

Cultural - increasing connections in new ways that are very old

The report highlights the significant benefits a connection with country has for spiritual, social, physical and mental health—particularly in Indigenous communities. In some cases Landcare has helped to maintain or increase existing connections, while in others it has created new connections or re-created connections that existed prior to white settlement.

Two case studies highlight the cultural benefits of Landcare and NRM: the Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon case study (representing an urban setting) and the Roper River case study (a remote setting). These projects not only contributed to the preservation of and access to traditional Indigenous knowledge, but also to the understanding of traditional Landcare and NRM activity among the broader community.

Resilience - resilient people, resilient landscapes

The report puts the view that resilient individuals, communities and landscapes are the end state of the multiple benefits of Landcare and NRM. Resilience in this case arises through the multiple benefits being evident, heavily integrated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. This is strongly demonstrated in the case studies and literature reviewed. In particular, Landcare promotes the formation of complex networks that allow communities to support each other and to can provide services beyond the agricultural and environmental domain when faced with adversity.

The beneficiaries of multiple benefits

In addition to the traditionally recognised beneficiaries of Landcare and NRM, this report identifies an additional set of stakeholders who benefit in ways that have not been previously recognised or well articulated. This group of beneficiaries crosses all scales—from individuals to national level bodies—more truly represents the diverse beneficiaries of Landcare and NRM and aligns with the contemporary direction of NRM in Australia with its focus on resilience and linked socio-economic systems.

Future directions

Multiple benefits and resilience research is an emerging area of both theory and practice and this report should be considered as a starting point in driving thinking, research and action. The evidence base for multiple benefits needs to be further developed, and this report suggests several indicators for doing so.

Australian Landcare Committee (ALC) response

The Australian Landcare Council sees this investigation and the preparation of this report as a starting point to further understand and promote the broader benefits of Landcare and NRM. The evidence base for the multiple benefits needs to be further developed, with the Landcare community in a perfect position to contribute to the data already collected. The council will communicate the findings of this report, consider possible methodologies for developing the evidence base and making it available to all, seek to further refine the indicators of multiple benefits, and provide advice to government on the findings of this report. As the evidence base develops and our understanding of the multiple benefits of Landcare and NRM grows, the council believes a strong case will emerge for increased and co-investment in Landcare and NRM, and for greater collaboration across government portfolios and the various sectors of the community.