

## Landcare NSW Incorporated

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*Many Hands, One Voice*  
Winnona, Winona, One Voice

15 February 2016

*Our reference: Submission NRC Review*

Review of the Natural Resources Commission Act 2003

Resources and Land Use Branch

Department of Premier and Cabinet

GPO Box 5341

Sydney NSW 2001

[nrcact@dpc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:nrcact@dpc.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Re: Submission to the Review of the NRC Act 2003**

Landcare NSW thanks the Department of Premier and Cabinet for the opportunity to provide input to the review of the Natural Resource Commission Act 2003. Using the questions framed in the issues paper, Landcare NSW has prepared a response, however we also offer more general comments we believe to be of relevance to the review. We make these observations based on first-hand experience of working with and participating in Natural Resource Commission (NRC) led activities.

### **General Observations**

As a general comment Landcare NSW strongly supports the continuation of the NRC as a body able to provide independent advice to the government on natural resource management issues, and for that advice to be shared and accessible to the community.

The sphere of natural resource management is influenced by environmental factors, economic considerations and social expectations and requirements.

This is a complex sphere, in which there is not a linear cause and effect. The approach of NRC which focusses on outcomes, not inputs, is necessary to properly evaluate and advise on any program or activity in natural resource management (NRM).

In their role, and through using an evidence based approach, the NRC have provided the following to the Landcare community in NSW:

- an opportunity to better understand and to contribute to the wider understanding of agricultural/environmental issues through their stakeholder involvement in the review process – (through a genuine process of listening to and providing roundtable opportunities for input to NRM reviews).
- a mediator role – where opposing parties can have a fair hearing and achieve a outcome satisfactory to both parties.
- an independent broker to monitor progress (and regress) in environmental objectives; and
- an audit role re the performance of the government departments that are involved in NRM and their programs, such as the old CMAs, the current LLSs, OEH etc. .

The evidence base the NRC draws upon not only contains a focus on science, it incorporates an understanding and respects the importance of values and beliefs, especially those of our Indigenous citizens.

With the government's commitment to community engagement, the NRC is well placed to monitor and review the efforts of agencies in this regard. In its role in relation to Local Land Services, the NRC has developed and applied a Performance Standard, which captures the importance of community ownership that allows for regional differences, whilst applying an underlying level of performance required. Further, it provides guidance and suggestions on how Local Land Services can achieve and self-monitor their performance. This is backed up by undertaking audits in key areas of performance.

The NRC Performance Standard and audit functions for Local Land Services also provides the Australian Government the confidence to continue investment through regional bodies, for NRM activities in NSW.

## **Responses to the Specific Questions**

### ***Do the Policy objectives of the Act remain appropriate? If not how should they be amended?***

The first two objects remain relevant, with the third requiring an update to be consistent with the outcomes of the review of the Biodiversity Act. The objects of the NRC Act should be broadened to include similar responsibilities in respect of the new legislation. It should be stated that regardless of changes to natural resource management Acts, there is need for a body that has the scope and remit to ensure the broader issues of NRM are considered in the implementation of those Acts by relevant departments and agencies. The NRC provides a body that is independent of departments and agencies with the ability to provide independent advice to the government on the broader implications of the functions within those Acts, and more broadly in response to issues that arise. This is critical to community understanding and continued investment and engagement with policy and legislation for NRM.

***Do the General and Specific Functions of the Act continue to support the policy objectives of the Act? If not, how should they be amended?***

Landcare NSW believes both the general and specific functions remain relevant. Landcare NSW requests that the requirements of community engagement, as a key component of natural resource management, be more strongly articulated in future amendments of the General and Specific functions, as well as the Guiding Principles and Objects.

***Are there any synergies between the NRC's audit reporting roles, and other government agencies or statutory bodies which perform similar functions? If yes, please detail any suggestions for how these might be leveraged.***

Whilst other government agencies and statutory bodies perform audit functions, Landcare NSW believes that an effective audit process can only be achieved in the NRM sphere by a body that understands the complex interactions between the environment, the economy, and social expectations. Auditing functions in NRM require a balanced approach of measuring outcomes as well as quantifying inputs, and Landcare NSW believes the NRC has considerable experience and knowledge within this area.

To our knowledge there is no other Act nor agency in NSW currently charged with, or having the capacity to, review and or audit the integrated environmental / economic / social outcomes of government investment. Should the NRC Act and the body itself be abolished, these functions would need to be re-established under another government Act / agency. Landcare NSW does not believe this would lead to an improved outcome nor savings, i.e. the whole role of the NRC would have to be recreated or incorporated within another Act or agency.

***Are there issues with any part of the Act that should be considered as part of this review? If yes, please detail any issues and the changes required.***

Landcare NSW does not have a comment re any issues with the current Act, rather we see areas where the knowledge and expertise of the NRC could be utilised.

Landcare NSW believes there is a need to ensure that agriculture and the environment are no longer considered separately. The integration of production and conservation is important not only at the landholder and community levels but also at the disciplinary level - agricultural scientists and environmental scientists must start seeing NRM issues together rather than apart. The NRC could have a role in facilitating greater collaboration in this regard, providing benefits to landscapes, industries and communities.

Yours sincerely,



**Rob Dulhunty** | Chair  
Landcare NSW Incorporated