

Chairman's Report 2016

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Many Hands, One Voice

Last year I opened my Chairman's report with the line "Its been a truly big year for Landcare in NSW", and the same can be said this year as I reflect over the accomplishments of not only Landcare NSW, but that of Landcare across NSW.

The strategic plan developed by Landcare NSW just over 18 months ago has guided the direction and activities of Landcare NSW, and we are beginning to see real dividends from the work of the Landcare NSW Councillors, our small band of dedicated staff, and the broader involvement of the Landcare community. I cannot thank them enough for their input, effort and support across the past 12 months.

Landcare NSW is guided by the input of the most important members of Landcare – those "on the ground" – and through the biennial Muster, the input of your regional representatives, and your involvement in the activities of Landcare NSW. We work on your behalf, we represent your views, we seek resourcing to underpin your operations and communicate to a number of grant programs so as to improve the access of Landcare groups to the funding that enables your on-ground activities.

In 2015 Landcare NSW secured support from all NSW major political parties for a renewed Landcare program, and the NSW Coalition Government committed \$15m over 4 years for the infrastructural support of Landcare. We value the partnerships established through this process, most particularly with Local Land Services.

The Parliamentary Friends of Landcare Group continues to maintain an interest in the development and progress of Landcare in NSW. In May this year we held a highly successful event at Parliament House, where members heard directly from Landcare committee members and local coordinators on the value that the government commitment was providing. I thank the executive of the Parliamentary Friends Group – the Hon Katrina Hodgkinson (Chair), Mick Veitch (Deputy Chair), Jeremy Buckingham (Treasurer) and Rick Colless (Secretary).

Landcarers know that Landcare provides an enormous return on investment for the government and other investors – however over the past 25 years we have never had a means by which to systematically quantify this and "Tell the Landcare Story". The leverage of partner funds, ranging from the very real cash contributions of landholders, the enormous number of volunteer hours of our groups members, and donations of goods and services from local businesses that our local groups can muster – simply by the fact they are part of the fabric of the local community – at least doubles, if not quadruples, the impact of the government invested funds

Landcare NSW, under the Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative (LLCI), now has established a program that has seen the placement of over 60 part time Local Coordinators across NSW to both support local scale activities and provide a systematic way in which this information can be captured across the state.

But as importantly we now have an opportunity to utilise this information – and in doing so broaden our member and supporter base. The Sustaining Landcare project, funded as part of the NSW

Government package, is establishing mechanisms to support Landcare into the future. We are grateful for the valuable input from the members of the Landcare Trust Steering Committee who, in the true manner of Landcare, are voluntarily giving their time, energies and connections to help Landcare NSW in this endeavour. In particular I would like to thank John Keniry, Natural Resources Commissioner, and Andrew Blore for their efforts and acknowledge the Deputy Premier Troy Grant, who is the patron of the Landcare Trust / Sustaining Landcare project.

The Sustaining Landcare project has explored what is needed for ensuring sustainability of the Landcare movement into the future – and has developed a plan, with input from both the Landcare NSW Council and the broader landcare community to guide its activities.

An initial focus is lifting our technology into the 21st century – this will support the functions of the Trust and allow us to broaden the investment base for Landcare support. It will also simplify the administrative process and data capture not only for Landcare NSW, but also our member groups. Very soon we will launch to our members; a Landcare NSW Insurance program to ensure that our groups and their volunteers are correctly covered, at an affordable price, and are supported with claims and information.

We are about to launch a major campaign to bring the work of Landcarers to the fore of public attention, and through this gain new members, and new fund sources to sustain Landcare – so that Landcarers can continue their work to sustain our land, our water, our bush and our productivity.

The strength of Landcare is in its partnerships, and the LLCI has, and will continue, to place emphasis on developing partnerships at all scales. At the commencement of the LLCI organisations were asked to collaboratively form regional scale bids for the placement within district scale Landcare areas of four or more part time Local coordinators, whose work would support the capacity of those organisations to make a difference at the local scale. Each host organisation, by accepting a Landcare coordinator position, also agreed to be part of a larger program, which built regional links – to strengthen connection between Landcarers within that region and to build skills and partnerships that will enable Landcare input into the regional scale level of design and delivery of NRM and sustainable agricultural programs.

The development of regional scale partnerships is supported at the State scale through the Joint Management Committee of Landcare and Local Land Services, who not only oversee the Local Landcare Coordinator program, but who are working to enact the MOU signed between Landcare NSW and Local Land Services in September 2016. Many in Local Land Services deserve recognition for their efforts, and in particular I acknowledge the leadership of the current and past Chairs – Tim de Mestre and Alex Anthony. Alex's efforts as the interim LLS Chair, and her ongoing involvement in the Joint Management Committee as the current Chair's delegate, has provided continuity and real support for achieving the goals of the partnership.

At the national scale Landcare NSW works through the National Landcare Network to ensure you have a voice into the heart of policy and program design and delivery. This is particularly important as the current National Landcare Programme ceases in 2018 and we, along with the NRM Regional bodies and Landcare Australia Ltd, are working collaboratively to ensure that the Australian Government maintains and hopefully increases the resourcing through the National Landcare Programme, so that the work of Landcarers tackling Australia's NRM and sustainable agricultural issues at the local scale continues to be supported.

Landcare has a renewed future – and it's up to us all to capitalise upon the tremendous steps achieved in the past 12 months. I call on each and every Landcarer, and in particular the Committee members – that band of tireless volunteers who not only give up their time to “do Landcare”, but also attend to the behind the scenes requirements – to make sure we are constructively pulling together for the greater good of Landcare across NSW.

Landcare is about working together – regardless of the scale – be it a local on-ground project, a district or regional level committee, or state or national level partnership.

There have been challenging times in the past – and there will be in the future – but it is only our combined efforts that will ensure we get through these challenges in a way that makes us stronger. Our strength is in unity and 60,000 hands speaking with one voice is a force for change. But what does “one voice” mean – it isn’t relying on Landcare NSW alone, it’s ensuring at the regional, district, and local scale we, through our own operations, demonstrate and communicate the same message on the value of Landcare and the importance of partnerships – within and outside of Landcare.

I look forward to continuing and building on the work of the past year, as together we forge a positive and lasting future for Landcare in NSW.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Rob Dulhunty', written in a cursive style.

Rob Dulhunty
Chair Landcare NSW