

SUSTAINING LANDCARE – THE NEXT CHAPTER

A draft policy statement from Landcare NSW

For Landcare community input

CONSULTATION PERIOD: 5 SEPTEMBER – 7 OCTOBER

Introduction

This policy statement presents the Landcare community's views to the NSW Government and all political parties.

Landcare NSW was formed in 2007 as the representative body for community Landcare. Our 22-member Council represents approximately 3000 groups and more than 60,000 Landcarers across all regions and electorates of NSW.

The Landcare community values the partnership between Landcare and the NSW Government and appreciates the support of Members of Parliament. Established in 2015, the *NSW Parliamentary Friends of Landcare* formalises a long tradition of bipartisan support.

About Landcare

Landcare is an organised community movement that works in partnership with governments at all levels to meet environmental, agricultural and social challenges.

Landcare began in the late 80s when local farmers recognised the impact of unsustainable agricultural practices on production and the natural environment. What started out as small scale collaboration among local farmers grew into statewide initiatives, then an ambitious national endeavour known as the *Decade of Landcare*. One of the keys to Landcare's success was the partnership between conservationists, farmers and governments which exists to this day.

For nearly 30 years Landcare has delivered economic, agricultural, environmental and social benefits throughout Australia. The model now exists in more than 25 countries. Landcare offers a framework in which groups of people work together to learn, share information, expertise and experience, develop skills and implement on-ground projects. Landcare leverages government resourcing by mobilising private investment and a volunteer workforce. It operates on private land, public land, along the coast, in cities and towns, across remote areas and agricultural enterprises of all types and sizes. Landcare, Bushcare and other community groups work in similar ways.

Landcare delivers private benefits, such as reduced soil erosion and shade, shelter and forage for livestock, which can be captured by landholders, but also public benefits, such as clean water, clean air, carbon sequestration, and habitat for rare and endangered species which have community benefits beyond the realm of the individual landholder.

Landcare is a volunteer movement supported by paid professional staff and infrastructure. It relies on funds from various sources, largely government, to pay for the essential infrastructural support and to fund diverse on-ground projects. These projects may involve planting trees, protecting habitat for rare and endangered species, running workshops, removing pests, fencing, erosion control, propagation, new farming methods, field days and many other activities.

The value of Landcare

Landcare is a quiet achiever not only in its environmental work but in building social capital; it creates rural jobs and lifts the capacity of local communities to manage problems and issues. While its contribution to natural resource management is well known, Landcare also runs many community activities such as support for farmer mental health. It has served as the entry point for government agencies in the case of a natural disaster or biosecurity threat. As a community movement Landcare is able to be nimble, to innovate, adapt and respond to changing circumstances. The Landcare model helps local communities identify and respond to a range of problems and opportunities. The Landcare caring hands brand is recognised and trusted. Government funds are leveraged to secure additional investment from a range of sources.

The demands of Australia's growing population are contributing to the clearing of land for development, loss of habitat, extinction of species and unsustainable agricultural production, with flow on effects to local communities. Governments play the lead role in addressing these issues, however Governments cannot deal with problems of this magnitude without an engaged, motivated and skilled community.

Around half of Australia's land is privately owned or managed. Landcare provides the key to unlock the resources and goodwill of landholders and volunteers to step up and take responsibility. We know from nearly 30 years of experience that Landcare works. The model adapts to the needs of the situation, whether it's regenerating a tract of denuded land; bringing farmers together to learn new ways to eliminate pest animals and weeds; or supporting city dwellers to restore remnant bushland on local council managed lands in their spare time.

Local ownership is a critical success factor. Volunteer Landcarers and the staff who support them are primarily local people who have strong social ties to their community and connections to their local environment. This community ethos is part of Landcare's success. Landcare fulfils a role that cannot be fulfilled by Government agencies or officers.

After many years, the Landcare movement has developed deep technical skills, expertise and knowledge – both in natural resource management and in how to sustain a diverse volunteer movement.

Landcare in NSW – where we are today

Over the past three years Landcare in NSW has been undergoing a transformation. This is the result of a renewed partnership with the NSW Government and the growth and development of the organisations and structures that support the movement.

Landcare has come a long way. It was only four to five years ago that a number of groups were considering folding. A prolonged period of minimal recognition, dictatorial ‘we’re from government and here to tell you what to do’ programs and reduced support from the State and Federal Governments had led to volunteer burnout, disillusionment and fatigue.

Through a concerted effort by the community, with the support and partnership of the NSW Government, this situation is turning around. The current Government Landcare policy commenced in 2015 and comprises:

- a renewed partnership between the Landcare community and the NSW Government
- funding of the *NSW Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative (LLCI)*
<http://www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/local-landcare-coordinator-initiative>
- statewide coordination by Landcare NSW and Local Land Services and 66 part-time, Local Landcare Coordinators hosted by community Landcare organisations
- a Joint Management Committee between Landcare and Local Land Services reporting to the Minister for Primary Industries
- diversification of revenue sources to reduce reliance on government funding.

There are many examples showing the difference this program has made on the ground and regular surveys show an increase in the stability and health of groups.

While excellent progress has been achieved, the job is not done. Landcare is still not on a stable footing. Further work is needed to build the infrastructure to support the volunteer movement. Investment in this infrastructure is needed so Landcare can focus on achieving on-ground outcomes. Staff and volunteers need continuity and security rather than constantly seeking funding and support.

Another challenge is to engage young people to create the next generation of Landcarers. Many volunteers who run the committees and organisations that are the backbone of the Landcare community have made their contribution over many years and are looking for others to take their place. Untapped potential exists to build partnerships between Landcare and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; this work has started and good progress has been made but it needs to continue. There is a need for communitywide education and awareness about Landcare and unified state and national leadership.

Landcare works best when the partnership between the NSW Government and the community is strong so these tasks can be tackled together.

Vision for the future

A healthy and well supported Landcare movement will equip us for future challenges, and provide capable and willing volunteers to work with governments to protect and restore our natural resources.

Some have asked why the job isn't done given how long Landcare has been going. But the reality is the job is never done – there are new problems to tackle like climate change, changing markets and environmental challenges. New generations of farmers take over; city people buy country properties and may not have access to knowledge passed down through generations; farms and small landholdings change hands; overseas buyers enter the market. Our population continues to grow and the resultant urban sprawl impacts on remnant areas; new arrivals to Australia do not have knowledge of Landcare; children are increasingly disconnected from nature and from how their food and fibre are produced.

Given the reality in Australia of remoteness, vast distances and the harshness of our Australia's climate, a healthy Landcare movement is essential to any government policy in the area of natural resource management. Landcare offers a ready-made community network and has the potential to expand, improve and involve even more Australians. The Landcare movement in NSW is willing to rise to these challenges but needs partnership and support from the NSW Government.

Landcare seeks continued support from the NSW Government

Landcare seeks the Government's leadership, commitment, resources and action. While the focus of this policy document is the role of the NSW Government, all levels of government play a role. Below are recommendations for how the NSW Government can support the next chapter of *Sustaining Landcare*.

Leadership

- continuation of a Minister with portfolio responsibility for Landcare, who shows a commitment to and interest in Landcare, recognises our voluntary contribution, speaks up for Landcare, and seeks ways to support Landcare
- ministerial and departmental leadership is needed to develop integrated approaches with Federal and Local Governments, and across portfolios, on funding and policy issues

Partnership

- the formal partnership between Local Land Services and Landcare NSW has been extremely positive; we would like this to continue at the State level and for it to be embedded and formalised at the State level and throughout all LLS regions
- Landcare seeks co-governance, co-management and co-delivery as part of a genuine government/community partnership

Stability

- consistent support and a stable policy environment will create certainty so the Landcare community can focus on its valuable on-ground work
- this requires increased effort by the State Government to design an optimal, consistent and efficient operating environment for Landcare

Recognition

- landholders and volunteers offer their money, time and energy; it is important that Government recognises and values their contribution

Trust

- Landcare is a community institution, as much a part of the Australian social fabric as Surf Lifesaving or the Rural Fire Service, Lifeline or the SES
- as such, Landcare seeks the Government's trust and willingness to devolve funds and decisions at the state, regional and local level, recognising that blanket approaches are ineffective
- while recognising the need to be accountable for public funds, Landcare seeks more efficient streamlined administration and reporting requirements

Infrastructure

- every volunteer movement needs infrastructure, in the form of organisations, professional staff, information, training and support services
- this infrastructure exists in NSW but it is under-funded and fragile
- government funding and support is needed for a strong state peak body, regional organisations, Local Landcare Coordinators and support services
- better integration is needed between the State and Federal Governments, including integrating the federally funded Regional Landcare Facilitator roles into the responsibilities of the LLS/Landcare NSW partnership

Funding

- the State Government's investment in Landcare via the *NSW Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative* is appreciated. The community seeks continuation and expansion of this funding to enable the growth and development of the Landcare network
- Landcare is committed to continuing to developing new revenue sources to reduce reliance on government funding however we seek a commitment from the NSW Government for sustainable funding to cover the infrastructural support which Landcare needs to operate
- Landcare also seeks further funding for on-ground projects

Opportunities

- Landcare seeks NSW Government recognition of the breadth of Landcare: its networks, skills and capacity which can be applied in a range of settings
- for example, Landcare is capable of working in partnership with a variety of agencies and issues such as biodiversity protection, conservation, national parks, biosecurity, agricultural advice, litter control, community health, and regional community development

A detailed proposal for Landcare Support

The NSW Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative is currently funded \$15m from 2015-2019. The Landcare community strongly values this program and seeks its continuation and expansion. The community is willing and able to build upon the momentum created, to deliver improved environmental, agricultural and social outcomes and looks forward to working in partnership with the Government to design the next iteration of the program.

A detailed proposal and budget is being developed by Landcare NSW and Local Land Services to seek continued, ongoing funding beyond 2019. This allocation will need to be made in the 2018 State Budget.

Further information on proposed changes to the current program will be provided by Landcare NSW and Local Land Services. These will draw upon the success and learnings of the current program.

More information

Please contact Landcare NSW on 02 6686 2779, administration@landcarensw.org.au

or visit: www.landcarensw.org.au