



Landcare NSW Inc

SUSTAINING LANDCARE – THE NEXT CHAPTER

A policy statement by Landcare NSW
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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.

Landcare began in the late '80s when local farmers recognised the impact of unsustainable agricultural practices on production and the natural environment. A small scale collaboration among local farmers grew into a statewide initiative, 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, landholder engagement 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. It includes Landcare, Bushcare, Rangelcare and other groups that have formed around geographical places or issues, share similar goals and values even though 'landcare' may not be in the group's name.

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.

Like all volunteer movements, Landcare depends on paid professional staff and infrastructure. Investment from a range of sources pays for essential coordination and support to keep the movement going.

This enables the community to take up funding opportunities for on-ground projects. These 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. Priorities are set both by funders and by local communities. For examples of Landcare activity view our case studies:

http://www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/casestudy_listing

The value of Landcare¹

Landcare is a quiet achiever not only in its environmental work but in building social capital; it creates rural jobs and lifts the skills and capacity of local communities to manage problems and issues. Government funds are leveraged to secure additional investment and in kind support. While Landcare's contribution to natural resource management is well known, Landcare also runs community activities such as support for farmer mental health and there are many examples of successful collaboration with Aboriginal communities. 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 wide range of problems and opportunities, and change social norms. The Landcare 'caring hands' brand is recognised and trusted throughout the community.

The demands of Australia's growing population are contributing to land clearing, 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 land.

¹ For more information see Landcare NSW Value of Landcare paper <http://landcare.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/161216-The-Value-of-Landcare.pdf> and recent papers commissioned by the National Landcare Advisory Committee <http://www.nrm.gov.au/national-landcare-programme/board-and-committee>

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 a key part of Landcare's success. Landcare fulfils a role that cannot be fulfilled by Government agencies or officers. While Governments are naturally focused on achieving 'outcomes' it is critical they also recognise and invest in the continued existence and growth of voluntary, grassroots community groups.

After many years, the Landcare movement has developed deep technical skills, expertise and knowledge, in natural resource management and in the community development skills required to sustain a diverse grassroots 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 some groups were considering folding. A prolonged period of minimal recognition, dictatorial 'we're from the government and we're here to tell you what to do' programs, along with 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 NSW 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)* which includes:
 - o statewide coordination and support by Landcare NSW and Local Land Services
 - o 30 full time equivalent Local Landcare Coordinators hosted by community Landcare organisations
 - o a Joint Management Committee between Landcare NSW and Local Land Services reporting to the NSW Minister for Primary Industries to provide co-governance
 - o 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. For example in Western NSW the number of groups has tripled in 1.5 years. Importantly, Landcare NSW has made substantial progress in building the capability to generate new revenue sources.

While excellent progress has been achieved, the job is not done. Landcare is still not on a stable footing and further work is needed to build the infrastructure to support the grassroots movement at all levels. Investment in this infrastructure will enable Landcare to focus on achieving on-ground outcomes. Staff and volunteers need continuity and certainty rather than constantly seeking funding and support.

Another challenge is to engage young people to create the next generation of Landcarers. 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. Overall, there is a need for community-wide education and awareness about Landcare and unified state and national leadership to engage more people in Landcare activities.

Landcare works best when the partnership between the NSW Government and the community is strong so these tasks can be tackled together, with each side bringing their expertise and strength.

Federal Government policy

In September 2017 the Australian Government released details of the next iteration of the National Landcare Program (NLP2) - \$1.1b over 6 years. While the funds are welcome, they represent a 20 percent reduction on the current program and much of the funds are tied therefore not accessible by the Landcare community.

Continued NSW Government funding to support Landcare infrastructure will enable communities to take up the opportunities to access funds for projects under this federal program.

The new arrangements will open up a large portion of federal funding to a competitive tender process. Landcare NSW is working in partnership with Local Land Services to build and expand the government/community model in NSW.

Vision for the future

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 such as 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 of native vegetation; 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.

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

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 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 will help to integrate approaches with Federal and Local Governments, and across portfolios, on funding and policy issues affecting Landcare

Partnership

- the formal partnership between Local Land Services and Landcare NSW has been extremely positive; we would like this partnership 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 collaboration

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 effort by the State Government to design and fund 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, and takes care that their actions do not disengage or disempower voluntary, grassroots community groups

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
- a specific Aboriginal initiative is needed to achieve collaboration and support a range of economic, environmental and social goals
- 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

Investment

- 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 working to develop 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
- \$32.5 million over four years is needed to fund Landcare support, commencing July 2019 therefore Landcare requests a funding allocation in the 2018 State Budget
- Landcare also seeks support to access funding from local, state and federal sources 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.

More information

Please contact Landcare NSW on:

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or visit: www.landcarensw.org.au