



## **The value of Landcare to the Australian community**

Landcare is a unique community and government partnership focused on managing and restoring Australia's natural environment and improving the sustainability of agricultural activities. Established more than 30 years ago, Landcare has played a leading role in Australia's natural resource management and led the world in developing and implementing local processes to shift attitudes and practices towards sustainable resource use and management.

Landcare comes in many forms. Embracing Bushcare, Coastcare, Rivercare, Dunecare and Junior Landcare, the Landcare movement in Australia includes more than 6000 community-based groups and district, regional and national networks – ranging from small groups of volunteers with a single narrow objective, to large professional organisations delivering major projects. Extending across Australia's vast physical environment – from the coastline and urban areas to agricultural and remote Aboriginal lands – Landcare groups are augmented by countless associated projects and partnerships with like-minded communities.

Bringing together people of all ages, cultures and socio-economic groups across Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Landcare encourages tens of thousands of volunteers to collectively own and address Australia's environmental and sustainability challenges. As an egalitarian, inclusive, democratic movement driven from and for the community, Landcare embraces localism as a means for engaging and motivating communities. Representing grassroots, community-based responses to local problems, Landcare groups demonstrate considerable flexibility and variation in their structure, objectives and programs. Their governance arrangements reflect the organic evolution of many groups and projects – with a 'flat' organisational structure and no complex or unnecessary hierarchy.

Landcare volunteers are engaged in a broad range of agricultural and environmental activities across Australia. By developing sustainable cropping techniques, implementing drought management programs, encouraging safe chemical use and storage, and undertaking projects to manage climate variability, minimise nutrient run-off and manage groundwater and salinity, Landcare programs and communities help to improve the sustainability of agricultural activities that cover around 60% of Australia's land area and create food and fibre.

Landcare groups also play a leading role in protecting, enhancing and rehabilitating the natural environment in both urban and rural areas – from collecting litter and encouraging bush regeneration by planting millions of trees, shrubs and grasses, through to stabilising sand dunes and riverbanks to reduce erosion and improve water quality, protecting threatened species by providing habitat for native wildlife and repairing eroding gullies and walking tracks.

While Landcare's positive environmental and agricultural impact is well recognised, the economic, social and cultural contributions of this vast volunteer and not for profit movement have not been as widely appreciated.

### ***Landcare provides a framework for information sharing and intergenerational learning***

By coming together at community meetings and workshops, field days and state and national forums, Landcare has encouraged collaboration and innovation around sustainable farming, natural resource management and programs to repair and prevent environmental degradation. Landcare has provided a framework for land owners and managers to formally and informally recognise existing expertise and knowledge – including the cultural knowledge and 'caring for country' approach of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians – as well as engage in peer to peer learning, share information and experiences, and support further learning and communities of practice. Through its school-based activities, Landcare groups and networks have also provided a foundation for intergenerational learning.

### ***Landcare builds community capacity, social capital and leadership***

With more than three decades as resourceful, self-organising groups – with extensive experience in fostering strategic partnerships and collaboratively delivering projects – Landcare programs have contributed to the capacity of the communities in which they operate. Individuals and communities involved in Landcare have developed experience and skills in working with governments, non government organisations and businesses, in grant management, project management, financial, communication and governance systems – capacities which are utilised in a broad range of other social, economic and community activities. In addition, Landcare members have increasingly taken a leadership role in their communities, on issues extending well beyond environmental degradation and sustainable agriculture.

### ***Landcare supports community engagement, and builds social cohesion and resilience of local communities***

Landcare groups provide supportive social networks for individuals and communities – building a sense of belonging, enhancing community connectivity and having a positive impact in building community resilience and adaptive capacity, in turn supporting community harmony and strengthening social cohesion. Landcare groups, networks and programs have also provided a forum for engagement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australians, and a platform for increasing the participation and recognition of women in regional and rural communities.

### ***Landcare positively impacts on the health and welfare of individuals***

Research suggests that involvement with Landcare activities can have positive impacts on individual health and wellbeing through the spiritual, physical and mental health benefits arising from connection with country, clean air and water. The volunteering aspect of Landcare supports individual wellbeing and mental health by helping people feel valued and part of their community. Landcare groups have often taken a proactive approach to tackling mental health issues experienced by farmers, particularly during times of drought and flood, when the challenges of living and working on the land are exacerbated.

### ***Landcare encourages investment in communities***

On the economic front, the Landcare model has matched vast volunteer time and effort with major in-kind and financial investment in communities, resulting in significant multiplier effects for Government investment. For a relatively small investment there have been significant returns for Government and the community at large. Built on a foundation of volunteerism, Landcare facilitates some of the estimated \$200 billion economic contribution made each year to Australian society by volunteers. Other economic benefits attributed to Landcare include direct financial returns, increased access to financial resources, and training to improve farming and management techniques.

### ***Landcare helps raise environmental awareness in the broader community***

Through broad scale community involvement, Landcare has helped to move community attitudes towards sustainability, increased community understanding about the causes and symptoms of environmental degradation and the impact of inappropriate resource management practices, as well as encouraged broader community awareness of Australia's current and emerging environmental challenges, such as sustainable resource use and conservation, climate change variability and food security.

### ***Landcare in Australia provides international leadership***

Landcare has positioned Australia as a world leader in community-based approaches to sustainable resource management. By the early 2000s, at least 20 countries – including New Zealand, South Africa and the Philippines – had adopted the Landcare approach into parts of their environmental programs.

Landcare has brought enormous value to the Australia over the past three decades, extending well beyond its positive environmental and agricultural impacts.

For a longer, more detailed statement on the value of landcare, including references, please visit: [www.landcarens.org.au](http://www.landcarens.org.au)

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