

Speech by David Walker, Landcare NSW Councillor
The 2017 Gerald Carnie Memorial Award
New South Wales Landcare Awards and Gala Dinner
26 October 2017, Albury

May I introduce to the stage:

Lorraine, Ryan and Jarrod Carnie, the family of our Landcare colleague, Gerald.

Greg Aplin, MP for the NSW Electorate of Albury, and representing Kevin Anderson the Chair of the NSW Parliamentary Friends of Landcare.

May I say that since the Parliamentary Friends of Landcare came into being in 2015, we have seen the appreciation of what Landcare does, increase markedly. Landcare places immense value on that support. And Greg Aplin has been to the forefront, attending every meeting that has been held.

And the Finalists for the Gerald Carnie Memorial Award, Robyn Watson and John Hughson.

Firstly, I wish to extend due respect to the traditional owners of this area, the Wiradjuri people, acknowledging that Landcare has been practised in this area by the Wiradjuri people for thousands of years. Their relationship with their land of 'connection, respect and trust' is pertinent to all of us.

My I also add my congratulations to all the nominees and especially the winners of tonight's awards so far.

The Gerald Carnie Award is not one of our traditional Landcare Awards, which as we've heard, recognise and applaud those in the Landcare community who 'do' Landcare work really well. We all celebrate their achievements.

Rather this award is about recognising someone who is an advocate for and defender of the Landcare philosophy. It goes beyond the 'local' to the 'global'.

Rehabilitated and protected natural areas, and healthy, productive, resilient and biodiverse farming systems are of course core business for Landcare, and it is fitting that the best of our Landcare practitioners are acknowledged.

But the history of Landcare shows that, as well as providing those outcomes, along with a high level of community 'buy in', it operates in a highly contested space.

Policy makers and funders often would like to mandate what Landcare "works on", whether or not it is a local priority, so as to meet high level targets developed on Canberra or Sydney.

Perhaps Government Agencies, with an eye to their own survival and funding, may seek to build their own profile by claiming credit for Landcare work, or may even see themselves as 'replacing' Landcare.

Landcare is kidding itself if it thinks it's inherent 'goodness', guarantees eternal life.

It's easy to understand why grassroots Landcarers are primarily interested in their 'patch', and just want to get on with their own 'hands on' Landcare.

But without people who understand where Landcare fits in the bigger policy picture, and are prepared to argue for Landcare as a vital contributor to natural resource management, and are willing to defend Landcare against detractors and competitors, Landcare would certainly not have the recognition that it has earned and the support that it warrants.

The NSW Government's Local Landcare Coordinator Program is testament to just that advocacy, and to the wisdom of a Government that can see the difference between an expenditure line item and an investment in social capital and capacity.

Gerald spoke about the importance of the spark of individual awareness, ownership and action as being basic to getting uptake of practice change and conservation. He said:

"Landcare's virtue is addressing the Landcarers' issues".

From that flows initial interest, learning, commitment, then broader action and significant co-investment.

The spark of interest is nurtured to become the flame of changed attitude and a transformed landscape.

Gerald's work in Landcare, at the local, regional and State level, was the embodiment of this conviction, and the Gerald Carnie Memorial Award is a testament to people who ensure the persistence and the spread of the Landcare flame.

So this award recognises those people who have looked up from their 'patch', and have seen that the philosophy Gerald spoke about is important. That if the work they wish to do on their patch is to be recognised and supported, and is to be extended beyond that little patch, then Landcare needs strong advocates and passionate defenders.

Thank you fellow Landcarers. I would like to leave you with the words of the world-renowned cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."