

Landcare NSW Inc

Landcare NSW Drought Response Paper

21 August 2018



Purpose of this paper

The Landcare NSW Council comprises representatives from all regions of NSW. At its 14 August meeting Council discussed local Landcare responses to the drought and agreed Landcare was well-placed to do more should resources become available. Council resolved to prepare a summary of ideas and suggestions from the Landcare community to provide to state and federal government and other partners. This paper will be updated as further input is received from Landcarers on the ground across the State.

Why Landcare?

Landcarers are in the frontline of the drought: they have a role in the immediate response, in recovery and in preparation for future droughts. Landcarers – many of whom are farmers or landholders – are immersed in working with the land and natural resource management. They are embedded in local communities and are well-respected and well-connected.

Landcare assistance includes: technical advice; education; peer support; social support; and rallying communities. Importantly, Landcare works at the local level to plan, fund and deliver on-ground projects, working with a range of partners including government agencies. Landcarers are knowledgeable about the environment, the natural resource base and who's who in the local community. Landcare offers a supported statewide network of groups, volunteers and professional staff.

Landcare the Drought

Landcare is already responding to the drought. Actions vary according to need and capacity but include participation in drought-related forums, local 'social' get-togethers and activities in partnership with Local Land Services, other government agencies and community groups.

Landcare groups are actively providing support, information and referral to landholders with the assistance of Local Landcare Coordinators and other professional Landcare staff. In smaller communities which do not have government staff or other community support groups on the ground, Landcare is the key point of contact. Within available resources Landcare groups are doing what they can to assist, often pushing other Landcare work to the background to focus on the immediate issues.

There are limitations due to many volunteers already being stretched to the drought. Most Landcarers are also managing drought on their own properties. Further, Landcare is experiencing challenges in capacity due to reductions in the NLP2 (federally-funded National Landcare Program). However Landcare is responding to the best of its ability.

At the state level, Landcare NSW is distributing information through on-ground networks and has offered assistance and support to the State Drought Coordinator, Ms Pip Job. Landcare NSW is sharing positive stories about farmers' resilience and ability to deal with drought to counter balance some of the media coverage.

Individual farmers who are part of the Landcare movement are applying practices learned through Landcare and demonstrating the results. This is being shared through the platform of the three thousand groups and 60,000 people who make up the Landcare movement in NSW. For example, two Landcare NSW Council members, Louise Turner from Western NSW near White Cliffs and Martin Royds from Braidwood, have recently been reported in the media for the work they are doing on their properties:

<https://www.theherald.com.au/news/national/5596719/plans-on-nsw-wetlands-return-amid-drought/>

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/how-a-farmer-went-from-the-moron-approach-to-a-farm-full-of-water-20180817-p4zy23.html>

Ideas from the frontline

At the 14 August Landcare NSW Council meeting, the drought and Landcare's response was discussed at length. Council resolved that Landcare is already and must continue to be actively involved in responding to the drought in terms of relief, recovery and planning for the future. This requires care of people, domestic livestock and the resource base including native species. A number of ideas were put forward by Council and some of these are provided below. It was emphasised by Council that the drought is affecting different parts of the State in different ways and that local Landcare groups and communities are best placed to advise on what additional support could be provided through the Landcare network.

- Landcare offers an existing network across NSW in all regions with a central coordinating team at the State level. If existing hours could be added to the part-time Local Landcare Coordinators they could provide an information and referral point to farmers to add to the role they are already performing within available resources. In some communities there are no government staff or other community support groups providing this role.
- Depending on the needs and issues of each community, Local Landcare Coordinators could implement activities tailored to the area in partnership with the Government and community partners, eg advice, local events, forums, mental health support, facilitating funding for on-ground works, education and assistance to landholders to access government assistance.

- There will be a major task to assess the state of the resource, pastures, native habitat and action needed to recover from this drought. With greatly reduced DPI and LLS technical staff and skills, qualified Landcare professionals and volunteers could assist with this role or make referrals.
- One way to support farmers with mental health while also providing practical skills during a time when normal work is disrupted is to provide access to educational activities on what can be learned out of this drought and skills to apply after the drought. The Landcare movement is able to either provide this education or connect farmers to providers.
- Landcare groups can help write Drought Plans – and/or link farmers to technical skills provided by other agencies. This can be done across regions to ensure support is provided equitably.
- Information on the location, design and management of on-farm drought feedlots to take grazing pressure off vulnerable native, or introduced, pastures and maintaining essential ground cover while retaining core breeding stock on-farm.
- Sharing of good news stories in times of adversity.
- In collaboration with LLS and local government, Landcare groups in some regions can help communities deal with conflict, for example, over use of Travelling Stock Routes and roadside reserves.
- Landcare Coordinators could help farmers understand and fill in forms for subsidies and allowances available from state and federal governments and other funding sources.
- Governments could provide seed funding to farmers via incorporated Landcare networks to undertake work on the properties to prepare for recovery, with the farmer required to provide matching funding. For example, soil erosion control works, feral animal control, fencing for improved grazing management and installation of more water points.
- Landcare can assist with implementing on ground projects to replant lost vegetation including connecting native corridors and improved fencing for better management of stock and vegetation.

Where to from here?

Landcare NSW presents these initial ideas from the Landcare community and welcomes additional suggestions and feedback. For more information please contact:

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