
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Report on the Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry and Department of
Sustainability, Environment, Water,
Population and Communities Annual Reports
2011–12: Caring for Our Country and
Landcare

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry

May 2013
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Foreword

In November 2012, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry's resolved to inquire into the 2011-12 Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

In considering the two reports, the Committee was particularly interested in the Caring for Our Country (CfOC) initiative, jointly administered by both departments. The operation of Landcare, the grass roots natural resource management movement partially funded by CfOC, was also considered by the Committee.

CfOC is a large, complex program backed by significant investment from the Australian Government from 2008 to 2013 to assist in the management of natural resources. At the conclusion of its first phase a review was undertaken. The results of this review were considered when developing the second phase of CfOC. This second phase is supported by \$2 billion of Commonwealth funding and is due to commence in July 2013. In implementing the new phase, the Australian Government has sought to improve the clarity of program administration and decision making by channelling the initiative into two streams - agricultural sustainability and environment.

The Committee's inquiry canvassed the review of the CfOC program released in 2012. The review, while largely positive, found a number of areas that could be improved including:

- the monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) framework;
- additional consultation in the setting of outcomes and targets, that should consider scientific and community experiences and account for the knowledge and expertise of regional natural resource management organisations
- uneven standards of governance and community engagement among regional natural resource management organisations; and

- changes to program design including broader consultation, establishing mechanisms to ensure the performance of natural resource management organisations, supporting partnership arrangements to increase leverage on funding and investment and increasing the community's capacity for effective action.¹

The Committee believes that the ongoing management of Australia's natural resources is a critical investment in our nation's future. In particular, the need to manage weeds and pests in natural environments warrants attention.

The Committee considers it vital that natural resource management projects must be monitored to ensure resources are spent wisely. In this regard, the Committee examined aspects of the National Reserve Scheme (NRS) – Australia's network of protected areas, conserving unique landscapes, plants and animals for the future. Evidence focussed on joint land acquisition arrangements for the scheme where the Commonwealth provides two-thirds of the purchase price and the land manager, the remainder. The Committee's report calls for clarity in circumstances where a land manager becomes unable to discharge their contractual obligations to conserve the designated land.

The Committee is acutely aware of the need for community engagement in the decision making process underpinning natural resource management. Local communities and local knowledge play a vital role in the identification of weeds, pests and other new conservation projects. They should also play a role in how resources are allocated to identified projects.


The Committee's report also encourages an improvement in mechanisms for sharing project outcomes. It is through the provision of this shared knowledge that future natural resource management projects can be better assessed and managed.

The Committee was pleased to see efforts by the departments embracing the use of new technology. In particular the use of mobile devices to engage with communities to identify potential projects was commendable. The Committee believes that such initiatives should continue and be improved as technology evolves.

In conclusion, I would like to thank staff of both departments for providing valuable input and clarification in the development of this report. It was clear to the Committee that both departments are committed to ensuring Australia's natural resource management framework is efficient and effective.

Hon. Dick Adams MP
Chair

1 Australian Government Land and Coasts, Report on the Review of the Caring for our Country Initiative, April 2012, p. 7.



Membership of the Committee

Chair Hon Dick Adams MP

Deputy Chair Mr Alby Schultz MP

Members Mr Darren Cheeseman MP

Mr Rob Mitchell MP

Mr George Christensen MP

Mr Dan Tehan MP

Mr Geoff Lyons MP

Committee Secretariat

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Terms of reference

On Thursday, 29 November 2012, the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry resolved to inquire into the 2011–12 Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.



List of abbreviations

DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
SEWPaC	Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
Committee	Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry
CfOC	Caring for Our Country
MERI	Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement
NRS	National Reserve System



List of recommendations

3 Issues and analysis

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that it be advised by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities once the Monitoring, Evaluation, Review and Improvement Strategy relating to the Caring for Our Country initiative has been published.

