



Submission to the National Landcare Program Senate Enquiry From Landcare SJ Inc.

Landcare SJ Inc. is a not for profit community group that coordinates landcare, bushcare and catchment care in the districts of Serpentine Jarrahdale and North Murray, Western Australia. In partnership with other groups and landholders in the community, we develop and enact programs to achieve:

- A reversal in land degradation;
- Promotion of best land management practices;
- Conservation and restoration of habitat for native flora and fauna; and,
- Improvement of water quality in river systems, drains and wetlands.

We also provide opportunities, resources and support for landholders and community groups to improve their skills and knowledge in the management of natural resources. Working closely with the Serpentine-Jarrahdale and Dandalup-Murray Land Conservation District Committees and local government entities, Landcare SJ has been incorporated since 2002, but has had active members for 25 years.

Landcare SJ Inc would like to provide brief comment on some points within the terms of reference to the Senate Enquiry into the *'History, effectiveness, performance and future of the National Landcare Program'*.

a. Establishment and performance of the National Heritage Trust;

- The driving force behind the Decade of Landcare, which has become the basis of a now decades long movement that is unique to Australia and is responsible for countless on ground environmental projects.
- Provided funds for on-ground officers to carry out projects and coordinate groups to so the same.
- Excellent method of distributing funds at grass roots level.
- Funding that underpinned the formation and coordination of Landcare and Catchment groups.
- Gave confidence and success to establishing groups by providing them with resources to carry out projects and learn about addressing and reversing land degradation.
- Responsible for widespread implementation of on-ground environmental projects.
- Responsible for the on-ground experience and training of Landcare/Natural Resource Management Officers, many of who are still working in the environmental industry and building on those skills and experience.
- Long term and perceived as stable at the time.
- NHT projects were the instigation of organisational partnerships with each other and farmers/landholders; and the acknowledgement and value of in-kind volunteer hours and efforts.

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- A local example is the Dirk Brook Project, which was an early river restoration project, including best management practices for rural drains. It successfully acquitted a quarter of a million dollars worth of funding, with large ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ engineering works and cooperation between several government departments, community organisations and land managers. The sites are still active and considered excellent examples of best management practices for rural drains.

b. The establishment and performance of the Caring for our Country program;

- Original strategy focussed on iconic national targets resulted in loss of grass roots support and engagement. Anecdotal outcome was volunteer movement out of landcare to other activities, resulting in great loss of social capital and social knowledge in localised NRM areas which had accumulated over many years.
- Introduction of landscape scale project targets admirable, however best suited to NRM regions, or co-operation between sub-regions. Local strategies not accommodated unless part of larger project. These projects required a great amount of coordination, planning and work – often unrewarded with grant application failure. In instances, the large amount of work involved in preparing an application to valuable time and resources away from limited capacity to deliver localised NRM projects.
- Community Action Grants and Community Landcare Grants extremely valuable initiative to localised NRM and landcare groups. Funding limit of \$20,000 insufficient for meaningful or longer term projects. Landcare organisations were better positioned for longer term planning with longer term policy commitment.
- Funding to support employment of Landcare co-ordinators and NRM Officers would be most beneficial, and provide greater certainty for communities engaged in landcare activities.

c. The outcomes to date and for the forward estimates period of Caring for our Country;

No comment



d. The implications of the 2014-15 Budget for land care programs, in particular, on contracts, scope, structure, outcomes of programs and long term impact on natural resource management;

- Implications of the 2014-15 Federal budget will have a negative long term impact on Natural Resource Management, particularly in terms of contracts, scope, structure and program outcomes:
 - Funding for localised holistic projects neglected in current strategy;
 - Further loss of volunteer social capital and knowledge largely relied upon to implement projects will be lost to other volunteer areas, or all together, reducing social fabric of communities and associated health implications;
 - Green Army participants under mutual obligation or work for the dole compulsion - participants in previous incarnations had poor work ethic, low productivity and maximum supervision requirement. Often participants have no interest in the environment. The green army participants do not possess the social capital and knowledge required to achieve landcare outcomes effectively and efficiently. Offering support for traineeships in Natural Resource management would have greater long term outcomes, and provide broader scope and increased structure to landcare planning and programs.
 - Twenty Million Tree project is admirable, however funding required supporting coordination and employment to achieve targets, negotiate revegetation, etc. This project only considers revegetation – a more holistic approach to natural resource management required – e.g. faunal protection, riparian protection, biosecurity, community training etc.

e. The Governments policy rationale in relation to changes to landcare programs;

- The Green Army aspect of policy rationale is flawed. Green Army is an employment and training outcome, not a Landcare outcome. Outcomes would be improved if funding was directed to Landcare co-ordinators, NRM Officers and traineeship support. This would result in indigenous employment, rural and regional employment and could reduce youth and long term unemployment. Improved rural and regional employment opportunities would result in building more sustainable communities.
- A lack of grant opportunities and schemes for landcare groups results in further loss of social capital from disenfranchised volunteers and participants. Local NRM objectives are not being met. Lack of continuity in on ground projects will result in increasing biosecurity threats. Long term, control and restoration costs will be greater.
- The Million Trees project only results in a small proportion of required landcare outcomes. The project does not tackle holistic landcare requirements.

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f. Analysis of national, state and regional funding priorities for landcare programs;

- In analysing funding priorities by national, state and regional groups, a management analogy may be applied. Are we considering the Board at the top of the organisation, or the customers? Landcare is traditionally completed by local volunteers who have a great deal of knowledge about local issues, species and needs of the environment. These volunteers may be considered the customer. Volunteer needs and wants must be reflected in funding priorities. These needs may be best fed up the chain through landcare organisations to regional bodies or state instrumentalities. Regional bodies are best to feed up program requirements to national bodies.
- In the same instance, national priorities can be fed down through the regional bodies, and directed to the local organisations and volunteers.
- State priorities are also essential in the entire scheme of landcare. These priorities are best directed through local landcare organisations.
- In setting funding priorities for landcare programs, all aspects of the landcare supply chain need to be considered, so that each of the stakeholders have an opportunity to source or direct funding as per their priorities. Landcare requires a multi program model to suit all stakeholders.

g. How the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture have, and can, work together to deliver seamless land care program;

No comment.

h. The role of natural resource management bodies in past and future planning, delivery, reporting and outcomes;

No comment.

i. Any other related matters.

No comment

Further information or comment regarding this submission may be directed to:
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