



## Katanning Land Conservation District Committee

PO Box 803  
Katanning WA 6317

ABN: 54 582 096 211

### **Submission to the National Landcare Program Senate Enquiry from Katanning LCDC**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Senate Enquiry into the '*History, effectiveness, performance and future of the National Landcare Program*'. We have elected to provide comment on some of the items within the Terms of Reference.

**a. Establishment of NHT** No comments

**b. Establishment and performance of the Caring for our Country program**

The shift to national targets under Caring for our Country away from the regional strategies created a significant amount of disengagement with the local communities. There was a loss of momentum in local projects that focussed on assets that were identified through regional NRM plans, as they were no longer considered eligible for funding.

The provision of Community Action Grants / Community Landcare Grants that community groups were able to apply directly to the Australian Government for were an important part of the opportunities available, and allowed local scale work to continue. The \$50,000 per project funding limit on the CLG grants was an appropriate amount that allowed meaningful work to be carried out. The \$20,000 limit on the CAG grants was too small.

A great benefit of the CfoC program was the reliability of having a five year policy commitment, and multi-year funding. It allowed for future planning, and facilitated longer-term outcomes to be sought.

**c. Outcomes and forward estimates of CfoC** No comments

**d. Implications of the 2014-15 budget for Landcare Programs**

The Katanning LCDC is concerned about a number of features of the proposed National Landcare Program for the 2014 – 15 year.

Disruptions to the flow of Landcare funding resources create significant hurdles for local communities and projects. These include:

- Uncertainty of employment for Landcare staff – the coordinators and facilitators at the local level
- Loss of continuity for activities such as pest animal and weed control, with a resultant loss of previous years' gains and achievements
- Disengagement of farmers who are annual participants – a forced 'year off' from their Landcare programs
- Uncertainty for providers such as tree nurseries, fencing contractors etc.

The lack of a community grants program this year through which community groups can apply directly to the Australian Government has been difficult for the Katanning LCDC and many other community based Landcare groups. Over 25 farmers had prepared expressions of interest for on-ground works on their properties for this year. However, without the Community Landcare Grants (or similar) program operating, we have not been able to submit these projects for funding, and consequently less environmental work has been / will be achieved over this period. The farmers have also been wondering "what's going on?" and we are concerned about the risk of landholders' willingness to engage in Landcare in the future.



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The Katanning LCDC has been disheartened with the launch of the Green Army program, particularly as this welfare and training program has been funded out of the Landcare budget. The Green Army does not meet the needs of the Katanning LCDC and it is unlikely that we will be able to engage meaningfully with the program. It is very disappointing to see that money that could have been spent supporting on-going and active community-based Landcare has been re-directed into a "Work for the Dole" program.

The Katanning LCDC has been watching the development of the 20 Million Trees Program with interest, and participated in the recent Request for Information process. We are hoping to be able to engage with the program, but we are concerned that its simplistic structure may limit the achievement of maximum environmental 'bang for buck'. At this stage, we understand that the funding will be for trees only, and will not encompass the holistic nature of landscape regeneration which includes fencing, nesting boxes for EPBC-listed species, pest control and associated activities. We are also aware that 20 million trees will not cover the usual extent of revegetation across Australia for the five-year period.

There is uncertainty about the proposal for all programs of general Landcare funding being run through the regional NRM groups. The Katanning LCDC is concerned that this may work negatively, especially for those Landcare and community groups that do not have a strong relationship with their regional NRM group, or have different local priorities to those held by the NRM region. Previously, having a grants program that allowed groups to apply directly to the Australian Government gave community-based Landcare groups the opportunity to present their project and provide a sound investment case without the constraints of the regional NRM plans and priorities. The Katanning LCDC is also concerned that the regional NRM bodies are very expensive organisations to run (high staffing levels and salaries, expenditure on marketing, governance costs etc) and this may impact on the amount of money that becomes available for the community groups to apply for – to carry out actual on-ground works.

## e. The Australian Government's policy rationale for changes to Landcare programs

It appears that the 'answers' to Landcare's needs have been over-simplified. The responses under the current Government appear to have been developed without an in-depth understanding of the Landcare ethic and movement.

Issue Government has Heard	Required Action	Response from the Australian Government
Challenges with volunteer recruitment and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meaningful consistent projects for volunteers to engage in.</li> <li>Professional staff to support volunteers.</li> <li>Training in areas such as engagement and succession planning.</li> <li>Recognition and support for local long-term volunteers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Green Army – a short term, unskilled / inexperienced 'work for the dole' program replacing the long term volunteers and local capacity.</li> </ul>
More on-ground works to be done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An annual or twice-yearly grants program to support holistic environmental and sustainable agriculture on-ground activities.</li> <li>More money to be available directly to on-ground groups and less supporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20 Million Trees. And nothing else (no fences etc).</li> </ul>



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	regional NRM structures.	
Complicated reporting / application processes – need for simplification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 'Community Landcare Grants' / 'Envirofund' type project application forms, regular consistent process and straightforward reporting.</li> <li>Continuity of the Joint Team, creating a single entry point to the two Commonwealth Departments.</li> <li>Single database which records the entity details of Landcare organisations and their funding history.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community grants to be run through the regions. Our region has the most difficult reporting system of all our funders, and there isn't consistency between regions.</li> <li>Separation of the Environment and Agriculture streams – two different departments and two sets of expectations.</li> </ul>
Close consultation and planning with the Landcare community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for and continuation of the National and State Landcare Networks.</li> <li>Close involvement at the policy development stages by the Australian Landcare Council.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding provided to State Landcare Networks.</li> <li>Shelving / non-use of the Australian Landcare Council.</li> </ul>
Landcare has benefits across a growing range of portfolios – mental health, emergency preparedness, biosecurity, food security and so on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider Landcare as a deliverer / partner in projects being undertaken in other portfolios ie <i>expand</i> the breadth of resourcing and engagement for Landcare.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moved items from other portfolios <i>into</i> the Landcare bucket, <i>diminishing</i> the available resources (eg Green Army should be in Employment &amp; Training, Concessional Loan Schemes in Finance etc)</li> </ul>

### f. Analysis of National, state and regional funding priorities for Landcare programs

Local priorities are highly important, and sometimes are not picked up at higher levels. However, it is often the case that the local priorities leverage higher levels of community and business support and are consequently a more cost-effective investment, achieving more on-ground outcomes.

It is understood that the Australian Government's national priorities need to align with EPBC Act and other legislative obligations. However, given that the principle of Landcare is community based on-ground action, there will be disparity between the local and national priorities. The Australian Government's Landcare program needs to be comfortable with this mis-alignment and provide the required support and resources.

State priorities often differ from National priorities. With no bilateral agreement between State and National governments alignment of NRM priorities is irrelevant.

The challenge that has existed since the beginning of the NAPSQ program has been that although regional NRM plans were intended to reflect the regional priorities, they were heavily influenced by the national priorities – if national priorities were not key to the plan, the opportunities for Federal funding were severely restricted. In order for regional NRM plans to be useful in the way they are intended – to guide prioritisation within a region based on regional needs – they need to be accepted and valued by the Government even if the national priorities do not feature strongly.



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### **g. How the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture can work together**

The Katanning LCDC strongly supports the model previously used of a Joint Team consisting of staff from both departments. This improved communication between the two departments, and also made a single 'entry point' for Landcare groups across Australia.

A Joint Team can ensure there are consistent reporting etc requirements across Australian Government Landcare programs. It also reduces the 'silo' effect which occurs when the two departments operate separately, forcing projects and on-ground works to align either with environment or agriculture outcomes rather than being able to jointly deliver on both.

### **h. Role of NRM bodies in planning, delivery, reporting and outcomes**

The Katanning LCDC is very much of the view that the regional NRM body should act as a 'clearing house' for funds and play a key role in network maintenance and strategic planning.

However, the regional NRM bodies appear to be very resource-hungry organisations. They have very high levels of staff numbers, and are delivering a large number of projects on their own. Staff salaries are considerably higher than those able to be afforded by community Landcare groups for their own Landcare Officers. It also appears that large amounts of money are also spent on activities such as corporate branding, uniforms etc, which 'rubs salt in the wounds' of local Landcare groups that operate on very little funding for employment and amenities. It is felt that if the role of the regional NRM bodies was restricted to funding distribution and strategic planning, more money would make it 'to the ground'.

The Katanning LCDC runs projects through a wide range of funders, including the Australian, State and local governments, philanthropic organisations, the regional NRM body, corporate sponsorship and others. However, the reporting requirements sought by our regional NRM body are by far the most cumbersome, labour intensive and inefficient.

The Australian Government appears to have a view that the regional NRM bodies act as an 'umbrella' or 'peak' organisation for all of the community based Landcare groups within their geographic region. This is simply not true. The regional NRM body is one of many organisations with which Landcare groups can choose to partner for the delivery of on-ground projects. It should not be assumed that the Landcare group has inferior governance structures or expertise. The regional NRM body's ability to act as a true voice for Landcare is limited by the fact that it is almost exclusively dependent on a single funder (the Australian Government) and not fully free to participate in other areas of Landcare or as an advocate for community Landcare.

### **i. Any other? No comments**

If you require any further information on any of our responses, please don't hesitate to contact:

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