



The Secretary  
Standing Committee On Environment And Communications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Farm Tree & Landcare Association (FTLA) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry regarding the National Landcare Program. We welcome the Australian Government's continuing commitment to sustainable land management.

The Farm Tree & Landcare Association (FTLA) is an independent incorporated association governed by its members. Established in 1986, the FTLA is one of Australia's largest network of landcarers with currently approximately 600 Member Groups, comprising over 16,000 households. The FTLA has evolved to cater for groups and individuals involved in Landcare, tree planting and similar land management and conservation activities. Our members include Landcare groups and networks, Friends Of groups, sustainable agriculture and other similar groups, mostly located in Victoria but we also have a number of members based in the other States.

The FTLA is primarily concerned with ensuring the health of Landcare and other similar community based land management groups, both through access to grants to do on-ground work and opportunities for capacity building.

Landcare was developed in the early 1980s and has proved to have a very robust program logic, namely:

- that local people are much better placed to develop solutions having better local knowledge
- that groups are generally more effective in achieving outcomes than individuals, and
- that working together on practical on-ground problems sectors of the community that usually don't align can come together on shared ground to create solutions.

This idea was so powerful that in 1988 the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation came together with the then government to launch the Decade of Landcare, and Landcare has never looked back.

As per the original concept, Landcare *"will be group driven, that is, its management will be by local groups who will cooperate towards a defined [Landcare] objective. ... The purpose of [Landcare] groups is to focus, and give practical, local expression to local needs, enthusiasms, initiatives and to integrate local and Government strategies, plans and resources to that end."*<sup>1</sup>

On the ground that means farmers and greenies, lifestyle landowners and established communities, by focussing on shared ground and local solutions, have been able to come together through Landcare and have been able to tackle intractable problems and negotiate solutions that bring mutual benefit to the farming and local communities and to the environment.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Total Land Care*. Submission by Land Protection Service (LPS) to the Victorian Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands (CFL) Conservation Focus Committee Meeting, 15 July 1986

*"Sustainability problems have systemic causes located deep in patterns of production and consumption, settlement and governance. Therefore, achieving ecologically sustainable development (ESD) requires recognition that complex environmental problems, like climate change, also involve social and economic dimensions as it is societies and economies - individual and collective human behaviours - that cause the problems, not the environment itself".<sup>2</sup>*

Landcare is essentially a social mechanism to achieve biophysical outcomes. While its primary focus is on generating outcomes for sustainable landscapes, it is the relationships that Landcare creates through group action, the resultant peer to peer learning, the norms established and the respect Landcare groups develop in local communities that make on-ground action possible. The success of Landcare over almost three decades demonstrates that the Landcare model is an effective mechanism for sustainable land management.

The local focus and community foundation of Landcare means that there is no typical landcare group or landcarer, but it has given the Landcare movement incredible strength and resilience. Nonetheless Landcare does not happen in a vacuum, it has always been a partnership with government and the National Landcare Programme has a major role to play in the continued success of Landcare.

To continue to be effective into the future landcare needs:

- Sufficient funding to allow the Landcare community to undertake and maintain on-ground works
- Access to funding to build capacity and develop skills and knowledge separate from funding for on-ground works
- A balance between asset prioritisation and landscape restoration and resilience
- Program delivery mix weighted to regional mechanisms but with a national delivery option to capture cross-regional projects

The principles contained in this submission have been developed with input by our members and stakeholders who have been involved in and impacted by Australian Government programs in this area including the Caring for Our Country program, the previous National Landcare Program, the Natural Heritage Trust, and the Envirofund.

## **The establishment and performance of the Caring for Our Country program**

Landcare has accessed Australian Government support through a number of different programs over the last twenty-five years, of which the Caring for Our Country program was the latest iteration. With each new program comes a period of transition, often painful, as the community adjusts to new priorities and the government re-learns what works and what doesn't both in terms of programmatic mechanisms and community support.

The introduction of Caring for Our Country was particularly painful in Victoria with changes in the funding conditions for the NRM bodies (Catchment Management Authorities in Victoria) resulting in a significant loss of Landcare support staff at both the agency and local group level. Simultaneously there was a reduction in the availability of small grants, previously accessed through the Envirofund. For FTLA Member Groups in particular the simplified auspicing process that had operated under the Envirofund became far more bureaucratic.

---

<sup>2</sup> Godden and Peel (2010) Environment Law. Scientific, Policy and Regulatory Dimensions. Oxford University Press, p 138. [from web forum jShep Comment 14 23 Mar 2011, 6:41 PM <http://caringforourcountryreview.com.au/topic/where-should-the-australian-government-focus-its-activities-in-improving-management-of-our-nations-natural-resources> [accessed 13/5/2011]]

Over the first five years of Caring for Our Country the Community Action Grants opened up the program to many Landcare groups and the application processes became more streamlined, although still requiring significant volunteer effort. The introduction of the Regional Landcare Facilitators was a welcome development, although not adequately replacing the loss of personnel and expertise lost in the transition. The recognition of capacity building as a separate funding priority was an important recognition of the importance of sustaining group health.

The second iteration of the Caring for Our Country program saw the introduction of two separate streams of Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Agriculture. Such a division was inconsistent both with the stated intention of an integrated whole of government approach and with the underlying principle of Landcare with which the FTLA is principally concerned, namely the indivisibility of healthy ecosystems and sustainable productive landscapes.

### **The implications of the 2014-15 Budget for land care programs**

Given pre-election commitments that the full Caring for Country and Landcare budgets would be maintained into the new National Landcare Program, the budget cuts to the National Landcare Program, in replacing the Caring for Our Country program, of \$483 million is disappointing.

Such cuts will reduce the amount of on-ground work able to be accomplished by dedicated volunteers. The volunteer contribution is significant compared to public investment, although in many areas any reduction or patchiness in available funding significantly impacts the amount of work able to be accomplished and undermines gains already achieved in natural resource management. The gap in funding this year<sup>3</sup> is already affecting Landcare groups and networks who are reporting significant loss of momentum and a reduction in capacity to achieve works on-ground.

This funding is further diluted as the remaining funding needs now to cover a greater number of programs further reducing the money available to for Landcare groups to do Landcare work. The programs include cane toad eradication in the Kimberley, \$9 million of fishing programs and a strategy to protect the Great Barrier Reef, the \$40 million Reef 2050 plan and some already diverted towards drought relief: while worthy initiatives, these are not generally Landcare activities.

The cuts may have been at least partially prompted by the recommendations of the National Commission of Audit to halve funding to the National Landcare Program, which assumed that the work that Landcare does can be done by private landholders without government support. Firstly this ignores the significant amount of work accomplished by Landcare volunteers on public land for public benefits. Secondly, land management issues are rarely limited by land tenure boundaries so Landcare work accomplished on private land has significant public benefits: riparian management benefits landholders downstream, both public and private; control of pests and weeds by private landholder reduces the spread of pests and weeds to other landholders both private and public; and so on. Thirdly, much of Australia's natural heritage is located on private land and it is reasonable for the Australian community to assist the private landholders to conserve and protect that natural heritage for the benefit of the broader Australian community.

---

<sup>3</sup> The last Australian Government grant round was the heavily oversubscribed Community Environment Grants round in May 2013, and the next has only just been announced on 8 Aug to open in September as a one-off round.

## The Government's policy rationale in relation to changes to land care programs

The Government has recently released National Landcare Programme Consultation Paper, which contains the programme principles of simple, local and long-term. These are good principles which fit with the Landcare ethic and we welcome them as guiding principles. However there is a paucity of detail available regarding the new National Landcare Programme which makes it difficult to comment on the policy rationale in detail.

### *Simplicity*

Simplicity enables the greatest amount of effort to be focussed on on-ground efforts rather than dealing with bureaucracy, however the test is always in the detail which is not currently available. Previous challenges to simplicity have included:

- limitations on the number of applications a particular organisation can sponsor or auspice
- application forms that can't be copied so that when someone (e.g. FTLA, Network or facilitators) are preparing multiple applications for multiple groups they have to complete each application from the beginning each time. Often applicants have only discovered this when trying to submit
- in the last grant round the financial requirements were simplified for small grants by replacing an audit with an accountant's review yet the financial statement requirements were worded as presenting a "true and fair view" which to an accountant is indicative of the need for an audit, rather than a review, resulting in delays, frustrations and unexpected costs when project managers attempted to prepare the final project reports.

Such examples only become apparent during the operation of the programme, but where possible learnings from previous programs or rounds should be carried forward.

Simpler shorter application forms are always of benefit, even two pages is often sufficient to demonstrate the value of the project proposal for small projects, and Expression of Interest application processes should be encouraged if more detail is required. The real time involved in preparing a grant application is in developing the project, creating partnerships, getting landholder agreements and sourcing accurate quotes for budgets. As funding rounds are often heavily oversubscribed this time is often 'lost' and even if funding is successful it may be delayed by months and project design may be affected by changing conditions, landholders and costs, so reducing wasted effort will prevent volunteer disengagement.

With approximately 600 Member Groups, the FTLA sponsors or auspices a significant number of grant applications and we have found that simplicity can be achieved by the FTLA providing auspicings and insurance details directly to the funding body greatly saving on administration, rather than 100 applicants asking the FTLA for the same insurance certificate and supplying 100 copies to the funding body. Similar systems may be appropriate for other organisations auspicings multiple applicants or providing group insurance coverage.

### *Local*

Local decision making is a founding principle of Landcare and recognises that local communities are best placed to assess local problems and are best able to develop appropriate local solutions should be recognised in the National Landcare Program. Local does not mean regional, but means local communities with similar concerns that may be within or across regions. Local does not always mean small-scale, as local groups work together as networks at the landscape scale.

Local decision-making should contribute to and take notice of regional planning and be informed by the ecological, agricultural and social evidence on a broad scale, and should be preferenced over

decision-making remote from the locality. Local knowledge informs local action which can then be evaluated locally creating a continuous learning and validation of local knowledge. These learnings should then be transferred across regions and adapted to other local conditions as applicable.

### *Long-term*

A long-term approach from government in terms of funding and programmatic structures would be welcomed. Landcare encompasses the inherent recognition that sustainable land management is an ongoing process that can take decades to show results from sustained improvements in management practices. The community element to Landcare enables it to weather changes in government policy and demographic change. This does not imply stagnation; on the contrary the lack of bureaucratic barriers enables Landcare groups to be highly responsive to new information and situations. It provides longevity in strategic planning, governance and in sustained action supported by knowledge developed and tested over long time frames.

Landcarers are often frustrated by short-term funding cycles of one to three years that mean that ongoing maintenance or monitoring cannot be funded, that valuable expertise and community enthusiasm is lost when a project is not funded in the next round, or that experienced support staff cannot be retained at either the community or agency level due to uncertainty of funding.

Even within funding cycles, short deadlines between funding rounds being publicised and closing creates significant frustrations as volunteers attempt to find time to write grant applications while fulfilling work and family commitments.

Successful recipients are also frustrated by intractable project deadlines that do not recognise that on-ground work is often weather-dependent, meaning that sometime projects need another season to enable them to happen rather than losing the investment in developing the project and obtaining funds. The longer term the government's approach to Landcare funding, the more effort can be put into effective sustainable land management action on-ground.

### *The Landcare approach*

This missing element to these principles is the importance of the group based community partnership approach intrinsic to Landcare. Natural resource management is broader than Landcare and much good work is done by individuals. Nonetheless Landcare's success is grounded in the benefits of the group approach, which is more effective than individual action even if it is harder to measure. Local decision-making occurs most effectively through groups of people with local knowledge who are best placed to work through the difficult decisions inherent in sustainability and make the best choices for their area. Many land degradation problems (soil erosion, salinity, rabbits, etc.) cannot necessarily be contained, let alone controlled by an individual landholder, no matter how well that person applies contemporary knowledge. By working together a group can generate a better outcome for all involved.<sup>4</sup> Group structures also enable peer learning and social capital formation enabling Landcare to achieve long-term commitment to and achievement of sustainable land use.

### *Programme delivery*

In terms of programme delivery, we welcome a mix of regional and national delivery streams, however the national delivery stream should include a grants program for projects that reach beyond NRM region boundaries. There are a significant number of organisations in the Landcare space that operate across regional and State boundaries, which are disadvantaged by the regional delivery model no matter how worthy their project proposal. An 80/20 regional/ national delivery model would

---

<sup>4</sup> Poussard, Horrie "The Early Beginnings of Landcare in Victoria"

provide an avenue for cross-regional, State-wide, and cross-State organisations and projects that necessarily fit within the priorities of a single NRM region to have access to the programme.

There are two new separate elements within the National Landcare Programme, being the Green Army and the 20 Million Trees programme. Funding for revegetation work has always been part of Australian Government funding for Landcare and any funding along these lines is welcome, although the rationale of having it as a separate programme is unclear. Many Landcare groups plant very significant numbers of trees each year as part of normal operations so it is to be hoped that the majority of the 20 Million Trees plantings can be accomplished through the grant rounds open to Landcare groups, particularly as the longevity of community-based Landcare groups is more likely to result in ongoing maintenance of plantings vis-à-vis planting undertaken via private contractors.

### *Green Army and 20 Million Trees*

The Green Army is a new initiative funded at \$525 million over four years, however in order for Landcare groups and other natural resource managers to take advantage of the Green Army program, there needs to be concurrent project funding available. Landcare groups are most likely to engage with the Green Army as Project Sponsors. Project Sponsors need to have an existing already funded project in order to be able to utilise the Green Army participants. Currently there is a \$10,000 allowance for "Project Specific Materials" which goes to the Service Provider, and each project needs to be substantial in order to absorb 20 weeks of labour. Such a project would generally be estimated at \$80,000 - \$100,000 in project costs. Nationally the estimated costs of bare bones small to medium grant program would be approximately \$100 million. Without a significant accompanying grant program the Landcare community will not be able to effectively utilise Green Army participants.

Moreover, the Landcare community has significant concerns that the Green Army not be considered a replacement for Landcare volunteer efforts, as experienced Landcare volunteers will be more effective hour for hour, dollar for dollar, than a trainee, however well-intentioned the trainee. Therefore, the Green Army should be used as adjunct to the volunteer Landcare effort, and should not crowd out funding for existing Landcare efforts.

## **National, State and regional funding priorities for land care programs**

From the National Landcare Programme Consultation Paper (2014):

*The National Landcare Programme will deliver a reform agenda focused on:*

- *putting local natural resource management communities, including Landcare, back at the centre of land management decision making and delivery*
- *cutting red tape through simplified application and reporting systems; and*
- *maintaining critical natural resources and environmental infrastructure through the continued support for long-term investments and planning.*

*Table 1: The objectives of the National Landcare Programme*

<i>Strategic objectives</i>	<i>Strategic outcomes</i>
<i>Strategic objective 1: Communities are managing landscapes to sustain long-</i>	<i>Maintain and improve ecosystem services through sustainable management of local and regional</i>



<i>term economic and social benefits from their environment.</i>	<i>landscapes.</i>
<i>Strategic objective 2: Farmers and fishers are increasing their long-term returns through better management of the natural resource base.</i>	<i>Increase in the number of farmers and fishers adopting practices that improve the quality of the natural resource base, and the area of land over which those practices are applied.</i>
<i>Strategic objective 3: Communities are involved in caring for their environment.</i>	<i>Increase engagement and participation of the community, including Landcare, farmers and Indigenous people, in sustainable natural resource management.</i>
<i>Strategic objective 4: Communities are protecting species and natural assets.</i>	<i>Increase restoration and rehabilitation of the natural environment, including protecting and conserving nationally and internationally significant species, ecosystems, ecological communities, places and values.</i>

At a national level the strategic outcomes outlined in the National Landcare Programme Consultation Paper seem good in principle, although greater level of details would be required for evaluation. The strategic objectives have a welcome emphasis on community involvement, however seem to be lacking specific mention of improving natural resource condition as an objective rather than an outcome.

As a general principle the targets set under these priorities should be scientifically based and adequately funded. The general level of funding should be increased as the protection of our natural assets such as our soils and biodiversity is vital in contributing to the long-term well-being of the nation.

#### *Asset Prioritisation, Landscape Restoration & Resilience*

Recent natural resource management programs have had an asset-based approach, which has its benefits however such approaches can undermine integrated approaches, particularly when these are individual assets rather than asset classes such as soils or biodiversity. The risk with this approach is that these assets become islands in the landscape and are threatened by lack of connectivity. While the protection of existing assets is important it is insufficient to achieve landscape restoration across the country.

Many communities and groups, particularly those in traditional agricultural land where much of the land has already been cleared, are based outside areas with assets identified as high priority. The focus for groups in these areas is restoration – to put trees into the landscape, to protect waterways, to stop salinity and erosion, to stop weeds and rabbits. These are basic land management tasks that address existing environmental degradation and engage the community in sustainable land management. A balance between asset prioritisation and wide-scale landscape restoration and resilience needs to be maintained.

#### *Maintaining capacity for on-ground works*

In order to achieve the stated object of putting local natural resource management communities, including Landcare, back at the centre of land management decision making and delivery, there needs to be ongoing support in terms of small grants and assistance with capacity building.

Landcare needs to be assisted to maintain its presence in an area. Depending on the activity between 50-90% of sustainable land management practice occur without direct government funding. These

activities were more likely to occur where there is a Landcare group in the local area<sup>5</sup>. Activity levels and project funding may vary over time, but without a Landcare group in the area there is no forum for planning, peer learning and project development.

Community skills, knowledge and engagement should be eligible for funding in its own right. While investing directly in on-ground projects buys immediate outcomes, investing in community capacity buys long-term commitment to sustainable land management and practice change and is as important if harder to measure. This need was recognised in the sustainable agriculture support envisioned by the Natural Heritage Trust that recognised the social viability and well-being of rural communities<sup>6</sup> as a purpose of the account.

Most on-ground works rely on community engagement, on creating relationships and trust, and that creation of social capital happens outside and before and after the on-ground works but the on-ground works cannot be accomplished or maintained without it. Landcare has been delivering community learning and partnerships and capacity building on the overhead from project delivery. These activities need to be specifically funded and supported otherwise the social capital already established will be lost and the ability of Landcare to deliver improvements in resource condition will be diminished.

Community engagement is best done by community groups or peer groups, or, when done by government agents, by people who are located in the community and have longevity (which requires attractive salaries and job security). Locally based support staff can be invaluable as a source of expertise and as knowledge brokers. They often bring skills that Landcarers who are more on-ground focussed lack, such as grant writing skills. Many Landcare volunteers are happy to do the work, but not the paperwork, and their contribution should not be lost through lack of support. In other areas where there are more lifestyle farms or peri-urbanites and fewer experience land managers, Landcare support staff are valuable to provide practical sustainable land management expertise.

Flexible funding should be available for Landcare groups and networks to develop capacity on an as-needs basis through engaging appropriate service providers or facilitating peer to peer learning networks. Engagement of support staff should be recognised as a valid mechanism, but not the only, method to deliver capacity. The most appropriate form of support will depend on local needs. Flexibility around project design and funding eligibility is needed: some areas will need to employ staff, others will want to contract peer to peer farmer-educators, some projects will need significant administration and some will be directed purely at on-ground action. In particular devolved grant and large scale programs which engage many landholders incur significant administration costs.

To achieve biophysical outcomes, community engagement and capacity building needs to be supported outside of project funds or part of the project funding needs to be a lump sum to recognise the social capital already created just as intellectual property has a financial value recognising that otherwise it would have to be recreated at considerable and wasted cost. This is particularly so when groups are unlikely to receive project funding year in year out (which given the massive oversubscription of most grant programs is highly unlikely) and therefore need to survive between projects rather than having to resurrect social buy in whenever they do get a project funded because that process takes years, generally longer than any project the government is willing to fund. Short term projects only work either when program managers are willing to pay commercial rates and to keep doing so, or when the project manager has access to existing networks, capacity and trust.

Strategic planning, volunteer recruitment, the documenting achievements and learnings and group operations should all be seen as valid activities to be funded. Some of these may be best funded

<sup>5</sup> Curtis, A & Mendham, E (2011) "Bridging the gap between policy and management of natural resources" In: *Changing Land Management: Adoption of New Practices by Rural Landholders*, Pannell, D & Vanclay, F (ed.s) CSIRO Publishing.

<sup>6</sup> NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST OF AUSTRALIA ACT 1997 – Section 16



through ongoing maintenance grants either directly or through the State or regional bodies. These are not once off funding needs: capacity always needs to be renewed as resources are expended and people leave and new people become involved in Landcare or take on new roles. Capacity is a moving target and can always be improved.

### *State Priorities*

In terms of the State priorities, our comments will be restricted to the Victorian experience as most of the FTLA membership is located within that state. Victoria is fortunate to have enjoyed sustained bipartisan government support from the beginnings of Landcare in the mid 1980s, greatly contributing to the strength of Landcare across the State.

In previous programs Landcare at the State level has had more of environmental focus, but with the integration of the departments of primary industries and environment may encourage more integrated approaches to Landcare. The Victorian government program was recently renewed in the State budget at levels similar to previous budgets. The Victorian government has undertaken a number of very welcome initiatives in the last decade including the Local Landcare Facilitators which have been invaluable in re-energising Landcare, a volunteer recruitment initiative and a corporate Landcare facilitator who acted as a local complement to the national role of Landcare Australia Ltd in diversifying the funding streams available for Landcare projects. The Victorian Landcare Grants and other small grant programs have provided vital funding in supporting on-ground works, however as always community capacity to undertake on-ground works always outstrips government support and more funds would be well utilised. Many of the State government programs have been delivered by the regional NRM bodies and there is an existing delivery infrastructure in Victoria as a result.

Some activities that are most efficiently done at a regional, State or national level to provide support to community such promotion of the brand and the ethic, celebration of significant achievements such as the awards, regional, State and national publications, websites, informational resources, leveraging large scale corporate sponsorship, provision of tailored training, expertise in volunteer recruitment, collection and publication of baseline scientific data, integrated mapping and so on. It is inefficient in many cases for individual groups to develop expertise in all these areas and these resources and the institutions, both government and non-government, that provide them should be supported.

### *Aligning Priorities*

In terms of aligning national, State and regional programs, there needs to be a degree of flexibility in new national programs to recognise and complement rather than duplicate existing infrastructure and allow agencies and staff at all levels to work together rather than separately.

There is also value in aligning national, State, regional and local priorities, especially if the alignment is bottom up rather than top down. However that value depends firstly on the quality of the local and regional planning processes which vary widely so the value of alignment would depend on those processes being properly resourced and developed with rigour. The timeliness of the prioritisation also affects the value of alignment as some of these planning processes can be quite static so priorities contemporaneous to the planning process may have altered due to climatic or demographic changes or new scientific evidence by the time of program delivery. It is also important that community experience and priorities be properly included in the planning process; cursory consultation processes do not suffice.

Most significantly, the alignment of priorities, particularly with current trend of asset prioritisation, can mean that Landscape restoration and resilience is disadvantaged. Areas or assets not currently of concern can quickly become threatened when conditions change if a base level of ecosystem resilience has not been safeguarded. While the protection of existing assets is important it is insufficient to achieve landscape restoration.

Communities and groups based outside areas with high priority assets may be alienated if landscape restoration is not recognised and funded. This makes it very difficult to re-engage the community later on when priorities change, both in terms of trust and having to play catch up for years of neglect. This is particularly a problem for those in established farming communities or peri-urban areas where much of the land has already been cleared.

So while alignment with the local, regional, State and national priorities should be valued, there should be sufficient flexibility within the program to promote resilience and restoration across the landscape and to enable proponents to demonstrate with good evidence why a particular project should be valued outside the current prioritisations.

## **Delivering a seamless land care program**

Natural resource management does not readily respect the boundaries of land tenure, or industry or departmental demarcations. This necessitates a whole of government approach, rather than Landcare being the “responsibility” of either the department responsible for environment or the department responsible for agriculture. This applies at all levels of government and requires good channels of communication between departments. This integrated approach also needs to apply in communications and rhetoric rather than labelling action “environmental” or “sustainable agriculture” as while these may aid logistics they reinforce a divided approach to land management and undermine effective integrated approaches. As Australia is continuing to increase its agricultural production so it is increasingly important not to separate the protection of environmental values from agricultural landscapes lest we end up with isolated patches of high environmental value in a sea of degrading agricultural landscapes

Landcare has always been focused on integrated sustainable land management for both agricultural production and the maximization of natural environmental values with the underlying recognition that across two-thirds of the country the two are interdependent in our modified Australian landscapes. Particularly recognising the public benefits to sustainable land management works undertaken on private land, but also recognising the productivity co-benefits to good natural resource management both on private land but adjoining public land. The current conversation within the Landcare community suggests that to these original concerns will be added food security, responding to climate change and the ongoing and increasing loss of biodiversity. The contribution made by Landcare to health and well-being, including physical, mental and social well-being, is also a current topic of discussion within Landcare, and further reinforces the value of integrated approaches reaching into the community development portfolio. The rise of international Landcare also presents an opportunity to involve the foreign affairs and trade portfolios.

The national institutions including the National Landcare Co-ordinator, the proposed National Landcare Advisory Committee or its predecessor the Australian Landcare Council, Landcare Australia Ltd, have a significant role in synthesising priorities and knowledge across departments and programs and regarding sharing learnings across the country. There should be a focus on maintain them and improving their effectiveness including good links into all relevant departments.

## **The role of natural resource management bodies**

Regional natural resource management bodies, catchment management authorities (CMAs) in Victoria, have been vital partners in Landcare work and for the most part in Victoria local Landcare communities have enjoyed productive relationships with their respective regional bodies.

There is in Victoria existing infrastructure through the regional bodies for delivery of programs and devolved grants so delivery of much of the National Landcare Programme through those existing mechanisms makes sense. Where delivery is through the regional bodies there should be 5% maximum on administrative costs so that the grant money is delivered to local groups on-ground.

With a regional delivery model, it is very important to involve community Landcare in the decision-making on Landcare funds. Landcare Networks should play a significant role, given that Landcare community has aggregated and developed capacity on that level which should be utilised, however this should not exclude individual groups as some of local groups have significant capacity in their own right. In some cases, where established networks with capacity exist, some functions of natural resource management bodies could be contracted out to networks.

It is also very important that regional bodies be required and supported to provide low level funds (around \$1000 pa) to keep groups going, to create resilience, to enable them to undertake the 50-90% of Landcare work that is unfunded and so they can be ready for the next grant round or for when government priorities change.

While communities have great capacity to affect change, they need to be supported. Therefore Regional bodies should also be required and supported to assist Landcare more generally in terms of information provision, training, newsletters and staff where needed. Some sectors of the community such as new or struggling Landcare groups, new landholders and minority groups may not have capacity to apply for funds initially as developing the knowledge and networks to develop good projects may take several and the successful grant writing itself requires considerable expertise. There needs to be explicit support through the Australian Government or via appropriate State or regional organisations in such situations.

Continuity of funding at regional and departmental levels is also important. Many volunteers are frustrated by insufficient support staff (extension officers, Landcare co-ordinators and facilitators) and high staff changeover to the extent that volunteers become disengaged as they do not feel it is worth investing in a relationship with agency staff when the person often needs to be informed on local issues and will leave within several years, starting the cycle again.

## **Related matters**

Conditions of grant contracts can be quite onerous on local groups, and are often carried through in devolved grant programs so that the same conditions are placed on \$5000 grant as a \$500,000 contract. Grant contracts should be appropriate to the size of the grant and to the recipient organisation. In particular contracts should be simple enough for a community organisation without access to legal advice to understand.

One area in particular that is onerous is that grant contracts often grant exclusive intellectual property rights to the funding body, even when the funds are provided for related activities rather than its actual creation. Intellectual property rights should be shared or at least unrestricted license should be granted for project proponents to use the Intellectual Property that has been developed by volunteers.

It is important to invest in planning, in pilot projects and in wide-scale delivery projects rather than just focussing on one type of project. There is some frustration in the Landcare community about the tendency of funding schemes to only be willing to fund “new” initiatives rather than investing in established successful projects or maintaining existing work. Similarly there is a tendency only to invest in pilot projects which means particularly with regards to software and mapping there is often a patchwork legacy of software programs that were only ever piloted and never delivered. It is important to fund new projects and initiatives, but it is also important to support proven projects and if a pilot demonstrates success to promote it more widely.