

Submission to the Senate Enquiry into the National Landcare Program from the Shire of Capel, Western Australia

The following dot pots summarise the observations and experience from the Shire of Capel since the beginning of the National Landcare Program.

A. The establishment and performance of the Natural Heritage Trust

NHT 1 (late 1990's) 3-4 years of funding for Coordinators with on-ground funding

- Locally-determined priorities were coordinated by existing local catchment and landcare groups.
- Funding was provided for the “upskilling” and resourcing of local active community members to work 1:1 with landholders to do “on-ground” landcare works. This created good up-take of funds for fencing of waterways, off-stream watering of stock, weed control and revegetation projects.
- Funding was administered by small landcare and catchment groups, who were often willing to adsorb administration costs by dedicated volunteers with a passion for landcare.
- The first review of NHT 1 showed the 1:1 connection between the local Landcare Officer and landholder was the single best way to engage landholders in landcare activities. The relationships and networks built up over 3-4 years made accessing experts easy and reliable.
- Landcare Coordinators had a good understanding of; the community in which they worked, the local landcare issues, local landholder mentors, local volunteers, local resources and provided 1:1 advice from their local experience.

NHT 2 (early 2000's) The development of new Catchment Councils to administer funding and projects using priorities set by Federal Departments.

- State Government agency support for landcare activities started to diminish as federal funding was seen as taking care of that part of the environment.
- The shift to federal priorities and catchment councils alienated active local landcare groups from the decision-making process and many folded or lost funding for projects.
- Many decisions on local priorities at the new catchment council were made behind closed doors due to confidentiality. This alienated the smaller active local groups who were excluded from the process even further.
- Landcare Coordinators who had built up networks lost their positions and projects lost their on-going funding.
- The administrative workload increased due to an extra tier of administration between the “on-ground” work and the Federal government.

B. Caring for our Country (Late 2000's onwards)

- Loss of all local input into funding priorities as these were now being set by the federal government who were looking for outcomes that could be seen from Canberra. Even though the catchment council developed the local priorities, they had to be in line with the priorities set by the federal government which often did not take into account previous projects that needed on-going support.
- Groups that did not reside in particular catchments or landscapes could not apply for funds to maintain works done in previous funding rounds. They saw weed control fall off the national priority list and local weed and feral control funding disappeared.
- The administrative workload was often higher than the work required for the on-ground action for small projects.

E. and F.

The Government's policy rationale in relation to land care programs and funding priorities

Landcare has simple fundamental concepts which are uniform across all states and landscapes. These are:

1. Fencing of stock out of waterways, wetlands and bushland areas.
2. Weed control and revegetation with local native species.
3. Protection of native bushland areas from human degradation such as illegal 4WD and motorbike access.
4. Feral animal control to protect biodiversity.

There has been a shift in focus from these simple concepts to a short-term funding of "iconic landscape" protection i.e. "protecting the Great Barrier Reef" or other specific locations. This has come at the cost of prohibiting funding access to active groups in other locations whose need is considered to be just as great by the communities in which they live.

The most effective way to retain equity and long-term results is to offer funding opportunities to all groups doing the fundamental landcare activities across the country.

By providing on-going support there will be real long-term outcomes on the ground across all landscapes, including the iconic landscapes such as the Great Barrier Reef. This could best be achieved by policy returning to supporting and funding the delivery of the basic fundamental concepts of landcare.

G. How the Department of Environment and Department of Agriculture can work together to deliver a seamless landcare program

See E and F.

There is a risk of confusing the role community-based landcare plays in landscape protection and the role of government agencies have to implement specific programs to address issues such as carbon capture and farming business development.

By giving landcare back to the community to deliver the basics as outlined in E and F, there should be no problems for the Department of Environment and the Department of Agriculture to understanding how to deliver good landcare program outcomes.

H. The role of NRM bodies in past and future planning, delivery, reporting and outcomes

The development of natural resource management bodies i.e. catchment councils, fragmented the pre-existing volunteer landcare community. The catchment councils although set up to be the voice of the community, are more the voice of the funding body with all the associated restrictions regarding priority projects and expected outcomes.

They suffer a lack of autonomy due to the limitations they have on the funding they receive. They suffer the lack of surety regarding their on-going existence due to the short term funding provided and changing priorities set by the federal government.

This situation is set to continue while the landcare priorities constantly change from the basic fundamental concepts and principles, to the concentration on iconic landscapes.

They do their best to plan, deliver and report on the projects they administer, however they cannot provide the most important element of landcare, future funding security for projects they begin.

I. Any other related matters

The Shire of Capel has been actively involved with Landcare since 1992 in their support of the Capel Land Conservation District Committee. By supporting this group financially and with resources this volunteer group is still active 22 years later.

This group of volunteers can plan projects 2 years, 3 years or more, ahead knowing they will have the long term on-going financial and resource support. It is the nature of landcare that it goes beyond the current limited funding cycle.

This longer term financial commitment is an essential requirement to successful landcare projects, as dealing effectively with environmental issues is not something that can be switched on and off. Decades of weed control can be undone in a couple of years without on-going monitoring and control. Erosion on waterways can go back to pre-works state if there is an event that takes out part of a fence.

The National Landcare Program was set up to support the basic principles of landcare, which are not complex, they are simple and relatively easy to achieve.

It is essential that those who are involved in landcare implementation and monitoring are provided with the knowledge that their efforts will be enhanced by future generations of land-carers. This can only be done by ensuring the on-going funding of projects that encompass the basics of landcare.

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