

## **Additional Information for Senate Committee Hearing into the National Landcare Program**

September 22, 2014

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We provide the following additional information to support our submission (Number 56) and clarify some of the questions asked by Senator Singh detailed below taken from the Hansard Transcript of Evidence from the Senate Hearing on Friday, 29 August, 2014.

**Senator SINGH:** Thank you, Ms de Preu. I think there was a slight confusion with submissions 56 and 57, so thank you for making that clear. I did just want to ask you a little bit about the effective principles that have come out of the National Landcare Programme and how you see that. I know that you relate specifically to the National Heritage Trust and the Caring for our Country program, but how do you see that the principles have really guided the development of the National Landcare Programme?

**Ms de Preu:** Sorry, I am not really clear on the question.

**Senator SINGH:** The National Landcare Programme has obviously been in place for a long time. We have now got this amalgamated program. Looking back over those years, what do you see have been some of the most effective goals, rather than principles, that have come out of the National Landcare Programme?

**Ms de Preu:** That is really out of my submission. I am just trying to pick up the—

**Senator SINGH:** I guess it is just helpful for the inquiry to have some examples.

**Ms de Preu:** Okay, can I perhaps take that one on notice.

### **NCSSA Response:**

NCSSA consider there are a number of important goals and outcomes that have emerged from the National Landcare Program since it was first developed including the following:

- Increased community awareness of land degradation from the impacts of pest plants and animals and unsustainable land management practices and how these impact on agricultural production and water quality;
- Increased awareness of the importance of native vegetation to both biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management practices;
- Raising skill levels and engaging local communities in local projects to restore native vegetation through weed control, tree-planting and revegetation projects;
- Development and implementation of best practice systems, including codes of practices and environmental management systems to achieve more sustainable land management ;

We have two key areas of concern regarding the goals of the National Landcare Program. Firstly, the primary focus of the program is on the benefits to agricultural production rather than addressing the dual benefits to both production and biodiversity conservation. We acknowledge that farmers and pastoralists have direct responsibility for managing significant areas of the Australian landscape and that their land management practices have important implications for biodiversity conservation.

There are however large areas of land that are managed for conservation outcomes across Australia including privately and publically owned land that may no longer be eligible for funding through the National Landcare Program. Given that the current guidelines for the program have not yet been released we are unable to confirm that this is the situation but based on previous Landcare programs the over-riding emphasis has been on sustainable use of natural resources rather than addressing the declines and ongoing threats to biodiversity.

Our second concern is that the generally small scale of projects funded through the National Landcare Program will not be effective in addressing the broader ongoing declines to biodiversity conservation and increase in threats that have been reported in various State of the Environment reports over recent years. In South Australia, the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) produces a state of the environment report every 5 years that assesses the condition of South Australian environmental resources, identifies trends in environmental quality, and reviews the effects of programs and activities that aim to protect, restore and improve the environment. The 2013 report found 24 of 27 environmental indicators that were assessed to be in poor or very poor condition while only 3 (11%) were assessed to be in good condition. These indicators showed further decline of already poor biodiversity, increased use of natural resources, increased development and industrial activity in sensitive areas such as the coastal zone, reduced water flows for the natural environment from the River Murray, and changes in the acidity, salinity and temperature of the marine environment.

**Senator SINGH:** In relation to land degradation in South Australia, are you able to point to any specific areas of South Australia where there is a threat of land degradation from this cut in funding?

There are a number of successful programs that may not be eligible for funding through the National Landcare Program, particularly threat abatement programs that focus on recovery of nationally threatened species such as the Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby and Malleefowl, rather than benefits to primary production. The ongoing management of feral goats in the Flinders Ranges is one such example. Co-ordinated ground-based and aerial goat control has been conducted across pastoral properties, indigenous managed land, private sanctuaries and national park reserves since the early 1990's and achieved a significant reduction in the goat population. Without ongoing funding to continue the program, feral goat numbers will quickly build up to previous levels where they not only cause serious soil and land degradation issues but also cause fouling of natural springs and waterpoints. A similar program has been undertaken in the Middleback Ranges on the central Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. The key to the success of these programs has been their broadscale nature and that they operate across land tenures including private and publically managed land. Reductions in funding for the National Landcare Program and the Regional NRM Boards will have flow on effects for these types of programs where the involvement of all landholders (not only those managing for primary production) is critical to achieving effective pest control and preventing further land degradation.