

Chapter 1

Introduction

Referral of the inquiry

1.1 On Thursday, 26 June 2014, the Senate referred the following matter to the Environment and Communications References Committee (the committee) for inquiry and report by 29 October 2014:

- a) the establishment and performance of the Natural Heritage Trust;
- b) the establishment and performance of the Caring for Our Country program;
- c) the outcomes to date and for the forward estimates period of Caring for Our Country;
- 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;
- e) the Government's policy rationale in relation to changes to land care programs;
- f) analysis of national, state and regional funding priorities for land care programs;
- g) how the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture have, and can, work together to deliver a seamless land care program;
- h) the role of natural resource management bodies in past and future planning, delivery, reporting and outcomes; and
- i) any other related matters.

1.2 The reporting date for the inquiry was subsequently extended to 25 March 2015.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The committee advertised the inquiry on its website and wrote to relevant organisations inviting submissions by 8 August 2014.

1.4 The committee received 73 submissions. These are listed at Appendix 1. The committee held public hearings in Canberra, on 29 August 2014; in Perth, on 7 October 2014; and in Melbourne, on 13 October 2014.

1.5 The committee would like to thank all the organisations and individuals that contributed to the inquiry and the witnesses who attended the public hearings.

Context

1.6 The recognition of Landcare as both a philosophy and a model began in the 1980s, reflecting growing community concern about sustainable land management practices. An Australian Government initiative, the Decade of Landcare, was announced in 1989. Since then, Australian Government support for Landcare projects,

groups and networks has been provided through the National Landcare Program (established in 1992), the Natural Heritage Trust (established in 1997) and Caring for our Country (established in 2008). In the 2014–15 budget, a new National Landcare Programme was established.

1.7 The Australian Framework for Landcare, authored in 2010 by a working group representing the Landcare community, explains the Landcare ethos:

Landcare is a unique community-based approach that has played a major role in raising awareness, influencing farming and land management practices and delivering environmental outcomes across Australian landscapes for many years. Largely, local group involvement has been the catalyst for voluntary community engagement, understanding and action in the development and adoption of sustainable land management practices and the acknowledgement of our shared responsibility for conserving biodiversity.¹

1.8 Currently, there are an estimated 6,000 Landcare, Bushcare and Coastcare groups across Australia.² Landcare remains largely a community-based movement, with funding support from government. In 2012, a survey on the health of Landcare was undertaken by the National Landcare Facilitator. It found that, of the 550 Landcare and related groups and 1,000 primary producers surveyed, 95 per cent felt that Landcare was still relevant. However, the majority of respondents—76 per cent—agreed that Landcare needed to evolve.³

1.9 In the regional stream, 56 natural resource management (NRM) organisations are tasked with working with local Landcare groups to identify local and regional priorities, as well as allocating funding to them and providing support.

1.10 In its submission to the inquiry, Landcare New South Wales summed up the status quo:

...Landcare is a crowded space—there are many organisations, programs, and structures that make up the complex picture that is Landcare. This confused and crowded space has impacted upon the delivery of programs over the past decades.

The 25 year anniversary provides an ideal time to review the structures that support landcare—what was set up 25 years ago may no longer be appropriate. A review provides an excellent opportunity to ensure efficiencies in delivery occur.

However it is also important in undertaking any review, that the views and needs of those on the ground, as well as those operating within the

1 Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group, *Australian Framework for Landcare*, 2010, p. i.

2 Landcare Australia, *What is Landcare?* http://www.landcareonline.com.au/?page_id=26 (accessed 3 September 2014).

3 Brett de Hayr, National Landcare Facilitator, *Health of the Landcare Movement: Survey Results*, August 2012, p. 1.

structures of Landcare and within government are incorporated into such a review.⁴

Structure of the report

1.11 Chapter 2 summarises the Decade of Landcare and discusses the establishment and performance of the Natural Heritage Trust.

1.12 Chapter 3 discusses the establishment and performance of Caring for our Country.

1.13 Chapter 4 examines the implications of the 2014–15 budget for Landcare, including the changes to Landcare policy and the anticipated short- and long-term impacts.

1.14 Chapter 5 examines the new National Landcare Programme, the underlying guidelines and response by stakeholders.

1.15 Chapter 6 canvasses issues related to the Green Army Programme and 20 Million Trees.

1.16 Chapter 7 considers the role of Commonwealth departments and regional resource management bodies, the perception of the public and private benefits of Landcare, including social benefits; Indigenous participation in Landcare and research and development issues.

1.17 Chapter 8 contains the committee's conclusions and recommendations.

4 Landcare New South Wales, *Submission 47*, p. 10.

