

# Chapter 7

## Other matters considered

### Introduction

7.1 This chapter examines the following:

- how the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture work, and have worked, together to deliver a seamless Landcare program;
- comparison of national, state and regional arrangements for Landcare programs;
- Indigenous engagement in Landcare; and
- research and development.

### Delivery of Landcare programs by the Department of the Environment and Department of Agriculture

7.2 The National Landcare Programme will be primarily administered by the Department of the Environment. Under the memorandum of understanding between the two departments, the Department of the Environment will administer the Landcare funding for the regional stream, but a joint executive group will meet fortnightly and both departments will be involved in assessing funding applications and briefing the ministers.<sup>1</sup>

7.3 Representatives confirmed that the Department of the Environment will administer seven of the eight priority Landcare initiatives under the national stream, as follows:

- 20 Million Trees;
- Coastal River Recovery Initiatives;
- Dandenong Ranges Wildlife Recovery, Weed Management and Fuel Reduction Programme;
- Greater Western Sydney—Cumberland Conservation Corridor;
- Keep Australia Beautiful and Clean Up Australia;
- Kimberley Cane Toad Clean Up; and
- Whale and Dolphin Protection Plan.<sup>2</sup>

7.4 The Department of Agriculture will administer the remaining 30 per cent of the Landcare budget. This includes:

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1 Ms Claire Howlett, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 64.

2 Ms Claire Howlett, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 64.

- funding to state governments to control new pest or weed incursions;
- contracts for the annual Landcare conference and Landcare awards; and
- 'a range of individual contracts with Landcare'.<sup>3</sup>

7.5 The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary grants program is being administered by the Department of the Environment, in consultation with the Department of Agriculture. The Reef Trust will be administered jointly by both departments.

7.6 Notwithstanding the division of funding and administrative duties between the departments, departmental representatives reiterated that there is a single application process, through the NRM website, which 'stakeholders have been using now for almost 15 years, so they are well used to that portal'.<sup>4</sup>

7.7 In evidence to the committee, Professor Allan Dale expressed the opinion that, historically, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Environment have worked well together to administer the Landcare program.<sup>5</sup> The Esperance Regional Forum stated that it had an excellent relationship with, and 'receives positive support' from, both departments.<sup>6</sup> GeoCatch reported that it had dealt satisfactorily with federal departments for 15 years.<sup>7</sup>

7.8 NRM WA supported the pre-2012 arrangement between the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture, explaining that it had involved a joint team across the two departments, co-location of officers and a shared funding and reporting process. NRM WA expressed concern on behalf of regional bodies that the 'consistency and ongoing communication' that characterised their relationship with the departments could diminish.<sup>8</sup>

7.9 The continuation of the joint team was also supported by Katanning Land Conservation District Committee. It stated that this led to improved communication between the departments and allowed 'a single entry point' for Landcare groups. It stressed the importance of consistency between the departments so that projects can report on both environmental and agricultural outcomes rather than being forced to align with one or the other.<sup>9</sup>

7.10 The South West Catchments Council (SWCC) submitted that the separation of the environmental and sustainable agriculture streams under CfoC also resulted in a departure from integrated property management. It suggested that, should the streams

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3 Ms Michelle Lauder, Department of Agriculture, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 64.

4 Ms Claire Howlett, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 65.

5 Professor Allan Dale, James Cook University, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 51.

6 Esperance Regional Forum, *Submission 42*, p. 5.

7 GeoCatch, *Submission 10*, p. 3.

8 NRM WA, *Submission 14*, p. 4. See also, NRM Regions Australia, *Submission 28*, p. 8.

9 Katanning Land Conservation District Committee, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

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remain separate, the reporting and documentation should be consistent between the two streams.<sup>10</sup>

7.11 The overlap of projects with agriculture and environmental outcomes was noted by the Esperance Regional Forum.<sup>11</sup> The Farm Tree and Landcare Association (FTLA) added that NRM does not readily fit into 'departmental demarcations' and that there should be a whole-of-government approach, rather than environmental and agricultural streams. This is particularly the case, it submitted, when agricultural production is on the increase:

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.<sup>12</sup>

7.12 In order to ensure seamless delivery of the Landcare program, the Condamine Alliance suggested that the departments seek:

- a collaborative approach to caring for the land, through programs that achieve social changes as well as environmental objectives;
- an understanding that people change practices when they see the benefit of doing so; and
- an acknowledgement that well-designed initiatives with appropriate methodologies and realistic aims lead to a legacy worth leaving.<sup>13</sup>

7.13 Mr Mike Berwick, Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective (QRNRMGC), commented that there needed to be a joint approach: it highlights the importance of the fact that we deal with both productive landscapes and natural environments.<sup>14</sup>

7.14 The Department of the Environment stated that it continues to work 'very closely' with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture in 'a collaborative effort'. Both departments, it stated, were involved in developing the National Landcare Programme.<sup>15</sup> In addition, as part of the simplification process, the departments were moving to one funding agreement for regional funding processes. Rather than the

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10 South West Catchments Council, *Submission 11*, p. 6.

11 Esperance Regional Forum, *Submission 42*, p. 5.

12 Farm Tree and Landcare Association, *Submission 41*, p. 10.

13 Condamine Alliance, *Submission 3*, p. 12.

14 Mr Mike Berwick, Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 34.

15 Ms Claire Howlett, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 64.

regions having an environment schedule and an agriculture schedule in their agreements, as is currently the case, a single schedule will cover all funding.<sup>16</sup>

### **Interaction of national, state and regional arrangements**

7.15 The National Commission of Audit reported on 'overlap between Commonwealth and state responsibilities and activity' in the Landcare program.<sup>17</sup> Evidence presented to the committee suggests that misalignment between the different levels of priority is a more pressing issue than overlap.

7.16 The QRNRMGC called for an integrated national, state and regional framework articulating national, state and regional levels of plans, priorities and targets. It also called for agreements between the federal, state and local governments and regional NRM bodies. States, it submitted, should be funded to share expertise and data to enable 'full and open participation across federal, state, regional and local levels'.<sup>18</sup>

7.17 The Torres Strait Regional Authority submitted that 'there is little coordination in the prioritising of natural resource management issues between the various levels of government'. It called for 'strong national leadership and a legislative approach that is consistent across all Australian states and territories'.<sup>19</sup>

7.18 Submitters pointed to the lack of coordination having resulting in unintended consequences. The Australian Coastal Society commented that policy makers should be aware of how national or state level decisions play out at the local level. It stated:

The full ramifications of centralised programs are not always clear when applied to a diverse and spread out feature such as the coastline.<sup>20</sup>

7.19 Ms Nicole Gammie submitted that benefits achieved by projects in one area of the country can be diminished by outcomes in a different area. She stated:

There are different objectives between the different levels of government within Australia that make policy contradictory...To have long term success, any objectives developed for programs to deliver natural resource outcomes need to be clear and binding for all parties at all levels of government.<sup>21</sup>

### ***State arrangements***

7.20 Not all states have their own defined Landcare programs or funding. In those without significant state government support, community and regional groups have a

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16 Mr Malcolm Thompson, Department of the Environment, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, pp 66–67.

17 National Commission of Audit, *Towards responsible government: appendix: volume 2*, February 2014, p. 19.

18 Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective, *Submission 22*, p. 7.

19 Torres Strait Regional Authority, *Submission 38*, p. 4.

20 Australian Coastal Society, *Submission 8*, p. 3.

21 Ms Nicole Gammie, *Submission 59*, p. 1.

say in the formation of the federally funded NRM body. NRM Regions Australia explained the current arrangements for the 56 NRM bodies across Australia. Each of the 56 is governed by a board, and the appointment of board members varies according to state. For example, in South Australia, New South Wales, the ACT and Victoria, NRM boards are appointed by the state government. In Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and the Northern Territory, board members are elected by the community.<sup>22</sup>

7.21 Details of arrangements in New South Wales and Victoria, where significant state support exists, and Western Australia and Queensland, where state assistance is much reduced are provided below.

7.22 In New South Wales, the *Local Land Services Act 2013* drew together natural resource management, agricultural advisory services and biosecurity under the umbrella of Local Land Services. New South Wales has 11 Local Land Services regions. This structure was implemented in 2014 to ensure 'state-wide consistency' in quality of service and governance, while also allowing local knowledge to inform regional program delivery.<sup>23</sup> Each of the 11 regions in New South Wales is consulting with government and community to develop a five-year plan. These plans will feed into the state strategic plan, which is currently under development.

7.23 The New South Wales Local Land Services set out in its submission a number of points it maintains are important to ensure the success of a 'local' approach. These include:

- enabling the community through the devolution of decision-making, project planning and implementation, acknowledging that people know their local area best;
- providing support at a regional level to communities, and encouraging peer support and learning;
- ensuring effective governance by establishing clear lines of responsibility and accountability; and
- allowing time to create meaningful partnerships built on trust.<sup>24</sup>

7.24 The New South Wales model works through state-assisted regional organisations providing support to local group projects and involving those local groups in whole-of-region planning. The New South Wales Local Land Services representative, while acknowledging the reduction in staffing levels due to the decrease in funding, expressed confidence in the ability of the Local Land Services to deliver. Mrs Alexandra Anthony stated:

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22 NRM Regions Australia, *Submission 18*, p. 1.

23 Mrs Alexandra Anthony, New South Wales Local Land Services, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 2.

24 New South Wales Local Land Services, *Submission 63*, p. 2.

In the new model we can work out who is best placed to deliver whatever it is that needs to be delivered in the most effective way. So it may not be that regional bodies have all the staff required to deliver a program within a region; it may be that someone else can provide that, and you are building capacity and social capital within the region by finding out who those people are and working with them.<sup>25</sup>

7.25 Victoria has 10 of the 56 regional NRM organisations, called Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) in that state, which sit under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (Vic). The board of each CMA is formed by ministerial appointment and state funding is provided from an annual grants program. A state-funded Regional Landcare Coordinator works in each CMA, in addition to the federally funded Regional Landcare Facilitators. The state also provides funding for 68 Local Landcare Facilitators. Landcare groups choose their own local facilitator and bid for funding for that position. In addition, Victoria funds an Indigenous state-wide facilitator. The Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries stated:

The strength of these relationships is critical to unlocking the leverage opportunities between Commonwealth and state governments and local communities.<sup>26</sup>

7.26 The Department acknowledged that the Commonwealth needs to set national priorities but noted that this can lead to challenges for groups trying to access funding for local priorities. It stated:

The role of target areas is important, because you need to focus...but, equally, you need to balance that against potentially excluding access to funding by some groups.<sup>27</sup>

7.27 The Department also commented that, while it cannot make up the shortfall caused by cuts to the Landcare budget at the federal level, it will maintain the current level of state funding to 'continue to support the membership base in Victoria'.<sup>28</sup>

7.28 The Victorian Landcare Council gave an example of national, state and regional collaboration. It reported on a project by the Upper Kiewa Landcare Group that received a small amount of federal support which then led to greater investment by state and regional agencies, a corporation and a local council. It stated:

It is estimated that a Landcare grant of just over \$3000 has seen over \$80,000 of value-adding works from project partners.<sup>29</sup>

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25 Mrs Alexandra Anthony, New South Wales Local Land Services, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 3.

26 Mr Peter Betson, Department of Environment and Primary Industries Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 1.

27 Mr Peter Betson, Department of Environment and Primary Industries Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 6.

28 Mr Peter Betson, Department of Environment and Primary Industries Victoria, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 7.

29 Victorian Landcare Council, *Submission 16*, p. 6.

7.29 In its submission, Connecting Country provided examples of large projects in Victoria which were carried out through networks, operating across Landcare groups, to achieve results at a district or landscape level. These projects were also realised with the support of both state and federal funding.<sup>30</sup> Connecting Country reported that the constant nature of the state-based grants allows groups to know how much funding is available and when to apply for it. State-based grants, it informed the committee, are also able to be used for capacity building, to raise community awareness of Landcare.<sup>31</sup>

7.30 Connecting Country hosts a Local Landcare Facilitator funded by the state government. It submitted that the 'Victorian Government's Local Landcare Facilitator initiative is a good model for professional Landcare support at a local level'.<sup>32</sup>

7.31 NRM WA submitted that 'an almost complete absence' of state government funding in Western Australia in 2014–15 would make WA regions 'particularly vulnerable' to any interruption of Australian Government funds and would threaten continuity of delivery'. It encouraged the Australian Government to engage with the states to also invest through regional NRM bodies.<sup>33</sup>

7.32 Dr Kathleen Broderick of NRM WA drew to the committee's attention the reduction in state funding for NRM in Western Australia when the federal-state bilateral agreements ceased at the start of Caring for our Country. In the absence of widespread state support, Dr Broderick explained, NRM activities in WA are overseen by non-statutory, community-based organisations that have built the necessary infrastructure of networks, integrated plans and knowledge sharing mechanisms.<sup>34</sup>

7.33 NRM WA also gave evidence that the state's focus has shifted to agricultural development rather than natural resource management and that the role of providing advice on sustainable agricultural practices had been taken up by regional bodies.<sup>35</sup>

7.34 The changes in Western Australia were also noted by the SWCC which reported that state funding in Western Australia is no longer coordinated with federal funding and that this is a challenge. The funding processes are different, requiring Landcare groups to invest time in duplicating applications, which means that 'money gets taken out of existing programs to go into writing applications for new programs'.<sup>36</sup>

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30 Connecting Country, *Submission 7*, p. 4.

31 Mr Max Schlachter, Connecting Country, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 14.

32 Connecting Country, *Submission 7*, p. 2.

33 Natural Resource Management WA, *Submission 14*, p. 3.

34 Dr Kathleen Broderick, Natural Resource Management WA, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 18.

35 Dr Kathleen Broderick, Natural Resource Management WA, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 24.

36 Mr Damien Postma, South West Catchments Council, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 12.

7.35 The SWCC commented that, in Western Australia, the lack of coordination between the federal and state programs, coupled with a reduction in funding at both levels, means that paid regional Landcare coordinators 'are literally surviving year to year if they are lucky'.<sup>37</sup> This, in turn, affects the programs on the ground. It stated:

A lot less of the work focuses on the strategic work they could be doing and more on organisational survival or surviving in that role. So the lack of strategy focuses more on securing the role rather than the outcomes.<sup>38</sup>

7.36 The SWCC asserted that much clearer information about state and federal responsibilities needs to be provided. It cited as an example recent Australian Government references to biosecurity in National Landcare Programme documents had caused interest at a local level. The SWCC was obliged to explain to its community groups that federal biosecurity funding was, in fact, not available for ongoing projects dealing with existing pests or weeds and that such projects could only be funded through state money. It commented that, to avoid such confusion in the future, state and federal funding could be provided through a combined mechanism.<sup>39</sup>

7.37 Queensland, similarly, does not have statutory NRM bodies. The QRNRMGC reported that the loss of Commonwealth-state Landcare funding agreements has caused fragmentation and that it is 'not clear where regions, community groups and industry fit in'.<sup>40</sup> The Collective now relies on Australian Government programs for 70 per cent of its funding. It stated:

The recently announced 20% cut to the NLP program, which devolves directly to Regional NRM Groups, will reduce Queensland bodies capacity to deliver the NRM outcomes desired by their regional communities as well as national priorities.<sup>41</sup>

7.38 The Condamine Alliance stated in evidence that there are always 'strong positives and strong negatives about each of the different programs' and that 'we are really starting to have a decent balance between national, state, regional and local programs'.<sup>42</sup>

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37 Mr Damien Postma, South West Catchments Council, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 12.

38 Mr Damien Postma, South West Catchments Council, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 12.

39 Mr Damien Postma, South West Catchments Council, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 17.

40 Mr Mike Berwick, Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 31.

41 Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective, *Submission 22*, p. 5.

42 Mr Phil McCullough, Condamine Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, pp 27–28.



## Public/private benefits

7.39 The Commission of Audit stated that Landcare funding supports 'activities that deliver substantial private benefits and that landholders would have an incentive to undertake without public funding'. It recommended:

Funding should be reduced and redirected to the activities with the greatest environmental externalities that do not provide sufficient private benefits for landholders to fund themselves.<sup>43</sup>

7.40 Submitters disagreed with the Commission's assessment.<sup>44</sup> While improved land management practices can lead to increased production and financial gain for farmers, a number of submitters and witnesses commented on the significant public benefits, both environmental and social, that also flow from improved practices on private land. For example, the FTLA commented that environmental issues 'are rarely limited by land tenure boundaries'. It stated:

...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>45</sup>

7.41 This point was addressed by the National Farmers' Federation which submitted that farmers manage 61 per cent of Australia's land mass and that 94 per cent of farmers are 'actively undertaking natural resource management'. Given this, it recommended that 'NRM investment programs are designed and focused in a way that supports farmers to achieve the NRM aspirations of the broader community'.<sup>46</sup> The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association also emphasised that Landcare activities not only increased productivity but also provided a public benefit:

This story has not only been about productivity but also the preservation and improvement of the natural environment and the engagement of local communities. Such engagement is difficult to measure purely in financial terms but provides a very real point of contact in communities that are too often isolated.<sup>47</sup>

7.42 The Bass Coast Landcare Network noted that Landcare has focused on improving cleared private land because it has been 'the source of most land degradation' and that addressing such degradation also addresses the broader impact on environments away from the source, 'such as wetlands, estuaries and marine

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43 National Commission of Audit, *Towards responsible government: appendix: volume 2*, February 2014, p. 19.

44 See, for example, NRM Regions Australia, *Submission 18* and *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2015, p. 55; Natural Resource Management WA, *Submission 14*; Farm Tree and Landcare Association, *Submission 41*; and National Rangeland NRM Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 55.

45 Farm Tree and Landcare Association, *Submission 41*, p. 3.

46 National Farmers' Federation, *Submission 31*, p. 1.

47 Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, *Submission 64*, p. 5.

ecosystems', as well as the protection of biodiversity and threatened species.<sup>48</sup> It further noted the contribution made by Landcare activities on private land to ensuring productivity and food security.<sup>49</sup>

7.43 The Hovells Creek Landcare Group echoed this point. It noted the community benefits flowing from the work done by private landholders:

...there are also community benefits associated with private landholders managing stream banks (which are public lands) in controlling soil erosion which contributes to salt and silt loads in river systems; in controlling weeds which do not respect property or local government boundaries, in providing habitat for wildlife and in tree planting which facilitates carbon sequestration.<sup>50</sup>

7.44 The National Rangeland NRM Alliance stressed that improved management of natural resources and improved productivity are inseparable and that this leads not only to 'improved financial returns for land managers' but also 'social outcomes for residents and communities within the rangelands'.<sup>51</sup> It noted:

Rangelands cover some 81% of Australia – more than 6 million km<sup>2</sup> – and improving the land management of the degraded areas of this region supports the productivity outcomes for the broader pastoral industry, Indigenous Australians and multiple outcomes across the national landscape.<sup>52</sup>

7.45 The idea that 'activity to improve landscapes outside of targeted landscapes is not worth public investment' was also challenged by the Victorian Landcare Council. It argued that an accounting system to better demonstrate the achievements of Landcare projects would also demonstrate 'the impact of private landholder investment in the environment'.<sup>53</sup>

7.46 Several submitters pointed to the significant contribution, both financial and in kind, that private landholders make to sustainable agriculture and environmental management.<sup>54</sup> The Hovells Creek Landcare Group submitted that, in addition to Government funded Landcare activities, landholders pay for fence construction, site preparation, tree planting and weed control, which can involve a commitment over several years.<sup>55</sup> Landcare Tasmania submitted that every dollar invested in Landcare

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48 Bass Coast Landcare Network, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

49 Bass Coast Landcare Network, *Submission 20*, p. 2.

50 Hovells Creek Landcare Group, *Submission 45*, p. 4.

51 Rangeland NRM Alliance, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

52 Rangeland NRM Alliance, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

53 Victorian Landcare Council, *Submission 16*, p. 9.

54 See, for example, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, *Submission 64*; Mr David Walker, National Landcare Network, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 8; and NRM WA, *Submission 14*, p. 8.

55 Hovells Creek Landcare Group, *Submission 45*, p. 4.

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'generates a co-investment by farmers and Landcare groups of \$4 to \$5 through contributions towards labour, equipment, volunteer time and expertise' as well as additional financial contributions from landholders.<sup>56</sup>

7.47 Landcare NSW pointed out that implementing natural resource management and sustainable agricultural practices can negatively affect farmers in the short term:

It often requires that they change the very way they farm and the very way they do business. Sometimes that means a short-term loss for their families, and this is for the benefit of the broader community.<sup>57</sup>

### **Indigenous engagement in Landcare**

7.48 In its submission to the inquiry, the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) argued that 'meaningful Indigenous involvement in program conception, development and delivery' is important to support Indigenous engagement in, and ownership of, NRM activities. The TSRA also made the point that programs needed to be better aligned with the social and cultural goals of Indigenous communities and take into account native title, traditional knowledge and employment opportunities.<sup>58</sup>

7.49 The regional NRM body for the Torres Strait region is the Land and Sea Management Unit, established by the TSRA in 2006. It receives funding from both the Australian and Queensland Governments. The TSRA noted that the unit has difficulty attracting and retaining staff when only short-term funding is available. It also expressed the view that a regional approach, with technical support from state agencies, under an overarching national framework, is the model that works best for its region.<sup>59</sup>

7.50 The TSRA observed that the Torres Strait region is 'significantly different' from the other NRM regions, in that it consists of islands, has a predominantly Indigenous population and shares an international border with Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. While the region does not have local Landcare groups, the TSRA submitted, community-based management of environmental resources has been 'highly successful'. It stressed the need for 'sufficient flexibility in program guidelines and investment mechanisms' to ensure the continuation of community-based management. It also recommended that Indigenous representation be included in the ongoing development of the National Landcare Programme to ensure that regional needs and native title interests are given consideration.<sup>60</sup>

7.51 In Western Australia, Environs Kimberley partners with traditional owners and Indigenous rangers on cultural and natural resource management projects. It noted

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56 Landcare Tasmania, *Submission 55*, p. 5. See also, Landcare Association of South Australia, *Submission 52*, p. 2; National Rangeland NRM Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 56.

57 Mr Robert Dulhunty, Landcare NSW, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 42.

58 Torres Strait Regional Authority, *Submission 38*, p. 1.

59 Torres Strait Regional Authority, *Submission 38*, pp 4–5.

60 Torres Strait Regional Authority, *Submission 38*, p. 6.

that there is a lack of data at the national level about the ecosystems of the region and the threats to those ecosystems and that the retention of experienced staff with knowledge of the local environment is vital.<sup>61</sup> It stated that, in place of community Landcare groups, Aboriginal rangers are the most 'active natural resource management force' and, further, that 'it cannot be stressed enough how important they are to natural resource management in the Kimberley'.<sup>62</sup>

7.52 Ranger groups in the Kimberley work with pastoralists and government bodies on a variety of activities. Environs Kimberley reported that they 'are very relied upon'.<sup>63</sup> Using local Indigenous rangers to provide data on the environmental health of remote regions also adds to natural resource management knowledge at a national level. Environs Kimberley pointed out that this becomes more important as state governments, museums and universities increasingly find the cost of doing such research in a remote area too prohibitive.<sup>64</sup>

7.53 The broader benefits of Indigenous engagement in natural resource management were also noted by Environs Kimberley:

There are flow on effects from the ranger engagement, such as community pride and self-pride, economic independence, physical and environmental health.<sup>65</sup>

7.54 Environs Kimberley commented that gaining consent from, and partnering with, Indigenous groups on projects in the Kimberley takes time. Working in such a remote region also incurs higher project costs, whether for fuel, administration or monitoring. A lack of computers and intermittent internet access can affect monitoring and reporting. Environs Kimberley recommended that these factors be taken into account in the provision of funding for projects.<sup>66</sup>

7.55 The Kimberley Land Council (KLC) reported 'multiple successes' under phase 1 of the Natural Heritage Trust, 'made possible through the direct partnership between the Australian Government and the KLC'. It noted that under phase 2 of the NHT there was a withdrawal of funding, reduced engagement by Government and 'an underrepresentation of Aboriginal people in NHT2 regional governance models'. It stated:

The experience from the National Heritage Trust 1 and II demonstrates that without dedicated investment and partnerships with organisations that represent Indigenous interests, traditional approaches to multi-stakeholder NRM models fail to engage Indigenous people. Further, the engagement of Indigenous people, as the most significant stakeholders in NRM in the

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61 Dr Malcolm Lindsay, Environs Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 1.

62 Dr Malcolm Lindsay, Environs Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 2.

63 Dr Malcolm Lindsay, Environs Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 2.

64 Dr Malcolm Lindsay, Environs Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 7.

65 Dr Malcolm Lindsay, Environs Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 2.

66 Dr Malcolm Lindsay, Environs Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, pp 2 and 5.

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North of Australia, is crucial to the success of NRM programs – both within the region and more broadly.<sup>67</sup>

7.56 The KLC stressed that 'a consistent approach to delivery of programs is essential'. It recommended building on the strengths of previous NRM programs, through long-term investment, streamlined contracting and administrative processes, and the inclusion of Indigenous representatives in ongoing consultation with Government.<sup>68</sup>

7.57 The Rangeland NRM Alliance gave the example of an NRM group in South Australia that works mainly with Indigenous landholders. It commented that a reduction in funding for that group could lead to staffing reductions and affect the group's interaction with landholders. It said:

That means that that coordination is lost and you lose the continuity of the program. The impact is difficult to quantify but even just losing the relationships and ability to interact with people will make them difficult to reinstate if funding is ever reinstated.<sup>69</sup>

7.58 Professor Allan Dale observed that, in Far North Queensland, a regional approach to NRM has been successfully implemented by 20 traditional owner groups and has led to a feeling of empowerment for the participants. Professor Dale put forward the view that having a strong framework and good governance enabled a regional organisation to support traditional owners to draw up their regional plan. He noted:

That enabled the traditional owners to negotiate very seriously with the federal government around major regional partnership agreements and other major funding sources to deliver on their land and sea aspirations.<sup>70</sup>

## **Research and development**

7.59 A further matter raised was the need for continuing investment in research and development in NRM. Mr Gerald Leach, National Farmers' Federation, pointed to the importance of on-going research and development:

...you cannot talk about investment in natural resource management without talking about R&D because the two go hand in hand.<sup>71</sup>

7.60 Mr Leach gave the example of the uptake of minimum tillage by farmers. However, Mr Leach argued that there was a risk to future development and incorporation of new technologies by farmers. He noted that over the last decade there

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67 Kimberley Land Council, *Submission 13*, p. 2.

68 Kimberley Land Council, *Submission 13*, p. 4.

69 Ms Kate Forrest, National Rangeland NRM Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 58.

70 Professor Allan Dale, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, pp 52–53.

71 Mr Gerald Leach, National Farmers' Federation, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 17.

had been a reduction in investment in R & D as farm incomes had fallen due to drought and the matching investment from government had also decreased.<sup>72</sup>

7.61 Mr Dale Park, WA Farmers, also pointed to the decline in research funding, particularly by government. Mr Park noted that research work into land conservation is almost inherently long-term and quite expensive, and it is very difficult to put a dollar value on the outcomes. He went on to conclude that probably much of the best research work is 'actually happening on farm by farmers. But unfortunately it is one of the first things that drops off the to-do list when things get tough'.<sup>73</sup>

7.62 The long-term impact of under-funding of research was noted by Dr Peter Ampt who stated that:

I do not think I could overstate how demoralising it is for people on the ground, for people involved in educating our future agriculturalists, as I am, and for people involved in research. The diminution of the funds available for a whole range of projects from which we can generate really good research outcomes and really good evidence, through which we can train future agriculturalists, cannot be understated.<sup>74</sup>

7.63 The Condamine Alliance Group also pointed to the lack of capacity of farmers to take up new practices arising from research and commented:

...sometimes they produce the best science in the world but when it gets out to a practical stage out to the farmers, sometimes they do not have the capacity to take that up. That means that a lot of the research we do may well end up sitting on the shelves, as it has done for countless years before us. I think the legacy of a lot of those things is some of the challenges we need to think about, particularly when we make new policy decisions about where we start spending money.<sup>75</sup>

7.64 A further area where research is lacking is the impact of climate change on NRM. The SWCC commented that research is urgently required to inform future management of priority assets and areas in Australia under climate change scenarios and assessment of the magnitude of ecological impact that climate change could have on biodiversity. However, the council argued that the lack of Australian Government R&D funding, especially in the context of climate change, is not allowing NRM to strategically tackle and deal with biodiversity conservation under a changing climate. It concluded that research and strategic funding is critical.<sup>76</sup>

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72 Mr Gerald Leach, National Farmers' Federation, *Committee Hansard*, 13 October 2014, p. 17.

73 Mr Dale Park, WA Farmers, *Committee Hansard*, 7 October 2014, p. 66.

74 Dr Peter Ampt, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 22.

75 Mr Phillip McCullough, Condamine Alliance Group, *Committee Hansard*, 29 August 2014, p. 31.

76 South West Catchments Council, *Submission 11*, p. 6.