



The history, effectiveness, performance and future of the National Landcare Program

Landcare is essential to landscape restoration and sustainable behaviour

Submission by Bass Coast Landcare Network

Landcare is a respected brand in urban and regional communities, and are often able to reach landowners, educate them, and work with them towards more sustainable land management practices. We have regularly been approached by different levels of government to engage landowners in various state and local government projects.

One of the most critical local environmental issues for the Bass Coast Landcare Network area is that there is less than 10% of indigenous bush remaining from pre 1700's. It is recognised that our natural environment, particularly its biodiversity is the key to its economic prosperity into the future through sustainable agriculture and tourism.

The Bass Coast Landcare Network is a successful network of ten local Landcare groups, with over 1,000 members. Local agencies, in particular the Bass Coast Shire Council have invested in the local Landcare Programs since 1990. These organisations remain committed to an ongoing effective working relationship, with Council continuing to provide financial and in-kind support to the Bass Coast Landcare Network.

The main aim of the Landcare Groups that form the Bass Coast Landcare Network is to promote land use and management that ensures integrity and sustainability of land, water and biodiversity. The Networks core purpose is to provide support and resources to the groups within the Network to assist them in achieving their aims and objectives.

The Bass Coast Landcare Network was formed in 2003 as an affiliation of the Landcare Groups, enabling them to better position themselves for investment from government, local, state and federal and corporate programs. Sixty percent of the 1,400 rural properties in the Network area are involved in and supported by the BCLN.

The ethic involved also includes *governments*, which for over twenty years have partnered with landcare volunteers to achieve both public benefits (clean water, biodiversity, landscape protection and restoration) as well as private benefits (protection of soil, crops and livestock). For detailed elaboration, see Youl (2006), and Curtis et al (2008).

Landcare has focused on *cleared private land*, because it is the source of most land degradation – often impacting on biodiversity as well as environments remote from the source (such as wetlands, estuaries and marine ecosystems). Public lands, particularly along coasts and rivers, have also been protected by landcare.

Landcare is essential for the protection of *biodiversity and threatened species*, which have been adversely affected by land clearing and invasive species, but are now being restored – with land managers' cooperation.



Landcare is also critical for *farming productivity and food security* since it works to protect soil; conserve moisture; and reduce the costs of pesticides and fungicides and chemical fertilizers.

Most tellingly, landcare is effective for *changing attitudes and behaviours* – towards lower resource consumption; more sustainable production; and more resilient communities that can cope with climate change, wildfires, droughts and floods.

And landcare helps *rural employment*, not only among those directly engaged, but in the provision of equipment and supplies, for instance in nurseries.

The establishment and performance of the Natural Heritage Trust;

The 1997 Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), with a \$1.25 billion budget over five years, put a massive shot of funding direct to projects chosen by Regional Assessment Panels of community members and agency staff. With the injection of funds, our Landcare Networks began to form, with community leaders, who saw the advantages of larger scale in Landcare organisation to meet the needs of the landcare community. There were advantages to local groups in more efficient project administration and increased credibility of funding bids. Networks took learning from projects and made this available across member groups. "Capacity building" at local level become a funded outcome. During this time, our Network was able to develop a level of professionalism and take on agency and corporate partners, diversifying our funding base and targetting localised priorities with genuine landscape scale change enabled through long term investment.

Caring for Our Country;

C4oC's business plan targeted six national priority topics for the current period, and focused its investment mostly in specific geographic zones - in the hope that progress could be more easily demonstrated than in the broad-scale regional delivery which preceded it.

The Bass Coast Landcare Network was incidental to these priorities and groups initially struggled to secure and undertake investment. Our Facilitators were largely abandoned in the beginning and as a result group health declined along with their ability to focus investment into local priorities. Facilitators turned into Project Managers with a singular focus and group action plans became more narrow in their focus.

CFOC appeared to be targeted from the topdown and aimed at the symptoms rather than addressing cause through an integrated, inclusive, long-term program which has been the main focus of the Bass Coast Landcare Network.

C4oC shows little apparent regard for joint founder Joan Kirner's ten principles for landcare (see Greig 2006):

- **Community** is the basis of landcare, assembled in groups and around sub-catchments.
- **Social** values are as important as environmental and economical values.
- **Integrated** actions are essential, but the resources required are usually beyond the reach of individuals.
- **Facilitators** are essential, but must be owned by community groups.



- **Partnerships** with private enterprise are important, but they should not have a controlling influence.
- **Priorities** must be decided jointly by farmers and government officials. (She also warned against a natural tendency for CMAs to take over decision-making, following an in-built belief that governments know best).
- **Productivity** of farmland must be considered in all actions.
- **Learning** from experience is important.
- **Sustainability** in all actions is critical.
- **Bi-partisan** political support for landcare is essential.

It is unlikely that the ideological divide between C4OC and landcare will be bridged in the current business plan, so that landcare (and CMAs) will need to adjust strategies accordingly, and move on.

The implications of the 2014-15 Budget for Landcare programs,

Landcare activities build social capital in the community and promote sustainable agricultural practises and increases biodiversity. The recent Federal Budget has significant implications to the Network's ability to deliver this vision. In particular, the apparent lack of a direct Landcare Grants program and the Green Army investment into environmental skills and training in young people. These programs should be complementary, not interchangeable.

The Bass Coast Landcare Network has delivered changes through landscape, establishing over 2 million indigenous plants over 120,000 ha. The Projected budget implication in the 2014/15 year include a 73% reduction in on ground activity for revegetation, remnant protection and sustainable agriculture. For the past ten years we have annually established 180,000 plants and protected 150 ha of remnant vegetation. Momentum has been established in the community and we fear that this will be lost with the recent changes to the Landcare Program.

Without the ongoing support from partners, including state and Federal Government, the Bass Coast Landcare Network is at risk of not delivering its vision and that of the community. The current gains made in increased biodiversity, weed management and community involvement have been achieved through accessing the knowledge, social capital and capability of our Landcare staff and community.

The BCLN is concerned about their sustainability into the future with the recently announced funding cuts and substitution of projects to the Green Army. Landcare's ability to work in partnership to protect, maintain and enhance the regions biodiversity is intrinsically connected to our regions prosperity.

Changes to Landcare programs and analysis of funding priorities for Landcare programs;



Having previously supported state government organisations in recruitment campaigns for various programs through our Extension of Interest Program we are very comfortable in extending these services to deliver the 20 million trees program throughout the Western Port and Gippsland Regions. BCLN has also implemented many partnership projects along waterways with Catchment Management Authorities and Melbourne Water. These partnerships have evolved from simple tasks such as project site identification and joint site visits through to the management and implementation of jointly funded projects with landcare project funding and Stream frontage funding. We have experience in attending partner organisational training to enable our staff to undertake assessments according to the organisations required systems and processes, such as with Ecotender and NVX.

BCLN has been the project manager of the Western Port Land Stewardship Project which is in the last year of a 5 year program. The project has multiple partners and included a vegetation project stream, soil health project stream and a training program. Melbourne Water is a partner in the project and stream frontage sites are directed through the program and are either jointly funded or referred directly through to Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Program. The Land Stewardship Project and Melbourne Water have also signed a Memorandum documenting the operational processes that guide the partnership. Similar partnership projects have been funded through the Bass Valley Landcare Group and the Phillip Island Landcare Group. Our Biodiversity Fund project being managed by BCLN also requires network staff to engage landowners, undertake site visits, plan projects and ensure project implementation.

Collectively this has enabled BCLN and its staff to develop thorough understanding and experience in all aspects on landowner engagement and project implementation on private land, including waterway protection and rehabilitation programs, a major requirement of this proposal.

The use of existing networks such as Landcare will be vital for local participation in the programme. Landcare, for example, already has the links to landholders, relationships with shires and other agencies, and undertake work with a very similar aim as the 20 Million Trees programme.

Landcare communities throughout Australia already have the existing on ground infrastructure to deliver large scale revegetation programs and have been doing so for the past 25 years. If delivered through these existing Networks the project would have localised ownership and success. The on ground infrastructure would be around growing and storing / maintaining plants till they are ready to be planted. Because successful revegetation relies heavily on using local providence seed stock, infrastructure in the form of nurseries is largely in existence at a local scale as is the necessary plant, equipment and resources to ensure the planting can occur.

Working together to deliver a seamless Landcare program;



Local ownership is essential for long term biodiversity outcomes. When landholders have the trust of the organisation offering the program for works uptake and success rates are much higher. Firstly by utilising local service delivery groups such as Landcare to strategically place the planting efforts following consultation with local agencies such as state environmental departments (who have biodiversity significance maps). Secondly by utilising the local trust to secure the site from future clearance, and lastly a comprehensive long term maintenance program. This approach would favour less urban planting.

The role planning, delivery, reporting and outcomes;

CMA's regard landcare as essential to their role (Victorian CMA Chairs, 2009). CMAs were a later development of the landcare ethic – providing regional scale integration, governance and planning, and monitoring progress on behalf of State government. CMAs estimate that landcare roughly *trebles investment* by government, through the voluntary input of private land, labour and capital.

But CMAs' ability to support Landcare through the current crisis is strictly constrained by the lack of discretionary sources of funding – for example, from regionally raised revenue.

A higher success rate might arise by forming *alliances* between landcare groups, networks, CMAs, NGOs, farmer groups, local government, water authorities, and private sources of funding. *What such allies have in common is their desire to achieve landscape restoration and protection.* And often, they will be unable to achieve such outcomes comprehensively on their own.

The partnership of CMAs and Landcare bring a complementary set of skills and benefits together in terms of community engagement, capacity building, rural area social and health issues. A partnership which brings these community benefits together with the sustainable productive capacity of rural land is an essential element in the contest for funds in Victoria.

We note specifically here the potentially broad appeal of recommendations of Victoria Naturally Alliance (McGregor et al, 2008), and the widely held concerns for future farming expressed by Department of Planning and Community Development (2009).

Ultimately, the questions for landcare are the same for all of the potential allies: how are those allies and their communities going to live and work sustainably and resiliently in the face of: expanding populations; declining resource bases (particularly land, water and fossil fuels); and increasing weather and fire intensity?

Clearly this is the time for collaboration, not competition. And it is the time to re-affirm the strengths of landcare.

Key points for the Bass Coast Landcare Network

- The need for longevity and continuity in funding for on ground action and resourcing to achieve biodiversity and sustainable agricultural projects;



- The sophistication and benefits of local Landcare action and strategic plans to identify and target works collaboratively;
- The grassroots Landcare community's ability and capacity to deliver, build social capital and achieve landscape scale change. The Green Army will move in and deliver activities that would normally be carried out by the Landcare community. How can we ensure that these sites are maintained beyond the life of the Green Army, if there is no capacity to engage local Landcare groups.
- The strain that the Green Army will place on local council and community resources if it is not linked to funding for on ground action. The BCLN is well equipped to work with the Green Army and deliver priority projects at a localised level that align to the 20 million trees and National Landcare Programs;
- If the Green Army is to be a success, timing is critical in achieving the outcomes identified. How will organisations that have agreed to participate in the program be supported if the start date is extended beyond July 2014. For BCLN, we will be placed in a very difficult situation if the team commences late in the 2014 planting session;
- The Bass Coast Landcare Network has a strong history in delivering programs like the Green Army, ie Green Corps. How can we ensure that the lessons learnt from these experiences and those that will come out of Round 1 of the Green Army are fed back to the Department of Environment to ensure subsequent rounds are successful;

Recommendations:

Landcare will not survive as we know it without a long term commitment and facilitators, it will certainly not thrive as before. Funding for paid facilitators is a proven way of nurturing volunteers - just like providing financial support to volunteer fire fighters.

- Landcare seeks long term government support for facilitators
- Landcare seeks bidding alliances with all related parties which have a common interest in restoring and protecting landscapes in the name of sustainability.
- Landcare re-affirms commitment to its founding principles.

Together with our partners, the Bass Coast Landcare Network is working to secure the sustainability and adequate resourcing of the Bass Coast Landcare Network to deliver these visions.