



The Australian Coastal Society welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry 'The history, effectiveness, performance and future of the National Landcare Program'.

This submission draws the attention of the committee to the treatment of coastal environments. Coasts deserve special attention because physically they are complex and highly dynamic places, creating more diverse challenges for managers than those in rural Australia. Land tenure arrangements also set coasts apart. Coastal NRM projects are largely carried out in publicly owned or managed coastal terrestrial and marine locations.

Coastal communities in cities, towns and villages see the coast as a part of the public good to be looked after. The first NRM program under the Minister for Environment, Senator Robert Hill understood this and strongly supported a distinct coastal program and made it a success; subsequent programs under Landcare have lost that coastal focus which offered interested people a reason to contribute to improving the environmental outcomes on public land near their beach or estuary.

This submission urges that coasts be given special attention. Coastal community engagement deserves closer attention by policy makers, not least because the vast majority of Australians live in cities, towns and rural areas near the coast and a substantial proportion of all recreation occurs in coastal environments e.g. the latest Victorian Coastal Strategy (VCC, 2013) reports that the total value of Victoria's non-commercial coastal uses is \$8.4 billion per year (Worsley Parsons, 2013)

Burn-out and lack of resourcing for support roles are noted as matters to be addressed. Dedicated funds beyond policy cycles are necessary for coastal programs to retain the volunteer community and to attract facilitators in support roles.

We have assembled our submission below under the appropriate headings using your terms of reference as a guide.

We have also attached to this submission the following documents (both authored by the ACS's Secretary Dr. Beverley Clarke) for your consideration as part of our submission:

- A. Australia's Coastcare program (1995-2002): its purpose, components and outcomes.
- B. NRM and the Coast: past, present and future.

The establishment and performance of the Natural Heritage Trust;

There have been three phases of coastal NRM that included a role for the community:
NHT1–(1995-2002) which supported the Commonwealth’s Coastcare program;
NHT2–(2002-2008) which introduced Envirofund and a regional delivery model
Caring for Our Country (2008-13) which introduced a business model and targeted delivery.

Funding allocated to coasts and the number of Coastal programs/projects around the country have significantly decreased over time.

NHT 1

Coastcare, in its original form (1995-2002) differed in fundamental ways from other Australian natural resource stewardship programs such as Landcare and Bushcare. Under NHT1 as part of the ‘Coasts and Clean Seas’ suite, Coastcare was the responsibility of one Minister, the Minister for Environment, Senator Robert Hill. He was the “champion” of coastal projects funded by NHT1 in collaboration with partnership funds from state governments. The Minister for Agriculture and hence DAFF had no role in the allocation of NHT1 funds under this program. Facilitators were employed to help volunteers; they operated at state level and often worked out of council offices. Coastcare during NHT1 was estimated to have involved 60,000 people or 2,000 groups nationally undertake projects (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002).

The focus of Coastcare was on public good outcomes; it had no agriculture emphasis. It was a community program involving volunteers interested in providing improved ecological outcomes around the whole of the Australian coast, thus recognising the great value placed by Australians on the public estate, not private land. In addition to its grants scheme the Coastcare model under NHT1 performed an education role and encouraged development of partnerships between tiers of government and the community. The scale of Coastcare in engaging communities and in education was extensive. ‘Coastcare Week’ was run nationally in the first week of summer each year with the purpose of drawing attention to particular coastal management issues, assisted by extensive media exposure. Coastcare Facilitators in most States ran short course training programs for community groups and local land managers about best practice coastal management.

The Coastcare BRAND was recognisable and different from Landcare; signs put up to identify coastal features such as fish and flora types can still be found. Volunteers identified with Coastcare and NOT Landcare.

Figure 1 below illustrates that overall the volume of activity under NHT1 was consistently higher than subsequent NRM schemes.

NHT2

The regional NRM model that evolved under NHT2 was a joint Environment-DAFF operation. In the transition from NHT I to 2 the suite of coastal programs formed under NHT I was abandoned. Coastcare was merged with other land-based community grant programs to form ‘Envirofund’ (Environment Australia and AFFA, 2002). Coastcare was wrapped up within the broad NRM umbrella and lost its single focus and “brand”.

Sadly under NHT2 the funding provided by states for Coastcare staffing was terminated and projects ceased after 2002, (e.g. NSW withdrew \$500,000 per year from coastal programs that

previously went to Coastcare). It is possible that the abandonment of the dedicated coastal network of facilitators in the transition to NHT2 has been partially responsible for the decline in attracting coastal community grants. Facilitators roles as collaborators, brokers and conduits between grassroots groups and other agents (local and state government, NGOs, etc) was significant in NHT I. There were two exceptions to this. Victoria and Western Australia continued to host facilitators and deliver state-sponsored community grant schemes.

In comparison to Coastcare during NHT I, NHT2 witnessed a dramatic decline in small grants dedicated to coastal projects through Envirofund in terms of both the number of projects and amount of allocated funding around the country. The CIE (2005) evaluation of Envirofund noted the low share of Coastcare programs compared to other activities (CIE 2005).

The loss of funding for the marine and Coastal Community Network in 2007/08 may also have contributed to this decline and certainly to the decline under the program below.

The establishment and performance of the Caring for Our Country program;

In 2008 the new initiative, *Caring for Our Country* (CfoC) merged a number of previous NRM programs (Natural Heritage Trust, the National Landcare Program, the Environmental Stewardship Program and the Working on Country Indigenous land and sea ranger program). The distribution of funds under this business approach through targeted programs was for specific sites: the Great Barrier Reef, Ramsar wetlands, critical aquatic habitat, and a number of coastal ‘hotspots’. Under CfoC there were fewer federally funded facilitator positions and none with a dedicated coastal focus. Some NRM bodies filled gaps funding their own facilitators, but availability of information about the number, focus and continuity of such roles is patchy.

Targets were set for at least 500 community organisations to be engaged in coastal and marine rehabilitation, restoration and conservation actions (by June 2013). In the transition year (2008-2009) from NHT2 to CfoC, support for coastal community groups was provided through ‘Community Coastcare’ grants. This separate scheme ceased in the 2009-10 business plan. Instead Community Action Grants (from \$5000 to \$20,000) were dispersed on a competitive basis to community groups contributing to CfoC priorities (Australian Government 2008c).

Through CfoC the Australian Government has re-centralised and narrowed the agenda for NRM, reinforcing short-term, measurable outputs. This approach has eroded benefits of investments made through previous state/territory governments and programs.

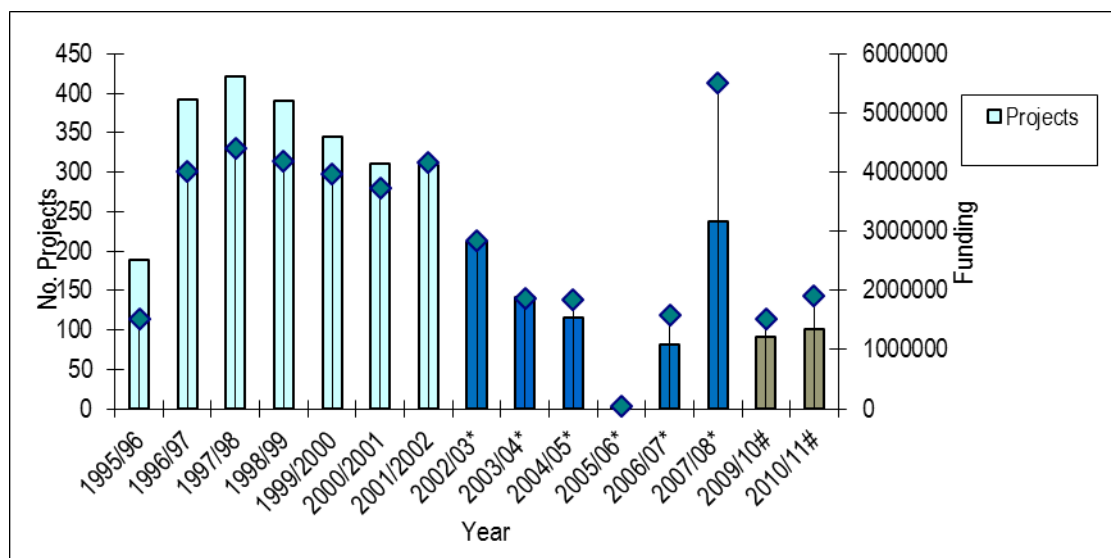


Figure 1: NRM community grants by amount of funding and number of projects

*NHT2, #CfoC (Source: Clarke, 2011)

- a. **the outcomes to date and for the forward estimates period of Caring for Our Country;**
- b. **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;**
- c. **the Government's policy rationale in relation to changes to land care programs;**
- d. **analysis of national, state and regional funding priorities for land care programs;**
- e. **how the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture have, and can, work together to deliver a seamless land care program;**

The role of natural resource management bodies in past and future planning, delivery, reporting and outcomes;

Coastcare was closely linked to local government; councils had the infrastructure and the legal standing to serve. The NRM regional model under NHT2 did not fit well with in those states where local councils were not part of the NRM regional governance structure such as Queensland and NSW. Broad scale reflection of NHT2 suggested that local government was marginalised (ALGA 2005; Robins & Kanowski 2011). The ALGA asserted that local government was the 'missing link' in NRM.

Under NHT2 funds for coast and marine environments largely relied on the inclusion of such matters in regional investment strategies. However, the status of NRM plans varied significantly between regions. NRM plans are only a statutory requirement in NSW, Vic and SA. A MCCN review concluded that many of the newly formed NRM regional boards failed to include detail concerning coast and marine matters.

Any other related matters.

Policy makers need to be made aware of how their decisions taken at a high national or state level actually play out and translate at the local level. The full ramifications of centralised programs are not always clear when applied to a diverse and spread out feature such as the coastline.

Yours sincerely,

Assoc. Prof. Geoff Wescott, Vice President, ACS.