



The Hon. Tony Burke MP

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

- 1 JUN 2010

Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions
Member for Fowler
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 10 March 2010 on behalf of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions about the petition presented by the Member for Gippsland regarding funding for Landcare facilitators and coordinators.

The Australian Government remains committed to supporting Landcare and recognises that Landcare is at the frontline in dealing with many of our future challenges, including food security, climate change and the protection of Australia's environment.

The 2010-11 Budget allocates \$36 million in funding to support Landcare community groups and volunteers across Australia. This is a \$1 million increase on last year's funding. We have also increased overall funding for Caring for our Country in the 2010-11 Budget by \$15 million, to \$423 million.

I recently attended the National Landcare Forum in Adelaide, where I had the opportunity to speak with many people from across the country who are involved with Landcare. Like the people of Gippsland, I understand the importance of having networks of facilitators, coordinators and project managers to support Landcare groups, particularly if they are to help meet our future agricultural and environmental challenges. This is why the government is providing \$33.6 million for a national network of 56 Landcare facilitators. These facilitators support local Landcare groups in many ways, including helping them to apply for funding, and will effectively link community groups and natural resource management bodies.

An open call for suitable organisations to host the Landcare facilitators was recently concluded, and I expect this network to be in place for the longer term by 1 July 2010. Further information about the Landcare facilitator initiative is available at www.nrm.gov.au. In the meantime, the government has offered each natural resource management region up to \$150 000 in funding to maintain facilitator employment in their regions while these arrangements are being implemented. Contrary to Mr Chester's allegation in his speech presenting this petition, this offer has been taken up by the vast majority of regional bodies.

Also contrary to Mr Chester's allegations, the Caring for our Country Business Plan explicitly recognises the importance of facilitators and provides funding opportunities for the purpose of employing a facilitator to help achieve project outcomes.

Mr Chester is further incorrect regarding funding for the capacity, skills, knowledge and engagement target under Caring for our Country – most projects funded under Caring for our Country meet this target and the latest Business Plan has merely clarified that projects need to address other targets, such as sustainable farming practices, when addressing the capacity building target.

The Caring for our Country Community Action Grants program is also helping many grassroots Landcare groups undertake their important projects. In January 2010, the Hon. Peter Garrett AM MP, Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts, and I announced almost \$5 million for 299 Community Action Grants projects. I am pleased to say that on 31 March 2010 I announced a further \$876 000 in funding for another 49 Landcare projects, to be undertaken by community Landcare groups. It is important to note that Landcare groups can apply for funding for facilitators through Community Action Grants.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Tony Burke

