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# Southern New England Landcare Ltd

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*Resourcing Landcare in our region*

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Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources  
PO Box 6021  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

19<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Dear Sirs,

**Submission to the House Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources:  
"Inquiry into the role of government in assisting Australian farmers to adapt to the impacts  
of climate change"**

#### Summary of Main Points:

That government can augment the shift towards farming practices which promote resilience in the farm sector in the face of climate change; and promote research, extension and training to assists the farm sector to better adapt to climate change by:

- Utilizing Community Organisations (such as Landcare Networks) that posses knowledge, social and intellectual capital that have been developed over the past two decades, to rapidly implement climate change programs
- Providing adequate and sustained resourcing to these community organisations to allow them to carry out this role
- Encouraging onground innovation by assisting local communities to build partnerships with agencies and research bodies to trial and develop technologies and practices that build resilience in the face of climate change
- Facilitating adoption of these and other innovative practices by landholders by funding local organisations to run projects that deliver extension and incentive programs.

For landholders to take ownership and responsibility for changed practices they must drive the direction of the change. Under current funding arrangements 20 years worth of experience and goodwill in landholder engagement stands to be lost, and along with it the opportunity landholder driven innovation and rapid adoption of management for climate change resilience.

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Our mission is to foster community participation in sustainable natural resource management.

Southern New England Landcare wishes to address the Committee on its terms of reference for this inquiry, via this written submission, and invites the Committee to view first hand the points covered in this written submission, either by touring our region, or via a presentation given to the Committee by our organisation

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**Background:**

Southern New England Landcare was established in the early 1990's as a coordinating committee to assist the Landcare groups in the region.

Our organisation is now a well established and highly regarded player in the primary industries and natural resource management sphere in our region. We are an independent community driven organisation governed by Board of Directors, with a reference committee made up of the Landcare and similar groups in the region, and have over 800 member families (predominantly farming families).

We work across the whole of our community in partnership with multiple stakeholders to deliver programs to assist the community to implement improved farming practices and natural resource management.

Our region covers over 2million Ha, which is approximately half of the New England IBRA Bioregion. It encompasses four Local Government areas ( Armidale Dumaresq, Uralla, Guyra and Walcha) the headwaters of four Catchments Management Authority areas (Northern Rivers, Border River-Gwydir, Namoi and Hunter), the southern half of the New England Livestock Health and Pest Authority and the tablelands area of the New England Weeds Authority.

Over the past 5 years our organisation has attracted over \$2.65million dollars in funding, to stimulate in excess of \$6.25 million worth of onground works, training courses and awareness raising events. In addition we have supported the delivery of projects by other organisations to achieve an overall investment in improved natural resource management worth over \$9million across in the region

These activities have enabled land managers to better understand the natural resource environment in which they operate and thus implement practices to improve the resilience of their farming operations.

The support of government, in particular through the National Landcare Program, has been instrumental in achieving this level of uptake and action.

Particularly, the investment allowing organisations such as ours to employ local onground Coordinators (Community Support Officers) has provided the community with a constant and trusted reference point. Our coordinators know our community and act as facilitators, brokers and coordinators for a myriad of programs run by all levels of government, as well as by private providers.

In addition these coordinators have a proven ability to assist our community to develop innovative programmes of their own, or facilitate community input to projects being run by other organisations to ensure that the outcomes are relevant to and adoptable at the farm scale.

The scope of projects undertaken, and outcomes achieved, is best shown via two case studies outlined below. Both projects show how a well supported community can innovate, become involved with and take ownership of technologies and practices that improve their farming resilience.

Fundamental to the success of both projects has been the ability of the organisation to secure funding to retain its coordinators, who use their experience and knowledge to bring multiple project partners with different skill sets together to work with the community so as to develop appropriate solutions to key issues faced by all project partners.

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### Case Study 1: Engineered Woodlands (2007-2009)

The Engineered Woodlands Project aims to demonstrate a profitable land use that integrates the growing of native trees and shrubs for biodiversity carbon and timber values within agricultural production systems. Engineered woodlands are paddock-wide tree crops where the trees are wide-spaced and allow normal agriculture to operate between them. In short, the plantings do not displace pastures and conventional crops but are integrated with them.

Key benefits of an Engineered Woodland are:

- Shade and shelter for better livestock, crop and pasture production,
- Better habitat connectivity for biodiversity,
- Improved soil nutrient cycling and water use efficiency, and
- Income from timber and carbon credits.

Key features of an Engineered Woodland are:

- Designed to produce multiple products from traditional agriculture as well as the trees
- The use of the entire paddock for tree establishment minimises fencing costs, thus substantially reduces establishment costs
- Agricultural activity can continue between belts once trees are sufficiently established (within 1-3 yrs for most sites)
- Tree belts or copses are established at spacings to suit machinery, pasture and stock management and are aligned to maximise microclimate benefits

This project is a partnership between several key players in the natural resource management field in northern NSW, namely; the Northern Inland Forestry Investment Group, Southern New England Landcare Ltd, Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA, Namoi CMA and local landholders. The project is overseen by a Steering Committee with representatives of these organisations and other stakeholders. The steering committee has devised and implemented communication and extension strategies, selected and established demonstration sites and developed monitoring protocols for the project.

Sixteen landholders have contributed over \$70,000 in cash and in-kind to establish demonstration sites, totalling 280 Ha in area, with 52,000 seedlings established. Monitoring of soils, tree establishment and growth, and biodiversity has occurred at each site, and landholders have received training in carbon trading.

These demonstration sites have formed the basis of numerous extension articles and hosted several field days, the latest of which is to be held on March 31<sup>st</sup> (see attached flier). This touring field day will demonstrate various aspects of engineered woodlands and participants will see real life examples of the land use including sites with spectacular tree growth – some up to 4m in height in just 15 months in a cool climate. Topics will include:

- Designs for stock shelter, carbon, timber, and incorporating fodder shrubs.
- An audit of greenhouse gas emissions on a grazing property at Wollun.
- How engineered woodlands can be used as carbon offsets.
- Economic aspects of engineered woodlands.

Four information sheets have been published, covering 1.Tree Establishment; 2 Design; 3.Carbon Trading and 4.Economics. Information Sheets 3 & 4 are included as an attachment to this submission, the other sheets are available on Southern New England Landcare's website. [www.snelandcare.org.au](http://www.snelandcare.org.au) and follow the links to Projects/Current Projects.

Over 800landholders have already accessed extension material and events from this project, with many farmers already applying the Engineered Woodland methods to their projects.

The Engineered Woodlands Project is a great example of what can be achieved when local innovation is supported. It is a project that has the potential to improve farmer's resilience in the face of climate change by proactively managing their land for increased production through improved biodiversity, soil health and micro climate manipulation. It also diversifies farmers income streams through the potential for timber harvest and carbon credits.

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## **Case Study 2: Land Water & Wool**

### ***Phase 1. Land Water & Wool Northern Tablelands Research Project (2002-2006)***

The Land Water & Wool Northern Tablelands Project was one of several projects funded under a research partnership program of Australian Wool Innovation and Land and Water Australia.

The Northern Tablelands project was led by Professor Nick Reid, of the University of New England, in collaboration with Southern New England Landcare Ltd, the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics (CARE), and local landholders.

This four year project was directed by a project steering committee of the above stakeholders, which was supported by a technical reference committee. The role of the Steering Committee, facilitated and supported by Southern New England Landcare staff, was to direct and ensure the project was implemented in a way that would allow meaningful input by the districts woolgrowers, and provide information that was useful to them and ensure adoption of recommendations at the farm scale.

The project used surveys, in depth case studies of three farms, and testimonials from seven other farms across the region to identify 41 different ways to improve wool profits and biodiversity conservation on farms in the region. This was backed up by on ground research and economic analysis occurring on 21 monitor farms for the duration of the project.

A series of 11 Fact sheets, 3 Case studies and 7 Testimonial sheets were produced through the project, and extended at numerous field days, which were attended by in excess of 2000 people, as well as via media opportunities, including a segment on ABC's Landline program.

The Fact Sheet – "How to Lift Wool Profits and Improve Biodiversity" is an attachment to this submission. The other sheets are available on Southern New England Landcare's website [www.snelandcare.org.au](http://www.snelandcare.org.au) and follow the links to Publications.

### ***Phase 2 Land Water & Wool Best Management Practice (2007-2008)***

Funding totalling \$669,529 was secured by Southern New England Landcare, from the National Landcare Program, and the Northern Rivers, Border Rivers-Gwydir and Namoi Catchment Management Authorities to assist landholders implement the findings from Land Water Wool Phase 1. Again a Steering Committee was formed to ensure the Land Water & Wool Best Management Practice project (LWW2- BMP) was delivered in a way that would achieve the best outcomes for both landholders and the funding bodies.

The extension products developed under Phase 1 were utilised in a series of 8 field days and 10 follow up workshops, where farmers were assisted by a group of technical experts and local 'Landcare champions' to use the information to plan onground works to implement best management practices identified under the Phase 1 project. Landholder's proposals were then assessed by a panel and funding was allocated according to specified criteria. This process is more fully explained in the Attachment – 2007/2008 Project Funding: Land Water Wool Best Management Practices.

In total 170 people attended the field days, leading to 50 farmers attending the workshops and submitting 90 project proposals. Funding allocations were made to 85 of these project sites, with landholders contributing around \$670,000 in cash and kind to implement the projects. On ground outcomes included:

- 36km of streambank and 263Ha of riparian vegetation protected with 45km of fencing
- Off creek watering systems established on 15 properties
- 589Ha of Remnant vegetation protected and 97 ha of revegetation established , protected by 152km of fencing
- 5Ha of Soil erosion treated and 54Ha of erosion prone lands protected

The two phases of this project are a great example of how local organisations can work in partnership with agencies and research bodies to research extend and implement improved practices.

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### The Future:

We believe that community organisations like Southern New England Landcare, have the proven ability to play a significant role in assisting Australian farmers to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

However to do so requires a long term partnership approach between community and government, whereby government provides secure and ongoing resourcing to allow such organisations to support the community in developing and implementing innovative projects to address climate change.

Such projects will build resilience in farming systems, thus reducing the impact of changes brought about by both long term climate change, and short term drought events.

Landcare at its best has been successful in harnessing community innovation and partnering with a wide range of stakeholders to produce solutions, a process which engenders ownership and increases adoption and adaptive management by the landholders. We invite you to look at our website which shows the scope and breadth of projects our community has been involved with.

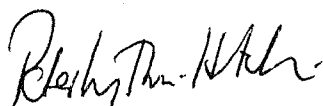
However the very existence of Landcare is under question (refer The Land February 26<sup>th</sup> p12-13). Current funding contracts expire at the end of this financial year, to be replaced by Caring for our Country Program. Under the Business Plan of this program, funding is only available to meet the pre determined targets for each region, rather than assist the community to identify issues and develop and implement solutions. Organisations such as ours will lose the ability to retain our skilled staff; staff our farming community has trust in and to whom they look to for support in implementing practices for improved natural resource management.

We believe there is great scope for this inquiry to look at how the community asset built up over the past 20 years can be utilised to assist farmers adapt to climate change.

We thank you for your consideration of our submission and look forward to an opportunity to discuss more fully the points made with the Committee if at all possible.

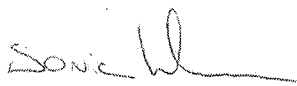
A visit to our region will give the committee an opportunity to experience first hand a model example of how industry, community, government and research can collaborate to respond to the challenges of climate change.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Lytton-Hitchins  
President,  
Southern New England Landcare Ltd

Yours sincerely,



Sonia Williams  
Executive Officer,  
Southern New England Landcare Ltd

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