

**To The
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

Submission by:- Werner Lange Wonyip Landcare Group. Victoria

Please accept the following comments on the **Terms of Reference to the Senate Inquiry** for your discussions.

I am addressing my remarks specifically with regards to the Landcare Networks, but most of the comments are generally applicable to all programs.

My comments are the result of observations and a short term experience since joining the Wonyip (Vic.) Landcare Group.

Reference

The lessons learned from the successes and failures of three decades of Commonwealth investment in resource management including Landcare, the National Heritage Trust, The National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality, and other national programs

Comment

Lack of communication at grass roots level has possibly led to some sections of farmers and landholders to reach a conclusion that their work has been completed and that there is nothing else to look at.

One must share more information within "landcaring groups" trying to achieve similar aims and results. Pool resources and share experiences and the facts learned.

Have specific outcomes in focus before asking for funding and justify the expenditures in detail to give a better understanding of the aims.

Prioritize funding for projects with specific long term end results such as weed control, pest control erosion etc.

Reference

How we can best build on the knowledge and experience gained from these programs to capitalise on existing networks and projects, and maintain commitment and momentum among land-holders

Comment

Provide consistency and certainty of funding for a minimum of 5 year periods with performance based reviews on a yearly basis to allow coordinators and other administrators to feel that they have some sense of security and that their contributions are respected.

Maintain existing good staff which has gained years of experience and have gained trust and relationships with the local community.

Broaden community and government understanding of the success and achievements of Landcare. Provide advocacy and public voice for Landcare to encourage a wider participation by the farming community and landholders.

Reference

The overall costs and benefits of a regional approach to planning and management of Australia's catchments, coasts and other natural resources,

Comment

Local knowledge is paramount to gain any benefit from money spent and achieve success in any project eg input from fishermen in the Corner Inlet of Wilson's Promontory in Victoria on the question of seagrass and fish species.

Modern communications can reduce the need for over-bureaucratising the system on local state and federal level and therefore save costs

Local corporations and businesses can be interested to contribute funding and receive benefits eg. HVP in the Strzelecki Forest of Victoria and without positive local planning may not do so if it were not regionally based

Reference

The need for a long-term strategic approach to natural resource management (NRM) at the national level,

Comment

NRM - (Landcare) should be a by-partisan and non "politically" steered organisation. Projects may run for 10 - 20 years to see any definitive outcomes and should be evaluated on their merit by scientific experts and not by politicians.

All natural resource management projects and priorities should be set as knowledge becomes available ie "climate change", "lack of precipitation" etc.

It is a waste of funds to start a project and then stop funding before a conclusion or outcome is achieved ie the early salinity investigations in the Murry River Basin a decade or so ago.

Reference

The capacity of regional NRM groups, catchment management organisations and other national conservation networks to engage land managers, resource users and the wider community to deliver on-the-ground NRM outcomes as a result of the recent changes to funding arrangements under the Caring for our Country program,

Comment

The YYLN (Yarram Yarram Landcare Network) has barely managed to retain enough staff with the help of additional "external funding" to have a temporary viability.

Without the on ground help and co-ordination of experienced and educated personnel the success and value of most projects undertaken by Landcare Groups are lost and the enthusiasm of the public community diminished.

Example :-The Wonyip LG (Victoria) received a Grant from World Wildlife Fund to establish Vegetation corridors for local wildlife and in particular for the the "Tiger Quoll".

It is essential to have proper reporting and fund project/management to justify receipt of such funding. The wider community may have the enthusiasm but not necessarily the skills to manage such administrative requirements on the ground.

The requirements to retain funding are based on performance and submission of progress reports on a timely basis, which obviously requires a degree of competence.

The coordinators are also custodians of the funds and manage the expenditure... an onerous task. Reduced Funding to employ permanent staff has a major counterproductive effect in such an instance and cannot enhance the capacity to provide essential support. The result will be reduced value outcomes to projects if not suspension or termination of them.

Reference

The extent to which the Caring for our Country program represents a comprehensive approach to meeting Australia's future NRM needs.

Comment

The intention of reducing bureaucracy should be a focus and target to reduce cost. To review the multitude of departments who are trying to achieve similar tasks can also be rationalised . The need of a national umbrella is valuable and necessary to ensure that strategic goals are kept on track for the benefit of the whole Nation and not only for specific local area benefit.

Funding should go directly to the various organisations ie Landcare, DSE, CMAS etc from the Federal Government with reports, funding requests and justifications for expenditure directly to the Federal Government.

It is necessary to evaluate and respect the "volunteering" inputs the wider community provides to actually achieve low cost results in "caring" for our country and not "feeding" and supporting that input may have negative overall results for the nation.

It is the grass "roots" that support the mass of trunk and canopy..... without it ALL purpose is lost.

Best Regards

Werner Lange