

SOUTH GIPPSLAND LANDCARE NETWORK

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14th August 2008

The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

**Re: South Gippsland Landcare Network submission to
Inquiry into Natural Resource Management and Conservation Challenges**

The South Gippsland Landcare Network Statement of Purpose is

South Gippsland Landcare Network, through community action, helps to preserve, protect and enhance the environment of South Gippsland by working with government agencies and local businesses to achieve natural resource management outcomes.

- i. **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,**

The South Gippsland Landcare Network has grown over the past 13 years and has delivered a range of on ground projects. Federal Government funding has played a significant role in the delivery of these works. This range of on-ground works include projects related to improving water quality, enhancing biodiversity, reducing decline of remnant vegetation, controlling pest plants & animals, managing salinity, groundwater monitoring, direct seeding trials, controlling erosion, promoting sustainable agriculture and developing partnerships across the region and beyond the boundaries of this region. The success of many of these projects cannot be measured in the short term of a funding cycle – usually one - three years.

Central to the success of the Landcare work in the Network has been dedicated and sustained efforts of individual landholders, Landcare's local community leaders and the essential community based Landcare Coordinators and Facilitators (C&Fs) who work directly with, and support, rural communities.

C & F's work with the regions Landcare community to encourage and support community involvement, activity and decision making with respect to NRM; in short this is capacity building by applying the following principles:

- People need to be able to participate in the process
- Communities need to learn about the issues
- Communities need to be able to understand how processes deliver outcomes
- Communities need to recognise how to influence desirable outcomes.

Long-term integrated projects across the region with local community ownership is still extremely important and one of the most positive things about Landcare.

Lessons learnt include

- Landcare support is vital to help local communities implement their natural resource management goals and outcomes
- Short term – eg: 1- 3 year funding, whilst it does achieve good outcomes – doesn't allow for long term planning
- Project coordinators/ managers are vital to the successful delivery of the project
- The lack of project coordinators/ managers would be one of the main factors in project failure.
- We need to be ready and aware of the carbon trading/ carbon emissions programs and get involved so that Landcare doesn't miss out on these potential opportunities
- The standard 10% - 15% for project administration including staffing is NOT adequate for a project to run successfully. **A minimum of 30% of the project costs should be allocated to project management/ administration to allow for the project to be effectively managed** and more importantly for the monitoring and evaluation to be included.
- There is a recognition that project monitoring and evaluation is crucial to enabling community action to be continued. However, it is usually the first thing to drop off a project when project management funds are not adequate.

ii. **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,**

The South Gippsland Landcare Network today covers 4000 square kilometres across the entire South Gippsland Shire and areas of Cardinia and Baw Baw Shires. The Network encompasses 22 Landcare Groups from Nyora in the West across to Welshpool in the East and from Mirboo Nth, down to our southern most group at Yanakie near Wilson's Promontory.

SGLN prepared a new Strategic Plan in 2007 which will guide its activities over the next 3 years. - *SGLN, through community action, helps to preserve, protect and enhance the environment of South Gippsland by working with government agencies and local businesses to achieve NRM outcomes.*

The SGLN Strategic Plan key objectives are:

1. *Strengthen individual Landcare Groups*
2. *Improve educational resources and advice available to groups*
3. *Significantly reduce reliance on single source of funding*
4. *Serve as a lobby for future funding and the public image of Landcare*
5. *Undertake network-wide projects to achieve a coordinated approach to problems, planning and landscape change*
6. *Communicate the strategic plan*

In order for commitment to be maintained and for the focus of Landcare activities to continue, ***the support and funding of project based staff and on ground works needs to continue.***

Landcare members put a huge amount of time and effort into the protection and enhancement of the local environment. However, they cannot be expected to do it alone.

The impact on volunteers of a lack of Landcare support staff will be significant in the future, without adequate technical and coordination support, volunteers may be forced to make decisions based on inadequate information.

Career progression and job security are two issues which need to be addressed as part of the NRM industry, in particular Landcare staff. Short term contracts – current CfoC funding – only 9 months at best does not allow highly trained Landcare staff members any security of tenure and invariably has them looking for more secure positions, in a lot of cases outside the NRM industry.

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

The formation of Landcare networks was driven by members to assist with administration and strategic delivery of projects. These projects are often local initiatives that reflect local NRM knowledge and needs while reflecting the broader priorities of the Regional Catchment Strategy. Landcare works closely with government departments, local government and other partners in NRM. The fact that Landcare is recognised as good business for land owners and managers results in enhanced environmental protection and improvement.

Regional/ Network approach – has allowed for

- Larger scale Network-wide Landcare planning.
- Greater opportunity of attracting funds for network-wide projects.
- Easier maintenance of relationships with government, agencies and sponsors.
- Better Coordinated larger scale projects and on-ground works.
- Coordinating discussion/advice on, policies, strategies and plans affecting Landcare
- Managing employees who assist community to achieve NRM outcomes

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

The need for long term approaches must be supported by long term strategic funding programs at a Federal and State level to allow long term strategic projects to be implemented.

The long term funding programs must recognise and support the need for project staff to be an integral part of any project and be adequately funded.

At least 30% of project budget should be dedicated to project management and administration.

v. 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, and

The capacity of regional NRM groups, catchment management organisations and Landcare Networks to engage land managers, resource users and the wider community to deliver on-the-ground NRM outcomes is extremely high. In South Gippsland, there are strong partnerships between all NRM agencies and organisations – at both a government and community level.

However, our capacity to deliver has been severely limited due to the timing of the Caring for our Country Program and the lack of solid information about the program objectives.

The Natural Heritage Trust 3 program funding ceased in June 2008. The Caring for our Country (CFoC) applications closed in late July and we do not know when we will be successful. Therefore, the lag time between June 30, 2008 and the notification of successful CFoC applications will be at least 3 months if not more. This has resulted in the loss of key staff from regional and locally based projects as we do not have the funds to keep them until the CFoC funding arrives.

Also the transitional nature of the CFoC funding – currently only until June 2009 has also resulted in short term project development.

We will lose key staff members because we are not able to offer medium to long term job security. Job security is a high priority for most employees, especially in this time of high interest rates, rising petrol costs and rising grocery prices.

The loss of key staff due to factors out of the Network control eg: lag time between funding announcements, short term program funding has a significant impact on the delivery of the on ground NRM outcomes.

The current Caring for Our Country round was targeted at ALL community organisations. However, the complexity of the application form and difficulty in accessing internet based forms by local Landcare members made it almost impossible for a locally based Landcare group to apply for project funding.

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

It is difficult to accurately assess the extent to which the CFoC program represents a comprehensive approach to meeting Australia's future NRM needs as we do not know what has been funded in this transitional year and that the CFoC business plan will not be released until September 2008, potentially 4- 6 weeks after submissions for this inquiry close.

Landcare Coordinators & Facilitator's (C & F's) are a priority for funding. This has been well documented in recent years at both a national and regional level.

The Australian Landcare Council (ALC) discussion paper (2001) on coordinators and facilitators – concludes that 'Landcare facilitators and coordinators have played a pivotal role in the development of community participation in successful natural resource management programs across Australia. Community groups resoundingly state that having a coordinator or facilitator working with the community is one of the most significant factors contributing to progress with natural resource management.'
Taken from WGCMA Coordinators and Facilitators Report May 2004 Amron Consulting Pty Ltd

The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority commissioned a C &F report – presented in May 2004

Coordinators and facilitators are an investment in natural resource management through helping to change community capacity/social assets. Linking coordinator and facilitator investment to targets set for community capacity/social assets enables a clearer link to be made with biophysical assets change.
WGCMA Coordinators and Facilitators Report May 2004 Amron Consulting Pty Ltd

The Caring for Our Country ineligible activities- taken from application form -
- " facilitator and coordinator projects where the facilitation component is not directed at linking national activities to regional or local activities or does not play a national leadership role"

This neglects to recognise the linkage role C & F's play at a regional and local level between the Federal government funding and locally based on ground protection and enhancement works.

Yours faithfully



Belinda Brennan
Network Coordinator
South Gippsland Landcare Network