

COMMUNITY LANDCARE SPEAKS: REALISING OUR FUTURE THE BEGINNINGS OF AN AUSTRALIAN FRAMEWORK FOR LANDCARE

Compiled by the National Landcare Facilitator Project team, a consultant to the Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry
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INTRODUCTION

Community landcare has not only endured the test of time, it has demonstrated outstanding results along the way and become an important Australian icon in the process. Spanning two decades, it has captured the attention of thousands of Australians, harnessing their energies and commitment towards the sustainable management of our country's assets – soil, water and native flora & fauna. Had it not been for the efforts of community landcare, what would be the condition of our communities and landscapes today?

As community landcare looks to the future, it has the potential to build on its many achievements and work through the various challenges that have emerged along the way. Moreover, it has the ability to design its own pathways to the future based on extensive knowledge and experiences from many years at the helm.

This will be the first guiding document for landcare since the Decade of Landcare Plan came to a close nine years ago in 2000. The Australian Government recently initiated a discussion on the prospect of developing a new Australian Framework for Landcare. This framework will be guided and owned by community landcare. In this context it is intended that 'landcare' includes the whole range of community groups that work on natural resource and productivity related issues.

To start the process a workshop with a small cross section of community landcarers was held at the end of April 2009. The purpose of the workshop was to consider the concept of a new framework to support landcare through the next 20 years and to determine the best process to ensure maximum community engagement, input and ownership. This workshop was facilitated by the National Landcare Facilitator.

This paper draws from the workshop and outlines the conceptual basis for a framework, or roadmap, for the future. It's now your turn. The thoughts of all community landcarers are most valuable to ensure we have a true community based document hence you are invited to put forward your ideas on *Community Landcare Speaks*. Refer to the section called 'Next Steps in Framework Development' in this document for information on how to have your say.

The Australian Government and the National Landcare Facilitator Project team (a consultant to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) are supporting the landcare community in developing this framework by providing the opportunity for all landcarers (including smaller groups and individuals) to contribute. Sessions seeking input on the framework at state landcare conferences or state-based workshops will be sponsored and a National Landcare Forum will be hosted in South Australia in March 2010, where it is planned that the Framework will be presented for wider discussion.

COMMUNITY LANDCARE TODAY

Community landcare has evolved as a community movement focusing on people in the landscape. At over 20 years of age it is responsible for achieving wide ranging, intergenerational community awareness and knowledge, resulting in significant landscape change across the country.

As it has evolved, community landcare has become more sophisticated and the use of the group 'learning in action' approach has been adopted by a multitude of groups across the country including Landcare, Coastcare, Bushcare, Friends of, Farming System and many others.

The growth of local, volunteer community groups has surpassed all initial expectations. In many cases developing from an initial farmer based focus on sustainable resource use and management it has become a valuable part of the fabric of Australian communities, supporting social, economic, environmental and cultural needs. The landcare ethic has spread to at least thirteen other countries around the world and increasing.

Volunteer contribution through community landcare has greatly amplified the on-ground works that regional natural resource management bodies and state and federal governments have initiated or undertaken. Group action through landcare has also had the effect of building community skills, knowledge and capacity, and extending the works and practice changes through time at little further cost to government.

Community landcare has addressed many challenges. It has needed to operate with a great amount of flexibility and adaptability to continually manage a range of influences and barriers over the decades including drought and climate adaptation, new and emerging technology and economic cycles. It now has a significantly different playing field to that of the early 1990's. Landcare's development has largely been influenced by a number of government policy shifts leading to changes in structures and programs across the country and impacting on the ability of groups to maintain momentum in a continually changing operating environment.

COMMUNITY LANDCARE FRAMEWORK DISCUSSION

It was enthusiastically agreed at the April workshop that over the coming months, community landcare across Australia will have the opportunity to have input into the development of the first landcare framework that sets out the way forward – guided from the ground up and owned by the landcare community. This will include extensive consultation with the broadest range of community landcare volunteers and will use means such as written and email comments, a web blog and workshoping opportunities around the country. Other natural resource management and sustainable resource use stakeholders are invited to be involved.

The following sections of this paper set out key questions aimed at drawing out the values, issues and approaches important to community landcare. Also included are the initial ideas from landcarers who attended the April workshop.

You are invited to provide your answers to these questions and make additional comments on what you would like included in the framework.

Q1. Could a landcare framework assist community landcare?

At the workshop there was strong, in-principle support for a new landcare framework to guide community landcare and its association with government structures into the future. The framework would need to be community led to ensure ownership and consistent continuity. There was also discussion around it being based on a true partnership, engendering confidence and mutual understanding between key stakeholders and that Governments needed to be part of the partnership as they continue to be the main source of funds that enable work to be undertaken.

Q2. What should the main elements of a framework include or consider?

The workshop established the following list of elements important to guiding the content:

- A framework should articulate landcare principles
- It be a statement of community values, about how we live in our landscape
- It recognises landcare for its leadership and credibility in sustainable resource management
- Guides government policy to align with landcare objectives and capacities
- It needs to be an enabling document that can be used as a guide to policy development with consistency between all levels
- Support both grass roots land managers and the regional model and other landcare structures
- It should identify the strengths of landcare and build upon them
- It must be capable of informing decision makers
- Must be broad and relevant at all levels and must value partnerships
- Is an organic living document that is flexible, bipartisan and has a feedback loop between the landcarers, other stakeholders and the framework managers
- It should acknowledge and guide on communicating landcare achievements and celebrate success
- It should empower and build resilience, create and build linkages, support autonomy and diversity and be consistent
- It should operate at short, medium and long term
- Recognise the need to up-skill landcarers, and the knowledge brokering role
- Be a signpost for governments about landscape change
- Have a recognised and valued role in regional operations
- Be an equal partner with regions
- Promotes the value of volunteerism
- Encourages accountability
- Must be relevant to diverse communities and groups across Australia
- It should ensure landcare and logo are synonymous with and enhance sustainable food and fibre production in a healthy, biodiverse and productive landscape
- Is conducive to succession – the `changing face of volunteers
- It should provide a strategy for the capture of experience, knowledge, skills of a mobile population shifting to and from communities/regions and changing demographics
- Involve social sciences in landcare
- Needs bipartisan support inc ACF, broad community, AG, states, industries etc

Possible scope and status:

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- The framework needs to be broad to cover all aspects – landcare means many things to many people including an ethic or inherent belief about caring for the land, volunteer community groups at the local level that are engaged and involved in sustainable land use and management activities and practices, an institution made up of a range of support structures and a government program that targets community capacity building. Landcare also incorporates social, economic, cultural & biophysical components.
- There needs to be short/medium/long term segments to the framework – it is more realistic to develop some five year segments to deal with the unknowns of the physical and social environments of 20 years' time.
- The Landcare brand and logo need preserving – owned by community landcare
- The framework should be acknowledged by government at all levels and inform governments' association with community landcare in the future

Q3. What elements of community landcare do we need to preserve?

There are important elements about landcare that have underpinned its success over the past two decades. They are essential components or assumptions that should inform a new landcare framework.

- Answerable to the grass roots
- Representative – two-way channel of communication between different levels
- State peak body representation
- Community-driven and developed projects supported by all levels of government across a range of environments
- Apolitical
- Continuity, which is critical to prevent loss of resources, knowledge etc for on-ground needs, and socially – succession
- Autonomous – strength in direction and ownership of purpose for local diversity, geographic, demographic issues
- Valued and acknowledged for its responsibility
- Networking/interaction including social engagement, mentoring and support
- Adaptability – linked to on-ground changes as well as to evolution of sustainable farming/producer groups, peri urban influences, climate change, water & food supply, peak oil, technology, time/labour/financial/communication constraints and intro of ETS
- Practice change model fundamental in delivering sustainable changes
- Power to challenge and change attitudes and behaviour in practices for community/landscape outcomes
- Guidance and community development (both for professionals and volunteers)
- Flexible, resilient to adversity, adaptable to change
- Breaks the big picture into small components
- Knowledge broker – information sharing capacity within individual groups, learning through shared experiences and with regions
- Demonstrative, triple bottom line benefits
- The upskilling of human resources
- Resourceful (inc. providing resources and effective partnerships), innovative and capacity to build resilience within communities
- Support base for landcare officers, mentoring role for other groups, volunteer ethic
- Often ahead of the times (proactive) – can give signposts to government

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Q4. What new and emerging elements do we consider for the future & how?

There are new and emerging elements that need to be considered in a framework that looks to the future, to ensure its relevance and ability to meet community needs.

- Social and demographic change such as increasing peri-urban and demographic influences including a lower proportion of young people
- Improving communication modes such as greater internet access and use
- Carbon reduction schemes
- GMO impacts on resources and community preferences
- Refinements in duty of care standards
- Increased mobility of people
- The changing priorities of the wider community

Q5. What do we want landcare to be known for in 20+ years time - vision?

The workshop considered their aspirations for landcare and its achievements into the future.

- An effective proactive movement that is a leader in adoption of practice change and a link between people and technology
- The community movement that is leading attitude and behaviour change in our nation towards our living within the country's capacity." Landcarers Care"
- Its leadership in attitude and behavioural change
- Contributing to a well resourced, resilient and valued community
- An organisation that enhances the economic and sustainable development of Australia
- A leader of community knowledge, as a reference point for onground workers
- Developing thriving productive systems
- As a people mechanism for change
- Its ability to bring many entities together
- Its ability to mentor, nurture and engage the broader community and all levels of government
- A body that values differences and is apolitical, independent and valued by all Australians
- Its achievements and works recorded and recognised

Q6. Do you have an other comments on what you would like included in the framework?

NEXT STEPS IN FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

It was agreed that it is important that the key stakeholders in landcare and its future are included in the development of the framework and have the opportunity for input.

- You are invited to share this document with other interested landcarers including Landcare, Coastcare, Bushcare, Friends of, farming system and other groups. All comments are welcome and should be provided by mid November 2009 so the Australian Government can facilitate a draft framework by the end of December 2009. It is planned that the Framework will be presented at the National Landcare Forum to be held in South Australia in March 2010.

- This document has been posted on the National Landcare Facilitator website at www.landcarefacilitator.com.au together with information on how to submit your response.
- A Landcare Speaks Blog is available at <http://landcarespeaks.wordpress.com> for open discussion and comment
- The National Landcare Facilitator eNewsletter will provide notice of updates. Contact national@landcarefacilitator.com.au if you are not on the eNewsletter distribution list.
- In addition the Australian Government has arranged support for discussions in each state and territory by funding sessions at Landcare/NRM conferences or other forums. Information on dates and locations will be included on the National Landcare Facilitator website at www.landcarefacilitator.com.au

References

The following references can be accessed at www.landcarefacilitator.com.au under 'Information & Publications'

1. 2003 National Landcare Conference, Darwin, Workshop Forum working group notes
2. 2004 and 2005 workshop notes from National Landcare Facilitator Community Landcare Conferences
3. 2006 International Landcare Conference, Melbourne, workshop notes
4. Historical Landcare Timeline