

Response ID ANON-X2RH-GDV4-S

Submitted on 2014-08-29 19:04:00.035848

Introduction

What is your state or territory

Please select:

New South Wales

Do you know which NRM region you are in?

Yes

Region - NSW

What is your NRM or Local Land Services region?

Region::

Greater Sydney

Response type

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or group?

Yes

Organisations and groups

What is your role within the organisation/group?

Role::

General manager

What type of group/organisation are you responding on behalf of?

Landcare Network (state or national)

If you selected "Other", please specify::

Partnering with the natural resource management community, including landcare

What opportunities are there for greater partnerships within the natural resource management community, including landcare, and what is the best way to foster/encourage these partnerships?

Submission::

The NRM community has many players – farmer groups, environmental groups, producer groups industry bodies, regional bodies, local government, schools and individuals to name but a few . Landcare is an all-encompassing movement which includes any or all of the above, depending up on the relationships and partnerships built up over the previous 25 years.

Effective partnerships are based upon recognition, respect and reciprocity, and the first step to achieving greater partnership is to provide the platform whereby partners can meet in a manner that embraces these keystone principles.

To achieve greater partnerships Landcare NSW recommends:

- acknowledge and value the role of community landcare and the many thousands of volunteers who provide their technical expertise, professional skills, time, labour and money
- build on the network of Regional Landcare Facilitators by re-instituting the network of local coordinators and support officers who can work with local landcare and NRM groups
- recognise that the history of landcare over the past 25 years shows that paid local staff based in local community organisations are able to unlock greatly increased volunteer contributions, develop ewffective partnerships, leverage local co-investment, and improve the quality of NRM decision making, planning, prioritising and investment
- paid local coordinators will also provide the liaison, linkages and project management to maximise the potential of Government initiatives such as Green Army, 20 million trees and other major national NRM projects
- build a relationship based on working towards common goals with recognition of the different roles
- formally recognise the role of landcare representative organisations at the national, state and territory, network, regional and local level, that provides the voice of landcare and support these organisations.

How could support for state and national Landcare networks best underpin the objectives of the programme and support the activity of all landcare-type groups?

Submission::

The Federal Government's recognition and support for the bodies that represent community landcare at the state, territory and national level is welcome. Historical evidence shows that when the landcare and producer group community does not have a central voice, to document and represent their value, then policy development quickly becomes government centric and top down with a resultant loss of resourcing and partnership with communities to the major detriment of NRM, agricultural and community outcomes. The last 10 years, which have seen a major decline in rural landcare and producer groups are testament to this

State and national landcare associations are able to assist governments in the development of policy, the design of programs and the achievement of effective on ground delivery, in a way that meets the needs of their landcare community . They are an effective interface for ensuring that the needs of the community can be built into programs, and that the requirements faced by government can be effectively communicated to the landcare movement and community.

These state bodies are at differing stages of development, but provide an emerging effective link to the regional Landcare networks and landcare community, through both a Council of volunteer regional representatives and a small but dedicated staffing base.

It needs to be recognised that the level of support provided under the proposed plan is not sufficient to directly interface with the landcare community in the state (in NSW there are 57,000 landcarers and over 3000 groups. Rather the State body plays an enabling role for the regions, by working with the NRM regional collective, to ensure adequate pathways and support at the regional scale, where the delivery occurs.

How can regional natural resource management organisations strengthen Landcare and community networks within and between regions?**Submission::**

NRM organisations can strengthen landcare and community networks by formally recognising and valuing their role and by providing ongoing funding for the infrastructure that supports them.

Groups of volunteers can do outstanding work at a local level but to achieve consistent quality across regions requires infrastructural support. Regional Landcare Facilitators are an essential part of this infrastructure. Their effectiveness would be significantly increased if they were working with a network of local coordinators and support officers.

Such a network would have the following features:

- coordinators are from the local community; they are embedded in the community and have deep connections in the community
- they work a number of local volunteer groups, helping to plan projects, liaise, build skills, form partnerships, apply for funding, organise meetings, prepare reports and conduct evaluation
- a Regional Landcare Facilitator is able to work with all the coordinators in a region to lift regional performance and convey information from the ground level back up to Government
- where possible, and the capacity exists, these positions would be based in community landcare or NRM organisations
- in areas where a suitable organisation does not exist the position would be based in a relevant NRM body with the aim of building capacity in a local community organisation and transitioning the role at the earliest opportunity

Regional Bodies can, by integrating the Statement of Common Purpose and the Localism policy into their operations, ensure landcare operations in their region are strengthened.

What opportunities are there for actively including Indigenous people in decision making and delivery of natural resource management?**Submission::**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are actively involved in programs caring for local land and resources. They are also working with landcare. This has provided a basis for Aboriginal people to reconnect with country and for better integration between Aboriginal caring for country and European land management cultures.

There are very significant benefits for greater connections between Aboriginal people, NRM and landcare. For example:

- in sharing knowledge and skills – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to share their deep knowledge of the land and practices to manage resources while the landcare movement can share its knowledge both of NRM and also the many skills associated with running groups, working with funding bodies and so on
- building bridges – in many communities landcare provides one of the few places where Aboriginal people and other members of the community can work together, overcome ignorance, myths and stereotypes and build mutually beneficial relationships
- dealing with social disadvantage – working on country strengthens culture, contributes to health and wellbeing, builds confidence and skills
- building local leaders – the experience of landcare has been shown to build local leaders who then exercise their skill in many other areas of community development.

Facilitating Landcare**What methods work best for sharing information and lessons learned with others engaged in landcare?****Submission::**

The landcare movement was formed when farmers decided to work together on issues of land degradation and the loss of biodiversity. The concept of people forming groups to learn, share information and take action remains at the centre of landcare and will always be its core strength.

The strong message from landcarers over the past seven years since the formation of Landcare NSW as their representative body, is that these groups need to be recognised, resourced and supported if they are to be effective and to reach their full potential.

There is also the need to ensure that landcarers communicate within and across regions to share learnings, and prevent "reinventing wheels". A network of local coordinators play a vital role at the subregional scale to ensure this occurs.

At the regional scale, for this to occur it is important that the RLF network is maintained as a statewide network that meets and exchanges information. It would be ideal for a State coordinator, based within the peak state landcare body play a coordinating and convening role with this network. It allows the learnings from regions to be shared, for common problems and issues to be raised and addressed.

At the State scale the Council of Landcare NSW plays a vital role in ensuring that information is shared and support processes developed are based upon the identified needs of their landcare community

How can regional natural resource management organisations better promote the achievements and outcomes of landcare?

Submission::

By working positively with landcare, and treating landcare groups as equal partners in NRM, these regional bodies send a strong message about the achievements of landcare.

There is potential for Regional Landcare Facilitators to collate the large amount of information that exists on the outcomes of local projects into reports that can be communicated.

As indicated earlier, a network of local coordinators and support officers would provide an infrastructure to enable information from a local level to be fed up to the regional level where it can be promoted and shared.

Community engagement in regional NRM planning and NRM project delivery**What are the best mechanisms to achieve greater participation by the community, including landcare representation, in regionally based natural resource management planning?****Submission:**

Where communities recognise and own a problem and play an active part in developing the solution, the likelihood of leveraging in-kind support and co-investment is massively increased.

The crucial step therefore is to ensure upstream collaboration, where projects are designed based upon local needs but with reference to regional priorities, not the reverse. In this way regional priorities are achieved – one local step at a time.

However to achieve this the community must be supported. The widespread belief that landcare sprung up as a voluntary movement is misguided – a correct view is that the original National Landcare Program, guided by the Decade for Landcare Plan, provided the policy, leadership, administration and resourcing that enabled volunteerism to be mobilised to achieve results.

To maximise the value of volunteers, infrastructure support is needed to enhance their efforts and contributions and provide a sense of recognition of their efforts, rather than be seen to use them to meet the aims and purposes of the plans of others.

To achieve greater participation in regionally based planning, local mechanisms are needed to ensure input by landholders, landcare groups, other NRM groups and community members. These may be community advisory or reference groups or other ways that allow community ownership of planning and delivery – depending on the circumstances of the region and what the local organisations think will work best. It is important to note that communities cannot engage effectively in these processes unless they have the skills, capacity and resources to do so.

What are the best mechanisms to achieve greater participation by the community, including landcare representation, in setting local and regional priorities and aligning them with national outcomes?**Submission:**

Communities that are enabled in the ways described above will be able to identify local and regional priorities as part of the planning process.

Restoring a layer of local coordinators and support officers will make it easier to obtain information from grassroots landcarers about the priorities in their area, and how they align with regional and national priorities.

Grassroots landcarers, having been involved at the planning stage, will be better placed to take carriage of the implementation stage.

Support for landcare associations at the state and national level is another piece in making the whole system work more effectively. These groups are able to liaise with government and the landcare community to achieve the best policy settings to achieve local results.

What are the best mechanisms to achieve greater participation by the community, including landcare representation, in decision making on natural resource management investments?**Submission:**

The above answers apply.

What are the best mechanisms to achieve greater participation by the community, including landcare representation, in delivery of National Landcare Programme projects?**Submission:**

There is enormous potential within the landcare movement to deliver projects, however experience shows that the volunteers who make up the movement are not responsive to “top down” decision making and priority setting. They have a deep knowledge of the environmental and agricultural production issues in their local community and what activities should be prioritised. While open to engaging with others in NRM, including government on national and regional priorities, they are clear on where they willing to devote their energy and available time and resources. Recognition of their role, and material support for their work, will result in significant and growing volunteer effort and co-investment.

Consistently, and over many years the landcare community has called for the reinstatement of community based landcare coordinators as the key to achieving greater participation in the delivery of programmes.

Organisational performance expectations**What expectations should regional natural resource management organisations be required to meet in terms of community engagement and participation, including with Indigenous groups, landholders, landcare and other community groups, and local governments?****Submission:**

An enabled community is a prerequisite to effective engagement. The Statement of Common Purpose, outlines the basis of an effective relationship between the community and regional bodies. The policy of “localism” that has been adopted by the NRM organisations demonstrates their willingness to recognise and support community engagement and participation. The challenge now is to put that policy into action so that the next 25 years of landcare sees the movement grow and flourish through a recognition of the grassroots landcare movement’s role and tangible support for it operate. Funding is needed both for local projects and for the infrastructure that enables the local work to occur.

How could the governance and community engagement performance of regional natural resource management organisations best be measured and communicated to their communities?

Submission:

Working in collaboration with local community organisations, NRM bodies need to 'map' their local region to obtain a detailed understanding of the community capacity within the area. Based on this information a plan can be developed to build capacity with measurement and progress communicated. In NSW, the Natural Resources Commission has developed a Performance Standard against which NRM bodies will be measured via a regular audit. This is a useful tool but as important is the leadership and culture of these organisations to ensure that community engagement performance is a high priority.

What mechanisms or tools would be most effective in assisting regional natural resource management organisations to improve their organisational capacity where development needs are identified?

Submission:

Our experience in NSW with regional bodies has shown vast differences in approach and outcome, with some working effectively with community landcare and others operating without reference to the community.

It is essential that a mechanism exists at the state level so that community landcarers can advise if a problem is developing and this can be dealt with early. Leadership at a state and federal level is needed so that organisations that have development needs are motivated to take action to rectify them. Those organisations that are operating well may be able to share their knowledge and practice with others.

Simplified administrative processes

What are the opportunities and challenges of this approach?

Submission:

This approach shows maturity and openness and where there is recognition respect and reciprocity with the community, this approach should work well. However to ensure that self assessment reflects the situation as seen from both inside and external to the organisation , there is a need to include input feedback and perhaps sign off from regional and/or state landcare community organisations.

What type of performance measures would be most helpful to assist regional natural resource management organisations to identify where their performance needs to be improved, especially with respect to community engagement?

Submission:

The Statement of Common Purpose provides the framework against which the effectiveness of community engagement can be assessed. The NSW NRC performance standards provide a useful mechanism that can be utilised, to measure this effectiveness within and across regional bodies.

What assessment methods would be most effective to clearly understand regional natural resource management organisations' performance?

Submission:

It is important that performance reporting is not restricted to the regional NRM body reporting upon itself. A feedback mechanism, in which the partners and customers of the regional bodies, can externally provide feedback is a necessary component to allow early identification of both positive and negative performance.

Simplified reporting

The Australian Government will take more of a 'hands off' role in relation to setting regional priorities and making decisions on projects.

How can we make sure the programme is still accountable with respect to natural resource management outcomes and community participation?

Submission:

It is important that in this approach the federal government shows leadership in defining, in consultation with the regional bodies and community, a consistent set of measures across regions, and then allow regions to report on outcomes, rather than report on the application of inputs.

As above.

How can regions and the Australian Government best use simplified reporting to demonstrate the on-ground benefits of natural resource management investment to the broader public?

Submission:

Additional comments

Do you have any additional comments on the design and delivery of the National Landcare Programme?

Limit your answer to 200 words:

The "Australian Framework for Landcare" and its accompanying "Community call for action" developed by the Australian Landcare Council in 2010 and 2011, with input from grassroots landcare, captured many of the points needed to rebuild support and participation. These ideas and plans need to be support and

resourcing.