

Opening Speech by Rob Dulhunty, Chair, Landcare NSW

Landcare Muster

1 September 2015, Orange

Welcome everyone to our 2015 Muster. Thank you for coming. It's good to see people from around New South Wales and I look forward to catching up with you over the next couple of days.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Wiradjuri people, the traditional owners of this area. On behalf of all of us involved with Landcare NSW I thank them for welcoming us to their country.

I often say that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the original Landcarers. I believe we should do more to recognise their connection to country, their skill and knowledge of the land...and their continuing responsibility for large areas of the State under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*. This is one of the many priorities I would like to see progressed through Landcare NSW and I welcome your suggestions and ideas.

I am not going to speak for long this morning – I want to use the time we have together for you to do the talking and us to do the listening.

After all, Landcare NSW is your organisation. You set the agenda; we endeavour to deliver it.

I look forward to hearing your feedback and priorities.

The theme I've chosen for my speech this morning is **The Next 25 Years of Landcare**.

Last year we celebrated the 25th anniversary of our movement. If we are to survive (let alone thrive) for another 25 years, we need a vision, a plan and a renewal of community action.

There's no reason why the impetus for a revival can't come from NSW. Victoria claims credit for the start of the original Landcare, let's see if NSW can be the catalyst for a new Landcare push over the next 25 years!

Since the initial Decade of Landcare we've faced changing policies, funding and institutional arrangements. Awareness of who we are and what we do has declined. Our membership is ageing.

In the past couple of years a number of Landcare organisations have considered closing the doors.

Despite the challenges, Landcare has survived, and in many areas Landcare is growing. If you consider the growth of bushcare and coast care in urban and peri-urban areas, our grassroots movement is flourishing.

One of the big issues at the last muster was the need for renewed Government support.

I'm pleased to say that due to the hard work and persistence of Landcarers, we now have a new Landcare Support Program.

All political parties went to the 2015 state election with a Landcare Policy – this followed representations made by Landcare NSW in Macquarie Street and hard work by Landcare organisations in writing letters, emails and – most importantly – meeting with local candidates.

The Baird Government's policy is for a 4 year program supported by \$15m. It will fund a network of local coordinators...a central support team and community of practice...and seed funding to build a sustainable funding source for Landcare support.

This is a great policy. While naturally we would have liked more money, this is a very significant funding program in a climate where very few new policy initiatives were funded. It's a great win for rural communities.

I must pay tribute to Troy Grant, Katrina Hodgkinson and many backbenchers who were highly influential in pushing our cause in the Liberal and National Party rooms.

The fact that Labor and the Greens also issued very strong policies in support of Landcare demonstrates that the spirit of bipartisanship that characterised Landcare at its foundation is still there.

I won't talk about the detail of the new Landcare program now – but you will hear more about this over the next few days.

The point I want to make is that this initiative presents a huge opportunity.

If we are successful in capitalising on this opportunity I believe we can set ourselves up for the future.

The next three years are critical.

If we can provide evidence of our success, we will have a very strong proposition to take to a range of funders and investors to continue their support.

We will always need Government funding but we need to get better at finding alternative funding sources – philanthropy, corporate, community fundraising, income generating activities.

In order to generate funds from those sources, people need to know who we are and what we do. They need to trust our brand. And they need evidence that their donation or investment delivered results. I am convinced there's money out there, but it's about value, accountability and results.

What we do in Landcare remains as powerful and as relevant today as it was 25 years ago. Perhaps even more so.

The environmental challenges are huge – and way beyond the capabilities of governments.

We have a growing population, more people to feed, growing pressure on our natural resources...climate change...changes in the demography of rural communities and family farms...

Our biodiversity is in decline. I read recently that Australia ranks in the bottom three countries for money spent on biodiversity relative to need. We have the unfortunate record of the worst mammal extinction rate in the world.

These are massive problems. If Government today tried to establish a national community of volunteers to work on these issues at the local level, how would they go?

It would require millions of dollars investment – not to mention visionary thinking by political leaders.

But as all know, such a network already exists.

We have been doing it for a quarter of a century on our properties and in our communities. Our model now exists in more than 20 countries around the world.

We know we have a really good product.

So what do we need to do to see Landcare grow and succeed for the next 25 years?

We need to retain the values upon which our movement was built

Our genesis was a meeting of the minds among farmers and conservationists. That remains one of our core strengths.

We need to be exemplary at what we do.

That means best practice in our organisations, our groups and our on ground works.

We need to measure.

We must be able to demonstrate how we have made a difference.

We need to educate, communicate, promote and advocate.

Decision-makers, leaders, the media, and the whole community needs to understand who we are, what we do and the results we are achieving.

We need to build partnerships and alliances

This includes all levels of government, business, community, philanthropy, corporate.

We need a new mindset of self-sufficiency, innovation and confidence

We have a highly effective model that engages thousands of Australians and it's a model that can attract funds if we can provide evidence of our results.

We need legitimacy and influence as a voice for the Landcare movement

Landcare is one of many groups in the community trying to attract funds...but we are unique in that we are a national grassroots movement. It's through membership of peak bodies such as Landcare NSW that we can strengthen our voice.

I'm sure you will have other ideas, and I look forward to hearing them.

I closing I want to extend my thanks to all members of the Council of Landcare NSW – both the current Council and all those who have participated over the years since our formation in 2007.

As chair it is a privilege to sit at the table with our volunteer Councillors. They bring not only their skills and deep knowledge to the table, but their wisdom and experience. Every three months they leave behind their farms, businesses, jobs, families and volunteer roles to

attend our meetings and participate in the business of our organisation. They are an incredibly dedicated group of people and the Landcare community owes them a debt of gratitude.

We have our AGM in November and it is important that we continue to get high quality representatives from all region on our Council so I urge you all to take the time required for this process.

As well as focusing on our endorsed regional representatives, we also need to bolster our membership generally. There are forms here today. Please get your group or organisation to join. You can also join as an individual. Take a moment and sign up today, and take some forms home with you...they're also available on our website.

When I visit Ministers and departmental representatives I am always asked how many members we have. If we are to have legitimacy and influence, we need to be able to demonstrate that we are representative of the Landcare movement.

I am now going to hand over to Sonia Williams who will give you a detailed report on what has been achieved since the last muster.

Thank you.