

**Speech by David Walker, Deputy Chair, Landcare NSW  
Presentation of the Gerald Carnie Award  
Keeping the Landcare Flame Alive  
NSW Landcare Conference, Orange  
2 September 2015**

Good evening fellow Landcarers, distinguished guests, and in particular, Lorraine Carnie and sons Ryan and Jarrod.

I wish to acknowledge the fact that ‘landcare’ has been practised in this country by the Wiradjuri people for many thousands of years, long before ‘whitefella’ Landcare was expressed in the Landcare movement 26 years ago.

I’m here, and I feel very privileged to be here, to explain the parameters of a new award - for the inaugural presentation of the **Gerald Carnie Memorial Award, for keeping the Landcare flame alive**. The reference to Indigenous Landcare is appropriate, then, as the judicious use of fire was an important part of their land management practices.

Most awards to Landcarers and Landcare Groups celebrate the difference they have made to their local landscape. The parade of Landcare champions this morning showed just what a difference Landcarers are making in that sphere.

This award goes beyond the local to the global. It celebrates the development of the ideas that help us to “think global, act local”, and to engender change in attitudes, which then translate to a healthier environment and more productive and sustainable farms and more cohesive and resilient communities.

Landcare is a partnership between government and the community, which recognises and respects the fact that it is the connection of people, with their local environment. It means it is them who are best placed to manage the landscapes in which they live.

For the 60+% of Australia utilised for farming, the effective engagement of these farmers is the prerequisite to achieving changed farming practices and landscape-scale conservation. For the rest of us, that big majority who aren’t engaged in agriculture, our sense of ownership of and responsibility for our local patch can similarly make a huge difference to why we live, and love, where we live.

Ever since the National Farmers Federation’s Rick Farley and the Australian Conservation Foundation’s Phillip Toyne bridged the divide between farmers and conservationists in 1989 for a shared vision of Australia’s environment, and persuaded Prime Minister Bob Hawke to commence the ‘Decade of Landcare’, attitudes and action towards productivity, sustainability and conservation on farmland have been transformed.

That hitherto unlikely collaboration sparked the proliferation of Landcare across rural Australia.

The Decade of Landcare was the catalyst that stimulated many farmers to think about, and to talk with other farmers, with scientists and advisors to gain a better understanding of the landscape function that underpinned their farm's productivity and integrity.

With government support came resources and the opportunity to work with their neighbours to take coordinated action to address declining productivity and to learn about innovations that would improve their profitability and sustainability.

The Landcare model was seamlessly transferred to urban communities, and work towards the restoration of habitats on public land also exploded. Of course often the work undertaken covered both private and public land, so that whole reaches of streams were rehabilitated, and habitat connectivity across whole landscapes re-established.

Integral to the success of Landcare has been the 'peer-to-peer' learning and mentoring that the group format enables, and the fact that trialling and adoption of the 'new' sustainable farming practices is led by the farmers, or the weed control or revegetation methods by the bushcarers, themselves - self-determination and 'ownership' are paramount in ensuring that the changes are embedded as 'social norms' rather than being directed by outsiders - Landcare is founded on 'respect', 'trust' and 'connection'. Landcare builds capacity, rather than dependence.

When the National Landcare Program was launched in 1989, it was envisaged there would be 2000 Landcare Groups by 2000. Landcare has continued to grow, with more than 5000 Landcare and related Community Groups in 2015, with more than half a million members.

I will quote from a report by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry:

“This army of volunteers has changed the face of Australia's rural and urban landscapes. It has planted millions of trees, shrubs and grasses; repaired riparian zones and restored water quality by reducing erosion and fencing out stock from riverbanks; protected remnants of native vegetation; regenerated areas to provide habitat for native wildlife; improved ground cover, grazing methods and soil management; and rehabilitated coastal dunes and recreational areas”.

The value of Government investment in Landcare has been outstanding. Again according to the Australian Government's own report, the average ratio of private cash equivalent contribution by Landcare groups to National Landcare Program funding has been about \$3:\$1 or \$4:\$1, with some studies showing an investment multiplier of up to \$12:\$1.

But of equal significance has been the contribution that Landcare has made to building the capacity and resilience of rural communities.

By providing a comfortable social forum to get farmers and their families off their farms and mingling with their peers, it has delivered invaluable community development and lifted the spirits of farming families, particularly in time of drought or natural disasters, and mitigated or prevented the development of serious rural mental health issues under the stresses that such situations bring. For example, the Little River Landcare Group right here in Central NSW has been widely recognised for its targeted rural mental health program to address drought stress.

So many people involved in Landcare have been perplexed, then, when they have seen the way that, over the past decade or so, Government policy moved away from the vision of Landcare's founders, and demonstrated a misunderstanding of Landcare's strengths. It moved away from the type of co-investment that Landcare needed to be effective, and needed to engender that valuable self-reliance, confidence and innovation in the community.

It was frustration with this misdirection of resources that led to the formation of Landcare NSW, and signalled the start of a 'push back' by community against the top-down and disempowering aspects of the Regional Model of NRM delivery.

Gerald Carnie was one of those who early on recognised that an organisation to speak clearly and forcefully for community Landcare was essential. Soon after Gerald came on to Landcare NSW, we were discussing the importance of having 'community ownership' of the Landcare coordinators that were to be provided through the Federal Government's Regional Landcare Facilitator Program.

Gerald characterised the importance of independence and community management and ownership of the planned Landcare coordinators as follows, and I quote:

"In the first instance it gives Landcare identity.  
In the second instance there is no overarching plan that that coordinator must be adhering to. Landcare's virtue is addressing the Landcarer's issues, and if they are able to do a project that suits their needs, and by doing that project it stimulates them to do other projects, and brings with it the participation of others, and if by that all happening it manages to start inadvertently hitting Australian Government or regional natural resource management organisation targets then so be it.  
But, if the government agency people try to say to the community:  
"By doing this project it will help the bigger picture, - we have a regional plan"  
They will answer:  
"Yes - that's fine, but someone else can do it."

Landcare helps look after the "what's in it for me" side of the equation and other outcomes follow. Gerald also used this analogy:

Landcarer:

“Start a little fire in a place where maybe not much heat is required, but there is fuel there. The neighbours join in to help nurture that fire and throw on some kindling, and help it to spread. Build up a flame and chuck on some logs.”

Australian Government/Government Agency/Regional NRM Organisation:

“I want a big fire here - I have a big log, why won't it burn?  
Can you carry your bits of kindling over to help me?”

Moral:

Australian Government/Government Agency/Regional NRM Organisation needs to help light little fires that Landcarers might then be happy to let them chuck logs on top to really feel some heat.

Support for Landcare can help kindle the fires, and others can then burn some logs.

So as well as the wonderful local activities that people like Gerald support and coordinate, there is a strategic level of policy development and advocacy that is also important.

Gerald had the Landcare fire in his belly. He knew that Landcare is vital to building resilience in our communities in order to build it in our landscapes. He worked hard for a Landcare partnership between government and the community that is equal, and based on respect and trust.

Gerald died suddenly in July 2011, aged 46, and leaving the Landcare community shocked and his family grieving.

This Award, then, is to recognise the importance of a very special individual's contribution to Landcare. It is called: ***The Gerald Carnie Memorial Award for keeping the Landcare flame alive***. The six nominations for the Award are:

Muriel Abraham - Wyangla Dam  
Christie Eleman - Parkes  
Claire Masters -Limpinwood  
Bill Pigott - Berry  
Martin Royds - Braidwood  
Robyn Watson - Boggabri

And the winner is, Bill Pigott from Berry. His son, Peter Pigott, another Landcare leader, will collect the award on his behalf.

Congratulations, Bill, on behalf of Landcare NSW and the whole Landcare community.

Thank you.

Ends.