

Chair's Report

Landcare NSW Executive Meeting

11 November 2015, VFFF Boardroom, 99 Macquarie St Sydney

It has been a truly big year for Landcare in NSW.

Twelve months ago we faced the prospect of Landcare organisations in some areas shutting their doors after 25 years' service to the community due to a lack of recognition and resources.

Landcare – an iconic Australian institution that has transformed the landscape using a model that has been replicated in more than 20 countries – was struggling. In the context of increasing demands on our natural resources caused by a growing population, and the reality of climate change, this did not make sense on any level. With resources provided by our philanthropic partners at the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, Landcare NSW developed a business case and spearheaded the *Sustaining Landcare* campaign to seek a renewal of the partnership between Landcare and the NSW Government.

Due to a magnificent effort by Landcare at the local level, our message got through. All political parties released policies in support of Landcare and the re-elected Liberal National Government committed \$15m over four years to a new program. This initiative will create a network of 60 Local Landcare Coordinators supported by a community of practice providing information, training, networking and support.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the Government's policy is the commitment to develop a long term, sustainable funding source for Landcare support. With support in place, volunteers can get on with the job of restoring and protecting natural resources and strengthening local communities. A major priority for Landcare NSW in 2017 is establishing a mechanism to enable ongoing investment from a range of philanthropic, corporate, community and government partners.

The new Local Coordinators will be on the ground by early 2016, facilitating activity, generating opportunities, leveraging additional resources and enabling volunteers to focus on local projects. The aim is to spark a renewal of Landcare across the State. We saw the beginnings of this at the 2015 NSW Landcare Muster in Orange. This biennial event is a meeting place for grassroots Landcarers who come from around the State to discuss issues of common interest. The atmosphere at this year's muster was one of the most positive I have experienced.

Crucial to our future success is the relationship between LLS and LNSW. In the past year both parties have worked very hard to build the partnership at the state level. While there is still much to do I'm confident with that with strong leadership and commitment from all sides we will see increased collaboration at all levels. We have also worked hard to build our ties with the Federal Government. The Federal Government's support for the state, territory and national Landcare representative bodies has been highly valued and appreciated.

There have been many other achievements throughout the year. For a summary see our report to the 2015 muster. As we prepare for the next phase of reform to create a truly sustainable Landcare movement, I must emphasise the importance of a strong and united voice for the Landcare community. We need to build the skill, capacity, strength and connections of Landcare at every level, from local groups to district networks, to regional associations to the state peak body, right through to the National Landcare Network which is our voice in Canberra. This is going to require effort from our volunteers, paid Landcare staff and supporters. While we have taken a massive step

forward in the past 12 months, many challenges lay ahead. One of these is to ensure we have the evidence base that tells the story of the difference Landcare makes to the environment and the community. Another is that we unite and take our message to decision makers and investors. As Landcare NSW continues to grow we must ensure our organisation is sufficiently resourced and properly managed to meet the expectations of our members and other stakeholders.

As Chair of Landcare NSW I wish to extend a heartfelt thanks to all members of the Landcare community who dedicate their time, thoughts, ideas, money and effort. For some this is working on the land and sharing their knowledge, for others it is leading organisations through turbulent times, or doing the hard yards of writing meeting minutes and organising events. I thank our many government partners – including the members of the NSW Parliamentary Friends of Landcare, State and Federal Ministers, departmental colleagues, Local Government – and our many friends and advisors in the community who provide us with financial help, expert advice, practical assistance and moral support.