



The state of landcare in WA

2017

Interim Report

This document is the interim version of a longer report being prepared with input from WALN member groups and others. The interim report highlights the current state of landcare in WA and promotes discussion about its future.

Comment is welcome.



The WALN is supported with funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme

Short Version 1.0 DRAFT: This version was prepared from a range of sources, and we recognise that work to date has not been able to source definitive data for many sections. Consequently this version is designed to stimulate debate and discussion on what are the key indicators for the health of the landcare movement in WA. We fully expect our current assumptions on these to be strongly tested through that discussion, and through the collection and collation of more detailed information in later versions.

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Summary

This is the first overview of the ‘State of landcare in WA’ produced in the more than thirty year history of the movement. We find that the unparalleled growth in engagement, self-reliance and on-ground change of landcare’s early years has not continued uniformly and has faltered in some areas.

In the past decade the number of agricultural and pastoral landcare groups has declined significantly, though there appears to have been an increase in the number of more environmentally focused ‘Friends of’ and neighbourhood based coast and bush care groups. Overall, there has been a decrease in the geographic spread of groups, and consequently the ability of local communities to leverage extra resources and maintain their landcare focus during periods of low funding.

While there is some argument that this lost capacity has, to some extent at least, been supplemented by significant increases in the staff employed by regional NRM organisations, the reliance of these groups on paid staff makes them even more vulnerable to the inevitable fluctuations of government funding.

On that basis, we consider WA’s landcare movement is at risk.

The thirty years’ worth of volunteer community effort put into improving soil health, fencing waterways and remnant vegetation, planting perennial pastures, planting vegetation, protecting coastal areas, surveying and protecting flora and fauna, monitoring water quality, developing new farming practices, nurturing traditional practices caring for country, building local capability to deal with change and many other measures is an incredible testament to community willingness to engage in positive action that improves public and private values. The success of WA’s original grassroots approach, which as part of the Australian landcare example, has been emulated by groups across Africa, NZ, Iceland, Canada and elsewhere in the world with great success¹.

Why then has support for this movement experienced a diminishing level of support in WA?

Despite the decrease in government support for landcare, it has survived in many forms, and grown in some areas. Landcare led a fundamental shift from WA’s land development eras to support the achievement of many important outcomes. What then could be achieved if more consistent and locally based support was provided across WA?

This Summary Paper provides the first iteration of a ‘State of landcare’ report for ongoing evaluation of landcare in WA. Why? Because the landcare movement is needed more than ever to address a range of challenges faced by the state. Landcare provides a self-help mechanism for leveraging the positive motivation of communities across WA to care for land, water, bush and oceans. As far back as 2000 it was estimated that “*land and water degradation [across Australia], excluding weeds and pests which are also substantial problems, are costing up to \$3.5 billion per year.*”² These costs have continued to increase in the face of the changing climate. This paper puts out the challenge for Commonwealth, State and Local governments to strengthen their role in supporting landcare in WA.

As the peak landcare group in Western Australia, the WA Landcare Network, has [set out what it sees as the resources necessary to sustain the landcare movement in WA](#).³ As of March 7, 2017 there has been no WA election announcements from either major political party concerning landcare. While there are some commitments that form part of what landcare does buried in a range of policies of the major parties, the value of the landcare movement leveraging community effort and investment to care for land, water, biodiversity, oceans and communities has not received recognition and commitment.

What is landcare?

While there are many landcares we broadly recognise two main evolutionary streams – the various government programs that have come and gone over the years, and the broad community movement that grew across Australia from the 1980's onward. We call this movement 'community landcare' or lower case 'landcare' for short, to distinguish it from government's 'upper case' Landcare programs and structures.

This report touches on the impact of a number of government Landcare initiatives and related structures, but has its main focus on the state of community landcare as a community movement. It uses the definition adopted by the WA Landcare Network:

“Community landcare is made up of a broad range of volunteer community groups and individuals, Not-for-Profit (NfP) groups and supporting professionals that work to restore, improve and/or protect the natural environment and natural resources.

Community landcare groups include coastcare, bushcare, rivercare, landcare, catchment, 'Friends of', Traditional Owner landcare, biosecurity, and farmers' groups working on sustainable production, soil health, habitat and land degradation issues.

A community landcare group or activity usually:

- *has strong links to a community, often a local or district community;*
- *operates at the local or district scale but is flexible to the natural area or landcare issue they are working on. This may include a local reserve, river system, catchment or landscape.*

Community landcare often has close links to local government, non-government organisations and regional NRM groups.”⁴

In using this definition we note the landcare characteristics identified by Peter Martin and Darren Halpin in their 1998 paper:

“People involved in [l]andcare typically express a commitment to participatory forms of action and coordination, believe in a 'win-win' approach to conflict and are opposed to government 'telling them what to do'.”⁵

A Brief History of WA Landcare

Western Australia was one of the founding states of the Australian landcare movement. As with Victoria, the origins of modern landcare here go back decades. This kind of state-wide self-help movement, working in equal partnership with Government, had not been experienced to that point. Landcare’s leverage of private and public funds, for the benefit of both, has been unparalleled.

The growth of landcare was such that in 1988 Commissioner for Soil Conservation, Graeme Robertson could claim:
 “More than 60% of farmers and 90% of pastoralists in Western Australia are involved in a community action program directed at reversing land degradation and achieving long term sustainable land use.”ⁱ

1983	First formal groups in WA form and a period of rapid growth follows.
1989	With the support and engagement of State governments, a major expansion of the Commonwealth’s engagement in landcare begins, with Prime Minister Hawke announcing that the 1990’s would be a ‘Decade of Landcare’ – underpinned by a \$340 million funding program, with Landcare Australia Ltd formed as a fundraising and educational program, and the One Billion Trees and Save the Bush programs also established.
Mid 1990s	A new phase of larger whole river catchment and then regional collectives begins, as groups such as the Blackwood Basin Group, GeoCatch, Yarra Yarra Catchment and the South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team form. While largely community owned, these generally began with strong support from government agencies and officers.
Late 1990s	The WA Government began taking a more integrated and stronger role after the mid 1990’s, particularly in the agricultural areas where their Salinity Action Plan dominated their program for a number of years.
Early 2000s	Fundamental changes in the structure and organisation of landcare in WA began. Driven by a combination of factors – a decline in the number of agency support staff, less funding available for local facilitators and ongoing population decline in the central and eastern wheatbelt. There is an increasing focus on what were considered strategic approaches, rather than providing support directly for community led on-ground actions.
2003 – 04 onwards	<p>Ongoing withdrawal by the Department of Agriculture, who had employed and/or funded a strong team of coordinators, facilitators and technical support staff through the 1980s and 1990s.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government led, and soon became the main funder of, a more formal network of Natural Resource Management Regions. Initially developed in conjunction with the state government, this was supported by a major spike in funding that lasted until around 2011-2012, and has declined from that point onward.</p>

Indicators

Working with key people in the WA Landcare Network, some indicators of the health of landcare movement were identified as:

- i. The number of spread of active groups
- ii. Engagement of the broader community
- iii. Funding for landcare
- iv. Effective support structures and processes
- v. Impact of landcare groups
- vi. Statutory protection for landcare values

For each of these indicators attempts have been made to identify accurate and useful quantitative data to show trends over time. However, in most of these areas, comprehensive data is not available. To expand on the limited quantitative data available, a small number of interviews with landcare practitioners was undertaken, to contribute qualitative data to this report.

1. The number and spread of active groups

Our interim conclusion

We have identified approximately 500 landcare groups in Western Australia that fit within WALN's definition of 'landcare'. This fits with earlier estimates and represents a significant reduction on the 700 to 800 presumed to exist in 2000. WALN members are reviewing the current list and substantiating each entry.

The main decline seems to be in agricultural and pastoral areas, with an increase in groups in urban, peri-urban, the more closely settled south west and where Native Title rights have been resolved. The rural and pastoral decline has many causes, but the difficulty in achieving core funding for groups support seems to be the main factor.

We consider the decline of group numbers and geographic spread a cause for concern.

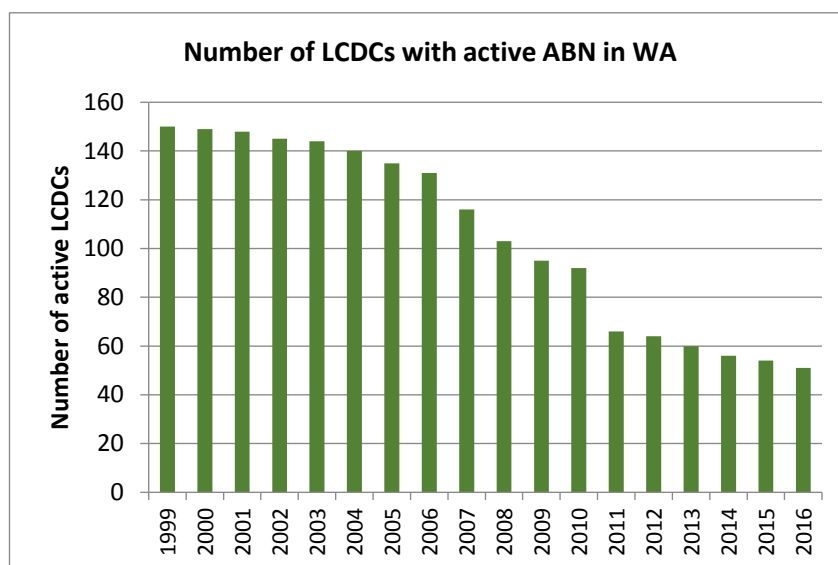
Available data

Active Land Conservation District Committees

Data sources⁶

Note

While the trend is clear, this data is likely to be an overstatement of the number of active LCDCs. WA Soil and Land Conservation Commissioner, Andrew Watson estimates there are 28 LCDCs that currently have committees appointed, and another 12 that haven't yet decided their future.⁷



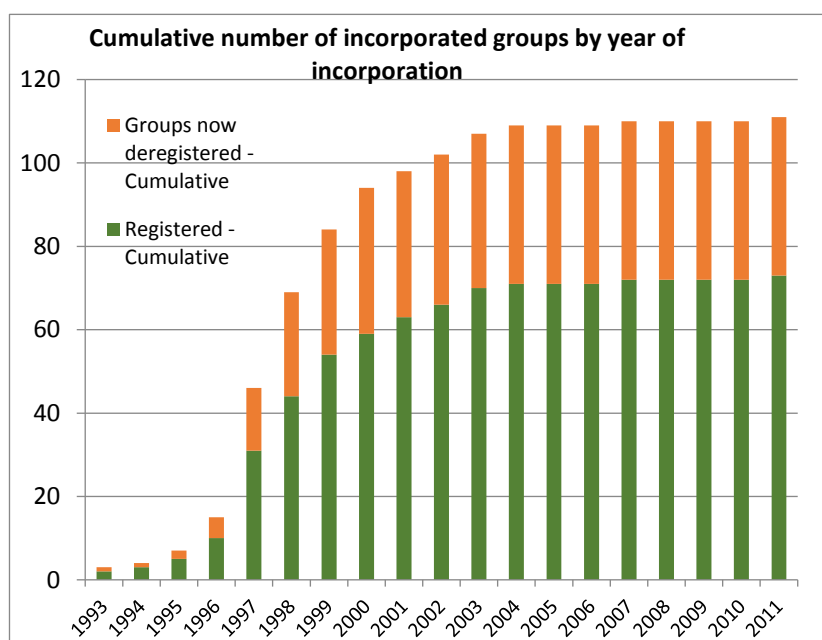
Incorporated Landcare and Catchment Groups

Data sources⁸

Note

It proved difficult to quantify the number of "friends of" groups using this method as these are numerous in many other sectors, such as arts and heritage.

Of the 111 organisations registered since 1993, 38 of them (34% of the total) are now deregistered.



From Landcare to Grower Groups

Anecdotal evidence from landcare practitioners and key State Government staff suggest that there has been a shifting in priority of some groups, with many landcare groups refocusing to become grower groups. Many of these grower groups have a focus on production, however it is a sustainable production approach.



Urban Environmental Care Groups

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase in the number of environmental care groups in the Perth metropolitan area. Many of these are not incorporated. For example, the Department of Parks and Wildlife lists 156 environmental care within this area, only 8 of these also appeared in the list compiled by WALN from records of incorporated landcare and catchment groups.



NRM Regional groups

WA has seven regional NRM organisations. Some of these have operated, in a different format, since the mid to late 1990s. While numbers have remained very constant, with one addition in recent years, the staffing levels increased significantly from 2003, by 7-800% in some cases, and are now dropping.



Traditional Owner groups

The past decade has seen a strong increase in Traditional Owner groups, enabled to some extent by recognition of Native Title over many areas, and with State, Commonwealth and philanthropic funding support.

2. Engagement of the broader community in landcare and landcare groups

Our interim conclusion

Very low levels of data are available, and much of this relates to attendance at workshops etc, with little indication of whether we are counting the same people many times or counting a broad spread of engagement. At present we presume, mainly based on interviews and discussion with member groups:

- a significant drop in engagement in the wheatbelt and pastoral areas, paralleling a related drop in the number of active groups, perhaps partly caused by population decline in the wheatbelt;
- an increase in urban and peri-urban areas, probably reflecting an increase in general environmental awareness in the community; and
- a significant increase in the ability of Traditional Owners to engage in 'caring for country' programs, supported strongly by increased Federal funding for salaries and core capacity.

Overall, we find it difficult to reach even an interim conclusion on this indicator.

Available data

This is a very difficult indicator to measure, *per se*, made more difficult due to the paucity of data and the variability between locations. At this stage, before we undertake extensive research and surveys with landcare groups, only brief anecdotal and qualitative evidence is available. Consequently, we consider this segment predominantly a 'position marker', reminding us that for subsequent versions of this report we need to have developed firm and measurable indicators of engagement, and found relevant data for them.



Number of people involved in landcare groups

Research in WA⁹ found that over half of landcare groups surveyed thought the number of participants in their group was decreasing. They suggested two primary reasons for this reduction in participation: rural de-population and a lack of interest from the younger generation.

For agricultural areas our interview data supported this analysis.

Note

Some Shires in the eastern wheatbelt saw their populations decline by as much as 25% in the period 2001-2010, leaving them with population densities of 0.05-0.1 people per sq.km.¹⁰ This is possibly below the level that can support sustainable land management.

3. Funding for landcare

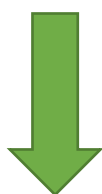
Our interim conclusion

Landcare continues to suffer from uncertain and spasmodic funding streams, along with a grant application process that appears time-consuming and inefficient, and is little changed in substance from the 1980's.

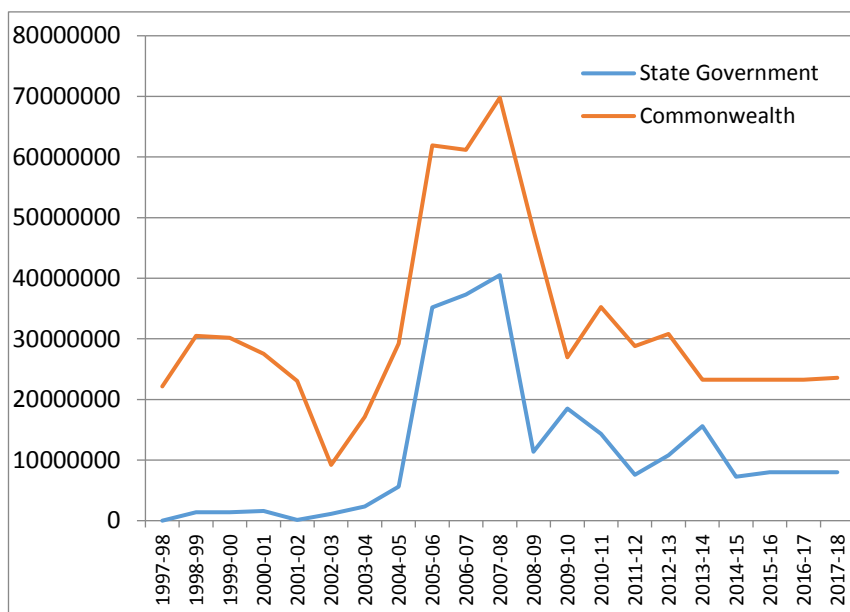
There was significant spike in overall funding in the period 2003-2009, which coincided with the beginning of the decline in agricultural and pastoral landcare group numbers and programs. We now appear to be entering a period when the administrative structures established during that period can no longer be financially sustained, or if they can it will be at further cost to on-ground works. Consequently, debate continues over the percentage of funding that actually supports key on-ground works.

Overall, we are concerned for the future of landcare unless better funding models are developed and implemented.

Available data



Changes in overall funding of landcare



Note

The State NRM office provided data on the major funding streams from the Commonwealth and State Government for NRM and landcare programs. Included in the State Government funding is:

- Remnant Vegetation Protection Scheme
- State Revegetation Scheme
- State NRM Program Phase 1
- State NRM Program Phase 2

Included in the Federal Government funding is:

- National Action Plan (Commonwealth)
- Natural Heritage Trust 1
- Natural Heritage Trust 2 (regional component)
- National Landcare Programme
- Caring for Country
- Caring for Country 2



Funding available for landcare groups

Our interviews with landcare practitioners found that:

- Overall levels of funding have been drastically cut
- Competition for grants has increased dramatically
- Many grants are extremely short term (e.g. 6-12 months duration)
- There is limited funding for landcare facilitators who play a critical role in working closely with landholders

Concerns over cost shifting

In 2000 two of the founders of the national approach to landcare stated that the Commonwealth funding had:

*'made it easier for State Government's to withdraw from regional Australia and from their traditional role of providing agricultural support. The Federal Government has provided funds for positions such as Landcare Coordinators, allowing State funded agricultural extension officers to be withdrawn... The states have used this opportunity to 'cost shift' and substitute federal money and positions for State resources.'*¹¹

We consider this trend has increased, and that we may now be entering a period where Federal funding declines.

4. Effective support structures and processes

Our interim conclusion

Over the past 10-15 years there has been a significant shift in the scale, scope and direction of funding for community based landcare efforts from all levels of government. While data that would show 'cause and effect' is rare, there seems little doubt that this has significantly reduced structural support for community landcare and that there is a direct correlation with the decline in the number of landcare groups in agricultural and pastoral areas, where the need for landcare work is greatest.

Overall, we consider that tangible government support for community landcare has now reached a dangerously low level.

Available data

Natural Resource Management regional arrangements

The seven regional NRM groups in WA underwent significant staff increases in the period 2003-4. This coincided with a reduction in the number of LCDC's, and the number of other landcare organisations stabilised after a rapid increase. This is likely to primarily reflect an impact of the shift away from government funding of core staff in local area and catchment groups to the situation today where the overwhelming bulk of such funding goes to regional NRM organisations.

It is no secret that there are often tensions between a more localised landcare approach and the regional NRM approach. The 2015 Senate Inquiry into the National Landcare Program, published excerpts from a number of submissions that highlighted this tension.¹²

Decline in number of Local Landcare Coordinators

An archived spreadsheet from 1998 shows 72 Landcare Coordinators were employed by local groups in 1998.¹³ A similar list does not appear to exist in 2017, though anecdotal advice suggests the number may have decreased by as much as two-thirds.

Though the figure may have dropped slightly, in 2015 the NRM regions employed 109 fulltime staff and 95 part-time and casual staff¹⁴. A number of these would be employed for internal and contract management purposes, not on-ground support roles.

Our interview data highlighted the crucial role that locally based Landcare Coordinators play, evidence which is supported by published research.¹⁵

Involvement of Local Government

There are landcare groups who work closely with their local governments, such as Capel, Serpentine-Jarrahdale, and the NEWROC groups in the wheatbelt, and local governments running substantial landcare programs, such as the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC). However it is difficult to find data that consolidates all of the financial contributions of Western Australia's 138 Local Governments, and this support may be waning somewhat. The one clear exception is along coastal areas, where local Government have maintained strong involvement in and support for coastal management groups, in conjunction with the Department of Planning and relevant NRM regional organisations.

State agency involvement and support

The direct government funding outlined for Indicator 3 does not include funds for agency staff involved with landcare groups and while for Indicator 6 we also note the decline of state support for statutory controls, it is important to note that the ongoing 'downsizing' of state government agencies has impacted on landcare at many levels. This withdrawal of capacity and intention from state government departments came at the same time as the Federal Government progressed a regional delivery model that it effectively controls, in terms of who gets the funds, how it is delivered, and how it is reported on. While NRM regional organisation staff often try to fill some of the roles once filled by state agencies, such as the Land for Wildlife program, we consider an overall decline in capacity has occurred.



Voluntary vegetation protection and management

After a steady increase from the mid 1980's, the period from around 2005 onwards has seen a steady decrease in mechanisms that help landholders protect native vegetation on their properties. This includes the effective loss of the Remnant Vegetation Protection Scheme (RVPS), the Natural Resource Adjustment Scheme (NRAS), and more recently the loss of the state funded area coordinators for the Land for Wildlife Scheme (LfW), along with a significant decline in the capacity to assist landholders to voluntarily place valuable areas under protective covenants.



The Coastcare Experience

Funding for WA's successful Coastcare program has reduced over the years, and priority has been given to Coastal Hazard Risk Management and Adaptation Planning. State Coordination is now limited within the Department of Planning's CoastWest grants program and quarterly magazine. Regional Coastal NRM facilitators, based in NRM regional organisations, are still supportive of coastcare groups and a successful longterm framework. However this depends heavily on the priority that NRM regions give to coast and marine issues. NACC and South Coast NRM appear to have the most effective approaches, while Peel Harvey doesn't have a coastal facilitator.

Consequently Coastcare groups are low on capacity, and many champions are leaving. Good attendance is often achieved for volunteer workdays but project planning, funding applications, and group administration has become too complex and demographics have changed. The most successful approaches (such as in the Capes region) are integrated, where all groups share roles – Coastcare Groups, Local Government, DPAW, and the various catchment groups.

5. Impact of landcare groups

Our interim conclusion

After over thirty years of landcare, and the extensive reporting required by State and Government funding bodies, there is no central database of the location, condition and on-ground achievements from the work of community landcare groups. To achieve that at this stage would be a massive undertaking.

Overall, we consider the paucity of readily available information on major trends in the sustainability of our landscapes reflects poorly on all the work done to date, and fear that policy is currently being made without evidence to support it.

Available data



Many environmental and resource condition trends continue to be negative

Unlike other states, WA has not prepared an overall State of the Environment Report since 2007. Even then it was considered that 'There is inadequate information about WA soil and landform condition,' although it was noted that 'vegetation cover, which provides a protective layer for land, decreased in 64% of monitored bioregions in the South West between 1996 and 2004. Vegetation cover decreased in 22% of monitored bioregions in the rangelands over the last decade'¹⁶. The report estimated that over 14,000 hectares was still being lost to land salinization each year (equivalent to 19 football ovals per day).

In 2013 DAFWA released a Report Card on sustainable natural resource use in agriculture¹⁷, reporting against the themes of: soil acidity, wind erosion, water erosion, soil organic carbon, soil compaction, water repellence, dryland salinity, nutrient status (phosphorous), nutrient export (phosphorous), acidification of inland waterways. While some areas are considered stable, in none of these were improvements noted.

Federal reporting and monitoring is improving but difficult to access

WALN member groups consistently report that government grants require an increasing amount of information on the issues being addressed, and some groups have 20-30 years of the information that has been supplied over the years stored in paper form, with no resources available to collate that information. More recently groups have entered a range of data onto the Commonwealth Government MERIT system, but groups consistently report difficulties in extracting information relevant to landscape condition in their area. NRM regional organisations do collect some information on trends, but these rarely capture more than relatively recent on-ground data and are inconsistent across the regions. Work is underway to remedy this through the adoption of the same GIS platform GRID (Geographic & Reporting Information Database) across most of the NRM regions.

Evaluating outcomes of NRM / landcare investments remains challenging

Many researchers (e.g. Robins & Kanowski 2011) have pointed to the challenges of evaluating the outcomes of NRM investments, including:

- the process is hindered by the lack of an adequate set of national environmental accounts;
- there are often complex links between the problems and solutions;
- the spatial scales at which NRM issues operate vary and are often extremely large;
- there are typically lengthy timeframes between action and system response;
- there is a multiplicity of players required to take action; and
- there is also a need to invest in less tangible or second-tier factors, like community education and network strengthening.¹⁸

These general observations are reflected in numerous anecdotal comments from WA. For example, Helen Watkins from Moore Catchment Council has found that:

*We are very time poor, and the things like reporting and sharing information are never high enough priority. Now, once you've done a project, no funding body seems to want to know about it. Once a project is finished – that is it. It is all very short-term, where you do the work, but there is no capacity for follow – up. There used to be more funding for that follow-up, and some projects ran over 3 to 4 years, so there was the ability to monitor them over that time, to see what is happening.*¹⁹

6. Statutory protection for landcare values

Our interim conclusion

It is difficult to source data that is publicly accessible, and we would appreciate any assistance members or others can provide. Despite this, we consider that there can be little doubt that statutory protection for landcare values has diminished in recent years. A primary cause appears to be significant staff reductions in key agencies, and a loosening of some regulations and guidelines.

Overall, we are extremely concerned that the benefits of landcare work across Western Australia is being diminished, if not overwhelmed, by damage and losses caused through unregulated activity.

Available data



Decline in agency staff support

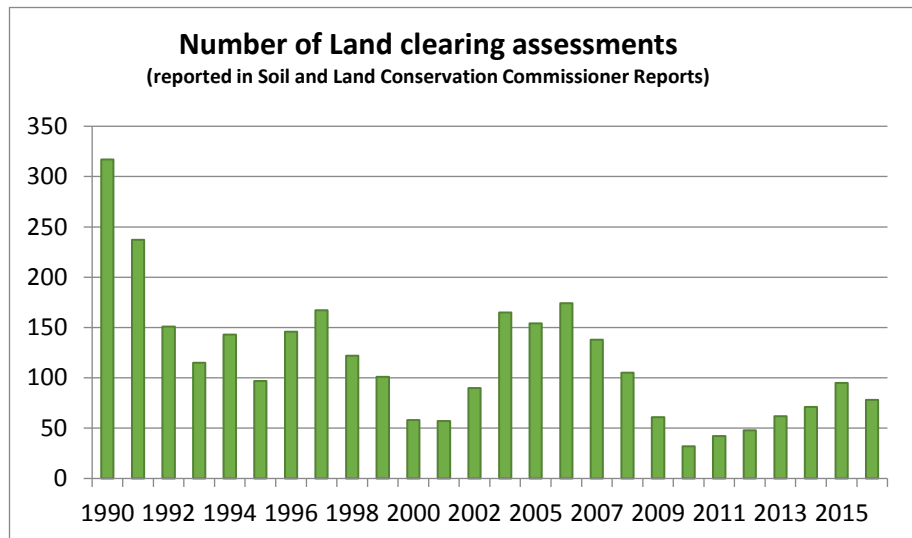
There has been a decline in effort by government agencies in the landcare area. For example, the Agriculture Protection Board, which up until the 1990's had regionally based staff in most country towns, no longer exists, and has not been replaced by equivalent staffing or mechanisms. The Commissioner for Soil and Land Conservation, who once had a significant role across many land care issues and values, has lost virtually all of the staff available to him, from an estimated 24 staff in the mid-1990s to, we understand, only two staff remaining by 2016.



Biosecurity

Difficulty in accessing support to tackle key weed infestations, such as Arum Lily in the Capel-Busselton- Ludlow areas, was a key issue raised at WALN's main Forum in 2016, with member groups reporting extreme difficulties in securing support to control major outbreaks of declared weeds. This seemed to reflect long-standing concerns. This example reflects the wider concerns documented by the State Auditor General in his 2013 report²⁰ and which still do not yet appear to be adequately addressed.

Statutory vegetation protection



The number of assessments in agricultural areas is only a broad guide to the extent of clearing proposed. The Department of Environmental Regulation reports that in 2012-13, 3,162ha were approved for clearing, in 2013-14 - 2,368ha, and in 2014-15 2816ha.²¹ However, we understand that these figures do not include clearing approved by the Department of Mines and Petroleum, exempt clearing and illegal clearing.

We share the concerns of the WA EPA that “there is currently no reliable means to determine how much native vegetation has been approved to clear, or how much is cleared in any given year, State-wide. . . . understanding of the extent of clearing of native vegetation would provide a context for the value of existing remnant vegetation and a measure of its cumulative impacts. This information would provide an essential knowledge base for assessments, improving policy and decision making, and conservation outcomes.”²²

We also share the concerns raised by the WA Auditor General that the indicators the Department of Environmental Regulation reports on in relation to clearing “are not relevant as they do not adequately measure the extent to which the outcome was achieved”.²³

Soil and Land Conservation/Land degradation

Earlier in this report we refer to the fact that staffing levels to enable the Commissioner for Soil and Land Conservation to undertake his work have been slashed from around twenty-four to two or less. On that basis we can only assume that it is impossible for the Commissioner to reliably and accurately regulate severe land degradation, and that statistics on this, such as in the Commissioner’s Annual Statements, must necessarily reflect a very narrow range of the situations that need to be addressed. This sad state of affairs is not considered to be a reflection on the Commissioner’s competence, but on a more general government aversion to supporting good land conservation in agricultural areas.

A Final Discussion

This report is not a definitive study, but a step towards a definitive study. We finish with comments from three perspectives.

Esperance Regional Forum Inc. started life twenty five years ago as the Esperance Land Conservation District Committee. It has led a number of fundamental changes and successfully completed a wide range of much-needed projects. But now it is closing down:

The time is right to close the group however this is certainly not due to lack of need for community landcare - there is more work than ever to be done in the natural resource management space! A number of factors have influenced our decision including the continued withdrawal of key government bodies from this area and the loss of highly skilled personnel from the fields of environment, natural resource management and agriculture and from the district too.

The National Landcare arena has changed dramatically with a reduction of funding and the widespread and increased use of short term, small grants that make it difficult to retain skilled staff or run effective long term, sustainable projects for the environment and community.²⁴

In summing up the health of landcare in Western Australia in general, Green Skills founder Louise Duxbury found many positive trends, despite the fact that “in terms of visible, on-ground activities, it feels as though we’ve gone backwards.”

The areas that haven’t gone backwards include no-till farming. There is an upsurge of interest in soil health which is very exciting... There has been some positive uptake on perennial pastures and other substantial gains. I think the landcare movement has gone through a really dark patch, and there is a bit more activity now than there has been for several years. Why? Because there has been the development of a movement again, and people really appreciate that, appreciate the idea that we can make things happen, without having to wait for government and the bureaucracy. Governments are not the leaders, the community is. The other positive thing is the State NRM office Capability grants, which meant that some of those landcare coordinators could be supported by the State Government. It means there has been an injection of capacity. We need the continuity of the capability to support the community effort.²⁵

Tennent and Lockie²⁶ summarise the situation for landcare in Australia as:

“No longer the centrepiece of Australian natural resource management efforts, Landcare groups are dependent, for funding, on their ability to align themselves with programmes and priorities established regionally and nationally. New approaches to funding regional NRM bodies and landholders, along with structural changes at the Commonwealth level, have reduced dedicated funding for Landcare. Despite international plaudits for Australia’s grand social experiment in community-based natural resource management, the National Landcare Program has always been subject to tension between the highly devolutionist model of community action and learning embedded in community Landcare groups, the cross-boundary dynamics of natural resource degradation, competing demands on government, and the need to demonstrate measurable improvements in natural resource condition. Following 20 years of seemingly universal political commitment to the Landcare model and its language of partnerships and capacity building, NRM policy is now dominated by business and investment plans, auditable targets and standards, hierarchical decision making and other

signifiers of an altogether more managerialist approach to the allocation of government resources.”

We agree, but see little evidence that the more recent approaches deliver for either the bio-physical health of the Australian landscape or the self-organising ability and social well-being of communities.

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¹ See <http://www.silc.com.au/international-landcare-links/>

² Council of Australian Governments (2000) *A National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*. Canberra: Commonwealth Government.

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⁴ Ironbark Environmental (2016) Community landcare in WA - Shaping priorities for the next 5 years. Pages 6-7. Report produced for the WA Landcare Network Inc., Perth.

⁵ Martin P & Halpin D (1998) Landcare as a politically relevant new social movement. *Journal of Rural Studies*. Vol. 14 No4 pp 445-457.

⁶ Register of ABNs and date of cancellation (www.abr.business.gov.au) and Western Australian parliament report on *Boards and Committees Abolished as at March 2010*

([http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tables/papers.nsf/displaypaper/3812103aa2019cae6173fe2a4825772a002893a5/\\$file/2103.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tables/papers.nsf/displaypaper/3812103aa2019cae6173fe2a4825772a002893a5/$file/2103.pdf))

⁷ Andrew Watson, WA Soil and Land Conservation Commissioner, interview 15 November 2016.

⁸ Associations Online database held by the Department of Commerce, <https://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/consumer-protection/associations-online>

⁹ Simpson, G. and Clifton, J. (2010) 'Funding and Facilitation: implications of changing government policy for the future of voluntary Landcare groups in Western Australia'. *Australian Geographer*. 41:3, 403-423.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), quoted in Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (2013) *Strategy Review*, p 6.

¹¹ Rick Farley and Phillip Toyne in Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage, 2000, p.65. (quoted in Beresford 2001)

¹² Commonwealth of Australia. 2015. *National Landcare Program*. Inquiry by the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee. March 2015.

¹³ Bradby Electronic Archives.

¹⁴ Collated from 2015 Reports provided by the NRM regional organisations to the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission. 2016 reports will be sourced for a later version of this report.

¹⁵ While Simpson and Clifton do not specifically define these as local positions, it is clear from their paper that respondents were referring to local coordinators. Hence they are defined as such here, to ensure clarity with the very different role of regional facilitators.

¹⁶ Summary points taken from <http://www.epa.wa.gov.au/state-environment-report-2007> accessed 1 March 2017 Salinity and other data is in the full report available from the full State of the Environment Report: Western Australia 2007 available at that web address.

¹⁷ DAFWA (2013) Report card on the sustainable natural resource use in agriculture. Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia. Available online at www.agric.wa.gov.au . Accessed 26 February 2017

¹⁸ L. Robins & P. Kanowski (2011) 'Crying for our Country': eight ways in which 'Caring for our Country' has undermined Australia's regional model for natural resource management, *Australasian Journal of Environmental Management*, 18:2, 88-108

¹⁹ Watkins, H. Interview. 8 February 2017.

²⁰ WA Auditor General (2013) Managing the Impact of Plant and Animal Pests: A State-wide Challenge. Report 18: 12 December, 2013 available at <https://audit.wa.gov.au/reports-and-publications/reports/managing-impact-plant-animal-pests-state-wide-challenge/key-findings/> accessed 13 February 2017

²¹ Department of Environment and Regulation. 2016. Regulatory Performance Dashboard 1 October - 31 December 2016. Graphs and additional data

²² Environmental Protection Authority. 2016. *Annual Report 2015-16*. p14.

²³ Auditor General, quoted in Department of Environment and Regulation. 2016. Annual Report 2015-2016.

²⁴ Email from Rose Riley for the ERF Management Committee to other local groups, 1 March 2017

²⁵ Duxbury, Louise. (2016) Interview on 21 December 2016.

²⁶ Tennent, R. & Lockie, S. (2013) Vale Landcare: the rise and decline of community-based natural resource management in rural Australia, *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 56:4, 572-587.