

# Creating a brighter future for landcare in Western Australia



## WA Landcare Network (WALN) Policy Statement 2017

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Landcare<sup>1</sup> is the community-based movement that, for over 30 years, has worked together with Commonwealth, State and local government and industry to address some of the state's most challenging environmental problems. Today, an estimated 500 community landcare groups operate across the state to restore and protect a variety of landscapes, from the coast to the outback.

Landcare is not just about restoring and protecting Western Australia's urban and rural environments. It has particular importance in building stronger and more diverse regional and urban communities and economies. Government support, both commonwealth and state, has been a critical part of landcare's achievements. Over the past three decades successive programs have enabled community groups and local communities to significantly improve the management of farms, rural and urban landscapes, river catchments, forests, coastal areas and local bush parks.

A major change early this century was the establishment of regional NRM groups, which are now the main recipient of Commonwealth National Landcare Programme funding. More recently, there has been a decline in integration between commonwealth and state landcare funding programs, leading to some confusion and inefficiencies. These and other changes have weakened support for collaboration and community-based approaches.

Western Australia needs a strong and well supported community landcare movement to work with government to sustain our agricultural industries, respond and adapt to climate change, address biosecurity issues, protect threatened species and maintain the community's quality of life.

### What reforms are needed

This paper expresses the policy position of the WA Landcare Network and proposes a number of structural reforms to increase the effectiveness of government's landcare funding and ensure that landcare delivers greater long-term benefit. Implementation of the reforms proposed in this paper may not require an increase in landcare funding currently provided by Commonwealth and State Governments. The reforms focus on:

- better integration and delivery of Commonwealth and State Government landcare funding programs;
- improved support of local landcare communities;
- the role of regional NRM groups, including how they work with local communities; and
- how the landcare model can give greater focus to long-term environmental outcomes.

Four main areas for reform are proposed.

### 1. Structural reform of landcare support

Structural reform of state and regional level landcare support is required to improve integration of commonwealth and state funding and resources, better support community landcare groups, and deliver more strategic, long-term benefit for the environment and community.

These reforms should lead to a renewed focus for regional NRM groups to:

- provide support for the operation of a diversity of landcare and Not for Profit environmental and industry groups across each region; and
- facilitate integration between the objectives of the various groups so that the most cost effective and strategically useful actions are identified.

The reform process should strengthen the role of regional NRM groups as facilitators, integrators and strategists at the regional and landscape scale, focused on empowering local communities, facilitating practical science and research, assisting local groups within their NRM regional boundaries to develop agreed plans and strategies, and the measuring and reporting of regional outcomes underpinning longer-term environmental trends.

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<sup>1</sup> In this Policy Summary, the term landcare is used in preference to natural resource management (NRM) given the greater public familiarity with the term landcare. We use the upper case acronym NRM to refer to the regional structures established in the last 15 years.

In support of the principle of subsidiarity<sup>2</sup>, we propose that regional groups not receive government funding to deliver on-ground programs, except perhaps in specific, and preferably temporary, cases where other groups do not exist. Other specific roles would need to be determined by their funders and members, but with state and commonwealth funding agreed through a bilateral agreement that minimises duplication and inter-government confusion.

The reform process must also lead to better use of state government funding and resources, through examination of the role and functions of the State NRM Office and Coastwest administration and the appropriateness of continued location within their current departments. We propose that the current NRM Office be reconfigured to:

- oversee implementation of a bi-lateral agreement;
- manage and integrated allocation process for major funding programs;
- provide administration services and executive support to the proposed WA Landcare Advisory Council and other major forums (See 2 below); and
- provide services to support landcare groups, including regional NRM groups and Landcare Support Officers.

The WA Landcare Network is committed to working with regional NRM groups and the commonwealth and state government to develop the details of these structural reforms.

## 2. Establish a broadly representative WA Landcare Advisory Council to provide informed advice to Government

A WA Landcare Advisory Council is needed to provide timely, informed, independent policy advice direct to government on matters affecting landcare and the management of natural resources in Western Australia. The Council would report directly to the WA Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council and the advice of the Council would be publicly available.

The Council would be made up of representatives from the community and government with an interest in landcare, including state government agencies, regional NRM groups, community landcare groups, WA Local Government Association and large Not-for-Profits working in the landcare arena.

## 3. Provision of sustained, base-level support for landcare groups

Landcare groups need sustained professional support to plan, deliver and manage landcare projects. They achieve much more, leverage considerable additional funding and support, and bring about longer-term change in their communities when supported to achieve both immediate and long-term objectives.

It is proposed that funding for a network of up to 70 full-time equivalent Landcare Support Officers are needed to work with local communities under a state-wide program, with officers located through careful assessment of community capacity and needs, and desired program outcomes. Precedence for this has been set in Victoria and New South Wales. This support cannot be, and should not be, provided through project-based funding.

## 4. Provide sustained funding for landcare works

Current funding arrangements need to be re-negotiated to improve integration and continuity. The current domination by Commonwealth Government priorities is a real concern. We argue for a bi-lateral agreement between the WA and Commonwealth governments that includes a process for funding allocation, administration and acquittal in 3 to 5 year funding cycles, with a forward rolling plan to enable local and regional landcare groups to plan for the future. Transparent funding allocation processes need to demonstrate their contribution to achieving strategic objectives at local, regional and/or state and commonwealth levels.



*This policy statement has been developed with funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme and presents the current position of the WA Landcare Network. <http://www.landcarewa.org.au/>. This Statement was first circulated in 2016 and has been adjusted by the WALN Committee to reflect feedback.*

*This version is dated February 6, 2017.*

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<sup>2</sup> Through which decision making is devolved to the lowest capable level