



For Landcare everywhere the last few months have been very challenging. Rarely before have we faced so much change and destabilisation. And with fewer resources to enable us to find our way through this churning, Landcare is struggling.

The VLC is well aware of the mood throughout the Groups and Networks. In many senses it is one of survival, alienation, exhaustion . . . a feeling of bewilderment as to why one of the most successful public policy initiatives of the last twenty years finds itself in the position it is in. There is no question that Landcare, particularly its thousands and thousands of volunteers, has delivered enormous economic leverage to government investment but we seem to be taken for granted. The Victorian Landcare Council is focussed on this dilemma and we are constantly seeking an explanation from policy makers, particularly with respect to the withdrawal of funding for coordinators.

PATRON

It is with enormous pleasure, and considerable pride, that we are able to formally announce that the Hon. Joan Kirner has agreed to act as VLC Patron. Joan was instrumental in bridging the elements of farm management and conservation all those years ago and it is to her great credit that she saw the way forward through community engagement. Having counsel and input from such a pivotal founding partner has already been of tremendous value and we look forward to moving into the future with the great advantage of Joan's insight and advice. She has lost none of her commitment and enthusiasm for landcare.

FOUNDATION CONTRIBUTORS

We are also pleased to announce that a number of Networks throughout Victoria have responded to the Council's call for foundation funding. These Networks have seen the opportunity for a positive representation of the Landcare volunteer community through the VLC and we thank them for their help, generosity and support. These initial funds will primarily be used to finance our continuing membership campaign throughout the State.

VLC PLANNING MEETING – FEB 2010

The VLC is working to ease some of the current landcare burden through our network of delegates across the state. In February the Council met at Wilson's Promontory for three days of reviewing some of the proposed institutional and policy changes, to start to prepare a pathway forward for the Council and to be in a position to assist the Landcare community to be part of the change rather than simply an observer.

Being part of the change is the first step in getting the benefits while minimising the losses. The bystanders just get the rough end and that is not where we think our community deserves to be. We have established a task force which has a short term goal of recommending actions we can take to inform and extend the Land and Biodiversity White Paper outcomes to the Victorian Landcare community. The task force has a range of suggestions and proposals which have been group workshopped and discussed, from which we will distil an active engagement process with recommendations to place the Landcare community in the strongest possible position.

The longer term goal of the task force is to make recommendations on how the changes to the administrative functions in natural resource management will impact on landcare. As well as the change to five "CMA areas" there will be an impact through the inclusion of coastal, bay and Gippsland Lakes issues, the introduction of an Indigenous Community Advisory Board on NRM and possibly some changes to the State Landcare Team. Again we would particularly like to be part of the process rather than watch it go by.

Our immediate recommendation to the next VLC Annual General Meeting (July) will be to increase the number of delegates per current (ten) CMA regions from two to five making for a Council of potentially 50 members. There are sound reasons for doing this. The upcoming workload as the various state and federal initiatives are being considered and commented on, as the funding constraints on Landcare dig in or improve and as we all seek ways to serve the interests of the Landcare community. With just two delegates we are thin on the ground in maintaining links with our respective communities. A larger Council will allow us to meet with even a 60% attendance and still have a better spread of input than we get with a full meeting now. It is envisaged that the full Council will meet two or three times a year, whilst our COM (only 10 members) will meet much more frequently.

This move will most certainly be supported and so we are seeking delegates who would like to join up with a dynamic team. Check with your current local delegates and find out how delegates were selected in your area. We need the input of the Landcare community to truly represent the interests of the Landcare community.

DSE: STATE LANDCARE TEAM

Mike Nurse has moved on and Jo McCoy has become Manager of the Community Engagement and Landcare Team within the Natural Resources division of DSE. The VLC extends its congratulations to Jo and looks forward to a constructive and fruitful relationship.

Recently, whilst commenting upon a Landcare workshop facilitated by NRM consultant Simon McGuinness (held late last year) Jo had the following to say, adding a request to pass the information along:

“Following the December release of the Land and Biodiversity White Paper, it has been decided to broaden the scope of the process. We will continue to examine the various roles for Landcare and what it needs to function effectively into the future. The process will place Landcare as a pivotal element in the context of broader community based NRM. It remains our objective to consult widely throughout this process and we will be contacting you with further details in the near future.”

The VLC welcomes Jo’s comments, particularly with respect to “*Landcare as a pivotal element*” . . . and applauds her commitment “*to consult widely throughout this process*”.

That constitutes, in the VLC’s view, a very good start.

NATIONAL LANDCARE NETWORK (NLN)

The NLN was established in February ’09 with the single aim of representing volunteer and community landcare across Australia. All States are represented via their respective state organisations. In Victoria’s case, through the VLC. It is important that landcare has a functional and representative structure at the national level and grassroots landcare can now be confident it has a voice advocating on its behalf with links from local groups to regional networks and on through state bodies to the national level. Representatives of the NLN met with Minister Tony Burke on 17th March and left the meeting with a strong feeling that the Minister has a vision for landcare as part of the answer to the questions of food security, climate change, the environment and the changing nature of volunteerism.

The Minister is well aware of our concerns, particularly from Victoria, about the future role of coordinators and our absolute need for such positions to ensure a dynamic and functioning landcare delivery at a practical and local level. Whilst we are appreciative of the ten new National Landcare Facilitator positions announced by the Minister, it does little to moderate the loss of over 50 coordinators in Victoria over the last eighteen months.

Significantly at the national level we now have a reconvened Australian Landcare Council (ALC) to provide advice to government on landcare and NRM policy; a revitalised Landcare Australia Ltd. to better broker partnerships with corporate Australia and a federation of state landcare organisations through the NLN.

Go to www.nln.org.au for additional information.

NATIONAL LANDCARE FORUM – Adelaide 23-24 March ‘10

- Victorians were well represented amongst the 600 participants.
- Keynote address by Minister Tony Burke – said all the right things again and we sense the Minister is genuinely supportive of Landcare.
- The Forum was a good opportunity to “network” and speak with like-minded people from around Australia.
- There was an attempt to workshop some elements of the National Landcare Framework but the size of the Forum made that almost impossible to be meaningful.
- TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Maybe it’s time to renew and rekindle the original partnership between the NFF and the ACF to enable Landcare to be repositioned in the “Canberra space”.

NATIONAL LANDCARE FRAMEWORK

- The major Landcare initiative of the Federal Government.
- Began in April 2009.
- A Reference Group has been established to progress the Framework.
- Purpose of Framework – “a guiding document to assist the resilience of volunteer Landcarer groups into the future”.
- Guiding Philosophy – “this (will) be a grass-roots community owned document, developed by the landcare community with the encouragement and financial resources of the Australian Government”.
- Workshops were held around the country last year and an opportunity was created for written submissions (the VLC forwarded a written submission).
- There are now two primary documents:
 - AUSTRALIAN FRAMEWORK FOR LANDCARE DISCUSSION PAPER
 - SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK FOR AN AUSTRALIAN FRAMEWORK FOR LANDCARE
- For more information and the Discussion Paper go to www.daff.gov.au/landcare
- Next stage of consultations is on now and landcarers are asked to comment on developments to date and the initial conclusions reached by the Reference Group. Please provide comments to: landcareframework@nrm.gov.au by Friday 9th April.

- It is envisaged that the Reference Group will have a draft document for consideration by the landcare community by mid-May with an expectation that its work will be completed by 30th June 2010.
- It is expected that the reconvened Australian Landcare Council will take responsibility for completion of the Framework and arrange for its final approval by the landcare community.

VLC MEMBERSHIP

The VLC was formed to represent the members of landcare Groups and Networks across Victoria, the essential volunteer base of Landcare. To fully and effectively represent this diverse and independent range of organisations and volunteers requires the VLC to demonstrate to those we try to influence that we have a committed membership.

It is therefore essential that the VLC attracts and retains as members as many committed groups and networks as is possible from all around the State. "Committed" means that you have made a financial contribution to support the VLC. This is the essential recognition factor, universally accepted, that the VLC has a supportive membership base.

In the next few weeks your landcare group and network will receive from the VLC a request to join at a nominal cost. Please give this request your immediate and careful consideration and conclude that your voice and support can make a difference.

The VLC was created to be your organisation and your voice. Its future is in your hands.
Let us not leave our fate to others.

Peter Huthwaite
Chair

Roger Hardley
Secretary Phone: 52 376 272
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For and on behalf of the Victorian Landcare Council

We look forward to your participation, comments and feedback and in particular we welcome our two new delegates from West Gippsland, Beth and Ian.

***"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens
can change the world, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has"***
Margaret Mead

