



Press release - 24 November 2008

The Federal Government's new "Caring for Our Country" Natural Resource Management funding program is in danger of "missing its mark", according to the chairman of Landcare NSW, David Walker.

Mr Walker said the grants announced last week by Ministers Bourke and Garrett had largely bypassed the "real natural resource managers" – landholders and community landcare groups.

"Landcare NSW is concerned that community-based Landcare and producer groups received very little of the Federal Government's Caring for Our Country (CFOC) Open Grants funding," Mr Walker said.

"Early fears that the new "centralised" and "competitive" grants process would make it more difficult for landholders and community groups seemed to have been realised.

"The Caring for Our Country grants process is anything but competitive!"

Mr Walker said the new grants process pitted Landcare and producer groups against government agencies and catchment management authorities (CMAs) in very one-sided competitions.

"The agencies and CMAs have numerous expert staff with time, data and facilities – all paid from our taxes – to invest in proposal preparation while community-based landcare and producer groups have very little resources for funding submission preparation and lobbying," Mr Walker said.

"Community-based landcare and producer groups have had all 36 paid Community Landcare Co-ordinators and Regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) facilitators removed under Caring for Our Country. Previously these vital roles were supported by the Federal Government's National Landcare Program and Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)."

Under CFOC the agencies and CMA who manage staff, plans and budgets will secure the bulk of the \$1.17 billion of CFOC funds up for competitive bidding, while the landholders who actually manage the majority of the nation's natural resources secured less than 10 per cent.

"The irony is that these same agencies will have to subcontract with landholders to deliver their proposed outcomes, and the landholders will end up labouring for the government agencies.

"This reversal of roles under CFOC results from policy advice of central bureaucracies, the majority of whom are born, bred and educated in Canberra, are largely disconnected from rural communities and primary producers in the real world."

Mr Walker said the trend of redesigning the national NRM programs every five years was resulting in a "three steps forward, two steps back scenario." He said the mistakes of NHT2 and its regionalization strategy are being repeated under CFOC.

"For the first years of NHT2 many newly formed government CMAs excluded Landcare and other community NRM groups from regional NRM delivery processes and wasted much effort attempting to deal directly with individual landholders," Mr Walker said.

"Eventually the smarter CMAs realised that Landcare and other producer and community-based groups already engaged with landholders and had their trust.

"These groups are far better placed than government agencies to plan and implement NRM projects, field days and farmer to farmer training that deliver landholder knowledge, practice change and catchment plan outcomes most efficiently."

"Instead of building on the culture of collaboration and partnership emerging towards the end of the NHT 2 funding program, CFOC has turned the clock back and actively encouraged government NRM agencies to by-pass the real resource managers – landholders and community landcarers."

However with the emergence of Landcare NSW as a body truly representative of the State's 50,000 strong Landcare fraternity, there is hope that landholders can work with Federal Ministers and Landcare bodies in other states to address the inadequacies apparent in the Caring for Our Country program.

"Landcare had proven itself capable over the past three decades and must be a central stakeholder in any federal Government Program that aims at improving sustainability, while adapting to global warming and climate change." Mr Walker said.

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