



**National
Landcare
Network**

Communiqué

July 2009

The third meeting of the National Landcare Network (NLN) was held at the Aboriginal Lands Trust in Adelaide on 5th and 6th July 2009.

Kurna elder, Lynette Crocker performed the Welcome to Country emphasising the importance of reciprocity, responsibility and reparation guiding the work of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians alike in caring for country.

The National Landcare Network applauded the steps that the South Australian government has taken to match words with action in its support for a reinvigorated Landcare movement. Jay Weatherill, Minister for Environment and Conservation and Aboriginal Affairs described the recently successful Landcare grants program in which the South Australian government had provided \$631,000 to 73 Landcare groups, confirming that the movement had energy, capacity and shovel-ready projects to roll out.

National representation

The meeting welcomed representatives to the NLN from the Northern Territory and Western Australia for the first time. In Adelaide in July a significant milestone was achieved: we had truly national representation for community Landcare in Australia (with apologies from the ACT representative for this meeting).

Establishing a robust and effective set of rules for membership is essential for this new organisation. Effective representative structures in each state and territory provide crucial conduits for information from and to the grassroots Landcare groups. This ensures that grassroots issues are on the agenda at a National level and that policy issues and initiatives at state and national level can be efficiently communicated to the grassroots for their input and critique.

In recognition of the fact that a number of states and territories are still in the process of establishing state level representative structures for community Landcare, the NLN unanimously agreed that an appropriate interim measure was to welcome representatives from each state and territory where they represented peak Landcare Networks and were part of negotiations towards establishing state-wide representation.

Response to Caring for Our Country

Reports from each state and territory confirmed that the Caring for Our Country (CfoC) application process presented many issues for Landcare groups, leaving many excluded from the process and therefore from access to funding and projects.

Whilst the Business Plan stipulated that regional NRM organisations were required to support local community groups, this was difficult to enforce or negotiate as the CfoC application process appeared to encourage a competitive process which pitched well-resourced NRM and government agencies against under-resourced community organisations who felt excluded from the process.

The NLN resolved to survey Landcare members across Australia to ascertain experiences of the application and project development process stipulated by CfoC. The NLN will communicate the

results of this survey to the Australian Government NRM team to assist with the reform of the process. The NLN encourages the inclusion and involvement of community environmental organisations because of the crucial role they play in delivering on-ground implementation, community engagement and the increased environmental awareness of the whole population.

Australian Government's Proposed 'Framework' to support Landcare

The Australia Government through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) is in the process of developing a policy framework to support Landcare for the next 20-25 years. This is a welcome development as there has been a vacuum in Landcare policy and a lack of a coordinated approach to support and resource the community movement. A number of NLN members were invited by DAFF to participate in a working group which met in April in Melbourne. The group was made up of selected individuals deemed by DAFF to have valuable input to the support required for a reinvigorated Landcare engagement.

The working group meeting was facilitated by Coral Love from the National Landcare Facilitator Program. A discussion document entitled "Landcare speaks" has now been released to further the policy development process. A range of views were expressed at the NLN meeting about the process and about the claim that the policy development process is community owned and driven.

It is entirely appropriate that the Federal government develops policy to support and resource the community Landcare movement, especially as the challenges of new threats such as climate change require even greater community engagement and investment in environmental sustainability. It is essential that the community is comprehensively consulted in developing the policy so that the community will have greater acceptance and ownership

The current consultation and document does not constitute a community driven process nor a community policy and there is no need to claim that it does. Although it may well be government policy that the community may well be happy to support. DAFF is currently funding workshops in state and territories to consider the framework discussion paper. Some concern has been expressed that these workshops are not really engaging the grassroots Landcare groups as the state forums where the workshops are to be held are, in a number of states, events which tend to attract mainly agency or government resourced NRM professionals.

PlaceStories

PlaceStories are web delivered audio-visual stories terrific for telling the stories of Landcare projects and environmental issues. Feral Arts, the Queensland community arts organisation which has developed the software proposed a partnership with NLN following successful projects with Queensland Landcare and Landcare NSW. The NLN is working with Feral Arts to explore the online communication needs and capacity of the Landcare movement.

Australian Government's National Landcare Forum

The Australian Government through DAFF is organising a National Landcare Forum to be held in Adelaide in March 2010. The purpose of the Forum and the role of the community in the Forum are still being established and similar reservations were expressed about this process as with the development of the policy framework. That is, robust and significant community consultation is crucial to achieve appropriate outcomes to support the community movement. However, whilst it

is essential for effective collaborations between government and the community, it is just not feasible or realistic to pretend that they are one and the same.

Next meeting

The NLN will meet again in Melbourne on 1st and 2nd November. The meeting acknowledged that it would be ideal is for the NLN to meet in a different state each time, with meetings hosted by each state or territory organisation. However, it is the case that the newer state organisations in South Australia and Victoria have few resources and in the spirit of enabling full national participation the meeting proposed to hold the meeting in Melbourne as it was determined that Melbourne is the cheapest city to travel to especially from Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

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