

2023-24 Budget Submission
on the National Landcare Program
Phase 3, December 2022

National Landcare Network

**BUILDING ON THE LANDCARE LEGACY IS AN INVESTMENT IN
AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE**



**LANDCARE STRIVES TO WALK TOGETHER
WITH TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS RESPECTING
KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND RESPONSIBILITIES
IN LAND AND SEA MANAGEMENT AND THEIR
ROLE IN LEADING THE PLANNING AND CARING FOR COUNTRY AND
COMMUNITY ACROSS AUSTRALIA. THEIR LANDS WERE NEVER CEDED.**



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INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRS

We represent the eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations with 2000-plus active member networks advocating for approximately 160,000 Landcarers on the ground.

Landcare has been an outstanding success since it became a national program in 1989, at the instigation of an alliance of farmers and conservationists. Initial funding and national leadership was provided by the Labor government of the time, and since then funding has been provided by governments of all political persuasions.

The next phase of the \$1.1 billion National Landcare Program (NLP3) begins in July 2023 and this represents an important opportunity for the new government to protect and build on the ALP legacy and work with the Landcare movement to address emerging and urgent challenges and opportunities facing Australia's environment and natural resource base, mitigate the threats to the future viability of Landcare and re-energise the Landcare movement.

As documented in numerous assessments, the condition of Australia's environment and natural resources continues to decline. The effects of climate change and an increasing prevalence and severity of natural disasters is expected to make matters worse. The continued prosperity and health of communities rural, regional and urban, and industries including agriculture and tourism, rely upon a healthy environment and continued access to sustainable natural resources.

Action is required now.

Governments alone cannot fix these problems. A successful approach requires community involvement and national leadership – and there is no other place-based, community-led network for environmental on-ground action like Australia's Landcare network. This point is acknowledged by the recent inclusion in the October

2022 Budget of funds to create Landcare Rangers and a Landcare Facilitator, and an Urban Rivers and Catchments Program.

We commend the Government for these new initiatives, but more needs to be done to address the risks to the Landcare movement which have been created by government policies over recent years. Indirect funding models have not effectively funded local Landcare groups and have weakened the Landcare brand.

Landcare is an unrivalled national community network of dedicated volunteers, farmers and other landowners, professional staff and delivery partners. It has a long history of working constructively and in partnership with governments - national, state and local. However, it needs support. It cannot be taken for granted.

The ALP's National Platform 2021 describes these challenges and opportunities we face, and correctly recognises that Landcare is important to achieving better environmental and resource management outcomes.

This submission represents the views of the Landcare movement. Its preparation has involved consultation and careful analysis. It draws upon the extensive knowledge within the Landcare movement. It draws on the findings of the review of the National Landcare Program, Phase 2 (February 2022), and other government reports and strategies related to the environment, threatened species, biosecurity, natural resources, and land management, and industry views.

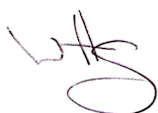
This submission presents a strong case for better environmental and natural resources management on public and private lands through:

- investments in new programs directed to on-ground Landcare to address the most pressing challenges and opportunities; and a national awareness-raising campaign to inspire existing and mobilise new community action; and
- improvements in the design and implementation of existing programs.

With the Government's support, Landcare is ready to make a difference.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A unique and important opportunity exists right now for the new Government to invigorate and refocus the next phase of the National Landcare Program (NLP3) which begins in July 2023. There are challenges to address and opportunities to exploit, which if done well will help reverse the decline of our environment and natural resources base, build community strength and resilience in the face of climate change and natural disasters, secure the future of the Landcare ethos and build upon and extend the Landcare legacy created by the Hawke Labor government in 1989.

Our assessment of the NRM challenges facing Australia identifies five standout issues.

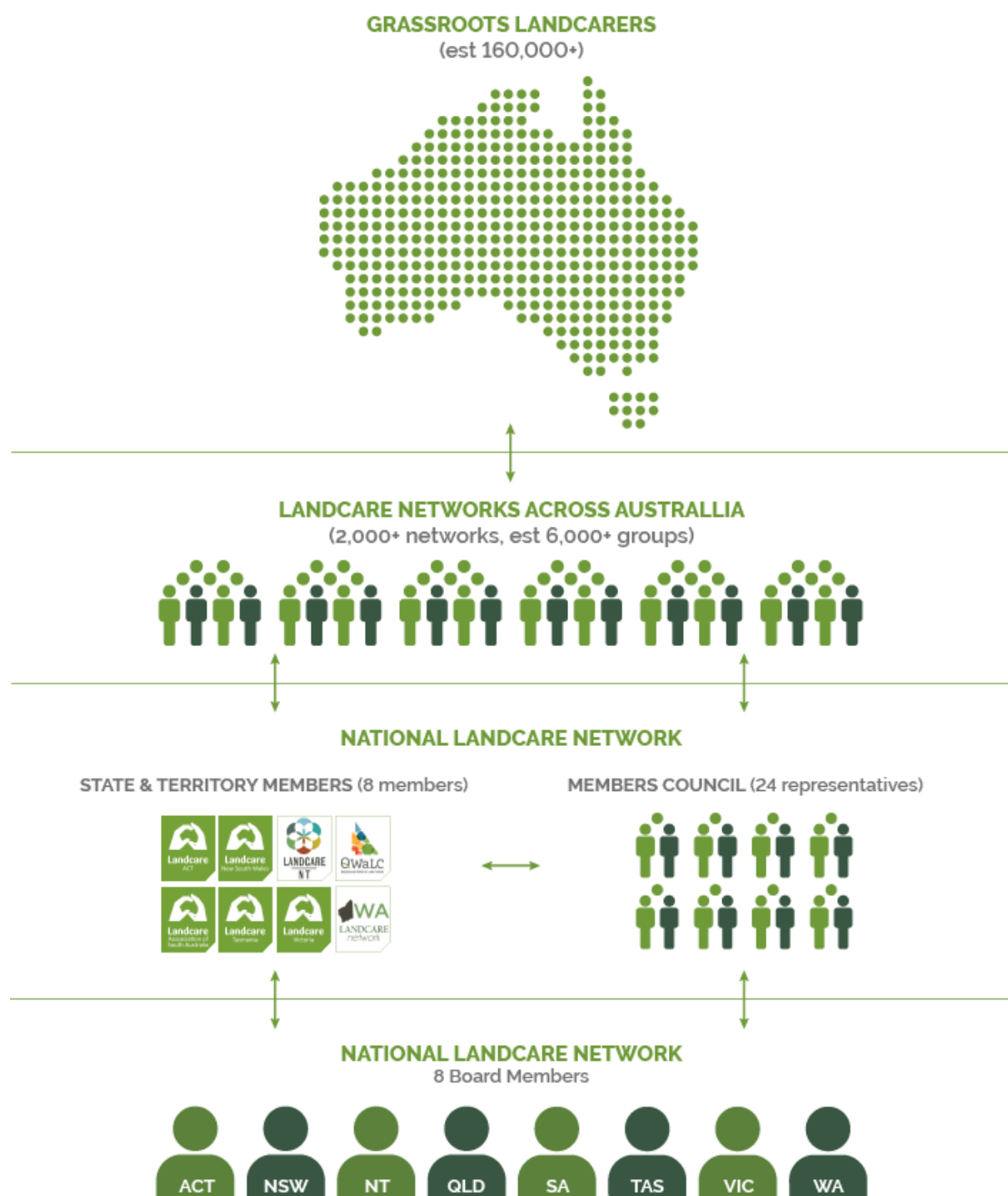
Our conclusions make it clear that the economic and social benefits we derive from our environment and natural resources are at serious risk.

Governments alone cannot achieve meaningful outcomes around natural resource management, climate adaptation, community resilience, and sustainable food and fibre production: there must be active support from communities, inspired, managed and led by fit-for-purpose, not-for-profit, proven organisations.

There is a strong case for Landcare and the National Landcare Network having an expanded and leading role, but it cannot do so without changes and new investments.

Landcare is unique in being led from the grassroots, through bringing people of all ages, cultures, regions, educational background and politics together in a common cause. Landcare in Australia is represented by the National Landcare Network (NLN) peak body, its eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations (STLOs) with 2000-plus active member networks advocating for approximately 160,000 Landcarers on the ground.

The Landcare movement - which also encompasses Bushcare, Coastcare, Parkcare, Dunecare and other community-led manifestations, supported by local councils, NGOs, agencies and businesses - has an unrivalled reach across the country to deliver environmental and NRM outcomes at a landscape scale. It attracts not just major in-kind investment through volunteer hours, but also significant state and local government funding and corporate support, with rates of return ranging from 4:1 to 7:1.



The Issues

1. Our environment and natural resources continue to deteriorate, putting at risk the services that support our economy and society, and Australia's unique biodiversity and ecosystems.

Our current ways and scale of protecting and managing our environment and levels of resourcing are not sufficient to reverse the downward trends. Action is required and governments cannot do this alone. Landcare has a national community network, and the experience and passion to be part of the solution.

2. Farmers are facing challenges to maintain production and achieve productivity gains in a changing and challenging operating environment featuring invasive species, demands from local and international consumers for products meeting environmental standards, and extreme events/natural disasters. At the same time, there are opportunities to participate in emerging markets for ecosystem services (carbon and nature repair).

There is a need for more Landcare activity on-farm and on adjacent lands leading to improved soils, water quality and availability, pollination services and biosecurity outcomes, as well as strengthened environmental credentials, and assisting market access.

3. Climate change adaptation is not happening fast enough, putting biodiversity, soils, rivers, farming enterprises, and communities (urban and country) and individual wellbeing at risk.

We must respond quickly to a changing climate and more frequent and intense natural disasters and build more resilient natural systems, communities and agricultural and other industries. Landcare has a role in building natural and community resilience and provides a surge capacity to respond to natural disasters.

4. The delivery of Landcare investments and governance has become overly complex, inconsistent across the country, and disconnected from community on-ground Landcare groups, with a loss of direct funding to these groups. The Landcare ethos and identity, and the Landcare partnerships between Landcare support organisations, community, industry and governments, are undervalued and under utilised.

While the underlying Landcare model is still relevant and valued, there are opportunities and an urgent need to refine and improve its delivery. Re-instatement of direct funding avenues will strengthen relationships between the Australian Government and the community.

5. Government has commitments under a range of international agreements and national strategies which require community engagement for implementation.

Properly resourced, Landcare will make greater positive contributions leading

to outcomes under national and international agricultural, environmental and sustainability agreements.

Our Recommendations

Drawing from the analysis of these issues, this submission makes twelve recommendations, each supported by an explanatory rationale. If adopted as a package, these will lead to better environmental and natural resources management on public and private lands and increase Australia's capacity to respond to the NRM and climate challenges which lie ahead. They include:

- Investments in new programs directed to on-ground Landcare to address the most pressing challenges and opportunities; and a national awareness raising campaign to inspire and mobilise existing and new community action; and
- Improvements in the design and implementation of existing programs.

These recommendations apply to three portfolios: Environment; Agriculture; and Emergency Management.

All amounts are GST exclusive.

BUILDING ON THE LANDCARE LEGACY WITH DIRECT ON-GROUND FUNDING

- 1.** The Government invest \$250 million over five years for direct funding of Landcare to deliver a significant, high-profile program to support sustainable agriculture and environmental restoration by addressing one or more key threats including invasive species, species loss, water quality and river health, or climate change adaptation. This investment would be delivered by the National Landcare Network through grant programs and other mechanisms. The on-ground actions would align with local regional plans, involve consultation with local government, and leverage co-investment and broad stakeholder engagement.

RECOMMIT TO ESSENTIAL FUNDING FOR THE LANDCARE NETWORK TO CONTINUE ITS CRITICAL WORK

- 2.** Continue the funding arrangements under the National Landcare Program for the National Landcare Network (which includes funding to the State and Territory Landcare Organisations) at \$1.64 m pa.

DEVELOP A LANDCARE-LED DISASTER RISK AND PREPARATION RESPONSE STRATEGY THAT REACHES DEEP INTO OUR COMMUNITIES

- 3.** The Commonwealth Government fund a trial with \$10m to establish a *Landcare Natural Disaster Rapid Response Fund* for the purpose of protecting and repairing the significant investments made by the Government and community in Landcare and other environmental assets that are damaged by natural disasters and extreme weather events. Funds would be allocated through the National Landcare Network according to agreed guidelines. Local government will be a critical partner in co-design and delivery of the trial.

4. The Commonwealth Government fund a project to develop better practice guidance for environmental restoration to make restored areas and the livability of the urban environment more resilient to climate change and extreme weather events. The project will be led by the NLN and involve Commonwealth, Territory and State NRM and scientific organisations, universities, local government and local Landcare practitioners. The project will produce guidelines and protocols for grant makers, program and project designers, and restoration practitioners.

IMPROVE REGIONAL PLANNING

5. The National Landcare Network be invited to contribute the extensive knowledge and experience represented by its eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations (STLOs) with 2000-plus active member networks representing approximately 160,000 Landcarers on the ground, in the design and implementation of a new model of regional planning that will improve environmental protection, as announced by the Minister for the Environment on 25 August, 2022.
6. As part of the planning reforms recently announced by the Minister for the Environment, the Government require NRM Regional Plans that are funded through the NLP be made consistent with Australian Government Regional Plans, as they develop.

CREATE MORE EFFECTIVE ON-GROUND REGIONAL DELIVERY

7. The Government, in conjunction with the National Landcare Network and NRM Regions Australia, develop criteria to identify and calculate the amount of funds allocated to on-ground activities to meet the Regional Land Partnership Service Agreement requirement of *at least 20 percent of the combined value of Projects delivered by the Service Provider [to] directly support the delivery of small on-ground projects and related activities that are delivered by, or directly engage with, the local Landcare community*, and each Regional NRM organisation report annually against these.

ENGAGE AN EFFECTIVE NATIONAL LANDCARE FACILITATOR

8. Fund the National Landcare Network \$2 million over four years so that it can develop a high-profile National Landcare Facilitator function to begin July 2023, as provided in the October 2022 budget. Embedding the facilitator within the Landcare movement will make them much more effective, and this is best achieved by locating the function within the NLN, the body created by the movement and most well-connected to its breadth, depth and diversity.

The National Landcare Network recommends that the funding should support two positions: an eminent National Landcare Facilitator and a supporting officer, with the Facilitator having a reputation, skills, qualifications, experience and competencies to provide national leadership and influence in coordinating community Landcare activities and improving knowledge sharing, with respect to:

- co-ordination across the Landcare network and between government agencies and organisations including the National Landcare Network (NLN), Landcare Australia Ltd (LAL) and NRM Region delivery partners, research providers, NGOs and landholders (on and off-farm)
- providing direct advice to Ministers and other decision makers on Landcare-related policy and program development, including impediments to the successful operation of Landcare
- knowledge capture and sharing across the network, communications, conferences and awards
- reviews, reports and recommendations regarding reforms and new opportunities for Landcare, including a State-of-Landcare Report
- promoting and engaging with the corporate and philanthropic sectors on the value of investment opportunities in Landcare
- being a source of advice to national and state Parliamentary Friends of Landcare groups.

It is proposed that the National Landcare Facilitator will report to a Board composed of the National Landcare Network, Departmental and Ministerial representatives on strategic and operational matters. As the host of the position, the NLN will provide administrative support and day-to-day oversight through the CEO.

The National Landcare Facilitator would be appointed jointly by the Ministers for the Environment and Agriculture, on the basis of recommendations from a selection panel including nominees from the relevant Commonwealth Government departments, the NLN and NRM Regions.

SUPPORT AN EFFECTIVE LANDCARE RANGER PROGRAM

- 9.** The National Landcare Network be actively involved in the design of the Landcare Ranger Program, as announced in the October 2022 budget. This engagement will ensure the program is well-targeted and achieves both training and environmental outcomes.
- 10.** Depending on the final design of the program, the NLN be allocated up to 500 Landcare Rangers with associated funding for operations and training, hosted by the eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations for placement with regional Landcare networks and local Landcare groups to undertake specific roles in project management, environmental restoration and sustainable land management enabling greater outcomes across communities on the ground.

MOBILISE LANDCARE VIA A NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION

- 11.** The Government invest \$2m over four years in a national campaign to be run jointly by the National Landcare Network and Landcare Australia Limited, drawing upon their different and complementary roles and expertise within the Landcare movement. The campaign will rejuvenate awareness of the environmental and natural resource challenges facing Australia, highlight

Landcare's role in meeting these challenges, and bring rural and urban communities together in practical on-ground actions. The campaign is a national call-to-action to all Australians. It will use social media and other channels to inspire existing Landcarers and to reach new audiences, including culturally and linguistically diverse communities and young Australians.

BUILD MORE INFLUENTIAL NATIONAL LANDCARE CONFERENCE AND AWARDS

- 12.** The Government utilise the partnership arrangements that underpinned the successful delivery of the \$14m Landcare-led Bushfire Recovery Grants Program in 2021, by having the National Landcare Network and Landcare Australia Limited jointly organise and deliver the biennial National Landcare Conference and National Awards and explore collaborating with the NRM Regions Australia.

SUMMARY OF NLN RECOMMENDATIONS AND INVESTMENTS

RECOMMENDATION	RELEVANCE	FUNDING
	New or improvement to existing program; Election commitment; Budget announcement; government policy announcement	All numbers in this table are GST exclusive
BUILDING ON THE LANDCARE LEGACY WITH DIRECT ON-GROUND FUNDING		
1. The Government invest \$250 million over five years for direct funding of Landcare to deliver a significant, high-profile program to support sustainable agriculture and environmental restoration.	New program	\$250m over 5 years (possible re-allocation of funding)
RECOMMIT TO ESSENTIAL FUNDING FOR THE LANDCARE NETWORK TO CONTINUE ITS CRITICAL WORK		
2. Continue the funding arrangements under the National Landcare Program for the National Landcare Network.	Improvement to existing program	\$1.64m pa
DEVELOP A LANDCARE-LED DISASTER RISK AND PREPARATION RESPONSE STRATEGY THAT REACHES DEEP INTO OUR COMMUNITIES		

3. Fund a trial with \$10m to establish a <i>Landcare Natural Disaster Rapid Response Fund</i> .	New program	\$10m from the Disaster Ready Fund
4. Fund a project to develop better practice guidance for environmental restoration to make restored areas and the built environment more resilient to climate change and extreme weather events.	New program	To be determined and funded from the Disaster Ready Fund.
IMPROVE REGIONAL PLANNING		
5. The NLN be invited to contribute the extensive knowledge and experience of its eight STLOs and 2000-plus registered member Landcare networks through participation in the design and implementation of a new model of regional planning.	Improvement to existing program and government policy announcement	Nil
6. As part of the planning reforms recently announced by the Minister for the Environment, the Government requires NRM Regional Plans that are funded through the NLP be made consistent with Australian Government Regional Plans, as they develop.	Improvement to existing program and government policy announcement	Nil
CREATE MORE EFFECTIVE ON-GROUND REGIONAL DELIVERY		
7. The Government, in conjunction with the NLN and NRM Regions Australia, develop criteria to identify and calculate the amount of funds allocated to on-ground activities to meet the RLP Service Agreement requirement.	Improvement to existing program	Nil

ENGAGE AN EFFECTIVE NATIONAL LANDCARE FACILITATOR		
8. Fund the NLN \$2 million over four years so that it can host the position of a National Landcare Facilitator to begin July 2023.	Budget announcement	\$2m, as announced in the October Budget
SUPPORT AN EFFECTIVE LANDCARE RANGER PROGRAM		
9. The NLN be actively involved in the design of the Landcare Ranger Program, as announced in the October 2022 budget	Budget announcement	Nil
10. Depending on the final design of the program, the NLN be allocated up to 500 Landcare rangers with associated funding for operations and training	Budget announcement	To be determined; funds announced in October Budget
MOBILISE LANDCARE VIA A NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION		
11. Invest \$2m over four years in a national campaign to be run jointly by the NLN and LAL	New program	\$2m over 4 years
BUILD MORE INFLUENTIAL NATIONAL LANDCARE CONFERENCE AND AWARDS		
12. The NLN and LAL jointly organise and deliver the biennial National Landcare Conference and National Awards, and explore collaborating with the NRM Regions Australia	Improvement to existing program	Nil

CONCLUSION TO THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia's environment and unique biodiversity is in decline and it is clear the economic and social benefits we derive from our environment and natural resources are at serious risk. Governments cannot address these risks by themselves; communities must be involved. The Landcare model first supported by the Hawke Labor Government has been very effective in mobilising communities across Australia, in partnership with industry and governments. Investment in Landcare is a cost-effective way of addressing environmental and NRM problems and also allows remote regional and rural economies to prosper.

In recent years, Landcare at the local level has suffered from government policies which have reduced direct support. There is a strong case that Landcare, the National Landcare Network and its eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations, must have an expanded and leading role if the decline in the condition of the environment and natural resources is to be arrested and reversed.

Landcare can no longer be taken for granted. It has been under-supported for the past decade and while it remains strong and extensive, it requires real investment and support to be able to assist government to achieve its objectives.

Drawing on our values of partnership and collaboration, this submission includes recommendations for new funding, and for the re-focusing of existing funding, as well as suggestions for improvements in the effectiveness of current implementation arrangements producing high-value outcomes for little or no cost.

LANDCARE AND THE NATIONAL LANDCARE NETWORK

Coral Love defined "the Landcare Approach" in her 2010 paper *Evolution of Landcare in Australia: In the context of Australian Government Natural Resource Management Policy and Programs* prepared for the Australian Landcare Council Secretariat which was part of the then Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Love's (2010) definition of the "Landcare Approach" comprised of an ethic, a movement and a model:

The Landcare approach comprises:

ETHIC - a philosophy, influencing the way people live in the landscape while caring for the land – the Landcare ethic

MOVEMENT - local community action putting the philosophy into practice – the Landcare movement founded on stewardship and volunteers

MODEL - a range of knowledge generation, sharing and support mechanisms including groups, networks from district to national levels, facilitators and coordinators, government and non-government programs and partnerships – the Landcare model.

Love's definition was then used in the last overarching framework written for the *Australian Landcare Community (the Australian Landcare Framework)* published by the Australian Landcare Council Secretariat also in 2010 (excerpt from page 1):

"Landcare is a unique community-based approach that has played a major role in raising awareness, influencing farming and land management practices and delivering environmental outcomes across Australian landscapes for many years. Largely, local group involvement has been the catalyst for voluntary community engagement, understanding and action in the development and adoption of sustainable land management practices and the acknowledgement of our shared responsibility for conserving biodiversity".

The Landcare movement (Landcare) in 2022 comprises a diverse network across Australia of local community groups, volunteers, landholders, businesses, local councils, NGOs and as paid professional staff. It includes the various Bushcare, Coastcare, Dunecare, Parkcare and other groups. The various groups include people of all ages and backgrounds, living in the country, towns and cities. Landcare strives to walk together with Traditional Custodians respecting knowledge, skills and responsibilities in land and sea management and their role in leading the planning and caring for country and community across Australia. Their lands were never ceded.

The National Landcare Network (NLN) is a not-for-profit organisation and the national peak body for the Australian Landcare movement, with eight-member peak State and Territory Landcare Organisations (STLOs). The NLN, through the STLOs represents and advocates on behalf of 2,000-plus registered Landcare member networks, comprising an estimated 160,000 local Landcare volunteers across the country, facilitating the delivery of on-ground works.

Reach and delivery

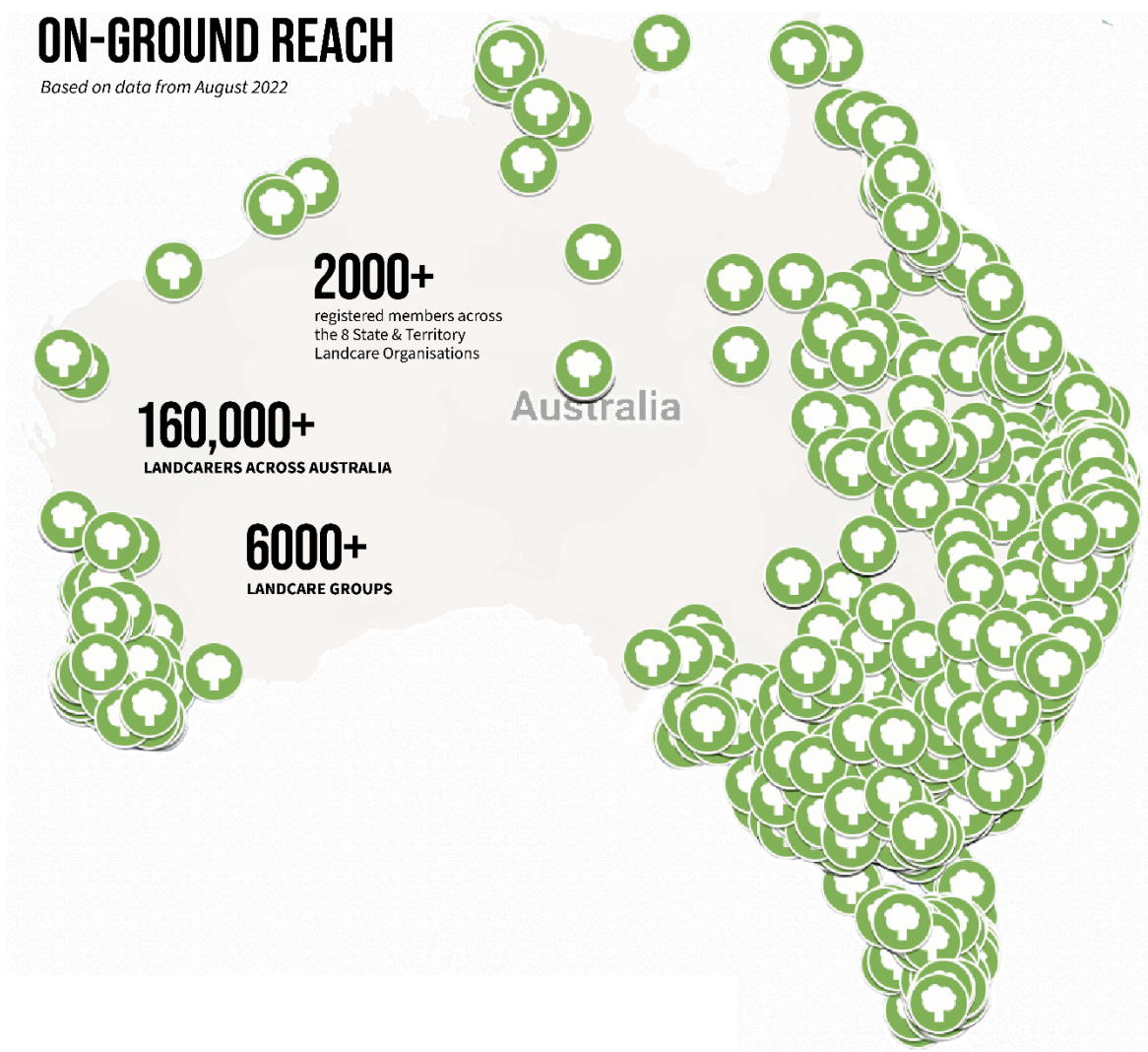
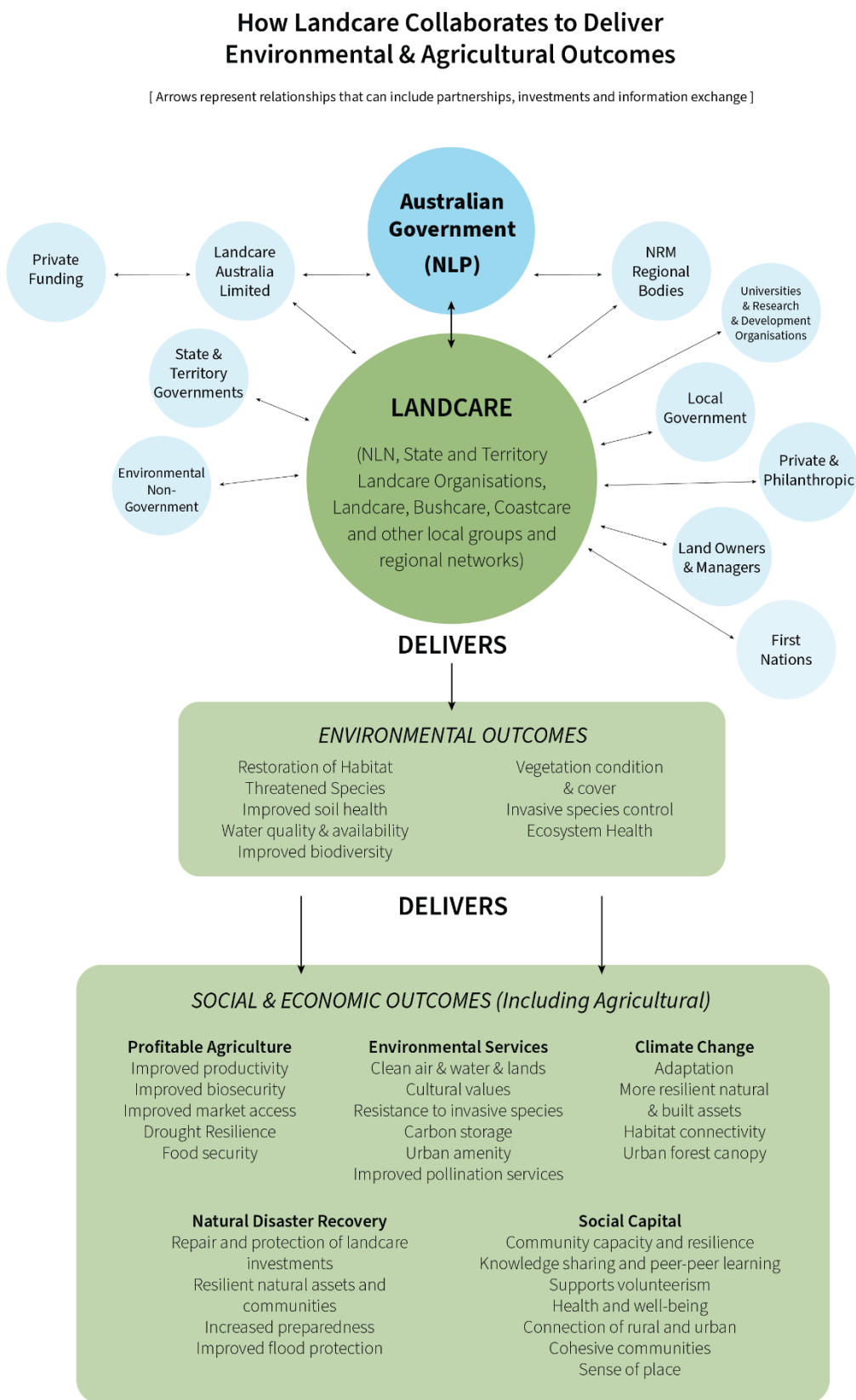


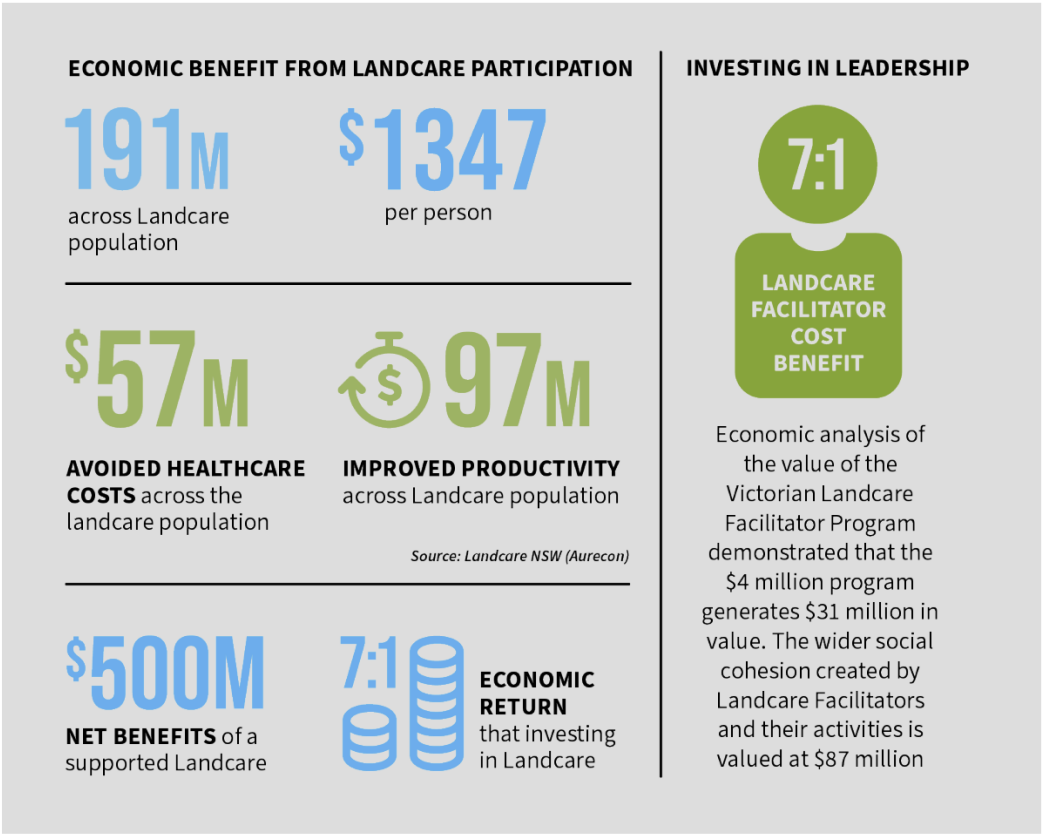
FIGURE: National Landcare Network (NLN) is a not-for-profit organisation and the national peak body for the Australian Landcare movement, with eight-member peak State and Territory Landcare Organisations (STLOs) representing over 2000 registered Landcare networks.

Landcare groups, and the STLOs, work through their own actions or in partnership with government agencies at all levels, regional bodies and institutions, and other not-for-profit organisations, to create more sustainable environments and systems of land use and management, on and off-farm. Landcare groups and networks leverage additional resources from many other sources, including local government, NGOs, businesses, state and territory agencies and land managers. Through its peer-to-peer learning model it has a proven ability to change thinking, improve practices and create new behavioural norms. Landcare is one of the largest volunteer movements in Australia and the Landcare logo is one of the most recognised and trusted brands in Australia.



Return On Investment

Numerous studies have established that the return on investment in Landcare ranges between 4:1 and 7:1 (*example studies by RPS 2020, and Nation Partners 2022*). The recent KPMG report (2021) estimates the conservative economic benefit from participation in Landcare at \$1,347 per person. Applying this to the estimated Landcare population generates a total economic benefit of over \$191 million dollars per year (KPMG 2021).



Landcare received national recognition in 1989 following an agreement between farmers (represented by the NFF) and conservationists (represented by the ACF) that they had a shared interest in addressing environmental problems. Seeing the urgency and importance of addressing the nation's problems with dealing conditions of biodiversity and natural resources, and the sensibility and power of this alliance, the then Prime Minister Bob Hawke AC responded quickly with a commitment of \$320 million from the Australian Government to fund a 10-year National Landcare Program.

When the earth is spoiled, humanity and all living things are diminished. We have taken too much from the earth and given back too little. It's time to say enough is enough. Today's announcements won't solve everything. But with the right mix of political commitment and community support we can ensure that our country is simply the best in the world. This is our country, our future.

The degradation of our environment is not simply a local problem, nor a problem for one state or another, nor for the Commonwealth alone. Rather, the damage being done to our environment is a problem for us all – and not just government – but for of us individually and together.

– Bob Hawke AC

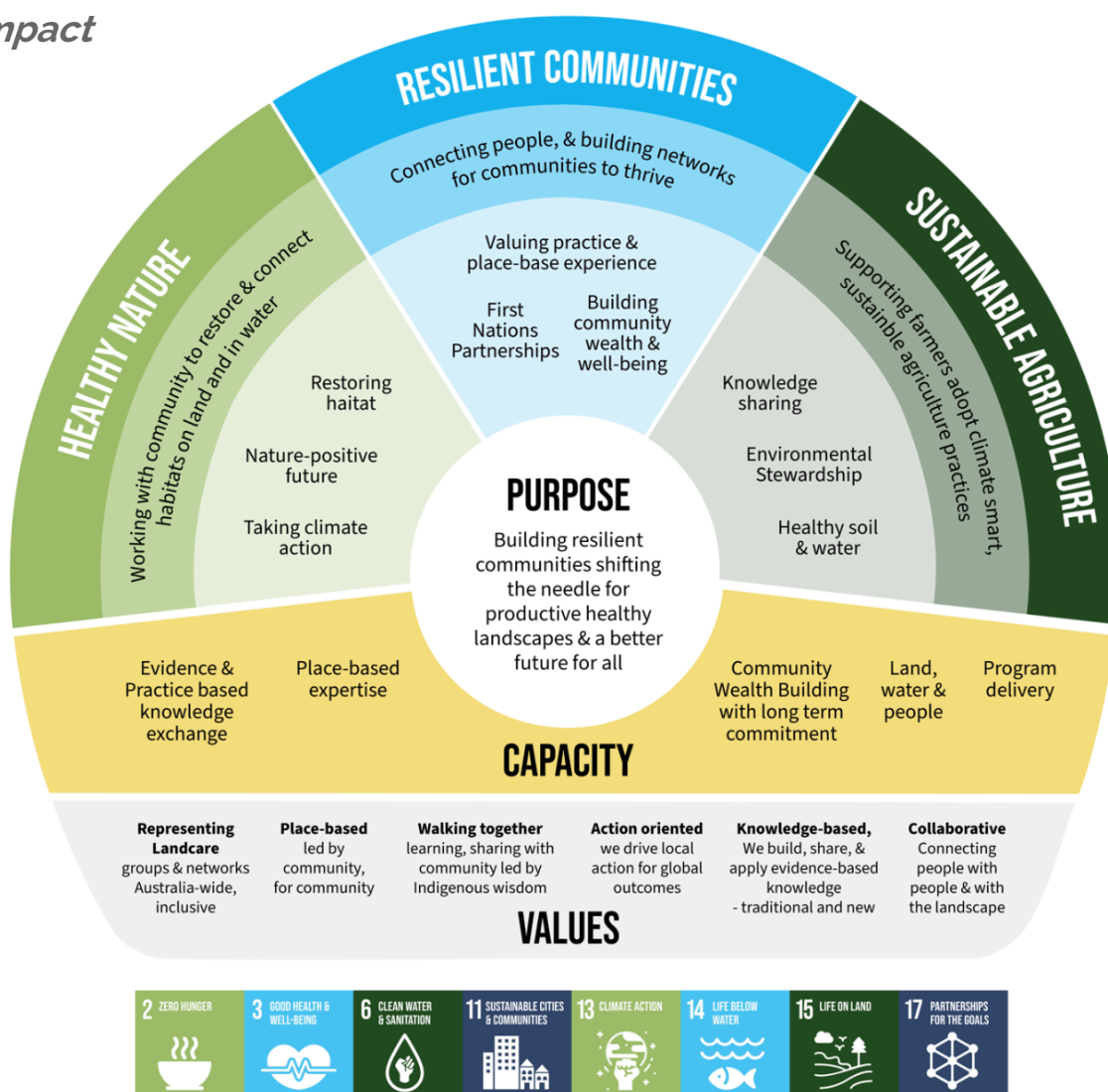
Launching the 'Decade of Landcare', 20 July 1989

Longer term funding was later secured in 1997 with establishment of the National Heritage Trust, to fund Landcare and other NRM programs, confirming the success and important legacy of Landcare.

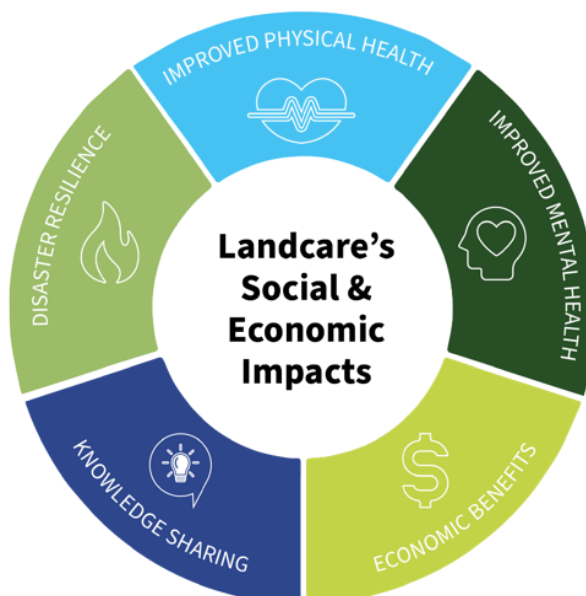
For more than 30 years, Landcare has delivered, and continues to deliver a diverse range of environmental, agricultural and community benefits; far more than improved conservation and land management. They include the repair, protection, and enhancement of land, water, waterways and coasts; natural habitat restoration and pest and weed actions to enhance biodiversity and support adaptation to climate change; improving farm production and productivity, and building resilience in Australia's food and fibre farming systems; bolstering local economies; helping to create social cohesion and well-being in rural and urban communities; being a credible advocate and adviser to community and governments, and building resilience to natural disasters.

Landcare creates trusted networks and empowers and mobilises communities, leading to local community ownership of issues; unlocking and sharing local knowledge and experience, providing a conduit for the dissemination of new scientific knowledge and improved land management and agricultural practices, and the adoption of cultural and behaviour changes in land management.

Impact



Brady D. and Duxbury, L. (2022) People Place Future. The Value of Community Landcare in Western Australia. Report prepared for the Western Australian Landcare Network.



KPMG (2021). Building resilience in communities: The wellbeing benefits of participating in Landcare. Report prepared for Landcare Australia.

THE ISSUES: AUSTRALIA'S SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

- 1. Our environment and natural resources continue to deteriorate, putting at risk the services that support our economy and society, and Australia's unique biodiversity and ecosystems.**

Our current ways and scale of protecting and managing our environment and levels of resourcing are not sufficient to reverse the downward trends. Action is required and governments cannot do this alone. Landcare has a national community network, and the experience and passion to be part of the solution.

The Landcare movement has made an important contribution over the last 30 years; but with greater support it can do much more to halt this deterioration, in both delivering on-ground improvements and sharing knowledge and better practice. Early and meaningful engagement of Landcare in the analysis of issues and the design of policy and programs would result in more efficient and effective delivery of outcomes. Expanding the peak Landcare organisations' roles in government sponsored program delivery would mean that Landcare would be more effective at all scales, from local group projects to Territory/State and national levels. Breaking away from the common perception that Landcare is all about planting trees and small-scale sustainable agriculture would open opportunities for greater community involvement in biodiversity and carbon markets, health, economic development and climate change adaptation.

From the latest *State of the Environment Report (2021)*:

"Overall, the state and trend of the environment of Australia are poor and deteriorating as a result of increasing pressures from climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, pollution and resource extraction"... "Our inability to adequately manage pressures will continue to result in species extinctions and deteriorating ecosystem condition, which are reducing the environmental capital on which current and future economies depend. Social, environmental and economic impacts are already apparent." The report identifies many roles for Landcare across the entire range of issues covered.

The WWF Living Planet Report (2022) makes a similar sobering finding: *"Biodiversity around the world is crashing at a startling rate, with global wildlife populations diminishing by 69% in the last 48 years."* Australia continues to have the most mammal extinctions in the world (SoE 2022) and has "the notorious distinction of having possibly the worst extinction record on earth" (UNSW 2009).

The outlook for the Great Barrier Reef is poor: *"Overall, habitats are assessed as being in poor condition. Habitat loss, degradation and alteration have occurred in a number of areas, substantially affecting populations of some dependent species... many species and species groups are assessed as being in poor to very poor condition. ...Actions taken now by managers, Traditional Owners, researchers, stakeholders **and the community***

will matter and make a difference to the Region's long-term outlook" (GBR Reef Outlook Report in Brief 2019).

The importance of the environment is captured by this quote: *"Australia's economy and communities have an enormous dependency on natural capital. Healthy ecosystems provide critical services such as fresh water, regulation of regional water cycles, soil fertility and crop pollination, carbon storage, recreation, and buffering from the impacts of hazards. These services, along with industries such as tourism, agriculture and fisheries that depend on natural resources and assets, are vital for both our prosperity and wellbeing."* (National Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021-2025).

These concerns are acknowledged/confirmed by the Government through the **ALP National Platform**, adopted in 2021:

"Australia's natural environment and iconic places are in an overall state of decline and are under increasing threat. The current environmental trajectory is unsustainable. The globe is facing an extinction crisis, and Australia has one of the worst records of extinctions on earth. Labor will act to arrest species loss, protect habitats, control invasive species, support sustainable development, protect biodiversity, protect heritage, restore landscapes, control plastic pollution, improve air quality and water quality, and restore natural capital."

*Labor will ensure national environment funding programs and other volunteer and community programs, like **Landcare funding**, support local sustainable agriculture, soil management, conservation and environmental priorities and contribute to national priorities to improve biodiversity and resilience... Local volunteers can play an important role in mobilising government and community action on local environmental issues, and their contribution to protecting and preserving Australia's environment, and the wellbeing of Australians, is invaluable."*

2. Farmers are facing challenges to maintain production and achieve productivity gains in a changing and challenging operating environment featuring invasive species, demands from local and international consumers for products meeting environmental standards, and extreme events/natural disasters. At the same time there are opportunities to participate in emerging markets for ecosystem services (carbon and nature repair).

There is a need for more Landcare activity on-farm and on adjacent lands leading to improved soils, water quality and availability, pollination services and biosecurity outcomes, as well as strengthened environmental credentials, and assisting market access.

The industry's peak body, the National Farmers Federation (NFF), has highlighted the importance of this issue: *"Farmers manage 51% of the Australia land. The long-term success of the agriculture industry will be dependent on continued access to productive land and water. The NFF promotes the protection and sustainable management of agricultural land to underpin the sector's aspiration of becoming a \$100 billion farm-gate value industry by 2030."*

To achieve this goal requires improvements in production and productivity, and these cannot be achieved without more investment in protecting and improving the condition of the natural environment, on and off-farm."

And: *"The prosperity of our agriculture sector relies on maintaining a favourable biosecurity status. Australia's biosecurity will underpin not only growth and access to new markets, but also our ability to protect what we have – maintaining current levels of output and existing market access."* (NFF 22/23 Pre-Budget Submission)

The National Biosecurity Strategy, 2022-2032 describes the risks and challenges including decreasing biodiversity arising from invasive species (pests, weeds and diseases), climate change and land-use management, which weakens the resilience of ecosystems to further outbreaks and incursions. The 2017 Review of NLP1 stated: "The cost of weeds to agricultural industries is estimated at around \$1.5 billion a year in weed control activities and a further \$2.5 billion a year in lost agricultural production. While difficult to estimate, the cost of weeds to our environment is likely to be even greater".

Landcare groups have proven experience in invasive species management and the strategy acknowledges the importance of community involvement through its Priority Areas: (emphasis added):

- *"Build on and develop **national awareness and education programs***
- *Strengthen the involvement of environmental agencies and **environmental and community groups***
- *Identify and implement opportunities for greater industry and **community involvement in decision-making bodies***
- *Enhance our national **surveillance and early detection** arrangements*
- *Increase the use of **citizen science, Indigenous knowledge and on the ground insight.**"*

Landcare's contribution to the protection and repair of Australian soils has been acknowledged and it will continue to have an important role in delivering the objectives of the **National Soils Strategy 2021** and similar initiatives.

Consumer choice and trust in agricultural products is becoming increasingly important in competitive local and international markets. The 2017 review of the NLP1 noted that Landcare: *"...is now widely accepted as being one of the foundations on which we can promote our clean, green credentials to world markets, and is in a position to support the development of 'Brand Australia', and its underpinning for the competitiveness of Australian agriculture."*

This has been also acknowledged by the National Farmers Federation (Pre -Budget Submission 2022/23): *"Maintaining and growing consumer trust is integral to Australian agriculture's ability to compete in global markets, particularly in leveraging our reputation for clean green produce to command premiums in export markets. Biosecurity, traceability, and the ability to manage weeds and pests are central to maintaining trust in the clean green image of Australian agriculture."*

Landcare can play an even greater role.

3. Climate Change adaptation is not happening fast enough, putting biodiversity, soils, rivers, farming enterprises, and communities (urban and country) and individual wellbeing at risk.

We must respond quickly to a changing climate and more frequent and intense natural disasters and build more resilient natural systems, communities and agricultural and other industries. Landcare has a role in building natural and community resilience and provides a surge capacity to respond to natural disasters.

The last decade of extreme climate and weather impacts have shown how vulnerable Australian communities, environments and economies can be. It has also shown that in many cases our ways of managing lands and our environment are not fit-for-purpose for the world we are moving into.

Climate change adaptation will require action on both public and private lands. Our native plants and animals need more, and better connected, habitat to be able to migrate through the landscape as climate changes and to recolonise areas after natural disasters. Maintaining and increasing vegetation cover is important for carbon sequestration, soil health, and water quality. The restoration of the environment, which is a core objective of Landcare, is critical and needs to be done in such a way to be resilient against ever more common floods, fire, drought and other natural disasters.

Our agriculture needs to adapt to the changing climate and become carbon positive. Landcare would like to work with governments and farmers to identify and realise opportunities for Landcare to deliver on-the-ground solutions which increase the pace of climate change adaptation and improve the responsiveness to natural disasters.

*"Australia's climate, along with the global climate, is changing as a result of human-induced climate change... We are already experiencing increased temperatures, changed rainfall patterns, increased extreme bushfire weather, and changed frequency and severity of extreme events such as heatwaves. **These changes are having a profound effect on all aspects of our environment**" (SoE 21).*

*"Analysis by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) found changes in seasonal conditions have reduced annual average farm profits by 23% or around \$29,200 per farm over the past 20 years, with larger reductions projected to 2050 in the absence of adaptation ... The Australian Government will continue to establish partnerships across all domains to drive coordinated action. This recognises that all levels of government, businesses, research institutions and **communities have roles to play in adaptation, and collaboration will be needed to build adaptive capacity and drive action**" (National Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021-2025).*

- 4. The delivery of Landcare investments and governance has become overly complex, inconsistent across the country, and disconnected from community on-ground Landcare groups with a loss of direct funding to these groups. The Landcare ethos and identity, and the Landcare partnerships between Landcare support organisations, community, industry and governments, are undervalued and under-utilised.**

While the underlying Landcare model is still relevant and valued, there are opportunities and an urgent need to refine and improve its delivery. Re-instatement of direct funding avenues will strengthen relationships between the Australian Government and the community.

Governments, taxpayers and community volunteers are not getting the best returns on their investments in environmental management and NRM. The flow of funds to on-ground Landcare groups has declined, is not always well targeted and is not provided over long enough timeframes or scale to fix environmental and NRM problems.

In a submission to Minister for Environment (Tanya Plibersek), Bob Debus recently wrote (personal communication): *"Landcare and the National Reserve System, world leading conservation innovations of the Hawke Government, are pillars of any effective national conservation strategy ... Landcare is underfunded but also diverted from its original purpose. The fundamental idea was that Landcare should be a community program that can keep landholders and volunteers permanently mobilised to support environmental, community resilience and agricultural sustainability policies at a local level."*

There needs to be better and more meaningful engagement between Landcare, and regional NRM organisations more broadly, and components of the new rural economy; i.e. corporatized farm enterprises, new agricultural practice organisations and the urban diaspora.

Since the beginnings of Landcare there have been many models of design and delivery. More recent changes have resulted in less transparency of the governance of the NRM sector and the support of on-ground Landcare, with very little direct funding and a consequent reduction in the support for local Landcare groups. At the same time and as government budgets have been cut there has been a diversion of funds to support government environment core programs, and a more corporatized approach by Landcare Australia Ltd which has seen it become less connected to on-ground Landcarers. The current model of Australian Government funding being directed to community-led on-ground works through the NRM Regional Organisations has resulted in a situation where there is no direct visibility to the community of Australian Government support, and credit for this support, where it appears that all resourcing comes from State/Territory organisations.

Over the last decade, changes have necessitated the formation of non-government Landcare entities such as the NLN and its member state and territory organisations to take up the roles previously carried out by governments and to represent the interests of on-ground Landcarers.

There are opportunities for better collaboration between Landcare entities, the different levels of government, and NRM bodies to ensure that any gaps in support of on-ground Landcare are filled, overlapping responsibilities are better managed and cooperation on areas of mutual interest occurs.

5. Government has commitments under a range of international agreements and national strategies which require community engagement for implementation.

Properly resourced Landcare will make positive contributions to outcomes under national and international agricultural, environmental and sustainability agreements.

Significant issues facing Australia are also the subject of global agreements and commitments such as the global biodiversity framework and **Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019-2030; the National Biosecurity Strategy; the UN Sustainable Development Goals; the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030;** international climate change commitments and various sectoral and trade-related schemes. Many of these commitments call for greater community engagement or can only be successfully delivered working with the community. Governments cannot do it alone.

Landcare has the capacity and experience to deliver on-ground and across the nation in many of these commitment areas. By aligning the next phase of the NLP and other programs to these issues, and using Landcare as a vehicle for addressing them, the Government can more effectively deliver its commitments under these agreements. As a consequence, the Government and the agriculture industry can build international credibility as well as showcasing Landcare to the International community as a model of government/community collaboration.

A key agreement is a new **Global Biodiversity Framework Post-2020** which is currently under negotiation. Meeting its targets will require partnerships between Government, NGOs, community, and industry. According to the currently available draft, targets include a reduction in the rate of introduction of invasive alien species, and controls or eradication of such species to eliminate or reduce their impacts; reducing nutrients lost to the environment; and nature-based contributions to global climate change mitigation. Additionally, the '30 by 30' protected area commitment (30% of Earth's land and ocean area as protected areas by 2030) will need the assistance of 'other effective area-based conservation measures' that go beyond the protected area estate. These are all targets where the broad reach of community Landcare is well placed to make a substantial contribution. Landcare also contributes to delivering **Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019-2030**, with its objectives of encouraging Australians to better understand, value and care for nature.

The National Biosecurity Strategy 2022 also recognises the threats to Australia's economy and well-being posed by decreasing biodiversity arising from invasive species (pests, weeds and diseases), climate change and land-use management. Implementation of its priority areas including community awareness, better surveillance, increased use of citizen science and stronger engagement by

community and environmental groups would be enhanced by a stronger Landcare network and better supported community Landcare groups.

Landcare measures also support the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**, most particularly those related to life on land (Goal 15), life under water (Goal 14), climate change impacts (Goal 13), resilient and sustainable cities and settlements (Goal 11) and food security and sustainable agriculture (Goal 2).

The National Landcare Network and Landcare Australia are members of the NGO consortium urging support for the **UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration** by policy makers, industry and communities - to retain ecosystems, reduce our impacts upon them and to repair ecosystems to optimise potential for humanity to revive the natural world that supports us all.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

BUILDING ON THE LANDCARE LEGACY WITH DIRECT ON-GROUND FUNDING

- 1. The Government invest \$250 million over 5 years for direct funding of Landcare to deliver a significant, high-profile program to support sustainable agriculture and environmental restoration by addressing one or more key threats including an invasive species, species loss, water quality and river health, or climate change adaptation. This investment would be delivered by the National Landcare Network through grant programs and other mechanisms. The on-ground actions would align with local regional plans, involve consultation with local government, and leverage co-investment and broad stakeholder engagement.**

Rationale

Landcare is a proven model for both motivating volunteer action and delivery, and for governments to apply resources to tackle specific environmental and NRM issues, on private and public lands. It attracts considerable in-kind and cash co-investments through volunteer hours and state, local government and corporate funding. Numerous studies have established that the return on investment in Landcare ranges between 4:1 and 7:1 (see example studies by RPS 2020, and Nation Partners 2022). The recent KPMG report (2021) estimates the conservative economic benefit from participation in Landcare at \$1,347 per person. Applying this to the estimated Landcare population generates a total economic benefit of over \$191 million dollars per year (KPMG 2021).

This program will directly fund local Landcare and other community environmental and NRM groups and leverage further co-investments and sharing of knowledge and better practice. Delivering the program through the National Landcare Network will help align priorities from the national to the local scale, streamline administration, and simplify the interface with the many on-ground groups. Local group support, reporting and risk management will be facilitated by the eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations.

The **Australian SOE 2021**, the Government's **Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021-25**, the *Report of the Independent Review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Samuel Review), the CSIRO report into the cost of invasive species all highlighted critical environmental and natural resource management problems facing the country, and these have been acknowledged across community, industry and governments. These include extreme weather events, invasive species, the need to adapt to climate change, loss of habitat, soil health and river health, and the need for agriculture to maintain production and lift productivity. All of these will take many billions of dollars over

decades to fix, but the earlier we accelerate our responses, the quicker and cheaper the results will be, both through slowing the growth and reversing the scale of the impacts and also avoiding the associated costs on the economy and the wellbeing of Australians.

All sectors of the Australian community are calling for meaningful and concerted action to address the critical issues identified above. The National Landcare Program Phase 2 Review Report (February 2022) noted that: *"Engagement with stakeholders for the review suggests if action was better coordinated, it would achieve much greater impact for the success of Australia's environment, agriculture industry and natural resources. The review found there is potential to improve engagement of local community groups and volunteerism in the NLP through co-design of priorities and projects, and increased opportunities for streamlined small grants aimed at grassroots volunteer groups pursuing local priorities."* (page 38)

To galvanise enduring and concerted action, a \$250m fund over five years applied to one or more of these issues will not only have a significant and positive impact, but will demonstrate to Australians and the world that we can fix problems, not just manage issues.

Delivery of the funds would mainly be through grants programs, though the NLN believes that it is essential to identify and apply other mechanisms such as direct commissioning of works, reverse auctions, Green Bonds, other market mechanisms etc.

It is proposed to run the grant component in two streams. The first will be for larger, more impactful projects, which will be allocated up to \$200m overall, and a second stream of small grants of between \$10-\$50k to be allocated up to \$50m. The second stream is deemed necessary to help engage and build capacity in the smaller and newer groups that are operating across Australia.

To optimise outcomes and efficiency, funds would be expended annually on a basis shown by on-ground experience to achieve enduring results; \$50m, \$75m, \$75m, \$25m, and \$25m over the five years.

There would be two rounds of major projects, with a duration of 5 years or 4 years and up to four rounds of small grants. The projects will be scaled according to the capacity of groups and their ability to deliver results. It is estimated that larger project stream projects could range from \$150 000 to \$1m, funding around 500 large projects overall (up to 100 x \$1m, 100 x \$0.5m, 300 x \$150k) and in the order of 2,500 from the \$50m for smaller grants.

The delivery mechanism for this funding allows for different scales of implementation from the local to the Territory/State and beyond. The delivery would involve all of the eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations.

Tackling these problems in a strategic and focused way will create opportunities for co-investment and the program could coordinate with other government initiatives, such as the Nature Repair Market, Threatened Species Strategy, Regional Planning and implementation of findings under the Independent Review of the EPBC Act (the Samuels Review).

This funding amount, and other co-investments (including in-kind) will only go part way to fixing the identified problem/s, but an investment of this scale demonstrates a serious commitment to address problems and is large enough to have a measurable impact. The program could serve as a catalyst and a model for long term investment and action. The program would demonstrate national leadership, a willingness to tackle the hard problems and could break the cycle of planning without action.

Landcare is better placed than any other organisation to deliver this program. The National Landcare Network has broad reach across the entire country including remote and regional areas with 2000 registered network members representing more than 6000 plus individual Landcare groups including Bushcare, Parkcare, Dunecare, Coastcare, Friends-of and other expressions of the Landcare ethos. Landcare values collaboration and partnership as core principles and works closely with farmers, governments, NGOs, local councils, Aboriginal communities, business and researchers. Previous programs such as One Billion Trees, show that Landcare can be an important partner in delivering inspirational, significant and transformative programs which capture the public's imagination.

Ensuring that the funding model includes direct funding to local Landcare and other community NRM groups will not only result in local benefits and outcomes and reinvigorate the groups but will help ensure the maintenance of the works beyond the funding period to fully realise their benefits. Landcare is also a proven model for peer-to-peer learning and achieving lasting practice change for better land management outcomes. The 'hands-on' nature of the program complements the statutory and institutional elements of the Government's environmental reform agenda. The program will create a context to help local groups understand how their efforts and projects fit into the national effort in tackling the declining state of our environment and natural resource base. As a new funding model, this program would be subject to a rigorous independent evaluation to determine its efficacy and potential as a long-term program.

RECOMMIT TO ESSENTIAL FUNDING FOR THE LANDCARE NETWORK TO CONTINUE ITS CRITICAL WORK

2. Continue the funding arrangements under the National Landcare Program for the National Landcare Network (which includes funding to the eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations) at \$1.64 m pa.

Rationale

The current NLN five-year funding arrangement of \$1.09m pa is due to finish 30 June 2023. The success of the NLN model has been demonstrated with increasing engagement across the sector and a growing demand for its participation in co-design and consultation processes for policy, research and program development. The NLN's eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations have increased their collaboration and knowledge sharing, both of which are critical at a time when the Landcare movement is experiencing a growing demand from the community in many jurisdictions for new opportunities to participate, and the scale of NRM challenges continues to increase.

Current funding under the NLP2 for the National Landcare Network has the following Grant Purposes:

1. Funding the NLN to have the ability, capacity and resources to function as the National Landcare Peak body.
2. The NLN will support its members to participate in the functioning of the NLN and operate as peak bodies. Recognising that the State and Territory Landcare Organisations (STLO) as NLN members need to be legitimate State and Territory level peak bodies in order for the NLN to be a legitimate National Peak Body.
3. To support each NLN State and Territory Landcare Organisation to successfully undertake Landcare-related activities which are consistent with the outcomes of the Australian Government's National Landcare Program Phase 2 (2018-19 to 2022-23).

These purposes remain necessary in Phase 3 of the NLP but require increased funding to meet rising costs, even without growth.

The modest and proportionate increase in funding sought in this proposal, which will be distributed between the NLN and the eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations, will enable the network to respond to the increasing calls upon its expertise and services, including invitations for input into various consultation and engagement processes, particularly those associated with the new policy and program agenda of the Commonwealth. It will also support the network to leverage additional funding sources and explore new partnerships to improve the effectiveness of the NRM sector.

The participation of the eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations will be enhanced, which in turn enables the NLN and its members to continue to act as a truly representative voice with the reach to mobilise the movement, able to

bring the perspectives of the broader network into policy and program development at the Commonwealth level, translate those outcomes into on the ground action, and leverage State government funding.

The increase to the NLN will slightly increase its staff profile, enabling it to respond to the increasing effort required of it to meet the demand for a national representative peak body, build new partnerships and opportunities, and effectively facilitate outcomes for the Landcare movement across the country.

DEVELOP A LANDCARE-LED DISASTER RISK AND PREPARATION RESPONSE STRATEGY THAT REACHES DEEP INTO OUR COMMUNITIES

3. The Commonwealth government fund a trial with \$10m to establish a *Landcare Natural Disaster Rapid Response Fund* for the purpose of protecting and repairing the significant investments made by the Government and community in Landcare and other environmental assets that are damaged by natural disasters and extreme weather events. Funds would be allocated through the National Landcare Network according to agreed guidelines. Local government will be a critical partner in co-design and delivery of the trial.

4. The Commonwealth government fund a project to develop better practice guidance for environmental restoration to make restored areas and liveability of the urban environment more resilient to climate change and extreme weather events. The project will be led by the National Landcare Network and involve Commonwealth, Territory and State NRM and scientific organisations, universities, local government, and local Landcare practitioners. The project will produce guidelines and protocols for grant makers, program and project designers, and restoration practitioners.

Rationale

The two recommendations are complementary: the first is about having a rapid response capacity to repair sites damaged by natural disasters and extreme weather events, where there has been significant community and government investment; the second is about ensuring future projects and investments are more resilient to natural disasters and extreme weather events, can recover quickly, and are cognisant of the potential for environmental projects to reduce damage to infrastructure assets including bridges, buildings and roads.

As a consequence of recent natural disasters and the likelihood of more frequent and intense storm events, governments are investing to strengthen the capacity and resilience of communities to respond to these disasters but this response does not explicitly recognise the importance and need for protecting and repairing the significant investments made by the Government and community in Landcare and related projects that are damaged by natural disasters and extreme weather events.

For the last four decades, there have been significant investments by governments, councils, communities and individuals in environmental restoration and sustainable land management projects. These investments are often severely damaged, if not totally lost as a result of exceptional drought, floods, storms, landslip and fire. The influence of climate change is making this type of impact more likely. Not only do communities lose the natural, physical and human capital investments, they can lose motivation and it may take many years to recover. A strength of Landcare is its ability to bring communities together and galvanise them towards a common goal, supporting community recovery as well as that of the environment.

As is the case with infrastructure, a rapid response to repairing damage to riverbank and erosion works, revegetation and regeneration projects, fencing of restoration sites and other Landcare type projects costs significantly less than a delayed response or writing-off projects altogether, as is often the case now. Under the trial, the funds will be held by the NLN, working closely with local government, allowing rapid deployment of funds and resources to Landcare and related groups, such as local council environmental volunteer groups, under strict criteria, to address damage done to projects. The program would use a triage approach, consolidating and stabilising damaged projects, preventing further degradation, rather than undertaking a full restoration, and would not be used to "start again" on sites that have been destroyed.

In respect to the second recommendation, the NLN acknowledges that while many Landcare projects use current best practice, this has not always resulted in sites that can resist damage from natural disasters and extreme weather events. By engaging with scientists, land managers and restoration practitioners, the NLN believes that it would be possible to develop clear and robust guidelines to maximise the likelihood that future project investments can better resist damage from natural disasters.

Landcare has demonstrated that it can manage and deliver large scale government grant programs through the recent successful \$14 million Landcare Led Bushfire Recovery Program which has been delivered by the National Landcare Network, Landcare Australia Limited and five NLN member State and Territory Landcare Organisations.

Landcare also has experience in responding to natural disasters:

Within days following catastrophic rain events in the Northern Rivers in February and March 2022 that caused thousands of land slips across the region, Border Ranges Richmond Valley Landcare Network, with funding from North Coast Local Land Services, and with Brunswick Valley Landcare, Richmond Landcare and Tweed Landcare,

undertook site assessments and prepared remediation plans for land slips across the Tweed, Brunswick and Richmond River catchments where these slips pose threats to threatened or endangered ecological communities, and are supporting landholders to stabilise slips and prevent further soil erosion.

The Wilsons River Landcare Group Inc has planted over a number of years tens of thousands of trees on the riverbank in Lismore. The February/March 2022 floods led to changes to river and creek morphology meant that in some cases plantings of 15 years or so were lost. The NSW Flood Inquiry Report noted: *"The Inquiry heard of good work being done to restore natural balance to NSW's floodplains. For example, approximately 100 volunteers as part of the Wilson River Landcare group have been focussing on urban riverbank regeneration, re-vegetation and stabilisation."*

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/floodinginquiry>

IMPROVE REGIONAL PLANNING

5. The National Landcare Network be invited to contribute the extensive knowledge and experience of its eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations and thier 2000 plus registered active Landcare networks through participation in the design and implementation of a new model of regional planning that will improve environmental protection, as announced by the Minister for the Environment on 25 August 2022.

6. As part of the planning reforms recently announced by the Minister for the Environment, the Government requires NRM Regional Plans that are funded through the NLP be made consistent with Australian Government Regional Plans, as they develop.

Rationale

Landcare recognises that previous and existing regional planning practices have often been complex and not always resulted in the land use and environmental outcomes expected by communities and governments. With its deep understanding and experience - more than 30 years - in planning and delivery of programs and projects, and its members extensive and intimate knowledge of and links to the regions in which they reside, Landcare would be an invaluable partner in helping the Government to meet national, regional and local objectives. A similar engagement process could be used to bring local knowledge into other government initiatives, for example renewable energy developments, as part of overall regional planning.

While it is not clear to date whether the proposed Regional Plans will have similar functions to the existing Bioregional Planning under the EPBC Act, the NLN believes that there is an opportunity and a need for these to have both a land use planning and an operational focus. The NRM Regional plans developed and implemented by

the 54 Regional NRM organisations and funded through the NLP pose an excellent opportunity to align existing Australian Government investment with the proposed planning reforms. Harmonising the two planning processes provides a cost neutral funding stream for on-ground implementation of components of new regional plans, and provides a coherent planning framework.

CREATE MORE EFFECTIVE ON-GROUND REGIONAL DELIVERY

7. The Government, in conjunction with the National Landcare Network and NRM Regions Australia, develop criteria to identify and calculate the amount of funds allocated to on-ground activities to meet the RLP Service Agreement requirement of... *at least 20 percent of the combined value of Projects delivered by the Service Provider must directly support the delivery of small on-ground projects and related activities that are delivered by, or directly engage with, the local Landcare community, and each Regional NRM organisation report annually against these.*

Rationale

It is the view of the Landcare network participants that less than 20% of funding is being directly spent on on-ground and related projects delivered by, or which engage with, the local Landcare community. There is no data or other information reported and publicly available to give confidence that the 20% commitment is being delivered as intended. The amount that is hypothecated through the RLP to this activity amounts to \$90m over 5 years.

This matter of reporting and transparency has been raised before by the NLN in its submission to the *ANAO Performance Audit of the Regional Land Partnerships Program* and acknowledged in the auditor's report (Page 41):

3.34: "At the end of each financial year, service providers are required to submit the annual core services report to outline their delivery of core services for the past 12 months. These reports largely rely on service providers to self-disclose any issues or risks to core service delivery. No evidence is required to be submitted by the service providers to demonstrate their delivery of core services, and DAWE does not have assurance over the accuracy of information provided."

Related footnote 46:

"For example, the reporting field asks service providers to provide quantifiable figures (i.e. dollar amounts) of the level of community and Indigenous investment. However, this is not provided by all service providers, and no evidence is required to support any figures provided, unless the service providers are selected for additional checks as part of the contract assurance process."

The NLN believes implementation of this more accurate accounting will assist the

regional organisations and the Government with consistency and accuracy in reporting across all regions. It will also assist regional Landcare groups and organisations by providing surety of future funding, allowing for better planning and implementation of projects. More funding will flow directly through to Landcare groups and increase the likelihood of long-term involvement by local volunteers and more impactful, long-term projects.

Implementing this recommendation will not incur additional costs to the Australian government budget.

ENGAGE AN EFFECTIVE NATIONAL LANDCARE FACILITATOR

8. Fund the National Landcare Network \$2 million over four years so that it can develop a high-profile National Landcare Facilitator function to begin July 2023, as provided in the October 2022 budget. Embedding the facilitator within the Landcare movement will make them much more effective, and this is best achieved by locating the function within the NLN, the body created by the movement and most well-connected to its breadth, depth and diversity.

The National Landcare Network recommends that the funding should support two positions: an eminent National Landcare Facilitator and a supporting officer, with the Facilitator having a reputation, skills, qualifications, experience and competencies to provide national leadership and influence in coordinating community Landcare activities and improving knowledge sharing, with respect to:

- **co-ordination across the Landcare network and between government agencies and organisations including the National Landcare Network (NLN), Landcare Australia Ltd (LAL) and NRM Region delivery partners, research providers, NGOs and landholders (on and off-farm)**
- **providing direct advice to Ministers and other decision makers on Landcare related policy and program development including impediments to the successful operation of Landcare**
- **knowledge capture and sharing across the network, communications, conferences and awards**
- **reviews, reports and recommendations regarding reforms and new opportunities for Landcare, including a state-of-Landcare report**
- **promoting and engaging with the corporate and philanthropic sectors on the value of investment opportunities in Landcare**
- **being a source of advice to the national and state Parliamentary Friends of Landcare groups.**

It is proposed that the facilitator will report to a Board composed of the NLN, Departmental and Ministerial representatives on strategic and operational matters. As the host of the position, the NLN will provide

administrative support and day-to-day oversight through the CEO.

The Facilitator would be appointed jointly by the Ministers for the environment and agriculture, on the basis of recommendations by a selection panel including nominees from the relevant Commonwealth government departments, the NLN and NRM Regions.

Rationale

The inclusion of a National Landcare Facilitator in the October budget is a welcome and important decision by the Government. A changing and complex operating environment, with many participants, and limited resources, is evidence of the need for such a role. The number and diversity of groups participating in NRM is on the increase, yet fragmenting, leading to lower quality outcomes. Landcare provides an anchor for maintaining community-led and quality-focussed outcomes. The NLN as the network around which the Landcare movement self-organises, is the optimum host for the position to enable the facilitator to connect across the elements of the sector. Having the Facilitator hosted by the NLN is consistent with a commitment made to the NLN prior to the election and will garner strong support from the Landcare groups and be seen as evidence of the Government acknowledging and supporting their efforts.

The National Landcare Program Phase 2. Review Report February 2022 noted that: *"Engagement with stakeholders for the review suggests if action was better coordinated, it would achieve much greater impact for the success of Australia's environment, agriculture industry and natural resources."* (page 38)

...and found:

"There is an opportunity to achieve impact at a larger scale by better coordinating the multiple programs, activities and investments being made in Australia's environmental protection, sustainable agriculture and natural resource management system. (page vi)

The structure and roles outlined here draw upon similar roles in other areas (eg Threatened Species Commissioner and National Soils Advocate) and the unique circumstances of Landcare (a national movement, involving mainly volunteers who have strong local connections, and many government and non-government organisations). The recommended process for selecting and appointing a Facilitator will demonstrate a desire to find the best candidate, through a transparent and arms-length process, with the support of all the key players.

This recommendation is supported by the 2021 ALP National Platform (Chapter 3, Climate Change, Energy and the Environment): (emphasis added)

*"56. Labor will ensure national environment funding programs and other volunteer and community programs, **like Landcare funding**, support local sustainable agriculture, soil management, conservation and environmental priorities and contribute to national priorities to improve biodiversity and resilience.*

57. Local volunteers can play an important role in mobilising government and community action on local environmental issues, and their contribution to protecting and preserving Australia's environment, and the wellbeing of Australians, is invaluable.

61. Labor supports Landcare and promotes sustainable farming practices and improved natural resource management."

SUPPORT AN EFFECTIVE LANDCARE RANGER PROGRAM

9. The NLN be actively involved in the design of the Landcare Ranger Program, as announced in the October 2022 budget. This engagement will ensure the program is well targeted and achieves both training and environmental outcomes.

10. Depending on the final design of the program, the National Landcare Network be allocated up to 500 Landcare rangers with associated funding for operations and training, to be hosted by the eight-member State and Territory Landcare Organisations for placement with regional Landcare networks and local Landcare groups to undertake specific roles in project management, environmental restoration and sustainable land management enabling greater outcomes across communities on the ground.

Rationale

In the October 22 Budget the Government confirmed its election commitment to the Landcare Rangers Program with \$88m over 5 years to "...to employ and upskill up to 1000 Landcare rangers to deliver on ground actions to protect and restore Australia's environment and heritage and help address labour and skills shortages in the environment sector..."

The NLN believes that this commitment provides an excellent opportunity to give relevant training in conservation and environmental management (environmental protection, sustainable agriculture and natural resource management), and if well designed will lead to environmental, economic and social benefits in those areas where they are deployed, improved future work opportunities for participants in related fields, and strengthened community capacity and resilience to respond to change, including from natural disasters and climate change.

To achieve this, we need to learn from previous similar programs (e.g., Green Army, Green Corp), which have varied in their success. NLN believes that the program should be aimed at a range of initial skill levels and have streams to guide participants into various career pathways in the Environment sector, including

Landcare. The final design of the program will influence the number of Rangers that could realistically be hosted by the Network.

Landcare is well placed to assist the Government in the design of the program. It has been involved in and has extensive knowledge of the success and failure factors of past programs and can provide an extensive array of placement opportunities across the country (eg, invasive species management, environmental education, revegetation, sustainable agriculture, salinity, project management, environmental restoration, community engagement and technical and administrative roles).

The costs to host, supervise and upskill participants, as well as operational costs, need to be considered as part of the program design and implementation.

As a result of the last decade of severe weather events and climate impacts many Landcare and similar groups have been challenged, as their projects have been subject to damage, new works difficult to instigate and COVID restrictions meaning that groups could not come together. An infusion of assistance and tangible expression of support to groups to help them get projects back on track will significantly boost group morale and activity.

MOBILISE LANDCARE VIA A NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION

11. The Government invest \$2m over 4 years in a national campaign to be run jointly by the NLN and LAL, drawing upon their different and complementary roles and expertise within the Landcare movement. The campaign will rejuvenate awareness of the environmental and natural resource challenges facing Australia, highlight Landcare's role in meeting these challenges, and bring rural and urban communities together in practical on-ground actions. The campaign is a national call-to-action to all Australians. It will use social media and other channels to inspire existing Landcarers and to reach new audiences, including culturally and linguistically diverse communities and young Australians.

Rationale

Landcare has been around for more than 30 years, and it is a proven approach to meeting environmental and natural resource challenges. It has also created many community health and wellbeing benefits (improvements in physical and mental wellbeing; a greater sense of connection with the community and the environment); Landcare is a trusted source of information about the environment (KPMG 2021) and its profile was enhanced through the production of collector Landcare coins and stamps, and its association with the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, and *Olympic Landcare*.

It now requires a contemporary campaign to refresh and bring the message to a new audience, including culturally and linguistically diverse communities, new rural residents, and youth, as well as inspiring existing Landcarers. Such a campaign will also promote the new NLP3, which we hope will include the initiatives proposed in this submission. The campaign will lead to a further demand for support from state and territory organisations, and the other initiatives in this proposal would provide the resources to meet that demand.

The fundamental Landcare ethos of city and country; community, industry and government; working together, to protect and restore the productive capacity and environmental values of Australia's land and waters still offers an effective model and well recognised and regarded brand for on-ground action and individual empowerment. It is the overarching identity which unites its many evolutions and iterations including Bushcare, Coastcare, Parkcare, Dunecare, Rivercare and others. This is a strong foundation from which to launch a Landcare promotional campaign, inspire individual action and volunteerism, help address environmental pessimism, and mobilise community action on the scale necessary to address today's challenges.

The growing recognition and acceptance of the threats posed by climate change and the biodiversity crisis, growing consumer expectations for sustainable production and 'green' credentials, the significant changes in regional economies, land ownership and farming enterprises and the diaspora of urban and coastal citizens to rural towns and farms all provide an opportunity to refresh and invigorate support for Landcare, increase membership and collaborations and allow Landcare to scale up its activities to meet needs.

There is also a real need and a great opportunity to better engage with the significant number of non-traditional corporate farming enterprises, such as those owned by banks and superannuation companies, to support their involvement in sustainable agriculture and environmental management, and to make them active members of their regional Landcare communities. These companies often have a strong and largely untapped corporate social responsibility ethos which is consistent with that of Landcare.

We propose a governance model similar to that used in the \$14m Landcare Led Bushfire Recovery Grants Program (2021) would be adopted for this project and build on Landcare Australia's capabilities in promotion and communications and the NLN's networks, connections with and understanding of the issues and on ground groups.

BUILD MORE INFLUENTIAL NATIONAL LANDCARE CONFERENCE AND AWARDS

12. The Government utilise the partnership arrangements that underpinned the successful delivery of the \$14m Landcare Led Bushfire Recovery Grants Program in 2021, by having the National Landcare Network (NLN) and Landcare Australia Limited (LAL) jointly organise and deliver the biennial National Landcare Conference and National Awards and explore collaborating with the NRM Regions Australia.

Rationale

The National Landcare Conference and National Landcare Awards are high profile events that showcase the important work of Landcare and bring Landcarers and others together to learn and celebrate. The Commonwealth Government contracts the national conference to Landcare Australia Limited.

While the events are well run and popular, there is an opportunity to make them more relevant and representative through the involvement of the NLN and its member groups. These are representative, member-based groups and have a direct engagement with the grassroot of the Landcare movement.

Having all the major players in the Landcare movement involved in the development and running of the conferences will unite the relative strengths of each of the organisations: LAL with its excellent marketing and organisational capacity, the NLN with its extensive networks across government, researchers and the Regional Organisations, and the grass roots of Landcare, which can bring a compelling relevance to the planning and content of the conferences and awards.

A whole-of-Landcare approach to the conference and awards will also help Landcarers and the broader community to understand who the major players are in the Landcare movement and how they work together.

This model should also be applied consistently to the various Territory and State conferences and awards, engaging with the state and territory Landcare peak organisations.

Because of the different reaches of the various Landcare organisations, this model is more likely to be able to bring in more sponsorship and engagement from a broader range of stakeholders.

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