

# The Case for Funding Landcare Facilitators

*In the same way that farmers prepare the land for their crops and strengthen their pastures, Landcare facilitators prepare the ground within communities. It's the community that harvests the benefits of a more productive and sustainable landscape.*

In 2010, the Coalition Government committed \$12.5m to support employment of 68 community-based part-time Landcare facilitators. The peak bodies for community Landcare in Victoria, the Victorian Landcare Council (VLC) and the Farm Tree and Landcare Association (FTLA), believe this funding should be continued, and the numbers of facilitators increased to 100, to support communities right across Victoria. We want a promise from all political parties to strengthen support for Landcare. Here's why .....

## ***Landcare is everywhere***

Victoria has more than 780 Landcare groups and 67 Landcare networks, and more than 500 other community-based natural resource management groups. The State's Landcare and other community-based natural resource management groups have around 60,000 members and engage an additional 45,000 volunteers in on-ground activities each year.

## ***Facilitators help communities get more done***

Landcare Facilitators turn community ideas into projects. Working behind the scenes, they provide crucial administrative support. They listen, encourage and provide technical advice on action. They help start new groups, and re-energise established landcare groups. Facilitators do the legwork that community volunteers don't have much time for.

Judy Croker, facilitator in the Mid-Loddon, organises field trips and specialists to bring new skills to Landcare groups, finds funding for demonstration projects and negotiates with government agencies. The **Baringhup Landcare Group** says: "*As full-time farmers, we're all relatively time poor, and without Judy, a lot that we would like to do just would not happen.*"

"Our landcare group used to come up with lots of ideas on things that landcare could do but most of these ideas remained just that—ideas! Now with access to a facilitator, ideas lead to projects that engage the community around landcare. For example, we have created a *Farmers Teaching Farmers* discussion group, we are part of a student-run community nursery at the local high school growing endangered native plants for landcare projects and we are setting up an annual fox control program."

Ian Maclagan, President, **Neerim and District Landcare Group**



"Most farmers are in their later years. Physically farm work is tiring. Dealing with weed problems, fencing and stock control to keep cover on the ground – especially in hill country. The vagaries of the weather, prices for livestock, breeding and health management of their stock – not to mention their own health. Then there is the bookwork to satisfy Tax Dept and various DEPI departments, budgeting and banks.

"We need the continuity of our facilitators to work with us, the various Departments and the local Council. Submitting applications for Grants is invaluable. They are

constantly looking outside the square to apply for monies to be spent on projects that, but for this dedication, would not be attempted."

Chrystene Antonis, Chairperson, **Balmattum Sheans Creek Landcare Group**

Expertise is essential to focus community projects. The facilitator with the **Broken Catchment Landcare Network** has sourced funds independently of the CMA for soil erosion works, field days, and local media coverage on erosion control. Enlisting the expertise of DEPI staff, she's been able to mount projects that improve farm productivity, protect riparian vegetation and improve water quality, and reduce road infrastructure costs by reducing sand wash into culverts on the Hume Freeway.

### ***Facilitators strengthen communities***

People trust their local Landcare facilitator. They connect experienced farmers with enthusiastic new landholders who want to learn how to manage their properties. They connect communities and government, finding resources and keeping up with what government programs offer. And facilitators make sure that all levels of government use local knowledge.

**Gecko CLaN Landcare Network** facilitator Kerri Robson, with committee members David Jamieson and Neil Devanny, worked with the Strathbogie Shire Council to develop a way to use local Landcare groups in dealing with roadside weeds. Landcare members decide on priorities for where spraying should be conducted, source contractors for on-ground works, oversight works and inspect works before contractors received final their payment. The Council holds the funds and employs the contractors to deliver the works. This model ensures that community knowledge and priorities guide the use of Victorian Government funding, and having local Landcare groups work directly with contractors ensures a high standard of works.



In the **Upper Goulburn Landcare Network**, facilitator Judy Watts has been helping an established group whose active members had dwindled to a core of 5 or 6 people. The establishment of a trail on the old railway line from Tallarook to Mansfield has sparked that group's interest in improving a seven acre bush reserve at a stopping point in Homewood. Judy has provided information on grants to support what the group wants to do, and given advice on writing and printing information brochures.

### ***Landcare is a platform for long-term change***

For 28 years, Landcare has been leading the adoption of sustainable farming practices and increasing habitat quality across Victoria's farmlands and peri-urban holdings. This is not

something government can do on its own—it needs volunteer effort from communities. Landcare is a credible, trusted platform for long-term change, helping to make landscapes and communities more resilient.

**Project Hindmarsh's** Planting Weekend in the Wimmera is the longest running of its kind in Australia. Each year since 1998, over 200 volunteers migrate to the Little Desert Nature Lodge for a weekend of fun and hard work, helping to revegetate and restore native vegetation on public and private land. The vegetation link between the Little and Big Deserts has been rebuilt, and corridors strengthened from Lake Hindmarsh and the Western Wimmera to the Grampians and beyond. Behind each year's projects has been the Hindmarsh Landcare Network's facilitator, doing the organising that allows volunteers to do what they do best.

**In the Mornington Peninsula**, with the help of their Facilitator, Landcare groups have formed the Peninsula Landcare Network. They saw the need for a Landcare presence that can take the big issues of landscape health and work with landholders and local government across the Peninsula. The need to keep these issues in public debate and in the minds of landholders won't change anytime soon, and a Network will keep Landcare there for the long-term.

With their new facilitators, Landcare Groups and Networks have started new groups, developed more projects, and drawn more funds and partners into projects. A small investment in facilitators is making a big difference to communities.

**South Cathedral Landcare Group** formed in February 2013. "Had it not been for the facilitators from Upper Goulburn Landcare Network I feel quite sure it wouldn't have happened. Our initial primary focus is on blackberry control, an issue that is currently out of control and costing landholders, farmers and the general community dearly. With the help of the facilitators we have been successful in obtaining a significant grant from the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce to start addressing the problem. The facilitators are always available to answer our questions, provide information and guidance. Being 'the new kids on the block' we would have had difficulty finding our way through all the rules, regulations and red tape."



Gail Dollimore, South Cathedral Landcare Group

Funding for projects is important too. It's difficult to maintain enthusiasm when there's little funding for work to which local communities have made a commitment. Government and Landcare need to look closely at funding levels for community-initiated projects to look at the trends across regions, and year-by-year.

### ***Landcare – what does the research evidence say?***

*Comment from Professor Allan Curtis, Professor of Integrated Environmental Management, Charles Sturt University, a leading researcher in community-based NRM*

"There is abundant evidence that landcare in Victoria has mobilised a large proportion of rural landholders and successfully engaged the wider public in group activities with a high focus on the public good. Landcare engages rural landholders in activities where they learn with their peers, learn by doing and learn by reflecting on experience, including from the results of monitoring environmental conditions.

"There is evidence that participation enhances landholder awareness, knowledge, management skills and leads to the adoption of practices expected to lead to more sustainable farming practices and improved environmental condition. There is also evidence that landcare activity affects the management practices of non-members.

"Landcare groups operate at the scale where there are "ties that bind" and through the rules, norms and reciprocal relationships they establish, they create social capital that enhances group outcomes, including the ability of groups and networks to deliver large-scale on-ground work in a cost-effective manner. Working through groups and networks, property and catchment planning can be integrated in ways that ensure that landcare activities address the causes of land degradation.

"Landcare also provides a forum where difficult issues can be explored, and a platform that enables government to respond quickly to local issues, as was the case with landcare groups working with the Goulburn Broken CMA in the recovery process after the Black Saturday fires in 2008 or after the floods in Western Victoria in 2010. Groups and networks can also scale-up their activities to improve the management of key environmental assets, including as partners with government agencies and NGOs."

***And the evidence is there in front of our eyes!***





## Neerim & District Landcare

Before



After



The erosion area above a wet, glyceria infested spring has certainly been better protected from grazing stock with the addition of a new fence, ongoing weed control and planting 2000 indigenous plants on the site (not to mention the one-to-one advice the new landholder receives from having specialists in the field tailor the site specific works to his needs!)

## Kilmany-Pearsondale Landcare



Our first project was to establish 7,000 trees along the Central Gippsland Number 3 drain (CG3) at Kilmany and involved negotiating with adjoining landholders, fencing off relevant sections, carrying out significant earthworks to level the clay banks in preparation for revegetation, many days of planting and follow up maintenance.

Before



After



The project was deemed a great success with the trees planted in 3 stages over an 18 month period. In addition to working bees that involved many local members volunteering their time, we had assistance from students at Sale College, Wurruk Primary School and Gippsland Grammar Junior School. Twelve years on, this plantation has greatly improved the appearance of the Kilmany landscape as well as providing shelter for animals, a habitat for many birds and assisting in reducing runoff of fertilisers into the drain and ultimately, the Gippsland Lakes.



## Upper Keiwa Landcare

Before



After



In 2011 the Upper Kiewa Landcare Group received a request from a community member asking if they could do something about restoring a once loved streamside reserve that was over-run by blackberries after the 2003 fires. The task was enormous requiring a bulldozer to create access, but over the past three years much of the blackberry has been controlled and an 800 metre streamside walking path constructed.

The project has garnered considerable investment from many groups - the local council, Parks Victoria, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, an electricity provider and the local Catchment Management Authority. It is estimated that a Landcare grant of just over \$3000 has seen over \$80,000 of value-adding works from project partners.

Over 1000 voluntary hours have been given with a substantial contribution by prisoners from the Beechworth Correctional Centre, school students and the broader community. Fishermen can now access the river and the streamside walking path is proving popular with locals and tourists. Without Landcare (and a small amount of funding to get started) - the area would continue to be a weed infested mess.

## Landscape Transformation, one working bee at a time!



How did the Upper Kiewa Landcare Group transform a 500m section of the East Kiewa River from a inaccessible, blackberry-infested mess, into a joyful chorus of bush and mountain river? One working bee at a time, for three years, with community muscle and financial support from the Alpine Shire, AGL, ParksVic, and State Landcare funding. Take community Landcare out of the picture, and how much of this would happen?