

## **Landcare Muster Background Paper**

In NSW we currently have 1,854 groups, 47,658 individuals in NSW that call themselves landcarers. Landcare membership in NSW has grown by about 7% in the last 9 months.

Landcare continues to grow as it has done since conception, despite varying support from governments. Landcare works and the community likes to use the landcare model to get involved in NRM. Volunteers will turn up regardless of any policy or program. To encourage this urge to be part of the solution we must continue to ensure there are policies and programs that support, encourage... even inspire this urge.

The movement needs to make sure its voice is heard and that support continues through the inevitable changes to governments and their policies.

### **Where it all started**

There is some argument about where the first landcare groups existed, apparently there were groups in Victoria in the early '80s... but exactly when and where it all started depends how you define landcare and how far you want to go back!

Late in the eighties, the federal Government, with bi-partisan support, drafted a national, decade long program costing \$340 million, the first National Landcare Program. This compared with the allocation for soil conservation in the previous year of \$1 million, so this was a big program.

The '90s was declared the decade of Landcare.

### **The NSW Landcare Working Group**

The NSW Landcare Working Group (NLWG) was set up as a sub-committee of the State Catchment Management Coordinating Committee to engage government, business and community in the Decade of Landcare Plan and to produce an evaluation of the plan's efficacy.

The Decade of Landcare Plan set goals, objectives and actions for the whole community to pursue over the next 10 years. The Decade of Landcare Evaluation was prepared in NSW in accord with the last action identified in the plan.

The evaluation showed that involvement in landcare steadily increased, the profile of the landcare idea grew with more and more people recognising the brand. Landcare members were more likely to be involved in training, field days, property planning, and TAFE courses. The list of landcare partners grew and grew.

The NLWG was comprised of 13 landcarers, (elected by their communities in each of the 'Natural Resource Management Areas' that the state was divided into in those days) representatives of organisations like Greening Australia, the Local Government and Shires Association and reps from each of the Government Departments. In all the group included about 27 members and was originally jointly chaired by a community

and a Government Agency member. Later this was changed to a community landcare Chair and an agency Deputy Chair.

Since the end of the Decade of Landcare this body's role had morphed into advising the Government on landcare Issues and advocating and providing leadership for landcare in NSW. However it lacked the structure (it was too big and was dominated by bureaucrats), the position (it did not have a direct reporting line to a decision maker) and the resources (it was resourced only really to meet) to perform this function effectively.

Some members and others were actively lobbying for improvements to the structure and function of the NLWG, by 2003 we had achieved a part time project officer for the Group.

### **Since NSW Government NRM reforms**

Other events, however, overtook and the NLWG was abolished in 2003 when the NSW Government's 'NRM Reforms' saw the establishment of 13 Catchment Management Authorities, the formation of the Natural Resources Commission and the creation of the Natural Resources Advisory Council. This latter body provides stakeholder advice to the Government and took over from a range of sectoral advisory bodies including the Landcare Working Group.

Those who had been lobbying for changes to the NLWG had seen the reforms coming and were determined to see a peak body to represent the interests of the landcare movement persist.

With the experience of the NLWG in mind, a model for a body that would provide both a responsive, agile and skilled body to participate effectively in the 'paper war' that is state level representation and provide for some level of democratic representation of the greater movement was conceived. Craig Knowles, the Minister for Natural Resources at the time, was supportive.

The model proposed a two part body; a small, skills based executive that related to and was informed by a reference group. The executive would be chosen by a merit based process addressing criteria around NRM skills, experience with landcare and landcare projects, experience with community involvement as well as having the support of their community. Craig Knowles proposed that the Chair of this executive would be appointed to NRAC. With Craig's support this body, the NSW Landcare Committee was eventually appointed by the then Director General of the Department, Jennifer Westacott.

The second half of the model was to be composed of one locally based representative from each of the 13 Catchment Management Authority areas, representatives of the Aboriginal Community and possibly reps from NGOs such as Greening Australia and Conservation Volunteers Australia. This part of the model would provide 'grass roots' input into the executive and serve as a communications conduit to and from the greater landcare movement across the state.

The Reference Group was never set up as again events overtook and when Premier Carr resigned so did Minister Knowles and with him went support for the completion of the model.

### **The NSW Landcare Committee**

The NSW Landcare Committee (NLC) is still operating and is made up of 5 landcarers and representatives of; Local Government, the Aboriginal Community, the Catchment Management Authorities Chairs Council and the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC).

The Committee is supported by staff from DECC and has a small budget that allows it to meet 4 or 5 time a year. The committee does not have resources to allow its members to travel or communicate across the state.

Over the last 3 years the NLC has made many representations to Ministers, Directors General and to the CMA Chairs Council (CCC) for support for the formation of a reference group and for more resources to improve the efficacy of the Committee, with little success.

Recently our relationship with the CCC has improved and a recent meeting with the new Director General of DECC has been promising.

### **Landcare Gathering at Myuna Bay**

In June 2007, Lake Macquarie Landcare, supported by Landcare Australia Limited and Lake Macquarie Shire Council hosted a 'Landcare Gathering' at Myuna Bay, on the shores of Lake Macquarie. This gathering was prompted by the feeling among many landcarers that landcare, since the NSW Government's 'NRM Reforms' was not receiving the strong, bipartisan support for its activities that it had enjoyed in the past. The gathering was an effort to discuss this and other issues with a view to strengthening landcare's voice across the state through mutual support, sharing success and by improving communications.

An issue raised strongly at the gathering was landcare's representation at the state level. It was resolved to take steps to improve landcare's 'voice' in NSW. Considering what we had already that we might build upon and that the support we already had from the State was important, it was suggested that filling the missing part of the existing model could be a constructive first step toward a better functioning, more independent voice for landcare in NSW.

A budget was provided by Landcare Australia Limited (\$10,000 pa) and a working group was tasked with furthering the idea. The working group has suggested an annual 'Landcare Muster' with a desired outcome for the day the formation of a 'NSW Landcare Community Reference Group', this group's role is, in the short term, to organise a yearly 'Landcare Muster' and fill the role of the 'missing' part of the original model. In the medium term this body could provide nominations to the NSW Landcare Committee and in the longer term... well who knows, by evolution rather than revolution, we could end up with a completely independent peak body for the landcare movement in NSW.