



Australian
Landcare
Council

Evolution of Landcare in Australia

In the context of Australian Government natural resource
management policy and programs

Perspectives from the former National Landcare Facilitator

Coral Love



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About the author:

Coral Love's longstanding experience and involvement in Landcare since 1995 has included membership of the Bengworden Landcare Group 1995–2002 and Mudgegonga Landcare Group 2005–current; Landcare Facilitator for the East Gippsland Landcare Network 1997–2000; and National Landcare Facilitator role 2002–09 (which saw her travel the country visiting countless community-based groups, support staff and government and non-government organisations to build her understanding of local community involvement and achievements).

In the role of the National Landcare Facilitator she contributed reports to the Australian Landcare Council and Landcare Australia Ltd Advisory Committee meetings (2002–08) and oversaw the development and completion of the Australian Framework for Landcare (as Chair of the Reference Group during 2010). In addition, she was member of the Australian Landcare Council from 2010–12 and contributed to the development and completion of the Framework's Community Call for Action (as Chair of the Council's working group during 2011).

Purpose of this paper

The “Evolution of Landcare in Australia” has been researched and written for the Australian Landcare Council, Ministers and staff of the Australian Government and stakeholders, to inform natural resource management policy and programs on the Landcare model. Information in this document is drawn from personal experiences, anecdotal reports and research of Australian Government policy and actions.

What is Landcare?

The term ‘Landcare’ means different things to different people across local Australian communities and within government and non-government organisations. For this publication the generic term ‘Landcare’ is qualified – adapted from the Australian Framework for Landcare (Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group, 2010).

‘Landcare’ is an approach that comprises:

- **Ethic** – a philosophy, influencing the way people live and work in the landscape while caring for the land (soil, water and biota).
- **Movement** – local community action founded on stewardship and volunteerism, putting the philosophy into practice.
- **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 policies, structures, programs and partnerships influencing broad-scale community participation in sustainable resource management.

Executive summary

This publication sets out a brief account of the evolution and the achievements of Landcare in Australia, with a focus on government policy and programs to repair and prevent land degradation.

It is separated into six sections:

- Soil conservation in Australia from the 1930s
- The first phase of the Landcare approach from 1986 to 1991
- The second phase, from 1992 to 1996
- The third phase, from 1997 to 2001
- The fourth phase, from 2002 to 2007
- The fifth phase, from 2008 to 2013.

A history of land degradation

While the degradation of Australia's land following European settlement was noted early in our nation's history by some, it wasn't until the 1930s that national policies and legislation to address these issues were initiated.

Despite this early action, over the next 50 years broad-scale land degradation increased across the country. It was influenced by the combined effects of extreme seasonal conditions, the spread of invasive plants and animals, continued land clearing, traditional European agricultural practices (not suited to Australian soils), mechanisation, government land settlement and management policies, and pressure from increasing development across urban and coastal landscapes.

The natural resource base for food and fibre production for growing populations, the livelihoods of primary producers and the quality of life for all Australians was under serious threat.

The 1983 dust storm that carried soil from Victoria's Mallee and Wimmera regions across the state and to Melbourne increased the urgency to 'fix' the problem.

Federal, State and Territory governments looked to a solution, and Victoria's LandCare program became the model to base a national framework upon – *the Decade of Landcare*.

Community participation

The Landcare approach combined an ethic, movement and model that continues to influence broad-scale community-based participation in sustainable resource use and management today.

Landcare has made a substantial contribution to Australia's achievements and prosperity and provides an essential vehicle to support Australia in changing direction to progress ecologically sustainable development. In 2012, more than 5000 community-based Landcare and related groups are operating and involved in local activities, and participation in Landcare has generated major community in-kind and financial investment.

Landcare activities have reduced degradation of our natural resource base and the integration of resource management practices into food and fibre production. It has also promoted a sense of responsibility outside landholder property boundaries.

Landcare also supports intergenerational learning through group corporate knowledge, family knowledge and school activities. It has enabled thousands of citizens and communities to develop their capacities in skills, knowledge and application to promote the repair of degraded private and public land, addressing issues such as soil erosion, water quality and ecological decline.

Social cohesion and community resilience have been strengthened across districts through involvement in Landcare and its incorporation of social, economic, environmental and cultural considerations. This has also assisted in disaster recovery efforts in farming and pastoral areas.

Aboriginal 'caring for country' is better integrated with European land management cultures and their people through Landcare activities, which provide new opportunities for Aboriginal people to reconnect with country.

Landcare activities are also important to building understanding of changes required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change to ensure water quality and availability while maintaining food and fibre security.

Landcare's achievements have positioned Australia as a world leader in developing and implementing a national community-based process to shift local attitudes and practices at the local level.

While the Landcare ethic and movement have remained an enduring combination from the humble beginnings in Victoria in 1986, the model has waxed and waned in more recent years since the *Decade of Landcare Plan* expired in 2001 and the focus on the model has diminished.

The Australian Government set a new focus on delivery through a regional and then national purchaser/provider model to improve investment outcomes – but this has not necessarily engaged broad-scale community participation.

Today, community-based groups are but one of many delivering on the government's national priorities within the complex natural resource management system that now exists. Not only does this volunteer not-for-profit sector contribute considerable in-kind value towards achieving environmental outcomes, their contribution to society also comes in the way of support to community wellbeing and resilience from within.

Refocusing on the Landcare model, the Australian Government initiated the development of the *Australian Framework for Landcare*. It was completed in 2010 after wide consultation with the Landcare movement followed by further consultation and development of its *Community Call for Action*.

Landcare for the future

Landcare needs to be recognised and valued for its contribution to Australia's prosperity and the progress and potential it offers our future. Leadership from all levels of government is essential to the effectiveness of the Landcare model. The challenge remains to develop and implement a system with consistent processes that can stand the test of time in a fast-changing world.

Managing natural resource issues across Australia is now recognised as an intergenerational process and remains critical to the resilience of people, their communities and our natural resource base. It underpins critical issues for the future such as greenhouse gas emissions, climate change variability, water quality and availability and food and fibre security for growing populations in Australia and around the world.

Broad-scale community participation is needed for Australia to manage these ongoing challenges.

Community-based groups in their districts and neighbourhoods and their mosaic of networks are uniquely positioned to continue driving and supporting long-term and local change management processes. This is their niche.

For broad-scale community participation to continue, a system that supports community ownership of environmental problems and their commitment to identifying and applying local solutions is vital.

- Providing landcarers with the opportunity to participate in delivering natural resource management programs will maximise investment return and maintain the commitment and capacity of the Landcare movement to act.
- Ensuring the Landcare model is included as a key consideration in all levels of policy development relating to sustainable resource management can potentially maximise the effectiveness of government investment in sustainable resource management.
- Re-strengthening partnerships between the Australian, State, Territory and local governments and industry, business and conservation sectors will underpin this resolve.

The Landcare movement's new *Australian Framework for Landcare* and associated *Community Call for Action* provide a key platform for strategic development, growth and support for broad-scale community participation for the long-term.

Soil conservation in Australia from the 1930s

The severity of land degradation across Australia's farming and pastoral landscapes became apparent by the 1930s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Primary industries as well as the natural resource base vital for supporting food and fibre production were considered seriously threatened.

The combined effects of natural processes such as water runoff, wind and frequent long periods of drought and the impacts of a changed landscape exposed by rabbit plagues, over grazing and land clearing created serious and wide-ranging soil erosion issues (Scott, Anthony, 2001).

Traditional European agricultural practices were not suited to many areas of Australia with its old soils and variable seasons. The policies of government regarding land settlement and management as well as the drive to conquer and transform land to optimise production were taking their toll.

Government response

Within three decades of Australia's federation in 1901 and recognising the need for a consistent approach across the country, Federal, State and Territory government policy, programs and structures set about to address soil degradation to ensure we maintained our resource base for food and fibre production for the future.

In 1936 the Australian Government requested "all states form soil conservation committees to promote and coordinate efforts to combat the wastage of soil resources" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

Government agricultural agencies generally formed statutory soil boards in rural areas in New South Wales from the late 1930s, in South Australia and Western Australia from the 1940s, in Victoria from the 1950s and on the Darling Downs in Queensland from the 1960s (Campbell, Andrew, 1994).

State and territory agricultural departments initially developed a system of agricultural production and soil conservation research (mainly derived from government institutions) and technical extension services (Scott, Anthony, 2001) for individual farmers and pastoralists. Soil conservation programs addressing erosion control works continued over the following decades in response to the particular needs within each state and territory, while adjusting to

revolutionary changes such as mechanisation, fertilisers, irrigation, chemicals and the use of pathogens and poisons.

However, the extent, scale and potential of land degradation was underestimated. The complexity of environmental issues continued to increase. They included soil erosion, weed infestations, feral animals, tree cover decline, water quality and dryland (and irrigation), salinity.

National structures and programs

The Australian Government recognised the need to draw together national strategies on land and water management, with national structures and programs established from the 1930s and continuing throughout the century. These included:

- The *Standing Committee of Soil Conservation* was established in 1946 (Australian Government, 2011) to act as the national coordinating body on soil conservation. The Committee reported to the Australian Agricultural Council, established in 1935 for continuous consultation amongst Australian governments on economic aspects of primary production.
- The *Australian Water Resources Council* was established in 1963 with a focus on the importance of water resources for agriculture (Australian Government, 2011).
- A *Collaborative Soil Conservation Study* was commissioned by the Australian, State and Territory governments in 1975 and the findings published in 1978. This influenced the development of the *National Soil Conservation Program* in 1983.
- The *National Tree Program* was launched in 1982 by the Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories (Greening Australia, 2007).
- A *National Conservation Strategy* was adopted in 1983 to implement the objectives of the *International Union Conservation of Nature's 1980 World Conservation Strategy* (Australian Government, 2010).
- The *National Soil Conservation Program* (1983–92) was administered by the Department of Primary Industries and Energy for various landmark initiatives. The *Federal Water Resources Assistance Program* (1984–93) commenced a year later. Legislation followed with the *Soil Conservation (Financial Assistance) Act 1985*. The *Soil Conservation Advisory Committee* was formed under this Act.

- The *Australian Soil Conservation Council* was established in 1985 (replacing the Standing Committee on Soil Conservation) to act as a national government coordinating body on all aspects of soil conservation and land degradation (Australian Government, 2011).
- State and Territory governments extended their programs in an attempt to address increasing issues and introduced various new Acts relating to environment protection. Queensland and Victoria trialed soil erosion control on a catchment basis in the mid 1950s, which was adopted in New South Wales from the 1960s (Scott, Anthony, 2001). The concept of 'catchment management' gained traction as issues were often across more than one isolated property. State Government policies, such as the NSW Government's *Total Catchment Management* (1984) moved to coordinate natural resource management using whole catchments as the basis for planning and management and to balance resource utilisation and conservation.

Meanwhile, non-government organisations were establishing to progress and assist conservation across the country beginning with the *Australian Conservation Foundation* in 1964, providing advocacy, research and outreach on a range of conservation issues (Australian Conservation Foundation, 2004).

The *World Wildlife Fund*, founded internationally in 1961, established an office in Australia in 1978 to focus efforts on conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring the sustainable use of renewable natural resources and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption (World Wildlife Fund, unknown).

Greening Australia formed in 1982 to engage the community in vegetation management and protection (Greening Australia, 2007). The *Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers* formed in 1982 to attract and coordinate volunteers for environmental restoration projects (Conservation Volunteers Australia, 2010).

Involving farmers and pastoralists

From the 1930s, State and Territory governments generally provided land management advice to farmers and pastoralists through extension officers (Scott, Anthony, 2001) who supported them in coordinated on-ground technical soil rehabilitation works on their properties. This included 'soldier settlers', some of whom had not farmed before but had settled on land set aside exclusively for them under *Closer Settlement Acts* (Public Record Office Victoria, 2011). Over time, the officers also worked with newly-formed local farmer and pastoralist producer groups, often established and supported by State Government programs such as South Australia's Soil Conservation Boards.

The concept of 'whole farm planning' for soil conservation began to evolve. As environmental issues broadened towards the 1980s, other producer groups established that were supported by government and industry programs targeting a range of specific issues. For example, tree decline on-farm or rabbit and weed control was a priority in Victoria and from 1982, *Land Conservation District Committees* in Western Australia targeted the management of soil conservation issues including dryland salinity (Campbell, Andrew, 1994).

Initially, State Government agricultural departments and agencies used the term 'conservation' to define managing the soil resource base for food and fibre production. Farmers and pastoralists were becoming increasingly concerned about the extent of the environmental issues and the impacts of traditional (European) land management practices. They were also recognising the importance of a healthy resource base for production and landscape function to maintain viable businesses. Identifying how to 'fix' these environmental issues quickly across all landscapes became an issue in itself.

From the 1960s, the international focus on conservation developed with a broader ecological basis. Organisations such as the *Australian Conservation Foundation* and the *World Wildlife Fund* referred to 'conservation' from the perspective of the natural environment and native flora and fauna. As this awareness increased and concerns relating to ecological conservation developed across urban Australia, those interested began to form into groups in local neighbourhoods such as 'Friends of' groups by the 1980s. Their time was volunteered to work on environmental flora and fauna restoration projects.

Opposing views on 'conservation' became a national contentious issue around this time, polarising urban citizens and farmers and pastoralists as well as government and non-government environmental and agricultural organisations. Skepticism and fear generally prevailed amongst farming and pastoral communities about the newer concept of 'ecological conservation' due to perceived threats of associated increases in production costs and losses through productive land having to be 'locked up'. They believed their livelihoods and the need to produce food and fibre should not be compromised in the debate and that the substantial contribution they were making to Australia's development and prosperity was not recognised.

In February 1983, during a long and severe drought, a dust storm of major proportions originated in the Victoria's wheat-growing Mallee and Wimmera regions, sweeping across the state and engulfing Melbourne (Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology, 2011). 'Fixing' the problem became a matter of national urgency. Governments focused on the most effective way to engage all farmers and pastoralists and support them to develop and adopt best land use and management practices in their productive enterprises.

A number of measures were enlisted while whole farm planning was reinvigorated and broadened in Victoria, influenced by the *Potter Farmland Plan* concept (Victorian Government Department of Primary Industries, 2011). Funded for two years from 1984 to 1986 through the *Potter Foundation* in partnership with the Victorian Government, this concept was based on the principles of local farmers learning together through demonstration projects on their farms. Fifteen farms in western Victoria demonstrated an integrated approach to ecologically and economically sustainable farming. The soil conservation focus was expanded to incorporate property layout, water conservation, tillage methods, pasture and crop development and tree planting. Being relevant to their business needs and practical in application, this process was seen as a way of encouraging others to participate.

A major shift in thinking

A more effective approach was sought after to engage all farmers and pastoralists to address land degradation across the country.

The efficiencies and effectiveness of working with small, local farmer and pastoral groups together with the experiences from the *Potter Farmland Plan* influenced a major shift in government policy. It moved away from the agricultural technical advisory extension model to the concept of self-directed, community-based group learning and action.

The concept was based on an understanding that for broad-scale community participation at the local level, it was vital that community ownership of the problem and commitment to achieving the solution existed. It was also thought an integrated approach would build on the previous method of addressing single focus issues in isolation.

A growing number of farmers and pastoralists had reached a point where they wanted to address the fundamental causes of land degradation. Making their own informed decisions based on research, local knowledge and on-ground learning rather than relying only on outside advice reduced the element of risk attached to changing how their farm businesses operated.

FIRST PHASE – The Landcare approach across Australian states and territories, 1986–1991

Government arrangements

The Victorian Government developed its *LandCare Program* in 1986 directly influenced by the *Potter Farmland Plan* (Australian Landcare Council, 2008). It was an initiative of Joan Kirner (the Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands) and Heather Mitchell (President of the *Victorian Farmers Federation*). The program was developed on the principles of community-based learning and action, tackling a range of integrated land protection issues with local groups involved in planning and implementing activities (Campbell, Andrew, 1994); (Australian Landcare Council, 2008).

Building on many years of experience across each state and territory, the first phase of the Landcare era focused on the broader land (rather than soil) conservation concept. It targeted self-directed learning by farmer and pastoral community-based groups, supported by overarching government and non-government policies, programs, structures and resources.

The Australian Government's *National Soil Conservation Program* operated from 1983 to 1992, with \$132.6 million invested over ten years (incorporating State and Territory government contributions). The program was restructured in 1988–89 to provide for *Community Landcare Support*, research, program support and public awareness, education and training. This influenced all State and Territory governments in adopting the Landcare approach, such as the Queensland Government's *Land Care Program*.

'Catchment management' continued to influence government decision-making and in 1988, Integrated Catchment Management was introduced into State policy in Western Australia to overcome land and water degradation (Mitchell, B. & Hollick, M., 1993). In 1991, the Queensland Government launched its Integrated Catchment Management policy. An increasing number of catchment-based projects were also supported through the *National Soil Conservation Program*.

At an international level, *Our Common Future*, also known as the *Brundtland Report*, was commissioned by the *United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development* as a 'global agenda for change'. Published in 1987 (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), it brought environmental issues to the political agenda and interlinked the environment and development as a single issue. It significantly influenced governments around

the world (including Australia) and led to the Australian Government establishing processes that incorporated ecologically sustainable development.

Involving farmer and pastoralist groups

Based on the Landcare ethic of caring for the land and principles of stewardship and volunteerism, the first LandCare group formed in Victoria at Winjallock, near St Arnaud, on 25 November 1986. Existing single-focused Farm Tree, Rabbit Control and Weed Control groups continued operating across the state, with many becoming LandCare groups over time. Land Care committees established from 1986 in Queensland. In 1987, catchment groups in Western Australia began to establish to work under existing Land Conservation District Councils. A number of large pastoral groups established from 1987 in the Northern Territory, such as the *Victoria River District Conservation Association*. Landcare groups established from 1988 in New South Wales, and under the umbrella of the *Soil Conservation Boards* in South Australia. In Tasmania, they established from 1989 following on from Tree groups and Rural Commodity groups (Campbell, 1990).

Landcare groups were established across the country as farmers and pastoralists responded to the concept, realising the many advantages of working in community-based groups. Others remained skeptical and watched from the sidelines, some believing it a 'government plot' supporting ecological conservation at their expense. However, those who joined groups were keen to address environmental degradation caused by food and fibre production to maintain the resource base and freely gave their time to learn about the problem and make the necessary changes to 'fix' it. They also believed that by demonstrating better ways of management and the associated two-way benefits to their skeptical neighbours, they too would become involved in time.

The 'care' group concept caught on in non-agricultural landscapes as well, although funding was sourced from other Australian, State and Territory government programs. The first Dunecare groups were established along the coast of New South Wales in 1988 (Australian Landcare Council, 2008).

Policy transition phase

The conservation debate continued across the country and was heightened as State and Territory governments legislated to address natural resource issues (such as native vegetation decline) through protecting native vegetation and biodiversity values. New legislation relating to

native vegetation retention fuelled the national debate, polarising views on either 'green' (ecological) or 'brown' (soil) conservation.

The success of state and territory Landcare programs together with messages from the *Brundtland Report* prompted an alliance (Australian Conservation Foundation, 2004) (National Farmers Federation, 2011) (Campbell, Andrew, 1994) between the late Rick Farley, the Executive Director of the *National Farmers Federation* and Phillip Toyne, Head of the *Australian Conservation Foundation*. At the time, their respective organisations were on opposing sides of the fence in the conservation debate. Their combined national vision integrating 'ecological conservation' into food and fibre production influenced fundamental changes in attitude of their organisations. This led to their subsequent lobbying for Australian Government leadership of an integrated approach by all stakeholders. This was the catalyst to develop new policy that supported a national framework.

On 20 July 1989, launching the *Statement of the Environment 'Our Country Our Future'* (Hawke, Bob, 1999) the Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, announced 1990 a *Year of Landcare* and the 1990s a *Decade of Landcare*. In his speech, the Prime Minister highlighted the environmental challenges Australia was facing, including the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and tackle soil degradation, tree decline, ecological decline and land and water pollution. He asked the community "to join us in these efforts for it is only by working together that we will restore and improve our environment". He also announced funding would be directed to the *Murray Darling Basin Commission* for the Basin's Natural Resource Management Strategy (classified a highly important 'food bowl' production area within Australia) as well as new *One Billion Trees, Save the Bush* and *Endangered Species* programs supporting ecological protection, maintenance and enhancement.

With support and guidance from the *Australian Conservation Foundation* and the *National Farmers Federation*, the Australian Government initially set about developing a strategic framework, the *National Decade of Landcare Plan*. Key stakeholders involved included State, Territory and local governments as well as the industry and corporate sectors. The aim of the national framework, with ongoing bi-partisan support, was to drive institutional change, bring together a range of stakeholders and engage local communities. The vision underlying it was for "the development and implementation of systems of land use and management which will sustain individual and community benefits now and into the future" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991).

State and Territory governments contributed significantly to the Australian Government's overall policy and program design for the *Decade of Landcare Plan* through the Ministerial

Councils and Standing Committees, particularly the *Standing Committee on Agriculture* (Australian Government, 2011).

Landcare became an approach comprising:

- **Ethic** – a philosophy, influencing the way people live and work in the landscape while caring for the land (soil, water and biota).
- **Movement** – local community action founded on stewardship and volunteerism, putting the philosophy into practice.
- **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 policies, structures, programs and partnerships supporting broad-scale community participation in sustainable resource management (Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group, 2010).

The *National Soil Conservation Program*, delivered through the Australian Government's agricultural Department of Primary Industries and Energy and administered through the *Soil Conservation Advisory Committee*, was further restructured to accommodate Landcare elements through national and state components. These included:

- The *National Landcare Facilitator Project* – established in 1989 and administered by the Department of Primary Industries and Energy, this facilitator role provided an overview of the development of Landcare across the states and territories to the *National Soil Conservation Advisory Committee* (previously advising the Australian Government on the *National Soil Conservation Program*), which in turn advised on the *Decade of Landcare Plan* to the Federal Ministers for Agriculture and the Environment and their respective departments. Mindful of the national conservation debate at the time, the position operated at 'arm's length' from government, enabling a more effective and open consultation process with existing Landcare groups across the country. Andrew Campbell was employed in the role, funded through the Advisory Committee until 1992.
- *Landcare Australia Ltd* – this not-for-profit company was established in October 1989 to develop and manage a national public awareness campaign and facilitate a steadily increasing contribution by the corporate sector to funding Landcare activities. Brian Scarsbrick was employed as Chief Executive of *Landcare Australia Ltd* and John Claringbould was appointed Chair of the Board. *Landcare Australia Ltd* developed the Landcare logo (symbolising the Landcare ethic), having ownership of the trademark and custodianship of

the brand. The logo was used for promotional purposes and was available to Landcare groups.

- *Landcare groups* – these aimed to develop environmental activities with access to funding for facilitation support. Initially, technical extension staff in State and Territory government agencies provided support for developing Landcare groups and their activities. During 1989, there were 425 positions funded (mostly technical, extension and scientific support from state and territory soil conservation agencies). Of these, 18 were employed in Landcare group facilitator positions as a new form of extension change-agent. By 1991–92, approximately 160 of 570 positions were employed by Landcare groups. It was expected new facilitator positions (which comprised the largest expenditure of the Landcare component of the *National Soil Conservation Program*) would be required only until groups were self-functioning and the Landcare movement was underway. Meanwhile, community projects were developed and responsibility was devolved to State Assessment Panels established to advise and prioritise potential projects.
- In 1991, the *Standing Committee on Agriculture* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995) developed a set of principles that defined the term ‘sustainability’ to guide the agricultural sector, influencing Landcare elements in the *National Soil Conservation Program* and the *Decade of Landcare Plan*. This definition was:

Sustainable agriculture is the use of farming practices and systems that maintain or enhance:

- the economic viability of agricultural production
- the natural resource base
- other ecosystems influenced by agricultural activity.

Meanwhile, the Australian Government started developing a new approach to research and development in the agricultural sector (jointly funded through government and industry) targeting the establishment of industry-specific Rural Research and Development Corporations from 1989 and Co-operative Research Centres from 1991. The *Land and Water Rural Research and Development Corporation* was established in 1990 (later known as *Land & Water Australia*) under the Primary Industries and Energy Research and Development legislation incorporating soil conservation and water research program funds. Its charter was to invest in generating and managing new knowledge, focusing on the sustainability of Australia’s productive agricultural landscapes.

The transition to Landcare was not without its difficulties. Community-based groups had to 'feel' their way with new policies, structures, programs and staff. Research and development institutions, particularly those state-based, experienced reduced funding for research work and employment of scientific extension officers. Agricultural extension staff reduced in numbers and those who remained were required to adjust to the new system. The *National Soil Conservation* and *Federal Water Resources Assistance Programs* evolved into the *National Landcare Program*, which began in 1992.

SECOND PHASE – Decade of Landcare Plan, National Landcare Program, 1992–1996

Government arrangements

The Australian, State and Territory governments' *Decade of Landcare Plan*, developed in accord with the *National Overview*, was launched in 1992 (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997). It became a key driver of work to address land degradation through sustainable land use while coming to terms with ecologically sustainable development. The first part of the *Decade of Landcare Plan* was about awareness-raising and planning. The *Natural Resource Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992* was legislated "to grant financial assistance in connection with projects relating to natural resources management, to establish a Natural Resources Management Account, to establish a *National Landcare Advisory Committee* and for related purposes".

Australia's *National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development* (Ecologically Sustainable Development Steering Committee, 1992) was developed in response to the 1987 *United Nations World Commission on the Environment and Development*. 'Ecologically sustainable development' was interpreted as using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained and the total quality of life now and in future can be increased. "The most important change has been the increasing integration of economic and ecological considerations" (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997). *The Natural Resource Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992* was Australia's first federal government Act to include the ecologically sustainable development principles from the National Strategy. It also provided for an integrated approach to managing soil, water and vegetation, rather than approaching each separately.

Principles from the National Strategy influenced the new national *Decade of Landcare* initiative. The *Decade of Landcare Plan* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991) set out five national goals:

1. The whole community is aware of the problem of land degradation and the benefits of sustainable land use.
2. Continuing development and implementation of sustainable land-use principles and practices.
3. All public and private land users and managers understanding the principles of sustainable land use and applying them in their use and management decisions.

4. All Australians working together in partnership for sustainable land use.
5. Effective and appropriate economic, legislative and policy mechanisms in place to facilitate the achievement of sustainable land use.

The new *National Landcare Program* (\$260 million over ten years plus \$46 million over four years) was based on the concept of partnerships and focused on sustainable primary food and fibre production. It operated under the *Natural Resource Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992* and became a key national environmental land and water conservation program. It covered natural resource management in catchments as well as community Landcare action, as it was viewed that catchment management (the government part of the partnership) would build on actions of local groups (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997). Developed and administered by a Landcare Policy section within the Department of Primary Industries and Energy, the *National Landcare Program* was structured similarly to the former *National Soil Conservation Program*. It had three components (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997) (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991):

- **Community grants** – these included community elements of the former soil and water programs targeting farmers and pastoralists in sustainable land use and management. State, Territory and local governments as well as non-government organisations were eligible for funding if partnering with community-based groups. There was a general limit of \$15 000 available per project based on \$1 for \$1 matching funds. The programs were administered jointly by the Australian Government’s agricultural and environmental departments, through an informal ‘one-stop-shop’ (administrative umbrella) in an attempt to provide user-friendly application processes for groups. (Other community grants also available were components of the *Murray Darling Basin Commission’s Natural Resource Management Strategy* and elements of the Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories’ new *One Billion Trees, Save the Bush* and *Endangered Species* programs.)
- **Federal, State and Territory government arrangements** – formal ‘Partnership Agreements’ required under the *Natural Resource Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992* with State and Territory governments established their responsibility for the delivery and joint resourcing and funding of projects. State and Territory governments were responsible for facilitating and supporting involvement of community-based groups while managing project funding and the delivery of community and Federal, State and Territory government projects. Jointly funded major projects included: Catchment Planning and Management; Land Management and Sustainable Agriculture (including Property Management Planning); regional initiatives and water services; and support for community engagement and participation activities. Responsibility was devolved to *Technical and Regional Assessment*

Panels, established to work with existing *State Assessment Panels* (having community representation), with responsibility for working through the checks and balances of project proposals and providing advice to the Australian Government.

- **National component** – structures within the national component usually had a broader focus that encompassed all on-ground activity such as primary production, Aboriginal land management and conservation activities on public and private land. They included:
 - *Landcare Australia Ltd* and the *National Landcare Facilitator Project*: already in operation, they remained a part of the national component. A new National Landcare Facilitator, Helen Alexander, was employed in the role from 1994–95.
 - The newly appointed community consultation forum: the *National Landcare Advisory Committee* replaced the National Soil Conservation Advisory Committee and operated under the *Natural Resource Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992*. It advised the Australian Government’s Minister for Primary Industries and Minister for the Environment on national issues, strategic directions and policy priorities on the land and water elements of the *National Landcare Program*. Another key focus was the partnership between government and Landcare groups.
 - Allocations for nationally-funded projects: these included Aboriginal Landcare, innovation, monitoring and evaluation with a range of major studies and assessments such as: the *Australian Collaborative Land Evaluation Project*; industry sustainability initiatives such as the *Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study*; and regional catchment-based investment such as the *Lake Eyre Basin Initiative*.

The achievements of the Landcare approach was noticed internationally, and other countries began adapting the model to their needs, so *International Landcare* developed as another part of the national component.

The concept of delivering community grants through Landcare broadened across many state and national environmental programs from this time. For example, in 1993 the Australian Government’s Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories established a *Waterwatch* program (Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2007) with a focus on community monitoring of water quality across the country. A *Coastcare* program (Landcare Australia Ltd, 2009) was established in 1995 and was delivered by *Landcare Australia Ltd* with a focus on community involvement in coastal restoration and protection. Both programs were incorporated under the *National Landcare Program’s* administrative umbrella.

Institutional change at the national level included the formation of Ministerial Councils, comprising the Australian, State and Territory governments (Australian Government, 2011). The *Australian and New Zealand Environment Conservation Council* was established in 1991 for member governments to form national and international policies on environment and conservation and in 1992, the *Australian Agricultural Council*, *Australian Soil Conservation Council* and *Australian Water Resources Council* amalgamated into the *Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand* to form policies, guidelines and programs to assist the beneficial and orderly assessment, development and management of Australia's resources. The *Council of Australian Governments* (COAG) was established in 1992 to initiate, develop and monitor implementation of policy reforms of national significance. National strategies and programs were initiated or revised for issues including weeds, rangeland management and greenhouse gas emissions. In conjunction, the United Nations adopted the *Framework Convention on Climate Change* (United Nations, 1992) "to set an overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenge posed by climate change". Australia ratified the Convention in the following December (Australian Government Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, 2011).

Non-government organisations such as *Greening Australia* and *Conservation Volunteers Australia* developed processes to provide support services and resources to groups. A number of local governments across the country developed support services ad hoc, 'housing' facilitator staff or providing resources, while collaborating to include groups in their on-ground projects.

Meanwhile, 'catchment management' was progressing across the states and territories and the Victorian Government developed its framework, the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (Victorian Consolidated Legislation, 1994) for the integrated management and protection of catchments, including the development and implementation of regional catchment strategies.

Involving community-based groups

Approximately 160 facilitators and coordinators funded under the *National Landcare Program* were working with local groups when they began to form state-wide networks in 1992 to assist with their professional development (for example, the *Community Landcare Professional Association* in Western Australia). Approximately 434 technical, soil conservation agency positions were also supported by the *National Landcare Program*.

Groups predominately included farmers or pastoralists who focused on land they managed for food and fibre production in their local districts. However, with more funding now available for off-farm environmental activities, opportunities increased for local neighbourhood groups with

common interests in conservation activities on public (and sometimes private) land. Landcare groups continued to increase as support staff facilitated processes enlisting a self-directed learning approach. Facilitator roles assisted in “creating an environment for people to build community capacity, that is, to voluntarily learn, share information and experiences, trial new ways for improvement, develop on-ground works or new management practice projects, apply the learnings for the long term and encourage others to become involved. This resulted in people as a collective, building their skills, knowledge and capacity to make informed change, ultimately leading to social capital spin-offs for the wider community across each district, town and region” (Love, C. Carroll, P. & Prior, J., 2009)

While not all groups sought funding from the programs, community-based groups were able to access a growing number of community grants:

- *Property Management Planning* became a key framework to guide farmer and pastoralist group activity. A number of tools were also enlisted such as on-farm trials and training days.
- Aboriginal communities became involved, broadening the Landcare focus to incorporate traditional land management.
- Community groups of interest in urban and coastal neighbourhoods increased significantly, such as ‘Friends of’, ‘Coastcare’, ‘Dunecare’ and ‘Waterwatch’, often working on public recreational, waterway and coastal areas addressing weed and feral animal management, landscape restoration, public access and aesthetics.
- Many groups also began developing regional, catchment or sub-catchment plans as they came to understand the need to incorporate a broader view.

While the national conservation debate continued and resistance by some farmers and pastoralists endured, attitudes were shifting with knowledge that our future food and fibre production, the health of our resource base and the wellbeing of generations to come depended on change. Many appreciated the opportunities provided by Landcare as it informed them about adopting sustainable management practices, reducing the risk of change.

The *1995 Evaluation Report on the Decade of Landcare Plan – National Overview* (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997) reported, “In some sectors, Landcare groups have progressed from focusing on single issues and on small catchment/geographic area projects and are now developing a bigger picture with regional or catchment-wide plans. They are recognizing the need to involve more fully the urban community, local government, rural industry bodies and public land managers as significant stakeholders in natural resource management”.

A number of state and territory associations formed such as the *Tasmanian Landcare Association* (Tasmanian Landcare Association, unknown), generally with State Government and *National Landcare Program* assistance. They provided support services to groups including the organisation of state conferences and Landcare Awards ceremonies. In some cases, the Chairs of these associations also signed off on State Assessment Panel-approved applications for grants to ensure community input before they were passed to the Australian Government although this was not a requirement of the *National Landcare Program*. Industry organisations also became involved, such as *Dairy Australia* and the *Grains Research and Development Corporation*, providing leadership on sustainable resource use and management to their industry sectors.

The 1995 Decade of Landcare Plan National Overview – Mid Term Evaluation highlighted its outcomes during the first phase (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1995) (Commonwealth Government, 1997). Achievements included:

- raising awareness of land degradation and sustainability issues
- building skills and knowledge in practice and decision-making processes
- 2200 Landcare groups operating (it was originally estimated numbers would reach 2000 by the end of the *Decade of Landcare* in 1999).

Policy transition phase

Private gain by primary producers engaged in conservation activities through government incentive funding (tax payer-derived) was questioned within government. A ‘public/private benefit’ debate mounted around the criteria for future funding.

The *National Landcare Facilitator 1995 Annual Report* (Alexander, Helen, 1995) explained the “participation in landcare is also an indication of the scale of the problems faced. Nationwide, the landcare community reports concerns about too much responsibility and too few resources, too little money for ‘works on ground’, too much funding going into government processes and not community action, too much paperwork, too little long-term funding and too little coordination between government departments”. Groups expressed the need to better align the broader range of programs available as well as a streamlined approach to reduce red tape and confusion for volunteers.

Released in 1994, the Australian Government’s White Paper *Working Nation* placed greater emphasis on developing regions to promote sustainable national growth (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997).

While the first phase of the *National Landcare Program* targeted a major awareness-raising campaign that would lead to on-ground actions, its mid-term review found “a lack of information on the extent to which changed management practices had an impact on the natural resource base” (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997). In the policy pronouncements leading up to development of the *Natural Heritage Trust of Australia Act 1997* (Australian Government, 2008), the Minister for the Environment announced, “we must move away from an awareness raising phase to on-ground action” (Senator The Hon Robert Hill, 1996). In contrast, the Landcare movement knew first-hand the extent of change in management practices and could already see landscape change. They perceived the project reporting system was unable to account for the ‘real’ changes taking place on-ground.

The 1995 *Evaluation Report on the Decade of Landcare Plan – National Overview* (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997) (Commonwealth Government, 1997) outlined moves being made at a national level towards a regional approach. This acknowledged changes to total or integrated catchment management already underway at the state and territory level. It stated, “there was an emerging need to coordinate the management of resources at the regional level across both public and private land...there is potential for stronger links on the ground between all key agencies”. The report also suggested property management plans were linked to regional catchment plans and highlighted the need for “clearly defined, simple and integrated performance indicators”.

In December 1996, after a number of years of joint working arrangements for program administration, a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian Government’s two departments (Primary Industries, and Energy and Environment Australia) “established a framework within which the agencies work cooperatively towards common and complementary environmental, natural resource management and sustainable agriculture outcomes” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997–98).

THIRD PHASE – Decade of Landcare Plan, Natural Heritage Trust, National Landcare Program 1997–2001

Government structures

This phase of the *National Landcare Plan* focused on broad-scale community participation in implementing local projects and plans that maintained or replenished Australia’s environmental infrastructure (Australian Government, 1997). Flexibility remained for learning activities that directly related to actions on-ground.

The *Natural Heritage Trust* (Australian Government, 2008) (\$1.2 billion over five years with a further \$0.3 billion later extended for a sixth year) was launched in May 1997 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997–98) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) although funds were advanced before its formal establishment. Its goal was “to stimulate activities in the national interest to achieve the conservation, sustainable use and repair of Australia’s natural environment”. The objectives of the *Natural Heritage Trust* were to:

- provide a framework for strategic capital investment, to stimulate additional investment in the natural environment
- achieve complementary environment protection, natural resource management and sustainable agriculture outcomes consistent with agreed national strategies
- provide a framework for cooperative partnerships between communities, industry and all levels of government.

Land, vegetation, rivers, biodiversity and coasts and marine were the five major focus areas, with key outcomes targeting integration and institutions, environment, sustainable production and people. New partnership agreements were negotiated with the State and Territory governments as they had key responsibilities for delivering each of the Trust’s programs. Funding was also matched to support group function.

The *Natural Heritage Trust* came with a significantly expanded budget for on-ground conservation projects, with funds sourced from the Australian Government’s partial privatisation of the national telecommunications carrier, Telstra. Community-based groups, State and Territory government agencies, local government and non-government organisations and other relevant stakeholders could now access substantially larger funding amounts from a central point for on-ground works projects across a broad range of landscapes.

The Trust's (Howard Partners, 1999) newly formalised 'one-stop-shop' application and assessment process comprised of nine programs from the Australian Government's primary industries and environmental departments to reduce the complexity for community-based groups in applying for funding. It included the *National Landcare Program* as well as new programs such as the *National Rivercare Program* (administered by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and *Forestry Australia*) and *Bushcare* (administered by the government's Department of Environment and Heritage). Another 12 programs under the *Natural Heritage Trust* from across the two departments had complementary goals, with different delivery mechanisms. Overall, areas targeted included air pollution of major cities, native vegetation, coasts and clean seas, endangered species, farm business improvement, farm forestry, fisheries, feral animal control, soil, national reserve system, rivers, weeds, wetlands, waste management, water quality, world heritage, the *Murray Darling 2001 Program* and the *National Land and Water Resources Audit* (established to provide better information to resource managers) (Australian Government, 2008).

The *Natural Heritage Trust Advisory Committee* (Australian Government, 2008) was established in 1997. It advised the new *Natural Heritage Ministerial Board* (comprising the Australian Government's Ministers for agriculture and environment) of the integration of the Act's (*Natural Heritage Trust*) objectives for environmental protection, natural resource management and sustainable agriculture, together with the effectiveness of Partnership Agreements with State and Territory governments.

National facilitators were employed for programs such as *Bushcare* and *Waterwatch*. An *Indigenous Land Management Facilitator Network* of 11 staff was established in 1997, partly funded by the *National Landcare Program* and *Bushcare*, to specifically support the involvement of Aboriginal communities. A *Local Government Environmental Resource Officer* was also employed in each state and territory to connect local governments with the *Natural Heritage Trust*.

While the national and state components of the *National Landcare Program* remained largely the same, the focus on catchment-based investment under the national component broadened:

- Community (grants) and State and Territory government partnerships remained focused on the program's sustainable agriculture niche while 'biodiversity' was a prime focus of the *Natural Heritage Trust*. Eligibility for considerably larger amounts of incentive funding available also required demonstrated outcomes in 'public benefit'. State, Territory and local government and non-government organisations remained eligible as project proponents if partnering with community-based groups.

- The national component usually had a broader focus that encompassed all on-ground activity including primary production, Aboriginal land management, conservation activities on public and private land and junior school groups:
 - Early in 1997 the name of the *National Landcare Advisory Committee* was changed to the *Australian Landcare Council*. It remained a statutory body under the *Natural Resource Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992*. Bruce Lloyd was appointed Chair. The Chair was also a member of the *National Heritage Trust Advisory Committee*, advising on the Trust. The *Australian Landcare Council* continued to provide advice and strategic direction to government and the Australian Government’s agricultural and environmental Ministers on the *National Landcare Program* and new *National Rivercare Program*. The Council comprised seven community state and territory representatives together with government and non-government representatives from stakeholder organisations. Having ‘observer’ status, the *National Landcare Facilitator* and Executive Officer of *Landcare Australia Ltd* also attended, providing reports at each meeting. Chairpersons of peak Landcare or natural resource management organisations from each state and territory met with the Chairman twice yearly (one of which was jointly held with the Council) to provide information on matters relating to Landcare and natural resource management in their jurisdictions.
 - The *National Landcare Facilitator Project* was expanded to involve a project team and the role changed to facilitating communication from a national scale to facilitators and coordinators funded by the *National Landcare Program* as well as state-funded positions. Lachlan Polkinghorne was employed in 1997 and remained in this role until 2002.
 - Following the success of the *Coastcare Program* in 1995, *Junior Landcare* was launched by *Landcare Australia Ltd* in 1998 to get school children across the country involved in Landcare activities.
 - National funding was available for short-term catchment-based projects.
 - International Landcare expanded with countries involved including New Zealand, South Africa and the Philippines. The Australian Government was often called upon for support such as providing information or seed funding through the Australian *AusAid* program.

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC) came into force (Australian Government, 1999). By 2001, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to form the *Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council*, subsuming the *Agriculture and Resource*

Management Council of Australia and New Zealand, the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council and the Ministerial Council on Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture. Two standing councils were also formed – the Primary Industries Ministerial Council and Environmental Protection and Heritage Ministerial Council (Australian Government, 2011).

Global warming and climate change were emerging as key priorities for the Australian Government since initial work began in the late 1980s on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and developing a *National Carbon Accounting System* (Australian Government Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, 2011). The *Kyoto Protocol*, an international agreement linked to the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997. The Protocol set binding targets for industrialised countries and the European community for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (United Nations, 1997). Three key mechanisms for countries to cost-effectively meet their emissions targets were emissions trading, a clean development mechanism and joint implementation.

Involving community-based groups

With access to significantly more funding across a larger range of programs, the diversity and number of groups escalated. It was estimated that by 1996, approximately 3240 community-based Landcare and related groups were operating. The need for facilitation and coordination support increased dramatically as more groups established and developed on-ground local priority works projects. Local level facilitator and coordinator positions were funded through the *National Landcare Program* while some were established with State Government funding. New facilitator networks funded through other *Natural Heritage Trust* programs included *Bushcare*, *Waterwatch*, *Coastcare*, *Endangered Species* and *Coasts and Clean Seas*. These positions generally enabled groups to take on delivering larger-scale on-ground works projects, often beyond the scope of volunteers alone. The number employed significantly increased to over 1000 by completion of the *Natural Heritage Trust* in 2002.

Group diversity also expanded, extending across a range of local interests and landscapes such as private land used to produce food and fibre, Aboriginal-managed land or other private and public land areas (including recreational, neighbourhood and coastal). Groups used a range of titles including Landcare, Coastcare, Bushcare, Rivercare, Urban Landcare, Junior Landcare, Indigenous Ranger, Friends of and Catchment. The individual activities of each group became part of a larger mosaic across the country as more people became involved. Group capacities, operations and access to resources varied depending on a number of factors. Some were inclined to target a particular issue while others targeted a more holistic approach. Some were

mindful of taking on more than they could manage while others were keen to get as much done as possible. Farmer and pastoral Landcare groups in particular began to broaden their focus and activities, incorporating social dimensions that encompassed environmental, economic, social and cultural considerations. This often enriched their social capital enabling greater community cohesion, health and resilience.

Many groups sourced funding for on-ground projects, mainly through the *Natural Heritage Trusts'* suite of programs but also other State, Territory and local government and non-government environmental programs. Other groups did not require funding but usually sourced support such as access to tools, machinery and assistance with on-ground works. Non-government organisations such as *Greening Australia* and *Conservation Volunteers Australia* became increasingly involved in providing support at the local level across rural, urban and coastal areas through matched project funding from the *Natural Heritage Trust*. Local governments also became involved in projects such as native vegetation restoration, land rehabilitation, improving water quality, and improving coastal and marine environments. Corporate businesses provided funds through organisations such as *Landcare Australia Ltd* for on-ground community projects. Schools became involved and many Junior Landcare groups learned about the environment within their school curriculum. Outdoor activities included *Waterwatch* monitoring and growing native plants. In some cases Landcare groups adopted Junior Landcare groups and included them in activities.

Many clusters of Landcare groups began to link via a network, usually on a sub-catchment basis, particularly in Victoria and New South Wales. These networks included a representative from each group in the cluster. Networks assisted with communication flows, coordinating cross-boundary projects and funding proposals and developing sub-catchment, catchment and regional plans. Many groups and networks became more sophisticated in their operations and cognisant of the bigger picture, developing numerous partnerships at the local and catchment scales.

Proponents sourcing funding through the *Natural Heritage Trust* phase (including community-based groups, State, Territory and local government and non-government organisations) had been involved in major on-ground works across the country and provided detailed reports back to government on the activities. The *Natural Heritage Trust Phase 1 Final Evaluation* (Hassall & Associates P/L, 2005) was released in 2005 and reported "Respondents in all the regional case studies provided anecdotal evidence of improvements relating to environment protection, natural resource management or sustainable agriculture in their region. These included: widespread tree planting and fencing of remnant vegetation; improvements in riparian zone management; improvements in water quality; and the adoption of more sustainable farming

practices including sustainable grazing in the rangelands, minimum till, and clay spreading on blown sandhills". A number of outputs were listed in the report, such as "1.57 million hectares of native vegetation works were undertaken, 172,000ML of drainage water or treatment effluent was recycled and 570 hectares of coastal land was weeded". It was suggested however, the evaluation of achievements in environmental protection was difficult as "outcomes are by their nature long-term, and difficult to attribute to one policy initiative".

More broadly, the conservation debate was slowly dissipating as more people became aware and committed to a sustainable future. 'Biodiversity conservation' was a key focus for the *Natural Heritage Trust*, although it was interpreted differently in each state and territory depending on if it was delivered by agricultural or environmental agencies. There was a perception amongst primary producers that the biodiversity focus and 'public benefit' criteria had limited the farmer focus niche of the *National Landcare Program*, becoming too 'green' and less relevant to their whole farm business activities. A number became disengaged and the phrase 'you can't be green when you are in the red' was often quoted. They maintained that farm and pastoral businesses, with their declining terms of trade and the impacts from issues such as drought, still had the realities of remaining solvent and therefore needed ways to meet environmental outcomes within a production system, rather than separating one from the other. There was also a view that incentive or seed funding would share the burdens of risk from any change and encourage more primary producers to get involved.

A trend had emerged for private consultants as well as newly-formed local (initially broad-acre) farmer and pastoralist groups such as the *Yorke Peninsula Alkaline Soils Group* in South Australia, No-till associations operating in a number of states and some Landcare groups to take up the technical extension service void created by the downsizing of state and territory research and development institutions and agricultural agencies. Groups began to drive local research and development on production methods, taking it upon themselves to provide local leadership and access to expertise while conducting their own trials, integrating local knowledge with expert opinion. State and territory agricultural agencies provided support in the form of industry-specific programs, often in partnership with the industry sector and based on the 'working with groups' model, while environmental agencies provided natural resource management services. A small number of Rural Research and Development Corporations as well as Cooperative Research Centres funded by the Australian Government established farming system groups similar to the Landcare model. Groups worked on practice change projects, such as the *Grain and Graze Program* (Land and Water Australia, 2008), jointly supported by the *Grains Research and Development Corporation*, *Meat & Livestock Australia*, *Australian Wheat Industry* and administered by *Land & Water Australia*.

The storage and dissemination of accumulated knowledge was increasingly left to consultants, industry and groups and sometimes posed access difficulties for others. The advantage of corporate knowledge within groups meant that it was relevant, validated and could be developed further in their local area.

Policy transition phase

The 1999 Natural Heritage Trust's Mid Term Review of the *National Landcare Program* suggested that "the fundamental importance of economic drivers could be more explicitly recognized in project activities (Dames & Moore – NRM, 1999). There is scope to more effectively integrate economic considerations with projects focused on promoting the adoption of more sustainable production practices".

Concerns were raised about the sustainability of the significantly increased facilitator and coordinator workforce (now exceeding 1000) and the impacts to program budgets, particularly the reduced availability of funds for community-based group projects on-ground. *The Natural Heritage Trust Annual Report 2001–02* (Australian Government, 2001) stated that "Community leaders, facilitators and coordinators play a crucial role in helping to build the social capital needed at a regional scale to address local issues and develop effective regional strategies".

The Australian Government's 1999 national policy discussion paper on *Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future* (National Natural Resource Management Task Force, 1999) (the 'blue' book) explained "Our understanding of natural systems is increasing and we have a greater understanding of the regional and catchment impacts of natural resource management activities, but we do not have all the answers to how natural resources should be managed to arrest or reverse the process of degradation. On the basis of current knowledge and management techniques, however, it will not be economically or technically possible to rehabilitate all affected areas...Because it will not be possible to fund the restoration of all existing degraded areas, it will be necessary for governments – national and State and Territory – and regional communities to set priorities and focus on rehabilitation efforts on strategic areas where a difference can be made". It was proposed that moving to a strategic approach at the regional scale would build on the effectiveness and needs of Landcare. It also stated that a "continued commitment to landcare is needed".

The *Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organisation's* (CSIRO) report for the 2003 *National Landcare Program* review (Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, 2003) concluded that "at the property and local level, new sustainable farming methods and better land management approaches stimulated by landcare group activity are

noticeably improving the condition of the resource base, with better water quality in streams, better soil condition and less erosion...However, the CSIRO also concludes that resource condition improvements at a regional level are not being noticed as a result of landcare activity on farms. This is not unexpected. It was not the objective of the landcare program and changes at that scale also need other interventions...". On leveraging private investment, it stated, "Australian Government funding under the *National Landcare Program* and the landcare component of the *Natural Heritage Trust* had served as a catalyst for major community investment on sustainable production and natural resource management. For every Australian Government dollar spent on landcare projects under the program, other parties had made a corresponding investment of at least \$2.60". Other sources have quoted higher figures as corresponding investment.

The Landcare approach under the *Decade of Landcare* was successful in achieving its aim of broad-scale community participation on thinly-spread funding. The 1999 *Natural Heritage Trust's Mid Term Review* (Hassall & Associates P/L, 2005) reported that Trust programs were "successful in raising awareness, creating partnerships and assisting communities to take local action". The Mid Term Review Response in 2000 (Australian Government, 2000) stated "While the community focus has been necessary to achieve commitment to the Trust's objectives, it has resulted in funds being spread over a large number of smaller projects that may have less impact than strategically directed larger projects" (Australian Government, 2000). This view came to be described as the 'vegemite approach' and was occasionally used to undermine the value of Landcare. The Trust actively sought more devolved grants and strengthened its regional approach, targeting regional-scale initiatives.

The 2000–01 ANAO audit report No 43 (Australian National Audit Office, 2001), in the context of performance information under the *Natural Heritage Trust* stated it was "poor in areas of monitoring and accounting for performance". The final evaluation of the *Natural Heritage Trust* released in 2005 (Hassall & Associates P/L, 2005) raised the issue of monitoring: "Whilst these on-ground actions are likely to have a positive environmental outcome, it is not possible to accurately predict what that outcome may be, given the absence of good baseline data and appropriate monitoring systems".

The Australian Government began developing a national approach to natural resource management through a regional delivery purchaser/provider model, initially tackling salinity and water quality issues. In 2001, the *Council of Australian Governments* adopted the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* (Australian Government, 2000) to build on achievements of the *Natural Heritage Trust*. Bilateral agreements were developed with State and Territory governments for its delivery. Twenty-one priority Australian regions most affected

by salinity and water quality problems were targeted. The *Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council* would also oversee implementation of the *National Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*.

By 2002, the national *Decade of Landcare* plan targeting broad-scale community participation through Landcare had run its course. That same year and following development of the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*, the Framework for the five-year extension of the *Natural Heritage Trust* (Australian Government, 2003) was endorsed by the *Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council* comprising national natural resource management outcomes and national standards defining best practice management of natural resources. Its model was similar to the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*. The Council stated “there will be a fundamental shift in the Trust towards more strategic investment” and endorsed the *National Framework for NRM [Natural Resource Management] Standards and Targets* to “guide investment through integrated regional NRM plans under the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* and *Natural Heritage Trust* extension”.

FOURTH PHASE – Natural Heritage Trust extension and the National Landcare Program, 2002–2007

Government structures

Australian Government policy shifted in 2002 to a purchaser/provider regional delivery model aimed at restoring Australia's environment and natural resources. It provided strategic regional-scale investment with \$1.4 billion of funding over seven years through the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* and \$1.032 billion over five years through the *Natural Heritage Trust extension (NHT2)* (Australian Government, 2003). The *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*, jointly funded by the Federal, State and Territory governments, was delivered through the plans and investment strategies of 35 regional natural resource management bodies (intersecting with the 21 priority regions identified in the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* as most affected by salinity and water quality problems). Combined investment in the NHT2 primarily focused on achieving natural resource management outcomes through biophysical resource condition targets. This was underpinned by a new regional delivery framework. Fifty-six regional areas with regional natural resource management bodies were established (Australian Government, 2010) to deliver on the goals of the NHT2 through a purchaser/provider engagement model with an emphasis on contractual governance.

The NHT2 (as with the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*) was based on an integrated approach and partnerships while having “a greater emphasis on capacity building and the development and use of more effective performance measures”. The first years involved an interim process for significant institutional changes to come into effect at all government levels and many previous arrangements and mechanisms for State and Territory government program delivery lapsed. A Natural Resource Management Team was established comprising staff from the Australian Government departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and Environment and Heritage (later the Department of Environment and Water). The Team administered regional policy delivery of the NHT2 and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*.

The three objectives of the NHT2 were: biodiversity conservation; sustainable use of natural resources; and community capacity building and institutional change. Four NHT2 program streams – Landcare, Bushcare, Rivercare and Coastcare – incorporated ten broader-scale priority areas of activity: threatened species; native vegetation; aquatic ecosystems; pests and weeds; protected areas; sustainability and productivity of industries; productive purposes; sustainable management; capacity building; and organisational frameworks. Activities from the

previous 21 programs of the first phase of the *Natural Heritage Trust* were generally incorporated into these priority areas.

The NHT2 was delivered through three investment stream levels (Australian Government, 2003):

- **Local** (community grants) – the *Envirofund* was directly accessible to community-based groups for small on-ground projects to address key local environmental problems. It was originally intended as a one-year program to bridge the gap between the *Natural Heritage Trust* and NHT2. State and national assessment panels assessed project applications.
- **Regional investment** – foundation and priority funding for regional natural resource management bodies was initially available through the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* and NHT2 to set plans and deliver large-scale projects. The continent was divided into 56 regions with regional natural resource management bodies established in each. The most significant distinction was whether they had a statutory basis under State legislation, such as the Victorian and New South Wales *Catchment Management Authorities* or were derived from existing regional processes that emerged from local communities before NHT2 and were incorporated into the new structures and boundaries. These regional natural resource management bodies instigated the major task of developing integrated and accredited natural resource management plans and investment strategies at catchment and regional scales targeting outcomes in resource condition change by way of on-ground works programs (Australian Government, 2005). Chairs of regional natural resource management boards met annually at a forum that incorporated a meeting with the *Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council*. The *National Natural Resource Management Regions Working Group* later formed with a representative from each state and territory regional natural resource management body collective, meeting periodically for discussions on NHT2 arrangements. Following the development phase, three streams of regional investment were available through the NHT2 and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*: a regional component for projects identified in regional accredited plans; a regionally-competitive component for multi-year and multi-region projects; and a national state-wide component that invested in projects of national significance and crossed a number of catchment boundaries or had a state-wide focus.
- **National level** – these included:
 - The *Natural Heritage Trust Advisory Committee* provided advice on NHT2 arrangements to the *Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council*.

- Bilateral agreements were formed and maintained with State and Territory governments outlining the purpose, responsibilities and regional delivery arrangements with matched investment on a cash or in-kind basis.
- National investment was available covering broader scale activities with a national or state and territory focus as well as a nationally-competitive component.
- Monitoring and evaluation became a major priority and requirements were set out in the 2002 *National Natural Resource Management Monitoring and Evaluation Framework*, approved by the *Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council*. Development commenced on a ‘Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement’ system.
- The roles of local government environmental resource officers (one based in each state and territory) refocused to engage local governments in regional natural resource management planning and implementation. Their titles were changed to Local Government Natural Resource Management Facilitators. The *Indigenous Land Management Facilitator Network* comprising 13 staff was continued as a two-way link between Indigenous land managers and other stakeholders. From late 2003, a NHT2-funded Australian Government *Natural Resource Management Facilitator Network* (a team of 30 staff representing *Bushcare, Landcare, Coastcare or Rivercare* themes) was established to operate in each state and territory to strategically assist regional delivery processes for the NHT2 and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*. Sixty-five regional natural resource management facilitator positions were also established across 56 natural resource management regions to assist regional processes in delivering the NHT2 and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*.

The *National Landcare Program* (with \$159.5 million of funding over four years under the *Natural Resource Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992*) returned to a separate ‘stand-alone’ program status in 2002. Continuing its food and fibre production niche, it operated alongside the NHT2 and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* and was managed by the Landcare Policy branch within the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. It aimed to “increase engagement by industry and resource users in landcare and natural resource management activities, with a focus on developing partnerships in sustainable primary industries” (Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2002).

It continued the focus on broad-scale community participation and comprised community, new regional and state, territory and national components:

- Community grants through *Community Support* and *Innovation Grants* programs targeted broad-scale participation of primary producers in sustainable primary production.
- State and territory government and regional natural resource management body arrangements were developed to administer *National Landcare Program* community grants programs.
- The national component usually had a broader focus encompassing all on-ground activity including primary production, Aboriginal land management, conservation activities on public and private land and junior school groups:
 - The *Australian Landcare Council*, with Bobbie Brazil appointed as Chair in 2005, continued to provide advice to agricultural and environmental Ministers and the Australian Government on all matters relating to natural resource management, the Landcare movement and the *National Landcare Program*. The Council was placed on hold in March 2008 at the completion of the *NHT2*.
 - The *National Landcare Facilitator Project* team adapted to the new operating environment and Coral Love took on the National Landcare Facilitator role from 2002. The role changed to include advocacy of the Landcare movement at a national level, two-way communication between government, the *Australian Landcare Council*, *Landcare Australia Ltd* and the Landcare movement. It also provided professional development support to the newly appointed *State Landcare Coordinator Network* of seven state-based staff from 2003–08. From 2005, the role provided feedback and advice to Ministerial staff and the Australian Government on matters relating to the Landcare movement and *National Landcare Program* and *NHT2* programs.
 - Jerry Ellis was appointed Chair of the *Landcare Australia Ltd Board* in 2005. Under new arrangements, the Board was separated into two groups: a Board that would oversee corporate governance, and an Advisory Committee that provided feedback on the relationship between the Landcare movement and the company.
 - A *State Landcare Coordinator Network* was established in late 2003. Seven positions were based mainly in farmer or industry organisations within each state and territory, (except the Australian Capital Territory) providing opportunities for improved links with industry. They assisted in delivering the *National Landcare Program's* two community grants programs and supported approximately 50 regional *Community Landcare Coordinators* after funding was offered to regional natural resource management bodies from 2004 for their employment at the regional level. Over time, most took up the offer.

The *State Landcare Coordinator Network* also worked closely with the *National Landcare Facilitator Project* team.

- Funding remained available for short-term national projects targeting sustainable production and industry engagement.
- Funding support to *International Landcare* was significantly reduced although at least 20 countries had adapted the Landcare approach into parts of their environmental programs. The main mechanism resourced was development and management of an *International Landcare Clearinghouse* incorporating a newsletter, website and links.

State and Territory governments re-visited and renewed their individual environmental policies and programs to better align with the Australian Government's new environmental policies and regional delivery model.

Meanwhile, drought was emerging as a major issue across the country and the *Council of Australian Governments* agreed on the *National Water Initiative* in 2004 (Australian Government National Water Commission, 2004) as the blueprint for water reform across the country.

Involving community-based groups

The transition to regional arrangements posed new challenges for governments, community-based groups, and non-government organisations. The duties of facilitators and coordinators changed, often becoming the responsibility of regional natural resource management bodies and adapting to a regional priority focus (approximately 600 local level facilitator and coordinator positions were re-employed through NHT2 regional base-line funding). With the entry point for access to the NHT2 priority and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* funding now at the regional level, non-government national organisations such as *Greening Australia* and *Conservation Volunteers Australia*, together with state and territory Landcare non-government associations, had a difficult task in finding new ways of accessing funds for ongoing service delivery. State, Territory and local government support and resources for Landcare reduced significantly with the change in funding arrangements (although the Victorian Government continued supporting its state-wide Landcare framework with a larger State Budget allocation than others).

There was an assumption support mechanisms for broad-scale community participation previously provided by State and Territory governments would be supported through new regional processes. It took considerable time over the next three years for the new

arrangements and operations to settle and flow more smoothly across all 56 natural resource management regions. However, as they became operational, regional natural resource management bodies varied in their capacities and service provision depending on their mode of operation, remoteness of location, level of funding and staffing (ranging from five to more than 100 people). With the confines of operating under the NHT2 and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* business model, targeting specific regional (not necessarily local) priorities so as to measure program outcomes, processes supporting community-based group function became ad hoc and sometimes even competitive depending on the arrangements regional natural resource management bodies chose to develop in their jurisdiction. Groups disengaged and their momentum flagged over this period as an early disenchantment with the new arrangements set in. The transition significantly changed the way groups now needed to operate or remain involved. Depending on their capacities and individual circumstances, some became dormant while others became increasingly independent. Feedback from community-based participants (members of groups, facilitators and coordinators and state and territory agency support staff who participated in a workshop at the National Landcare Conference at Darwin in 2003) raised concerns that “there was not a clear picture for the direction of Landcare” and they were unsure “how to set their own (group’s) agenda in the new regional arrangements” (National Landcare Facilitator Project Team, 2003).

Over time, with some exceptions, groups and regional natural resource management bodies generally developed alliances in the delivery of strategic regional priorities of the NHT2 and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* programs. A substantial number of projects were delivered through new regional arrangements during this era. There remained though, an underlying feeling by the Landcare movement that something (maybe their ownership and independence in what had been transpiring for more than a decade previously) had been lost with a ‘shifting of the guard’. Towards the end of the NHT2 era, new state Landcare associations formed in Victoria and New South Wales in an attempt to ensure groups had a voice and were not forgotten for the part they played in driving broad-scale community participation and the delivery of environmental programs.

The community grants components for NHT2 (*Envirofund*) (Australian Government, 2008) and the National Landcare Program (*Community Support* and *Natural Resource Innovation Grants*) (Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2009) proved to be very popular with groups and a key engagement mechanism as funds could directly be accessed independent of the regional process:

- The *Envirofund* program was extended as an annual call for the life of NHT2. It was over-subscribed, particularly by conservation groups previously supported by Natural Heritage

Trust programs such as *Coastcare*, *Waterwatch*, *Bushcare* and *Rivercare*. Activities included digging out weeds, planting native vegetation, clearing rubbish from parks and waterways, fencing to protect coastal dunes and wetlands, eradicating feral animals, fencing to protect aquatic habitat and native vegetation, protecting endangered species, monitoring water quality, supporting traditional land management and managing soil erosion. Rounds 2 and 7 specifically targeted drought, a major long-term issue for many landholders during this time. The *Evaluation of the Natural Heritage Trust Envirofund* (Centre for International Economics, 2005) reported outputs, for example 15,496ha of remnant vegetation protected by fencing, 2600ha of wetlands protected and the control of weeds and pests across 5750ha of land. It also concluded, “Envirofund has provided a valuable source of funds – in some regions the only source – for community environmental work over the last few years. Envirofund grants have been well leveraged against the value of voluntary labour and other inputs by successful applicants. The program has also resulted in many farmers becoming engaged in NRM activities who would otherwise not have done so”.

- *National Landcare Program Community Support and Innovation Grants* generated a significant increase in involvement by producer groups (not necessarily previously involved) although many districts were in the grips of long-term drought. Groups developed sustainable primary production projects, integrating production with conservation practices. Examples included: broader involvement of minimum and no-till practices in the cropping industry with involvement from the sugar cane industry; integrated pest plant and management projects across many industry sectors; and improved grazing management systems across large pastoral properties using a system of yard, gate and water structures, allowing tracts of land to rest and recover. Australia was experiencing major drought conditions across the country and water access and quality was a contentious issue with a number of projects trialling water use monitoring and efficiency systems (Blackadder, Jesse, 2007). Issues around climate change were also driving projects that assisted in better equipping farm businesses to prepare for adaptation and mitigation, such as learning about soil carbon.

Funding was also sourced from the NHT2 investment streams through regional natural resource management bodies as part of their integrated project proposals. As well, there was a range of other national, state and territory environmental programs on offer including those assisting climate change adaptation.

Transition phase

Issues around drought, water use efficiency, climate change and greenhouse gas emissions were becoming a high priority and in 2005, the Australian Government's Minister for Agriculture established the *Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group* and tasked them with providing a report on agriculture and food policy for the next generation. The 2006 report emphasised "Landscape scale environmental management needs to recognize that farmers (60%) and Indigenous landholders (15%) control around three-quarters of Australia's land...the public environmental benefits being sought from landholders warrant a provision of incentives for improved land, water and vegetation management". A number of future challenges and issues associated with food and fibre production in Australia in the context of environmental considerations were highlighted, including: food security from biological diseases; increasing demands on Australia's natural resources and challenges in managing them; the importance of water and the need for efficient and effective use and management; and preparation required (research into adaptation, risk management and mitigation options) for the potentially serious implications of climate change on sustainable agriculture and rural communities (Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group, 2006).

The Australian Government commissioned a *Climate Change Review* by Ross Garnaut in 2007 (published in 2008) with the focus on tackling the challenge of climate change (Garnaut, 2008 Garnaut Review, 2011). The *Water Act 2007* was enacted to implement key reforms for water management across the country (Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities, 2011). The Department of Climate Change was established in December 2007 (Australian Government Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, 2011). By April 2008, the Australian Government announced a new national plan, *Water for the Future*, with four key priorities: taking action on climate change; using water wisely; securing water supplies; and supporting healthy rivers (Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities, 2011).

Prior to NHT2, although there was significant change in community awareness and land management at the local level, reported outputs by groups were not clearly translated into broader outcomes at the Auditor General's level. During NHT2, while major on-ground works had been achieved and improvements were evident through both community-based (group and individual) and contracted activity, reported outcomes by regional natural resource management bodies were also not clearly translating into measurable outcomes on government investment.

The ANAO Audit Report No 21 2007–08 *Regional Delivery Model for the Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* (Australian National Audit Office, 2008) stated “Performance measurement had been an ongoing issue covered by three previous ANAO audits since 1996–97”. The Audit Report found “there is evidence that activities are occurring ‘on the ground’.... The absence of consistently validated data, the lack of agreement on performance indicators and any intermediate outcomes has significantly limited the quality of the reporting process”. When evaluating the NHT2 and *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* programs, the Audit Report also found “At the time of the evaluations there was little evidence that there has been substantial movement towards landscape scale repair and replenishment of natural resources as envisaged by the NHT [*Natural Heritage Trust*]. There was no evidence of significant progress towards preventing, stabilizing and reversing salinity trends as envisaged by the NAP [*National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality*]. From the evidence reviewed as part of this audit, this is still the case which suggests that stronger targeting of NHT3 towards the highest priorities and most critical national assets is necessary to achieve measurable outcomes”.

Through NHT2, many groups perceived the shift in the government’s focus from broad-scale community participation had inadvertently undervalued the important social processes at the local level that significantly contribute to achieving ‘real’ on-ground outcomes. They were most concerned that national policy and programs were becoming further removed and disconnected from the significance and benefits of Landcare and its ability to foster broad-scale community participation. Further to this, from a policy perspective, the understanding of Landcare became more confused during the NHT2. While groups believed Landcare was about broad-scale community participation in all landscapes, it was limited to the agricultural niche of the *National Landcare Program*. This alienated a large number of Landcare and related groups not involved in farming.

The *Natural Heritage Trust Ministerial Board* commissioned an independent Ministerial Reference Group to consider future natural resource management program delivery (Ministerial Reference Group for Future NRM Programme Delivery, 2006). In its 2006 report, the Group concluded there had been a “giant shift in the way Australia is approaching natural resource management with much greater emphasis being placed on regional priorities”. It explained there was a strong call for any future changes to be “evolutionary and not revolutionary” and that “processes needed to be in place that maximized community engagement and ownership”. During the last year of the NHT2, the Australian Government consulted widely to identify improvements that would inform development of its next program (proposed NHT3) and to re-establish links with the community.

FIFTH PHASE – Caring for our Country, 2008–2013

Government arrangements

A change of government at the national level in 2008 led to the *Caring for our Country* program (more than \$2 billion over five years). A substantial shift from regional to national biophysical targets was underpinned by strategic national priorities. This would be delivered through a purchaser/provider engagement model. The initiative sought “to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well managed and resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008).

Strategic five-year outcomes (in the context of longer term, 20-year projections) were supported by a range of specific short-term targets and delivered across six national priority and mapped asset areas:

1. The National Reserve System
2. Biodiversity and natural icons
3. Coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats
4. Sustainable farm practices
5. Natural resource management in northern and remote Australia
6. Community skills, knowledge and engagement.

The Australian Government Natural Resource Management Team became the Land and Coasts Team, comprising staff from the government’s Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The Team was responsible for developing the *Caring for our Country* framework and its delivery mechanism, the 2008–13 Business Plan. Inviting proposals to deliver against the strategic objectives set out in the outcomes statements, the Business Plan was reviewed publicly and updated annually, ensuring it was more adaptive, flexible and timely for ongoing future reforms.

Criteria for principal funding from *Caring for our Country* through an open call was a competitive national process that focused on large and medium-scale partnership projects across wide geographic areas to target multiple outcomes for priority assets. It was available to a wider range of stakeholders including regional natural resource management bodies, State, Territory and local governments, Aboriginal organisations, industry and the commercial sector, non-

government organisations, community-based groups and networks. Also, an Environmental Stewardship Program targeted matters of environmental significance.

Baseline funding for regional natural resource management bodies was reduced and each organisation was required to submit annual proposals for ongoing baseline funding “outlining how they will contribute to the delivery of national *Caring for our Country* targets” (Australian Government, 2008).

Other changes to national structures included adjusting the roles of the Australian Government *Natural Resource Management Facilitator Network* (state-based), and phasing out the *Regional Natural Resource Management Facilitator Network* by 2009 (approximately 65 positions) that were previously funded through the NHT2. A number of national advisory bodies, including the *Natural Heritage Trust Advisory Committee* and *Australian Landcare Council* were placed on hold.

The *Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement* system (Australian Government, 2011), developed during NHT2 became a tool to assist project proponents to achieve their stated outcomes, and a high priority for effectively reporting measurable outcomes on government investment in *Caring for our Country*.

The *National Landcare Program* ceased to exist in name from this time on and its funding allocation was integrated into *Caring for our Country*. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry’s Landcare Policy Branch became part of the joint interdepartmental Land and Coasts Team:

- Community (grants) were now integrated within the sustainable farm practices priority of *Caring for our Country*.
- State, territory and regional arrangements became a part of *Caring for our Country* arrangements.
- The national component was structured within *Caring for our Country*:
 - The development of an *Australian Framework for Landcare* (Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group, 2010) was initiated in September 2008 by the Landcare Policy Branch in the Land and Coasts Team, and with significant support from the *National Landcare Facilitator*. It was finalised in 2010 and followed by its supporting *Community Call for Action*, in December 2011.
 - The *Australian Landcare Council* (Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2011) was reconstituted in 2010 under the *Natural Resource*

Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992, as a key national advisory body on Landcare and matters concerning natural resource management. Kim Chance was appointed as Chair. The first meeting of the Council was held in Canberra on 27 May 2010. Included in its charter, the Council undertook a key role ensuring the completion of the *Australian Framework for Landcare* and the development and completion of its supporting *Community Call for Action*.

- Heather Campbell was employed in the CEO role of *Landcare Australia Ltd* in 2009. With a new CEO in place, the Board and staff of *Landcare Australia Ltd* sought feedback on performance and updated the organisation's Business Plan. A range of strategic measures were later instigated to improve operational systems in relation to findings from the *Australian Framework for Landcare* consultation process including upgrading communications, promotions and initiatives to assist the Landcare movement.
- The *National Landcare Facilitator Project* significantly contributed to developing an *Australian Framework for Landcare*. With the *Australian Landcare Council* on hold from 2008–10, the role also filled the gap in providing feedback and advice to Ministerial staff and government. Coral Love remained in the role until December 2009. From early 2010, contractual arrangements for the *Project* changed and the role was internalised within the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Brett de Hayr commenced in the position in January 2010. By mid 2011, the role changed to a Ministerial appointment.
- In mid 2008, the *State Landcare Coordinator Network* funded by the *National Landcare Program* merged with the NHT2-funded state and territory-based *Natural Resource Management Facilitator – 'sustainable resource use' Network*. The *Regional Community Landcare Coordinator Network* was phased out. By late 2010, a new *Regional Landcare Facilitator Network* was established to assist at the regional level, supporting Landcare and production groups to adopt sustainable farm and land management practices and to protect Australia's landscapes.
- The focus on International Landcare lapsed during the *Caring for our Country* era although renewed interest began to build in late 2011.

The Australian Government's *Clean Energy Future* plan was developed, incorporating a package of tools and information to get communities involved in addressing greenhouse gas emissions and climate change (Australian Government, 2011). Following the Productivity Commission Report in 2010 on the *Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector*, the *National Volunteering Strategy* was released late in 2011 and provides a national framework to support volunteerism (Office for the Not-for-Profit Sector, 2011).

State and Territory governments re-visited and renewed their environmental policies and programs to better align with the Australian Government's new approach targeting national priorities. At the same time, states such as Victoria and New South Wales committed new funds to support Landcare.

Involving community-based groups

The *Australian Framework for Landcare* (a new national plan for Landcare) was initiated in September 2008. Supported by the Australian Government and *National Landcare Facilitator*, it was developed with extensive community consultation. The *Framework* aimed to help improve the understanding of the Landcare movement and to strengthen the Landcare model while filling the gap left since the *Decade of Landcare Plan* ran its course a decade earlier. After a workshop involving community representatives from across Australia in April 2009, a *Landcare Speaks* paper was developed for public discussion and an extensive consultation process followed. The *Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group*, established in January 2010, considered community feedback and developed the Framework document on behalf of the community with further consultation before its completion in September 2010. The *Australian Landcare Council*, after its reconstitution midway through 2010, assisted the process on behalf of the movement. It has overseen the Framework's completion and the follow-up consultation and development of the supporting *Community Call for Action* (finalised in December 2011).

In response to the issues of involvement experienced by the movement during NHT2, representatives of state and territory Landcare organisations and associations (non-government), together with other individuals (in the absence of state or territory organisations) met in Melbourne in February 2009. They formed the *National Landcare Network* (National Landcare Network, 2011). Its stated role is "to foster a cohesive and cooperative forum to collaborate, support, advocate for and add value to landcare and other community, volunteer natural resource management groups; foster strategic partnerships; celebrate Landcare achievements; represent community-based landcare at the national level; and speak as the national voice in the development of Landcare and broader natural resource management policy".

The *Caring for our Country* program initially created some uncertainty for groups in respect to the changes in support and funding opportunities and how they may be involved and impacted. The cut in base funding to regional natural resource management bodies prompted some regions to either reduce or redeploy facilitator and coordinator staff working with local groups. Many had to readjust their operations in order to continue their support of group involvement. Developing larger-scale projects threatened many smaller groups as they considered how they

could form partnerships and retain their autonomy, while others did not have capacity to operate at this scale. As priority areas for funding were specific, not all groups were eligible. Although the opportunity for project funding was increased, the challenge was in the competitive process.

The *Caring for our Country* annual public review cycle of its Business Plan gives stakeholders including community-based groups an opportunity to provide feedback and highlight areas for improvement. Through this process the criteria for large-scale partnership projects was relaxed and development of the *Community Action Grants* program improved access to funding for the broader range of groups. The Australian Government's 2011–12 *Caring for our Country* review (Australian Government, 2011) highlighted key items for improvement:

- increasing community skills, knowledge and engagement
- Indigenous natural resource management
- regional delivery
- better alignment between government priorities and regional plans
- improving the way investment priorities are set and investments made
- improved monitoring, reporting and administrative processes
- increased investment in innovative practices
- better encouragement of partnerships

As in the past, groups adjusted to new arrangements over time. They also access other government and non-government, corporate and philanthropic funds when available. More than 5000 community-based Landcare and related groups continue to deliver local and catchment projects under *Caring for our Country*, often in partnership and supported by other organisations such as regional natural resource management bodies albeit within the limitations of each organisation's charter and budget. The support from these organisations comes with the view that the involvement of communities is an essential factor in achieving priority natural resource management outcomes.

Achievements through Landcare

Landcare, an approach consisting of an ethic, movement and model has been instrumental in achieving broad-scale community involvement and improved systems of sustainable resource

use and management across Australia. Achievements directly attributable to Landcare are profound. Landcare has:

- provided an essential vehicle to assist a nation to change direction and work towards ecologically sustainable development
- involved more than 5000 community-based Landcare and related groups currently operating
- harnessed major community in-kind and financial investment through broad-scale community participation in sustainable resource management for the long term
- supported intergenerational learning through group corporate knowledge, family knowledge and school activities
- enabled thousands of people across communities since the 1980s to develop their capacities in skills, knowledge and application to progress:
 - the repair of land degradation on private and public land across the country including soil erosion, water quality and ecological decline
 - the prevention of further degradation to the natural resource base
 - the uptake of resource management practices integrated into food and fibre production
 - a sense of responsibility outside landholder property boundaries
 - better linkages and integration between Aboriginal ‘caring for country’ and European land management cultures and their people
 - opportunities for Aboriginal people to reconnect with country
 - an understanding of the changes required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, manage climate change adaptability and water quality and availability while maintaining food and fibre security
 - social cohesion and community resilience across regions through incorporating social, economic, environmental and cultural considerations into everyday activities that also assist disaster recovery in farming and pastoral communities
 - positioned Australia as a world leader of a national community-based process that has successfully shifted attitudes and practices at the local level where the application of change actually needs to take place.

The Australian Framework for Landcare

The Landcare vision outlined in the Framework is for “all Australians to take responsibility for the way they live in the landscape to ensure a healthy environment that supports a sustainable future” (Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group, 2010).

The Framework highlights:

- The Landcare movement has significantly contributed to improved land and water management systems across the country through broad-scale community involvement. Groups are well-placed and have an important leadership role to play in driving sustainable resource management into the future.
- For Landcare to be effective, the partnership at the national level needs to be re-strengthened and local, regional, state and national plans and priorities aligned.
- The successful operations of community-based groups, founded on stewardship and volunteerism, require autonomy, being able to direct their own course (for ownership and commitment) depending on their interests, needs, capacities and energies within their local communities, neighbourhoods and districts.
- Opportunities through a range of bi-partisan government and non-government support mechanisms would assist effective group function and broad-scale participation at the local level by all generations and cultures. These include access to resources, information and knowledge sharing systems, links to plans at all levels and support for effective volunteer group function.

Landcare and our future

Landcare needs to be understood, recognised and valued for its contribution to date and its potential for the future. It is clear that leadership from all levels of Australian government is essential to the effectiveness of the Landcare model. The challenge has been developing a system of consistent processes that stand the test of time in a fast-changing world.

While the Landcare ethic and movement have remained an enduring combination from the humble beginnings in Victoria in 1986, the model has waxed and waned in more recent years since the *Decade of Landcare Plan* expired in 2001. The Australian Government’s focus on delivery since 2002, through a regional and then national purchaser/provider model, was not specifically targeted to broad-scale community participation.

Community-based groups are but one of many service providers of the government's national priorities within the complex natural resource management system that now exists. The volunteer not-for-profit sector contributes considerable in-kind value, however it is not well recognised that groups deliver more than environmental outcomes. Their value to society also comes in the way of supporting community wellbeing and resilience from within. "Volunteering is an essential part of a socially inclusive society in which all Australian people feel valued and have opportunities to fully participate in community life" (Office for the Not-for-Profit Sector, 2011).

The ongoing management of natural resource issues across Australia, now recognised as an inter-generational process (a key building block of the 1991 Ecologically Sustainable Development processes), remains critical to the resilience of people, their communities and the natural resource base. Furthermore, it underpins critical factors into the future such as greenhouse gas emissions, climate change variability, water quality and availability, and food and fibre security for growing populations in Australia and around the world. Broad-scale community participation is essential for Australia to manage these ongoing threats.

Groups in their districts and neighbourhoods, together with their mosaic of networks, are uniquely positioned to continue driving and supporting long-term local change management processes as part of their everyday lives. This is their niche. For this participation to effectively continue, a system that supports community ownership of environmental problems and commitment to identifying and applying local solutions is fundamentally important.

Providing landcarers with the opportunity to participate in natural resource management program delivery will maximise investment return and maintain the commitment and capacity of the movement to act.

Ensuring the Landcare model is included as a key consideration in all levels of policy development into the future can potentially maximise the effectiveness of government investment in sustainable resource management.

Re-strengthening partnerships between the Australian, State, Territory and local governments and industry, business and conservation sectors will underpin this resolve.

The Landcare movement's new *Australian Framework for Landcare and Community Call for Action* has a significant role in providing a foundation to base future strategic development, growth and support of the Landcare model and achieving broad-scale community participation.

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