



**The value of Landcare to the Australian community**

**Landcare NSW**

## **Executive Summary**

Landcare is a unique community-based approach to managing and restoring Australia's natural environment and improving the sustainability of agricultural activities. Established in the late 1980s, Landcare and its associated networks of community-based action have constantly evolved, responding to the opportunities and challenges posed by successive Governments' approaches to managing Australia's challenging natural environment.

Consistent throughout these past three decades has been the critical role that Landcare has played in leading Australia's approach to agricultural practices, natural resource management, environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. While these positive environmental and agricultural impacts of Landcare have been well recognised, the multiple benefits deriving from the economic, social and cultural contributions of this volunteer and not for profit movement have not been as widely appreciated.

This Landcare NSW Position Statement outlines the extent of these economic, social and cultural benefits, highlighting the enormous role Landcare has played in building and maintaining the capacity and social cohesion of many communities, particularly in rural and regional Australia.

As this statement demonstrates, Landcare has provided a framework for land owners and managers to formally and informally recognise existing expertise and knowledge, to share information and experiences and to support further learning and communities of practice. Landcare groups and networks have also provided a foundation for intergenerational learning, particularly through its school-based activities.

Founded on the understanding that community action is required to collectively address environmental and sustainability challenges, Landcare has brought together people of different ages, cultures and socio-economic groups, positively impacting on the health and wellbeing of both communities and individuals. The volunteering aspect of Landcare has further supported individual wellbeing and mental health by helping people feel valued and part of their community.

Individuals and communities involved in Landcare have developed extensive experience and skills in working with governments, non government organisations and businesses, in grant management, project management, financial, communication and governance systems – all transferrable experience, skills and systems which are utilised in a broad range of other social, economic and community activities.

Landcare groups, networks and programs have also provided a forum for engagement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australians, and a platform for increasing the recognition of women in regional and rural communities.

On the economic front, the Landcare model has matched vast volunteer time and effort with major in-kind and financial investment in communities, resulting in significant multiplier effects for Government investment. For a relatively small investment there have been significant returns for Government and the community at large.

In summary, Landcare has brought enormous value to the Australia over the past three decades, extending well beyond its positive environmental and agricultural impacts.

## Introduction

Landcare is a unique community-based approach to managing and restoring Australia's natural environment and improving the sustainability of agricultural activities.

Established more than 30 years ago, Landcare and its associated networks of community-based action have played a leading role not only in Australia's natural resource management – including improving the sustainability of agricultural activities – but have led the world in developing and implementing community-based processes to shift attitudes and practices towards sustainable resource use and management at a local level.<sup>1</sup>

Landcare comes in many forms. Embracing Bushcare, Coastcare, Rivercare, Dunecare and Junior Landcare, the Landcare movement itself includes more than 6000<sup>2</sup> community-based groups and district, regional and national networks. These groups are augmented by countless associated projects and partnerships with like-minded groups and communities, extending across Australia's vast physical environment – from the coastline and urban areas, to agricultural and remote Aboriginal lands.

While Landcare's positive environmental and agricultural impact is well established, the multiple benefits of the economic, social and cultural contributions that this volunteer and not for profit movement have made has not been as widely appreciated.

## Origins

The national Landcare movement grew from initiatives in the mid-1980s which utilised community-based learning and action to address land conservation issues.<sup>3</sup> The first Landcare group formed in Winjallock in Victoria in November 1986 in response to concerns about land degradation and biodiversity loss.<sup>4</sup> With farmers and conservationists alike appreciating the benefits of community-based action to address environmental degradation, the Landcare movement gradually expanded from these early origins to a national movement, philosophy and ethos.

The catalyst for national action was prompted by an alliance between the leaders of the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation, who joined forces in the late 1980s to lobby the Australian Government to provide leadership for an integrated national framework focused on sustainable land use management and environmental protection. Launched in July 1989, then Prime Minister Bob Hawke's *Statement of the Environment 'Our Country Our Future'* provided the basis for the Year of Landcare in 1990 and a decade long program, backed by administrative, infrastructure, technical and financial support of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

From these early days, Landcare has constantly evolved, responding to the opportunities and challenges posed by successive Governments' (at all three levels) approach to agricultural practices, natural resource management, environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. From the National

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<sup>1</sup> Coral Love, *Evolution of Landcare in Australia: In the context of Australian Government natural resource management policy and programs*, Australian Landcare Council Secretariat, p.8, [http://www.daff.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/2170976/evolution-of-landcare.pdf](http://www.daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2170976/evolution-of-landcare.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government Department of Agriculture, *Landcare*, <http://www.daff.gov.au/natural-resources/landcare> (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.16.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.17.

Landcare Program of the early 1990s, through the later 1990s and early 2000s closely aligned with the National Heritage Trust, and more recently the Caring for Our Country and Biodiversity Fund, Landcare has worked in partnership with Governments at all levels, corporate and philanthropic sponsors and non-government organisations to deliver real outcomes for Australia's environment and community.

### **Landcare today**

Today Landcare is conceived as an approach comprising three key elements:

- A philosophy, influencing the way people live in the landscape while caring for the land – **the Landcare ethic**
- Local community action putting the philosophy into practice – **the Landcare movement** founded on stewardship and volunteers
- A range of knowledge generation, sharing and support mechanisms including groups, networks from district to national levels, facilitators and coordinators, government and non-government programs and partnerships – **the Landcare model**<sup>5</sup>

Landcare groups and initiatives across Australia range from small groups of volunteers with a single narrow objective, to large professional organisations delivering major projects and servicing extended communities and interests.

Landcare groups are local, community-based responses to local community problems and challenges, and as such demonstrate considerable flexibility and variation in both their programs and objectives. Landcare networks operate at a larger scale and have formed in a variety of ways including state agency intervention, collaborative non-government efforts and spontaneously through internal initiative.<sup>6</sup> At both local and network levels, Landcare has a 'flat' organisation, with no complex or unnecessary hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to natural resource management, agricultural sustainability and environmental protection, Landcare's organisational structure reflects the organic evolution of many groups and projects, and embraces the diversity and difference of communities across Australia. Valuing and maintaining this flat structure is an ongoing challenge for Landcare groups and networks.

While there is enormous diversity in the size, types and objectives of Landcare groups and networks, a common element across all initiatives is its grassroots local nature. Landcare is an egalitarian, inclusive, democratic movement driven from and for the community, embracing localism as a means for engaging and motivating communities. Involving people of all ages and from across Australia's diverse cultural population, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Landcare encourages tens of thousands of volunteers to actively and collectively own and address the environmental and

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Landcare Council Secretariat, Department of Agriculture, *Australian Framework for Landcare 2010-20*. Prepared for the Australian Landcare Community by the Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group, 2010, <http://www.landcareonline.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/landcare-framework-post-consultation-pages-1-5.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Sobels, Allan Curtis, Stewart Lockie, 'The role of Landcare group networks in rural Australia: exploring the contribution of social capital', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 2001, Vol 17, pp.265-276 at p.266.

<sup>7</sup> Rob Youl, Sue Marriott and Theo Nabben, *Landcare in Australia – founded on local action*, October 2006, p.23, [http://www.daff.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/29141/landcare\\_in\\_australiaJune08.pdf](http://www.daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/29141/landcare_in_australiaJune08.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2014).

sustainability challenges faced by Australia – in New South Wales alone there is an estimated 58,000 people involved in formal Landcare groups.<sup>8</sup>

Undertaking projects large and small, Landcare volunteers have engaged in a broad range of agricultural and environmental activities across Australia. By developing sustainable cropping techniques, implementing drought management programs, encouraging safe chemical use and storage, and undertaking projects to manage climate variability, minimise nutrient run-off and manage groundwater and salinity, Landcare programs and communities have improved the sustainability of agricultural activities that cover around 60% of Australia's land area<sup>9</sup> and create food and fibre.

Landcare groups have also played a leading role in protecting, enhancing and rehabilitating the natural environment in both urban and rural areas – from collecting litter and embracing bush regeneration by planting millions of trees, shrubs and grasses, through to stabilising sand dunes and riverbanks to reduce erosion and improve water quality, protecting threatened species by providing habitat for native wildlife and repairing eroding gullies and walking tracks.

While Landcare's positive impact on Australia's rural and urban landscapes is well recognised,<sup>10</sup> the multiple benefits of Landcare, and its influence and impact, has extended well beyond these environmental and agricultural achievements.

#### ***A framework for information sharing and intergenerational learning***

By coming together at community meetings and workshops, field days, property management planning activities, and state and national forums, Landcare's community-based networks have encouraged collaboration and innovation around sustainable farming, natural resource management and programs to repair and prevent environmental degradation.

Landcare has provided a framework for land owners and managers to formally and informally recognise existing expertise and knowledge – including the cultural knowledge and 'caring for country' approach of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians – as well as engage in peer to peer learning, to develop communities of practice and share information and experiences – as well as drive local research and development into production methods, farming systems and natural resource management.

Landcare represents a reservoir of trust and goodwill; it has helped to build connectedness between neighbours and across communities, as they talk together and work together to more effectively solve their local problems through networks and partnerships.

Landcare has also supported intergenerational learning, through group corporate knowledge, family knowledge and school activities.<sup>11</sup> Activities involving school students in practical environmental

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<sup>8</sup> Landcare Support NSW, *Landcare in NSW - Summary Report as at 3 February 2014*, <http://www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/landcare-support-nsw/projects/nsw-landcare-group-statistics/2014-nsw-landcare-group-statistics/nsw-landcare-group-statistics-february-2014/view> (accessed 20 August 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Stefan Hajkovicz, 'The evolution of Australia's natural resource management programs: Towards improved targeting and evaluation of investments', *Land Use Policy*, 2009, Vol 26, pp.471-478 at p.471.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*; GHD (Report for the Australian Landcare Council), *Multiple Benefits of Landcare and Natural Resource Management: Final Report*, 7 July 2013, p.14, [http://www.daff.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/2386926/multiple-benefits-of-landcare-and-natural-resource-management-report.pdf](http://www.daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/2386926/multiple-benefits-of-landcare-and-natural-resource-management-report.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Love, *op cit*, p.8.

projects and outdoor 'living classrooms', such as kitchen gardens and composting projects, have been particularly effective in promoting learning amongst young people.

### ***Building community capacity, social capital and leadership***

With more than three decades as resourceful, self-organising groups, with extensive experience in fostering strategic partnerships and collaboratively delivering projects, Landcare programs have significantly developed the capacity of the communities in which they operate.

Landcare groups and networks have developed extensive experience in grant management, in working with governments, non government organisations and businesses, in driving community based research and science projects, and in managing volunteers and teams. Many groups have developed project management, financial, communication and governance systems to support their programs<sup>12</sup> – all transferrable skills and systems which are utilised in a broad range of other social, economic and community activities.

In addition, Landcare members have increasingly taken a leadership role in their communities. On issues extending well beyond environmental degradation and sustainable agriculture, Landcare members are representing their communities to governments on local and regional issues of importance – and engaging with other key stakeholders, including private sector and industry boards, schools and local government.<sup>13</sup>

The relationships underpinning Landcare have also contributed to the development of social capital – defined by the Productivity Commission as “the social norms, networks and trust that facilitate cooperation within or between groups.”<sup>14</sup> Landcare groups have helped build social capital by establishing trust, building relationships and social bonding amongst peers, working in partnership with government and industry, and generating developing land management norms and standards.<sup>15</sup> Social capital formation through Landcare can produce both public benefits – such as improvements in water quality and biodiversity – and private benefits – such as the personal economic benefit of a landholder who has adopted improved practices.<sup>16</sup> It has also been suggested that Landcare, with its extensive local

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Landcare NSW's extensive online Factsheet series, covering issues including Running Efficient Meetings, Duties of Office Bearers, Record Retention, DGR Status, as well as information about company law, financial reviews, audits, insurance, work health and safety and social media: <http://www.landcarensw.org.au/resources.php?tid=2> (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Phillip Toyne and Rick Farley, *The decade of Landcare: Looking backward - looking forward*, 2000, Discussion Paper No. 30, The Australia Institute, p.9, <http://www.tai.org.au/node/893> (accessed 31 July 2014); GHD, *op cit*, pp.16, 21, 33, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Productivity Commission, *Social Capital: Reviewing the Concept and Its Policy Implications*, Commission Research Paper, 2003, AusInfo, Canberra, p.viii, [http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/8244/socialcapital.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/8244/socialcapital.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2014). Note that the Australian Bureau of Statistics utilises the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) definition of social capital: "networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups": Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Measuring Social Capital: An Australian Framework and Indicators*, Information Paper 1378.0, 2004, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/Lookup/13C0688F6B98DD45CA256E360077D526/\\$File/13780\\_2004.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/Lookup/13C0688F6B98DD45CA256E360077D526/$File/13780_2004.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>15</sup> GHD, *op cit*, p.14. Allan Curtis, *Reflecting on the Landcare experience: A report based on information held within ABARE and BRS*, Bureau of Rural Sciences, September 2003, pp.5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Erlina Compton and Bob Beeton, 'An accidental outcome: Social capital and its implications for Landcare and the "status quo"', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 2012, Vol 28, pp.149-60 at p.151-152, <http://w3.unisa.edu.au/crhacd/newsevents/Landcare%20paper.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2014); A. Curtis, H. Ross, G.R. Marshall, C.

group structure and community-state partnership, has built the adaptive capacity of communities and effectively filled a void in many communities caused by economic restructuring, rural decline and the withdrawal of government services and other institutions.<sup>17</sup>

By bringing diverse communities together in formal and informal settings, Landcare involves and engages communities in a way that governments cannot. Landcare is seen by the community generally as ‘non-threatening’ and an ally – this gives Landcare a special ability to engage with a number of demographics that governments often find it difficult to communicate with. With increasing emphasis on localism, Landcare is a potentially valuable ally for governments.

Landcare groups are often well placed to be the first responders, on the ground, to natural emergencies such as bushfires – again in a manner where government agencies are sometimes more constrained. One such example was the response to the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, when Landcare networks were among the first to engage with the community. Building on their local knowledge and community networks, Landcare groups ran field days for affected communities, coordinated the volunteer clean-up program and provided critical communication channels, particularly around sensitive issues such as illegal clearing.<sup>18</sup> Landcare members were also instrumental in environmental management and recovery efforts in the aftermath of the fires.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Supporting social cohesion and resilience of local communities***

Landcare also positively impacts on the health and wellbeing of communities. Founded on the understanding that community action is required to collectively address environmental and sustainability challenges, Landcare brings together people of different ages, cultures and socio-economic groups.

Beyond the environmental and agricultural projects and initiatives for which the Landcare group was formed, these groups provide supportive social networks for individuals and communities – building a sense of belonging and enhancing community connectivity. These factors have a positive impact in building community resilience and adaptive capacity, supporting community harmony and strengthening social cohesion.<sup>20</sup> Improved social cohesion and community resilience in turn assists rural communities, in particular, to cope with broader challenges such as drought and market pressures,<sup>21</sup> as well as

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Baldwin, J. Cavaye, C. Freeman, A. Carr and G.J. Syme, ‘The great experiment with devolved NRM governance: lessons from community engagement in Australia and New Zealand since the 1980s’, *Australasian Journal of Environmental Management*, 2014, Vol 21, No 2, pp. 175-199, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14486563.2014.935747> (accessed 18 August 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Trevor Webb and John Cary, ‘Social capital and natural resource management: An application to Landcare’, *Rural Society*, 2005, Vol 15, No 2, pp.119-131; Terry Besser, ‘Changes in small town social capital and civic engagement’, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 2009, Vol 25, pp. 185-193; Sobels, Curtis, Lockie, *op cit*.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Government, Australian Emergency Management Institute, Attorney General’s Department, *Australian emergency management handbook: Community Recovery – Community Recovery Handbook 2 - Building a disaster resilient Australia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 2011, pp.297-298, <http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Community%20Recovery.PDF> (accessed 20 August 2014). See also the evaluation of the role of community organisations in response to the Black Saturday bushfires: Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd for Goulburn Broken CMA, *Community Skills, Knowledge and Engagement – Bushfire Recovery Program*, April 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Kate Roberts, Daniel Healy, Rhiannon Apted, Mark Cotter, ‘Restoring the landscape after Black Saturday’, *Extension Farming Systems Journal*, Vol 7, No 2, pp.118-122, [http://www.csu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/199157/EFS\\_Journal\\_vol7\\_n02\\_23.pdf](http://www.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/199157/EFS_Journal_vol7_n02_23.pdf) (accessed 20 August 2014).

<sup>20</sup> GHD, *op cit*, pp.11, 12, 19, 20, 27-28, 31, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Australian Landcare Council Secretariat, *op cit*, p.i.

prepare and recover from disasters.<sup>22</sup> In many communities, prior to the establishment of Landcare, there were few other forums that brought communities together in this way.

### ***Encouraging investment in communities***

The Landcare model has matched vast volunteer time and effort with major in-kind and financial investment in communities, resulting in significant multiplier effects for Government investment. For a relatively small investment there have been significant returns for Government and the community at large. The transaction cost of doing business through Landcare is much lower than other avenues.

The 2003 Review of the National Landcare Program report found that the National Landcare Program funding had been “highly successful in catalysing substantial private and community investment in landcare projects, and further private investment on sustainable farming practices, and land, water, vegetation management and repair on farm.”<sup>23</sup> The report found that for every Australian Government dollar spent on landcare projects under the program, other parties have made a corresponding investment of at least \$2.60.<sup>24</sup>

In 2008, Landcare Victoria and Department of Sustainability and Environment found that every dollar that is invested in Landcare leverages 2-5 times that amount through contributions towards labour, equipment, voluntary expertise, and often additional donations from landholders and businesses.<sup>25</sup>

Other analyses have suggested that the economic benefits derived from such investment could be even higher, particularly when volunteer time is adequately accounted for. This ‘value add’ is particularly evident where governments have invested in coordinators: the importance of coordinators in effective volunteer groups has been acknowledged in the context of Landcare, where coordinators have been identified as important in accomplishing group goals.<sup>26</sup>

Built on a foundation of volunteerism, Landcare facilitates some of the estimated \$200 billion economic contribution made each year to Australian society by volunteers.<sup>27</sup> Other economic benefits attributed to Landcare include direct financial returns, increased access to financial resources, and training to improve farming and management techniques.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Supporting the health and welfare of individuals***

Research suggests that involvement with Landcare activities can have positive impacts on individual health and wellbeing through the spiritual, physical and mental health benefits arising from connection with country, clean air and water.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Love, *op cit*, pp. 8, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, *Review of the National Landcare Program report*, October 2003, p.9, <http://nrmonline.nrm.gov.au/downloads/mql:3230/content> (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p.32.

<sup>25</sup> Landcare Victoria and Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Shaping our future: Proceedings*. Presented at the 2008 Victorian Landcare Forum, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Sobels, Curtis, Lockie, *op cit*, p.268.

<sup>27</sup> University of Adelaide, ‘Volunteers worth more to Australia than mining’ *Media release, 28 August 2012*, <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/news/news55621.html> (accessed 17 August 2014).

<sup>28</sup> GHD report, p.24.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, p.17.

General findings about the beneficial impact of interaction with the environment on health and physical and mental wellbeing<sup>30</sup> have been reflected in specific studies of activities similar to those undertaken by Landcare. For example, a 2010 Health Impact Assessment undertaken into the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority's extension work with farmers in southern New South Wales found positive effects of the Authority's service on the health, wellbeing and empowerment of landholders. These impacts resulted from biophysical changes to the landscape following the adoption of positive land management techniques, and from interpersonal contact with the Authority's officers.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, the 'Feel Blue, Touch Green' pilot project – which specifically examined the mental health impact of work on a range of environmental activities on residents of the Geelong and Surf Coast districts in Victoria who may experience stress, anxiety, depression or social isolation – found that participants with the community conservation group ANGAIR (the Anglesea and Airey's Inlet Society for Protection of Flora and Fauna) experienced many health and wellbeing benefits from their involvement. These included developing ongoing social links, learning social, environmental and personal development skills and gaining increased confidence. The authors of the final report concluded that these findings suggested that involvement in conservation and nature-based activities not only benefited the environment but also enhanced community cohesion and improves mental health and wellbeing.<sup>32</sup>

Landcare groups have often taken a proactive approach to tackling mental health issues experienced by farmers, particularly during times of drought and flood, when the challenges of living and working on the land are exacerbated.<sup>33</sup> As the *Australian Framework for Landcare* has acknowledged, "Communities

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<sup>30</sup> For example, a 2008 Deakin University review of relevant literature about the health benefits of contact with nature in a park context concluded that being in a natural environment positively affects people's health, particularly their blood pressure, cholesterol, outlook on life and stress-reduction. The report also noted that 'green nature', can reduce crime, foster psychological wellbeing, reduce stress, boost immunity, enhance productivity, and promote healing: Cecily Maller, Mardie Townsend, Lawrence St Leger, Claire Henderson-Wilson, Anita Pryor, Lauren Prosser, Megan Moore, *Healthy parks healthy people: The health benefits of contact with nature in a park context*, 2008, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences, Deakin University, Executive Summary, [http://www.friskinature.org/media/healthy\\_parks\\_healthy\\_people\\_1.pdf](http://www.friskinature.org/media/healthy_parks_healthy_people_1.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2014).

Similarly, Beyond Blue has commissioned research into the links between mental health and well-being and contact with nature, finding that there are a range of psychological benefits for people who visit and spend time in green, open spaces like parks, forests and woodlands. These benefits include improved mood, lower levels of anxiety, lower stress levels, lower levels of depression and increased physical activity. The report further found that participating in health-promoting group activities such as gardening also had a range of benefits for psychological well-being, such as alleviating anxiety, depression and sleep disturbances and minimising feelings of isolation and vulnerability: Mardie Townsend and Rona Weerasuriya, *Beyond blue to green: The benefits of contact with nature for mental health and well-being*, 2010 Beyond Blue Limited, [http://www.hphcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/beyondblue\\_togreen.pdf](http://www.hphcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/beyondblue_togreen.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Greater Southern Area Health Service, *Farm Family Health and Landscape Health: A Health Impact Assessment of the Extension Component of the Sustainable Native Pastures Project (Final Report)*, 2010, <http://www.iaia.org/hia2010/proceedings/HIA%202010%20Presentations%20PDFs/10%20Thur%2011am%20Embedding%20Health%20-%20New%20uses/Gow.pdf?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1> (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Ebdon and Mardie Townsend, *'Feel Blue, Touch Green': Final Report of a Project undertaken by Deakin University, Barwon Health, Parks Victoria, Alcoa Anglesea, ANGAIR and Surf Coast Shire*, December 2006, p.4, <https://www.deakin.edu.au/health/hsd/research/niche/hns/document/Feel%20Blue,%20Touch%20Green.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>33</sup> For example, the 2014 Landcare Adventure, held in and around Glen Innes in March 2014, included a Farm-Link speaker on Rural Mental Health: <http://www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/glenrac/projects/2014-landcare-adventure-healthy-land-resilient-communities> (accessed 17 August 2014) and the Gwymac Landcare group in March 2014 collaborated with the Northern Tablelands Local Land Services, Farm-Link and the Rural Financial Counselling Service to host a series of practical

have understood the benefits of joint action to analyse and solve local problems, including many that are beyond the capacity of individuals to solve. This has been vital in providing social cohesion and support structures in rural communities struggling to survive in the face of drought and market pressures. In this sense, the Landcare approach has contributed to the health and welfare of local communities.”<sup>34</sup>

The volunteering aspect of Landcare also supports individual wellbeing and mental health by helping people feel valued and part of the community. For example, a 2010 study examining volunteers in a marine natural resource management program found that their volunteering in the program made them feel good emotionally and mentally, and generated personal satisfaction through their contributions, and connecting with others.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders***

Landcare groups and programs have also provided a forum for a range of benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ unique understanding of the Australian environment is informed by their deep spiritual, cultural and economic connections to the land. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are involved in 'caring for country' on their own lands, as well as sharing their knowledge about the land and its care with other Australians.

While there are Landcare care groups associated with Aboriginal Land Councils and communities, many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples participate in, and contribute to, Landcare through on the ground projects and provision of advice.<sup>36</sup> These Landcare connections have provided a basis both for Aboriginal people to reconnect with country and for better integration between Aboriginal ‘caring for country’ and European land management cultures.<sup>37</sup> These relationships have also been identified as a means to access and preserve traditional customs, knowledge, language and medicines<sup>38</sup> and protect cultural heritage sites.<sup>39</sup>

As for other Australians, there are significant potential physical and mental health benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders connecting with, and working in, the natural environment. There is also mounting research evidence specifically linking the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples with

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drought management workshops, including on mental health wellbeing: <http://www.gwymalcare.com.au/news-details.php?nid=16> (accessed 17 August 2014)

<sup>34</sup> *Australian Framework for Landcare, op cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Rebecca Koss and Jonathon Kingsley, ‘Volunteer health and emotional wellbeing in marine protected areas’, 2010, *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Vol. 53, pp.447-453.

<sup>36</sup> Allan Sharp and Jesse Blackadder (eds), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, ‘Indigenous landcare’, section 6 in *Making a Difference: A Celebration of Landcare*, 2008, [http://www.daff.gov.au/natural-resources/landcare/publications/making\\_a\\_difference\\_a\\_celebration\\_of\\_landcare/section\\_6\\_-\\_indigenous\\_landcare](http://www.daff.gov.au/natural-resources/landcare/publications/making_a_difference_a_celebration_of_landcare/section_6_-_indigenous_landcare) (accessed 31 July 2014); GHD, *op cit*, pp.26-27.

<sup>37</sup> GHD, *op cit*, p.11.

<sup>38</sup> GHD, *op cit*, p.30.

<sup>39</sup> Richard McTernan and Mary-Anne Scully, *Finding Common Ground: A Review of Indigenous engagement in Landcare in Victoria*, Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment, June 2010, p.12, <http://www.landcarevic.net.au/news/finding-common-ground-a-review-of-indigenous-engagement-in-landcare-in-victoria> (accessed 31 July 2014).

contact with nature, in terms of traditional lands and seas.<sup>40</sup> A recent Australian study found that Aboriginal “caring for country” was associated with better nutrition, more frequent physical activity and fewer chronic disease risk factors and diagnoses.<sup>41</sup> Other research suggests that embracing cultural practices, such as Aboriginal land management, can promote the spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of indigenous health and well-being.<sup>42</sup>

There is potential for the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Landcare to be expanded further. To date Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in Landcare has been limited for a variety of reasons, including marginalisation of groups and communities, communication challenges, differing expectations, and difficulties experienced by Indigenous communities in making use of mainstream natural resource management project development.<sup>43</sup>

Given the acknowledged benefits of Landcare in building social capital and social cohesion, greater engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Landcare holds potential for expanded cross-cultural partnerships and understanding – factors contributing to reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians.

### ***Increased recognition of women in rural communities***

Women’s participation in Landcare, particularly in rural and regional communities, has been recognised from the outset. A 1997 report found that, while their experience varied considerably, Landcare had been a positive experience for most women.<sup>44</sup> The report found that women were concerned, knowledgeable and influential land managers, and looked to Landcare as a forum to give their knowledge credibility.<sup>45</sup> It also found that women – estimated at that time to be 29 per cent of Landcare members<sup>46</sup> – were undertaking important Landcare work as participants and leaders – particularly using their administrative and organisational skills in critical coordination and administrative roles in community groups.<sup>47</sup> Other reports during this period suggested<sup>48</sup> that Landcare was more inclusive of women than any other farm-based organisations<sup>48</sup> and had helped to raise the profile of the role of women in agricultural family business.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Christopher Burgess, Fay Johnston, Helen Berry, Joseph McDonnell, Dean Yibarbuk, Charlie Gunabarra, Albert Mileran and Ross Bailie, ‘Healthy country, healthy people: the relationship between Indigenous health status and “caring for country”’, *Medical Journal of Australia*, 2009, Vol. 190 (10), pp. 567-572, <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2009/190/10/healthy-country-healthy-people-relationship-between-indigenous-health-status-and> (accessed 31 July 2014); Townsend and Weerasuriya, *op cit*, pp.35-37.

<sup>41</sup> Burgess et al, *ibid*, p.571.

<sup>42</sup> Townsend and Weerasuriya, *op cit*, p.37.

<sup>43</sup> Youl, Marriott and Nabben, *op cit*, p.44; McTernan and Scully, *op cit*, p..4, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Allan Curtis, Penny Davidson and Terry De Lacy, ‘Women’s Participation and Experience of Landcare in Australia’, *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, Vol 10, Issue 2-3, 1997, pp 37-56.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, p.47.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, p.49.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, pp.47-48.

<sup>48</sup> Stewart Lockie, ‘Landcare in Australia: Cultural transformation in the management of rural environments’, *Culture & Agriculture*, March 1998, Vol 20, Issue 1, pp. 21-29.

<sup>49</sup> Liz Hogan and Bruce Cumming, *More than a question of numbers: Working with women and people from a non-English speaking background toward total catchment participation* (Report of the Landcare Participation Project), 1997, Department of Primary Industries and Energy, and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Canberra, ACT.

This recognition of women in Landcare has continued to the present day, with the Department of Agriculture's *Recognising Women Farmers* initiative (2009-2012), which "supported activities that built the leadership and representative capacity of women in primary industries – to strengthen primary industry productivity and build rural, regional and remote community resilience to a changing climate", awarding grants to several Landcare projects.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Raising environmental awareness in the broader community***

As has been long acknowledged, Landcare has been successful in moving community attitudes towards sustainability, in providing information and stimulating attitudinal change.<sup>51</sup> Through broad scale community involvement, Landcare and its associated networks of community-based action have increased understanding of the causes and symptoms of environmental degradation and the impact of inappropriate resource management practices – as well as encouraged broader community awareness of Australia's current and emerging environmental challenges, such as sustainable resource use and conservation, climate change variability and food security.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Providing international leadership***

Landcare has positioned Australia as a world leader in community-based approaches to sustainable resource management. By the early 2000s, at least 20 countries – including New Zealand, South Africa and the Philippines – had adopted the Landcare approach into parts of their environmental programs,<sup>53</sup> and in 2008 Australian Landcare International – a not-for-profit organisation aiming to use its members collective Landcare experience in Australia to help people in other countries manage their land and water resources – was established.<sup>54</sup>

The Landcare network now operates in Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, Tonga, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Fiji, USA, Canada and 12 African countries.<sup>55</sup> While these countries have adapted Landcare to meet their local needs and circumstances, it has been recognised that "the common thread is community empowerment to identify, plan and act holistically on environmental problems."<sup>56</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As a volunteer, community-based, not for profit movement Landcare has had a demonstrably positive impact across Australia – not only in "raising awareness, influencing farming and land management practices and delivering environmental outcomes across Australian landscapes"<sup>57</sup> – but also in the broad economic, social and cultural contributions it has led in Australian communities.

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<sup>50</sup> See Australian Government Department of Agriculture, *Recognising Women Farmers*, [http://www.daff.gov.au/climatechange/australias-farming-future/community\\_networks\\_and\\_capacity\\_building/recognising\\_women\\_farmers](http://www.daff.gov.au/climatechange/australias-farming-future/community_networks_and_capacity_building/recognising_women_farmers) (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Toyne and Farley, *op cit*, p. vii,

<sup>52</sup> Love, *op cit*, p.8.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*, pp.31, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Australian Landcare International, *About ALI*, <http://alci.com.au/about-us/> (accessed 31 July 2014).

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>56</sup> Youl, Marriott and Nabben, *op cit*, p.36.

<sup>57</sup> *Australian Framework for Landcare*, *op cit*, p.i; Australian Landcare Council Secretariat, Department of Agriculture, *Australian Framework for Landcare: Community Call for Action*. Prepared for the Australian Landcare Community by the Australian

Today, many of the rationales for the establishment of the national Landcare movement more than three decades ago remain challenges: the adverse effects of settlement and development on Australia's biodiversity, the continuing sustainability of our agricultural activities, soil erosion and acidity, food security for Australia's growing population and the impacts of climate change.

To continue its vital work across the Australian landscape, and to sustain and further develop its positive impact in communities across Australia, the Landcare movement requires continuing support and investment from everyone in the Australian community.<sup>58</sup> Governments at all three levels need to commit to the development of a suitable institutional and legislative framework to provide a basis for the Landcare community to operate effectively and to coordinate national, state/territory and local government efforts.<sup>59</sup> Enhanced partnerships with governments, industry associations, businesses, philanthropists and other stakeholders are required to complement these efforts, to harness financial and human resources, and enable Landcare volunteers and groups to continue their critical efforts throughout Australia

Landcare has brought enormous value to the Australian community and environment over the past three decades. For its contribution to continue and grow, it now requires solid backing from across the Australian community.

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Further information: [www.landcarensw.org.au](http://www.landcarensw.org.au)

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<sup>58</sup> *Australian Framework for Landcare: Community Call for Action*, *op cit*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*.

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