



# **LANDCARE ALIGNMENT PROJECT**

## ***Aligning Community Landcare***

## ***& Government***

Prepared for the National Landcare Network

By Hugo Ottesen

September 2019

## Abbreviations & Acronyms

- ACF** – Australian Conservation Foundation<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- ANU** – Australian National University<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- CfoC** – Caring for Our Country program
- CISS** – Centre for Invasive Species Solutions
- CMA** – Catchment Management Authority<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- COAG** – Council of Australian Governments
- DA** – Department of Agriculture (May 2019 – present)
- DAFF** – Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
- DAWR** – Department of Agriculture and Water Resources<sup>[1][2]</sup> (2015-2019)
- DEE or DOEE** – Department of the Environment and Energy<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- EPBC Act** – *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* 1999
- ESD** – Ecologically Sustainable Development<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- IGAE** – Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (1992)
- LAL/LA** – Landcare Australia Limited
- LLS** – Local Land Services
- NAPSWQ/NAP** – National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality
- NFF** – National Farmers’ Federation<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- NGO** – Non-Government Organisation
- NHT1** – Natural Heritage Trust<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- NHT2** – Natural Heritage Trust Extension<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- NLN** – National Landcare Network<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- NLP** – National Landcare Program<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- NRM** – Natural Resource Management<sup>[1][2]</sup>
- RALF** – Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator
- R&D** – Research and Development
- RLP** – Regional Land Partnerships

## Table of Contents

<b>Abbreviations &amp; Acronyms</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Purpose</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>A Note on Structure</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Alignment with the Constitution</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Alignment with Heads of Power</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Water .....	11
<b>Cooperative Federalism</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Alignment with the Regions</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Criticism & Revision .....	15
<b>Alignment with Past National Programs</b> .....	<b>17</b>
National Landcare Program & the Decade of Landcare (1989-1996) .....	17
The Natural Heritage Trust (1996-2008) .....	18
Caring for Our Country (2008-2013/14) .....	19
<b>Alignment with today’s National Landcare Program</b> .....	<b>19</b>
NLP Phase One .....	20
NLP Phase Two .....	20
Regional Land Partnerships (RLP).....	20
RLP Long Term (5 year) Project Outcomes (Program Logic) .....	22
Smart Farms.....	22
Other Programs & Environmental Objectives .....	24
<b>Conclusion: Lessons &amp; Opportunities</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>28</b>

## Purpose

This paper is intended to be a resource for community Landcare. It is written to help landcarers better understand the political and financial systems they work within. It aims to empower and energise landcarers, which will translate into more activities and better on-the-ground outcomes.

This paper recognises it will also be of relevance for two other audiences. To the government and the NRM regions, it signals that community Landcare is an active and ready partner to engage with, collaborate and achieve on-the-ground outcomes. It also highlights the distance left to travel by both government and the regions to align with community Landcare.

## Introduction

It can be frustrating when community groups, government bodies and agencies fail to work together, ‘see eye-to-eye’, and achieve common objectives. Community groups struggle when government and others do not adequately support their activities. Or when governments pursue other priorities they deem more in need of their attention. Likewise, government officials and agencies are limited in their influence when community groups, individual landholders and agricultural businesses fail to align their work with broader national or regional priorities and plans, or to comply with the protocols and demands of public administration. It is particularly unfortunate when considering that at the end of the day all these groups and individuals share the same objectives: the conservation and sustainable management of Australia’s natural resources - its soils, land, water, fauna and flora. The purpose of this paper is to remedy some of this frustration, by attempting to better align the understandings and expectations of community, government and industry.

Landcare, Australia’s community based natural resource management model, emerged in the 1980s and quickly spread across the continent as vital and needed solution to Australia’s environmental ailments. At this time, community-based solutions to managing natural resources were becoming popular as a third alternative to traditional ‘state’ or ‘market’ based approaches (the ‘leviathan’ /regulation or ‘privatisation’/deregulation). Lisa Robins described Landcare’s emergence as a ‘paradigm

shift from focusing on the individual farmer and their property to sponsoring local community groups, and building relationships and networks at the local community level' (2007, 307). Social scientists explain Landcare using concepts such as social capital, community capacity and empowerment theory. Social capital emphasises the value of things like relationships, reciprocity, and trust are analogous to and interrelated in their value with physical or human capital (Putnam 2000, 20). Building social capital and capacity in communities gives them the ability to govern their own resources, solve their own issues, and effectively disseminate and adopt knowledge and skills (current and new), along with other positive flow-on benefits such as improved individual and community health outcomes (Compton & Beeton 2012; Cramp 2006). While this removes burden from government and mitigates negative outcomes of the market, there remains an important role for all three approaches. In particular, the role of government in carefully cultivating social capital and community capacity is vital (Sobels et al 2001; Compton & Beeton 2012; Campbell 1992; Curtis & Van Nohuys 1999). Both neglect and excessive control of community by government can stifle activity and erode social capital and other valuable gains.

Scholars have explored other factors that explain the effectiveness of community Landcare through reference to empowerment theory (Compton et al 2009). Empowering processes are those when people create and or are given opportunities to control their own destiny and influence the decisions that affect their lives (Zimmerman 1995, 583). It occurs when individuals achieve critical understanding of their socio-political environment, are actively engaged in their community, have a proactive approach, and perceive personal control over their affairs (Zimmerman 1995, 581). Empowerment and empowering processes lead to higher levels of proactivity, participation and effectiveness. Disempowerment breeds less activity, lower levels of participation and effectiveness, and can lead to a decline and erosion of social capital.

Thus a central objective of this paper is to empower community Landcare, by providing a better understanding of the socio-political environment, government priorities, and institutional realities in which they find themselves. A better comprehension of Australia's different governments and institutions, and their priorities and constitutions, the so-called 'rules of the game', can enable and empower Landcare groups to better align themselves and their own objectives. It can explain why governments prioritise

particular issues and processes, and illuminate how community can best work within and towards them. This alignment and subsequent empowerment can bring about positive change in great leaps, translating to greater success in on-ground outcomes.

## A Note on Structure

The paper's structure has been shaped by both its content and purpose. It aims to provide a critical understanding of Australia's environmental governance and funding for Landcare and natural resource management (NRM). Consequently, in some ways it also constitutes a genealogy of the National Landcare Program (NLP).

This account begins with the Australian Constitution, which defines the basis and limits of governance for the environment. As Australia has a federal system of government, it therefore involves exploring the delineation of powers between Commonwealth and States, and an account of Australian federalism. As our understanding of the Constitution and approaches to federalism change over time, with the emergence of issues or High Court judgements, this is also a historical exercise.

A central theme in all this is the important role of all levels of government for Landcare and natural resource management in Australia. For simplicity's sake however, this paper refrains from delving deeper of different state and territory arrangements, or similar discussion of local government.

The paper then goes on to describe the most significant development in Australia's natural resource management system since the emergence of Landcare: the regional model. Understanding the rationale behind the regional model, and its strengths and criticisms, is crucial in illuminating how Landcare can better align itself with environmental and policy imperatives. In turn this understanding is informed by understanding Australia's federalism and Landcare's successes and limitations.

With this background accounted for, the paper then goes on to describe the evolving national programs, beginning with the first National Landcare Program and the Decade of Landcare (beginning in 1989), moving through different stages of the Natural Heritage Trust (1996-2002 and 2002-2018), the Caring for Our Country (2008-2013), and finally

the new National Landcare Program, Phase One (2014-2015 to 2017-2018) and now Phase Two (June 2018 to June 2023).

Finally the paper concludes with a list of lessons and opportunities to bring about a better alignment of community Landcare with various levels of government, international commitments and objectives, the regional model, and with the National Landcare Program. With this critical understanding, lessons and opportunities illuminated it can hopefully empower community groups to engage and act with renewed verve, reflected in increased on the ground activities and outcomes.

## Alignment with the Constitution

One of the first places to look in order to understand Australia's approach to funding and priorities is the Australian Constitution. Constitutions, like any historical document, reflect the knowledge and values of the times in which they were produced. This is no different when considering the Australian Constitution, drafted and written in the 1890s, when issues such as the environment were not considered of national importance.<sup>1</sup> Thus there included no reference of the environment or conservation in the delineation of roles and powers and historically the environment and issues of conservation have fallen within the jurisdiction of state governments. However, as environmental and conservation issues have become more and more the focus of awareness and concern, particularly since the 1960s, even more in the 1980s, governments and groups in Australia have struggled to clarify and demarcate their respective roles and powers vis-à-vis the environment.

Australia's Constitution affords relatively few words to defining the different areas of power, with most of the distinction being defined in one clause (Section 51). S51 describes 39 'heads of power' for which the Federal Government has responsibility, and can therefore legislate on. They include things such as taxation, defence, currency, external affairs, corporations, interstate trade, immigration and industrial relations. Those powers that are not defined under s51 or elsewhere are regarded as 'residual

---

<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that there were not individuals arguing for their protection and a notable history by Australian National University scholar Tim Bonyhady has argued against the dominant belief that early colonialists possessed no concern for their environment - Tim Bonyhady, *Colonial Earth*, 2000.

powers', and fall within the remit of the states and territories. Where, however, state legislation is inconsistent with federal legislation, so that it is impossible to obey both, federal law prevails (s109).

The minimalist approach of defining a set number of powers for the Commonwealth leaves everything else, a seemingly infinite number of areas, for the States. While the Commonwealth appears limited by a finite set of 'heads of power', state governments do not. However, there exist a number of ways the Federal Government can legislate and expand its presence in areas seemingly belonging to the states. In fact, since Federation there has been a tendency towards an increased centralisation of power. While there exists no explicit head of power for something such as the environment, broad interpretation of existing Commonwealth 'heads of power', like 'taxation', 'corporations', 'defence', and 'external affairs', offers potentially unlimited number of ways of influencing policy in different areas. Moreover, while the Commonwealth does have defined powers, states do not.

Section 51 does define the Commonwealth's powers in areas such as quarantine (ix), and trade and commerce with other countries, and among states (i), providing much of the basis for its role in agriculture, issues such as biosecurity, and the environment.

With the external affairs head of power (s51xxix) federal governments have been able to expand their role and legislate in areas in order to deliver on obligations under international treaties. The most prominent example of this occurred in 1983, when the Hawke Government successfully blocked the damming of the Franklin River in Tasmania by passing the *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983*, and through use of its power in external affairs via national legislative embodiment of an international treaty. During the landmark High Court case, *Commonwealth v. Tasmania*, the Tasmania government argued that the Commonwealth had no right to legislate or regulate in the environment, while the Commonwealth government justified itself through reference to its external affairs power in relation to international treaties. The High Court ruled in favour of the Commonwealth, affirming its ability to legislate in order to fulfil its international legal obligations. It has therefore been a significant legislative power for conservation and the environment, and other areas such as human rights. While it provides insight into the potentially limitless potential for expansion of power, it also



illuminates the particular issues and areas of focus and priority for the Commonwealth (biodiversity etc.).

Hence, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the EPBC Act), which provides much of the framework for Commonwealth environmental protection in Australia, derives much of its Constitutional validity and substance from a number of international treaties. These treaties include:

- The Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1975 (World Heritage Convention);
- The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat 1975 (the Ramsar Convention);
- The Convention on Biological Diversity 1992;
- Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA);
- China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA);
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals - (Bonn Convention); and
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora 1976 (CITES).

The EPBC Act repealed previous legislation such as the *Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974* (Cth) (EPIP Act), the *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975*, and the *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act 1983* (the instigator of the Tasmanian Dams High Court dispute), replacing and merging them into a single overarching national environmental protection framework. It is reviewed decennially, with the last significant review occurring in 2009 by senior bureaucrat Allan Hawke (consequently labelled the Hawke Review). Accordingly, the next review of the Act is underway and due later this year (i.e. 2019). It remains the Commonwealth's main overarching framework for environmental protection, defining much of the government's agenda and priorities.

Similarly, accession to international agreements on issues such as climate change, such as the Kyoto Protocol (1992), subsequent Doha Amendment (2012), and the more recent 2016 Paris Agreement, have shaped Commonwealth priorities and programs. Their influence is also borne out by the increasing emphasis on climate resilience in consecutive federal Landcare programs.

On top of the generous interpretation of legislative powers, the disproportionate revenue raising ability gained by the Commonwealth since Federation<sup>2</sup> has given it the ability to influence state governments. The Constitution stipulates that the Federal Government may make payments to the states as sees fit (s96). As a result of this capacity and what has been described as a ‘vertical fiscal imbalance’ (not to be confused with the horizontal fiscal imbalance that exists between the states and territories), the Commonwealth can significantly influence policy in areas traditionally and constitutionally within the remit of the states, including education, health, infrastructure, and the environment, via the lever of funding transfers tied to a policy objective.

The Commonwealth has thus been able to lead in areas like the environment through ‘cooperative federalism’, working with and sometimes coercing state governments to implement strategic policy frameworks (Wheller 2015; Samnakay 2017). However, while the Commonwealth enjoys significant ability to steer and drive policy in Australia, it does not do so without limits.

## Alignment with Heads of Power

In 2012, the High Court significantly altered the previously understood scope of the Commonwealth executive’s power to act, spend money and enter into grants. *Williams v Commonwealth*, also known as the School Chaplain’s case, involved a challenge to the Commonwealth government’s funding of chaplains in public schools under the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP), brought about by Queensland parent Ronald Williams. It contested the previously thought unlimited power of the Commonwealth to spend money and enter into contracts without legislative power. In part based on constitutional theory and principles of responsible government and parliamentary accountability, the High Court ruled there was no legislative basis to the Commonwealth’s program.

The decision had vast ramifications for a range of government programs and contracts like the NSCP, which the government had to scramble to try and save through legislation

---

<sup>2</sup> This vertical fiscal imbalance is largely a product of developments such as the Commonwealth’s takeover of income tax in the early 1940s and subsequent High Court rulings (Uniform Tax Case – *South Australia v Commonwealth*).

and other means. For those programs and contracts falling under a legislative head of power, but without relevant legislation, this is relatively simple. However, programs and contracts without a referable 'head of power' cannot be saved in such a facile way – not to say that many of them cannot be saved at all. Since *Williams*, however, when the limits of Commonwealth power were exposed, all programs and activities are cautiously examined and carefully framed in accordance with a legislative power and the Constitution.

Some groups, including the Australian Conservation Foundation and a joint Senate Committee for the Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (1999) have recommended, in the case of a broad change of the constitution such as might occur if Australia became a republic, the addition to s51 of a head of power for the environment. Such an inclusion would clarify the ambiguity surrounding power and responsibility for the environment, providing the Commonwealth government more authority to implement national policy frameworks. Whether or not the Commonwealth would desire such an explicit definition of its power (and responsibility) is a different question. In the absence of such an inclusion, however, Commonwealth action on the environment demands cooperation and involvement with state and other governments.

## Water

The case of water is distinct in some ways. Unlike the environment and conservation, the management of Australia's water was already considered an issue of immense importance and heavily contested during the Convention Debates in the 1890s. In particular, who would control the Murray River became a long and tangled debate preoccupying and frustrating delegates (Pepper 2011). Eventually, unable to reach a consensus on riparian rights, delegates directed their attention to limiting the future Commonwealth government's ability to interfere with the rights of the states. The inclusion of section 100 was agreed upon:

'The Commonwealth shall not, by any law or regulation of trade or commerce, abridge the right of a State or of the residents therein to the reasonable use of the waters of rivers for conservation or irrigation' (s100).

Thus, as in the case of the environment, there exists no direct constitutional power for the Commonwealth to regulate state water. However, this does not mean there does not exist ways to do so.

## Cooperative Federalism

As outlined above, effective governance of issues such as the environment demands cooperation across all levels of government. Australia's federal system has been described to follow the example of 'cooperative federalism', where local, state and Commonwealth governments cooperate on across levels and policy areas. This is particularly important in areas like the environment, which straddle state boundaries and are not clearly defined within explicit powers in the Constitution. How closely reality accords with this 'cooperative federalist' model can be debated at different times and on different issues. Different governments have different approaches, with some working cooperatively and by 'consensus', and others acting in a more unilateral fashion (Crowley 2001). Moreover, there is a great diversity in the ways that Commonwealth governments can go about implementing a strategic national policy framework (Samnakar 2017). Nevertheless, there exist a number of practices, institutions and mechanisms that coordinate and facilitate cooperation between governments.

The most obvious, Australia's peak intergovernmental forum and mechanism of cooperative federalism is the Council of Australia Governments or COAG. Established in 1992 under the Keating Government, replacing the decades old Premiers' Conferences, it comprises the six state, and two territory governments, and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). Within COAG, there exist a number of intergovernmental councils or 'Ministerial forums', established to focus on 'key national priorities', including for example transport and infrastructure, health, education and energy. Councils facilitate discussion, intergovernmental agreements, and allow coordinated policy in important areas such as infrastructure, energy and health. Prior to 2013 councils existed for the environment and natural resources along with more than a dozen other shifting topics. In 2013, ministerial councils were streamlined down from more than 20 to just several on the most 'important' intergovernmental issues. Unfortunately, this does not include a specific council on the environment or natural resources.

An endorsement by COAG or the contemporary equivalent is often (though not always) the first port of call in implementing of a new national policy framework (Samnakar 2017). Accordingly, the emphasis on cooperative federalism from the 1980s manifested in the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE) on 1 May 1992, a ‘political pact’ to work together and better define roles and responsibilities on the environment. Under the IGAE, the Australian Government and all state and territory governments agreed to integrate environmental considerations into their decision-making and pursue the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD). This cooperative federal consensus began the process leading to and would later underpin the EPBC Act 1999 (Crowley 2001, 8), ‘the primary vehicle<sup>[11]</sup> for implementing ESD at the Commonwealth level’ (Hawke 2009, 48).

In reality, cooperative federalism occurs constantly, even more outside the formalities of COAG and its Ministerial Councils than within. Everyday on a plethora of matters there is communication, coordination and cooperation between national, state and local government. Bilateral agreements and arrangements are made on a variety of issues, and individuals and institutions collaborate freely across boundaries and jurisdictions. Australia’s cooperative federalist model has often been compared to a ‘marble cake’ where programs and authority are mixed pragmatically across levels of government, as opposed to the ‘layer cake’ model where they are clearly divided among the different levels. Hence, Australia’s federal system is more complex and interconnected than first glance suggests, demanding cooperation and collaboration on multiple levels.

## Alignment with the Regions

The most significant development in Australian natural resource management since the emergence of community Landcare in the late 1980s was the development of a regional planning and delivery model based on catchment management organisations (Campbell 2009, 31). The result of this, is that to some extent Australia now has three and a half levels of government when it comes to natural resource management: federal, state, local and another regional or subregional. Aligning and engaging with all these levels of government is key for Landcare’s success. Understanding the logic and rationale behind the emergence of the regional model is therefore crucial.

While the ‘decade of Landcare’ had been viewed an enormous success, with bottom-up localism and volunteerism becoming a staple component and basis of Australian natural resource management, many including early Landcare proponents Rick Farley and Phillip Toyne noted that changes had not gone far enough in addressing the mounting environmental issues (Toyne & Farley 2000). Landcare was enormously successful in its ability to invigorate wide support and activities, but government had to be able to demonstrate results and changes on larger, regional, state or national levels. Localism alone failed to adequately deliver coherent and coordinated changes needed to justify large amounts of public money invested. The regional model appealed to policymakers for its capacity to address local issues and circumstances, while more efficiently delivering nationally coordinated programs (Robins 2007, 306). Regionalisation was thus driven by the need to balance devolution of NRM with greater coordination at a catchment and ‘landscape’ level. As Paton et al observed it was both ‘the successes and limitations of Landcare that hastened the move to regionalisation’ (2004, 259). Landcare demonstrated the importance of devolved local NRM, but also highlighted that local groups alone with limited resources were unlikely to affect regional level change.

Beginning in earnest in 2002, two national programs, the Natural Heritage Trust Extension (NHT2) and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAPSWQ or just NAP), underpinned the formalisation of these 56 integrated catchment regions across the continent with corresponding regional bodies (Robins 2007, 306-307). Regions were designed in terms of natural ‘catchments’, shared environmental characteristics, issues and industries, and local and state government jurisdictions (Andrews 2018). They were intended to ‘improve the efficiency of engagement between these local groups and governments at all levels, to strengthen cooperation between the Australian and state governments...and to provide an ecologically sound, bioregional context for devolved decision-making’ (Curtis & Lefroy 2010, 7). Regional organisations varied from statutory bodies, such as Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) in Victoria or Local Land Services (LLS) in NSW, to officially recognised NGOs. Some regions developed earlier during the 1990s had already formed crucial partnerships and attachments with other groups and projects within their catchments. Indeed, distinct histories and cultures of development in each

state shaped the varying success and experiences of the regional model perhaps as much environmental differences.

In theory the regional organisations would provide strategic coordination and support to NRM activities in their catchment. With professional staff and funding, they could create strategic plans for their catchment and work with and support community Landcare groups and other relevant stakeholders to address local NRM issues. Paid and professional staff would support and enable community groups in applying for grants, manage paperwork and bureaucracy, designing and implementing projects, and anything else they might need assistance with. In this way the regional model built upon community Landcare, designed to help realise the full potential of a coordinated and supported bottom-up localism and volunteerism.

### **Criticism & Revision**

Unfortunately while in some parts of the country the regional model thrived, in other parts this was not the case. In some regions, Landcare groups had grown alongside regional bodies, or Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) over almost a decade, developing close and productive working relationships. In other cases, the introduction of the regional delivery model did not integrate so smoothly with community Landcare groups, and has drawn criticism. In particular, funding volatility, demands for greater accountability and control by regional bodies, resulted in waning of enthusiasm and energy from volunteer groups (Prager & Beeton 2009). Moreover, some regional bodies have seen themselves more as service deliverers rather than community facilitators, and have tried to bypass Landcare groups in their programs and activities (Compton et al 2009). Thus unfortunately instead of building on the successes of the Landcare model, in some cases the development of the regional model has in fact undermined it. Andrew Campbell analogised it to constructing the third storey of a building by ‘pinching bricks’ from the first (pers. com. 2019).

Empowerment theory suggests that the greater top down control exerted by the regions disempowered communities and individuals and stifled activity, participation and effectiveness (Compton et al. 2009). In many places the introduction of regional bodies undermined community groups sense of ownership of their efforts through increased control, barriers like bureaucracy, or just neglect (Compton et al. 2009). Instead of better

harnessing and growing the value of community activities, some regional bodies by attempting to supplant community groups have thus undermined it.

As Campbell wrote a decade ago, ideally each major development in our natural resource management model should proceed in parallel, reinforcing one another (2009, 31).

However, the tendency has been to see them as sequential developments, with a 'been there done that' mentality. Just as Landcare is vital, so too is the regional framework, giving a more strategic approach with a regional or catchment scale, a more integrative approach across different issues, while maintaining a community base (Campbell 2009, 32). Moreover while there have been problems in some cases, in many there have been great successes, and the overall rationale behind the regional model remains intact and strong. We need to take the time to get the regional framework right, says Campbell, and 'not undermine it before it has a real chance to deliver' (2009, 32). A decade after Campbell asserted this, and while the government continues to work to get the model right, the case behind his assertion remains strong.

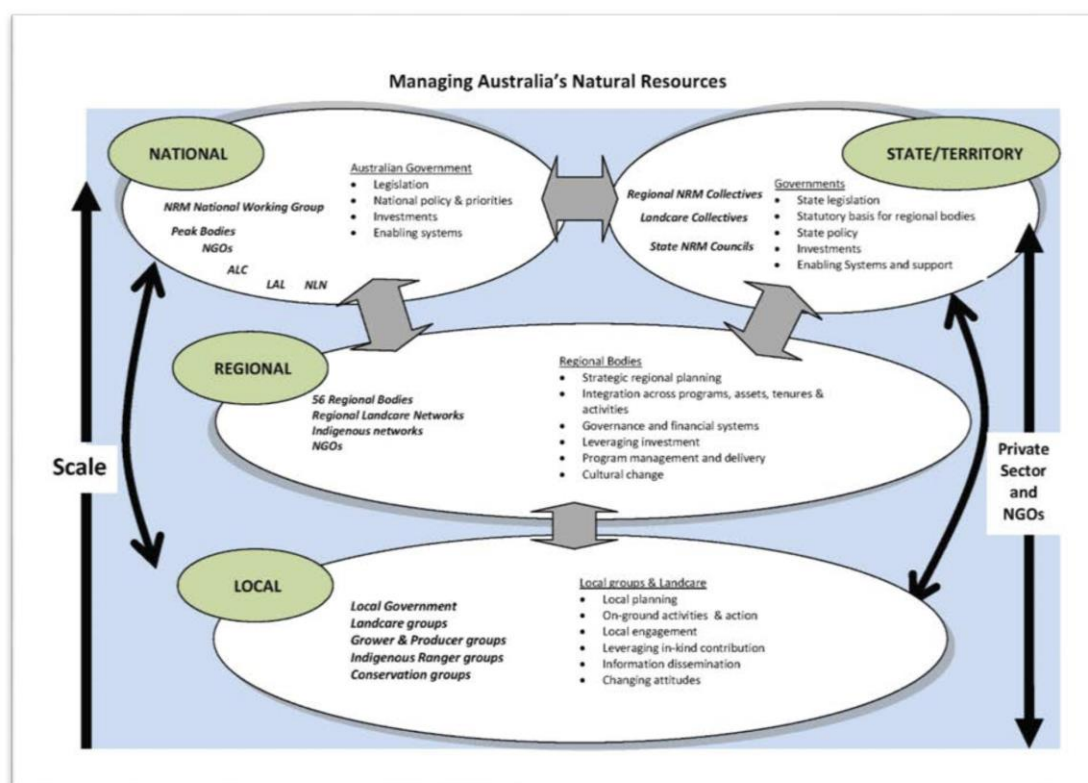


Figure 1. Different levels of governance in Australia's natural resource management model (NRM Regions Australia 2014, 9).



## Alignment with Past National Programs

Since the emergence of a National Landcare Program in the 1980s, Commonwealth funding for Landcare and NRM has gone through several different stages or programs, corresponding with successive governments. Each funding regime has been shaped by factors ranging from basic constitutional constraints, international commitments, pressing environmental and economic issues of the day, the incumbent government's fiscal position and approach towards federalism, and precedents set by previous Commonwealth programs and funding arrangements. Understanding the developments and legacies of each of these programs is as important as understanding the Constitutional and legislative backgrounds.

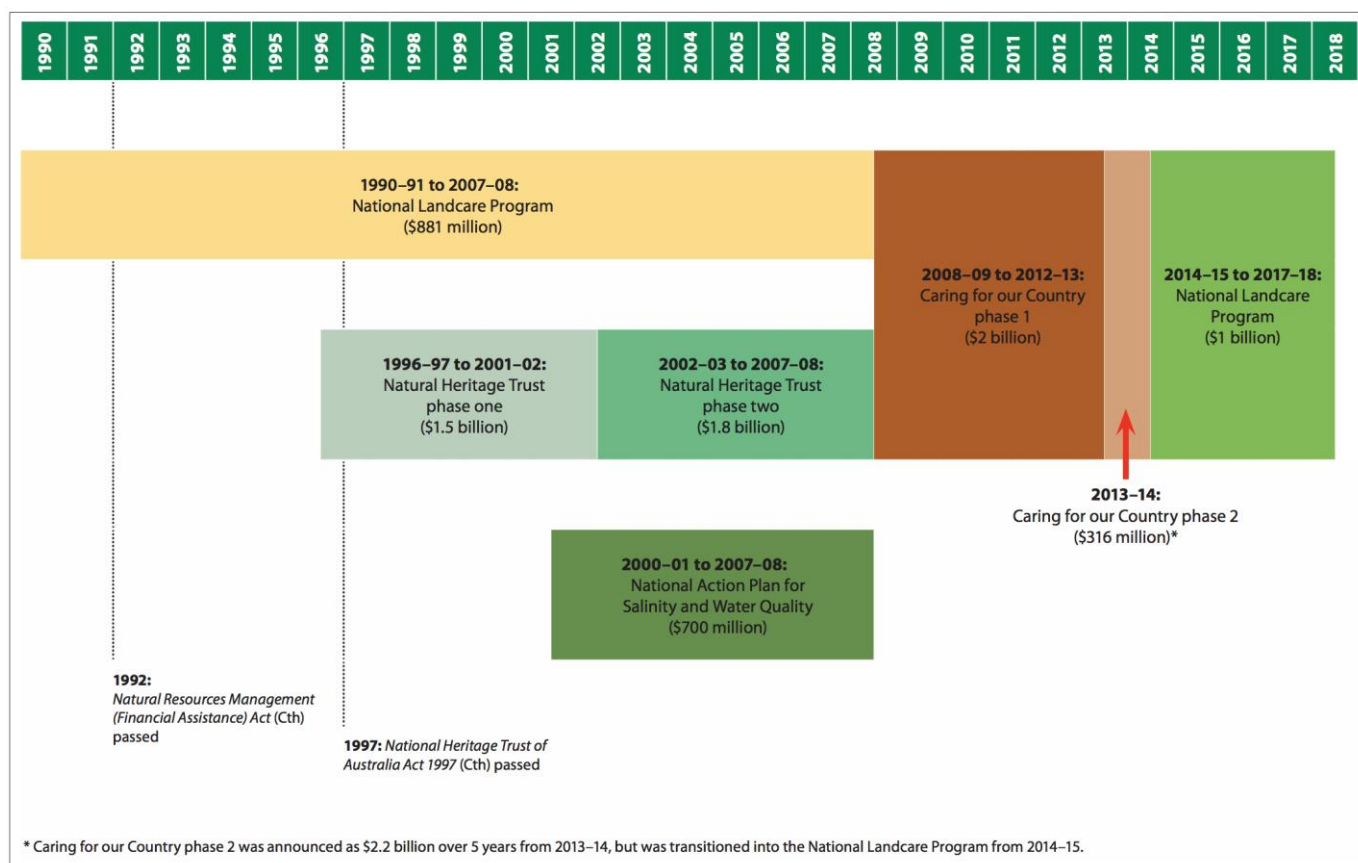


Figure 2. Australian Government investment in NLP Phase One and predecessors since 1990 (DEE & DAWR 2017, 5).

## National Landcare Program & the Decade of Landcare (1989-1996)

While there had been minor federal programs directed towards issues such as soil degradation since as early as the 1930s (for more information: Kerin 2017; Dovers 1992,

1-18), the emergence of Prime Minister Hawke's National Landcare Program in 1989 was in many ways unprecedented and set the tone for programs to come. Nevertheless, Landcare originally emerged as an innovation of the states, in particular, in Victoria under the Labor Minister (later Premier) Joan Kirner. The Victorian government had launched 'LandCare' in 1986, a community-based program under which voluntary groups could apply for funds to support land conservation activities (Campbell 1995). When National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) leaders Rick Farley and Phillip Toyne collaborated to lobby Prime Minister Bob Hawke, the first National Landcare Program and the Decade of Landcare were born. Farley and Toyne saw the need to establish a program recognising 'the importance of a self-help approach, which [would] rely heavily upon local community groups, within a framework which recognise[d] the responsibilities of Local, State and Federal Governments' (1989 3; quoted in Lockie and Vanclay 1997, 3). Hence from its national inception, Landcare was conceived as a federal arrangement, coordinated and driven at a national level.

### **The Natural Heritage Trust (1996-2008)**

The election of a Coalition government under John Howard in 1996 consolidated Landcare with bipartisan support. The Howard government established the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), a quasi-institutional umbrella for all Commonwealth natural resource management programs. The Government's partial sale of the national telecommunications company Telstra allowed them to commit a significant \$1.25 billion to the new NHT, later doubled for a second five-year period. Unprecedented, it represented the 'largest single environmental spending program in the country's history' (Crowley 2001, 2), raising the bar for federal investment and involvement in this space.

Despite the enormous Commonwealth investment and direction the NHT remained and intended to be a federal enterprise. Commonwealth investments generated matching state investments, and the program functioned based on partnerships and agreements between the Commonwealth government and state and territory governments (Robins 2007, 305-306; Crowley 2001, 2). As the new Minister for the Environment Senator Robert Hill said, the NHT aimed to 'efficiently and effectively deliver environmental outcomes whilst revitalising the national government's environmental partnerships with state and local governments' (Hill 1998, 11, in Crowley 2001, 4). Launched to 'directly

address pressing environmental issues whether they be at a local, regional, State or national level', the NHT functioned as a federal mechanism (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997).

A further stage under the Howard Government and the NHT began in 2002 with two national programs, Natural Heritage Trust Extension (NHT2) and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP). These two programs drove the formalisation of the regional model across Australia, as detailed above.

### **Caring for Our Country (2008-2013/14)**

A change of government in 2007 brought with it a new federal NRM program replacing the NHT2 and NAP, the 'Caring for Our Country' (CfoC) program under the new federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett. The CfoC program, established in 2008, constituted a dramatic overhaul of the previous NRM regime, attempting to consolidate many programs into one single program.

In little time, the new CfoC program drew significant criticisms. Robins and Kanowski (2011) listed eight ways that CfoC undermined Australia's regional model, and eroded gains made under the NHT and NLP. Through narrowing the agenda; more centralised control; focusing on simple outputs; compromising state and territory buy-in; reduced and constrained funding; high transaction costs; widening the gap between local and regional groups; and R&D withdrawal; rather than addressing weaknesses of previous programs and learning from past experiences; CfoC was jeopardising Australia's NRM position (Robins & Kanowski 2011, 102). In effect, their criticisms inferred that CfoC lost sight of how the system aligned and functioned, compromising important relationships and components within it.

### **Alignment with today's National Landcare Program**

The change of government in 2013 again brought about a revision of the Commonwealth's natural resource management programs. The Coalition government replaced CfoC with a new National Landcare Program (NLP), with a commitment of \$1billion for a first phase from 2014-2015 to 2017-2018 (DEE & DAWR 2017).

## **NLP Phase One**

Phase One funding of the new NLP was divided into a Regional Stream and a National Stream. The Regional Stream represented the ongoing commitment to the regional delivery model, investing through the 56 recognised NRM organisations. Regional organisations were expected to work ‘with their communities to identify and set local priorities for investment’, and while the Australian Government would ‘not prescribe delivery approaches’, organisations were required to allocate at least 20 per cent of their annual funding to ‘local, on-ground projects and related activities’ delivered by or directly involving the local community, ‘including landcare, Indigenous groups, agriculture groups, other community groups and individual land managers’ (NRM.gov.com.au).

The National Stream included various big target initiatives including 20 Million Trees Program, threatened and endangered species, biodiversity, as well as continuing commitments such as World Heritage and Indigenous Protected Areas. Many of these accord closely with Australia’s international commitments and other priorities. It also included other more specific funding for building leadership and community capacity, such as the funding of Landcare’s peak representative bodies – including Landcare Australia Limited and the National Landcare Network.

## **NLP Phase Two**

The second phase (NLP2) began in mid 2018, following a comprehensive 2017 review of Phase One jointly completed by the Department of the Environment and Energy and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resource (DEE & DAWR 2017). The program’s structure and direction reflects a number of considerations, some new but many older.

## **Regional Land Partnerships (RLP)**

Composing the bulk of the NLP2’s funding is the Regional Land Partnerships program, or RLP. From July 2018, the RLP component of the program will invest \$450 million over five years to deliver national priorities at a regional and local level. The program is delivered through regional NRM organisations, demonstrating the government’s commitment to the regional model.

One central consideration informing changes for Phase Two was the continued need to ‘ensure the program’s outcomes are measurable and reportable’ (DEE & DAWR 2017, vii). This was a key rationale behind the establishment of the regional delivery model 15 years earlier and a perennial bugbear for the regularly reviewed taxpayer funded program. The Program needed to be able to demonstrate measured and coherent outcomes from their investments. Procurement and reverse auction methods were argued to in many instances ‘offer effective and efficient mechanisms to deliver on-ground outcomes’ (DEE & DAWR 2017, vii). Thus one of the most significant changes in RLP’s program delivery is the switch to a procurement or service provider model. Unlike previous grant funding models where groups received funding largely with no strings attached, a procurement model involves the purchasing of services by the government. Thus regional organisations become service providers, with greater demands for demonstrable outcomes, efficiency and accountability. While regional organisations are well positioned and qualified to meet rising expectations, doing so without passing on challenges to community groups, ill-equipped to manage the rising demands of bureaucracy, will be the test of their success.

The consensus that regional organisations constitute the best delivery instruments remains unchanged, but there was acknowledgement of a need for some recalibration. Reviewers recognised the continued need to improve and refine the performance of the regional organisations to ‘help improve governance, delivery and capacity building functions’ as well as cut administrative costs and build efficiency (DEE & DAWR 2017, vi). Accordingly RLP emphasises the role of regional organisations to engage local communities to deliver outcomes where possible. Again, there is a requirement that a minimum of 20% of funding will be used to support on-ground projects and activities delivered by, or engaging with, the local landcare community. It might be questioned whether 20% is close to sufficient enough for organisations primarily designed to facilitate on the ground community activities.

An emphasis on the network of Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitators, or RALFs, is crucial to this too. Each regional organisation (service provider) must employ a RALF, funded from their core services funding. This funding is in turn drawn from that core funding provided by the to the Department of Agriculture (DA), whom RALFs are required to regularly report to and use as a resource. For example, a ‘RALF hotline’

exists so RALFs can contact the DA at any time for information and advice. RALFs are expected to act as conduits in their regions, consulting and facilitating cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, and encouraging alignment of community with regional and national priorities and plans. Again, these look like positive changes in the direction towards better alignment of government with community, but their success will wait to be seen and Landcare's involvement in the policy formation process, led by bodies such as the NLN, can provide the feedback needed to assess them.

### **RLP Long Term (5 year) Project Outcomes (Program Logic)**

1. *The ecological character of Ramsar sites is maintained or improved.*
2. *The trajectory of species targeted under the Threatened Species Strategy, and other EPBC Act priority species, is improved.*
3. *The natural heritage Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage properties is maintained or improved.*
4. *The condition of the EPBC Act listed Threatened Ecological Communities is improved.*
5. *The conditions of soil, biodiversity and vegetation are improved (on farm).*
6. *Agriculture systems have adapted to significant changes in climate and market demands.*

Looking at these six outcomes a few observations can be made. Four of the six outcomes are environment focused, the other two being agriculture focused outcomes. Most of them, particularly the environmental outcomes, deliver against key Commonwealth priorities, most notably defined in the EPBC Act 1999. Many of these further align with international commitments by the Commonwealth, which constitutes much of the basis of Commonwealth environmental authority. Outcome 6 deals with resilience, climate change, and agricultural productivity, supporting progress on Australia's international commitments on climate change, including the recent 2016 Paris Agreement.

### **Smart Farms**

Alongside RLP, the DAWR has allocated \$134million of NLP funding towards the Smart Farms Program, designed to encourage innovation and development in new

management and farming practices, tools and technologies. The program has three components:

- **Smart Farming Partnerships (SFP)** – allocates \$60 million through two rounds of competitive grants into medium to large scale projects to encourage the trial, development and roll-out of innovative tools and farm practices that will reduce the pressure on Australia’s natural resources while increasing industry productivity and profitability. SFP is directed towards more sophisticated ventures usually involving agriculture and fisheries industries, and towards partnerships of at least two entities.
- **Smart Farms Small Grants** – will invest up to \$50 million in competitive small grants program over several rounds to support the adoption of best practices that improves the management and quality of our natural resources and increases on-farm productivity.
- **Building Landcare Community and Capacity** – allocates \$24 million to support the sharing of knowledge and achievements, and promote community leadership. This includes funding for Landcare’s peak representative bodies, like LAL and the NLN – the switch from the environmental ‘national stream’ in NLP1 perhaps indicating a change of emphasis from environment and towards agriculture.

NLP’s Smart Farms illuminates a few important priorities of the government. First, the government aims to foster innovation, experimentation and development in new technologies and practices. Consequently, it offers opportunities and support for some risk-taking. Second, Landcare’s role in promoting agriculture and sustainability is highlighted. It emphasises the important involvement and influence of industry in and by Landcare. Third, it emphasises the importance of partnerships and collaboration between different groups, such as between community, industry, and R&D institutions. Considering these points, the Smart Farms Program offers some potentially fruitful opportunities for Landcare groups and landcarers ready to collaborate with their regional organisations and with industry, to take risks and experiment.

On the flip side, to what extent Smart Farms Programs really are friendly towards community participation and involvement is yet to be seen. While government might be limited to certain issues by legislative and international responsibilities, they enjoy enormous scope in program and policy design, and policy instrument selection.

## Other Programs & Environmental Objectives

Alongside RLP and the Smart Farms Program are a number of other programs and environmental commitments. This includes continuing to deliver on the Reef 2050 Plan, Caring for our World Heritage places, support for Indigenous Protected Areas, establishing the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS, formally Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre, or IACRC), and efforts to eradicate Red Imported Fire Ants. These more specific programs indicate key concerns of the government, linked with international commitments or broader priorities such as Indigenous involvement in natural resource management, the Great Barrier Reef, and biosecurity.

## Conclusion: Lessons & Opportunities

Based on the information explored above, this paper has drawn out and illuminated some key lessons and opportunities in which a better alignment between community Landcare and government can be brought about.

1. Landcare is a federal phenomenon, a state innovation adopted and embraced nationally. It involves the cooperation of all levels of government from the federal and state levels down to the local and regional levels. No one level is sufficient by itself to achieve meaningful change.
2. The Commonwealth government typically sets the agenda on environmental action and funding, as in the case of subsequent Landcare programs, but does so within the bounds of Australian federalism and the Constitution. By creatively aligning within these bounds, Landcare groups can encourage cooperation, translating into greater on-ground activities.
3. Landcare should engage with and encourage future intergovernmental initiatives and agreements through mechanisms, including but not limited to COAG. Greater cooperation particularly between the Commonwealth, and state and territory governments will bring about the most beneficial changes.
4. Where consistent with their own priorities, Landcare groups should direct efforts towards national priorities set by Australia's international commitments and legislation such as the EPBC Act. This includes issues such as biodiversity, biosecurity, climate change and drought resilience, threatened and endangered



species, and Ramsar and World Heritage sites. Where possible they should frame their work and activities within accepted terms (e.g. pest and weed control, or riparian work in terms of biodiversity and threatened species, sustainable practices in terms of increased biodiversity and greater resilience to changing environment).

5. This year, second decennial review the EPBC Act has commenced. In reviews such as this, there exist opportunities for peak representative bodies such as the NLN to be involved in the process and provide greater perspective on the role and opportunities of Landcare in Australia's approach to issues such as environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. By seeking to play a part in the review process, the NLN can gain recognition of community Landcare's important role and contributions and further shape the terms of the debate.
6. While it is a vexed and perennial issue, Landcare must recognise the continued demand by government and the public for measurable outcomes and efficient and effective use of public funds. By doing its best to align with these demands, coordinated projects, regional plans, and regional organisations, it can better demonstrate its value in the face of regular expenditure reviews.
7. Just as Landcare has become a staple component of Australia's natural resource management model, so has the development of a regional delivery model. The regional model is vital in unlocking the enormous potential of Landcare, and striking the crucial balance between bottom-up and top-down approaches to natural resource management. Community Landcare must engage and build productive working relationships with their regional partners as much as possible.
8. This should not overlook the reality that much of the onus and responsibility for alignment falls to the regional bodies, which were established to provide support and direction between top and bottom. This means helping community Landcare achieve its potential by facilitating and coordinating their activities. As outlined above, in some regions this basic purpose has not been achieved. This has been recognised by government in recent revisions to the NLP, but must be re-emphasised whenever possible.
9. Partnerships breed partnerships, greater support and better on-ground outcomes. Landcare groups should actively seek and develop partnerships with local and

state governments, agricultural industries, R&D bodies, universities, and regional organisations.

10. While it is clear that positive changes have been made in recent iterations of the National Landcare Program, there remains much to do to harness the potential of Australia's community Landcare model. Nevertheless, actively and constructively engaging with the NLP2 program, and seeking to be involved in the formulation and design of the next National Landcare Program (NLP3), can produce the changes needed to bring a better alignment between community and government. Peak representative organisations like the NLN play a key role in achieving this.

This paper explains how Australia's natural resource governance and support for Landcare has come about. In doing so it hopes to empower Landcare groups and illuminate the opportunities for them to better align, attract support and achieve better on-ground outcomes. It has concluded with a list of lessons, opportunities and recommendations of what community Landcare should do to achieve this.

However, Landcare already does many of these admirably well. At its heart, 'partnerships are a defining feature of the Landcare movement' (DAFF 2008, 116), finding common ground, and building bridges between government and farmers, or between farmers and conservationists. This is one of Landcare's core strengths. As emphasised throughout this paper, Landcare is innately a federal experiment and has succeeded through its partnerships with different levels of government, local, state and federal. It is a dynamic and holistic movement, and manifests around a whole gamut of issues and different circumstances. It excels at achieving on-ground outcomes while building capacity and developing and promulgating new knowledge and practices. In this regard, aligning with different issues and priorities presented by government is not a difficult task and something Landcare already does.

In the areas where Landcare needs support in meeting the demands and expectations of government, bureaucracy and public administration, and greater coordination and provision of measurable outcomes, the regional organisations are there to help. The regional delivery model emerged crucially to strike this balance between and thereby allow community Landcare to achieve its full potential at regional and national levels.

It is hoped that this paper has contributed to a better understanding of the Australian Government's approach and funding for natural resource management functions, and to draw attention to opportunities for greater engagement. And with this understanding, Landcarers are convinced the future is bright for an energised and engaged movement as it enters its fourth decade.

## Resources

Much of this report has been informed through the previous completion of a literature review for the National Landcare Network in May this year. For further reading on some on the function and value of community Landcare in Australia see:

- Ottesen, H. 2019, *The Value of Community Landcare: A Literature Review*. The National Landcare Network, Canberra.

For more information on the current National Landcare Program visit:

<http://www.nrm.gov.au/>

### Sources:

Andrews, K. 2018, NRM Australia Transforming and transformer regional natural resource management (Speech). 6 March 2018, ABARES Outlook Conference, Canberra.

<http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/outlook/Documents/presentations-2018/andrews.DOC>

Bonyhady, T. 2000, *The Colonial Earth*. Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria.

Campbell, A. 2009, 'It's time to renew Landcare', *Agricultural Science*, vol. 2, pp. 30-33.

Campbell, A., Alexandra, J., & Curtis, D. 2017, 'Reflections on four decades of land restoration in Australia', *The Rangeland Journal*, Vol. 39, 405-416.

Compton, E., & Beeton, R. J. S. 2012, 'An accidental outcome: Social capital and its implications for Landcare and the "status quo"', *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol 28, 149-160.

Compton, E., Prager, K. & Beeton, R. J. S. 2009, 'Landcare bowling alone: finding a future in the 'fourth' phase', *Contested Country: Local and Regional Natural Resources Management in Australia*. Edited by Marcus B Lane, Cathy Robinson and Bruce Taylor. Australia: CSIRO Publishing, 147-160.

- Crowley, K. 2001, 'Effective Environmental Federalism? Australia's Natural Heritage Trust', *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 3 (4), 255-272.
- Cramb, R.A., 2006, 'The Role of Social Capital in the Promotion of Conservation Farming: The Case of 'Landcare' in the Southern Philippines', *Land Degredation & Development*, 17, 23-30.
- Curtis, A., H. R. 2014, 'The great experiment with devolved NRM governance: lessons from community engagement in Australia and New Zealand since the 1980s', *Australasian Journal of Environmental Management*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 175-199.
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) 2008, *Making a Difference: A Celebration of Landcare*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Department of the Environment and Energy and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DEE & DAWR) 2017, *Report on the Review of the National Landcare Program*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Dovers, S. 1992. 'The history of natural resource use in rural Australia: practicalities and ideologies' In: Lawrence, G., Vanclay, F. and Furze, B. (eds), *Agriculture, environment and society: contemporary issues for Australia*. pp.1-18. Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Hawke, A. 2009, *Report of the Independent Review of the EPBC Act 1999*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Hogan, A. & Young, M. 2015, *Rural and regional futures* edited by Anthony Hogan and Michelle Young Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon; New York.
- Kerin, J. 2017, *The Way I Saw It; The Way It Was: The Making of National Agricultural and Natural Resource Management Policy*, Analysis & Policy Observatory, Melbourne.
- Lockie, S. & F. Vanclay 1997, 'Critical Landcare: Introduction', *Critical Landcare*, Ed. Stewart Lockie & Frank Vanclay, Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga NSW.

- McGrath, C. 'Australia's scrambled egg of government: who has the environmental power?', *The Conversation*. 5 December 2012.  
<https://theconversation.com/australias-scrambled-egg-of-government-who-has-the-environmental-power-9582>
- Pepper, R. 2011, "The constitutionalisation of water rights: solution or levee?" *Australian Environment Review* 34, 26(2), pp 39–40.
- Prager, K. & F. Vanclay 2010, 'Landcare in Australia and Germany: Comparing structures and policies for community engagement in natural resource management', *Ecological Management & Restoration*, Vol. 11, No 3, 187-93.
- Putnam, R.D. 2000, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Rappaport, J. 1987, 'Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 15 No. 2, 121- 48.
- Robins, L. & P. Kanowski 2011, "'Crying for our Country": Eight Ways in which "Caring for our Country" has Undermined Australia's Regional Model for Natural Resource Management', *Australasian Journal of Environmental Management*, 18:2, 88-108.
- Robins, L. 2007, 'Major paradigm shifts in NRM in Australia', *International Journal of Global Environmental Issues*, Vol. 7, 300-311.
- Samnakay, N. 2017, "Thinking Strategically in Federal Policy: Defining the Attributes of High-level Policies', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 76, no. 1, pp. 106-121.
- Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committees (SECITAC) 1990, 'Chapter Six: Commonwealth Environment

Powers and Australian Federalism', *Commonwealth Environment Powers*.

Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

[https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary\\_business/committees/senate/environment\\_and\\_communications/completed\\_inquiries/1999-02/enviropowers/report/c06](https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/environment_and_communications/completed_inquiries/1999-02/enviropowers/report/c06)

Sobels, J. Curtis, A., Lockie, S. 2001, 'The role of Landcare group networks in rural

Australia: exploring the contribution of social capital', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 17, 265-276.

Toyne, P. & R. Farley. 1989. 'A national land management program'. *Australian Journal of*

*Soil and Water Conservation* 2(2): 6-9.

Toyne, P. & Farley, R. & The Australia Institute 2000, *The Decade of Landcare: Looking*

*Back, Looking Forward*, Australia Institute, Deakin, Canberra ACT.

Zimmerman, M. 1995, 'Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations', *American*

*Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 23, No. 5, 581-599.