



Planning with Purpose: A Guide to Planning for Landcare members, Groups and Networks

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Acknowledgements

Thanks go to David Rooks, Ross Colliver and Andrea Mason for their writing and editing prowess, thereby making this guide readable and useful. The authors gratefully acknowledge the funding and support from the Norman Wettenhall Foundation and the Community Engagement and Landcare Unit of the Department of Sustainability and Environment whose contributions made writing this guide possible. Special thanks for encouragement from Beth Mellick, John Robinson, Jo McCoy and Allison Long. Thanks to Ben Gosling for his designer's eye and for being there over the long haul. Thanks also to Grant Godden for showing me how useful Program Logic can be.

Thank you to the Kiewa Catchment, Mitta to Murray and Ovens Landcare Networks who trialled parts of the guide and to Regional Landcare Coordinators David Cromarty and Amber Croft and Tom Croft from the North-east CMA who supported them to do so.

Huge appreciation and thanks go to the Board and staff members of the Bass Coast Landcare Network, whose daily practice inspired this guide and whose commitment to empowering others in Landcare supported its development.

Finally to the many wonderful people in Landcare who demonstrate that good planning is invaluable, and in particular: Belinda Brennan, Doug Evans, Leigh Blackmore, Neil McInnes, Mandy Baker, Paul Martin, the Woody Yaloak mob and all their colleagues.

This set of guides are designed to help Landcare members and support staff plan for local Landcare groups, Landcare networks and for specific projects. It describes what needs to be in each plan, and how to run the planning process.

The benefits of planning

Planning is about deciding what a group or network wants to achieve, and how it will go about doing so. Goals need to be ambitious but realistic. Assumptions about how to achieve goals need to stand up to scrutiny.

Good planning provides clear direction and a sense of purpose that can unify the members of groups and networks. It develops people's understanding of the landscape in which they live and work. The plans that emerges from debate about priorities ensures that resources are used effectively, and focuses the effort of Landcare members rather than allowing people to become discouraged by the size of the tasks they face.

A clear plan makes it easier to explain your goals to others, work out who is best placed to help you, and recruit the people and other resources you need to achieve what you want to achieve. Finally, plans provide a starting point for measuring progress and learning from action—are we achieving what we set out to achieve? This pumps new understanding into the next plan, and even into government planning.

Landcare's approach to planning

Landcare Groups are based in *communities of place*— local communities where people identify with living and working in a certain area. They also work with *communities of practice*, those networks of people who share an interest in an activity, interact often, and develop their practice together – in dairy farming, for example, revegetation, horse-riding or a hundred other specialist activities. Landcare groups and networks also engage and influence *communities of interest*, like the residents of towns, or retirees, or conservationists. These are people who share similar values even though they may not live in the same place or interact much with each other.

Landcare planning draws on the aspirations and knowledge of all these communities, and provides a focus for their action. Planning might seem the same wherever it is done—it sets long-term and short-term goals, and works out what actions will achieve goals. However, Landcare planning is distinctive in four ways.

Landcare plans for community priorities. Landcare priorities are chosen by communities. Unlike programs funded in whole by government, Landcare effort is volunteer-based and mostly volunteer-funded. Landcare plans do not tell people what to do – they record what people themselves have agreed to do. If there is commitment, then time, materials and the learning that comes with action will all flow.

Landcare plans consider do-ability. Aspirations are one thing: motivation and capacity to do it now is another. Successful action has an impact on the ground, builds enthusiasm and relationships, and widens people's horizons. Landcare committees of management weigh up readiness for action within communities. Committee or facilitators may propose new action, but if there is little interest, they bide their time. From little things, big things can grow, and that needs a do-able starting point.

Landcare draws on local knowledge. Planning for landscape change requires local knowledge. Landcare brings to bear landholders' understanding of how a landscape behaves over decades, their knowledge of changes underway in agriculture locally, and of the condition of native vegetation based on walking through the landscape. Landcare Groups and Networks also draw on members' knowledge of what has worked and not worked in the past, and their social knowledge of attitudes, practices and opinion leaders in their communities.

Landcare nurtures learning and innovation. Landcare plans can focus the learning between people that emerges from action. They are a jumping off point for peer-to-peer learning, and a basis for drawing others with expertise and resources into learning within the community. What works and doesn't work in specific communities and landscapes? Landcare finds out by taking action, then taking a hard-nosed look at the results. Sometimes this is learning how to make a new practice work; sometimes it is developing a new way to do things, an innovation. In both cases, learning in Landcare emerges from action on the ground. By providing a clear rationale for the approach being taken, Landcare plans provide a basis for testing assumptions and when necessary, revising the thinking that underpins action.

Landcare's place in NRM planning

Landcare began in Victoria in the mid-1980s as local communities decided to take action on land degradation. Community, industry support, agency staff and government funding were all important in its early growth. Landcare groups were established across the country, and by 2000 there were 4500 groups operating. Landcare developed an international reputation for its ability to link farmers, conservation groups and government in environmental activism on public and private land.

Local Landcare Groups identified local problems and developed local solutions. To encourage broad community participation in natural resource management (NRM), the Decade of Landcare (from 1989) and then the Natural Heritage Trust (from 1997) directed funds to projects proposed by local groups. From 1995, Landcare Networks began forming, so that local groups could integrate their funding bids and share their learning with each other.

However, governments became concerned that the approach of widespread community action was not integrating action or focusing on the most significant problems within landscapes. Through the 1990s, collaboration emerged between agencies and communities at regional level. Then from

2002, Australian Government and State funding was directed through regional strategies. Priorities were set by Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) to target public spending on the most important assets facing the most significant threats.

In 2007, Australian Government funding was targeted to a more selective set of priority landscapes, and funding for Landcare facilitators reduced. Victoria's NRM investment has also shifted to specific high priority landscapes. The policy of targeted investment now influences public spending more strongly than that of broad community participation (Colliver 2010).

This makes planning by Landcare Groups and Networks even more important. Plans sort out local priorities and organise local action, and provide a way to connect to government priorities. If there is a good fit with government priorities, then funding may be available to support community action. If funding is not available, then plans still guide local action. They also provide a starting point for negotiating funding from other sources such as philanthropic trusts, local government or businesses.

Landcare groups and Networks need to understand government plans at regional, state and national level, and know how different programs will affect landholders on the ground. To the extent that government programs still operate out of silos, Landcare remains the integrator of NRM service provision.

Problems and opportunities in sustainable agriculture and catchment health operate at multiple scales. Algal blooms in rivers, for example, may require changes by individual landholders to their land management, by Landcare Groups through their education projects, by CMAs in targeting practice change in specific parts of a large catchment, and by governments in their allocation of funding.

Planning is needed at each level of scale

It is tempting to assume that the best way to do planning is as a hierarchy of plans where goals at the top are driven down the hierarchy through progressively more specific plans. A more nuanced understanding is that each level of scale is autonomous but interdependent with other scales. Planning at each scale takes account of issues specific to that scale, and draws on a distinct pool of knowledge and tools that fits those issues. Each depends on people and projects at other scales to deliver results. With that in mind, here are the levels of planning to which Landcare contributes:

Property Planning manages individual properties for financial and environmental outcomes. Training provide landholders with the knowledge, frameworks, strategies and access to specialist agricultural information and services to improve management of their properties. It also helps landholders align their practices with goals for catchment health, and with industry standards for sustainable production.

Landcare Group Action Planning sets goals for improving the environmental health of localities, through support for specific improvements in land management practices or through joint action to maintain or improve specific sites. These plans influence landholders' plans for their properties, and take account of Network and regional goals, but concentrate on what landholders are willing to work on together.

Landcare Network Planning sets goals for larger landscapes and targets priorities across the communities of place and practice within these landscapes. Plans here will provide technical support and source funds for the priorities of local groups, but will also pursue action on ecosystems or issues that cross group boundaries. Planning will have a good understanding of regional, state and national priorities, but will make judgements about where action will have most benefit to the landscapes and communities within the network.

Regional Catchment Strategies look at pressures and ecosystems within large scale catchments, making judgements about where investment will deliver most environmental benefit. Seeking government investment for their priorities, regional planners will make their case in terms of goals at state and national level, and they will look to Landcare Networks and Groups to provide the on-ground connections and sometimes project management to deliver on their priorities.

State and national investment plans consider the most important environmental assets at their respective scales, and negotiate for funds for this. However, many of the actions they propose will depend in the end on action by individual landholders, so they would do well to look at what Landcare Networks and Groups know about effective influence within communities.

Intention of the authors

Planning is one of those tasks that is important but not urgent. Like doing your tax return or spending quality time with your family, planning requires putting the urgent to one side for a moment, and working on what's important long-term.

Bass Coast Landcare Network (BCLN) has invested in its planning. Our community members and staff have participated and presented at many regional, state and national forums on issues ranging from reducing agricultural greenhouse emissions, managing vegetation offsets, setting local standards of environmental management and integrating market based instruments into Landcare project delivery. Many Landcare people have wanted to know more about the way BCLN plans and manages its work. This Guide makes this available to others.

The Victorian State Landcare and Community Engagement Unit and the Norman Wettenhall Foundation saw the value of sharing these planning processes in this way and graciously funded the development of this Guide. BCLN has drawn on their own materials, but also on that of other Landcare

Groups and Networks in Victoria, and from other community guides to planning, all of which are listed in the references. We extend our thanks to all of these sources.

This Guide seeks to strengthen the natural advantage of Landcare Groups and Networks as catalysts for innovation in NRM. At BCLN, we know that community action can develop new ways to tackle the task of improving the environment. Good planning puts that innovation in front of government programs and invites their staff to learn from what Landcare is doing. Landcare is a principle and values based approach to land management. If we can agree on the principles and values, negotiating the outcomes will come more easily.

The Guides are arranged in parts, each as a separate document:

- 1 – Landcare Group Action Plans
- 2 – Landcare Network Strategic and Operational Planning
- 3 – Business Planning options for Landcare
- 4 – Project Planning and Development for Landcare

From time-to-time there will be revisions—the first set of Guides are current as of May 2013, and downloadable from www.basscoastlandcare.org.au/resources.

References, useful web sites and templates for use in planning processes are provided in a separate, alphabetically listed document. These will also be revised from time-to-time.

We value your thoughts about the Guides, and your experiences as you use them. Send a note to moragh@vic.chariot.net.au.