



QWaLC
QUEENSLAND WATER & LAND CARERS

Queensland Community Landcare Coordinators Program

Discussion Paper

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1. Introduction

Nearly 30,000 Queenslanders are involved in Landcare activities across the state. From restoring beaches and waterways to working with farmers to promote sustainable land management practices, Landcare volunteers are helping to protect the state's rich natural landscape and resources.

This paper calls on the Queensland Government to establish a **Community Landcare Coordinators Program** to enable Landcare groups to become self-supporting and to build local capacity in the delivery of on-ground Natural Resource Management (NRM) initiatives. For 300 active community-based Landcare groups in Queensland, their time, funding and capacity are stretched to the limit – they are doing what they can on minimal resources and entirely on volunteer efforts.

As the state peak body for community NRM volunteers, Queensland Water and Land Carers (QWaLC) has consistently heard from its members that their long term viability depends on paid local coordinator positions, similar to those in Victoria and New South Wales (NSW).

The paper presents a strong case for why a Community Landcare Coordinators Program is needed in Queensland by examining key challenges faced by Landcare groups, how similar programs work in other states and the potential social and economic benefits the program would bring to Queensland communities.

Queensland Local Landcare Coordinators Program: What would it look like?

Purpose: A network of Local Landcare Coordinators in rural and regional communities to enable groups to become self-supporting and to build local capacity for the on-ground delivery of environmental and land management activities that contribute to local, state and national NRM priorities.

Geographic scope: Fifty Local Landcare Coordinator positions in rural and regional communities in Northern and Western Queensland.

Required investment: \$10 million from the Queensland Government to fund 50 part time coordinator positions at \$50,000 per annum per position over four years.

Application and hosting process: Landcare groups interested in having a Local Landcare Coordinator in their community will apply to QWaLC for fixed term funding (recommended term is four years) towards the coordinator's salary and operating costs. Once funding is secured, Landcare groups will hire and host their own coordinator (alternatively, the coordinator may be hosted by a consortium of Landcare groups).

Reporting arrangements: The coordinator will work closely with their Landcare group to develop an operational plan for the duration of their term (i.e. four years) or review and update an existing plan, ensuring alignment with national and state NRM goals, and local priorities. Based on this, an annual Work Plan that outlines key priorities and activities will be prepared and submitted to QWaLC and the Queensland Government for ongoing reporting and monitoring purposes.

2. Overview of Landcare

2.1 Origins of the Landcare Movement

Initially launched in 1985 as an initiative to reverse land degradation in central Victoria, Landcare has transpired into a national community-driven movement. In 1989, following the federal government announcement of the *Decade of Landcare Plan*, Landcare officially became a nation-wide program with a funding injection of \$320 million (Landcare Australia, 2015).

The spread of the Landcare ethic and the proliferation of Landcare groups, supported by the *Decade of Landcare Plan*, led to a transformation in understanding of farming practices, of landscape function and of the benefits of nature conservation and a healthy environment by farmers, and the broader community generally. This improved understanding was complemented with a rush of activity across the country, addressing land degradation, productivity and conservation issues, with substantial government investment combined with a huge co-contribution of farmer and community time, materials, equipment and money (Youl, Marriott & Nabben, 2006).

The success of Landcare is attributed in part to its bottom up philosophy centred on community-owned and community-driven approach in addressing local environmental degradation and land management issues (Youl et al, 2006). Currently, there are 5,000 Landcare groups formed in all states and territories across Australia.

2.2 National Landcare Program

The National Landcare Programme is an Australian Government funded four-year program for NRM. The National Landcare Programme consists of two funding streams, national and regional, which in total invests \$1 billion towards projects that address environmental and sustainable agriculture issues (Australian Government, 2015a).

The National Landcare Programme has four strategic objectives, which include:

1. Communities are managing landscapes to sustain long-term economic and social benefits from their environment.
2. Farmers and fishers are increasing their long term returns through better management of the natural resource base.
3. Communities are involved in caring for their environment.
4. Communities are protecting species and natural assets.

The regional stream of the National Landcare Programme also requires regional NRM bodies to allocate 20 per cent of their federal funding towards community engagement and on ground activities undertaken by community Landcare groups (Australian Government, 2015a). The continued and active engagement of citizens and volunteers, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and people, is indispensable to achieving and sustaining NRM outcomes at the local level.

2.3 Landcare in Queensland

In 2003, a statewide survey of NRM volunteers conducted by the then Landcare and Catchment Management Committee (LCMC) indicated a strong community direction and support for a representative organisation at the state level. This resulted in QWaLC being established as the Peak Body for NRM volunteers in April 2004 through a Ministerial Directive from the then Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, The Honorable Stephen Robertson. QWaLC became an Incorporated Association in September 2004.

Since then, there have been continual changes to Landcare and the environment in which it operates. Today, there are over 300 community-based landcare groups who themselves represent an estimated 29,000 volunteers¹. The term 'Landcare' is used broadly to refer to Landcare, Coastcare, Rivercare, Waterwatch, Bushcare, Friends of, and similar volunteer organisations dedicated to sustainable land and waterway management, and landscape protection in Queensland.

The breadth of on-ground environmental activities undertaken by Landcare groups in Queensland has expanded in the past two decades. The 1991 Landcare survey undertaken by the University of Queensland found weeding and community awareness were primary activities undertaken by Landcare groups (Holsinger, Keith and Chamala, 1991). While these are still a focus for many Landcare groups in Queensland, most have diversified into a wider range of on-ground activities including wildlife conservation, community education (through the delivery of workshops), water quality monitoring, sustainable agriculture, and dune and coastal protection (QWaLC, 2014).

In recent years, changes to federal and state policy direction on NRM have affected Landcare groups and their operations. These changes include:

- **Funding cuts and changes to the National Landcare Program.** Before the 2013 election, the then Coalition Government promised there will be no budget cuts to the Landcare Program, with the promise being reaffirmed after the election. However, the program was merged with the 'Caring for our Country' program in May 2014, resulting in a funding cut of \$484 million over five years. The newly merged National Landcare Program was created with a budget of \$1 billion of which more than half was allocated towards a new employment initiative called the Green Army. Under this initiative, young school leavers, gap year students, graduates and job seekers between 17 and 24 years are trained and paid an allowance for carrying out local environmental and heritage restoration activities such as weeding and tree planting (Australian Government, 2015b), replacing the need for community NRM volunteers. In May this year, the Minister for the Environment announced \$179 million boost to support the government's goal of reaching 1,500 Green Army projects by 2018 (Australian Government, 2015c). While there are now Green Army projects up and running in various communities, there are still concerns among Landcare groups since their core activities have been replaced or duplicated by those

¹ Based on QWaLC 2014-2015 membership

of the Green Army. Inevitably, Landcare groups have had to think seriously about their existence as well as how they operate in light of the program funding cuts and the overlap of work with the Green Army.

- **Queensland Government reforms on environmental regulations.** With the election of the Coalition Government, led by Campbell Newman in 2012, there have been significant changes to the policy environment in Queensland. The Newman Government made sweeping reforms to the state's environmental regulations in order to free development projects from bureaucratic 'red tape'. This included the removal of the wild rivers protection laws, exposing free-flowing rivers and waterways to potential environmental threats such as mining (Rebgetz, Arthur, Agius, 2014). The Newman Government also amended the state's mining approvals process by abolishing the right for landholders and communities to object mining projects. This right has now been restored by the current Labour Government (Queensland Government, 2015). The former government also removed the regulatory requirement for coal seam gas companies to apply for water licences, amid landholder and public concerns over groundwater contamination (Zonca, 2014).
- **Threat to the Great Barrier Reef.** The poor and deteriorating condition of the Great Barrier Reef raised concerns regarding its possible removal from the World Heritage List. The Great Barrier Reef is under threat by declining water quality associated with terrestrial runoff from landuse changes and discharge of nitrogen, fine sediments and pesticides, loss of habitat from coastal development, outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish which kills coral coverage, increase in shipping and fishing, proposed construction of mega coalmining ports and climate change impacts (Brodie, Waterhouse, Schaffelke, Kroon, Thorburn, Rolfe, Johnson, Fabricius, Lewis, Devlin, Warne & McKenzie, 2013). The international outcry over the failure to protect the Great Barrier Reef led to the development of the Reef 2050 Plan in March 2015, a joint response by the Australian and Queensland Governments in managing the reef over the next 35 years. The plan was unanimously endorsed by the World Heritage Committee at its meeting in July. Under this plan, the federal and state governments pledge to ban the discharge of dredged seabed sediment within the Reef's world heritage area and to restrict capital dredging for new and expansion of existing port facilities within the regulated limits of Gladstone, Hay Point/Mackay, Abbot Point and Townsville (Australian Government, 2015d).

Accordingly, Landcare groups have had to constantly adapt and respond to changes in policies and funding priorities, some conflicting with local environmental and community aspirations. For groups to continue their on-ground activities in environmental conservation and sustainable land management, they need to become more strategic, coordinated and resilient to the ever changing political climate in which they work. This requires assistance and support, beyond what is now being provided by volunteers.

3. Existing Landcare Coordinator and Facilitator Programs

This section describes the current arrangements in place for supporting Landcare groups and the model for the local coordinators program in Victoria and NSW.

3.1 Regional Facilitators

Under ‘Caring for our Country’, the Australian Government funds one full-time equivalent Regional Landcare Facilitator position in each of the 56 NRM regions, including 14 positions in Queensland (Australian Government, 2015d). The initiative is administered through the Department of Agriculture. The Regional Landcare Facilitators provide support to Landcare and production groups to protect natural landscapes and to adopt sustainable farm and land management practices.

In addition to the Regional Landcare Facilitator position, there are state-funded facilitator programs operating in Victoria and New South Wales. These programs support Landcare groups at the local catchment level with co-benefits flowing onto the wider community.

3.2 Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program

The Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) commenced on 1 July 2015 as a replacement for the Victorian Local Landcare Facilitator Initiative (VLLFI) which was in place from 2011 to 2015. The Program provides continued funding of \$50,000 per annum over four years for 68 part time positions, a total investment of \$13.6 million. Funding for 2016-2019 will be subject to budget confirmation.

Under the VLFP, Landcare groups must apply for funding towards a local facilitator position. The funding covers the facilitator’s salary and operating costs, which must be detailed in a Program Delivery Plan, prepared by each applicant organisation and submitted to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) for approval. Operating costs include printing, office space, telecommunication and work-related travel expenses. Landcare groups recruit their own local facilitator, who can be hosted with a Landcare group. Catchment management authorities and local governments are not eligible for a local facilitator however they can act as a host organisation.

The role of a facilitator is to enable Landcare groups and networks, landholders and the community effectively participate in NRM activities that protect, enhance and restore the environment and improve agricultural productivity (Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2015). The facilitator also supports community capacity building to increase self-reliance of groups and networks. However, the facilitator is not responsible for the day-to-day operation of a group or network, or the management of on-ground projects (Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2015).

The VLFP seeks to ensure Landcare facilitators provide support to more groups and networks, and where possible extend geographic reach by:

- establishing new groups/networks in areas where there are currently no groups/networks;
- extending support to adjoining Landcare groups/networks where no facilitator currently exists;
- reviving dormant Landcare groups/networks.

The Landcare facilitator's work plan is determined by local needs and priorities aligned with Key Work Areas of the program, which include:

1. Supporting on-ground NRM delivery
2. Building local community capacity to enable groups/networks to be self sustaining
3. Undertaking community engagement and building partnerships
4. Assisting with planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting
5. Securing project grants and other funding
6. Extending support to more groups and networks

Specific activities to be undertaken by a facilitator against each of the Key Work Areas are detailed in a Program Delivery Plan for the VLFP.

3.3 New South Wales Local Landcare Coordinators Initiative

The NSW Government has committed \$15 million towards the 2015-2018 NSW Local Landcare Coordinators Initiative (New South Wales Government, 2015a). This program will employ a network of up to 60 half time (0.5EFT) Local Landcare Coordinators across the state to build capacity and connections within communities. The coordinators will be contracted by host Landcare organisations for up to 3.5 years from 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2019. Funding of \$50,000 per financial year is available to host organisations to cover salary and operating costs associated with the coordinator position. This program is completely additional to the existing funds provided by the NSW Government's Local Land Services in supporting Landcare group capacity.

The purpose of the program is to support the effective participation of voluntary community-based Landcare groups and networks, landholders and the wider community in NRM activities that manage and restore natural landscapes, improve the sustainability of agricultural production, and build community resilience. Local Landcare Coordinators will provide support to increase the capacity of groups to (New South Wales Government, 2015a):

- Support and increase community engagement;
- Extend their coverage and provide support to more groups, networks and landholders;
- Undertake planning, develop partnerships and secure resourcing through project grants and other sources;
- Monitor, evaluate and report on their projects and activities;
- Improve their ongoing governance and financial sustainability;
- Effectively participate in natural resource management activities that address critical agricultural sustainability and environmental issues; and

- Link to programs of Local Land Services and other organisations to develop on-ground natural resource management projects in line with regional and state strategies.

As stated in the application guidelines, coordinators will assist host organisations develop an action plan to identify activities and required resources for the upcoming year in alignment with the organisation's strategic plan (New South Wales Government, 2015a). As part of the funding agreement, host organisations will be required to complete:

- Baseline and annual governance health check (focused on policy procedures and operations);
- Baseline and annual group health check (based on activity level, numbers, change in capability);
- Baseline and annual collation of investment and partnerships;
- Baseline and annual collation of activities undertaken;
- At least three single-page case studies per year; and
- Six monthly contractual reporting to Local Land Services.

The network of Local Landcare Coordinators will be supported by two state-wide positions: the Landcare Support Program Manager (employed by Local Land Services) and the State Landcare Coordinator (employed by Landcare NSW). These positions will assist coordinators and the Landcare community in the respective regions to identify program and support linkages.

The program is interlinked with two other components of the Local Landcare Coordinators Initiative: the Landcare Community of Practice and the Landcare Future Fund. The Landcare Community of Practice is a centralised support team that will increase the activity and effectiveness of the Landcare network (New South Wales Government, 2015b). The Community of Practice will provide information, training and communication, and collect and collate information relating to Landcare activities across the state. Preparatory work will also be undertaken to set up the Landcare Future Fund, a funding mechanism for achieving a self-sustaining Landcare model that: supports Landcare NSW volunteers, local coordinators and support; is entrepreneurial and; leverages investment from the corporate, philanthropic, government and community sectors (New South Wales Government, 2015c). The establishment of the fund will be informed by data collected from Local Landcare Coordinators and through the Landcare Community of Practice.

4. Justification for the Queensland Community Landcare Coordinators Program

Landcare coordinator/facilitator programs in Victoria and NSW as described in the previous section enable Landcare groups to be self-supporting and to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of NRM activities across communities and regions. There is a strong case for introducing a similar program in Queensland, which is discussed in this section. Evidence is also provided to highlight the potential social, economic and environmental benefits of the proposed program.

4.1 Landcare groups are almost entirely-run by volunteers and are over-stretched

QWaLC conducts an annual survey of its members to inform its advocacy work on promoting the interests and needs of Landcare groups in Queensland. In addition to the membership survey, QWaLC holds face-to-face consultations with Landcare groups across the state, engaging them in strategic discussions about governance and funding, as well as future priorities for the Landcare program.

The findings of the membership survey and consultation indicate Landcare groups are highly dependent on volunteers and are operating on very limited resources, which have serious implications on organisational capacity and sustainability. According to the 2014 QWaLC Membership Survey, two thirds of Landcare groups (66%) do not have any paid staff and rely entirely on volunteers to manage their operations (QWaLC, 2014). The majority of groups have 11 to 50 volunteers who collectively spend more than 35 hours per month on environmental activities alone. Most groups are reliant on government funding, with nominal income being raised through entrepreneurial activities and from non-government sources.

There is a clear and consistent message that emerges from the results of membership surveys and consultation. That is, the need for a network of paid Landcare coordinators that supports Landcare groups enhance their organisational and financial capacity, partner (rather than compete) with other groups and NRM actors, and concentrates on the on-ground delivery of environmental activities. Without such support, members argue that groups will struggle to continue their work and at worst, some groups may cease to exist in the near future (QWaLC, 2014).

4.2 Local coordinators strengthen group capacity and enable groups to maximise the use of available funding, expertise and resources

In Victoria, where their Landcare facilitator program has received renewed funding as of July 2015, it was found that paid Landcare facilitators turned group's ideas into projects, and they helped strengthen communities by assisting to source funding and keeping them up to date with relevant information on government programs (Victorian Landcare Council, 2014). According to the Victorian Landcare Council (2014), local Landcare facilitators in Victoria have been effective in:

- Starting new groups;

- Developing more projects (translating ideas into action);
- Sourcing and securing more funding (to continue and scale up Landcare activities);
and
- Developing new partnerships between diverse NRM stakeholders.

Funding for Landcare facilitators has been extremely successful in Victoria primarily because the facilitators were placed in Landcare networks and worked directly with groups at the community level. The success of the Victorian program has led to NSW Government establishing a similar initiative (with coordinators to commence their four year term as of 1 January 2016) and Tasmania is currently looking into the possibilities of also establishing a state-wide Landcare facilitator program.

In addition, submissions to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee's review of the National Landcare Program (2015) highlights the positive impact local Landcare coordinators have on group governance and capacity. This includes increased capacity among landowners and community groups. For example, the South West Catchments Council (SWCC) in Victoria stated facilitators have transformed their organisation from 'a kitchen table landcare through to a more professional industry' (Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, 2015:11). This is attributed to Landcare coordinators who are able to offer support in skilling and resourcing groups so they can deliver activities that are well-planned and better aligned with broader NRM strategies. Local coordinators provide invaluable support to enhance the capacities of groups to plan, implement and manage projects at the local level. With the federal government expected to expand the Green Army program to 1,500 projects by 2018, local coordinator positions are required to help groups sufficiently prepare for and manage Green Army projects.

4.3 More time spent on administration increases burn out and reduces time spent on catalytic on-ground action

Local Landcare coordinators would relieve Landcare volunteers from administrative burden and related burn-out and support them to do what they do best – initiate and implement catalytic actions that have both environment and socio-economic benefits but more effectively by leveraging on available resources, connections and opportunities.

The majority of Landcare groups in Queensland rely on government funding, seeking, securing, reporting and accounting for funds and complying with relevant funding guidelines, while necessary, are extremely time-consuming (QWaLC, 2014). Government funding involves filling out cumbersome paperwork, which not all volunteers have time or are skilled in. What is more of a concern is how these administrative tasks can deplete group energy, and detract them away from delivering more creative environmental actions (as noted in Campbell, 1995) that prompt positive behavioural change in agricultural production and land use management – which are what groups care about most and bring people together in the first place.

As argued by Andrew Campbell when at the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the Australian National University, the principal function of Landcare groups is to “generate commitment to sustainability at a rural community level, to change social norms in favour of developing more sustainable systems of land use and management” (Campbell, 1995:2). For this to happen, local coordinators can assist Landcare groups identify funding and entrepreneurial opportunities beyond the traditional form of government grants to help turn ideas into concrete projects. This ensures groups remain energised and focused on what they are good at, and reduce the risk of volunteer burnout.

4.4 Better alignment is needed between local level environmental activities and national and state level NRM priorities

Landcare coordinators also contribute to the ability of groups to plan for the long term and strategically align their work to regional and national NRM priorities. Volunteers rarely have time or the expertise to undertake strategic planning, which is where facilitators step in to help groups take advantage of the information and opportunities that are available. As one submitter to the Senate review clearly stated (Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, 2015:58):

“For many Landcare groups to put together a project that aligns with a regional strategy and national strategies and targets is quite difficult. Unless they have an NRM professional in the group on their committee they really struggle with it. They are ordinary people who are not in this world of NRM and all that kind of thing. To try and produce projects that align strongly is difficult for them. I think that is another reason why coordinators or facilitators or whatever they are called in other parts of Australia are quite helpful. If the government wants groups to help to implement these strategies it needs to help the groups to do it.”

In effect, local coordinators can provide guidance to groups so their activities contribute to the realization of NRM goals and objectives, such as those stated in the Queensland Regional NRM Framework, including the four specific objectives on engagement (Queensland Government, 2011):

1. Ensure Indigenous Queenslanders’ contribution to NRM is valued and partnerships are supported.
2. Empower community and industry members and organisations to undertake NRM.
3. Support volunteers to contribute effort to their full potential.
4. Promote strong partnerships between all levels of government and with key industry and community organisations to support NRM.

Therefore, local coordinators are pivotal for linking top down NRM agenda and interests with bottom up processes and actions, which in turn contributes to an integrated approach to NRM.

4.5 Behaviour change in sustainable land management requires local ownership of and solutions to local environmental problems

Sustainable land practices and environmental conservation requires behavioural transformation of individuals and societies as a whole. For this to occur, people need to understand how they connect to the landscapes they live in, how their activities impact natural ecosystems and what they can do to protect the environment. The Landcare movement does this through community workshops and working closely with farmers and landowners, connecting them to the problems and solutions to land degradation as explained by Professor Allan Curtis from the Charles Sturt University (Victorian Landcare Council, 2014:3):

“There is abundant evidence that landcare in Victoria has mobilised a large proportion of rural landholders and successfully engaged the wider public in group activities with a high focus on the public good. Landcare engages rural landholders in activities where they learn with their peers, learn by doing and learn by reflecting on experience, including from the results of monitoring environmental conditions.

There is evidence that participation enhances landholder awareness, knowledge, management skills and leads to the adoption of practices expected to lead to more sustainable farming practices and improved environmental condition. There is also evidence that landcare activity affects the management practices of non-members.

Landcare groups operate at the scale where there are “ties that bind” and through the rules, norms and reciprocal relationships they establish, they create social capital that enhances group outcomes, including the ability of groups and networks to deliver large-scale on-ground work in a cost-effective manner. Working through groups and networks, property and catchment planning can be integrated in ways that ensure that landcare activities address the causes of land degradation.”

Local coordinators would further enhance the capacity of Landcare groups to educate farmers, land owners and communities, and bring about the attitudinal and behavioural change necessary to implement innovative and sustainable land management practices. Community awareness and participation, and attitudinal change are what some consider as a prerequisite to on-ground action (Davenport, 1997; Curtis & De Lacy, 1997). From a government point of view, funding local coordinators would appear to fulfil the need for communities to “own both land degradation problems and their solutions” (Campbell, 1995: 3). For communities, local coordinators can solidify the efforts of Landcare groups and strengthen their influence in supporting sustainable management of local landscapes and waterways.

4.6 Landcare activities have the potential to create new jobs and enhance the local economy

The employment of local coordinators would also have direct economic benefits to local communities. It is important to note that the concept of local Landcare coordinators is not

new to Queensland. In 1994, 14 out of the 25 Landcare groups in the Wide Bay-Burnett region employed part time coordinators with funding from the state government (Morrisey & Lawrence, 1997). Professional assistance provided by coordinators increased the ability of groups to complete their stated objectives and groups were able to become somewhat ‘semi autonomous’ by managing the activities of their own coordinators (Morrisey & Lawrence, 1997). At the very centre of the current local Landcare coordinator/facilitator programs in Victoria and NSW is the desire to make groups self-supporting, which indicates that a high level of autonomy and independence is being sought, both in terms of governance and financial management. Assuming that the community-centred philosophy of Landcare would also extend to the financial realm, Landcare groups are likely to give preference to spending their money locally by engaging local people, traders and suppliers for the conduct of their activities. While data on the economic benefits of local coordinators is sparse, it would be safe to presume that the deployment of such positions will have flow-on impacts to the local economy, supporting local businesses and jobs.

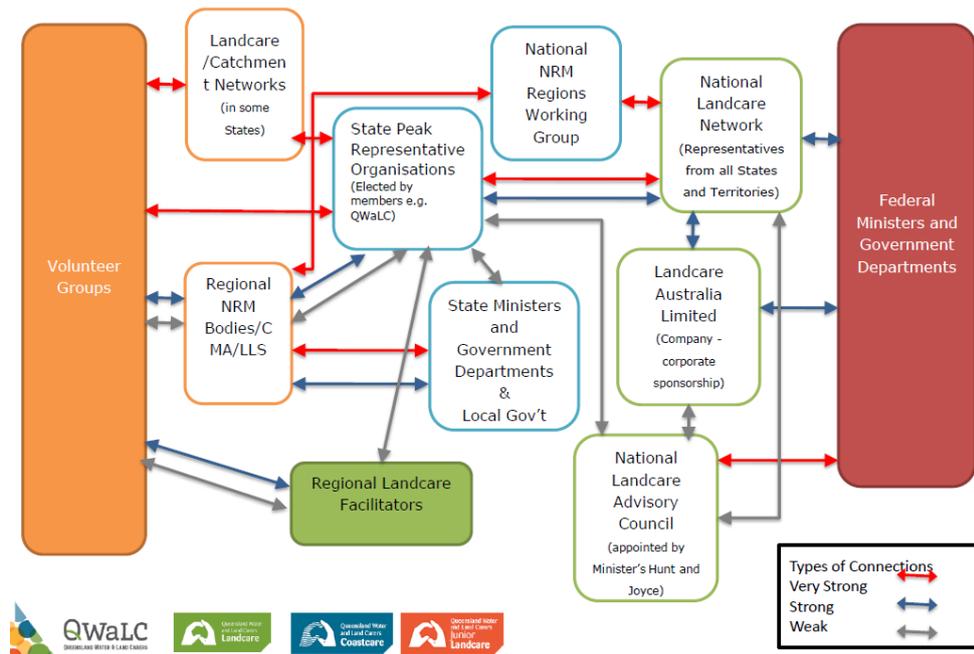
In fact, this is the case for the Lake Baroon Catchment Care Group (LBCCG), a not-for-profit community-based organization established in 1992 to improve the water quality in the Lake Baroon catchment on the Sunshine Coast. The catchment provides more than 20,000ML per year into the Southeast Queensland Water Grid which services the population in South East Queensland (Skull, 2012). The LBCCG has a 10 year funding agreement with SEQ Water, which provides LBCCG with \$160,000 per annum in funding to cover the cost of a full time Project Manager and to deliver specific water improvement projects (Skull, 2012). According to Skull (2012), this arrangement has multiple economic benefits including the direct employment of a full time worker, local procurement of contractors and suppliers for LBCCG projects, reduced costs associated with water storage and treatment for SEQ Water, increase in bulk water sales resulting from improved ecosystems services (water quality and biodiversity), and improved amenity and ecotourism opportunities for property owners (see Box 1 for further details on LBCCG). Similar economic benefits are likely to be generated by paid local Landcare coordinator positions, which can stimulate economic activity and create new employment within communities.

4.7 The need for improved communication and information sharing between groups, land users, NRM bodies and governments

Additionally, Landcare facilitators/coordinators also assist with relationship building and communication. As Landcare groups do not operate in isolation, informing and working with local governments, NRM and catchment bodies and other environmental and community groups are essential not only for maximising the impact of on-ground action but for the sheer continuity of Landcare group existence. Being aware of the broader changes taking place in the policy and funding environment is critical yet groups may lack the time or know-how, or become too immersed in their own activities and forget what is happening around them. Thus local coordinators can help Landcare groups improve their communication channels and obtain information that would strategically inform their work.

Local coordinators also provide an avenue for Landcare groups to better engage with land managers, farmers, industry, volunteers, Indigenous leaders, Traditional Owners and communities, essentially bringing these NRM actors together to work in a more coordinated and integrated manner. This is an important element since existing relationships between NRM volunteers and regional bodies and Regional Landcare Coordinators in Queensland remains weak, as evidenced by QWaLC’s assessment (see Figure 1). With the Australian Government requiring regional NRM bodies to allocate 20% of their regional stream funding towards community engagement and on-ground activities, the need for strengthening the relationship between Landcare groups and regional NRM bodies cannot be underestimated. Hence local coordinators will act as a bridge to link NRM actors together, foster interaction between them and create opportunities for greater collaboration in the delivery of NRM outcomes.

Figure 1. NRM Relationships in Queensland (Indicative Only)



Local coordinators, if effective in their facilitation of Landcare groups will help develop a shared sense of direction among Landcare groups and NRM actors, stimulating interaction between them and enabling them to pool and maximise the human and financial resources available (Campbell, 1995). This is exactly what is needed for the NRM sector in Queensland.

4.8 Landcare groups offer support and act as a lifeline for communities in times of adversity

Beyond their environmental impact, landcare groups function as social support systems and contribute to the ongoing wellbeing of communities in times of crisis. For example, after the 2012 floods, Landcare groups in the Queensland Murray Darling Region rallied to offer their assistance and support to help people recover from the floods (QWaLC, 2013). They

organised fundraising events and distributed much needed disaster-relief items to affected households.

With 80% of Queensland currently in drought, rural and regional communities are facing extreme hardship. Hiring and mobilising local coordinators will enable communities to effectively plan and respond to environmental and social stressors associated with the drought. Fundamentally, Landcare brings people together and a paid coordinator can make a huge difference to help communities get back on their feet by applying and supporting the Landcare ethos (see next section).

4.9 Local Landcare coordinators support the very ethos and characteristics of Landcare planning

Finally it is important to mention that local coordinators will enhance the very ethos and characteristics of Landcare planning, which are central to its ongoing operation and existence. These characteristics include (adapted from Mackay, undated):

- **Landcare plan is a community plan** that are developed and owned by communities. The community-based nature of Landcare activities and membership requires grassroots engagement and action in setting priorities and identifying solutions to environmental and agricultural land issues. Local coordinators will empower groups to achieve their goals by seeing what is possible and bringing people and resources together.
- **Landcare effort is volunteer based and mostly volunteer-funded.** People themselves must agree to participate and be involved in the delivery of Landcare activities. Individual and collective commitment, time, materials, pooling of resources and shared learning are all critical to support localised action. Local coordinators will keep people focused on what they are passionate about and good at, which is a key ingredient for sustaining the engagement of volunteers.
- **Landcare plans are ‘do-able’.** The focus is not only on aspirations but the capacity for motivation to achieve real impact on the ground, build enthusiasm and relationships, and widens possibilities for greater action. Local coordinators empower groups to achieve realistic and tangible outcomes.
- **Landcare draws on the local knowledge of landholders and stakeholders who live, experience and work off the land.** Accumulated knowledge of changes to landscapes and vegetation are leveraged, along with the wisdom of Indigenous people. Collective knowledge and expertise are identified by local coordinators to enable groups to use and build on existing community strengths, which is an integral part of the community development process.
- **Landcare nurtures collective learning and bottom-up innovation.** Landcare plans are based on action-learning and trialling new assumptions, practices and methods. Local coordinators will allow groups to share key lessons learned and best practices to

develop new and innovative approaches to environmental conservation and sustainable land management. Local coordinators will bring a renewed sense of energy and commitment to Landcare in Queensland.

Box 1. Lake Baroon Catchment Care Group

The Lake Baroon Catchment Care Group (LBCCG) on the Sunshine Coast has a funding agreement with SEQ Water, which includes funds for a full time project manager. The agreement for this year totals \$210,000 of which \$80,000 is for the project manager salary and associated costs (including office rental, transport, administration and other operating expenditure) and \$130,000 for the delivery of specific water quality projects. The organisation secures additional funding from government and private sources.

According to LBCCG, local procurement is an essential part of building its relationship with the local community. LBCCG spends approximately \$150,000 per year on contractors and material supplies, with 90% being expended locally within the Sunshine Coast region. Using local labour and materials – even though they may not be the most cost-effective option – is advantageous to LBCCG for several reasons: first and foremost, the contractors are trustworthy and reliable; they possess local knowledge and connections required to ‘get the job done’; and they are a valuable source of ‘local news’ which helps LBCCG find out what is going on in the community and to stay connected with residents and property owners.

Aside from the economic benefits, LBCCG believes having paid staff has allowed the organisation to strengthen its governance capacity and public image. Prior to the project manager coming on board, the LBCCG management committee was said to be ‘fractured’ and it was difficult to have enough members turn up to meetings to get the quorum it needed. The employment of a project manager has helped recruit and retain a dedicated group of local members on the management committee. The project manager spends nearly a day each week on organisational governance, making sure necessary paperwork and information are provided to executive officers, preparing powerpoint slides on key project achievements and progress, and arranging necessary paraphernalia for the management committee meetings. The secretarial support provided by the project manager ensures that the meetings are conducted according to the agreed agenda and remain focused on strategic issues, which keeps the committee members engaged and interested, and it also prevents lengthy meetings. The project manager prepares his reports so they are professionally written and presented, which aids in enhancing the organisation’s image and credibility.

According to LBCCG, having paid staff is a key reason for its success. “High capacity NRM groups that achieve things are ones that have paid staff,” says LBCCG’s Project Manager. A new three year funding agreement of \$400,000 per annum is currently being finalised between LBCCG and SEQ Water, and is expected to commence by December 2015.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

With nearly all Landcare groups being entirely volunteer-run operations and most facing serious challenges to sustain their existence and activities, there is a need for establishing a Community Landcare Coordinator Program in Queensland.

In Victoria, local Landcare coordinators have been invaluable in providing professional support, advice and assistance to farmers and volunteers on essential matters that affect the governance, operations and management of Landcare and its activities. NSW has followed suit and will be commencing their state-wide coordinators program in January 2016.

Introducing a similar program in Queensland will have multiple benefits for both Landcare groups and the communities they serve. Local Landcare coordinators will enhance the capacity and capabilities of Landcare groups to apply for funding, contribute to environmental improvements within their local regions, and assist in the delivery of state and regional NRM priorities and targets. Specifically, they will be critical in providing strategic coordination and support towards:

- Maintaining the sustainability of existing groups by assisting them to grow and meet the needs of their local communities;
- Establishing new Landcare groups and in turn increasing active citizenship, volunteerism and environmental stewardship in local communities;
- Increasing the organisational, technical and financial capacity of Landcare groups and in the long term help them become ‘self-supporting’;
- Supporting groups in recruitment and retention of volunteers;
- Establishing and enhancing relationships between NRM actors at all levels;
- Assisting in developing new partnerships and funding sources; and
- Aligning the work of Landcare with federal and state outcomes on environment, agricultural production and land use management.

Fixed term funding for local coordinators would generate greater leadership and renewed enthusiasm towards sustainable land management among people from rural and remote communities. This would enable local ownership of land degradation issues as well as solutions needed to solve them, which in turn strengthen the capacity of communities to prepare for and respond to future environmental challenges. The mobilisation of local coordinators would also have positive outcomes for community wellbeing and local economic development as discussed in this paper.

Recommendation

QWaLC strongly recommends the Queensland Government to consider introducing a Community Landcare Coordinators Program as follows:

- A total investment of \$10 million to fund 50 part time coordinator positions over four years (\$50,000 per annum for each position). Landcare groups may seek other funding from other sources to top up funds should they seek to employ a full time worker.
- The program should give priority to rural and regional communities in Northern and Western Queensland due to geographic isolation, limited access to staffing and resources, and the socio-economic hardship and environmental challenges brought on by continuing drought.
- The program purpose is to enable groups to become self-supporting and to build local capacity for the on-ground delivery of environmental and land management activities that contribute to local, state and national NRM priorities.
- Similar to the processes in other states, Landcare groups will follow an application process to secure fixed term funding (recommended term is four years) for local coordinators. The funding will cover both the salary and operating costs.
- Landcare groups will have the autonomy in hiring their own **Community Landcare Coordinator**. The position may be hosted by the applicant organisation or where this is not possible organisations may nominate other hosting arrangements such as through a consortium or partnership with local and regional NRM organisations.
- The coordinator will work closely with their Landcare group to develop a strategic plan for the duration of their term (i.e. four years) or review and update an existing plan, ensuring alignment with national and state NRM goals, and local priorities. Based on this, an annual Work Plan that outlines key priorities and activities in accordance with the program's key performance areas will be prepared and submitted to the Queensland Government for ongoing reporting and monitoring purposes.
- The program will be subject to an independent mid-term and final evaluation. Quantitative and qualitative data on the benefits of the program, including case studies, should be generated and shared among stakeholders in the NRM sector.

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Landcare encompasses - Landcare, Coastcare, Waterwatch, Bushcare, Catchment Associations, Conservation groups, Regional Bodies and sub-regional organisations.