

DECADE OF LANDCARE PLAN

NATIONAL OVERVIEW
Published 1995

Australia's Transition to Sustainable Resource Management

The Decade of Landcare - the Challenge

The Decade of Landcare initiative arose from a joint National Farmers' Federation–Australian Conservation Foundation proposal to the Commonwealth for action on land degradation. The proposal emphasised the importance of a self-help approach relying heavily on local community groups, within a framework which recognised the responsibilities of Commonwealth, State and local governments. The Decade of Landcare was formally launched in the 1989 Statement on the Environment.

The initiative recognises that Australia's future is inextricably linked to better management of its natural resources. Deterioration of our natural resource base will result in cost to the people of Australia through loss of economic production, disruption to ecological processes, loss of biological diversity and decline in rural communities.

The challenge identified for the first stage of the Decade of Landcare was to increase the adoption of sustainable land management practices by land managers. It is now recognised that we must look to ways of further increasing the adoption of sustainable practices by integrating the management of land, water and biological resources.

Decade of Landcare Plan

The Decade of Landcare Plan comprises a series of documents:

- the revised National Overview of the Decade of Landcare Plan;
- the Commonwealth Component Plan; and
- individual State and Territory component plans.

The following are key aspects of a framework for future action under this revised Plan.

- The role of government is to:

- stimulate private investment (of financial resources, labour, etc) in landcare actions; and
 - facilitate public investment and community action off-farm in situations where the level of public benefit is high.
- Land, water, vegetation and nature conservation programs need to be integrated on a catchment basis to ensure that landcare actions are coordinated.
 - Other programs, particularly regional development initiatives, impact on the achievement of landcare goals: landcare and regional development programs therefore must work closely together.
 - Catchment (or regional) strategies are required to ensure that public benefit is identified.
 - Landcare actions on farms need to be integrated with the farm business through processes such as the Property Management Planning (PMP) campaign.
 - Adoption of on-farm practices is enhanced if landcare practices are seen to be essential and are demonstrated to be profitable (both in the short and long term).
 - Continuation of support for landcare group development and coordination, including the establishment of regional networks.

In summary, to help meet the challenge during the second stage of the Decade of Landcare the following changes will be made:

- the focus will shift from sustainable land management to sustainable natural resource management;
- there will be emphasis on implementation of landcare action and on awareness raising, information transfer and skill development; and
- landcare and catchment management groups and governments will work together to pursue regional initiatives.

Definition of Sustainable Natural Resource Management

In the context of the Decade of Landcare Plan, natural resources comprise land, water and their biological systems. Sustainable natural resource management means management of natural resources and natural resource based industries in accordance with the objectives and guiding principles of the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development to ensure:

- the economic viability of agricultural and other industries dependent on land, water and biological resources;
- the maintenance or enhancement of the associated resource base; and
- the maintenance or enhancement of ecosystems which are influenced by land and water resource management activities.

What has been achieved already?

The mid-term evaluation of the National Overview found that there had been progress against all of its goals.

Findings of the evaluation included:

- Awareness of landcare within the farming and wider community is high, as evidenced by the growth in the landcare movement and widespread involvement in community environmental monitoring.
- The focus of research and development activities in Australia has moved significantly towards the sustainable management of natural resources. Progress is being made in communicating the results of R&D to landholders and involving them in research activities.
- While landcare members had significantly higher levels of adoption of best bet practices for sustainable resource management, these practices were also being widely adopted in the general farming sector.
- More and more Australians are working together in partnership for sustainable natural resource management.

- A more comprehensive approach to the integrated management of soil, water and biological resources is developing, for example through the coordination of community involvement in natural resource management by national and State/Territory landcare councils.
- Changes to legislative and policy mechanisms for natural resource management by Australia's governments have occurred. For example, the National Landcare Program, underpinned by the *Natural Resources Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992*, and Commonwealth/State Partnership Agreements designed to achieve sustainable management of land, water and related natural resources, were put in place.

During the first stage of the Decade of Landcare, there were major policy developments with implications for the management of natural resources. The most important of these was the adoption by the Commonwealth and all State and Territory governments of the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development.

Other strategies with a bearing on the work of natural resource managers include:

- the National Drought Policy;
- the National Water Quality Management Strategy;
- the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity;
- the draft National Weeds Strategy; and
- the development of the National Strategy for Rangeland Management.

The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment has provided the foundation for coordinated Commonwealth/State action on the environment.

Where to from here?

While much has been achieved in the first half of the Decade of Landcare, particularly in raising awareness, the task ahead is still substantial. We need to attain long-term sustainable management of our land, water,

vegetation and other natural resources to ensure a future for our resource based industries and the maintenance of biological diversity and essential biological processes. This revised National Overview of the Decade of Landcare Plan has a greater focus on outputs that address the decline in the condition of the natural resource base and the loss of biological diversity.

New information is already available on improving productivity and sustainable land management practices—the challenge now is to remove the impediments to its implementation. As part of this process, changes to the uses of land and the development of alternative land uses may be required.

The key message is that we must all work together and intensify our efforts to address the deteriorating state of our natural resources. With such a renewed effort Australia will be better placed to build a future consistent with its National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development.

The vision underlying the Decade of Landcare is:

Development and implementation of resource management practices which enhance our soil, water and biological resources and sustain individual and community benefits now and in the future.

The principles:

The Decade of Landcare Plan seeks to:

- integrate economic and environmental goals in policies and activities;
- sustain agricultural production over the long term;
- ensure that environmental assets are appropriately valued;
- provide equity within and between generations;
- deal cautiously with risk and irreversibility; and
- recognise the global dimension of action.

These principles will be best applied if natural resources are managed to meet the needs of society over the longer term, rather than simply to reap maximum short term benefits. Sustainable natural resource management is most likely to be achieved through profitable operations, and appropriate management practices that enable individual managers to capture the benefits and bear the costs of their decisions.

Working towards sustainable land use

The national goals of the Plan and the strategies to achieve them are as follows:

Goal 1 All public and private land users understanding and adopting the principles and practices of sustainable resource management

Strategies

Continue support for newly formed and established Landcare groups for the basic tasks of awareness raising, skills development and information transfer.

Support public and private land managers working together at the regional and catchment level to advance sustainable natural resource management.

Support property management planning, including risk management, as a critical tool for achieving sustainable natural resource management and as a key means of involving the finance sector in landcare.

Support the development of sustainable farming systems, including the integration of farm forestry, measures to conserve biological diversity and recognition of the role that processes such as property management planning can play in achieving this integration.

Encourage governments and the landcare community to monitor and evaluate the impacts of their activities.

Goal 2 Effective and appropriate economic, legislative and policy mechanisms in place to facilitate the achievement of sustainable resource management

Strategies

Develop and implement an appropriate mix of policy instruments and programs for sustainable natural resource management.

Strategically support on-ground works which are consistent with a regional or catchment plan and a State, national or major river basin strategy, which bring a substantial public benefit and which address a major resource management constraint.

Involve a wider range of government programs, including the Rural Adjustment Scheme, labour market programs and regional economic development programs in the landcare effort.

Further integrate land and water management through implementation of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Water Reform Agenda.

Build on local landcare group activities by providing support for large scale regional/catchment/district planning and priority setting for landcare action and base this on an integrated multi-disciplinary approach to sustainable natural resource management.

Focus on action plans which: have broad community involvement to achieve increased productivity of rural industries and maintenance or improvement in the condition of natural resources; identify measurable outcomes, costs and benefits and performance indicators (economic, environmental and social); and, are in accordance with State, national or major river basin strategies.

Establish mechanisms to encourage on-farm nature conservation through retention and enhancement of native vegetation.

Establish and improve processes which involve the community in policy development for sustainable natural resource management.

Promote with the agricultural service industries the importance of sustainable natural resource management to the well-being of the agriculture sector.

Promote the links between sustainable natural resource management, farm profitability and industry and regional development.

Goal 3 Research, development and information exchange relating to the principles and practices of sustainable resource management

Strategies

Further develop farm management and planning skills to address economic, biophysical and social aspects of sustainability, and risk management elements as integral parts of farm business management.

Provide support to meet the demands of established groups for more sophisticated information and skills in the move from awareness raising to information transfer.

Pursue complementary research and development activities which further develop existing and new sustainable land use systems.

Improve information flows between researchers and resource managers, recognising that a range of social and economic factors can affect the uptake of research outcomes.

Establish communication networks which enable access to information of local use on the principles and practices of effective sustainable natural resource management.

Goal 4 The whole community aware of the problem of the degradation of our soil, water and biological resources and the economic, social and other costs and benefits of sustainable resource management

Strategies

Provide clear, relevant information targeted to particular audiences about the condition of Australia's natural resources and the economic, environmental and social costs and benefits of sustainable natural resource management.

Implement focused awareness campaigns promoting greater understanding of landcare principles and practices to those groups under-represented in the landcare community.

Goal 5 All Australians working together in partnership for sustainable resource management

Strategies

Involve financial institutions and rural financial advisers more fully in supporting landcare principles and practices.

Develop and implement partnerships between relevant stakeholders to undertake monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

Develop links between public and private natural resource managers to enable coordinated management across the landscape.

Establish a framework which enables everyone in the community to contribute appropriately to sustainable natural resource management.

Promote cooperation between Governments, landcare groups and relevant industry groups.

Evaluating the Plan

Individual natural resource managers, local communities and State/Territory and Commonwealth governments have allocated considerable resources to landcare activities and it is important that the impact of their efforts is assessed. The first evaluation of the Decade of Landcare Plan, conducted in 1994, involved consultations with the landcare community through the National Landcare Conference in Hobart in September 1994 and at the State/Territory and regional level. The National Landcare Advisory Committee was closely involved in the evaluation.

The evaluation was endorsed and recommendations for the future directions of landcare have been agreed to by the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand. This National Overview has been revised to reflect the Council's recommendations.

It is proposed to again review the Plan nationally in 1998 and 2001 to assess progress towards sustainable natural resource management and the performance of the Plan as a framework for action.

Performance indicators

As part of the progression from an input to an output focus, the vision and goals will be supported by performance indicators. A recognised problem in developing performance indicators for the Decade of Landcare Plan has been the difficulty of relating its relatively short term actions to the long term nature of many natural resource degradation problems. Furthermore,

there can be difficulties in attributing cause and effect to a single initiative such as the Decade of Landcare Plan.

The proposed performance indicators listed below are linked to the goals of the National Overview:

- **Awareness**—a measure of the level of understanding of landcare, not just an awareness that it exists, as an indicator of behavioural change.
- **Skills/education**—including assessment of the managerial competencies of farmers, other land managers and community groups and the availability of competent advice.
- **Participation rate**—measuring community involvement in property management planning, landcare and related groups, and catchment and regional planning.
- **Implementation**—an assessment of the adoption rate of a set of best management practices for agricultural production and conservation activities.

In addition to the above indicators, measures of change in natural resource condition are being developed for national State of Environment Reporting and by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management (SCARM) Indicators for Sustainable Agriculture project.

The SCARM project has identified a set of key indicators to reflect and monitor the objectives of sustainable agriculture: *long term net farm income; land and water quality; offsite environmental impacts and; managerial capacity*. Each of these indicators is supported by a set of measurable attributes, such as net farm income, nutrient balance on farms, chemical contamination and farmer education level.

Roles

Everybody has a role to play in achieving the landcare vision. Landcare continues to be an individual and community based initiative.

Individual natural resource managers can participate by:

- improving their understanding of the costs and benefits of sustainable natural resource management;

- understanding natural resource systems and the cause/effect relationships which apply to their land;
- improving their knowledge and skills so they can make better decisions and improve their own management practices;
- integrating economic and environmental values in managing their land;
- becoming actively involved in local landcare and other interest groups;
- cooperating in, and where relevant planning activities jointly with neighbours; and
- supporting and promoting sustainable production practices.

Communities can act through:

- local group development and action;
- local involvement in public land management;
- participating in regional and local initiatives;
- raising awareness and improving education; and
- representation on advisory committees.

Non-government organisations have a role through:

- representing their members' interests;
- providing their members with information about the landcare movement, its activities and actions;
- developing codes and policies that will help attain the landcare vision; and
- participating in the further development of the Decade of Landcare.

Local governments have a role through:

- assisting information exchange;

- assisting with the coordination of community activities;
- acting as a community advocate;
- providing resources to help local groups;
- developing and applying local conservation strategies; and
- exercising statutory planning responsibilities.

State and Territory governments contribute to sustainable natural resource management through:

- providing a suitable institutional and legislative framework;
- developing and implementing effective policies and programs;
- providing positive support through financial incentives and assistance schemes as well as appropriate standards and regulations;
- research and resource assessment;
- catchment planning and management;
- education and public awareness;
- support for natural resource management advisory and extension services; and
- managing their own natural resources responsibly.

The **Commonwealth Government** can provide national support through:

- creating an economic, environmental, social and cultural framework which encourages sustainable natural resource management;
- developing and coordinating national natural resource management policies and programs;
- research and resource assessment;

- public awareness and education;
- funding of community landcare programs;
- taxation measures;
- managing its own natural resources responsibly; and
- developing with other stakeholders a balanced program of incentives, standards and penalties.

Inter-government liaison

The Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand is responsible for:

- coordinating the landcare effort in consultation with other relevant Ministerial Councils, particularly the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council; and
- ensuring the aims and objectives of the Commonwealth, State and Territory components of the Revised National Overview of the Decade of Landcare Plan are consistent and remain relevant to achieving sustainable natural resource management.

This revised National Overview of the Decade of Landcare Plan has been endorsed by the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand. In the course of its preparation consultations were held with the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council.

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