



Director
Conservation Incentives and Design Section
Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
GPO Box 787, Canberra ACT 2601
Fax: 02 6274 1332
wildlife.corridors@environment.gov.au

Director

Re: Australian Landcare Council submission - National Wildlife Corridors Consultation Plan

The Australian Landcare Council (the council) commends the Advisory Group on the National Wildlife Corridor Consultation Plan. It is an exciting and important initiative that recognises and builds on the work done to date and will enable landscape connectivity at a national scale. The intent of this initiative is both far reaching and timely and the council supports the directions and approach taken in the document as being consistent with the roles, ethics and principles of Landcare and NRM.

This initiative will be a legacy and provides validity for the promotion/use of corridors in the Australian context.

The council believes it is important that the Plan aligns, supports, enhances and complements the many National and State/Territory's existing initiatives and frameworks to maximise the outcomes for investment. The implementation of the Plan builds on the significant work undertaken by volunteers and stewardship through Landcare and NRM.

The council endorses the five steps of action including the proposed legislation which is intended to be high level and enabling rather than regulatory. The council trusts that the final legislative framework is intended to provide transparency and consistency while avoiding being punitive or overly bureaucratic. We recognise that the Plan is intended to support connectivity at all scales, and while detailed attention is given to connectivity within macro-corridors, more detail is needed for areas outside the macro-corridors to achieve this.

The Consultation Plan notes the important role of land managers but the council believes it is also important to specifically recognise and refer to farmers, pastoralists and farmer groups throughout the document. Direct reference is vital to building ownership and engaging the sustainable production sector in the Plan's acceptance and implementation. Recognising the role of corridors to foster productive landscapes and to support in part significant issues such as food security will also improve the Plan's perceived relevance.

The document gives regard to the importance of community skills and understanding, partnerships and community participation. These sit 'hand in hand' with the *Australian Framework for Landcare* and will be important when engaging community in the delivery of the Plan.

Australian Landcare Council is the Australian Government's key advisory body on Landcare and natural resource management matters.

The council suggests that the Plan could more strongly acknowledge the contribution and interactions currently made by sustainable productive land use to landscape connectivity, either as habitat or to aid movement. Recognition of work that is already being undertaken by farmers, pastoralists and land managers and the promotion of multiple benefits including social and economic will increase participation.

The technical nature of the document means that at times it can be read as almost clinical in nature, with a 'top-down' focus and separated from community. One of the strengths of the corridor approach is the hope and passion inspired by many people working together towards a great vision. This critical human element needs to be better integrated into the principles and objectives through better articulation of inclusiveness and social values. Quotes are an effective way to engage readers and express aspirations. The use of more quotes will nurture the Plan's 'sense of heart' and personalise the multiple benefits derived from corridors.

While the document notes the importance of community engagement and delivering local benefits it would be considerably strengthened by recognising in its objectives and principles that community is at the heart of corridor development. Corridors must be designed with and by the community and partners.

The document emphasises design based on science and recognizes the need for the inclusion of Indigenous ecological and local knowledge. The document would be strengthened by a greater emphasis on how to enable inclusion of this indigenous and local knowledge. For example, through identification of social principals and provision of access to collaborative tools, methods for community based planning, development of community based visions, use of scenarios and other practical mechanisms to assist communities.

The principles of equity and access need to be recognised as key elements of a sound and collaborative governance framework. The Plan should also give due regard to indigenous governance systems. It would be valuable in the council's view to seek comment from the Indigenous Advisory Committee on the Plan and specifically on governance and principles of planning.

It would make sense for the Plan to recognise the broadest range of stakeholders as community. The corridors concept is inclusive, offering potential for farmers and producers, conservationists, planners and miners to contribute to the Plan.

The premise that the framework relies on community and regional nomination and support could be more strongly emphasised and clarified. Though the corridor sites listed are inferred to be indicative it is unclear whether:

- the listed sites need to first be nominated by the community in order to be considered or whether they will be automatically accepted once the legislative framework is in place
- communities will have to wait to progress their own additional nominations where the sites are not currently listed
- additional potential existing corridors identified through stakeholder consultation such as the Wet Tropics Conservation Strategy in north Queensland (which overlaps with the southern section of the Cape York corridor) will be recognised
- additional resourcing will be provided to assist communities to nominate.

To maximise access to the resources provided under the framework the council encourages the Australian Government to seek community nominations as soon as possible.

Threats of altered fire regimes, water regimes and over abundant native species are relevant Australia-wide. They impact at large scales on both sustainable production and conservation and require greater recognition in the Plan.

The council recognises the importance of innovation, to look at new and different ways of doing business in particular as part of strategic investment associated with the Plan.

Operational and administrative details are not currently dealt with in the Plan and the ‘how, what, where, when and by whom’ of implementation needs to be articulated. It is also important that the principles and objectives of the Plan be kept in mind during the current Caring for our Country program design phase.

A sound monitoring and reporting framework will be critical to drive annual reporting, evaluation and improvement of the Plan. The council encourages the development of common indicators and the use of existing rather than new reporting frameworks wherever possible. The Plan provides an excellent opportunity to drive forward the development of a set of useful, coordinated and consistent national biodiversity indicators in partnership with stakeholders and community.

There is a need to reflect on the communication of the Plan which will influence by whom and the extent to which it is taken up. In addition, a number of important themes and issues are likely to arise through stakeholder consultation which are beyond the Plan’s scope but nevertheless critical to its successful implementation. The council encourages the Australian Government to remain flexible and adaptive across the suite of mechanisms available to it in order to incorporate valuable input and respond to issues raised.

The council thanks the Advisory Group for the opportunity to comment on the Consultation Plan which can reinforce and extend the principles of Landcare and NRM, build community knowledge and understanding, support participation and partnerships, build on existing work, enhance and extend existing programs, and deliver multiple benefits to a broad range of stakeholders.

Yours sincerely



Kim Chance
Chair

18 April 2012