



Communiqué of the Australian Landcare Council meeting 36 held in Longreach, Queensland, 16-18 May 2006

The Australian Landcare Council (ALC) held its thirty-sixth meeting in Longreach, Queensland, on 16-18 May 2006. One of the major issues addressed was the question of continued Australian Government program support for agricultural sustainability and natural resource management beyond June 2008. The Council discussed a draft submission to Minister Peter McGauran and Minister Ian Campbell, prepared by the NRM Futures Working Group, which will provide advice on future funding programs from the NRM community and landcare perspective. The Council plans to present the submission to the Ministers in June 2006.

The second major issue discussed by Council was community perception of the roles and responsibilities of the Landcare facilitators and coordinators. Members provided feedback on mechanisms to improve community engagement with landcare facilitators and coordinators. The Chairman will take this information back to the two Ministers in the form of preliminary advice, pending further investigation and discussion of the subject.

The Council held a formal dinner at the Stockman's Hall of Fame on 17 May 2006. Guests included representatives from the Desert Channels region's landcare groups and NRM bodies, the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee and Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee, as well as the Longreach Mayor, Councillor Pat Tanks. Mr Angus Emmott, Chair of the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee and member of the Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee, addressed the Council and guests at the dinner. Mr Emmott outlined the management and governance processes set up to manage the region's two major resources, the Lake Eyre Basin and the Great Artesian Basin. He provided background on the challenges and success stories resulting from those management and governance processes, and emphasised the necessity for active pursuit of a long term strategic vision at all levels of government and community to make the resources sustainable into the future.

Those issues were reinforced by a presentation to the Council on 18 May 2006 by the Desert Channels Queensland's Executive Officer, Ms Leanne Kohler, and Landcare Facilitator, Mr Cameron O'Neil. The presentation provided the Council with a description of the key priorities of the Desert Channels region (coordination of activities and service delivery and effective community engagement with catchment committees, Indigenous community, community groups and producer groups) and their NRM challenges (how to deliver on-ground activity within investment package, lack of 'cached-up' industries to invest, the cost of doing business, lack of data and information, environmental versus economic feasibility, and climate). In addition to winning an Australian Government Landcare Regional Award in 2005, the achievements of the region include strong engagement of community/stakeholders, community ownership of regional plan, coordinated strategic approach to NRM, substantial on-ground investment (200+ properties), investment in capacity and investment in the regional knowledge base.

The Council was able to see some of those issues faced in the Desert Channels Queensland region first hand on a field trip on 17 May. While some of the planned itinerary had to be curtailed because of transport problems, members saw The Grove's Prickly Acacia National

Landcare Project, being carried out by Winton Shire Council. Council members gained a appreciation of the difficulties faced in remote areas because of the vast distances and lack of resources, particularly human resources to carry out on-ground works.

At the meeting on 18 May, Council working groups provided updates on their activities.

- The NRM Futures Working Group had been very active in the period since the last meeting, providing structure and input to the proposed submission to provide advice on future government funding of NRM in Australia.
- The Citizen Science Working Group will look for two groups to take forward its citizen science template which seeks to document the successes of local landcare groups in terms of observations of landscape change in the short and long term.
- The work of two working groups, Native Vegetation and Taxation, is still pending feedback on questions raised in earlier correspondence.

The Council received a comprehensive report from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on progress with Australian Government NRM programs. Reports were also received from members representing the Australian Conservation Foundation, National Farmers' Federation, Landcare Australia Limited, National Landcare Facilitator Project, Greening Australia, Murray Darling Basin Community Advisory Committee, youth and forest industries.

The Council's next meeting will be held in Canberra on 15-16 August 2006 (ALC37). Following this, Council members will attend the International Landcare Conference in Melbourne in October, and then hold their next regional meeting in Alice Springs in early November 2006.

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The Council is the Australian Government's statutory policy advisory body on Natural Resource Management and Landcare and has a majority of community Landcare members.