

## THE ROLE OF LANDCARE GROUPS IN WEED CONTROL

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Landcare groups have played a key role in weed control in Australia. Landcare groups have provided a forum for an exchange of information between landholders and Government Departments, and have increased awareness of weed problems in the community. The groups have fostered cooperation between neighbouring properties and Government research and extension agencies.

Landcare groups have adopted a participative action research/learning approach, with demonstration sites and field days to increase landholder awareness and education of weed control methodology. Landholders on the Landcare groups are aware of the factors that may influence the adoption process of other landholders. In some cases peer pressure has been responsible for effective weed control in an area.

Weed control has been the single most important issues responsible for the formation of some landcare groups. These groups have recognised that an integrated approach is required, as weeds do not recognise property boundaries. A number of case studies are provided which describe the processes used by some Landcare groups.

Landcare groups also provide an administrative body for the application of funding from State and Commonwealth funding sources.

### BACKGROUND TO LANDCARE GROUPS

Landcare groups are made up of people who have come together to collectively work towards improved land management. Groups usually consist of primary producers, members of local government, educational institutions and anyone from the local community. With limited financial and people resources, groups rely on awareness and education to promote sustainable land management practices.

The number of landcare groups in Australia grew in response to a commitment by the Australian Government to support a concerted effort by the community towards addressing land degradation. This support was brought about by the collaboration of the two key primary producer and conservation groups, the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation. The result of this collaboration was funds being set aside for distribution to the community by way of grants, known as the National Landcare Program.

Issues which groups address vary between districts and states. In southern Australian salinity, feral animals, revegetation and soil erosion are key issues. Woody weeds, rangeland management and soil erosion are key issues in northern Australia, eight of the fourteen different pasture communities in Queensland are threatened by the spread of woody weeds or undesirable timber regrowth (6).

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Landcare groups organise activities such as field days, guest speakers at meetings, farm walks, bus trips and project sites. Funding for projects and activities can be obtained by submissions to the National Landcare Program.

## COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

The early landcare groups which formed in Victoria aimed to address problems of weeds and salinity. Producers saw the futility of doing action on their property without the cooperation of their neighbours. Weed control will only be effective if the source of weed seed is also controlled. This is difficult if the source is on a neighbouring property. Working towards a cooperative solution also saves on human and financial costs. Landcare groups have the advantage of being able to influence their neighbours and develop a joint effort.

Government and non-government agencies, individual landholders and local communities will not only have to find new solutions to ecological problems - they must also find new ways of working together (2). Combined activities and projects have benefits for both government agencies and producer groups. Input from the community results in ownership of problems and acceptance which may lead to more effective action. Government agencies enjoy the benefits of an additional extension service and input to research projects.

Dalrymple Landcare Committee. The Dalrymple Landcare Committee located around Charters Towers have a close working relationship with government agencies, agribusiness and producer organisations. The Committee has links with Tropical Weeds Research Centre (Lands Department), Grazing Lands Management Unit (Department of Primary Industries) and CSIRO.

Management of woody weeds is a major issue for the Committee. At their regular field days weeds are always on the agenda. By organising field days, the Committee seeks to provide informative discussions which may minimise the costs of weed control to landholders in the Shire and surrounding districts.

Prickly Acacia Landcare Project - Western Queensland. Prickly Acacia is an overwhelming woody weed problem in the Mitchell Grass Downs of North West Qld which is being addressed through the efforts of four landcare groups and Lands Department. The Flinders, Richmond, MacKinlay and Cloncurry Landcare Groups submitted a combined project to National Landcare Program to appoint a prickly acacia extension officer to assist with mapping the weed and providing advice to landholders on control programs.

## AWARENESS AND EDUCATION IN RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITY

Landcare groups do not have the resources to address all the problems in their districts. A role which groups fill is in promoting available information and technology to other producers. Promoting discussion on methods of weed control plays a big part in eventual management. Bringing issues out in the open helps producers to understand their problems and perhaps be more willing to act.

Many weeds in Australia originated as urban garden weeds and escaped into the country. Road side demonstrations and trials set up by landcare groups help to raise awareness of issues and promote early control of weeds. These demonstrations also educate the urban community about

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issues of weed control. Hopefully it will serve to help the community to accept responsibility for land degradation, in this case weeds.

### PEER PRESSURE AND LANDHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

The primary role of landcare groups, and the measure of their effectiveness, is generating commitment to sustainability at a community and individual level (1). Commitment is achieved through helping the community to understand and own the issues of land degradation and to develop action.

Landcare groups can play a unique role in the rural community by putting pressure on other landholders to control weeds. The message is coming from landholders who have the same constraints and who are often in a similar situation. Landholders will more often listen to opinions and advice from other landholders.

Feedback to government agencies on land degradation is a role taken seriously by landcare groups. Following is an extract from a talk given at the Dalrymple Landcare Committee Rubbervine field day.

*"Weed control on the massive scale needed in Northern Australia is too much for landholders alone. Over zealous lands officers, departmental heads, single issue enthusiasts or stupid politicians will extinguish what hope we have if lack of understanding overshadows realism."*(3)

### FUNDING FOR WEED CONTROL

Only recently has funding been made available through the National Landcare Program for landcare groups to work on weed projects. Landcare groups have been instrumental in helping people to understand that weeds are land degradation.

Several projects, which were submitted for funding, from Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, under National Landcare Program specifically related to weed control (5).

The recently released Draft National Weed Strategy stated that:

*"Weed management should be seen as a fundamental part of landcare, because weeds are major contributors to land degradation and weed management is an important factor in sustainable land use and ecologically sustainable development (4).*

It is hoped that this statement will assist in providing more assistance in the future for weed management, financially through programs such as the National Landcare Program and also be encouragement to community groups such as Landcare and to State government departments in the fight against weeds.

Understanding and ownership of land degradation issues by the community are fundamental in successfully moving towards sustainable land management. The problem of weed control did not appear overnight and can not be solve by supply of simplistic weed destruction information. Landcare groups are attempting to addressing the issue by promoting understanding of the problem, discussing the issues and encouraging action.

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Cooperation and collaboration with Landcare groups may assist in more effective methods of weed control than is possible by chipping away at the problem in isolation.

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