

Submission to the National Landcare Programme Consultation

29 August 2014



About the Australian Land Conservation Alliance

Acting as a national voice for private land conservation, the Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) represents the Nature Conservation Trust of New South Wales, The Nature Conservancy (Australia), Queensland Trust for Nature, Nature Foundation SA, Tasmanian Land Conservancy, Trust for Nature (Victoria) and the National Trust of Australia (WA), together representing thousands of private landholders engaged in permanently protecting their own land for biodiversity. The Alliance also works closely with other stakeholders in the conservation sector, including Bush Heritage Australia, Conservation Volunteers Australia, WWF-Australia and many others.

All private land conservation activities must be part of the National Landcare Programme

Throughout Australia, private land conservation encompasses a range of approaches, from Landcare-type activities such as tree planting and fencing to more formalised approaches such as permanent protection of remnant vegetation through conservation covenants. Private land conservation is supported by multiple stakeholders and its focus is broader than biodiversity – increasingly taking place in productive landscapes where private lands are sympathetically managed for both conservation and production, leading to more resilient landscapes and more sustainable practices.

In this way the work of our members strongly links to the aims of the National Landcare Programme. ALCA's member organisations are developing communities of landholders who are engaged with their local environment, and providing a link between private landholders, sustainable land management and environmental outcomes at local, regional and national scales. Throughout Australia, ALCA members harness the enthusiasm and expertise of those already living on and managing the land: building the land management capacity of landholders through active stewardship programs, changing land management practices to become more sustainable, and contributing to the achievement of national and international conservation targets. And by working in productive landscapes, farmers are benefitting from this support for sustainable land management (e.g. from weed management, wind breaks and managing soil erosion).

The National Landcare Programme should support permanent protection

An important part of turning on ground environmental activities into long-term gains is through the support of permanent protection mechanisms. From an investment perspective, national environmental programs should support permanent protection, as it provides long-term security for the investment of

public money and mitigates investment risk in activities that would otherwise have no certainty that they will survive into the future. Conservation covenants are one such mechanism which provides in-perpetuity protection of on-ground works. Yet in its present design the National Landcare Programme, does not emphasise nor make any specific allocation of its \$1bn investment to permanent protection.

Permanent protection is also important for the survival of threatened species and ecosystems, including on private land where much important biodiversity currently exists outside of the protected area estate. Protected areas, including on private land, form the backbone of Australia's efforts to conserve threatened species. Indeed a large proportion of threatened species occur entirely outside public protected areas, including some of the most threatened ecosystems. Encouraging permanent protection on private land through the National Landcare Programme will provide a pathway for private landholders to support the conservation of threatened species.

It is important to emphasise that permanent protection on private land is entirely voluntary, and can work within and alongside agricultural land. Through the work of ALCA members, interested landholders are provided the opportunity to permanently protect their own land with a conservation covenant. Whether the covenanted land is a small or large amount of their property is negotiated with the landholder, and in many instances results in a mix of both agricultural and permanently protected land. They are also encouraged to adopt sustainable land management practices and provided with stewardship support to actively manage their land in ways that benefits biodiversity. So it's a win-win situation for farmers and for the environment. In this way, permanent protection offers a pathway for willing landholders to work at the local scale and deliver long-term environmental outcomes.

Supporting permanent protection will align with national environmental policy trends

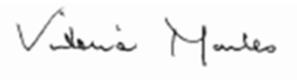
It is also important to note that the omission of allocating funds to permanent protection in the design of the National Landcare Programme is against international trends in national environmental policy. For example, the USA, through the America's Great Outdoors program, has recently committed USD\$900m towards permanent protection through the Land and Water Conservation Fund and an additional USD\$200m for the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program¹. Canada, through its recently announced National Conservation Plan, has committed CAD\$100m over 5 years to The Nature Conservancy of Canada aimed at supporting permanent protection of ecologically sensitive lands, with an additional CAD\$3.2m for the development of a national inventory of permanently protected public and private land². Across the Tasman, the New Zealand government provides base funding of NZD\$3.7m per year for the permanent protection of private land, covering an area similar to the state of Victoria. Scaled up for Australia's 8 states and territories, this is equivalent to \$29.6m per year across the country.

¹ Land Trust Alliance, "America's Great Outdoors". Accessed 27 August 2014 at: <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/policy/public-funding/greatoutdoors>

² Government of Canada, 2014. "Conserving Canada's lands and waters" Access 27 August 2014 at: <http://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/ncp/conserving.html>

We strongly recommend incorporating an emphasis on long term protection into the National Landcare Programme in order to ensure that this important public expenditure results in environmental benefits well into the future.

Yours sincerely,



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