



Communiqué of the Australian Landcare Council Meeting 43, Canberra, 12 – 13 February 2008

The Australian Landcare Council (ALC) held its 43rd meeting (ALC 43) in Canberra on Tuesday 12 and Wednesday 13 February 2008.

On Tuesday the Council convened a high-level forum exploring climate change and carbon trading from a rural industries' perspective.

Chairs or delegates from the research and development corporations, most state and territory 'chairs of chairs' for the natural resource management regions, representatives of the National Farmer's Federation and others participated in the forum. The speakers included: Dr Michael Robinson, Executive Director of Land and Water Australia; Dr Colin Creighton, CEO of the Mackay-Whitsunday NRM Region and Coordinator of the Managing Climate Variability R&D programme; Dr Mark Howden, climate change and adaptation specialist, CSIRO; Mr Brett de Hayr, CEO, AgForce; Mr Matthew Reddy, CEO of CarbonSMART and Dr Stephen Bygrave from the Department of Climate Change, Australian Government. There were robust discussions centering on mitigation, adaptation and emissions trading, as well as consideration of the broad opportunities and threats posed by the implementation of carbon trading and a changing climate. Delegates also debated the role rural industries should play in a carbon trading framework.

The forum was divided into three sessions followed by a panel discussion and opportunity for further questions. The three sessions were: science, adaptation and innovation, and policies and practicalities. Key messages were extracted from each session and will form the basis of a working advice to our relevant ministers. Dr Graeme Pearman provided an expert commentary to guide the deliberations.

For ALC 43 the Chairman had asked ALC members to 'consult their networks to consider how the Australian Government can best direct future investment to boost rural industries' capacity to adapt to climate change'. The remainder of Tuesday, after guests departed following the forum, was dedicated to considering these, and other points relating to climate change and emissions trading.

The outcomes of the forum, members' networks responses, and meeting discussions will constitute an informed advice to the Ministers in the form of policy recommendations and a list of priority areas warranting further analysis.

The Chairman's report congratulated the new Ministers on their appointments and the Australian Government's strong sustainability agenda with special emphasis on climate change and water. The Chairman was a keynote speaker at the NSW Landcare and Catchment Management Conference at Tamworth and she highlighted the leadership roles of other ALC members in helping make that event a success.

Concern was expressed over the uncertain status of a future International/ National Landcare Conference, and the urgent need to finalise both time and place for that event.

The Chairman also reported on her attendance at the LAL Board dinner and Woolworths Sustainability Advisory Committee meeting.

The Chairman's letters to the new Ministers from the previous ALC meeting introduced the Council, its membership and statutory role, as well as outlining policy recommendations from ALC 42 and the field trip in the Ord Catchment Area.

ALC 43 included reports from Mr Martin Walsh (DAFF) and Ms Mary Colreavy (DEWHA). Departmental representatives noted that no NHT bilateral agreements between the states / territories and the Australian Government were signed prior to the federal election. The Australian Government and departments are now undertaking a review of NRM programmes.

ALC members were concerned that any transition to a new national NRM programme should ensure a continuum of the built capacity and momentum achieved and in place in regions across Australia. It was noted that the Australian Government is aware of the need for certainty and information on any future program changes and will provide this as soon as possible. Ms Colreavy reported that the Sustainable Practices Grants under the NLP will close 25 February 2008.

Members took this opportunity to discuss the future direction of NRM programmes and the recently released ANAO paper on the regional NRM delivery model.

Presentations were given by Dr Jacky Williams, Post-doctoral Fellow at the University of New England; Dr Don Thompson, the National Waterwatch Facilitator and Dr Wendy Craik, CEO of the Murray Darling Basin Commission. Dr Williams presented the outcomes of the Landcare 11 Forum which met on 14 August to identify a consistent approach in describing the future for sustainable agriculture from a national perspective and how to align the systems available to achieve sustainable agriculture goals. Dr Thompson discussed the successes and challenges facing the Waterwatch model, including the role of the National Waterwatch Facilitator. Dr Craik presented information on the progress of the Living Murray initiative with particular emphasis on the icon sites.

Members made final recommendations on a new weeds policy paper and this paper will be finalised and sent to the Ministers for their consideration. The ALC emphasised the enormity of the problem of invasive plant species and believes the levels of investment should be commensurate with the scale of the issue.

At the dinner on Tuesday evening, ALC members were joined by forum delegates and heard from the distinguished scientist, Dr Graeme Pearman, who addressed the topic "Climate Change, Unfolding Science and Implications for Australia" reflecting on the urgency of the climate change problem .

The Australian Landcare Council has been commissioned by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to produce a book showcasing landcare achievements. The steering committee for this project met on Thursday to review the submissions and to discuss how the finished product should look and how best to direct the editor. The Council reiterates its thanks to all those who have contributed.

The Council's next meeting will be held on 20 – 21 May 2008 in north-west Tasmania. Members will be undertaking a field trip in the region to gain an understanding of the NRM challenges and opportunities facing local communities and will take the chance to view NLP and other projects first hand.