



MURRUMBIDGEE
Landcare
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Murrumbidgee Landcare Incorporated Report:

Map the Landcare Groups (past, present and potential) in the catchment

(First milestone report, due 31 March 2013, delivered 16 May 2013, revised 4 June 2013)

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The Landcare Support Officer project is funded by Murrumbidgee CMA from their Community Partnerships program



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Introduction

In early 2013, Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority (Murrumbidgee CMA) allocated a Community Partnership Grant to Murrumbidgee Landcare Incorporated (MLi) to engage a part time Landcare Support Officer (LSO) to work with Landcare groups in the Murrumbidgee Catchment. The role of the LSO is to assess the status of Landcare groups in the catchment; establish current constraints, needs and interests; enhance communication strategies between groups and to the public; develop project ideas; and seek future funding and partnership opportunities.

The project and this report has been prepared at an early stage in the regional integration of services offered to landholders in NSW, involving the CMAs (natural resource management, NRM), the agricultural advisory services of the Department of Primary Industry (DPI) and the Livestock Health and Pest Authorities (LPHA). The new regional rural services organisation will be called Local Land Services (LLS), and it will begin operations on 1 January 2014.

This report *"Map the Landcare Groups (past, present and potential) in the catchment"* is the first of eight Milestone reports to be delivered during the Project.

Landcare Support Officer

Mr Alan P Cole; B.Sc. (Forestry), MBA, RPF.

In April 2013 Alan took on the part time role of Landcare Support Officer with Murrumbidgee Landcare Incorporated. This role supplements his independent consulting forestry service, trading as Acacia Forestry Services.

Alan has had an extensive career in environmental management and as a consulting forester. He was the Forest Manager for the Midway Afforestation Investment Service Pty Ltd group of companies from 1987 to 2003 and was directly responsible for the establishment and maintenance of over 6,500 hectares of hardwood and softwood plantation in south west Victoria.

In 2003 Alan joined GHD Pty Ltd's Canberra office as a consulting forester and Health Safety and Environmental Coordinator. He completed numerous major consultancy projects including being Job Manager for GHD's role as the Independent Forester for the Great Southern group of companies. More recently he was a job manager and field team leader for a number of forestry due diligence assessments including the successful acquisition by Global Forest Partners of the Timbercorp Ltd and Willmott plantation estates.

Since returning to Canberra in 2003, Alan has completed his Master in Business Administration (MBA) degree, and has conducted numerous project reviews including reviewing Greening Australia's Gondwana Link Project. He was the Independent Forester for Eraring Energy's investments in Mallee plantings for carbon sequestration in southern NSW, and has conducted environmental auditing of the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environments and VicForests operational harvest planning.

Alan has a small farm at Bowning in NSW and has entered into a number of Landcare projects with the Murrumbidgee CMA and Greening Australia. He is a member of the Yass Landcare Group.

Scope of this Report

The scope of this report is to *"Map the Landcare Groups (past, present and potential) in the catchment"*. The "catchment" for the purpose of this report is defined as the published catchment of the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority with the addition of the Australian Capital Territory.

Limitations

The services provided by Murrumbidgee Landcare Incorporated in connection with preparing this Report were limited to those specifically detailed in the scope outlined in this Report.

The opinions, conclusions and any recommendations in this Report are based on conditions encountered and information reviewed at the time of preparation.

Methodology

Upon engagement, a number of historic MLI documents were provided outlining the Landcare networks and groups in the Murrumbidgee Catchment. These documents included "Murrumbidgee Landcare Networks and Groups" MLI (2006) and the document "All Groups by Network" MLI (circa 2009).

The MLI website listed 15 networks and their associated groups with contact information for those networks and groups. A current database or listing of the status of Landcare across the catchment was not available.

Assessments

One of the initial tasks of the project was to establish a current database of the catchments networks and groups; the intent of this database was not only to capture a current listing but also to document the status of historic groups on original listings, current key contacts and ultimately the range of activities undertaken by the active groups.

All networks and/or groups were contacted either by email or telephone, contact details were sourced from websites, and where these failed alternative contacts such as MLI staff, Murrumbidgee CMA staff or other Landcare stakeholders were contacted to establish the status of networks and groups.

In addition to email and telephone communications, meetings were attended with a number of networks, groups and organisations (Table 1).

Results

Activity Status

The activity status of all 15 networks listed on the MLI website was established, and of these:

- 11 were classified as Active,
- 1 considered to be Inactive, and
- 3 classified as Closed.

Table 1. Meetings Attended

Networks	Groups	Other Organisations
Ginninderra Catchment Group	Queanbeyan	Cootamundra DPI and CMA staff
Kyeamba Valley Landcare Network	Murrumbateman	Conservation Council of the ACT
Molonglo Catchment Group	Sutton	
Riverina Highland Landcare Network		
Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group		
Yass Area Network		

Table 2 Summary of Landcare Network and Groups in the Murrumbidgee Catchment

Network	Network Status	Active Groups	Inactive Groups	Closed Groups	Formative Groups
Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee	Active	14	1	14	
ACT NRM Council Southern ACT Catchment Group	Active	33		3	
ACT NRM Council Molonglo Catchment Group	Active	8		3	
ACT NRM Council Ginninderra Catchment Group	Active	10		2	
Yass Area Network	Active	8		7	1
Harden Murrumburrah Landcare Group	Active	2			
Cootamundra District Landcare Network	Closed			7	
Junee Area Landcare Network	Active			13	
Riverina Highlands Landcare Network	Active			4	
Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group	Active			5	
Kyeamba Valley Landcare Network	Active			3	
Eastern Riverina Landcare Network	Inactive			8	
Central Riverina Landcare Network	Closed	1	2	14	
Lower Murrumbidgee Catchment Landcare	Closed	2		14	1
Hay Balranald Landcare Network	Active	2	1	1	
Total		80	4	98	2

Of the 184 groups past and present listed on Landcare documents and websites:

- 80 are Active,
- 4 are Inactive,
- 98 have Closed, and
- 2 are Formative.

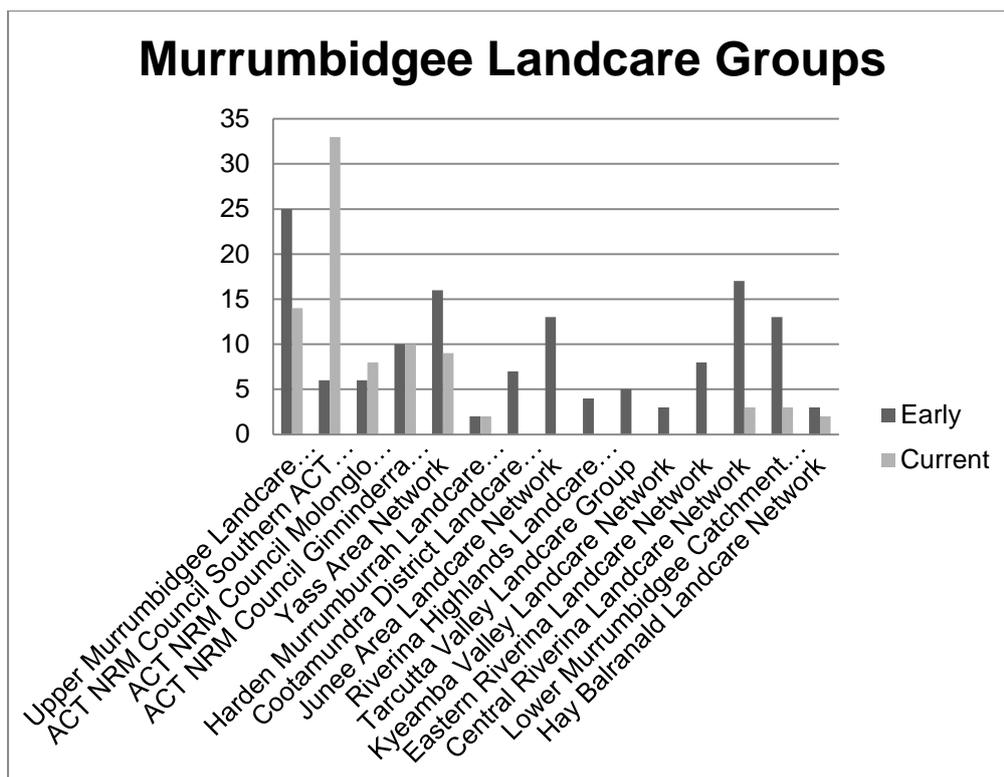
The current situation is represented in Table 1. Meetings Attended

Networks	Groups	Other Organisations
Ginninderra Catchment Group	Queanbeyan	Cootamundra DPI and CMA staff
Kyeamba Valley Landcare Network	Murrumbateman	Conservation Council of the ACT
Molonglo Catchment Group	Sutton	
Riverina Highland Landcare Network		
Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group		
Yass Area Network		

Table 2.

A comparison was made of the status of Landcare in the past (pre-2009) and now (Figure 1). The “past” groups have been labelled “Early” groups as they contain the spectrum of Active, Inactive and Closed groups. The “Current” groups include groups that are now Active, Inactive (but still in existence) and Formative but excludes the Closed groups.

Figure 1 Past and Present Landcare Groups in the Murrumbidgee Catchment



Numerous Landcare stakeholders were questioned as to why Landcare groups "Close". The most common responses to this question included:

- Burn out of key group members, these members become exhausted with their leadership role, have achieved their goals, left the district or retired,
- Low economic viability of Australian farming due to successive years of drought, low sale prices and high input costs, resulting in Landcare being a low priority on farms,
- Lack of understanding of the value of biodiversity and sustainable agriculture,
- Lack of understanding of the scope of Landcare and what it can offer,
- The complexity and competitive nature of funding applications,
- The requirements for in-kind contributions in a climate of challenging farm viability,
- Landcare is what the CMA does.

Annual Landcare Group Costs

The following indicative annual costs have been provided to gain an appreciation of what it costs to run an incorporated Landcare Group.

Table 3 Indicative Landcare Group Annual Costs

Item	Indicative Annual Cost (\$)
Public Liability Insurance	350
Incorporation Fees	50
Auditing	600
Post Office Box	90
Stationary/postage	250

Venue Hire	120
Total Annual Costs	1,460

Source L Hufton (personal communication).

Observed club subscriptions range from \$5 (once-off subscription) to \$25 per annum.

Discussion

Landcare Past and Present

As can be seen from Table 1. Meetings Attended

Networks	Groups	Other Organisations
Ginninderra Catchment Group	Queanbeyan	Cootamundra DPI and CMA staff
Kyeamba Valley Landcare Network	Murrumbateman	Conservation Council of the ACT
Molonglo Catchment Group	Sutton	
Riverina Highland Landcare Network		
Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group		
Yass Area Network		

Table 2 and Figure 1, the number of Landcare Groups in the lower catchment (below Harden) has declined. Across the whole lower catchment, groups have contracted into the Networks, three of the Networks have closed and one is now Inactive. In the lower catchment, Landcare as a movement and culture is struggling. However, the activities of Landcare have been sustained by the efforts of an active Executive Committee, two Regional Landcare facilitators, and by winning a number of grants for NRM activities.

This declining trend in the number of groups is not replicated in the upper catchment, where both in NSW and the ACT the Landcare groups remain active and apparently viable.

Figure 1 identifies that, in the upper NSW portion of the Murrumbidgee catchment, Landcare remains relatively strong but the number of groups in the two networks (Upper Murrumbidgee and Yass) have diminished over time. In some groups, the efforts of a few dedicated CMA staff members have succeeded in maintaining a high level of Landcare activity against an overall trend of decline.

In contrast, within the Networks that belong to the ACT NRM Council, Landcare has flourished, growing from 22 “Early” groups to 51 “Current” groups.

It should be noted however that the number of Landcare members, groups and networks is only one measure of “success”, and does not capture the community Landcare “activity” within the catchment. For example, MLI has managed several NRM projects, including the relatively large cross-property planning projects that have been undertaken in conjunction with funding from Communities in Landscapes and Biodiversity Fund sources. Furthermore, a number of small grants have been secured, enabling successful activities including Flood damage mitigation (Tarcutta group – Qantas funding), Landcare in schools (Westpac), and

wetlands in rangelands (Wah Wah Water Users group). The MLI, individual networks, and groups recently secured \$256,370 in Caring for Our Country Community Landcare Grants for six projects across the catchment.

Further discussion on the status of Landcare in the catchment will take place at the MLI Annual Forum to be held at Junee in August 2013 and information is also promoted on the MLI website.

Annual Landcare Group Costs

Assuming an average annual subscription of \$15 per member a total of 97 financial members per group would be required to sustain the Total Annual Costs outlined in Table 3 without the benefit of external funding or grants.

At this stage of the Project we have not calculated the average number of financial members per group, but it is unlikely to exceed 50, and many groups would not exceed 20 financial members. As a consequence, some groups don't expend funds on the budget items listed in Table 3 such as public liability insurance. A failure to take out insurance coverage potentially exposes the officers of the groups to liability, and may be affecting the willingness of people to take on group leadership roles and therefore a contributing factor in the decline of Landcare.

Landcare Potential

Understanding the contrast in Landcare growth and vitality between the NSW and ACT catchment areas is critical in evaluating Landcare's potential.

The Landcare movement in the ACT catchment areas remains strong and membership appears to be growing; the Landcare groups in the NSW areas of the Murrumbidgee catchment is in decline.

In part, these effects can be explained purely on the grounds of population, with Canberra and the ACT having a population of approximately 360,000. However, population alone does not provide a full explanation, as Wagga Wagga, a major regional centre of approximately 62,000 people only supports one Landcare group. Griffith with a population of 17,600 people retains two Landcare groups, as does the shire of Harden and the town of Binalong with a combined population of approximately 4,000 people.

The contrast in Landcare growth and the variance in the fulfilment of its potential can be explained, at least in part, by the different models adopted by the Murrumbidgee CMA and the ACT NRM.

The ACT NRM model has the following characteristics:

- Has very limited ACT NRM Regional Landcare Facilitator presence, with an allocation of only 1 FTE,
- Has minimal direct involvement with individuals,
- Directs the bulk of its funding to NGO's; the 3 Catchment Groups (Belconnen, Southern ACT, Molonglo) and Greening Australia,
- Provides individual Landcare groups with Public Liability insurance,
- Enables networks and groups to generate a high level of additional funding,
- Generates a high level of volunteer involvement.

The Murrumbidgee CMA model has, in the past:

- Allocated Regional Landcare resources using its own staff,
- Has direct involvement with individual landowners rather than through MLI,
- Does not direct funding to the Landcare Networks,
- Supports individual groups with staff resources, but with no financial support,
- Fails to generate significant network and group access to additional funding,
- Fails to generate a high level of volunteer involvement.

Whilst the ACT model empowers the Catchment Groups with financial support enabling the employment of non-government regional Landcare facilitators at a network level, the NSW model does not. The CMA's direct contractual agreements with individual landowners tend to isolate the Networks from their key stakeholders. The NSW model may achieve on-ground works on individual properties, but it does not appear to foster a culture of Landcare in rural communities and it fails to generate the multiplier effects achieved from additional funding and from a high volunteer input.

Conclusion

The first two months of this project has assessed the status of community Landcare; reviewed current models for support for Landcare, and identified some future opportunities.

The conclusions about support for community Landcare include:

- Under the past CMA model, the Landcare movement has neither been sustained nor grown across the whole Murrumbidgee catchment.
- The ACT NRM model appears to be achieving success against a trend of Landcare decline in rural environments. It would be worth reviewing in greater details the key components of that model (approach, organisation, funding, and operation) to identify what makes this model successful, at least in terms of group numbers and activity. In this context, discussions with Landcare bodies in adjoining catchments, such as Holbrook Landcare group (which operate a different model in the Murray region) and LachLandcare would be worthwhile for review their models.
- The number of active community Landcare networks and groups is not the sole measure of Landcare "success" in the catchment, as it does not measure the level of "activity" generated by the individual networks and groups.

Opportunities

- The amalgamation of the Murrumbidgee CMA, the DPI and the LPHA into the newly structured LLS is an opportunity to consider more effective models for State-funded agencies to work collaboratively with community Landcare.
- The new LLS model has the potential to offer greater opportunities for partnerships and alliances for delivering information on sustainable agriculture and NRM and for engaging landholders. Community Landcare can play a vital role here.

- Other models not explored in this report also offer opportunities for community Landcare. MLI currently has funding from Commonwealth, State, regional and corporate bodies for multi-partner, multi-network projects. Under this model, a peak body operates as broker and project manager to support Group and Network project development and participation. This multi-partner model is dependent on sufficient funds flowing to the peak body to enable it to operate as broker and manager.

Next Steps for the LSO Project

In the LSO project, there are several issues that require further exploration. The first is to identify current needs and interests of Landcare groups and networks and review the communication strategies they have in place or could utilise to support their goals. These matters are the subject of the next milestone report (due 31 May).

A second issue to consider is the potential for re-energising groups and networks by a number of means, including direct grants to groups, the arrangements for preparing and distributing Landcare information, partnerships between MLI and existing networks such as farmer networks (Ricegrowers' Association, Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation, Farmlink, Murrumbidgee CMA/LLS), alliances that are possible between RLFs and NROs, the use of templates for grant applications, and other ideas.

Direct measures of Landcare activities, outputs and outcomes are needed to determine the current strength and future potential of community Landcare in the different landscapes that occur in the catchment.

Bibliography

Murrumbidgee Landcare Networks and Groups MLI (2006)

All Groups by Network MLI (circa 2009)

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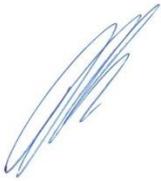
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Signatures



Alan P Cole 4 June 2013

Landcare Support Officer

Referred for comment to Chair, MLI

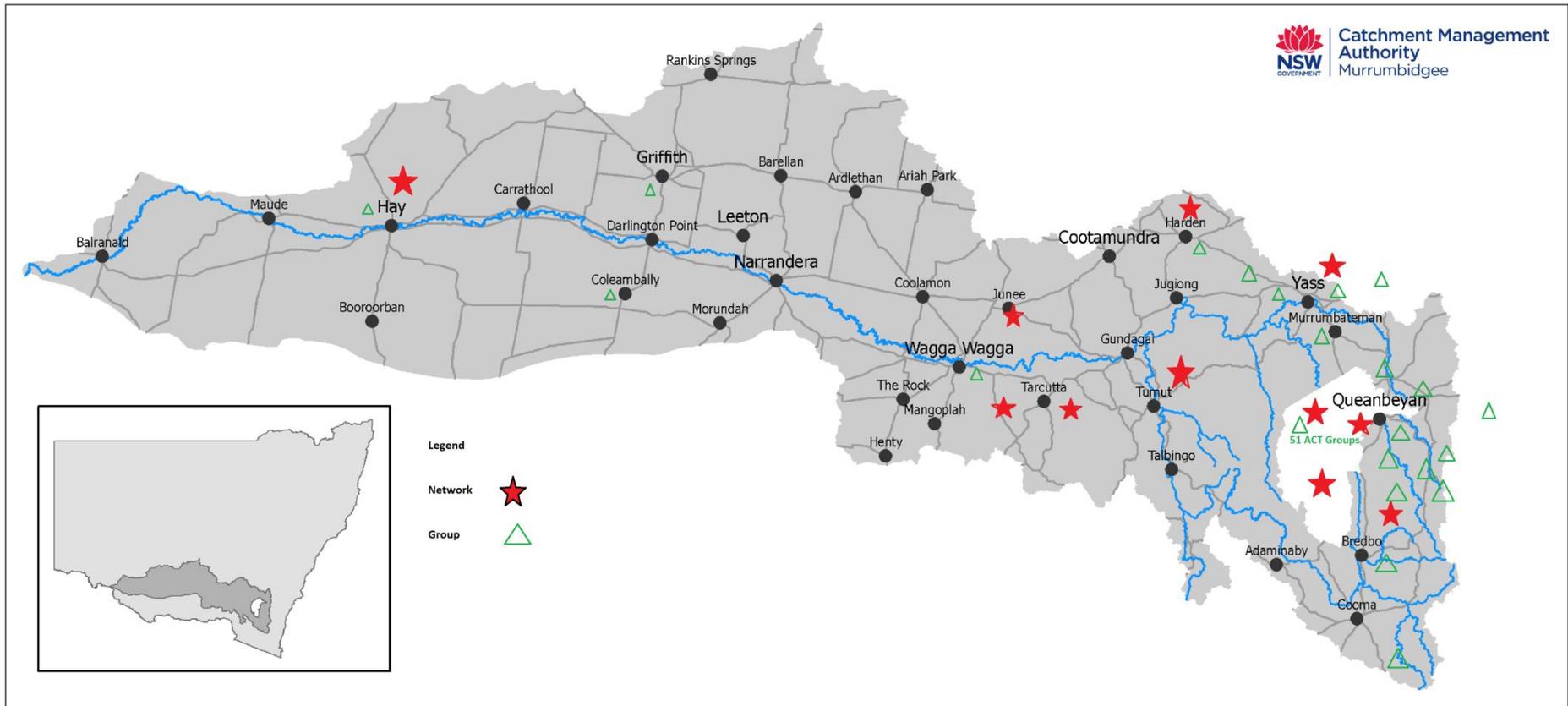
Alan Cole has made good progress in coming to grips with this project and his role. I appreciate his strategic approach to understanding the issues for Landcare in the Murrumbidgee catchment. This milestone report is late, a consequence of the need for the first report to be considered at a meeting of the MLI Executive or, failing that, by the Chair. I have now reviewed the report and several amendments have been incorporated to my satisfaction.



EC Wolfe, 4 June 2013

Chair Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc.

Appendix A Murrumbidgee Landcare Map



Source of basic map: Murrumbidgee CMA. Locations have been entered by AC