



**Independent review of flood events  
Submission by Landcare Tasmania  
11 November 2016**

Landcare Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the review of flood events that occurred in Tasmania in June 2016.

Landcare Tasmania's principal interest is in the role of community Landcare activity in building resilience to such events and its role in mitigating adverse impacts. This is consistent with our mandate to represent, support, strengthen and grow the community Landcare movement to maintain and improve the health of our natural and working landscapes.

In the aftermath of the floods, there were a number of media reports of instances where actions taken in catchments to manage and revegetate the riparian zones of creeks and rivers appears to have resulted in less damage from the floods. Whilst it is not our area of expertise, we are aware that this view has a considerable level of scientific support. Put simply and generally, catchments which are well vegetated have slower hydrological response than those which are not, and rivers and streams whose riparian zones are well vegetated are more resistant to factors such as erosion.

Some, such as TFGA President Wayne Johnson, linked the impact of the floods at least in part to the decline in Landcare in rural areas:

"Mr Johnson said over the longer term there may be a need to reinvigorate the Landcare network for on-ground riparian rehabilitation work.

'Landcare is not what it used to be. There is a lot of experience among farmers who were involved in Landcare and have done a lot of work along the rivers to mitigate against floods. We need to try and get that happening again.'"

*Tasmanian Country, 29 August 2016*

Rather than taking this as criticism of Landcare Tasmania, we have publicly applauded it. The situation Wayne described is a result of chronic under-funding of Landcare over much of the last dozen or so years, and draws a clear link to the impact of the floods.

Landcare Tasmania and the community movement it serves remains strong. In 2015 our 180 member groups conducted 2,200 events and activities, engaged 3,300 members and volunteers, and

performed around 90,000 hours of voluntary community work. At the Australian government's valuation of volunteer time of \$37 per hour, that represents around \$3.3M worth of work and a return of 16-22 times every dollar we receive from the State and Commonwealth government's combined.

However, we are acutely aware that there has been a significant shift in the demographic of Landcare Tasmania's membership. Whereas once it was strong in rural areas, it is now very heavily focused in peri-urban and coastal areas. In the mid-2000's there were over 300 Landcare groups in Tasmania, and many of these were in rural areas and focused in 'Rivercare' activities.

Landcare Tasmania believes this shift is a result of 3 factors:

- reduction in funding to support **community** Landcare;
- failure to recognise the unique and varied needs of farmers to facilitate their contributing to Landcare activities, such as those associated with rivers and flooding; and
- the adoption of mechanistic models of delivering environmental programs that fail to recognise the foundations in the community that this requires, particularly on private farming land.

It is the latter point, and its implications for mitigating the impacts of recent and future floods, which is Landcare Tasmania's main interest in the floods review.

As indicated above, Landcare Tasmania considers there to be strong support for the notion that well managed and vegetated catchments and rivers can mitigate the impact of floods, though this will be variable and with limitations.

We also consider that our unique model of genuine community ownership of the environmental effort needed to achieve this will become more important as events such as the June 2016 floods increase in frequency and severity.

We have some member groups who established on an entirely voluntary basis and have worked continuously for long periods of time to address issues associated with rivers, including implementing, of their own will, State government Rivercare Plans. For example, the Quamby Bend Landcare Group has been implementing its Rivercare Plan for over a decade and has a strong list of achievements for that time.

Although funding is important to this work, it would have little effect without the support, energy and commitment of the local community to organise itself to deliver. These things cannot be imposed and are the core and foundation of community Landcare for delivering environmental outcomes, irrespective of whether their focus is on rivers or other environmental issues.

Landcare Tasmania believes one of the lessons from the floods of June 2016 is that governments need to reinvest in the community Landcare model to build resilience and achieve mitigation outcomes. We believe this model is particularly well suited to rural and farming areas, and we are

working hard to develop ways to strengthen and extend the model so that it addresses the unique and varied needs of farmers to be involved. Our experience is that there is not a lack of willingness, just a lack of the RIGHT forms of support.

Landcare Tasmania, and the range of services we provide to support community Landcare, is a critical part of the support infrastructure that is needed. However, our organisation has been chronically under-funded for much of the last decade.

Landcare Tasmania's current funding contract with the Tasmania Government provides just \$70,000 of base-funding – less than a resourced full time position. The contract also provides \$50,000 to distribute to Landcare groups for basic support, but this has not changed since 1998 and represents a decline of 40% in real terms over that time. In recent years, despite increasing costs, we have had to reduce the annual amount we can provide to groups. In contrast, and despite Landcare Tasmania operating as a peak body with a large membership and Statewide responsibilities, our base funding is about 10% of the total provided to the 3 regional NRM bodies.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that at least one impact of this under-funding is a reduction in the community Landcare effort on rivers and streams and the associated mitigation effects this may have.

The floods of June 2016 should be a wake-up call, not just about the need for building resilience and mitigation for extreme events, but about the need for this to be based on genuine and effective community involvement such as that delivered by the Landcare. Government controlled and directed programs can only do so much, especially in rural areas, as they cannot impose ownership and willingness.

Landcare Tasmania believes our unique model of community Landcare is a critical part of bridging the gap between identifying the needs for resilience and mitigation, and actually achieving it. That gap is our strength, and it is not currently supported at sensible levels. That gap involves what Landcare Tasmania does best with the community - building ownership and shared vision, high operating standards, skills to deliver, and a strong Landcare culture and ethic. To quote famed American football coach Bill Walsh, when you have these things "the score takes care of itself".

**Further information:**

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