

RMCG

SEPTEMBER 2019

The Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program – Review

Final Report

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Level 1 East, 1100-1102 Toorak Road, Camberwell Victoria 3124

(03) 9882 2670 – rmcg.com.au

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
1 Introduction	4
1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE VLFP	4
1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW	5
1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE REVIEW	5
2 Approach	6
2.1 OVERVIEW	6
2.2 DESKTOP REVIEW	6
2.3 ONLINE SURVEY	6
2.4 DIRECT STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	9
2.5 DATA ANALYSIS	9
3 Review Findings	10
3.1 KEY FINDINGS	10
3.2 PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS	12
3.3 PROGRAM IMPACT	20
3.4 PROGRAM DESIGN	25
3.5 PROGRAM GOVERNANCE AND SUPPORT	38
4 Learnings & Looking Forward	41
4.1 LEGACY & RATIONALE FOR SUPPORT	41
4.2 LEARNINGS AND IMPROVEMENTS	42
4.3 WIDER CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE INVESTMENT	45
Appendix 1 – Evaluation Framework	
Appendix 2 – Online Survey Questionnaire	
Appendix 3 – Program logic for F10	

Executive Summary

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The support provided to the Landcare groups and networks through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) has played an important role in increasing community capacity to deliver NRM projects on the ground (Figure E1). This includes building partnerships, securing grants and supporting project delivery (including planning, monitoring and reporting).

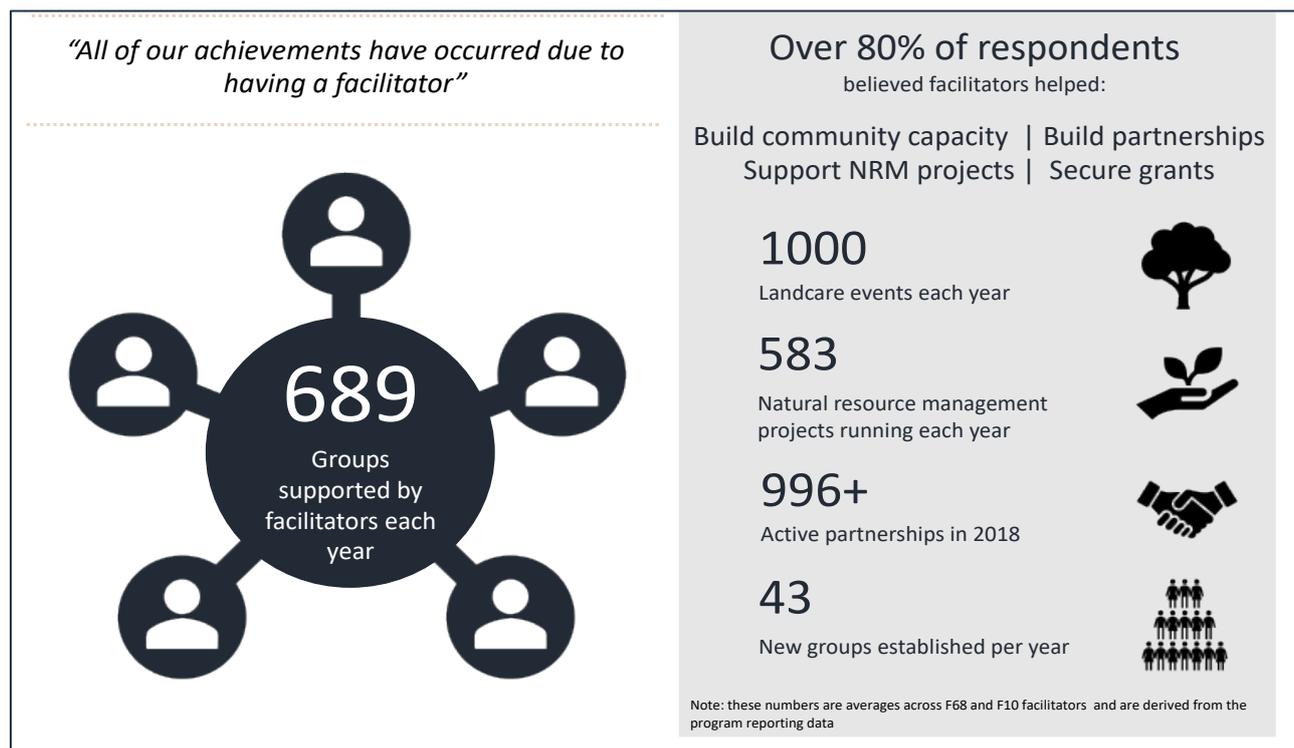


Figure E1: Key achievements of the VLFP drawn from survey responses and reporting data.

Feedback gathered through this review suggests that Landcare Facilitators helped increase the impacts of on-ground NRM projects by providing landscape-level oversight and coordination, and by improving community engagement, awareness, knowledge and skills, and by helping groups to secure the resources needed to deliver projects.

In addition, Landcare Facilitators delivered a range of important non-target benefits including supporting emergency management and increasing community resilience to drought and bushfire, as well as a range of social benefits including supporting community cohesion in rural areas.

Feedback from the facilitators, funding recipients and the wider Landcare community highlighted that the perceived independence of facilitators and the empowerment of local groups/networks to shape their work were key to these achievements.

KEY CHALLENGES

The review highlighted a number of challenges and areas for improvement, in particular in relation to:

- **Program Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI)**
 - A lack of annual reporting during the initial phase of the program leading to three-year retrospective reporting
 - A clear need for improved guidelines to ensure consistency of reporting of activities and outputs
 - A lack of clearly stated objectives for the VLFP, and associated monitoring and reporting of outcomes.
 - A lack of clear articulation of the alignment between the VLFP, the objectives of Victorian Government investment in Landcare and the Government’s wider strategic objectives.
- **Program Design and Governance**
 - A highly devolved, bottom-up model for program delivery reducing the DELWP’s ability to provide appropriate oversight and control of some key components of the model
 - A lack of understanding of the level of responsibility that funding recipients were taking on at the start of the program.
 - A potential lack of the appropriate knowledge/skills/capacity for some funding recipients to appropriately manage this range of responsibilities
 - The risk of turnover of skilled volunteers playing key roles on group/network committees in facilitator employment
 - Challenges with providing the desired level of support to a large number of employers with diverse employment arrangements

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EVALUATION THEME	#	KEY FINDINGS TO BE ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS
Program Effectiveness	1	<p>Delivery of the Key Work Areas</p> <p>The VLFP has successfully delivered a wide range of activities across the seven Key Work Areas. The role played by facilitators is highly valued by those community members who have been involved in the program, and they are considered to be a key hub connecting a wide range of community networks.</p>	<p>Improve activity-level reporting</p> <p>To increase clarity and consistency of activity-level reporting, review and revise reporting templates and accompanying guidance.</p> <p>Implement annual reporting on activities.</p>
	2	<p>Quality and efficiency of program delivery</p> <p>Steps have been taken to ensure and improve the quality and efficiency of program delivery.</p>	<p>Implement a systematic approach to continuous improvement</p> <p>Implement a systematic approach to program review and continuous improvement. At a minimum this should include an annual review by key delivery staff of achievements and potential improvements.</p>

EVALUATION THEME	#	KEY FINDINGS TO BE ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS
Program Impact	3	<p>Achievements of the Program</p> <p>The VLFP has helped to increase community capacity and supported effective participation in NRM activities in Victoria. However, clear articulation of, and reporting on, program outcomes is currently lacking.</p>	<p>Improve Program MERI including outcome reporting</p> <p>Clearly articulate the intended outcomes of the VLFP. Develop an associated MERI Plan (including a program logic) setting out how these outcomes will be achieved, and how delivery of outcomes will be monitored and reported.</p>
	4	<p>Contribution to wider strategic objectives</p> <p>The VLFP makes a contribution to a range of strategic Victorian Government environmental and sustainable land management objectives, although alignment to these strategies is not well-described.</p>	<p>Update the Victorian Landcare Plan</p> <p>Review and update the Victorian Landcare Plan to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clearly articulate the objectives of Victorian Government investment in Landcare 2. Set out the role of the VLFP in achieving those outcomes 3. Highlight the links to other Victorian Government strategies.
Program Design	5	<p>Characteristics of the current model</p> <p>The existing delivery model is highly devolved. Stakeholder feedback highlights a range of strengths and weaknesses for this model.</p>	<p>Develop alternative models to improve program delivery</p> <p>This review identifies a range of feasible alternative models to improve program delivery. As part of the case for future investment, DELWP should further develop their preferred model based on this assessment.</p>
	6	<p>Current resourcing requirements</p> <p>Evidence suggests that although the number of facilitators and their spatial coverage was adequate, resourcing for 'program support' is not currently sufficient.</p>	<p>Review resourcing requirements for preferred future delivery model</p> <p>Undertake an internal review of resourcing requirements to deliver the program effectively based on the department's preferred model. For devolved models, this should take into account the need for increased resourcing for the department to support local program delivery.</p>
Program Governance	7	<p>Roles and responsibilities</p> <p>There is a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities in relation to the current highly devolved delivery model. This creates significant reputational risk for DELWP.</p>	<p>Strengthen program governance arrangements and increase support</p> <p>Ensure that governance arrangements are robust and appropriate for the preferred program delivery model. This includes improved clarity and communicating regarding roles and responsibilities, and more robust requirements combined with increased support to ensure funding recipients are able to meet their obligations.</p>

1 Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE VLFP

The VLFP is a key component of the Victorian Landcare Program. It is *'an important mechanism by which the Victorian Government empowers and supports local communities to act for the environment'* (DELWP Project Specification). The program is a part of the broader Victorian Landcare Program which also includes the Victorian Landcare Grants and the Regional Landcare Coordinators. The Victorian Landcare Program provides project management support for the VLFP (state-wide).

The VLFP provides funding for seventy-eight part time Landcare facilitators who work under seven Key Work Areas defined by DELWP. The actual number of facilitators employed has been as high as eighty due to the flexible arrangements at local levels (e.g. job-sharing). Funding over the four years of the program has grown from \$3.2 million in year 1 to just over \$4.0 million in year four (Table 1-1).

VLFP-funded facilitators support environmental volunteer groups and networks across Victoria. While the majority of groups supported are Landcare, a range of other environmental groups also receive support. This includes Friends and Coastcare groups, and Conservation Management Networks. Previously DELWP has reported that the footprint of groups supported by VLFP-funded facilitators is significant, with the 584 Landcare groups in Victoria covering fifty-two per cent of the state.

The original sixty-eight facilitator positions commenced in 2011/12 and were funded through an initiative known as the Victorian Local Landcare Facilitator Initiative (VLLFI) with a budget of 3.22 million. In March 2015 the then minister approved a four-year extension to 18/19 of the sixty-eight Landcare facilitator positions through a program called the Victorian Landcare Facilitator program.

Employment and hosting arrangements for the facilitators vary widely. The most common arrangements see facilitators operating from an existing Landcare networks' or group's premises or home office. nineteen out of seventy-eight positions have a host employer like a CMA or local government.

This review has been commissioned because the program has reached the end of a four-year funding phase. It is important to also note that it has particular significance for the state's strategic approach to environmental volunteering, Victorians Volunteering for Nature - Environmental Volunteering Plan (EVP). The EVP includes the wider environmental volunteering community including Friends of Groups, citizen science projects, Coastcare and community energy. This review considers this wider strategic context.

Table 1-1: Summary of the facilitator program funding and recipient organisations for the four years of the VLFP (Source: DELWP)

YEAR	FUNDING FOR FACILITATORS	NUMBER OF RECIPIENT ORGANISATIONS	COMMENTS
2015/16	\$3,232,375	68	
2016/17	\$3,461,400	79	Includes ten (eleven positions) additional Landcare facilitators funded from 1 April 2017.
2017/18	\$3,921,421	80	Two funding recipient organisations for one position due to change in funding recipient organisation halfway through financial year.
2018/19	\$4,019,454	79	
TOTAL	\$14,634,650		

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

The aims of the review are to:

- Assess delivery against the program outcomes and broader Victorian Landcare Program goals
- Examine program effectiveness and assess accountability for funds invested
- Identify opportunities for program improvements, including considering alternative delivery models
- Provide insights and knowledge to inform future similar programming and investment.

As part of addressing these aims, the brief also requested that the review consider alternate models for program delivery and governance, and provide recommendations for future program design and delivery. These aims are a combination of what was noted in the Request for Quote and specific requests made by DELWP over the course of the project.

A more detailed Evaluation Framework is provided in Appendix 1.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE REVIEW



Figure 1-1: Structure and content of the subsequent sections of the review

2 Approach

2.1 OVERVIEW

The following quantitative and qualitative data was collected for the review:

- Desktop review of all available documents
- VLFP reports (three-year report from all facilitators)
- Ten regional meetings with representatives of the funding recipient organisations and the facilitators
- Targeted interviews with the program managers and key stakeholders
- On-line survey distributed through the existing channels to Landcare members and groups, environmental volunteer groups, peak bodies and stakeholders.

Data from all of the sources listed above was used to address the key evaluation questions set out in the evaluation framework. Where possible, our analysis has drawn on data from multiple sources in order to test the robustness of findings and to develop deeper understandings.

2.2 DESKTOP REVIEW

The Desktop Review component of the evaluation included an assessment of all available documentation including strategy documents and VLFP reports. This provided quantitative data on program effectiveness and impact, as well as informing the findings in relation to program design and governance.

2.3 ONLINE SURVEY

SURVEY DESIGN

An online survey was developed in order to enable broader feedback on the facilitator role from a wider range of respondents than those that participated in the ten regional workshops (Appendix 2). This includes Landcare volunteers and community members, as well as broader environmental volunteers.

The survey was designed to enable data to be categorised by source (i.e. the role of the respondent, relationship with Landcare, location and property type, types of activity undertaken by groups/networks, and whether the group/network is supported by a facilitator).

As well as basic respondent information (described above), the survey aimed to capture feedback to inform the following evaluation themes and sections of this report:

- **Program Effectiveness** – Feedback on how well each of the Key Work Areas have been delivered (quantitative) and the reason behind the rating (qualitative).
- **Program Impact** – Feedback on the extent to which the facilitator role has had an impact on Landcare groups/networks' capacity to deliver NRM projects.
- **Program Design (& Governance)** – Feedback on the nature of facilitators' employment arrangements, advantages and challenges with these arrangements, and suggestions for how they could be improved.
- **Program Governance** – Feedback on the level of support provided to facilitators and their employers, whether this was sufficient and how it could be improved.

The survey also provided an opportunity for more general feedback on the facilitator role, and how the VLFP could be improved in future.

SURVEY RESPONSES

The response to the on-line survey was very strong, with 592 responses. This includes representation from across the state (all ten CMA regions) and from people in a wide range of roles in Landcare and environmental volunteering.

Figure 2-1 shows the representation by CMA region among the respondents to the survey – highlighting that there were more than twenty-five responses from each region (up to a maximum of ninety-nine responses from Corangamite).

Table 2-1 shows some other characteristics of the survey respondents – again, highlighting the breadth of respondents.

The level of response to the online survey provides some confidence that the feedback received represents a broad sample of views from across the Landcare community. In addition, the survey also garnered additional responses from the wider environmental volunteer community (e.g. members of other environmental groups - 14% of the total number of respondents).

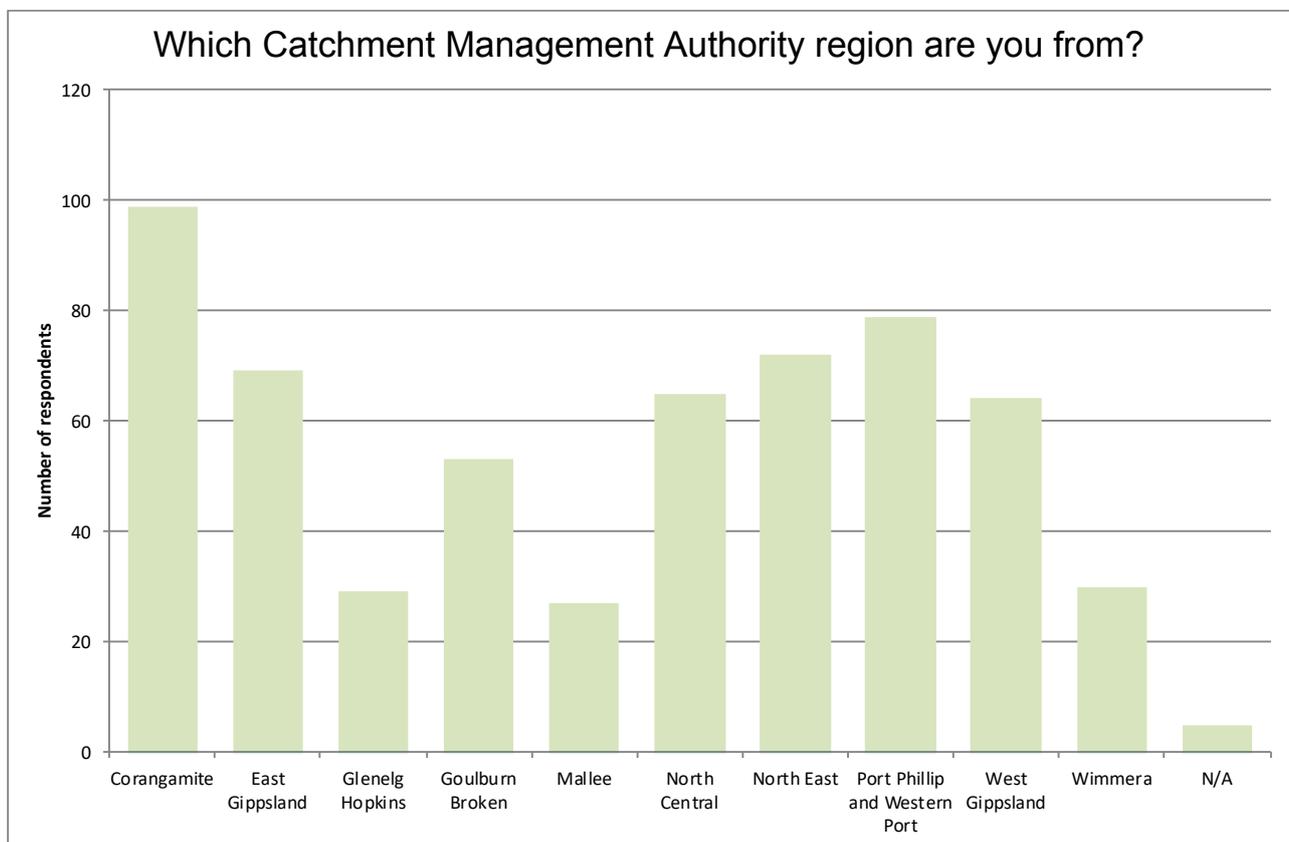


Figure 2-1 Survey respondents by CMA region

Table 2-1: Respondents to the survey

	RESPONDENTS		RESPONDENTS
Total	592	Land used for:	
Part of a Landcare or similar network.	469	Cropping.	10
Location:		Grazing.	112
Rural.	369	Mixed farming.	69
Peri-urban.	62	Lifestyle / hobby farm.	138
Urban.	15	Managing for conservation purposes.	72
Regional city or town.	43	Urban / town house block or apartment.	56
Respondents roles or interest:			
Member of a Landcare group.	446	Other government staff (e.g. DELWP, Parks Victoria, EPA or water corporation).	12
Member of a Landcare network.	152	Peak body representative (e.g. Landcare Victoria Incorporated (LVI) or the National Landcare Network).	12
Member of another environmental volunteer group e.g. Friends of, Conservation Management Network, Committee of Management, Coastcare, Waterwatch, EstuaryWatch, etc.)	85	Landcare Australia employee or Board Member.	3
Landcare Coordinator.	16	Local government.	19
VLFP Funded Landcare Facilitator.	46	Other (please specify).	47
CMA employee.	17		

2.4 DIRECT STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The following stakeholders provided input to the review:

- VLFP-funded facilitators
- Recipient organisations of VLFP funding, and host employers of VLFP-funded facilitators
- Groups un/supported by a VLFP-funded Landcare facilitator
- Landcare Victoria Inc, Victorian Environment Friends Network
- Victorian Landcare Program staff
- CMA-based Regional Landcare Coordinators.

REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

Participation in the ten regional workshops was strong. In total, there were 145 participants, which included sixty-nine facilitators and sixty representatives of funding-recipient organisations as well as participants from CMAs (e.g. Regional Landcare Coordinators).

TARGETED INTERVIEWS

In addition to the workshops, we conducted targeted interviews with a range of key stakeholders including the Victorian Landcare Program managers and staff, as well as representatives of Landcare Victoria Inc and of the Victorian Environment Friends Network.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative survey responses relating to the delivery of Key Work Areas were analysed and the data is presented in Section 3 of this report (Program Effectiveness).

Qualitative responses were reviewed and coded based on the Evaluation Framework. This enables feedback to be sorted and grouped, and common themes to be identified. These common themes have been presented in the relevant sections of the report, along with a number of representative quotes taken directly from the survey responses.

WORKSHOPS AND INTERVIEWS

Following completion of the regional workshops and targeted interviews, the RMCG project team conducted an internal workshop to collate, present and review the qualitative feedback gathered through this direct stakeholder engagement. The workshop was structured around the Evaluation Framework, aiming to identify key themes and cross-cutting findings, as well as key achievements or challenges that were unique to a particular region.

3 Review Findings

3.1 KEY FINDINGS

This section of the report provides an overview of the key achievements and challenges identified through this review. These are then explored in further detail in the subsequent sections of the report.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The feedback gathered as part of this review emphasises that the support provided to the Landcare groups and networks through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program has played an important role in increasing community capacity to deliver NRM projects on the ground (Figure 3-1).

In particular, the feedback highlighted the importance of facilitators in building partnerships, securing grants and supporting project delivery (including planning, monitoring and reporting).

Project highlights include supporting a thousand Landcare events, 585 projects and forty-three new groups on average in each year of the program. Facilitators have also played an important role in developing, supporting and coordinating partnerships (with close to a thousand active partnerships reported in 2018), as well as leveraging additional funding for projects (with roughly \$9M in grant funding secured by groups or networks in each year of the program).

Feedback from the Landcare community suggests that the facilitators played a critical role in these achievements, and that in the absence of this role, the level of on-ground outcomes that groups and networks deliver would be significantly reduced.



Figure 3-1: Key achievements of the VLFP drawn from survey responses and reporting data.

KEY CHALLENGES

Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI)

This review highlighted a small number of issues in relation to monitoring and reporting.

At the activity / output level (discussed under Program Effectiveness, Section 3.2), there were a small number of issues relating to inconsistent interpretation and reporting of standard outputs and a lack of clear definition between the outputs delivered by groups (i.e. NRM outputs) and those delivered by the facilitator (i.e. events supported, partnerships developed). These issues were further exacerbated by delays from the Victorian Landcare Program in setting out the reporting requirements for the facilitator role, resulting in a need to report retrospectively on three years of activities and outputs. In addition, reporting did not explicitly link all outputs to the Program's Key Work Areas – meaning that additional analysis and interpretation are required to highlight key achievements in relation to each of these.

At the outcome level (discussed under Program Impact, Section 3.3), a lack of clearly defined objectives and associated monitoring and reporting requirements mean that data was somewhat lacking on the impact of facilitator activities. This report therefore relies heavily on qualitative feedback gathered from the Landcare community through the stakeholder interviews and the online survey undertaken as part of this review.

Both of these issues could be addressed in future through more rigorous Program MERI, based on a clearly articulated program logic for the VLFP including clearly defined objectives for the facilitator role. This would provide the basis for a monitoring and reporting framework which enables data to be captured on activities (linked to Key Work Areas), and on outcomes. This would not only improve feedback to facilitators and enable the program to celebrate successes but would also help to support a structured process for internal evaluations and continuous improvement.

Findings and recommendations relating to these issues are further discussed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3.

Program Design and Governance

The current delivery model and governance arrangements for the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program is characterised by a high degree of devolved control – with responsibility for several key components of the program placed on volunteer committees for groups and networks. This includes:

- The employment arrangements (including status as an employee or contractor, hosting arrangements, pay rates and work patterns)
- Work-planning (including development of Program Delivery Plans for each facilitator)
- Day-to-day line management – including performance management, professional development, and resolution of any emerging HR issues
- Management of payroll and expenses associated with facilitators (e.g. vehicle costs, office rental etc)
- Understanding and ensuring all statutory requirements are met and that best practice is implemented in terms of appropriate insurance, Workplace Health and Safety etc.

Feedback gathered through this review highlights that there was clear and strong support for the level of flexibility and local empowerment that the current delivery model creates – particularly in relation to work patterns and work planning. However, feedback from both the survey and direct stakeholder engagement also repeatedly raised concerns that this level of devolution also creates a number of significant challenges. These include:

- A lack of understanding of the level of responsibility that group or network committees were taking on at the start of the program. This issue was highlighted in several of the regional workshops.
- A potential lack of the appropriate knowledge/skills/capacity within some committees to appropriately manage this range of responsibilities – particularly in relation to administration of payroll and management of HR issues. Some committees have effectively addressed some of these issues by outsourcing responsibility for payroll to a bookkeeper.
- The risk of turnover of skilled volunteers playing key roles on group/network committees in facilitator employment. This creates uncertainty about employers' ongoing ability to manage the facilitator role for the life of the program. This risk is inherently higher in groups (compared to networks), where the pool of skilled volunteers is likely to be smaller.
- Challenges with providing the desired level of support to a large number of employers with diverse employment arrangements. Although the Victorian Landcare Program staff have taken significant steps to support employers (providing written guidance, responding to queries and establishing an Employee Assistance service to address HR and legal issues), feedback still suggests that some groups/networks feel under-supported managing their diverse responsibilities. The diverse range of employment arrangements means that it is hard to provide generalised, central advice that addresses most issues that arise.

In addition, the bottom-up model for program delivery (i.e. that groups or networks self-organise and elect to apply for facilitator funding) initially created some challenges around gaps in the spatial coverage of facilitators across the state (as highlighted in RMCG's 2015 review of the VLFP). Although this issue was largely addressed through funding for ten additional facilitators in spatially targeted locations (the 'F10', in addition to the original 'F68'), there remains some inefficiencies and unevenness in the level of service provision across the state (i.e. some overlaps in facilitators' service area, facilitators supporting very high or very low numbers of groups).

These issues could be managed through adjustments in program design, and a strengthening of program governance. Findings and recommendations relating to these issues are further discussed in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 of this report.

3.2 PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

This section examines the effectiveness of the VLFP. For the purposes of this review, assessing 'effectiveness' has focussed on the delivery of activities within the program's Key Work Areas (KWAs):

1. Build local community capacity to enable groups/networks to be self-sustaining
2. Undertake community engagement and build partnerships
3. Assist with planning and priority setting processes
4. Support the development of on-ground natural resource management projects
5. Secure project grants and other funding
6. Assist with monitoring, evaluation and reporting
7. Extend support to more groups, networks and landholders.

Across the KWAs, activities include the wide range of traditional roles that Landcare facilitators play, such as training, extension events, linking groups to opportunities, helping groups access information and expertise, and supporting the development of NRM projects.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- To what extent has VLFP delivered on the seven Key Work Area?
- Has the VLFP been delivered efficiently and to a high standard?

KEY FINDING 1: DELIVERY OF THE KEY WORK AREAS

The VLFP has successfully delivered a wide range of activities across the seven Key Work Areas. The role played by facilitators is highly valued by those community members who have been involved in the program, and they are considered to be a key hub connecting a wide range of community networks.

Formal VLFP Reporting

The formal VLFP reporting provides qualitative summary information about how each of the KWAs have been delivered, as well as reporting on outputs (not explicitly linked to KWAs). Illustrative examples of completed or 'on track' activities listed in the VLFP reporting are provided for each of the KWAs below:

1. Build local community capacity to enable groups/networks to be self-sustaining

- Assist with the development and delivery of courses, workshops, training, and field days to build groups and community capacity.
- Deliver training to groups where a specific knowledge gap has been identified that is not being met by another provider locally, preferably in partnership with another organisation or agency. This may include both technical skills directly related to natural resource management, and other governance-related training such as grant-writing, OHS, financial management, etc.
- Maintain an understanding of the needs and interests of Landcare groups, including topics of interest, skills gaps and preferred modes of communication.
- Provide information to groups, networks, and the wider community via media, newsletters, emails, and community bulletin boards.
- Support good governance processes in network and groups we engage with.

2. Undertake community engagement and build partnerships

- Build and maintain effective partnerships with key agencies, government, Landcare networks, Industries bodies and stakeholders.
- Provide opportunities for networking and information sharing between Groups, such as field trips to past project sites and social get-togethers (such as pizza nights) at Network level.
- Support the design and delivery of non-project Landcare Groups activities as identified in action plans and promote and publicise these events to Landcare members and non-members to encourage the community's participation.
- Attend regional Landcare Coordinator/Facilitator gatherings to maintain networks, resource and idea sharing.
- Publicise and promote positive outcomes of key strategic projects to engage with groups and the community and encourage participation.

3. Assist with planning and priority setting processes

- Facilitate the development of a dynamic Strategic Plan for the Network which is complimentary to existing NRM policies, plans and programs.
- Provide support and provision of up to date information, related to changing trends in the Landcare movement, by attending appropriate CMA committee meetings, workshops, training session and industry information sessions.

- Provide support to private landholders in the development of Best Management Practice plans for their individual properties, using current, trending management programs. Workshops and training opportunities will be facilitated to support this action.
- Assist with the development of landholder shade and shelter planning (NRM projects)- at individual and cluster levels. Where this work connects with existing groups, support inclusion in planning of group programs.

4. Support the development of on-ground natural resource management projects

- Assist Groups and information with planning on-ground projects, providing general technical information where possible and connecting them with more specialist knowledge as required.
- Work with State Government [and/or] CMA specialist to ensure specialist information and advice is incorporated into all projects.
- Support Groups to engage in activities such as field days, site inspections and guest speakers relating to NRM issues.
- Assist landholders to access the information and resources to support their on-ground works projects by providing site assessments, advice related to land management practices, remnant flora identification, EVC based indigenous planting lists and helping to organise equipment and other resources, engage expertise where necessary, provide evaluation, reporting and follow-up documentation, and mapping all activities.
- Work with all groups and associate groups in and around the network area to develop on-ground NRM projects and encourage partnerships where appropriate that support network and group strategic plans and regional NRM policies.

5. Secure project grants and other funding

- Gather Landcare members wants through the collation of an annual Expression of Interest process and Landcare Group Annual / five-year plans, to better understand community need.
- Monitor grant and funding opportunity resources such as online subscriptions, lists and mailing lists.
- Identify and promote relevant funding opportunities via a monthly electronic newsletter.
- Encourage Groups to have well developed project plans, ready to go as funding opportunities arise.
- Provide expertise and coordination to the relevant BLG subcommittee and review funding applications.
- Work with NRM agencies, NGO, local businesses and organisations to partner in funding bids and project development.
- Seek opportunities for local and regional mutually beneficial sponsorship and in-kind support of events and projects.

6. Assist with monitoring, evaluation and reporting

- Support Groups to collect quality data from their projects and activities.
- Assist groups with the monitoring, evaluation and reporting of NRM activities to the appropriate authorities and funding sources.
- Collect data and evidence of landscape health and biodiversity on private land in network region.
- Contribute to the production submission and/or presentation of interim and final project reports to organizations providing financial support to the project.
- Encourage Groups to share the results of their evaluation to celebrate successes and help others avoid pitfalls and improve on successes.
- Assist groups with report card and promote the value of feeding the information back to all departments.

7. Extend support to more groups, networks and landholders

- Research and retain data on why Landcare Groups in the region change, dissolve, grow, and hibernate. This is useful learning information for ourselves, future groups, State and Regional Landcare Policy - as well as assisting the Regional Landcare Facilitator functions.
- Identify ways to reinvigorate dormant groups and to increase participation by non-active Landcare members.
- Support Landcare groups/networks with no facilitator support via sharing experiences and how-to information where possible.
- Facilitate and support the formation of a new Landcare Group throughout the network area.
- Continue to promote Landcare to the broader community through media, field days and events and investigate new ways of engaging more landholders and community in Landcare.
- Establish ways to enable individuals in gap areas to become linked with Landcare communities.
- Assist Landcare groups to review their area boundaries to see if there is an opportunity for them to expand boundaries into adjoining areas that currently don't have a Landcare group.
- Promote "theme-based" projects that can include groups that do not have access to Facilitators, but have a common interest.
- Assist Landcare groups to diversify and network with likeminded groups to keep vibrant and lend support to other groups.

Table 3-1 and 3-2 show more detailed activity data reported by the facilitators. Current reporting does not require these data to be explicitly linked to the KWAs, but for the purposes of this review we have assessed and highlighted those linkages retrospectively.

Table 3-1: F68 Facilitator group - quantitative data from the program reports

F68 – QUANTITATIVE DATA	KWA	15/16FY	16/17FY	17/18FY
Key Statistics				
Number of facilitators (sum).	NA	82	76	79
Total group supported (sum).	NA	641	652	647
Activities & Outputs				
Total no. of events supported (sum).	1, 2 & 4	949	948	1,008
Total event hours.	1, 2 & 4	4,364	4,549	4,239
Summary - total number attendees at events.	1, 2 & 4	39,396	40,909.50 ¹	37,959
No. of on-ground projects.	4	574	526	575
No. of plants planted.	4	1,151,096	1,302,709	643,017
Area where native vegetation has been established (Ha).	4	5,995	8,920	4,053
Summary - total number successful grants secured.	5	404	395	433
Summary - total amount successful grants secured.	5	\$9,248,232	\$8,500,233	\$9,053,922
Average amount of grant funding secured per facilitator.	5	\$144,504	\$132,816	\$141,468
Total new groups (sum).	7	39	51	31

¹ As reported in VLFP reporting.

F10 QUANTITATIVE DATA	KWA	16/17FY*	17/18FY
Key Statistics			
Number of facilitators (sum).	NA	3	18
Total group supported (sum).	NA	41	87
Activities & Outputs			
Total no. of events supported (sum).	1, 2 & 4	23	100
Total event hours.	1, 2 & 4	147	486
Summary - total number attendees at events.	1, 2 & 4	1,409	5,801
No. of on-ground projects.	4	11	64
No. of plants planted.	4	5750	46,828
Area where native vegetation has been established (Ha).	4	10	9
Summary - total number successful grants secured.	5	11	38
Summary - total amount successful grants secured.	5	\$175,699	\$953,527
Average amount of grant funding secured per facilitator.	5	\$17,570	\$95,353
Total new groups (sum).	7	1	7

Table 3-2: F10 Facilitator group - quantitative data from the program reports

Feedback from survey, workshops and interviews

Feedback from survey respondents highlighted some key achievements of the facilitators, including accessing grants, developing partnerships, leveraging support and building the capacity of groups:

“Our facilitator has a good track record for delivering grants plus establishing and maintaining strong partnerships with other groups and agencies”.

“Without the Facilitator very few grants would be applied for, monitored or reported on. Volunteers are happy to provide their on-ground labour but that is all they have time for. Due to work by the Facilitator we have ongoing commitment from Wettenhall Environmental Trust Towards project officer costs. Through a small grant for a pilot project in seagrass restoration we now have a \$200k grant for further work. These are just a few of the things that would not exist without a Facilitator.”.

“The group had a period of time without a facilitator and it is very clear that activity and effectiveness improved when the Facilitator position is in place and is a paid individual - through funding”.

“[There are] too many [examples] to give specifics. Lots of activities just would not happen without the Facilitator.”.

The online survey data showed a consistently strong positive response regarding delivery of the work areas. Responses did not vary across significantly across different segments of survey respondents e.g. by role/position, location etc. Feedback across all work areas was broadly very positive, with over 70% of respondents reporting that all KWAs were delivered 'reasonably well' or 'very well'. Responses were particularly positive with regard to the following work areas were delivered very well Figure 3-2:

- KWA 1. Building local community capacity to enable groups/networks to be self-sustaining
- KWA 2. Undertaking community engagement and building partnerships
- KWA 4. Supporting the development of on-ground natural resource management projects
- KWA 5. Securing project grants and other funding.

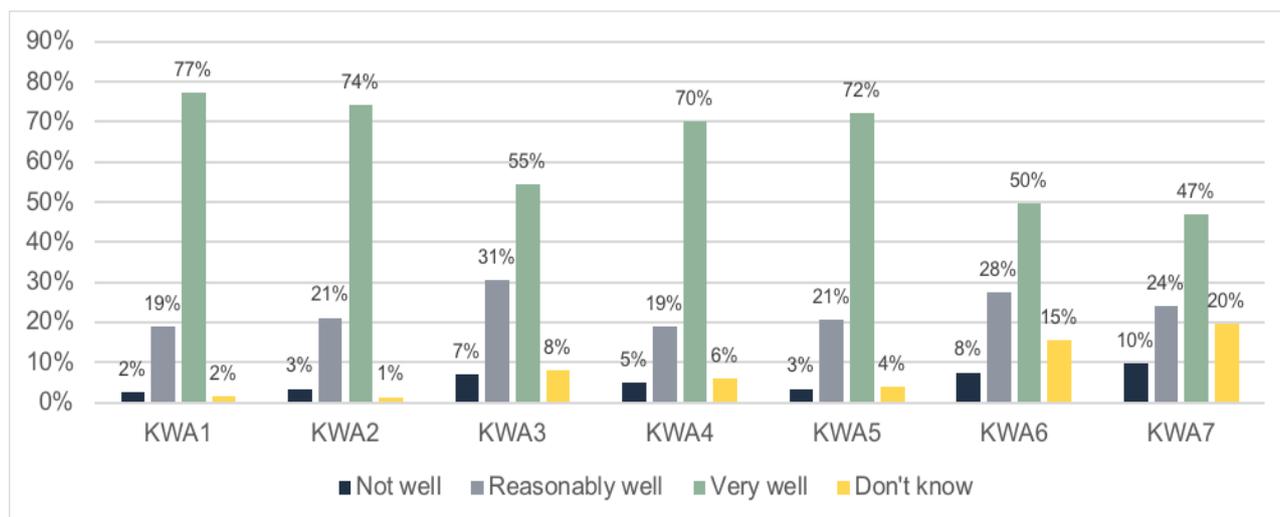


Figure 3-2: Landcare Facilitator Program Review survey responses: *How well do you think this work area has been delivered?*

Three KWAs where the survey response was slightly less emphatic were: KWA 3 (planning and priority setting); 6 (MERI); and 7 (extended support)², although responses to these KWAs were only slightly less positive than the other four. The survey and workshops highlighted that groups' focus is often on the delivery of on-ground activities, and it is possible that these KWAs are not perceived as being as important or tangible as e.g. securing grant funding, support NRM projects. The less positive feedback may therefore be explained by the number of respondents who said they did not know whether these KWAs had been delivered well or not.

RECOMMENDATION 1: IMPROVE ACTIVITY-LEVEL REPORTING

To increase clarity and consistency of activity-level reporting, review and revise reporting templates and accompanying guidance. Implement annual reporting on activities.

Activity-level reporting is essential to enable the achievements of the VLFP to be captured and highlighted. It is particularly important in the absence of robust, systematic and well-established outcome-level reporting.

The current reporting template captures a range of activity-level data. Much of the data on activities explicitly linked to KWAs is qualitative. However, reports do include a number of DELWP standard outputs (e.g. total groups supported, new groups, number of events, number of attendees, budget information etc.), which can be linked retrospectively to KWAs (as per Table 3-1 and 3-2 above).

² Note: Planning (KWA3) and MERI (KWA6) were previously combined, and extending support (KWA7) was added following the last program review in 2015.

This review highlighted a number of cases where the quantitative data was potentially unreliable due to a lack of a well-understood and consistently applied approach to outputs recording. This includes a number of examples where it was unclear how exactly figures had been calculated, or where it is not clear what role the facilitator played in the activities/outputs reported. For example:

- A total of 2,905 events supported by the F68 facilitators, attended by a total of 118,264.5 participants. The wide range in reported outputs raises some questions about data integrity e.g. number of attendees at events ranges from less than 1,000 to almost 9,000 in a single year; the number of events supported was generally between 40 and 80 per year but two employers reported over 200 events in a single year. This may suggest inconsistent interpretation of what different funding recipients counted as 'support' and as an 'event'.
- Over 1 million plants reported to be planted on average each financial year, and an average of 6,323ha of native vegetation established for the F68 facilitator group. However, it is unclear what contribution the facilitator made to this NRM output.
- The average amount of funding secured per facilitator was in the region of \$1350-\$145K for the F68, but one funding recipient reported that they secured in excess of \$2million in grant funding in a single year. This may be accurate, but the wide range (alongside other anomalies in the data) underline the need for this data to be reviewed and treated with some caution.

We recognise that steps were taken to ensure that outputs were recorded systematically (including the provision of guidance material), but the fact that issues persist, highlights a need for improved support. It is also important to clearly differentiate between the activities and outputs of the VLFP (focused on the direct role of the facilitator), and the activities and outputs of the wider Landcare program (including activities and outputs from on-ground projects). The facilitators role in these projects is one of 'support' – e.g. with project design, funding applications and monitoring and reporting. An example output of the facilitator role is therefore 'number of projects supported'. The outputs of the projects themselves (e.g. 'area of land treated', 'number of trees planted') should be captured separately in the reporting for the relevant project. Although these programs are complimentary, in order for both the VLFP and project reports to be meaningful it is vital that these outputs are not double counted.

For the current program, these issues were further compounded by a lack of timely (annual) activity-level reporting: VLFP funding recipients were required to report retrospectively on three years of activities in a single report. DELWP are fully aware of the challenges that this created, particularly in cases where individual facilitators had not been in the role for the whole reporting period.

There are a number of steps that could be taken to improve the clarity and consistency of activity-level reporting:

- Implement annual reporting of activities within Key Work Areas.
- Review and revise the activity-level reporting template to ensure that activity-level reporting is fit-for-purpose (i.e. targeted, useful, specific to the VLFP and with no superfluous data requirements). This could include consultation with a subset of facilitators to ensure that it meets their needs as well as the departments.
- Review and revise activity-level indicators using the Key Work Areas as a framework. This should be part of wider VLFP MERI planning, including reporting on outcomes (see Section 3.2).
- Clearly differentiate between the outputs of the VLFP and the on-ground outputs of Landcare projects. Where appropriate, this could include linking facilitator activities to a specific project (the outputs of which are reported separately).
- Improve guidance on activity-level reporting for facilitators and their employers, including clear guidance (drawn from the DELWP Standard Outputs) on exactly what should be counted and reported. Examples that illustrate good and bad practice could help to improve consistency.
- As a matter of highest priority, provide the revised annual reporting template and associated guidance and provide to facilitators and funding recipients as early as possible.

KEY FINDING 2: QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF PROGRAM DELIVERY

Steps have been taken to ensure and improve the quality and efficiency of program delivery³.

Conducting a detailed cost-benefit analysis is not within scope of this review, so this section focuses on the extent to which measures have been taken to improve the quality and efficiency of program delivery through adaptive management and continuous improvement. This includes identifying:

- Examples that demonstrate whether there has been a systematic approach to review and improvement of the program over the course of its delivery (rather than waiting till the end)
- Practices that ensure the funds have been used efficiently such as collaborations or partnerships to maximise value for money.

“[A good facilitator is] someone who understands the area, the people, how to write grants, knows what grants are available for the types of landholders and their needs” (Survey respondent).

Our review identified the following actions intended to improve the quality and efficiency of program delivery:

- Increased support for facilitator training and professional development, and a needs-analysis (via the ‘training needs’ survey) to inform support provision.
- Increased HR support for facilitators including provision of an employment referral services, and the addition of a ‘Useful Links on Employment of Landcare Staff’ Fact Sheet to provide up-to-date information on employment and human resource management issues (as an attachment to DELWP’s VLFP funding agreements with recipient organisations).
- The 2015 review of the Key Work Areas (originally five, now seven), including extension of Landcare Facilitator support to wider environmental volunteering groups (KWA7).
- The inclusion of a section on ‘Lessons and Future Improvements’ and ‘Reflections and Feedback’ in the reporting template, which encourages funding recipients and facilitators to review their own performance and the delivery of their PDP.
- The role of the central DELWP Landcare Team – particularly in reviewing the PDPs for each facilitator. This ensures that activities are aligned to the Key Work Areas of the program whilst enabling local control and oversight to shape day-to-day activities.

RECOMMENDATION 2: IMPLEMENT A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Implement a systematic approach to program review and continuous improvement. At a minimum this should include an annual review by key delivery staff of achievements and potential improvements.

Although improvements have been made to improve quality and efficiency of program delivery (as described above), these changes have been somewhat ad-hoc. The program currently lacks a formal, systematic approach to review and continuous improvement. Combined with the lack of timely (annual) reporting on activities, this creates the risk that problems with program delivery are not detected and addressed in a timely fashion.

³ Note: several of the improvements in program delivery are in response to the findings from the 2015 VLFP review.

As part of the development of a wider MERI framework for the VLFP, a more systematic approach to review and continuous improvement should be developed and implemented. This should include:

- An annual review by key delivery staff of achievements and potential improvements. This would be an opportunity to collate, present and discuss the data from annual activity-level reporting, and to identify issues, gaps, and areas for improvement.
- Feedback to Landcare facilitators and their employers' findings from the annual reporting and review. This should include key achievements for the year, examples of good practice, and areas for improvement (identified through the annual review, above).

3.3 PROGRAM IMPACT

This section examines the impact of the VLFP. For the purposes of this review, assessing 'impact' focuses on the extent to which the program has delivered tangible outcomes on the ground⁴. In addition, this section of the report discusses the contribution of the VLFP to the strategic objectives of the Victorian Government for environmental and sustainable land management, and the unexpected outcomes of the program.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- Has the VLFP achieved its intended purpose and delivered the desired outcomes?
- What were unexpected positive/negative outcomes of the VLFP?
- To what extent has the VLFP contributed towards strategic Victorian Government environmental and sustainable land management objectives?
- What contributions has the VLFP made to the public outcomes detailed in the Victorian Landcare Program Strategic Plan?
- What contributions is the VLFP making towards the goals of *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037* and other major government strategies i.e. Agriculture Victoria plans?

KEY FINDING 3: ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROGRAM

The VLFP has helped to increase community capacity and supported effective participation in NRM activities in Victoria. However, clear articulation of, and reporting on, program outcomes is currently lacking.

The VLFP currently lacks a clearly articulated statement of the program's intended outcomes. The desired outcomes of the VLFP can only be inferred from program documentation such as funding agreements, which state that facilitators will:

“build community capacity and enable and support the effective participation of Landcare groups and networks, landholders and the wider community in natural resource management activities that protect, enhance and restore the natural environment, and improve agricultural productivity”.

⁴ This is in contrast to 'effectiveness' (Section 3.1), which focuses primarily at the level of activities within work areas.

Formal, systematic reporting on these (implied) outcomes by facilitators or their employers is also currently lacking, with current reporting requirements focused only at the activity-level. In the absence of such outcome-reporting, data collected as part of this review (e.g. survey responses and stakeholder feedback through regional workshops) has been used to describe the key achievements of the program. In particular, they highlight the important role that facilitators have played in increasing the capacity and coordination of community volunteers, and supporting rural communities e.g.:

“[Facilitators are a] tremendous support to volunteers who could not achieve their goals without this professional support.”

“Expertise is spread around lots of groups, but the groups are drawn together by activities organised by the facilitator.”

“The VLFP funded Facilitators are vital for the ongoing health and wellbeing of Landcare groups and members”

“[Our facilitator] has been critical in putting life into Landcare on the Mornington Peninsula with her amazing enthusiasm & commitment. She was successful for large grant funding for Biolink project, this is amongst her numerous achievements.”

*“In drought facilitators play a key role in social cohesion”
(Survey respondent)*

One of the key highlights noted in the regional workshops was the critical role facilitators have played for communities who have faced natural disasters. This has included the Grampians fires, on-going droughts in various parts of the state, and floods in various parts of the state.

FACILITATORS AND LANDSCAPE-SCALE PROJECTS

Across the state facilitators highlighted a wide range of projects that were operating at a landscape scale – a much larger scale than the particular group or network they were aligned with. These projects were possible because of the level of coordination between facilitators. Some examples of these projects were:

- Regionwide rabbit control work in north east Victoria and the Mallee
- Biolinks – Pyrenees, Mornington Peninsula, Healesville to Phillip Island
- Dung beetle distribution projects

In addition, the key role that facilitators play in planning and coordinating delivery of NRM projects has helped to ensure that there is landscape-scale oversight of activities – thus helping to maximise their impact.

On the basis of this feedback from facilitators, their employers and members of the wider Landcare community, combined with the activity-level reporting, it is reasonable to claim that the program has successfully contributed to increased community capacity and effective participation in NRM activities in Victoria.

The ability to tell this story well would be significantly improved by systematic monitoring and reporting of clearly stated program outcomes, which should be identified as part of a revised MERI Plan for VLFP.

RECOMMENDATION 3: IMPROVE PROGRAM MERI INCLUDING OUTCOME REPORTING

Clearly articulate the intended outcomes of the VLFP. Develop an associated MERI Plan (including a program logic) setting out how these outcomes will be achieved, and how delivery of outcomes will be monitored and reported.

In future, the intended outcomes of the VLFP need to be more clearly articulated in the form of unambiguous outcome statements e.g.

The intended outcomes of Victorian Government investment in the VLFP are:

- 1. To increase community capacity (through increased engagement, knowledge, awareness and skills) in order to...*
- 2. Support effective participation in NRM activities (through increased funding, improved partnerships, and stronger coordination).*

A robust program MERI Plan can then be developed including the following components:

- A program logic articulating how these outcomes will be achieved through activities within work areas (via intermediate outcomes where appropriate) This logic can draw on a previous logic that was developed for DELWP as part of its approach to reporting on the Sustainability Fund support for the ten additional facilitators (Appendix 3).
- A clear set of indicators that can be used to monitor achievements at both the activity- and outcome-levels.
- A Monitoring and Reporting Framework clearly setting out monitoring and reporting requirements (how), responsibilities (who) and frequency (how often) for the VLFP.

Outcome-level indicators must directly link to the work of the facilitators (i.e. focused on capacity building and social change) rather than the ultimate NRM outcomes that might be delivered by the groups that they support. Examples might include:

- Indicators of engagement (e.g. 'group health' status, number of groups, number of members, number of volunteer hours).
- Indicators of change in the levels of awareness, knowledge and skills relating to NRM activities (e.g. data collected via surveys at capacity-building events, proportion of groups/committees with particular training/expertise).
- Indicators of 'support for effective NRM activities' (e.g. level of funding secured/leveraged, number of partnerships developed or supported, evidence of strategic planning/landscape-level coordination).

No one of these indicators can, in isolation, tell the full story of program outcomes, but taken together they provide a body of evidence that helps to demonstrate progress towards outcomes. Whilst data collection (monitoring) against these indicators may be ongoing, reporting on outcomes may be required less frequently than for activities e.g. at the middle and end of the program.

Whilst the VLFP is primarily focused on increasing community capacity to deliver NRM outcomes (and so these outcomes should be monitored systematically), feedback suggests that the program also delivers a wide range non-target benefits e.g. improved emergency management capacity, improved liveability in rural communities, wider health benefits (including mental health). Although systematic monitoring of these non-target outcomes is not necessarily appropriate, the VLFP outcome-reporting template should provide an opportunity for facilitators and their employers to succinctly capture anecdotal evidence about these non-target outcomes in order to highlight the wider benefits of the program.

KEY FINDING 4: CONTRIBUTION TO WIDER STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The VLFP makes a contribution to a range of strategic Victorian Government environmental and sustainable land management objectives, although alignment to these strategies is not well-described.

Anecdotal evidence from stakeholder interviews and survey responses highlights that the VLFP contributes to a range of wider benefits by increasing community capacity and supporting project delivery. This includes:

- Improved NRM outcomes on the ground – particularly through landscape-level oversight and coordination through the facilitators
- Practice change to improve sustainability of agricultural land management practices (including improved soil and waterway health, and climate change adaptation and mitigation)
- Improved relationships between local volunteer groups and local- and state government agencies
- Providing a channel for government agencies to seek input from community members.

*Facilitators provide a connection to Traditional Owners- they can help breakdown fears for landholders.”
(drawn from regional workshop comments).*

It is clear from anecdotal evidence and the activity-level data in the program reporting that the VLFP contributes (to a variable degree) to a range of Victorian Government goals and targets. Activities funded through the VLFP contribute in particular to the objectives of the following subsequently-developed strategies⁵:

- **Protecting our Environment - Biodiversity 2037** – including the following priorities:
 - *Raise the awareness of all Victorians about the importance of the state’s natural environment*
 - *Increase opportunities for all Victorians to have daily connections with nature*
 - *Increase opportunities for all Victorians to act to protect biodiversity*
 - *Help to create more liveable and climate-adapted communities*
 - *Better care for and showcase Victoria’s environmental assets as world-class natural and cultural tourism attractions*
 - *Support and enable community groups, Traditional Owners, non-government organisations and sections of government to participate in biodiversity response planning*
 - *Build capacity to increase Aboriginal participation in biodiversity management*
 - *Deliver excellence in management of all land and waters.*
- **Victorians Volunteering for Nature - Environmental Volunteering Plan** – including following key focus areas:
 - *To sustain existing environmental volunteering programs and networks*
 - *To regenerate environmental volunteering and encourage more Victorians to act for nature*
 - *To value and recognise the contributions of environmental volunteers*
 - *To understand the diverse needs of the environmental volunteering sector.*
- **Our Catchments, Our Communities**, in particular the Goal 1 ‘*Effective community engagement in catchment management*’.

⁵ This list is not exhaustive but focuses on those with most direct links to the VLFP. The program is likely to contribute indirectly to a range of other government strategies/objectives, including e.g. The Community Resilience Framework for Emergency Management, Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework etc. In addition, we note that these strategies were developed subsequent to the VLFP.

⁶ As per the Bio2037 Implementation Framework.

However, the linkages between the VLFP and the Victorian Government's strategic NRM objectives have not been clearly articulated for the current iteration of the program. This is also true for the wider Victorian Landcare Plan (2012) – which pre-dates the VLFP. This means that drawing a clear link between the VLFP and any of these wider strategic objectives is difficult and can only be based on assumptions.

As well as contributing to a range of NRM objectives, the VLFP also contributes to wider improvements in sustainable land management – particularly by supporting increased knowledge, awareness, skills and adoption of sustainable agricultural management practices. This is a key component of the VLFP, and a priority for many groups and networks.

However, it is difficult to map this important outcome to an overarching Victorian Government strategy for sustainable agriculture – the existing Agriculture Victoria Strategy (DJPR) has a particular focus for improving economic productivity, agricultural efficiency and increasing market access (rather than improved environmental sustainability per se). It lacks a specific NRM component focused on the role of farmers as land managers. This lack of a clear link to an overarching government strategy for agriculture, can result in some of the important achievements of the VLFP not being adequately reflected and recognised.

RECOMMENDATION 4: UPDATE THE VICTORIAN LANDCARE PLAN

Review and update the Victorian Landcare Plan to (1) clearly articulate the objectives of Victorian Government investment in Landcare, (2) set out the role of the VLFP in achieving those outcomes and (3) highlight the links to other Victorian Government strategies.

Many of the issues described above could be addressed through a revision of the Victorian Landcare Plan. This was last updated in 2012 (prior to development of the VLFP) and is in clear need of review.

The existing Victorian Landcare Plan (2012), does not adequately set out overarching objectives, nor links to wider government strategies. The plan only describes 'government intent':

The Government, in partnership with communities, has a role in maintaining a healthy natural resource base for current and future generations. A key priority for Government is to promote local action on the environment – to empower people with information to make well-informed choices and to bring about outcomes on the ground.

This statement alludes to NRM objectives ('promote local action on the environment') and social objectives ('empower people with information to make well-informed choices') but does not explicitly articulate how government support will help these distinct objectives to be achieved, nor how investment in Landcare contributes to wider government strategic objectives.

A review of the Victorian Landcare Plan would provide an opportunity to:

1. Clearly articulate the key objectives (goals) of Victorian Government support for Landcare
2. Highlight how each of the component parts of the program (facilitators, grants, central support) will contribute to these overarching objectives (via short, medium and long-term outcomes)
3. Highlight how the Victorian Landcare program will contribute to a range of other overarching government strategies. This may focus in particular on Bio2037 and the Environmental Volunteering Plan, but should also include links to other important strategies as outlined above.

3.4 PROGRAM DESIGN

This section examines the design of the VLFP. This includes an overview of the ‘current state’ of program design, but has a particular focus on options for a ‘future state’. Recommendations for this future state are not intended to be prescriptive but to focus on key design principles with options for how these might be delivered.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- Is the current VLFP model the most effective approach to achieving its objectives and supporting the delivery of the Victorian Landcare Program and key Victorian Government objectives, such as those in the *Environmental Volunteering Plan* and *Protecting our Environment - Biodiversity 2037*?
- What lessons can be taken from similar programs in other jurisdictions?
- Provide analysis, including the advantages and disadvantages, of potential alternate models for delivering the VLFP. Consideration should be given to geographical spread, host employers and funding/contractual arrangements for delivery positions.

KEY FINDING 5: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CURRENT MODEL

The existing delivery model is highly devolved. Stakeholder feedback highlights a range of strengths and weaknesses for this model.

The facilitator role works because

- *We sit in the community*
- *We're seen as independent (not government)*
- *Our Board has ultimate say*

(drawn from regional workshop comments).

The current delivery model for VLFP is highly devolved to the local level, as described in **Table 3-3** below. This model is very unusual for a government funding program and was created partly in recognition of the fact that the Landcare community highly values its role as a grassroots community-led volunteering program.

Table 3-3: Characteristics of the current delivery model

COMPONENT	LOCAL CONTROL	DEPARTMENTAL CONTROL
Number of facilitators state-wide.	X ⁷	
Spatial configuration and coverage of facilitators.	For the initial F68.	For the additional F10.
Number (and nature) of groups supported by a facilitator.	X	Approval only.
Employment arrangements (including status ⁸ , hosting arrangement, pay rate, work patterns).	X	
Key Work Areas.		X
PDP development (work planning) including all activities to be undertaken.	X	Review and approval w/ intervention as needed.
Day-to-day management.	X	
Development and implementation of reporting requirements for funding recipients.		X

⁷ Number of facilitators was determined (1) by the total amount of funding available (departmental control), and (2) by the number of applications from local groups (local control).

⁸ Employee vs contractor

*“Our network gets to determine what the position does.”
(Survey respondent)*

The current model is characterised by a high degree of devolved control and flexibility, enabling local groups and networks to determine how the role is

used to meet the needs of the local community. This not only includes management of the day-to-day activities of the facilitator, but also the spatial configuration of each facilitator’s ‘patch’, the number and types of groups that will be supported, and the employment arrangements (including hosting arrangements, if applicable). In effect, the department’s influence is limited to approval of the arrangements proposed by funding recipients, the PDPs and development and implementation of reporting requirements. The department also plays a key ‘supporting’ role for both facilitators themselves and for groups/networks.

The strengths and weaknesses of this model are summarised in Table 3-4, and discussed in further detail below. Issues relating specifically to governance are discussed in Section 3.4.

Table 3-4: Current delivery model – impacts on program delivery

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Empowerment of local groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant variation in the level of service provided (ratio of facilitators to groups)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived independence of facilitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of control over on spatial coverage
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant governance issues (addressed separately in Section 3.4)

The following characteristics were identified as important components in the success of the program, and were highly valued by the community (based on survey and workshop feedback):

- **Empowerment of local groups.** This links to local control over key components of the program (as per **Table 3-3** above). Survey responses and stakeholder workshops highlighted that flexibility is a key benefit of this delivery model – in particular, flexibility to enable the local community to determine the day-to-day activities of the facilitator. While the department required that facilitators deliver the seven key work areas, these were suitably broad and ‘all-encompassing’ so that they did not significantly limit flexibility.
- **Perceived independence of Landcare facilitators.** Feedback from the workshops and the on-line survey highlighted that the perception that facilitators operate independently of government at the behest of their local community was a significant strength for the current delivery model. Although there were examples where facilitators were hosted by CMAs or local government, these arrangements were still driven by the local community and based on local dynamics. Numerous facilitators suggested that this model provides them greater access and support from landholders, and increased convening power as a representative of community interests.

*Facilitators reported that they were able to bring organisations to the table who would often be difficult to engage. As the facilitator they were considered to be community representatives but also able to work with agencies.”
(drawn from regional workshop comments).*

Whilst some characteristics of the current model are likely to increase efficacy and impact, other characteristics may reduce the ability to deliver the intended outcomes. Again, this relates back to the degree of local vs departmental control of the program (as per **Table 3-3** above).

Specifically, this includes:

- **Significant variation in the level of service provided by facilitators.** There are examples of facilitators supporting very high numbers of groups (more than 20), as well as examples of facilitators supporting just one (and in one case, a Landcare network and no groups). Whilst in many cases this unevenness is an appropriate and pragmatic arrangement that meets local needs and works relatively effectively, there are cases where facilitators are spread too thinly (over-worked, or only able to provide

a very limited level of service). Conversely, we identified a small number of cases where facilitators are effectively under-occupied, or (more often in practice) where groups are over-serviced (which can lead to facilitators playing more of a coordination/project management role).

- **Overlaps in the spatial scope of facilitators.** The lack of central or regional coordination of the spatial scope of individual facilitators has meant that there are cases where two neighbouring facilitators overlap, and in some cases where individual groups are covered by two facilitators. Although this may be the result of pragmatic local decision-making, it could introduce inefficiency and inequity in the delivery of facilitator services.
- **Gaps in spatial coverage.** This was identified as a significant issue in the last review of the facilitator program⁹, and important steps were taken to address these gaps (including recruiting an additional 10 facilitators to target un-serviced areas¹⁰). This has been largely successful, and anecdotal evidence suggests that coverage is no longer a significant issue. This issue was further explored during the regional workshops, and feedback suggested that facilitators generally operated pragmatically, creating a 'fuzzy boundary' around their patch to ensure that any remaining gaps were addressed based on requests for facilitator services. However, the fact that an additional targeted funding-round was required to address this issue highlights an inherent shortcoming of the current delivery model: that the spatial coverage is largely determined from the bottom-up (with the exception of the F10), and that a mechanism for coordinating or targeting coverage is currently lacking.

RECOMMENDATION 5: DEVELOP ALTERNATIVE MODELS TO IMPROVE PROGRAM DELIVERY

This review identifies a range of feasible alternative models to improve program delivery. As part of the case for future investment, DELWP should further develop their preferred model based on this assessment.

As part of this review, we considered a range of existing alternative delivery models including Coastcare and Regional Landcare Coordinators in NSW, and the national Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitators program (funded by the Australian Government through the National Landcare Program 2). Key learnings from these alternative approaches are presented in highlighted text boxes in this section of the report.

⁹ Evaluation of the Victorian Local Landcare Facilitator Initiative. RMCG, 2015.

¹⁰ With more top-down intervention, including a role for the CMAs to recommend how gaps should be addressed.

ALTERNATIVE MODEL 1: COASTCARE FACILITATORS

In Victoria, the Coastcare program is delivered by DELWP. The program consists of a 'state-wide Coastcare facilitator' and five 'regional Coastcare facilitators' dispersed across the state (West Victoria, Surf Coast/Bellarine, Port Phillip/Westernport, West Gippsland and East Gippsland). In most cases the facilitator sits within the public land business and works closely with environmental planners. The overall Coastcare work-program is led by the DELWP State-wide Coastcare facilitator.

The role of the facilitator is to:

- Implement the Coastcare program locally in collaboration with the state-wide Coastcare co-ordinator and Coastcare facilitators in other regions;
- Ensure the program is delivered in an efficient and integrated way across Victoria; and
- Build the capability of coastal volunteer groups to help achieve the goals of the Coastcare program and integrated coastal management.

A key differentiation between Coastcare and Landcare is that 96% of the Victorian coastline is public land overseen by DELWP. This means that the majority of coastal volunteer work is undertaken on crown land that is delegated to Parks Victoria, Local Government or a Committee of Management to manage. In addition, DELWP is the delegated approver under the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018* for any works on coastal crown land and these consents are processed by the public land regional offices.

In 2015 an 18-month trial was undertaken where the state-wide Coastcare facilitator sat within the CMA's for 18 months, which was not continued beyond the trial. The facilitator was very connected with the CMA and the regional facilitators of other volunteer led initiatives (Waterwatch, Estuary Watch and Landcare) but there were challenges in maintaining control or management of the Coastcare facilitators work program.

Some lessons from Coastcare could be applied to Landcare include:

- The facilitator to lead capacity building for OH&S for all Landcare groups.
- Drawing on the highly successful 'summer by the sea' program, DELWP could fund a yearly 'initiative' where all facilitators work together to deliver a state-wide program.

ALTERNATIVE MODEL 2: NSW LANDCARE COORDINATOR INITIATIVE

The NSW Landcare Coordinator Initiative is a \$15 million program from 2015-2019, providing a network of locally based coordinators to work with local Landcare groups and networks across NSW. This funding supported up to 60 part-time (0.5FTE) positions across the state. There are a number of key similarities with the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program:

- Community-based groups or networks involved in natural resource management and/or sustainable agriculture could apply to host a coordinator.
- Host organisations may directly employ coordinators, or if they prefer may seek to enter into an arrangement with another organisation e.g. Local Council, regional NRM body (Local Land Services, LLS, in NSW) or another regional community umbrella organisation.
- Host organisations are expected to meet all additional on-costs, office and service overheads, travel and operating costs and management and reporting costs. As such, hosts are strongly encouraged to build partnerships with Local Land Services and/or Local Government to share costs and provide additional support and resources for the role.

However, this model also includes some key points of difference from the VLFP that provide potential improvements to the current model:

- Program governance is more structured and centralised. This includes robust eligibility criteria based on core purpose, spatial coverage of proposed role, connectivity (host organisations must be able to demonstrate strong linkages with other organisations), and capability (demonstrable capacity to meet critical governance standards).
- There was greater top-down oversight to shape the distribution and spatial coverage of coordinators, with a nominal baseline level of service provision for each LLS region (2-3FTE). In several regions, a number of coordinators are hosted directly by LLS, each with a sub-regional spatial remit.
- The \$15 million funding included support for a Landcare Community of Practice Initiative, providing essential support to host organisations in relation to good governance and employment, as well increasing capacity and connectedness of the Landcare community.
- At the outset, the Landcare Coordinator Initiative set out structured MERI requirements for host organisations, based on clearly articulated outcomes for the role.

ALTERNATIVE MODEL 3: REGIONAL AGRICULTURE LANDCARE FACILITATORS

Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitators (RALFs) are funded by the Australian Government as part of National Landcare Program 2. RALFs are hosted by NRM regions across Australia (one per region). RALF workplans are developed regionally in collaboration with their NRM hosts in order to meet local needs but aim to deliver a set of Core Services (similar to the Key Work Areas). However, the model is significantly different to VLFP in a number of keyways:

- Significantly more structured program governance, including mandated MERI requirements. This includes annual reporting on activities and core service delivery, as well as monitoring and reporting of longer-term outcomes.
- Participation in 'communities of practice' to build technical expertise and skills, coordinate activities and share knowledge.
- Participation in monthly teleconferences with the entire national RALF network and the Australian Government to facilitate two-way sharing of information.
- Hosting by NRM regional bodies means that although the RALFs may work with Landcare groups, there is not the same perceived independence and local empowerment over their role as with the VLFP.

Although we have reviewed and drawn insights from existing alternative delivery models, we feel that the context for these programs is so significantly different to that of the VLFP (including the history and level of devolved control) that it is useful to consider the design of future programs based on key design characteristics rather than in reference to other 'off-the-shelf' models.

From the review of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing delivery model for the VLFP, we have identified that the following design features are critical to ensure effective and efficient delivery of any future similar program:

1. Mandated Key Work Areas designed to deliver clearly defined program outcomes
2. Local community input to shape day-to-day activities (based on the work areas)
3. Targeting of funding to ensure full and efficient spatial coverage (no overlaps) and reduce inappropriate variation in the level of service provision.

These key design features, described further below, should be considered foundational features of any future design.

1. Work areas aligned to clearly defined program outcomes

The importance of clearly defined program outcomes, for the purposes of monitoring and reporting, has already been discussed in Section 3.2 of this report. However, this clarity is also important for shaping future programs, in particular to develop an appropriate set of Key Work Areas.

Feedback from the online survey suggests there is broad support for the current KWAs. The more detailed feedback from regional workshop participants highlighted a mixture of views: most noted that having very open work areas was helpful in being able to tailor activities to meet the needs of their local community – and that this would be jeopardised by narrower and more prescriptive work areas. However, some participants felt that the work areas were so broad that they were not useful for setting priorities within their work-planning, nor do they encourage groups/networks to be more strategic or targeted in their activities (i.e. it did not enable the facilitator to rule many things out on the basis of non-alignment).

Other observations on the work areas were that they were seen (by some) as disjointed. Some are focussed on broad high-level outcomes (e.g. 'building partnerships'), while others are operational and could be considered part of routine delivery of the role (e.g. securing grants, assisting with monitoring, evaluation and reporting).

In future, an outcome-focussed approach to developing the work areas (utilising a program logic) would help to ensure that they are pitched at the right level and fit-for-purpose. The final number of KWAs used should be informed by such an approach – including a clear articulation of how each work area will contribute to the intended outcomes of the program. This may include differentiating between work areas that directly contribute to those outcomes (e.g. community engagement, capacity building, support for projects), and those that contribute indirectly through improved group/network-level governance (e.g. strategic planning and coordination, MERI).

There are clearly trade-offs between KWAs that are flexible and broad enough to enable tailoring of activities to meet local needs, and KWAs that are narrower to enable strategic planning, prioritisation and targeting of effort. One approach that could address this issue is to maintain broad KWAs that apply to all facilitators but link them to specific regional NRM priorities that enable strategic planning and improve the targeting of investments. These priorities could be drawn from existing local strategies and plans but should include engagement and input from the local community.

Key Work Areas are a crucial feature of successful program delivery and are key to ensuring that activities align to DELWP's requirements. Even under the current, highly devolved model, the Key Work Areas are developed centrally by DELWP (see Table 3-3 above). This feature of program design should be maintained in future, regardless of the delivery model for the program.

2. Local community input to shape day-to-day activities

Local empowerment was identified by a wide range of stakeholders as a key design component for the program, and one that was critical to the overall success of the facilitator role. This feature helps to ensure that facilitator activities meet local needs, and also increases community support for their work. In the current model, this feature is achieved through devolved control over employment arrangements (i.e. funding recipients deciding how and where their facilitator will be employed), and in many cases through direct line-management of the facilitators by networks or groups themselves. A key 'lever' is the development of the Program Delivery Plans (PDP), which although reviewed and approved by the department, are developed by the funding recipients.

Although some stakeholders highlighted that the process for development, review and approval of PDPs was cumbersome, feedback from departmental staff highlights that the PDPs crucial because there are few other opportunities to shape program delivery. However, many funding recipients also noted they had not considered the KWAs again once the PDP for their facilitator was approved, and often those not directly involved with PDP development were unfamiliar with the KWAs.

Despite this, input from the local community (e.g. group or network committees) to shape the day-to-day activities of the facilitator (as described in their PDP) should continue to be a key feature in the design of any future program. However, alternative models for program delivery (including those with increased departmental control over key elements) could potentially achieve this feature in different ways e.g. through PDP consultation with group/network committees, or through more formalised 'committees of management' with local group representation to co-develop PDPs and discuss other aspects of the facilitator role.

3. Targeting of funding to ensure full and efficient spatial coverage and reduce inappropriate variations in the level of service provision.

Full spatial coverage has been implicitly identified by the department as a key design feature of the VLFP. This is evidenced by the decision to seek additional funding for a further 10 facilitators (the 'F10') to address gaps in the coverage identified in a previous review of the program (RMCG, 2015).

In the current model, control over the spatial configuration of facilitators across the state is largely driven from the bottom-up based on self-organisation of groups/networks and their subsequent applications for facilitator funding¹¹. This created the need for the additional F10 to address gaps in service provision and has also led to a small number of cases where areas are covered by more than one facilitator (i.e. overlaps). In addition, this bottom-up approach has created significant variations in the level of service provision across the state (e.g. the ratio of facilitators to groups) – although this is pragmatic and appropriate in some cases, there are a small number of examples where facilitators arguably support too many or too few groups in comparison to their colleagues.

Future program design should aim to address these issues at the outset through increased targeting to ensure full and efficient (i.e. without overlaps) spatial coverage, and to reduce inappropriate variations in the level of service provision across regions. In practice, this can be achieved under several of the alternative delivery models discussed in the next section of this report, e.g.:

- **Highly centralised** top-down control e.g. DELWP manage facilitators directly and therefore determine their spatial scope independently of the configuration of groups/networks.
- **Regional control** e.g. targeting of funding to CMAs who then decide the spatial configuration of facilitators – this could be shaped to a lesser or greater degree by the 'boundaries' of groups or networks.

¹¹ With the exception of the additional F10 facilitators

- **Highly devolved** local control e.g. funding applications still largely determine the spatial configuration of facilitators, but DELWP use the application process to provide a 'steer' (through communication materials and via the RLCs) to encourage groups to coordinate in order to ensure full spatial coverage, avoid overlaps and reduce major variations in the level of service provision. This includes the option of taking a 'light touch' approach with current funding recipients where there are no significant issues, whilst being more interventionist where current arrangements are not ideal.

Alternative Models for Program Delivery

There are a range of alternative delivery models that could feasibly include all three of the key design features described above. For the purposes of this review, we have assumed that Key Work Areas designed to align to clearly stated outcomes (key feature (1) above) are ubiquitous to all models. In the assessment below we have then discussed how the model could incorporate the other key design features ((2) and (3)) and assessed the relative merits of each. This assessment is presented in Table 3-5 below.

Our intention is not to be prescriptive, but instead to provide insight into how each alternative model could be designed to deliver the outcomes of the program, and to highlight some of the considerations for government associated with those models. Further considerations – including the overall number of facilitators and other resourcing implications are discussed subsequently.

Table 3-5: Comparison of alternative program delivery models

LEVEL OF DEVOLUTION	DELIVERY MODELS	LOCAL COMMUNITY INPUT TO SHAPE ACTIVITIES	SPATIAL COVERAGE/ LEVEL OF SERVICE PROVISION	CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Central control</p>	<p>1. Direct management by DELWP. All facilitators directly employed by DELWP and embedded in the DELWP regions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional processes would need to be developed to ensure that local communities have a clear input to shape activities. For example, this could involve: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted engagement/consultation with groups/networks facilitated via the DELWP regions or CMAs. A formalised structure of 'committees of management' for each facilitator including representatives of local groups/networks. These processes would require additional central or regional resourcing to be delivered effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spatial distribution of facilitators determined centrally by DELWP. This could be based on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Landscapes or catchments (independent of the self-organisation of groups/networks). This potentially increases the program's ability to delivery landscape-scale outcomes, but could risk reducing direct links to local groups/network. Existing Landcare (group/network) boundaries. This would help to maintain the close connection with groups/networks and would support the feeling of local empowerment but may reduce the landscape-scale oversight and coordination. Many facilitator positions would not be embedded locally within Landcare boundaries due to the number and location of DELWP regional offices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could address all of the issues in the current program in terms of effective program delivery (control over spatial coverage, variation in the level of service provision). Could also be designed around landscapes/ catchments and aligned to DELWP NRM priorities. There are resource considerations associated with engaging the local community to inform work-planning. Even with local input into work-planning, this model potentially compromises some of the important strengths of the current program (e.g. local empowerment, perceived independence from government), and therefore risks being poorly received by the Landcare community.
	<p>2. Out-source program management and delivery to third party. DELWP contracts a third party to deliver the package, with very specific requirements defined in the contract. That party takes responsibility and determines delivery details. Third parties could include e.g. industry linked body (e.g. LVI), an employment agency, or combinations of both. NOTE: Requirements of the contract would be determined by DELWP. Under alternative versions of this model, many components could be further devolved to the regions (CMAs) or local groups/networks, with third party just providing central program administration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The various iterations of this model could have varying degree of further devolution. The approach and extent to which the local community maintains input into work-planning would depend on the specific model. Additional processes to undertake community engagement and facilitate local input into work-planning (as described above) would increase the required capacity of the third-party provider, or would require collaboration with, for example, the CMAs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spatial coverage/ service provision issues could be addressed through the contractual requirements specified by DELWP. If determined centrally, either landscapes/ catchments or existing Landcare boundaries could be used to determine spatial arrangements. In particular, the landscape-based approach would require high levels of technical expertise in relation to NRM and strategic planning, or would require DELWP to undertake the planning phase and specify the spatial configurations as part of the contract. If the spatial configuration component was devolved to local groups, the service provider would be required to steer that process from the top-down to ensure problems identified with the current distribution are addressed. Again, this requires strong background knowledge in the third-party provider. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be practically difficult to fully outsource program delivery. There may be a high chance that no organisation or business would be willing or have sufficient technical capacity to take on this contract. Some hybrid or 'middle-ground' options exist, where DELWP provides technical capacity in relation to strategic planning, community engagement etc but a third party provides capacity for program administration, HR, payroll etc. Although managing a reduced number of contracts may reduce some administrative costs, this is highly dependent on the costs of a third-party provider. The 'market' is also likely to be limited by the technical/capacity requirements of the contract. The overall capacity implications for DELWP would depend on how much technical support was required to ensure the program achieves the desired outcomes. Having a trusted third party (e.g. LVI) take on a central oversight role may reduce the perception of 'government overreach', but this would be highly dependent on the version of this model adopted and associated communication.
<p>Regional control</p>	<p>3. Direct management by CMAS. Management and administration of the facilitators is devolved to the ten CMA regions. DELWP would manage one contract with each CMA. The Regional Landcare Coordinators would play a formal role in managing the facilitators in their region, in partnership with their Landcare and environmental volunteer community. NOTE: A further iteration of this model could involve CMAs devolving management of some facilitators to high-capacity networks within the region (i.e. those that can demonstrate appropriate systems and processes to adequately support and manage an employee).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As with Model 1, additional processes would need to be employed to ensure local communities can provide input into work-planning. This could include the options described for Model 1: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted engagement/consultation with groups/networks. A formalised structure of 'committees of management' for each facilitator including representatives of local groups/networks. These processes would require additional resourcing for the CMAs to be delivered effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spatial distribution of facilitators is determined by the CMAs. As with Model 1, this could be based on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Landscapes or catchments (independent of the spread of groups/networks). This potentially increases the program's ability to delivery landscape-scale outcomes, but could risk reducing direct links to local groups/network. Existing Landcare boundaries. This would help to maintain the close connection with groups/networks and would support local empowerment but may reduce the landscape-scale oversight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DELWP would only be required to manage ten contracts. CMAs have high technical capacity, good governance, strong local knowledge, and are well-placed to provide landscape-level oversight and coordination. Enables more direct oversight of program delivery (by CMAs) to ensure that outcomes are being delivered as planned Could address all of the issues of the current program in terms of effective program delivery (control over spatial coverage, variation in the level of service provision). However, even with some level of local input into work-planning, this model potentially compromises some of the important strengths of the current program (e.g. local empowerment, perceived independence from

LEVEL OF DEVOLUTION	DELIVERY MODELS	LOCAL COMMUNITY INPUT TO SHAPE ACTIVITIES	SPATIAL COVERAGE/ LEVEL OF SERVICE PROVISION	CONSIDERATIONS
				<p>government), and therefore risks being poorly received by the Landcare community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This approach is dependent on the willingness of CMAs to take on the leadership role and the quality of their relationship with their local Landcare community.
Local control	<p>4. Multiple Delivery Partners.</p> <p>This model involves devolving delivery to a limited set of approved partners. Any prospective funding recipient would be required to meet a specific (high) standard for governance and capacity before they can receive funding for a facilitator. This standard would be set such that organisations like CMAs, local governments and the higher functioning Landcare organisations (networks) could readily meet it.</p> <p>This model has similarities with the existing model. However, in the current model, funding recipients are the groups/networks and the decision about hosting arrangements is made locally. In the proposed alternative model, only organisations that meet sufficiently high standards can receive funding. For groups/networks that do not meet that standard, funding could be provided through alternative hosts e.g. CMA or local council.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For 'high-capacity' recipients (i.e. those that can demonstrate appropriate systems and processes to adequately support and manage an employee), no additional processes would be required to ensure local input into work-planning. Where facilitators are hosted by CMAs or local councils, additional processes would be required, as described for Model 3 above. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because the distribution of facilitators would (in part) be determined by the funding applicants, DELWP may need to provide a 'steer' to ensure full, efficient spatial coverage and to reduce inappropriate variations in the level of service provision (e.g. too many or too few groups per facilitator). This could be formalised by setting out further specific requirements for funding applicants (in addition to those around governance and capacity). Alternatively, DELWP could take an informal approach. Preferred arrangements could be communicated via the Landcare team to the regions (e.g. through the RLCs). This approach would enable groups that are already meeting DELWP's requirements to reapply without major changes to their arrangements, whilst encouraging other groups to make changes as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This model is not a major departure from the existing model but can address significant deficiencies in those current arrangements. This could be a way to address issues with the current model without significantly reducing local empowerment or the perceived independence of facilitators. Although the model does not directly include provisions for landscape-level oversight or strategic planning, this could be supported by the development of specified regional priorities to accompany the Key Work Areas. Simplifies administration in comparison to the existing model by enabling CMAs and local councils to apply for facilitator funding directly where local groups do not meet the required threshold to qualify. In order to maintain positive and constructive relationships with those current funding recipients that do not meet this standard, careful communication will be required. This could also include providing funding applicants with the opportunity (and support) to address deficiencies in order to meet the required standard.
	<p>5. Improved Status Quo.</p> <p>This model is based on the current arrangement but with tighter requirements/ higher minimum standards in relation to governance, employment arrangements, and oversight/reporting.</p> <p>This would encourage funding applicants that lack capacity to develop alternative arrangements to ensure that requirements are met e.g. by arranging for facilitators to be hosted by other organisations (e.g. CMAs or local government).</p> <p>This model could include some aspects similar to the NSW Landcare Coordinators Initiative – including clear requirements of funding recipients and increased support through 'communities of practice'.</p> <p>Governance arrangements are further discussed in Section 3.4.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need for additional processes to ensure local input into work-planning will depend on the nature of the relationship between the groups/networks and the hosts. In many cases the processes used in the current program will be adequate. In the small number of cases where groups/networks do not meet the funding requirements and alternative hosting arrangements are required, this may need specific attention and support. Under this 'improved' model there may be cases where the decision to host the facilitator externally is effectively required by DELWP rather than chosen by the funding recipient. In these cases, it may be necessary to ensure that there is a clear process for groups/networks to provide input into work-planning for the facilitator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The distribution of facilitators is determined by the funding applicants (from the bottom-up). Therefore, DELWP may need to provide a 'steer' to ensure full, efficient spatial coverage and to reduce inappropriate variations in the level of service provision (e.g. too many or too few groups per facilitator). This could be formalised by setting out further specific requirements for funding applicants (in addition to those around governance and capacity). Alternatively, DELWP could take an informal approach. Preferred arrangements could be communicated via the Landcare team to the regions (e.g. through the RLCs). This approach would enable groups that are already meeting DELWP's requirements to reapply without major changes to their arrangements, whilst encouraging other groups to make changes as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evolution of existing model based on adaptive management. Tighter funding requirements could address many of the issues with the current model without significantly reducing local empowerment or the perceived independence of facilitators. This model will still result in a wide variety of funding and hosting arrangements (as now) which is likely to be more costly to administer than other less complex models (particularly when the costs currently borne by funding recipients are taken fully into account). Line management is locally devolved. As with the current model, the extent of oversight/control over delivery of program outcomes is limited to the Key Work Areas, PDPs and through reporting requirements. Improvements are possible to ensure that KWAs and PDPs are well-designed to deliver intended outcomes and that monitoring, reporting and systematic review are required. However, ultimate control over delivery is still highly devolved.

KEY FINDING 6: CURRENT RESOURCING REQUIREMENTS

Evidence suggests that although the number of facilitators and their spatial coverage was adequate, resourcing for ‘program support’ is not currently sufficient.

For the purposes of this review, our assessment of current program resourcing is divided into two components: (1) resourcing for program delivery (e.g. the number of facilitators and their associated costs), and (2) resourcing for program management, administration and guidance/support provided by the department.

1. Resourcing for program delivery.

Analysis of survey responses and feedback from regional workshops highlighted a number of key themes in relation to resourcing for program delivery:

- **The VLFP is successfully delivering against the Key Work Areas and achieving its intended outcomes**¹². As described in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this report, the evidence collected and collated for this review suggest that the program is effectively delivery activities against all of the KWAs, is achieving the intended outcomes and is delivering a range of non-target benefits to regional communities across Victoria. This view was strongly echoed across the regional workshops. This suggests that current resourcing is sufficient to enable facilitators to achieve good outcomes on the ground.
- **There was no obvious demand for more facilitators.** This is in contrast to the previous review (RMCG, 2015) where feedback highlighted a clear demand for additional facilitators in order to address gaps in spatial coverage. Increasing the number of facilitators from 68 to 78 (under the current delivery model) seemed to address this need. Taken together with the points above, this suggests that under the current delivery model (with the existing spatial configuration of facilitators), approximately 78 facilitators is appropriate to the needs of the community and has enabled the program to be delivered effectively.
- **There is no simple equation to identify the optimal number or spatial configuration of facilitators that would increase efficiency and/or effectiveness.** Under current and future models, there may be some opportunities to increase efficiency and equity of service provision (i.e. address spatial overlaps and re-balance where facilitators support too few or too many groups). Some of the parameters that affect the ‘demand’ for facilitators are:
 - The spatial area to be covered
 - The number of groups within that area
 - The level of ‘activity’ of these groups (e.g. how many projects they have ongoing)
 - The capacity of these groups (i.e. how much support is needed to plan and deliver projects)
 - The challenges (economic, social and environmental) being faced by that community.

We identified a range of very different arrangements that were equally ‘appropriate’ for the circumstances e.g. facilitators covering a large area with only a very small number of low-capacity groups versus facilitators covering a comparatively small area but with a higher number of high-capacity groups. The current arrangements are based on local demand, and (with a few minor exceptions) are broadly appropriate to meet these needs.

¹² Noting that these outcomes have not been stated explicitly, but are implied through program documentation, as per Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

- **Funding recipients stated that demand for facilitator support was ongoing.** Through the workshops, we explored the extent to which facilitator activities (particularly capacity building) had led to groups being more sustainable. The feedback we received suggested that although the facilitators had increased the capacity of the Landcare community to deliver projects, most groups or networks stated that if the facilitator role was lost in future, their level of activity, effectiveness and ultimately, capacity would decrease again. In part, this is due to the dynamic nature of the groups – their capacity is closely linked to their membership and the availability of funding for projects.
 - **Increased resources for facilitators would lead to increased support for project delivery.** Although there was not a clear demand for more facilitators per se, workshop participants across all regions stressed that if more resources (i.e. facilitator time) were available, this would lead to increased support/capacity to deliver NRM projects, and ultimately to greater outcomes on the ground. Many facilitators stated that their ability to deliver effective support was limited by the number of hours available (i.e. demand outweighed supply).
 - **Funding recipients and facilitators were concerned by the lack of guidance on administrative costs and salary arrangements.** The current model allows for each funding recipient to reach an arrangement that is suited to local conditions. Many funding recipients reported that they had not received sufficient guidance from DELWP regarding how they should go about meeting their responsibilities as employers. Specific examples highlighted include the lack of information about appropriate employment contracts and how best to manage administrative costs.
- We needed DELWP to advise on the okay range for pay.
We need a standard set of policies available for us to take and tailor to our situation.
(drawn from regional workshop comments).*

2. Resourcing for program support

Overall levels of support

DELWP's support for VLFP delivery centres around the Melbourne-based Landcare team. They are responsible for program oversight which includes applications for facilitator funding, funding agreements, review and approval of the Program Delivery Plans for each funding recipient, and for program reporting.

The regional consultations and interviews indicated widespread acknowledgement from both facilitators and funding recipients that the DELWP team are generally very accessible and responsive. Many people were very complimentary of the advice and assistance they received from the DELWP team.

However, facilitators did not feel universally well-supported. When asked about the level of support they had received to fulfil their role 27% of facilitators who responded said that they did not get sufficient support. Similarly, 38% of funding recipients also reported that their organisation did not receive enough support.

Amongst those that identified a need for additional support, the most significant feedback was that when issues became particularly challenging, the department was perceived to have stepped back in order to avoid being drawn into what they considered to be a 'local issue'. While it may be strictly true that the issues were the responsibility of the local parties, there is a significant reputational risk to DELWP if issues continue on unresolved. As the funder and ultimate administrator of the VLFP, DELWP's reputation is still at stake if the devolved arrangements fail.

The need for additional support was identified as part of the previous review of the VLFP. In response to those recommendations, the department have put in place the Landcare Employment and Workplace-Related Advice service. This seemed to be well received by those who had used it, however, the level of awareness of this service among facilitators and funding recipients was mixed. This is understandable since the service has only been in place since November 2018.

Central support

The specific level of support provided by DELWP to manage the VLFP is not clear, but is estimated to be 0.6-0.8 FTE. However, there is no benchmark data available to indicate the level of support (and funding) that would be required for a program of this size. Whilst feedback from facilitators and funding recipients highlighted the importance and value of the support DELWP provides, this review has identified several indicators that suggest that the current level of support is inadequate. They are:

- The failure of the program to appropriately manage annual program reporting (discussed below)
- The delays in getting measures like the employment support service in place
- The unmet demand for additional support, as highlighted by survey responses.

Taking into account these indicators and the size, scope and complexity of the VLFP, it is reasonable to conclude that the current level of investment in support is not adequate to support program delivery under the current model. The alternative delivery models described in Section 3.3 will each have different support requirements. An in-depth internal assessment of the implications these models will have on support requirements will be critical for any future program.

Regional Support

Alongside the central DELWP Landcare team, it was very clear that Regional Landcare Coordinators (RLCs) are also important to the success of the VLFP in many regions. RLCs were often crucial in providing direct advice, and for their role in brokering peer-to-peer support. In most regions, the RLC brought the facilitators together regularly to share experiences, develop relationships, share resources, participate in regional planning and to look for partnership opportunities. In some regions network chairs are also brought together in regional meetings.

However, the roles played by the RLCs seemed to vary across regions, and regular regional catchups were not a feature across the board. There is potential for DELWP to support an expansion of this regional support role as part of the roll-out of any alternative delivery models in future. Under some of the proposed models the required scope of this role would need to be significantly increased.

RECOMMENDATION 6: REVIEW RESOURCING REQUIREMENTS FOR PREFERRED FUTURE DELIVERY MODEL

Undertake an internal review of resourcing requirements to deliver the program effectively based on the department's preferred model. For devolved models, this should take into account the need for increased resourcing for the department to support local program delivery.

The development of an alternative model for program delivery can create some opportunities to increase efficiencies and address anomalies in the level of service provided by facilitators. Different models will have a range of different resourcing requirements – largely dependent on efficiencies of scale, and the extent to which costs are shared by other organisations.

The resourcing required for 'program support' (management, administration, and guidance/support provided by the department) will also depend significantly on the chosen delivery model. It is important to note when considering the management and administrative costs that these are adequately captured in any analysis, even when they are being borne by other organisations (e.g. CMAs or local groups/networks).

One of the most significant differences in resourcing requirements between models is likely to be the level of support and guidance required to ensure that the program delivers effectively. This is likely to be high for highly devolved models (e.g. as in the current case). It may also be high if the program is outsourced to a third party, depending on the extent of subsequent devolution. Support costs may be lower where facilitators are directly employed by DELWP or by the CMAs as these models enable them to tap into exist support and governance arrangements.

The decision on resourcing requirements for support in a future program should consider the following components:

- The level of overall service to be provided by facilitators – linked to the FTE per facilitator area, and likely to depend on the level of funding that is available
- The number of facilitators across the state
- Facilitator employment and contract arrangements
- Overheads and on-costs (who bears them)
- Training and professional development requirements
- Level of central/regional support and guidance required
- Extent of cost-sharing.

3.5 PROGRAM GOVERNANCE AND SUPPORT

This section assesses the current governance and support arrangements for the VLFP and presents some recommendations to improve this in future.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- How successful have Landcare facilitators been in delivering on their roles and responsibilities to support Landcare and other environmental volunteer groups/networks?
- How are the overall Landcare support structures currently interacting? How effectively do the different levels of Landcare support complement and support each other? To what extent is the structure successfully supporting the delivery of the VLFP?

KEY FINDING 7: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There is a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities in relation to the current highly devolved delivery model. This creates significant reputational risk for DELWP.

The highly devolved model used in this program is unusual and presented challenges for all parties involved, particularly in relation to roles, responsibilities, and accountability. The current model devolves a significant level of responsibility for governance onto community volunteers. This includes:

- Recruitment
- Decisions about employment arrangements (e.g. employee vs contractor, direct employment)
- Hosting arrangements (e.g. hosted by groups/networks or a third party)
- Overheads
- Payroll – including setting salaries and administering pay/benefits
- Insurance and workplace health and safety
- Work-planning (PDP)
- Line management – including performance review and management, workload management, career development etc
- Employee welfare – including addressing HR issues should they arise.

This represents a significant governance burden for community volunteers – an issue that was frequently raised at the regional consultation sessions. Many funding recipients made the observation that, at the time they applied to the program they were not fully aware of the responsibilities and obligations that would come with a successful application. Both facilitators and funding recipients reported that they would have benefited from more guidance particularly at the start of the program. Many funding recipients noted basic things like salary, position descriptions, employment contracts and travel budgets as areas where they needed more assistance.

At this late stage in the program, many workshop participants were now more confident and positive about their current arrangements and many employers seem to have progressed to a situation where they have a reasonable understanding of their roles and responsibilities, with one of the more mature networks noting:

“Our group is run somewhat like a business in that:

- The Committee involves our Facilitator in all planning and decision making (except in relation to direct employment issues);*
- There is good governance (i.e. workplace controls, policies and procedures) in place to give the Facilitator freedom to work within set parameters; and*
- Regular Committee meetings (i.e. every 6-8 weeks) and having a direct 'line manager' in place provide the Facilitator with direction if and when it is required”.*

However, there are still some situations where the current arrangements are unsatisfactory for both the employer and the facilitator. While these are small in number (fewer than ten), they could have a significant impact on the overall success and reputation of the program. A common thread across these situations were governance problems at the local level. This included situations where there was inadequate separation between the employer organisation and the paid facilitator (e.g. the facilitator was an officeholder in the employer organisation); where the role and accountability arrangements were inadequate which led to disputes over routine work planning; and cases where turnover of people in the key roles in the funding recipient organisation resulted in uncertainty, lack of leadership and lack of guidance for the facilitator.

Beyond these acute situations, we heard several examples where both facilitators and funding recipients still did not fully understand their roles and responsibilities. For example, some did not understand the significant differences between the two employment options available – namely a contractor or employee model. There were funding recipients who were not clear whether their contractors had appropriate arrangements in place (e.g. workplace health and safety, insurances etc.).

Although DELWP does not have direct responsibility over these program components, as a state government department and the program funder, it does face significant reputational risk in the event that something significant went wrong under these governance arrangements. In addition to this reputational risk, poor governance arrangements also risk reducing the effectiveness and efficiency of the program – potentially reducing accountability, increasing costs and jeopardising the delivery of program outcomes.

These issues arose despite significant efforts on the part of DELWP to provide information and advice about the program (e.g. guidelines, FAQs and funding agreements). The lack of traction that this support seems to have gained may be a reflection of the nature of the participating organisations (community volunteers who meet infrequently and who may have little interest in governance), rather than a lack of effort on DELWP’s part.

Given that funding recipient organisations are volunteer based, the capacity of those organisations will change over time as those occupying key officeholder rolls change. The risk of governance issues arising therefore tends to be more pronounced for groups than for networks because the skills-pool for groups is almost always inherently smaller.

RECOMMENDATION 7: STRENGTHEN PROGRAM GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND INCREASE SUPPORT

Ensure that governance arrangements are robust and appropriate for the preferred program delivery model. This includes improved clarity and communication regarding roles and responsibilities, and more robust requirements combined with increased support to ensure funding recipients understand and are able to meet their obligations.

Future governance requirements will be closely informed by the chosen model for program delivery. Although these risks exist for all delivery models, it is clear that highly devolved models where local volunteer groups have a wide range of complex responsibilities are inherently riskier than more centralised models delivered by government departments or agencies. However, that is not to say that such risks cannot be managed through appropriate systems and processes. The evidence suggests that although the department has made significant efforts to provide support and guidance on program governance, there are still significant issues in some locations.

Good governance is vital, not only to manage risks, but also to ensure that the program performs effectively and efficiently, delivers the intended outcomes, is able to monitor and report key achievements, and is able to identify and address issues quickly and appropriately.

There a range of interventions that would help to address the existing issues and improve program governance in future. These include:

- **Clear, up-front information on the roles and responsibilities of successful funding applicants.** This should be clearly communicated at the very outset of the process. This should use a range of formats to ensure that community volunteers engage with the information e.g. fact sheets, online videos, interactive online guidance.
- **More stringent minimum standards for funding recipients to demonstrate that they can meet these responsibilities.** This could include a mandatory 'code of practice', statutory declarations, or requirements to submit supporting evidence with funding applications. It is critical to ensure both legal and ethical obligations are met. Continuation of funding throughout the program could be linked to ongoing compliance with these minimum standards by, for example, giving non-compliant groups a 'warning period' to address issues before funding is withdrawn.
- **Training and support to enable organisations to meet these minimum standards.** This could include online training modules to maximise uptake by community volunteers. Some basic training modules could be made mandatory in order to access funds, whilst other management training could be voluntary.
- **Safeguards to ensure that these minimum standards continue to be maintained throughout the life of the program.** This review highlighted that community volunteer groups are always vulnerable to key members leaving. This vulnerability is more pronounced for groups than networks as they have a smaller skills-pool on which to draw. DELWP could consider developing safeguards to address this risk such as only funding a group if a clear statement about how this risk is to be addressed has been provided.
- **Support to 'outsource' components of program delivery where groups are unable or unwilling to meet minimum standards.** This could include sharing information on how other funding recipients have addressed these issues, or even information on third-party service providers (e.g. book-keeping, payroll etc).
- **Tighter restrictions on employment arrangements** e.g. clear requirements around salary. This could also include requirements that mean engagement of facilitators as contractors (rather than employees) is only by exception and requires evidence that they have appropriate arrangements in place.

4 Learnings & Looking Forward

This section is focussed on learnings from the VLFP and looking forward to future investments. This includes a short summary of the legacy of the program and rationale for ongoing support; an overview of the key findings of this review and recommendations; and some wider considerations for future program design.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- To what extent are the outcomes achieved by the VLFP likely to endure beyond the timeframe of investment?
- Does the rationale for the VLFP still exist?
- What are the learnings from and recommended improvements for the VLFP? Consideration should be given to all key elements of the program, including support structures at the local, regional and state-wide level.
- What should be the primary areas of focus for Landcare facilitators to most effectively build group/network self-sustainability and effectiveness in achieving environmental outcomes?
- What is the proportionality of investment in the VLFP compared to centralised support and on-ground investment? Is this most appropriate blend for delivering the Victorian Government's strategic objectives for the Victorian Landcare Program?

4.1 LEGACY & RATIONALE FOR SUPPORT

This review highlights that the VLFP has been effective in delivering the Key Work Areas aimed at:

- Capacity building
- Engagement and partnership development
- Planning and priority setting
- Supporting on-ground NRM projects
- Securing grants and other funding
- Assisting with monitoring, reporting and evaluation
- Extending support to more groups, networks and landholders.

Anecdotal evidence collected through this review suggests that the facilitators have successfully helped to build local communities' capacity to deliver NRM activities on the ground and have delivered a range of wider benefits including increased social cohesion and improved rural liveability, and increased resilience in the face of major challenges including drought, bushfires and flooding. Perhaps most importantly, the facilitators are a vital conduit between government departments and agencies, and communities on the ground. As well as contributing towards NRM outcomes, trusted Landcare facilitators provide government with a vital means of making contact with rural communities.

Feedback from key stakeholders strongly underlines continued support for the role of facilitators, and continued demand for the services they provide. Survey responses highlight that Landcare groups' ability to deliver on-ground projects would likely be significantly reduced in the absence of facilitators, and that groups themselves may also dwindle without this crucial support. This suggests that although facilitators have not made Landcare groups and networks 'self-sustaining' or self-sufficient, they have played an important role in maintaining and supporting these important community volunteering groups.

4.2 LEARNINGS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Although the VLFP has been effective in delivering the Key Work Areas and supporting local communities to deliver NRM projects, there are a number of ways that the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the program could be improved.

Here we present summary of the key findings of this review focused on the current state of the VLFP, and recommendations to inform the future state.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Table 4-1: Program effectiveness

	KEY FINDINGS TO BE ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS
1	Delivery of the Key Work Areas	Improve activity-level reporting
	The VLFP has successfully delivered a wide range of activities across the seven Key Work Areas. The role played by facilitators is highly valued by those community members who have been involved in the program, and they are considered to be a key hub connecting a wide range of community networks.	To increase clarity and consistency of activity-level reporting, review and revise reporting templates and accompanying guidance. Implement annual reporting on activities.
2	Quality and efficiency of program delivery	Implement a systematic approach to continuous improvement
	Steps have been taken to ensure and improve the quality and efficiency of program delivery.	Implement a systematic approach to program review and continuous improvement. At a minimum this should include an annual review by key delivery staff of achievements and potential improvements.

PROGRAM IMPACT

Table 4-2: Program impact

	KEY FINDINGS TO BE ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS
3	Achievements of the Program	Improve Program MERI including outcome reporting
	The VLFP has helped to increase community capacity and supported effective participation in NRM activities in Victoria. However, clear articulation of, and reporting on, program outcomes is currently lacking.	Clearly articulate the intended outcomes of the VLFP. Develop an associated MERI Plan (including a program logic) setting out how these outcomes will be achieved, and how delivery of outcomes will be monitored and reported.
4	Contribution to wider strategic objectives	Update the Victorian Landcare Plan
	The VLFP makes a contribution to a range of strategic Victorian Government environmental and sustainable land management objectives, although alignment to these strategies is not well-described.	Review and update the Victorian Landcare Plan to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Clearly articulate the objectives of Victorian Government investment in Landcare 5. Set out the role of the VLFP in achieving those outcomes 6. Highlight the links to other Victorian Government strategies.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Table 4-3: Program design

	KEY FINDINGS TO BE ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS
5	Characteristics of the current model	Develop alternative models to improve program delivery
	The existing delivery model is highly devolved. Stakeholder feedback highlights a range of strengths and weaknesses for this model.	This review identifies a range of feasible alternative models to improve program delivery. As part of the case for future investment, DELWP should further develop their preferred model based on this assessment.
6	Current resourcing requirements	Review resourcing requirements for preferred future delivery model
	Evidence suggests that although the number of facilitators and their spatial coverage was adequate, resourcing for 'program support' is not currently sufficient.	Undertake an internal review of resourcing requirements to deliver the program effectively based on the department's preferred model. For devolved models, this should take into account the need for increased resourcing for the department to support local program delivery.

PROGRAM GOVERNANCE

Table 4-4: Program governance

	KEY FINDINGS TO BE ADDRESSED	RECOMMENDATIONS
7	Roles and responsibilities	Strengthen program governance arrangements and increase support
	There is a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities in relation to the current highly devolved delivery model. This creates significant reputational risk for DELWP.	Ensure that governance arrangements are robust and appropriate for the preferred program delivery model. This includes improved clarity and communicating regarding roles and responsibilities, and more robust requirements combined with increased support to ensure funding recipients are able to meet their obligations.

4.3 WIDER CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE INVESTMENT

Victorian Government investment in Landcare comprises three major key components¹³:

1. The Victorian Landcare Grants program
2. Investment in Landcare facilitators through the VLFP
3. Central and regional support for delivery – including the DELWP Landcare Team and the RLCs.

Through this review, we heard a range of feedback from stakeholders highlighting demand for increased resources for this investment portfolio, including specific feedback relating to each one of these components. However, it is worth noting the following considerations in relation to the proportionality of for future investment:

- **The scale-of-need for central and regional support for the VLFP will depend on the delivery model for future investment.** Alternative models ranging from highly centralised to highly devolved all have different resource implications depending on the level of governance and management devolved to local volunteer groups, and the extent to which costs can be shared with other organisations.
- **Significant changes to the overall resourcing for Landcare facilitators will directly impact the level of service that can be provided across the state.** Under the current model, full spatial coverage has been achieved through 78 facilitators, noting that there may be some (limited) opportunities to improve efficiency of this model by reducing overlaps and addressing the small number of cases where facilitators are required to service too many or too few groups. Although there was no clear demand for more facilitator positions, feedback did highlight demand for more facilitator time.
- **In developing a preferred delivery model, the department may choose to increase, decrease and/or redistribute the facilitator resource across the state.** However, the overall level of service delivery is directly correlated to the level of resourcing and so significant reductions in resources are likely to result in significant reductions in the service provided. Feedback from groups suggests that this is likely to reduce the scale and effectiveness of on-ground NRM projects, reduce landscape-level coordination and eventually erode the capacity of local community groups.
- **The availability of project funding was perhaps the most important factor in terms of increasing community capacity and supporting NRM project delivery.** Although one of the intentions of the facilitator program is to leverage new funding to support Landcare groups, in practice State Government is still one of the major direct contributors to NRM project delivery. A key question remains whether investment in a facilitator to build community capacity delivers greater benefits than the direct investment in projects themselves. This review highlights the diverse range of additional benefits that are delivered through the facilitator program (including increasing community resilience and facilitating government 'access' to regional and rural communities) - these may not have been achieved through direct investment in projects. However, there is currently not sufficient data to undertake a true cost-benefit analysis. Improved monitoring and reporting of program outcomes (including non-target benefits) is vital to enable such an analysis in future.

¹³ Additional components include Victorian Government investment in the Awards Program, Landmate, support for LVI and Landcare Australia.

Appendix 1 – Evaluation Framework

Table A1: Evaluation Framework for the VLFP Review¹⁴ and Stakeholder Engagement Plan

REVIEW AREA	HOW THIS EVALUATION QUESTION WILL BE ADDRESSED
<p>Program Effectiveness: Has the VLFP achieved its intended purpose and delivered the desired outcomes?</p>	
<p>To what extent has VLFP delivered on the seven Key Work Areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Built local community capacity to enable groups/networks to be self-sustaining ▪ Undertook community engagement and built partnerships ▪ Assisted with planning and priority setting processes ▪ Supported the development of on-ground natural resource management projects ▪ Secured project grants and other funding ▪ Assisted with monitoring, evaluation and reporting ▪ Extended support to more groups, networks and landholders <p>Has the VLFP been delivered efficiently and to a high standard?</p> <p>How does the effectiveness and capacity of facilitator-supported groups/networks compare to unsupported groups/networks?</p>	<p>VLFP Program Delivery Plans and reports (Collation of Facilitator reports)</p> <p>Survey (on-line, Engage site)</p> <p>Focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivery against each work area ▪ Role and value of facilitator from groups perspective ▪ Employment arrangements and support for facilitators ▪ Unexpected positive/negative outcomes <p>Target audience for survey:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VLFP-funded facilitators ▪ Recipient organisations of VLFP funding ▪ Host employers of VLFP-funded facilitators ▪ Groups un/supported by a VLFP-funded Landcare facilitator ▪ CMA-based Regional Landcare Coordinators
<p>Program Impact: To what extent has the VLFP contributed towards strategic Victorian Government environmental and sustainable land management objectives?</p>	
<p>What contributions has the VLFP made to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Victorian Landcare Program Strategic Plan? 	<p>VLFP Program Delivery Plans and reports</p>

¹⁴ Evaluation Framework was used to inform data collection. KEQs have been reordered in the report to improve presentation and readability.

<p>Has it contributed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victorians Volunteering for Nature Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037 and other major government strategies i.e. Agriculture Victoria plans? <p>What were unexpected positive/negative outcomes of the VLFP? For example, increased community resilience.</p>	<p>Group interviews (in person or via video conference)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VLFP-funded facilitators Victorian Landcare Program staff and Regional Landcare Coordinators VLFP funded regional organisations (incl hosts)
<p>Roles & Accountability: How well have Landcare facilitators built community capacity and enabled effective participation of Landcare and other environmental volunteers in projects that protect, enhance and restore our natural environment?</p>	
<p>How successful have Landcare facilitators been in delivering on their roles and responsibilities to support Landcare and other environmental volunteer groups/networks?</p> <p>How are the overall Landcare support structures currently interacting? How effectively do the different levels of Landcare support complement and support each other? To what extent is the structure successfully supporting the delivery of the VLFP?</p>	<p>VLFP Program Delivery Plans and reports (Collation of Facilitator reports)</p> <p>Survey (on-line, Engage site)</p> <p>Group interviews (in person or via video conference)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VLFP-funded facilitators Victorian Landcare Program staff and RLCs VLFP funded regional organisations (incl hosts) Peak bodies – i.e. Landcare Victoria Inc Representatives of other environmental volunteer groups – Victorian Environment Friends Network, Coastcare, Waterwatch
<p>Delivery Models: Is the current VLFP model the most effective approach to achieving its objectives and supporting the delivery of the Victorian Landcare Program and key Victorian Government objectives, such as Victorians Volunteering for Nature and Biodiversity 2037?</p>	
<p>Is the VLFP model an effective approach to engage the community in environmental volunteering and other similar activities?</p> <p>What lessons can be taken from similar programs in other jurisdictions?</p> <p>Provide analysis, including the advantages and disadvantages, of potential alternate models for delivering the VLFP. Consideration should be given to geographical spread, host employers and funding/contractual arrangements for delivery positions.</p>	<p>Group interviews (in person or via video conference)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VLFP-funded facilitators Victorian Landcare Program staff and RLCs VLFP funded regional organisations (incl hosts) Peak bodies – i.e. Landcare Victoria Inc Representatives of other environmental volunteer groups – Victorian Environment Friends Network, Coastcare, Waterwatch <p>Individual interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies – Parks Vic, Coastcare, Waterwatch, Local Government Vic Catchments

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peak bodies – i.e. Landcare Victoria Inc, Victorian Environment Friends Network ▪ Informants from other jurisdictions – e.g. ReefWatch, CoastCare etc.
<p>Learnings & Looking Forward: What changes can be made to the VLFP to increase delivery of strategic outcomes?</p>	
<p>What should be the primary areas of focus for Landcare facilitators to most effectively build group/network self-sustainability and effectiveness in achieving environmental outcomes?</p> <p>What are the learnings from and recommended improvements for the VLFP? Consideration should be given to all key elements of the program, including support structures at the local, regional and state-wide level.</p> <p>What is the proportionality of investment in the VLFP compared to centralised support and on-ground investment? Is this most appropriate blend for delivering the Victorian Government’s strategic objectives for the Victorian Landcare Program?</p> <p>To what extent are the outcomes achieved by the VLFP likely endure beyond the timeframe of investment?</p> <p>Does the rationale for the VLFP still exist?</p>	<p>Workshops on findings and future directions (in person or via video conference):</p> <p>1. Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Victorian Landcare Program staff ▪ Regional Landcare Coordinators <p>2. External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VLFP-funded facilitators and VLFP funded regional organisations (incl hosts) ▪ Key ‘external’ stakeholders - peak bodies and agencies

Table A2: Engagement plan for the VLFP Review

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	DATA COLLECTION METHOD	DETAILS
Landcare and environmental volunteers– incl. PV networks, VNPA, GA, Birds Vic etc. Identify Groups supported & unsupported by VLFP	Online survey plus follow-up interviews (Interview group 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Qualitative and quantitative questions. ▪ To be available via Engage web-site for a three week period. ▪ Optional phone and hard copies of the survey will be available upon request ▪ Follow-up interviews via self-nomination (i.e. offered as part of survey) and following analysis of the survey data (up to 15 interviews) Questions relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experiences with the program (incl. examples) ▪ work area activities ▪ 'characteristics of successful facilitators' ▪ Interest in, and options for, support in future
<p>Interview group 2 – Impacts, roles and responsibilities. These interviews will focus in two areas - regional delivery and the overall program. There will be one group interview per region that focusses on the contributions the program has made in that region. There will also be another 12 interviews covering the Victorian Landcare program staff, peak bodies and agencies.</p>		
Victorian Landcare Program staff, incl. Regional Landcare Coordinators	Individual & group interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One-on-one interviews (six), in-person (or via telephone), will be offered to Landcare Program staff. ▪ RLCs will be engaged via regional sessions as well as a specific group interview session (one) targeting them.
VLFP-funded facilitators - F68 and F10	Group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One group interview per CMA region (10) with all facilitators invited to participate.
VLFP funded regional organisations (incl hosts)	Regional sessions (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One group interview per CMA region (10).
Peak bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LVI ▪ Vic catchments ▪ TBC 	Tailored interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An interview guide will be developed for this group. ▪ One-on-one interviews (four), in-person (or via telephone).
Affiliate agencies/groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parks Victoria ▪ Waterwatch ▪ Coastcare ▪ VEFN ▪ TBC 	Tailored interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An interview guide will be developed for this group. ▪ One-on-one interviews (six), in-person (or via telephone).

Appendix 2 – Online Survey Questionnaire

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

Thank you for participating in this review. Your feedback is valuable to help us improve the program

The Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) is reviewing the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. This program aimed to build upon the strengths of Victorian Landcare by employing facilitators around the state. It has now been operating since 2011, although this review is focussed on the last four years. Reviews like this are part of normal government processes.

The key focus is on assessing the program's impact and effectiveness, and looking for opportunities to improve future iterations. The focus is solely on the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program as a specific funding initiative, not on the broader Victorian Landcare Program.

This survey is part of the review. All members of the Victorian community with an interest in Landcare or in similar community environment programs are invited to complete the survey.

RM Consulting Group has been engaged to act as the independent reviewer of the program and has developed this survey.

The closing date and time for this survey is 11.59pm on Tuesday 23rd July 2019.

Thank you for your assistance.

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

* 1. Which Catchment Management Authority region are you from?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Corangamite | <input type="radio"/> North East |
| <input type="radio"/> East Gippsland | <input type="radio"/> Port Phillip and Western Port |
| <input type="radio"/> Glenelg Hopkins | <input type="radio"/> West Gippsland |
| <input type="radio"/> Goulburn Broken | <input type="radio"/> Wimmera |
| <input type="radio"/> Mallee | <input type="radio"/> N/A |
| <input type="radio"/> North Central | |

* 2. Please select your current role/s

- Member of a Landcare group
- Member of a Landcare network
- Member of another environmental volunteer group e.g. Friends of, Conservation Management Network, Committee of Management, Coastcare, Waterwatch, EstuaryWatch, etc.)
- Landcare Coordinator
- VLFP Funded Landcare Facilitator
- CMA employee
- Other government staff (e.g. DELWP, Parks Victoria, EPA or water corporation)
- Local government
- Peak body representative (e.g. Landcare Victoria Incorporated (LVI) or the National Landcare Network)
- Landcare Australia employee or Board Member
- Other (please specify)

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

3. Is your group a part of a Landcare or similar network?

- Yes
 No
 N/A

4. What are the main activities that your group / network focusses on?

- Pest animal and weed control
 Revegetation and protecting remnant vegetation
 Coastal protection and restoration
 Soil health e.g. managing erosion, salinity
 Waterway (river, wetland or estuary) protection or restoration
 Threatened species conservation
 Waste or litter management
 Sustainable food production
 Citizen science or community based activities - e.g. bird counts etc, water quality readings)
 Community education and capacity building
 N/A
 Other (please specify)

5. How long have you been involved with Landcare or a similar environmental volunteering group?

- < 5 years
 5 - 10 years
 11 - 15 years
 15 - 20 years
 > 20 years

6. Which one best describes where you live?

- Rural
- Peri-urban
- Urban
- Regional city or town
- Other (please specify)

7. Which one best describes your property?

- Cropping
- Grazing
- Mixed farming
- Other (please specify)
- Lifestyle / hobby farm
- Managing for conservation purposes
- Urban / town house block or apartment

* 8. Has your group/network received support from a Landcare facilitator employed through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program?

- Yes - from a Landcare facilitator employed by our group or network
- Yes - from a Landcare facilitator employed by another network or group
- No - but we had support from another agency
- No - we didn't receive any support from another agency
- Don't know
- N/A

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

* 9. Think back to before your group/network had a VLFP funded Landcare Facilitator. Compared to then, how would you rate the health of your group now?

Much better

Slightly worse

Slightly better

Much worse

Stayed the same

Can you please explain why?

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

10. By which means is the Landcare Facilitator employed?

- Directly by a Landcare group
- Directly by a Landcare Network
- Hosted by a CMA
- Hosted by a Landcare Network
- Hosted by Local Government
- Don't know
- N/A
- Hosted by another organisation

11. What are the advantages of the employment arrangements?

12. What are the challenges of the employment arrangements?

13. How do you think the facilitator's employment arrangements could be improved?

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

The 78 Landcare facilitator positions are aimed at delivering activities under seven Key Work Areas. These are specified in the Program Delivery Plans. Please look at each Key Work Area below and rate how well you think these activities have been delivered.

Key Work Area 1: Building local community capacity to enable groups / networks to be sustainable

- assist with the development and delivery of capacity building activities such as courses, workshops, seminars and field days;
- increase the provision of information to groups by keeping them informed of funding, learning and other relevant opportunities; and
- assist groups/networks to function effectively and adopt appropriate governance processes and procedures.

14. How well do you think this activity has been delivered?

	Not well	Reasonably well	Very well	Don't know
Key Work Area 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you please explain why?

Key Work Area 2: Undertaking community engagement and building partnerships

- facilitate information sharing, cooperation, collaboration and networking among Landcare groups/networks and with Landcare staff;
- assist groups/networks to engage local communities in Landcare activities;
- assist groups/networks with their efforts to engage landholders in Landcare;
- promote and provide opportunities for broader community participation in Landcare activities; and
- develop and support local partnerships with other community groups, organisations and schools to increase awareness of, and involvement and participation in Landcare.

15. How well do you think this activity has been delivered?

	Not well	Reasonably well	Very well	Don't know
Key Work Area 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you please explain why?

Key Work Area 3: Assisting with planning and priority setting processes

- assist groups/networks with the development or review of action or strategic plans
- assist with the interpretation of regional natural resource management plans and priorities at group or network scale;
- assist with the development of landholder property plans; and
- build community knowledge and understanding of natural resource management policies, plans and programs and priority setting processes.

16. How well do you think this activity has been delivered?

	Not well	Reasonably well	Very well	Don't know
Key Work Area 3	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you please explain why?

Key Work Area 4: Supporting the development of on-ground natural resource management projects

- facilitate access to natural resource management advice, specialist information and expertise to support the development of projects; and
- assist with the planning and development of on-ground projects.

17. How well do you think this activity has been delivered?

	Not well	Reasonably well	Very well	Don't know
Key Work Area 4	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you please explain why?

Key Work Area 5: Securing project grants and other funding

- identify and promote grants and funding opportunities; and
- facilitate groups/networks to apply for and secure funding for projects.

18. How well do you think this activity has been delivered?

	Not well	Reasonably well	Very well	Don't know
Key Work Area 5	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you please explain why?

Key Work Area 6: Assisting with monitoring, evaluation and reporting

- assist groups/networks establish systems or processes for the monitoring of projects;
- collaborate with Regional Landcare Coordinators to assist with data collection, group/network health surveys, and group/network mapping.

19. How well do you think this activity has been delivered?

	Not well	Reasonably well	Very well	Don't know
Key Work Area 6	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you please explain why?

Key Work Area 7: Extending support to more groups, networks (and landholders)

- facilitate the establishment of new groups/networks in gap areas, i.e. where there are currently no groups/networks; and/or
- extend support to adjoining Landcare groups/networks that currently don't receive facilitator support; and/or
- facilitate the revival or re-establishment of Landcare groups/networks that are currently dormant; and
- pursue new or different ways of engaging more landholders and the wider community in Landcare. In particular for facilitators who are unable to extend their support geographically to more groups/networks.

20. How well do you think this activity has been delivered?

	Not well	Reasonably well	Very well	Don't know
Key Work Area 7	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you please explain why?

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

21. Were there particular achievements or successes where having the VLFP Funded Facilitator was critical?

22. Is your Landcare group / network doing anything differently as a result of having a VLFP Funded Facilitator?

23. What aspects of the VLFP facilitator role do you think could be improved?

24. Are there any long-term impacts of the facilitator program? i.e. if it stopped tomorrow what would be some of the lasting changes

* 25. **If you are / were a facilitator**, did you get enough support to fulfil your role?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

Can you please explain?

* 26. **If your organisation is / was an employer of a facilitator**, was there enough support for your organisation?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

Can you please explain?

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

27. Name the agency or initiative that has provided your group/network with support (please specify)

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

28. What achievements has your group made over the last few years? i.e. grants obtained, natural resource management projects, partnerships with other groups, membership numbers

29. If your group or network would benefit from access to a facilitator what type support would you seek from that facilitator?

30. If you expected to have support from a facilitator but did not, could you describe what happened?

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) Review

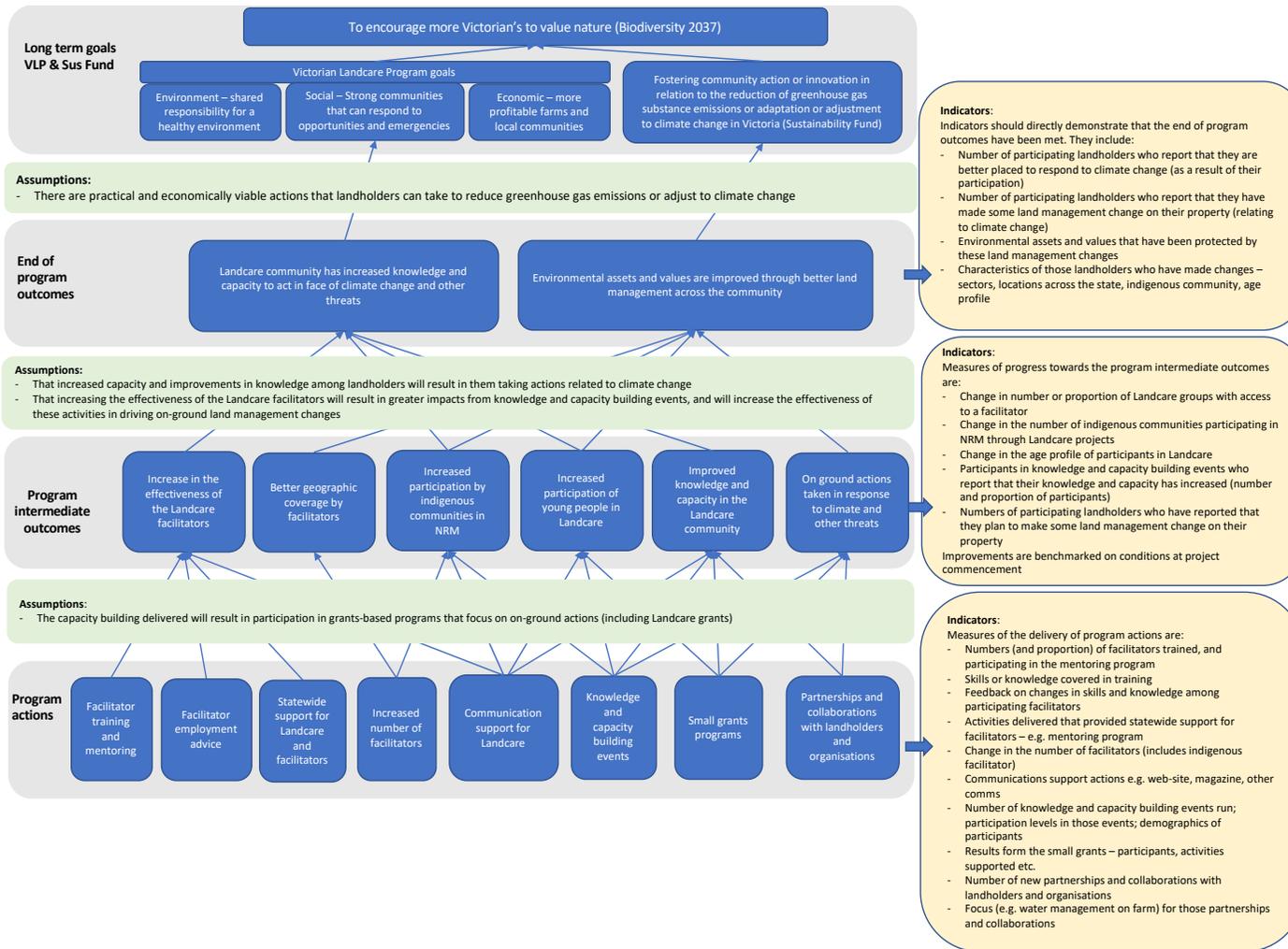
31. Do you have any other ideas on how the overall program could be improved?

32. How did you find out about this survey

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Landcare Gateway website | <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email from Regional Landcare Coordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email from Landcare facilitator | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email from Landcare network | <input type="checkbox"/> Word of mouth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email from Landcare group | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

Appendix 3 – Program logic for F10

This program logic was prepared in June 2018 for the evaluation of the Support for Landcare initiative.



This report has been prepared by:

RM Consulting Group Pty Ltd trading as RMCG

Level 1 East, 1100-1102 Toorak Road, Camberwell Victoria 3124

(03) 9882 2670 — rmcg.com.au — ABN 73 613 135 247

Offices in Bendigo, Melbourne, Torquay and Warragul (Victoria) and
Penguin and Hobart (Tasmania)



Key Project Contact

Claire Feniuk

0452 379 869 — cfeniuk@rmcg.com.au

Document review and authorisation

Job Number: #0545

Doc Version	Final/Draft	Date	Author	Project Director review	BST QA review	Release approved by	Issued to
1.0	Draft	02/08/19	C. Feniuk S. Annett	S. Annett	S. Annett	S. Annett	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
2.0	Final	16/08/19	C. Feniuk S. Annett	S. Annett	S. Annett	S. Annett	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
3.0	Final (Revised)	10/09/19	C. Feniuk S. Annett	S. Annett	J. Belz	S. Annett	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
4.0	Final (Revised)	30/09/19	C. Feniuk S. Annett	S. Annett		S. Annett	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning