

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program Review

Key Findings, Recommendations & Actions



December 2019



Victorian
Landcare
Program



Environment,
Land, Water
and Planning

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the Landcare facilitators, community members, Landcare and environmental volunteer groups and networks who contributed to the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program Review via the regional workshops, phone interviews and online survey.

Thank you to the Catchment Management Authorities, Landcare Victoria Incorporated and the Victorian Environment Friends Network who continue to work closely with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to build on and professionalise the current Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program to improve outcomes aligned with *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037's* vision for Victoria's biodiversity to be healthy, valued and actively cared for.

Photo credit

Lisette Mill, Landcare Facilitator, Basalt to Bay Landcare Network (far right), Landcare facilitators and representatives from Landcare Australia, CFA, Glenelg Hopkins CMA and DELWP in front of a newly recorded Aboriginal scar tree on Gunditjmara Country. Lisette was responsible for the identification and recording of this Aboriginal scar tree, which is now registered on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System, and protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* 2006.

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



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Context

The Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program (VLFP) is an important mechanism by which the Victorian Government empowers and supports local communities to act for the environment. The VLFP currently supports 78 part-time Landcare facilitators employed by VLFP funding recipient organisations (including Landcare groups and networks) and a range of host employers, with contracts currently in place to 30 June 2020. Funding for these Landcare facilitator positions was supported through the 2016 State Budget, which provided \$18 million over four years for the Victorian Landcare Program (VLP), including the VLFP. The VLFP represents the second tranche of multi-year funding for Landcare facilitators, superseding the Victorian Local Landcare Facilitator Initiative consisting of \$12 million from the 2011 State Budget to fund 68 part-time Landcare facilitator roles over four years.

The Landcare facilitators are focussed on building the capacity and capability of Landcare and other environmental volunteer groups and networks that care for our landscapes. The Landcare facilitators assist groups in leveraging investment in Landcare and support the delivery of on-ground works and community engagement projects that support environmental, social and agricultural outcomes across Victoria.

In June 2019, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) secured RM Consulting Group to design and deliver a participatory review of the four-year VLFP, investigating program effectiveness, impact, roles and accountability and alternative delivery models. This review has provided an important opportunity to hear from community members and we acknowledge the input of the 145 participants who attended the 10 regional workshops that were supported by Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), and the 592 respondents who completed the online survey.

This document highlights the recommendations from the VLFP review and DELWP's response to these recommendations within the current policy context (including *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037* and *Victorians Volunteering for Nature - Environmental Volunteering Plan*). This document also provides details about the actions that DELWP will undertake to implement the recommendations in the review to improve the design and delivery of the VLFP so that it is more effective, efficient and has a greater impact.

Key Achievements

The support provided to Landcare and other environmental volunteer groups and networks through the VLFP has played an important role in increasing community capacity to deliver natural resource management projects on the ground. This includes building partnerships, securing grants and supporting project delivery.

There are over 650 Landcare and other environmental volunteer groups and networks that are supported by VLFP-funded Landcare facilitators across Victoria. Feedback from the VLFP review highlighted that the Landcare facilitators play an important role in the community, supporting the following:

- + increasing community capacity
- + building and maintaining partnerships
- + securing grants for on-ground works
- + supporting project planning & development
- + improving community engagement, awareness, knowledge and skills
- + building and supporting local Landcare and environmental volunteer groups/networks

Key Challenges

The review revealed key challenges in the following areas:

Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI)

The review noted that there was inconsistency around the interpretation of and reporting on DELWP's standard outputs. It was also difficult to distinguish between the outputs delivered by groups/networks themselves compared to the outputs the Landcare facilitators have had a direct role in delivering. Delays in reporting templates, lack of strategic alignment to the current Victorian Government policy and lack of clearly defined objectives for the VLFP, have created further challenges for both the groups and networks employing Landcare facilitators and the Landcare facilitators themselves. Consequently, it is difficult to obtain robust and consistent data that can be linked to key targets in *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037*. There is an opportunity to improve data standards and collection so that the important work being delivered by Landcare facilitators, groups and networks is understood and reflected in progress towards the goals of *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037*.

Program Design and Governance

Feedback through the review's consultation process identified that there was clear and strong support for the level of flexibility and local empowerment that the current delivery model provides. However, this level of devolution also creates several challenges including:

- + placing the burden of responsibility on volunteer committees to manage Landcare facilitators' employment arrangements, work planning, day-to-day management, payroll, workplace health and safety etc.
- + a potential lack of the appropriate knowledge/skills/capacity within some committees to appropriately manage this range of responsibilities as employers.
- + challenges (for DELWP) with providing the desired level of support to a large number of employers with diverse employment arrangements.

In many cases, the Landcare networks and groups who employ Landcare facilitators are highly organised and run like professional organisations, however others need additional governance support to ensure they can appropriately manage the employment of Landcare facilitators professionally and effectively. The review provides the opportunity to prepare a suite of governance related support information to help host-employers in the employment of facilitators. This will reduce the burden of responsibility and will ensure the employer has the right skills and tools to manage their responsibilities as employers.

Developing a New Delivery Model

Key strengths of the current model highlighted in the review include:

- + the high degree of control and flexibility it gives groups and networks.
- + allowing groups to determine how the Landcare facilitator role is used to meet the needs of local communities.
- + perceived independence of Landcare facilitators from government, as they are instead seen to represent community interests, reflective of a grassroots environmental movement.

The review also highlighted how this approach can result in negative consequences such as the significant variation in the level of service provided to groups by Landcare facilitators (aligned with the ratio of Landcare facilitators to groups), and in some cases significant governance issues.

The five alternative delivery models outlined in the review report range from highly devolved local control through to centralised models. As well as the alternative models outlined in the review, there are also learnings to be taken from other jurisdictions that require consideration to help determine the final preferred delivery model. DELWP will continue to work with key stakeholders to develop a preferred delivery model that will enable the Landcare facilitators and the groups/networks they support to thrive by:

- + addressing the challenges outlined in the review's final report
- + implementing the actions in this Key Findings, Recommendations and Actions report including:
 - o incorporating improved governance and reporting processes
 - o adopting minimum employment standards
 - o developing and implementing a MERI framework
- + applying learnings from other jurisdictions, where appropriate.

Findings, Recommendations & Actions

As per the 2015 review of the VLP (also conducted by RM Consulting Group), this review reiterated that the VLFP is a highly valued component of the VLP. There are seven key findings and recommendations in the 2019 review's final report, which are aligned with the following themes: Program Effectiveness, Program Impact, Program Design, and Program Governance. DELWP's response and proposed actions to these finding and recommendations are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: VLFP Review - Key Findings, Recommendations & Actions

Theme	#	Key Findings to be Addressed	Recommendations	DELWP's Response	Action
Program Effectiveness	1	Delivery of the Key Work Areas The VLFP has successfully delivered a wide range of activities across the seven Key Work Areas ¹ (KWA). 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.	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.	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide improved activity-level reporting templates and guidance so that its very clear for Landcare facilitators and their employers what should be reported and counted. • Review and revise activity-level indicators using the seven KWAs as a framework. • Maintain and build on reporting improvements commenced in 2019, including annual reporting. • The actions above will form part of the MERI plan that is to be developed, as outlined in Recommendation 3.
	2	Quality and efficiency of program delivery Steps have been taken to ensure and improve the quality and efficiency of program delivery.	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.	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key delivery staff to undertake an annual review of the VLFP's key achievements and identify issues, gaps and areas for improvement and provide feedback to Landcare facilitators, their employers and the Landcare community. • Develop and implement a systematic approach to continuous improvement (as part of the MERI plan as outlined in Recommendation 3).

1. The VLFP-funded Landcare Facilitators deliver activities against the seven Key Work Areas (KWAs) in their Program Delivery Plans:

- KWA 1: Building local community capacity to enable groups/networks to be self-sustaining.
- KWA 2: Undertaking community engagement and building partnerships.
- KWA 3: Assisting with planning and priority setting processes.
- KWA 4: Supporting the development of on-ground natural resource management projects.
- KWA 5: Securing project grants and other funding.
- KWA 6: Assisting with monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
- KWA 7: Extending support to more groups, networks (and landholders).

Program Impact	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.	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.	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop robust MERI plan that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + a clear program logic showing how the outcomes for the VLFP will be delivered through the each of the Key Work Areas. + a clear set of indicators that can be used to monitor achievements at both activity-level and outcome-level. + a monitoring and reporting framework that sets out monitoring and reporting requirements (how), responsibilities (who) and frequency (how often).
	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.	Update the Victorian Landcare Plan Review and update to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly articulate the objectives of Victorian Government investment in Landcare Set out the role of the VLFP in achieving these objectives (via short, medium and long-term outcomes) Highlight the links to other Victorian Government strategies. 	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a Strategic Plan for the Victorian Landcare Program that clarifies and communicates the objectives of the Victorian Government's investment in Landcare, including the VLFP. Articulate how the VLFP delivers on the Victorian Government's wider strategic policies, including <i>Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037</i> and <i>Victorians Volunteering for Nature - Environmental Volunteering Plan</i>. This will also form part of the MERI plan as outlined in Recommendation 3.
Program Design	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.	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.	Support in principle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options for the future delivery model of the VLFP to be prepared for government consideration. This will also inform part of the refresh of the Strategic Plan for the Victorian Landcare Program (Recommendation 4).
	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.	Review resourcing requirements for preferred future delivery model Undertake an internal review of resourcing requirements to deliver the program effectively based on DELWP's preferred model. For devolved models, this should take into account the need for increased resourcing for DELWP to support local program delivery.	Support in principle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources to support delivery of preferred model will be determined.

Program Governance	7	Roles and responsibilities <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>	Strengthen program governance arrangements and increase support <p>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 are able to meet their obligations.</p>	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear, up-front information on roles and responsibilities to recipient organisations of VLFP funding. • Incorporate minimum employment standards and improved governance arrangements as part of future delivery of the program and adopt safeguards to ensure they are maintained. • Provide guidance and training opportunities to better support employer organisations of Landcare facilitators to ensure they meet the minimum employment standards. • Develop support tools to be shared via the Landcare Gateway. For example, FAQs on the new minimum employment standards.
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Further Considerations

The process of the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program Review has identified further opportunities for the Victorian Government to build the capacity and capability of Landcare groups/networks and environmental volunteer groups across the state.

Landowners and community volunteers (through Landcare groups/networks and other environmental volunteer groups) are actively caring for our natural environment across Victoria every day. Many of these groups and networks have been strengthened by the support provided by the VLFP-funded Landcare facilitators, whereas other groups continue to seek additional support. We look forward to building on the work achieved through the delivery of the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program over the past eight years to deliver outcomes that align with government policy. In the context of *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037* and *Victorians Volunteering for Nature - Environmental Volunteering Plan* we will continue to explore opportunities to develop the relationship between the Victorian Government, key stakeholders and peak bodies that support Landcare groups/networks and environmental volunteer groups that care for our landscapes to establish partnerships that benefit our environment and biodiversity.

Regular updates from DELWP on the implementation of the actions outlined in this document will be available on the Victorian Landcare Gateway – see link below.

Further information

For more information on the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program Review please visit:

<https://www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/victorian-landcare-facilitator-program/vlfp-review-2019/updates/> or email DELWP's Victorian Landcare Program staff via landcare@delwp.vic.gov.au

