

29 June 2012

Stephen Clark  
Director, Natural Resources Policy and Strategy  
PO Box 500  
East Melbourne  
VIC 3002

Dear Stephen,

### **DRAFT LANDCARE PROGRAM STRATEGIC PLAN**

The Victorian Farmers Federation welcomes the opportunity to submit on the draft Victorian Landcare Program Strategic Plan (the Plan).

As a high level document the Plan describes the grass roots movement that is Landcare, and sets out the ways in which the Landcare Program should support this movement. It is notable that the document appears more akin to a funding and support framework, as opposed to a strategy. For many grassroots organisations the more important question will be how and where the money will be spent.

A critical issue that is systemic to the Strategic Plan is the consistent focus on environmental outcomes above all else. On page 5 of the Plan the document acknowledges that the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the administrator of the Landcare Program, "invests in projects and programs that have tangible and demonstrable environmental and community benefits for Victoria". It is clear that this investment focus is born out in the Plan.

Landcare in Victoria was started by farmers, as the Plan acknowledges. Productive agriculture was, is, and will continue to be a key focus of many Landcare groups. Many natural resource management practices are undertaken primarily to protect and improve the agricultural productivity of land, with environmental outcomes a secondary motivator. The Plan must consistently reflect dual objectives of environmental stewardship and agricultural productivity.

It is our belief that the Department of Primary Industries should be a co-administrator of the Landcare Program to ensure a focus on land productivity is applied in making funding decisions.


In addition to the comments above, we have identified some specific parts of the Plan that should be changed:

- Page 6 – "Ideally, accomplishing the five functions will lead to the shared responsibility for a healthy environment that the public values (and is investing in), and in turn will create some additional social and economic benefits...". This statement places environmental outcomes above social and economic outcomes, even though for many groups the benefits are more economically motivated.
- Page 8 – "Landcare is a way of bringing people together around common natural resource management issues...". We support the use of the term natural resource management, rather than "environmental". Natural resource management reflects that for many people the land is a productive asset, i.e. a resource.

- Page 10 – “The common goal of Landcare groups and networks across Victoria is to enhance and protect the environment...”. We suggest this should be changed to “The common goal...is to enhance and protect natural resources”.
- Page 10 – “On-ground Improvements to the Condition of the Environment”. We suggest you amend this to be “On-ground Improvements to the Condition of the Environment and the Productivity of Land”.

If you wish to discuss any issues raised in this submission further, please contact the VFF's Land Management Policy Adviser, Jacob McElwee, on 03 9207 5552, or at [jmcelwee@vff.org.au](mailto:jmcelwee@vff.org.au).

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. W. Leach". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

**Gerald Leach**  
**Land Management Committee Chair**