

## **Guidelines for the Formation of a Landcare Group**



Landcare involves local people taking action to prevent the degradation of our natural resources and to achieve sustainable and profitable land use in their area. Landcare groups may be formed where people wish to work together and take tangible action to improve natural resource management practices in their district. Landcare groups use local knowledge to solve local problems and lead by example.

These guidelines will help your community to form a landcare group. A nine step process is described.

### **Step 1: Initiate local action to form a Landcare Group**

The first step in forming a landcare group is to stimulate local discussion about landcare and the need for a local group. This can be achieved as follows:

- identify and promote local issues to landholders, organisations, local government and others in the area.
- obtain information and assistance from your Regional Landcare Facilitator, on what a group may do, the way other groups operate and how you might go about forming a committee.
- discuss the merits of forming a landcare group at meetings of local government and other organisations.
- call a public meeting at which the functions of a group and its benefits can be explained to a wide cross-section of the community.
- arrange for a representative of a landcare group from another district, or the local Landcare Coordinator to address local meeting.

Proceed to step 2 when you consider there is sufficient interest to form a landcare group.

### **Step 2: Identify and inform key groups, organisations and individuals**

To be effective a landcare group must have the confidence of the community and government. There are a range of factors, particularly the membership, which will influence the credibility of the group. No group or agency should have an overriding influence on the formation of the landcare group. It is important that membership represents the range of interest in the locality.

Before forming a steering group it is important to consider organisations already existing in the area.

- Identify key groups, organisations and individuals that need to be involved in the formation of a landcare group;
- inform all the groups and individuals of the plan for a landcare group and invite them to become involved (personal contact is often the best way to ensure they are informed).

In some cases a landcare group may be formed from an existing community group and broadening its objectives, membership and area of interest. In most cases a new steering group will need to be formed.

### **Step 3: Establish a steering group**

A steering group consists of people who reflect the interests and concerns of the community and organisations in your area. Its job is to oversee the formation of the landcare group.

It is essential that the steering group be highly credible and have the support of the community to form a landcare group. To form a steering group, relevant individuals, organisations and agencies should be contacted and given the opportunity to participate. The steering group is generally selected at a public meeting.

The steering group should then consider:

- the objectives of the proposed group
- area to be covered by the group
- composition of the group to obtain a cross-section of views

### **Objectives**

While the objectives of a landcare group will vary from district to district, most groups should reflect a long term commitment to a diversity of natural resource management issues and include:

- raising community awareness of resource management issues;
- educating the public on these issues and the means to address them;
- fostering cooperation between land-users, including government agencies, whenever action is needed to improve natural resource management;
- fostering action of local people to tackle local issues in their area.

## **Area to be covered**

The area to be served by a landcare group should be small enough to ensure that members are able to relate effectively with landusers but large enough to attract general community interest. In some cases, catchment boundaries may provide suitable boundaries.

## **Composition**

A landcare group should have a membership which reflects the range of interests in the locality and has active contacts with local and state government departments, businesses and other community groups. The steering group should recommend a method for forming the group which achieves a wide membership.

Any interested person may join a landcare group. Organisations such as producer groups, local authorities and relevant government departments may nominate representatives to be members of the group.

## **Step 5: Form the landcare group**

The Steering Group should then take action to establish the landcare group seeking wide membership from the community. This may involve arranging public meetings to elect members, seeking nominations from industry organisations, local authorities and other groups.

The first meeting of the group provides an opportunity for publicity and should be organised as an event with media possibilities.

The steering group should be disbanded at this meeting and a management committee may be elected to manage the group. A chair, secretary and treasurer should be elected at the first meeting. Other items to consider include proxies, meeting times and frequency, and rules for conducting meetings.

## **Step 6: Decide whether to incorporate**

Groups formed with the intention of undertaking significant projects involving the collection and disbursement of moneys including project grants, should consider incorporation under the Associations Incorporation Act 1981.

Benefits of incorporation and information on becoming incorporated can be found at: <http://www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au/incorporated-associations.htm>

They include:

- liabilities of an incorporated association are enforced against the association and not against committee members personally;
- an incorporated association is able to enter into contacts in its corporate name;
- an incorporated association is able to sue and be sued in its own name;

- the ability of an incorporated association to hold property in its corporate name without the necessity of appointing trustees.

While incorporation induces a sense of autonomy, it also imposes additional administrative requirements, such as the submission of audited returns to the Office of Fair Trading. Auditing of financial statements and their lodgement involves some annual cost, as well as the cost of lodging an application for incorporation.

Thus the decision to incorporate depends mainly on the financial situation and expected performance of the group and the tolerance of its members to the rules and auditing costs associated with incorporation.

### **Step 7: Prepare the constitution**

The Landcare group should prepare a constitution outlining the objectives and meeting procedures of the group.

Groups that elect not to become incorporated may develop their own constitutions.

### **Step 8: Register as a landcare group**

Following adoption of its constitution, the group should contact Queensland Water and Land Carers (QWaLC) to register their new landcare group.

QWaLC provide public liability and personal accident insurance to protect members undertaking group activities.

Become a financial member of Landcare Queensland (\$20 per year) to be eligible for funding, free training and other benefits through their corporate partnership program.

### **Step 9: Commence action**

Activities carried out by landcare groups will vary from place to place. To achieve its objectives, a landcare group is likely to become involved in:

- identifying the main natural resource management problems in the area;
- prioritising the issues and deciding on which ones can be acted on by the group;
- preparing an action plan to address the problems, including the identification of milestones for the coming year;
- obtaining resources and community support to help implement actions;
- educational programs (such as Saltwatch, Waterwatch);
- organising activities (such as field days, seminars, discussion evenings and school excursions) to educate the community about good natural resource use and management;
- encouraging good liaison between local authorities, land users, government departments and other organisations;

- organising team action within the local community to implement solutions;
- reporting progress to the local community and organisations;

It may take some time for your new group to start working as a team, particularly if there is a diversity of interests represented. Look on any stormy sessions as an opportunity to exchange views and develop a shared understanding of an issue. Trained facilitators can provide professional assistance in team building and group dynamics.

Assistance from trained facilitators can also help the landcare group through the initial planning phases to develop a shared vision and action plan. Facilitation assistance may be found in your local community.

Try to tap into local expertise. Many communities have a wide range of skills and expertise that can be invaluable to help the group get started and maintain momentum.

### **Project Funds**

Landcare groups are eligible to apply for Commonwealth or Queensland Government grants to assist with specific projects. Groups may also apply for funds to employ a project officer to conduct specific project activities. Information on the guidelines and availability of these funds can be obtained from your regional landcare facilitator or on government websites.

### **Useful reading**

Publications are available to assist group members who wish to learn more about obtaining resources, getting their message to the public, motivating community action for natural resource management and other skills that might assist groups to achieve their objectives. The following publications are recommended:

Mortiss, P.D. (1993). *Extension for Rural Change..(2nd)*. Department of Primary Industries, Queensland.

Chamala,S and Mortiss, P. (1990). *Working Together for Landcare - Group Management Skills and Strategies*. Australian Academic Press, Brisbane.

Carman, K. and Keith, K (1994). *Community Consultation: Purposes, Processes and Pitfalls - A Guide for Planners and Facilitators*. Department of Primary Industries, Queensland.