

Rebuilding Natural Capital in a Tough Climate

— thoughts on regional NRM
based on community, equity and sustainability

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Key Points

- We need to revitalise landcare and NRM in Australia
- Kevin Rudd's professed values of equity, community and sustainability are spot on
- The opportunities are immense, the imperative is urgent
- This agenda needs to be nested cohesively within a bigger picture of climate, water, energy and food systems
- This talk outlines a new trajectory for landcare and regional NRM
- Including what makes a successful CMA



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Backdrop

- Steep & rapid climate change (chaos)
- Food systems struggling, with demands increasing
- Steep price rises for energy and nutrients (& carbon?) imminent
- A rural sector under pressure
- An environment sector increasingly frustrated
- Recalibration of the respective roles of governments and markets, and re-learning the need for a moral compass to guide them
- Recognition of the need to invest in skills, innovation and infrastructure



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A seismic shift

Kevin Rudd, Westminster Abbey, 31 March 2009:
suggesting that the free market needs a moral compass:

*“To these values of security, liberty and prosperity
must also be grafted the values of
equity, of sustainability and community.”*

- Equity, Sustainability, Community...
- Sounds like Landcare values to me



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The imperative

- Rapid, often surprising, on-going environmental change will challenge governments and industries, and stress communities
- Many responses (proactive and reactive) will need to be designed and/or interpreted at regional and local levels. Tough decisions will be needed. Successful implementation depends on community support.
- We need an environmentally literate and capable delivery framework at a regional scale, with strong community support, involving community leaders and engaging grassroots volunteers
- Policy convergence in climate, energy, water and food systems will require an integrated regional planning & delivery framework
- Evidence-based policy depends on a good evidence base, trusted by stakeholders. We need frameworks that build on local knowledge and that can report at a fine-grained level across the whole country.

The opportunity

- Re-engage the community sector
- Build an environmentally literate (and equitable) regional framework
 - For regional planning
 - For guiding (not always implementing) public & private investment
 - As a bridge between government & community
- Honour the path pioneered by Hawke, Kerin, Cook, Farley, Toyne, Joan Kirner, Heather Mitchell and tens of thousands of volunteers
- Repairs & Maintenance and renovation of crucial social and environmental infrastructure in rural Australia
- Give tangible effect to the PM's values of equity, community and sustainability
- Finally get our act together on knowledge and innovation, moving beyond policy amnesia, adhocery and myopia

A 7 point plan for renovating NRM

1. **Rejuvenate** Landcare and Re-engage the Community
2. **Reinforce** the Regional Model
3. **Rewire** Environmental Information Systems
4. **Revolutionise** Agricultural Research, Extension and Education
5. **Reform** Drought Policy & Rural & Regional Services
6. **Re-unite** the Carbon, Water, Energy, Food, Farming and Fire agendas
7. **Redesign** the Institutional Architecture



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Underpinning principles

- Building Resilience
- Balancing centralism and subsidiarity
- Re-engaging stakeholders and devolving responsibility
- Taking the time necessary to sort through complex, contested, connected issues
- Building, sustaining and using a comprehensive evidence base
- Investing in skills, knowledge, innovation and leadership
- Budgeting for longer term stability



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Where have we come from?

- **20 years ago**, (July 1989) Bob Hawke announced the Decade of Landcare and a 30-fold increase in Commonwealth funding
- **1980s-1990s: the landcare decades**
 - Cooperative work across farm boundaries, neighbourhood group extension, rationalisation of government services, global sustainability issues
- **1996-2007: consolidation of a national approach**
 - political prominence and engagement: COAG, Wentworth Group
 - Major Multilateral Programs (>\$5 billion)
 - COAG Water Reform, National Competition Policy
 - Natural Heritage Trust 1 and 2, National Action Plan
 - Evolution of the Regional NRM Model
- **2008—: focus on key national assets**



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Where are we now?

Three major developments in NRM over the last 20 years:

1. Community landcare
 2. The regional model
 3. Assets-based approach — evidence-based targeting
- There is a tendency to see these developments as sequential: each supplanting the previous approach
 - In fact they should be implemented in parallel
 - They are complementary, mutually reinforcing
 - Synergistic with good planning & delivery



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Observations on Caring for our Country

- Setting national priorities and targets inherently sound
- Business Plan a good idea
- Focusing a critical mass of effort and investment on high priority assets is also sound, especially where those assets cross state and regional boundaries
- It is likely that some valuable new partnerships and collaborations will emerge from successful projects
 - Public investment in NRM should not be a closed shop

Observations on Caring for our Country (II)

BUT: the assets-based approach fails the equity test — it implicitly suggests the rest of the country doesn't matter

- ecological apartheid
- big long-term issues all demand landscape-scale, tenure-blind approaches
- Targeted national investment should be on top of, not instead of, the enabling, underpinning framework investments that necessarily should cover the whole country
 - Community engagement, Science, Planning, Extension, Education, MERI
- This iteration of C4C undermines important features of the Australian community-based approach. Competition corrodes collaboration. **Huge transaction costs.**
- Some babies have been thrown out with the bathwater
- **Fortunately, the situation is retrievable, if we act now**

Rejuvenating Landcare

First, some unhelpful myths:

1. That we have 'done landcare and it didn't work'
 - i.e., resource degradation has continued, therefore landcare failed;
 2. That we have 'done that and need to move on'
 - i.e., we have completed the task of awareness raising and improving knowledge and understanding of NRM;
 3. Landcare cannot deliver landscape-scale change
 - i.e., we need new approaches that can operate at a larger scale
- Allan Curtis has just submitted a major review* of landcare impacts based on extensive empirical data over 15 years
 - Showing significant on-ground benefits & value



- **Other OECD countries would love such an asset**

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13 * forthcoming paper submitted to the *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* CONSULTING

Rejuvenating Landcare (II)

The case for a major rejuvenation of landcare

- Grassroots community involvement and ownership is fundamental to the long-term success, durability and resilience of any environment agenda, in a country without a strong regulatory/compliance culture
- Community engagement is an essential condition, but not sufficient
- The awareness and knowledge task will never be completed. Issues change, knowledge grows, and new entrants need to be engaged
- Australia will see a massive change in land & water ownership & management over the next decade, and rapid environmental change
- Most NRM knowledge resides at the local level
- A vibrant community base will be critical
- Landcare is a great brand, extremely well known
- International opportunities are significant
- It ticks all the boxes for the Rudd values & agenda



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Rejuvenating Landcare (III)

Let's not be starry-eyed:

- Landcare does not work everywhere — never has
 - We don't want or need a 'one size fits all' approach
- Groups go through a natural evolution
 - some die a natural death, that's OK - don't try to exhume them
 - Landcare is moribund in many districts

BUT, let's also understand fully why landcare is struggling

- Landcare in Australia has had no strategic attention for more than a decade
- Problems are symptomatic of policy neglect, amnesia, adhocery & myopia
- The regional model has undermined landcare in many regions
- The facilitator network has been a shambles, and funding often too cumbersome
- Much of the criticism could more accurately be directed to governments, rather than inherent flaws in the model. Read ANAO reports carefully!

Rejuvenating Landcare (IV)

Elements of a new approach

- Seek, value and use community input
- Set realistic goals — landcare is primarily around social outcomes
- Articulate a complementary relationship with the regional model
- Support local, grassroots, voluntary activities
 - Annual grants of \$1,000 for accredited groups with no paperwork
 - Grants of <\$10k for engagement projects on a one page application
 - Support for voluntarism a key performance indicator for regional bodies
- Sort out the facilitator network (see extension agenda)
- Revitalise landcare in schools
- Reform the national architecture (LAL, ALC, NLF)
- Promote & support Landcare internationally

Reflections on the regional model

- **Australia's regional model is a world-leading effort to implement sustainable NRM at a landscape scale. It's also a grand experiment:**
 - Devolve decision making & resource allocation to appropriate scale
 - Tap into and build on deep local knowledge and connection to place
 - Work across issues and industries in an integrated way
- **At its best, the regional NRM model has been a huge stride forward**
 - Harnessing local action & enthusiasm within a strategic regional framework
 - Engaging local community leaders in partnership with government
 - Connecting with research and building regional knowledge systems
- **BUT: Developing new institutions takes time**
 - progress & performance has been patchy
 - dependent on the quality of boards & management
 - uneven support from States (type & level)
 - in some areas has undermined, not complemented, local landcare

What makes a leading Catchment Management Authority?

1. Understanding
2. Relationships
3. Positioning
4. Delivery
5. Governance



Characteristics of top CMAs (1)

UNDERSTANDING

- Comprehensive knowledge of your clients
 - demography and demographic trends
 - who lives in the catchment, what are their drivers?
 - values, perceptions, hopes, fears, know-how
- Tapped into the best available knowledge relevant to your strategy
 - sustainable land used options
 - best practice measures and factors affecting adoption
 - a useful toolkit
 - incentives, planning, regulation
- The NRM knowledge hub for your region
 - Making local, regional and regionally-relevant knowledge easily findable, accessible and usable — WEB-BASED!



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Characteristics of top CMAs (2)

RELATIONSHIPS

- **Understood and valued by key client groups**
 - grassroots community volunteers
 - landholders and consumers of resources (e.g. tourists)
 - resource-using industries (and other industries)
 - all tiers of government
 - other relevant non-government organisations (NGOs)
- **Seen as adding value by these groups**
- **Able to influence behaviour within these groups consistent with implementing the RCS**



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Characteristics of top CMAs (3) POSITIONING

- Closely linked with relationships
- CMA roles very well defined and clearly articulated
 - Including how they relate to those of each tier of Govt (especially local govt planning, zoning, rating, approvals etc)
- CMA seen as adding value to the efforts of volunteers
- CMA seen as a credible partner for industry
- Supported by clear and durable institutional frameworks
- Grounded in connections to place



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Characteristics of top CMAs (4) DELIVERY

- Top CMAs make an impact on the ground
 - they do what they say they are going to do
 - with a rigorous, transparent rationale for resource allocation
- Top CMAs operate strategically
 - not doing stuff that others could do better or more efficiently
 - working through partnerships and building local capacities
 - Complementing what others are doing
 - tracking long-term impact and learning from experience
- Top CMAs practice what they preach
 - E.g. tracking and minimising water, carbon and energy footprints
 - Modelling best-practice systems & behaviour



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Characteristics of top CMAs (5) GOVERNANCE

- Successful organisations are well run
 - they make a difference
 - good balance between performance and conformance
- Significant public funding demands good governance
 - being well run, and being seen to be well run
 - strategy, people, finance, risk, compliance, audit
 - Governance
 - Clarity and respect for distinct roles of Board/CEO/management
 - Clear reporting and audit frameworks
 - Codes of conduct and sound mechanisms for conflicts of interest



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Reinforcing the Regional Model

- Arguments for landcare and the importance of a vibrant community base also apply at the regional scale
- But the added planning and integration challenges at the regional scale are critical
 - Carbon, water, energy, food systems and biodiversity converge (and often collide) at the regional scale
 - There have to be environmentally literate and capable bodies at this scale that bridge government and community, public and private interests
- The 'NRM' brand is problematic
 - bureaucratic, opaque, cumbersome
- **Why not just regional and local landcare?**



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Reinforcing the Regional Model (II)

Possible elements of a new approach

- COAG commitment to a regional planning & delivery framework
 - Setting minimum standards for State/Territory support for regional bodies
- A big new 10 year Landcare program (local and regional) funded separately from Caring for our Country
 - With **bipartisan support** and re-engagement of ACF and NFF
 - With explicit goals around equity, community and capacity
 - Pulling together all the 'care' and 'watch' initiatives into a cohesive overall framework
 - Closely aligned with a new approach to drought
 - With strong nationally coordinated components around education, training, MERI and knowledge



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A broader reform platform

Regional and local Landcare are planks in a bigger platform of environmental reform:

- **Rewire** Environmental Information Systems
- **Revolutionise** Agricultural Research, Extension and Education
- **Reform** Drought Policy, and Rural & Regional Services
- **Re-unite** the Carbon, Water, Energy, Food, Farming and Fire policy & knowledge agendas (blow up some silos)
- **Redesign** the Institutional Architecture to build a new environmental federalism



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Our future is in our hands

“The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating.
The paths to it are made, not found.”

— Phillip Adams

- We are in a mental dance between fate and desire
- We know that ‘what’s coming at us’ is big, ugly and scary
- We know that much of it we can’t influence
- But we do have choices, and some influence
- Now is for far-sighted reform & leadership **at all levels**
- Equity, Community and Sustainability are the right values

“To decide not to succeed, is to decide to fail” — Greg Bourne

Take home messages

- Landcare, and Australia’s regional approach, are the envy of other advanced economies with a big farm sector
- We have come a long way in 20 years
 - We have learned, and achieved, a great deal
- There is an opportunity right now to reframe and refocus the Australian landcare journey for the next ten years
- Your community base, and community leadership roles are crucial in delivering engagement, equity and sustainability

GO FOR IT!

For more info
including background papers,
presentations and images

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