

9th January, 2023

Senator David Pocock

Hello David,

Increased Support for Landcare

I refer you to my recent letter and email (3rd January, 2023).

Thank you for your work to secure additional funding for organisations such as Landcare Greening Australia and others as explained in the email from your Advisor, Sam Lewatt (16th January, 2023).

As a result of my further research, I have attached a short summary and links to pertinent documents which may be of use to you and your staff. I draw your attention to:

- National Landcare Annual Report 2021-22, and the Australian Government response to the Senate Environment and Communications Inquiry report: National Landcare Program 2014 to 2023 (issued February 2022)
- 20 Million Trees Program
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions

National Landcare

The most recent annual report (2021-22) from Landcare Australia highlights the amazing work this organisation continues to champion, more than 30 years since it was established with funding from the Hawke Government in 1989. The report outlines many projects which focus on protecting, enhancing or restoring the natural environment through sustainable land management and conservation activities.

The Australian Government response to the Environment and Communications Inquiry report: National Landcare Program 2014 to 2023 (issued in February, 2022) was very positive and had followed-up the 15 recommendations in the committee's report.

In summary, funding of the National Landcare Program (2014-2023) included:

- initial investment of \$1 billion (2014-15 to 2017-18)
- further investment of \$1.1 billion (2018-19 to 2022-23)

I urge you to read both reports to better understand the incredible outcomes of this amazing organisation.

I draw your attention to one of the many successful projects, '20 Million Trees'

20 Million Trees Program

This program which complemented and aligned with the work of the Office of the Threatened Species Commissioner commenced in 2014 and concluded in 2020. The program has been reviewed, and I quote: "that it met its 4 strategic objectives with:

- 29,508,062 trees (over 2 metres when mature) established as at 30 June 2021
- 4,061,837 understorey plants established
- more than 30,000 hectares revegetated
- over 2,500 species planted
- 17,958 hectares treated for weeds
- 96,654 people participating in project activities as volunteers
- 141 Indigenous people employed through the program in ranger and non-ranger positions
- the program could indicatively sequester on average 1.47 to 2.95 million tonnes CO₂ over the decade from 2021 to 2030, based on 29.5 million trees (over 2 metres when mature)

The program spent \$61.775 million of its just over \$62 million revised budget, which was reduced from the original \$70 million budget in line with expected achievement of program objectives.”

I congratulate the people within the Government, Landcare, Greening Australia and many more organisations, communities and volunteers involved in planning, implementing and monitoring such a wonderful program. So much has been achieved with such a small budget.

Unfortunately, this 20 Million Trees Program has not been continued. It was originally established in 2014 to provide leadership in tree planting. In 2021 the Australian Government ended the program, “knowing capability in the sector has been enhanced and is continuing to attract private and community funding”.

I believe that by ‘refunding’ significantly larger tree planting projects the Australian landscape and its biodiversity and our communities will continue reap so many benefits.

A side note: Although the review mentioned ‘tree planting efforts are highly subject to environmental factors’ and it included results of many plant survival surveys, I question what was the real impact of the 2017 – 2019 drought? The reasons to mention this are:

- the 2017-2019 multi-year drought across subtropical eastern Australia (where the majority of the plantings occurred) was the driest and hottest 3-year period, since 1911, and its impact increased to become most severe in 2019
- I was recently reminded of the devastating impact of this drought. In 2022, I was fortunate to co-organise the Rotary ‘Adopt A Tree’ program and participate in five different planting events (a total of 7500 plants) in southern NSW in the spring of 2022. On one property all 2000 trees planted by the property owner in 2016 (before the drought) had perished. Our volunteer planting team was so happy to replant 2000 trees on the same property in October 2022.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions (a bigger role for agriculture and re-vegetation is needed)

My understanding is that Australia is not performing well. In simple terms:

- 2002 total GHG emissions reported by the ABS were approx. 540Mt CO₂-e
- 2022 total GHG emissions reported in the DCCEE quarterly update, were approx. 470Mt CO₂-e

Sectors included in these estimates were electricity, stationary energy (excluding electricity), transport, fugitive emissions, industrial processes and product use, agriculture, waste, transport, land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF). I draw your attention to: “the estimated emissions from the LULUCF sector are not universally accepted: an analysis of Queensland data suggested forests in that state were being cleared at almost twice the rate reflected in national greenhouse accounts” (Guardian report, June 26 , 2022). Therefore, when taking out emissions from the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry sector which were:

- In 2002 approx. +10 Mt CO₂-e
- In 2022 approx. -40 Mt CO₂-e

The adjusted total emissions figures for the rest of the Australian economy now demonstrate a different picture:

- In 2002, total emissions adjusted 540-10 = 530 Mt CO₂-e
- In 2022, total emissions adjusted 470- (-40) =510 Mt CO₂-e

This represents a reduction of only 20 Mt CO₂-e (3.8%) in 20 years. Realistically all other sectors must improve their rate of reducing GHG emissions, as there has been almost no net change in the last 20 years.

The recent increase in supply of renewable energy has reduced the total GHG emissions of the electricity sector, however this is being cancelled out by increase in emissions in other sectors.

There is a huge task in front of all Australians to change our processes and practices to result in nett negative carbon emissions for all sectors.

Conclusion

In returning to the purpose of this letter, I believe there is a strong case for significant additional and surety of funding for Landcare, Greening Australia and other similar organisations.

The wonderful projects planned, implemented and managed by these and other organisations continue to make significant contributions to improving the health of the country and its biodiversity. The positive impacts of re-establishing native vegetation and improved agricultural and livestock practices include:

- Improved habitat for native wildlife, including endangered or threatened species, and threatened ecological communities
- Carbon capture above and below ground to contribute to a reduction in Australia's net greenhouse gas emissions
- Restoration of landscapes to be more resilient to future climate change events

These are amazing achievements however we need to do much more.

Thank you for your time and patience in reading this letter. I am sure you have much to think about and actions to take, as another year has finished while our planet and beautiful country continue to get warmer and our treasured biodiversity continues to be threatened.

Kind regards,
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References

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