

LANDCARE COMES OF AGE - 21 YEARS

National Landcare Forum 23 – 25 March 2010 – Adelaide

The theme of the National Landcare Forum “*Celebrate, Communicate, Invigorate*” was certainly apt and if that was the aim of the organisers, then congratulations on definitely achieving their goal and providing the Landcare movement with this opportunity. The energy and enthusiasm of the 650 delegates present was very evident, palpable and contagious and the dinner was a great celebration of Landcare and a fitting 21st birthday party.

Minister Tony Burke opened the proceedings and his words motivated each and every person into thinking of a positive future for Landcare, charging us with seeking out the next questions and ensuring that Landcare continues to be the answer, for example the role Landcare can play in moving the soil carbon debate forward could be momentous. The three great challenges facing us in the future are food security, climate change and the changing nature of volunteerism, and Landcare needs to position itself to deliver on these.

The newly appointed Chairman of the Australian Landcare Council – Kim Chance spoke of renewing Landcare with clarity, flexibility and continuity. His vision for Landcare is inspiring and provides us with the confidence that the new Australian Landcare Council will assist Landcare in clarity of purpose, flexibility in delivery and confidence in continuity and thus able to achieve the multiple outcomes that will be expected of Landcare.

Peter Cozier from the Wentworth Group of concerned scientists, classed Landcare as a cultural revolution, and charged the Landcare movement and other natural resource management bodies with establishing a set of environmental accounts at the regional level, that enabled the progress in improving land degradation and adoption of best management practice to be measured. The carbon economy could unleash a new revolution to ameliorate land degradation, and Landcare is the obvious vehicle to carry this forward.

Julian Cribb’s data sets on where the world is heading regarding food security were very sobering. The notion of a potential 11.4 billion people on earth by 2060, who, given the current trends in the rate of consumption, will be eating enough for 14.5 billion is very scary. Cities will consume more than ½ the world’s water and by 2030 the mega cities of the world will occupy the same area as the whole of China, and the recreation areas required for those cities will occupy the same area as the USA. The pressure on arable land to continue to regenerate and provide for the population is indeed a massive challenge, as we have probably well passed peak land.

Julian Prior reinforced our longheld belief that Landcare answers many calls for building social capital, sustainable livelihoods and vibrant resilient communities. Group networks are the answer to galvanising action where there is a need to adapt rapidly, and facilitating community ownership of problems.

Southern Rivers CMA was very well represented from both CMA board and staff and community Landcarers, with one participant even commenting that we appeared to be everywhere. I felt very honoured to be a part of and representing this great region. Chairman, Pam Green, presented among other things, an impassioned plea to ensure we always consider the relationships at the forefront of all our work, as this is the glue that binds all our activities. Pam also gave a great overview of the National Regional NRM Reference Group, which explained another aspect of the “thinktanks” available to feed the discussions on NRM and delivery of programs.

Bill Pigott showed amazing facilitation skills and understanding of strategic processes within community as he managed a room full of 600 enthusiastic landcarers who all had strong individual views on the Framework for Landcare. This process should provide a great source of ideas and an overview for the working group now able to work up a great framework for Landcare.

The origins of Landcare came with the visionary approach of combining the Australian Conservation Foundation and the National Farmers Federation in 1989. These origins were confirmed as still being very relevant in today’s Landcare and serve to reinforce and balance the production and conservation needs in our communities. The variety of the presentations that made up the balance of the program were a testament to the range of intelligent, diverse, resourceful and well developed projects and programs that are currently being undertaken.

The conference reinforced in me the dream of every Australian having an underlying philosophy of Landcare that is second nature in every action taken or decision made, with a choice to opt “out”, rather than trying to convince Joe average to opt “in”. This would transform the nature of Landcare from merely groups of people doing great environmental work, to an immediate response in people’s psyche. This may be the visionary leap that is required to take Landcare into the future for the next 20 years.

Mandi Stevenson - April 2010