

A personal reflection on Landcare
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Being involved in landcare has been the most rewarding endeavour I have undertaken.

Seeing people think and behave differently towards the environment and as a result see the landscape improve has given me great personal satisfaction.

But I have also observed that Landcare as I first knew it has changed a lot.

As Leigh said in the introduction, Landcare is now more than just planting trees, controlling weeds and killing rabbits. Many other inter-linked issues demand our attention as well.

This means landcare has become complex.

I use the word complex and not complicated deliberately because complexity conveys a critical point I want to make about where landcare has moved to - and therefore what we need to think about in the future.

Complicated means there is a 'right answer', a correct way of putting the 'pieces' together.

Building a jumbo jet is complicated (or furniture from IKEA). It has millions of pieces and if you don't get it right it doesn't fly.

Complexity implies there is no single way of doing things. Many different approaches can lead to the same outcome.

Complexity also takes into account the human elements of decision making, people's values, beliefs, personal circumstances and their desire to make their 'patch' better.

Complicated solutions downplay the human side with greater 'instructions' on how to do things (guidelines and rules).

My observation is we have tried to address increasing complexity in landcare with complicated and not complex solutions.

The desire for our partners to narrow what they will invest in and to try and 'pick winners' informed by computer models and regional / national 'priorities' are examples of this.

You can understand this approach if we are dealing with a complicated problem and you could direct what people did. You would rationally analyse the environmental assets, identify the threats and provide incentive to remove these highest priorities threats.

BUT

Landcare is fundamentally about people. With people comes diversity, different values, different beliefs and different priorities. People are also unpredictable in when they will be 'ready to go'.

When and how they act dictates the environmental outcome we get.

We think we invest in the environment - we don't . We invest in people who, by their actions change our environment.

As one of the farmers on the Woody Yaloak Committee said recently 'we need to keep focussed on shaping what goes on between the ears because if we get this right the rest will follow'.

So to me it is not surprising there is a backlash from communities that feel their local priorities are no longer considered and their local values are not recognised.

These are symptom of applying the wrong solution (complicated) to a complex challenge.

I often hear expressions around landcare such as 'not one size fits all', that we need 'flexibility with funding', that 'our priorities are different', that getting funding or doing things has become too hard.

Again this reflects a desire for a complex solution, not a complicated one.

If we don't get it right, it will adversely affects volunteerism, by adding more paperwork and restricting what people can be part of.

Why are we surprised when the next generation aren't as excited about landcare as we were?

I believe they see it as too bureaucratic, limited in scope and often don't think it is a way to address what they see as important. It is not a priority.

The landcare survey Bret (de Hayr) presented indicates the majority still believe in the landcare brand but are choosing not to participate at this time.

We need to get them active again.

Our focus must be about winning and holding people's hearts and their minds.

Future landcare must strive to make things simpler (not simplistic), easier and inclusive.

It must focus on the people.

We must always remember landcare is voluntary. People choose to participate or not.

If we can get people to participate we generate other positive benefits.

The first is that it drives **innovation**. Because there is no 'right answer', no 'silver bullet' to a complex problem, we look for a range of creative solutions.

Landcarers are not secretive. In fact I have found landcarers to be most generous in sharing ideas, encouraging each other and try new approaches.

It is great to see the word innovation reappearing in the landcare conversation as it will be a way of finding novel solutions that fit local and national needs.

The second is it attracts **co-investment**. By co-investment I mean more than just dollars. I mean permission, knowledge, time, other resources and peer encouragement.

I believe we have devalued these 'intangible contributions' that people bring to landcare and just focussed on the dollar contribution.

These intangibles need to regain greater status when we consider what to invest in.

Co-investment and participation gives **scale**.

If you look at the size of change required, we need lots of people doing their bit year after year to make a difference.

Picking winners and narrowing the people who participate doesn't create the 'horsepower' to achieve what we want.

The final benefit I wish to mention is the need to **integrate**.

This refers to addressing environmental issues together rather than as single issues and the integration of the environment and production.

The catchphrase of the Woody Yaloak group is *productive catchment management*.

We came up with this catchphrase over 20 years ago and it is probably more relevant and important today that it was 20 years ago.

So to sum up.

I strongly believe landcare can have an exciting, vibrant future if we accept our challenges are complex and that we tailor our solutions to reflect this.

This means greater emphasis on the people, making landcare easy, enjoyable and rewarding to be part of.