



The ties that bind: hands-on volunteers, part of Community Land Management Inc., gather for an open day update at the Australian Landscape Trust's Calperum Station.

Australian Landscape Trust

processes, are often able to deliver 'on-ground' outcomes more efficiently.

Independent and unconstrained, community organisations, they say, are often able to involve landholders and others suspicious of government, and to gauge local community needs, better than government agencies.

Emotional land tenure

The Australian Landscape Trust (ALT) is a case in point. Set up by the Ian Potter Foundation (Australia's largest philanthropic organisation) in 1996, the ALT addresses major land management issues in the rural sector – these being a legacy of unsustainable land use in decades past. Nothing unusual about that, but it is the manner in which the Trust tackles its mission, engages the community and builds 'community capacity' that is unique ... and attracting international attention.

The ALT's main interest has been in the Riverland area of South Australia at Calperum and Taylorville Stations on the Murray River near Renmark. Calperum and its broad environs comprise the largest intact area of mallee woodland in existence and it also boasts a huge (30 600 ha) Ramsar-listed wetland. Together the two stations represent 345 000 ha of conservation land owned by the Australian Government.

'In an unusual arrangement operating since 1998,' says ALT Program Director Pam Parker, 'the Commonwealth Government contracts management of the properties to the Trust, which works with the community to deliver the services required to research, restore and manage the conservation lands.'

The contract specifies standards of care and the ALT serves as guarantor of performance and advisor to community participants. Some 14 000 volunteer hours a year are provided by the local community for stewardship of the land and its wildlife.

Pat Feilman says she is particularly proud of the long-term investment by the community. People are voluntarily looking after the common property of Australia by tackling feral animal control and maintenance tasks, revegetating the landscape and monitoring their progress. There is even a waiting list to adopt paddocks.

A community REVOLUTION

Around Australia, ordinary people are forming organisations and mobilising against sustainability challenges in a wave of community-level action that began in the 1990s. Steve Davidson profiles four successful initiatives that illustrate the power of local effort.

Exemplified and led by the establishment of Landcare in 1989, now a household name and an umbrella to over 4000 voluntary organisations, community action for sustainable development has broadened to encompass a range of differentiated groups across rural and urban regions.

While each organisation tends to have a different focus, approach or regional emphasis, many of these volunteer-powered community initiatives involve sophisticated co-ordination and partnerships with government, businesses and philanthropists, and they often link up in complementary or supportive arrangements. Working together is strengthening their cumulative impact and generating a renewed community spirit.

Some of these groups concentrate on land acquisition and stewardship for

conservation, some tackle salinity or revegetation in a catchment, some take on regional natural resource management as a whole, while others seek to reduce energy use and emissions in a street or suburb, or work on social issues. All, however, strive for better sustainability outcomes, and it is remarkable what these motivated communities are achieving.

In a discussion paper¹ initiated by CSIRO and The Ian Potter Foundation, Carl Binning (now heading up Greening Australia) and civic leader Pat Feilman (trustee and founder of the Australian Landscape Trust and former Executive Secretary of the Ian Potter Foundation) argue that while governments play a critical role in planning and achieving, say, conservation goals, non-government organisations, free of bureaucratic

¹ Binning C and Feilman P (2000) *Landscape Conservation and the Non-government Sector*. National Research and Development Program on Rehabilitation, Management and Conservation of Remnant Vegetation, Research Report 3/2000, Environment Australia, Canberra.

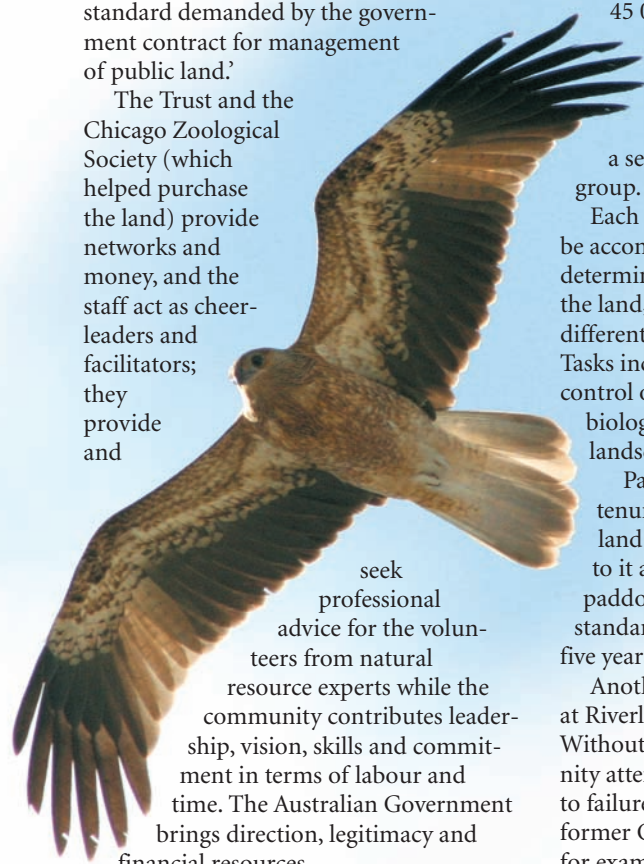
She acknowledges the brave move in 1998 by the then Minister for the Environment, Senator Robert Hill, to entrust care of Australian Government conservation land to the community.

As Parker puts it, there tends to be two conflicting cultures around national parks – the professional rangers and the neighbouring community – and here the Government took the risk of ‘letting the farmers in’ to manage the public land.

‘We are exploring a model or, if you like, participating in an experiment in community conservation,’ she said, ‘and farmers have proved to be brilliant problem solvers. Volunteers seek to get a job done through “learning by doing” and, in turn, pass on their acquired skills to others.

‘When we reported this approach at an international conference in Durban, South Africa, other delegates, particularly government representatives, were just blown away. It was unheard of... but the Australian Government and the Riverland community have shown it can work. That is, the private sector, including community volunteers, can deliver services to the high standard demanded by the government contract for management of public land.’

The Trust and the Chicago Zoological Society (which helped purchase the land) provide networks and money, and the staff act as cheerleaders and facilitators; they provide and



seek professional advice for the volunteers from natural resource experts while the community contributes leadership, vision, skills and commitment in terms of labour and time. The Australian Government brings direction, legitimacy and financial resources.

Previously used for pastoralism, Calperum and Taylorville Stations are still divided into fenced paddocks, up to



Centre: restoration of the natural wetting and drying cycles at Ramsar-listed Lake Merretti on Calperum Station has revitalised surrounding habitat and led to the return of 24 000 waterfowl annually. Clockwise from top left: Australian Shelduck; Australian White Ibis; local skinks; Red-Kneed Dotterel. Below left: A Whistling Kite. Australian Landscape Trust

45 000 ha in area, and an approach that has worked well is the ‘adoption’ of paddocks by members of the community, whether a family, a group of friends, a service club or a special interest group.

Each paddock has its own list of tasks to be accomplished annually, these being determined by the nature and condition of the land, since floodplain wetlands have different needs to mallee woodland. Tasks include: road and fence maintenance, control of weeds and feral animals, biological surveys, species restoration, landscape repair and revegetation. Parker calls this ‘emotional land tenure’ as the people looking after the land develop an ongoing attachment to it and, in return for access to the paddock, they look after it to a high standard and for a term of at least five years.

Another important facet of the success at Riverland is the help given by scientists. Without scientific support, many community attempts at rehabilitation are doomed to failure, says Feilman. The high-profile former CSIRO scientist Dr Dean Graetz, for example, has been intimately involved with the Riverland program, providing pro bono advice and training to ALT staff and volunteers in monitoring the hydrology of

the floodplain using test wells and soil sampling. There is particular concern about an influx of hypersaline groundwater, from elsewhere in the landscape, towards the Murray River.

A detailed account of the achievements and acknowledgements of all the people and organisations involved in the program is not possible here. However, highlights include:

- establishment of Community Land Management, Inc. by community leaders, notably citrus grower Michael Punturiero, to drive aspects of the program and to work with other farmers in the region to improve sustainability;
- restoration of lakes in the Ramsar wetland, including re-introduction of a natural wetting and drying cycle at Lake Merretti under the guidance of wetland manager Mike Harper... and subsequent return of some 24 000 waterfowl;
- large-scale revegetation of once overgrazed land, including establishment of many fenced plots or ‘garden experiments’ with return of some native plant species not seen for a long time; and
- construction of the McCormick Centre for the Environment, a state-of-the-art facility for environmental education.

FOCUS

The Condamine Alliance

Operating in the Condamine River catchment of south-east Queensland, at the headwaters of the mighty Murray–Darling system, the Condamine Alliance is a leading not-for-profit community body that is engaged with a diverse regional community to achieve sustainable management of natural resources.

Encompassing Toowoomba, Warwick, Dalby and Chinchilla, the catchment supports irrigated and dryland cropping, beef production, intensive animal production and secondary industries.

‘Perhaps unusually for a community body, we essentially have a corporate structure or business model,’ says CEO of the Alliance, Phil McCullough. ‘There are 10 directors with a variety of backgrounds and, set up under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, the Alliance has developed a detailed Regional Natural Resource Management Plan with community input at every step. We also have an associated \$10.7 million Regional Investment Strategy to tackle key issues identified in the plan.’

‘Our strength lies in having every single major group in the region – industry, landholder and environmental groups and all local governments – involved in sustainability projects that will benefit their members in the long run. That includes cattle and egg producers, pig and dairy farmers, corn and cotton growers, conservation and Landcare groups, all engaged and participating in 67 currently active

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projects aiming to improve natural resource management in the catchment. It’s a huge undertaking.’

McCullough told *Ecos* of the dilemma in trying to prioritise all the projects that community groups suggest. ‘We just can’t take on every issue, but it is very difficult to knock back enthusiastic people with good ideas who want to participate.’

‘Our approach is to use incentives to encourage landholder involvement in priority areas identified in the plan. Take grazing: we wanted farmers to think about how they might achieve the target of moving towards at least 70 per cent pasture cover all year. Incentives here included financial support, technical assistance, provision of manuals for weed control and the like,’ explained McCullough.

‘To build up the resource management skills of the community, the Alliance also often enlists the help of companies providing products or services to landholders. So in the case of, say, irrigation expertise, we

work with company representatives to impart knowledge about improving water use efficiency on farms, because it is they who regularly have face-to-face contact with landholders.’

Working within five themes – biodiversity, community, land use, salinity and water – the Alliance and its partners have set themselves innumerable goals. Some examples of agreed ‘resource condition’ targets include:

- in biodiversity – five sub-catchments with less than 30 per cent remnant or woody vegetation in 2003 will achieve a 10 per cent increase in native vegetation cover by 2018;
- in community – achieve a 20 per cent increase in the number of land managers undertaking and implementing sustainable use of natural resources by 2020;
- in land use – decrease the spread of key agricultural weeds and pest animals across the catchment by 2013;
- in salinity – no further increase in area of land affected by salinity (from 2009 levels) by 2025; and
- in water – achieve a 10 per cent improvement in the condition of stream reaches across the catchment by 2020.

By teaming up with community groups, the Alliance has treated 13 local salinity hotspots, helped protect three endangered regional ecosystems and one threatened species, tackled the special challenges of burgeoning lifestyle landowners, secured commitment of 80 per cent of egg and poultry producers to use the industry’s environmental management system, and discovered a unique montane sedgeland and heath wetland in the catchment and negotiated with the landholder to protect it.

A corporate social responsibility model developed by the Alliance to engage companies in natural resource management was also a finalist in the Environmental Protection Agency’s Sustainable Industries Awards this year.

A community for initiatives

Our Community is the ‘national gateway’ for Australia’s 700 000 community groups and schools. An internet-based organisation, it provides, through 15 online Centres of Excellence, practical resources and support for community groups. It also facilitates communication between community networks and the general public, business and government in every state and territory.



The Australian Landscape Trust’s McCormick Centre informs and educates local and international visitors. Australian Landscape Trust



Back Plains landholder Geoff Warfield, left, and the Condamine Alliance's technical officer for grazing systems, George Lambert, review on-ground works supported by the Alliance on Mr Warfield's property south-east of Toowoomba. Condamine Alliance

Rhonda Galbally OA, co-founder and CEO of Our Community, says more than 65 per cent of Australians belong to a community group, but that all community organisations face growing challenges – not least, a constant battle for funding and increasingly complex compliance requirements.

'At Our Community, we are helping community groups deal with these challenges by delivering an online hub of essential resources and tools for community groups to be able to survive and thrive. We also advocate for groups around issues such as public liability insurance and help them to find new funds, members, board members and volunteers and to manage their finances and operate more efficiently and effectively,' she says.

Our Community also works with business to encourage Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), emphasising cost-effective products and services for community groups. It calls for CSR programs that concentrate on community impact rather than mere image or company window-dressing.

Galbally says integrated CSR needs to focus on sustainability and involves corporate governance, the environment, the workforce, human rights and, of course,

community. 'CSR is what companies do voluntarily beyond legal minimum standards. Traditionally it meant a genteel, paternalistic attitude to employees and discreet donations to the Chairman's pet worthy cause. But today it needs to become a vital part of a bold, long-term approach to business success.'

Asked what she sees as future challenges, Galbally says, 'A lot needs to be done to establish the value proposition and measure it so that company board members and shareholders can agree to social responsibility becoming a serious and worthwhile proposition for corporations.'

'Also, we need to encourage Australians to give to the smaller community groups, not just the big and familiar ones that can afford to market themselves,' Galbally told *Ecos*. 'Our Community is assisting "not-so-sexy" community organisations of all kinds, especially membership-orientated ones, to get more people involved and to expand their participating membership.'

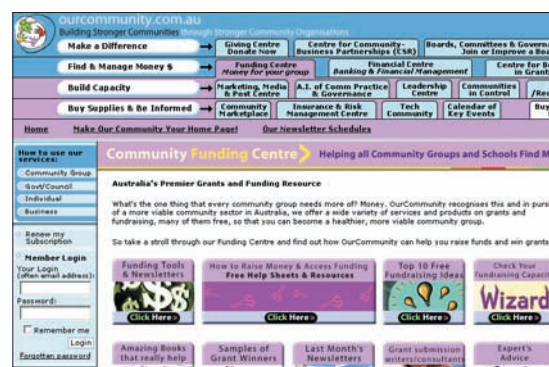
'These smaller groups – those often working in their own community backyards providing a local service or solving local problems or addressing less popular issues – tend to get overlooked. We need Australians to be more thoughtful in their giving.'

Galbally argues that because smaller innovative groups find it hard to get support, we, as a nation, don't gain the benefit of experimentation. We don't use new approaches to deal with the issues that need to be worked on ... and we're certainly not respecting the sorts of groups that are working so hard at the grassroots level.

A partnership still going strong

In 2000, *Ecos* first reported on the activities of the Herbert Resource Information Centre (HRIC) in Queensland – an Ingham-based partnership between the Hinchinbrook Shire Council, CSR Ltd, The Herbert Cane Protection and Productivity Board, canegrowers, the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and CSIRO. Since then, the centre has continued to support sustainable development in the Herbert River catchment.

Essentially a community-based GIS (geographic information systems) facility, the centre has been involved in some important resource management projects in the sugarcane-growing catchment of the Herbert in recent years and it still strives to facilitate productive communication between partners in the joint venture within the local region.



Our Community provides an online resources portal to support community initiatives.

One recent initiative, allowing better cane harvest management, is the fitting of a GPS to every harvester in the district, generating data that identify the exact location of the machinery to within five to eight metres. This helps the operation of the entire regional harvest, which is done on an equity system so that all growers get a fair share of the peak harvesting cycle and finish on the same day. A community GPS network to assist in the push towards precision agriculture, which is good for the industry and the environment, has also been established.

These were established by HRIC partner, Herbert Cane Productivity Services Ltd, with HRIC project development and assistance.

Centre Manager, Raymond De Lai, says it is some achievement that the joint venture partnership, formed in 1996, has flourished for 10 years. 'Not many strategic alliances last the full term and we are now in the happy position of planning for another 10-year partnership. We're likely to pick up some new partners as we move forward.'

What's the reason for this longevity and success? De Lai puts it down to working hard at building and maintaining trust and relationships between stakeholders.

'An analysis, involving interviews, showed that the main reason, from a list of nine, for the HRIC's success has been effective co-operation and collaboration, despite the potential for conflict in resolving catchment issues,' says De Lai. 'Funnily enough, our GIS technology as such didn't even rate a mention!'

More information:
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www.condaminealliance.com.au
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