



# Forming a landcare group

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*This note provides guidance for people considering forming a landcare group in their local area. Topics covered include points to consider before getting started, the first few steps and suggestions for positive future action. It aims to increase the likelihood of success when forming a landcare group.*

## What is a landcare group?

A landcare group is a group of people concerned about land management issues, working together to do something positive for the long-term health of the land.

Some landcare groups may have a single focus (for example pest plants or salinity); others may be involved in many issues within their community.

Most landcare groups are rural, although there is a rapidly growing number of groups along the coast and in urban areas.

## Should we form a landcare group?

Before attempting to form a landcare group, it is important to find out if other local community members support the idea.

If community members are involved in the formation of the group, they will be more likely to become involved and committed to the group. It will take time to get this support, but it is time well worth investing as landcare groups work best when a number of people share the workload, rather than relying on a few inspired people.

If you consider some of the following ideas, success is more likely.

### Assess the need for a landcare group

An important point that should be considered is: 'Is there a need for a landcare group in my local area?'

There is little point in setting up a group if there is no perceived need in the community, or if there is a suitable group already operating within the area.

### Potential members

A group includes many different types of people. Often this diversity is essential to the success of the group.

When identifying potential members, think 'inclusively' rather than 'exclusively'. When most groups start, they usually do not realise the potential of other players either inside or outside the group boundaries to help the group.

Nearby landholders, local school children and teachers (especially geography/ biology teachers) stock and station agents, progress association members, school and shire council members, regional water authority members or the government extension officers may all be potential members of your group.

### Objective of group

A common feature of successful groups is that they have strong aims or direction. Clear objectives help to focus and unite a group.

When seeking an aim or a focus, consider and investigate local issues that need to be addressed. Issues may include salinity, pasture improvement, pest plants and animals, soil erosion, productivity, soil acidity, soil structure, tree decline, waterways, protection of native vegetation or whole farm planning.

### Established local groups

Investigate groups that are currently established in your community. Many rural people are often over committed and already part of one or more groups or voluntary organisations.

If an established group (such as a "Friends of" or conservation/ environmental group) will meet your needs, there is little point in forming yet another group.

## Yes! We want to form a group!

Once the need and informal support for a landcare group has been identified, community commitment is required.

A public meeting is a good forum to achieve this support.

### Planning a public meeting

#### Who to invite

Personally invite as many people identified as potential members as possible. Again, think inclusively.

Guest speakers can help to develop enthusiasm and/or create confidence among potential members. You may consider inviting an active member of another group, a local Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) or Catchment Management Authority (CMA) representative, and/or any other respected and interested members of the local community.

These people may also assist in chairing if you are not confident or experienced in running a meeting.

### Publicity

Ensure potential members know about the meeting. If people are not aware of a meeting, they definitely can not attend!

Options include:

- A flier/letter drop to local landholders
- Advertising in local papers, radio or television (community announcements are particularly good).
- Posters in local business windows or community noticeboards
- Word of mouth (often the best method). Amazing levels of support can be generated on an informal level by phoning friends and chatting in the supermarket!

### Meeting time

Plan your meeting for a time when the majority of people you have invited will be available. Consider school hours, work hours, not too late at night, seasonal/ farming considerations eg hay making time and milking hours.

Start and finish on time. This will indicate that the group intends to be taken seriously, and will encourage members to turn up on time for future functions.

If you are worried about latecomers disrupting the meeting, advertise both the arriving and starting times – for example “7:15pm for a 7:30pm start”.

### Venue

The physical setting for your meeting can have a marked influence on social atmosphere. If you have to meet in a large area, consider partitioning off a suitable sized area.

Other issues to consider include:

- Seating arrangements (semi-circles are often better than rows)
- Heating/ ventilation (no one likes meetings in a freezing or stifling venue)
- Adequate equipment/ facilities (such as power points for overhead projectors or urns, toilets, chairs etc)
- Centrality to proposed landcare group members
- Easy to find and/or well known in community

### Catering

Catering for the meeting is a good idea. Providing tea/ coffee and a few biscuits after the meeting will provide an opportunity to remain and socialise.

### Agenda

Develop an agenda for the meeting. The agenda should be short and achievable. Most meetings are over ambitious in the topics they wish to cover.

It is important to clearly establish if the community wishes to form a group. Asking for a show of hands is a good way to determine this.

**For more information on running meetings, see Landcare Note LC0034: “Streamlining administration – meetings”**

## SAMPLE AGENDA

1. **Welcome** – Chair
2. **Apologies** – Chair (with input from the floor)
3. **What is landcare?** – Guest speaker, CMA
4. **My experience of landcare** – Guest speaker, member of nearby landcare group
5. **Identification of local issues** – Guest speaker or facilitator
6. **Do we want to form a landcare group?** – Chair
7. **Election of a (interim?) Steering Committee**– Guest speaker, active member of nearby landcare group
8. **Next meeting** : date, time, venue – Chair
9. **Cuppa time!**

Figure 1. Example agenda for a public meeting

## Let's start! – the first few steps

### Name

The group's name should be easily recognisable to the community. It may reflect the geographic location and/ or the main issues the group has decided to tackle.

For example, you could use the name of a local landform, river, or a parish name.

### Committees and positions

There are various options for leadership roles when forming a landcare group. groups must decide which option is suitable for their situation.

#### Executive committee

An executive committee's role is to run the group's day to day operations. They also attend all group meetings, and may be called upon to make routine decisions on behalf of the group.

An example of common executive committee positions:

- Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer

These positions are usually open to election, often at the first or second meeting.

#### General committee

For a large group, a General Committee may also be established. Members of this committee attend meetings, access minutes and support other management group members in their work.

There may be scope for specific positions to be established within this group. These positions may include:

- Media liaison
- Newsletter/ publications
- Weeds/ pest animals

Taking on a leadership position in a group means taking on responsibility, but can also lead to opportunities for enrichment and personal satisfaction.

**For more information about committees, see Landcare Notes –**

**LC0035: "Common landcare roles"**

**LC0036: "Sharing the load"**

### **Group boundaries**

The group's boundary should be reflected by the geographic area its members live in and the issues the group has decided to tackle. Tree establishment groups may consider a boundary over a number of catchments with tree decline.

The first step to take in defining a new group's boundary is to investigate the boundary of adjoining groups. You may find that this job is already completed for you!

Some groups have started small and after two or three years increased in area by three or four times because of the needs of the community.

Flexible boundaries enable all interested people to join the group and be part of the community push to achieve works on the ground. Set boundaries can be "brick walls" to people living outside them.

### **Group administration**

Landcare groups must address several straightforward administrative issues.

#### *Registering your landcare group*

Your group should register as a landcare group with your Regional Landcare Co-ordinator. Your local NRE office will have copies of the registration form. Registration puts you on the database to receive landcare information and access to grants programs.

#### *Incorporation*

Landcare groups must be incorporated if they are planning to be involved in any activities that may cause personal injury or damage to properties.

Incorporation is a legal process that protects all members of the landcare group.

#### *Insurance for groups*

Adequate public liability and personal accident insurance cover is essential to protect group members in case a claim is made against the group.

If your group employs a full or part-time coordinator, you *must* take out WorkCover insurance. WorkCover is Victoria's workers compensation system and cannot be replaced by any other form of insurance.

**For further information, see Landcare Notes: LC0037: "Landcare groups: incorporation" and LC0038: "Landcare groups: insurance"**

#### *Membership fees*

Some landcare groups charge a membership fee, which may be used to meet administrative or other costs (additional to incorporation costs).

Other groups believe that membership fees reduce potential member numbers.

It is up to your group to decide on a policy for membership fees.

### **Short and long term priorities**

Usually when a group forms it is some time before it has a clear idea of what its objectives are, and how it will achieve its goals.

A way of getting ideas on the group's goals is to run a brainstorming session and try to answer the following questions:

- What land degradation/ management issues most concern the group? (Usually it will identify five to eight.)
- How should the group tackle these issues in the next three, six, twelve or twenty-four months?

By discovering the main issues the group can then look at short and long term priorities and set realistic and achievable goals.

**For more information on priority setting, see Landcare Note – LC0039: "Priority setting"**

## **Other points to consider**

### **Communication**

In both starting and sustaining a landcare group, it is important to consider social aspects of groups. Plans and ideas must be communicated to group members if they are to be put into action.

An internal contact system is useful to ensure all members are kept informed and up-to-date with landcare news. The type of system (and subsequent formality) is up to the group (options include newsletters (formal) and phone call relays). The only requirement is that it is known and agreed upon by the group.

**Other aspects of communication are covered in Landcare Note – LC0040 "Streamlining administration – communication"**

### **Support**

Support to landcare groups is available from a range of people and organisations and in a variety of forms.

Technical and advisory support is available from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Catchment Management Authorities and Greening Australia.

Many local resources are often overlooked. These may include municipalities, universities and schools, companies or businesses, nurseries or plant/ seed suppliers, environment groups or local residents and experts on establishing trees or plant identification.

Other landcare groups can be a source of encouragement and technical information. They may also provide new ideas for group management and a discussion forum for regional issues.

Ways of networking with other groups may be through newsletters, personal contacts, field days, workshops and conferences.

### **Publicity**

Publicising the achievements of your group boosts members' morale, raises the status of your group and brings the issue of land and water management before the general public.

Local media (press, radio and television) are often keen to publicise achievements of members of the local community. There are many publications to assist first-time writers to prepare news releases (see section: *Further information* especially 'Group Skills and Community Action').

Publicising upcoming events is a good way to increase involvement levels. This can be done by putting posters/notices in shop windows or on community noticeboards and through mail-outs/ letterbox drops.

A group map (with appropriate scale and your group name), signage and/ or a logo will help group recognition and a sense of unity among the members.

### **The first few meetings**

Encourage people to wear name badges for the first few meetings to help members to get to know one another.

Ask questions of members. Each member giving a short introduction to themselves and why they have become involved with the group may encourage people feel relaxed and part of the group

Early meetings should have a sense of purpose. If nothing else, members should leave with a sense of achievement and a feeling that the group is moving towards worthwhile goals.

Think about combining a meeting with a social occasion, such as a meal or BBQ. Some landcare groups meet in the function room of the local pub, and follow the meeting with a counter meal.

Other activities that could be combined with early meetings include a bus trip around your landcare group area, or to a project by another landcare group.

**For more information on running meetings, see Landcare Note LC0034: "Streamlining administration – meetings"**

### **Get involved and have fun!**

People become committed through action. By taking part in activities and achieving on-ground work, people feel good about themselves and the group.

It is important to achieve some success in the early stages of the group. This will help to attract members, hold existing members and gain assistance from other community organisations and government authorities. Therefore, the first few activities should be simple and guaranteed to succeed!

Remember that a group includes many different types of people. Not everyone wants to attend farm walks, working bees or meetings. Diversify your activities and more

people will join you in working towards your goals of landcare.



*Figure 2. A result of landcare group activities*

### **Further information**

Campbell, A. (1994) *Landcare – Communities Shaping the Land and the Future*, Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd

Chamala, S. and Mortiss, P.D. (1990) *Working Together for Landcare – Group Management Skills and Strategies*, Australian Academic Press Pty Ltd

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