

Forum on Twenty First Century Landcare and Agricultural Competitiveness

Final Report

September 2015

**Convened by the Australian Land Management Group
with support from the Maranoa Landcare Association
and the Australian Government Landcare Program**



Introduction

At a September 2015 Forum at Roma, Queensland, landholders and agribusiness representatives expressed strong support for reinvigorating Landcare through verifying continuous improvement in environmental outcomes.

The purpose of the Forum was to draw on experiences with the Certified Land Management (CLM) system so as to highlight the benefit from innovation not just on-farm but in government policies and programs affecting rural communities, Landcare and agricultural competitiveness.

The Forum was convened by the Australian Land Management Group (ALM Group) with support from the Maranoa Landcare Association and the Australian Government Landcare Program.

The Forum was opened by Hon. Bruce Scott, Federal Member for Maranoa, with keynote presentations from Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon, Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Ms Sue Middleton, Chair of the National Landcare Advisory Committee, and Dr Ben Lyons, Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise.

[Download the Forum program.](#)

Certified Land Management

According to Jock Douglas the founder of the ALM Group, Certified Land Management (CLM) is a critical tool to enable Australian farmers to not only produce more sustainably but to receive better access and higher margins in top end markets throughout Asia and beyond.

Jock and Certified Land Management (CLM) landholder Peter Thompson outlined the purpose, nature and benefits of CLM. The key message from Jock and Peter was that on- and off-farm benefits flow from implementing a continuous improvement system designed and operated to enable domestic and global marketing benefits.

[See more from Jock Douglas.](#)

Michael McKellar, another CLM landholder, underscored the importance of policy and practice innovation from the perspective of a Nuffield Scholarship holder.

Food and fibre marketing

Dr Ben Lyons' contribution to the Forum reflected his practical and academic backgrounds honed by extensive experiences in overseas marketing, particularly in China. Early in the 21st century, Ben was the driving force leading to support for CLM from Japanese and Korean textile firms wishing to differentiate their products in global markets.

Dr Lyons' key message was that technological developments, particularly in digital communication and in transport, are opening up exciting new marketing opportunities for high-quality differentiated agricultural products.

Role of government

The Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs Joel Fitzgibbon made important points favouring the need for a robust externally audited national verification system supporting improved environmental management. He expressed his support for Landcare and observed that:

- The five big things in relation to agriculture are:
 - there are huge opportunities
 - smart strategies are needed to benefit from them
 - value is better than volume
 - reputation is Australia's main competitive advantage, and
 - its greatest assets are human and natural resources.
- There is too little community attention to the maintenance of our natural resources, including soil.
- The government role is to address market failures.
- There are needs in relation to biosecurity, research and development, verification systems, foreign investment, skill enhancement, coping with a drying continent, and climate adaptation and continuous improvement.

Mr Fitzgibbon emphasised the importance of Landcare as a vehicle for pursuit of these issues, and pointed out there has been an agreed framework for environment management systems since 2002. He said that progress with this has not been good enough and that government should be carrying out a greater role. He said that the voluntary take-up of CLM-type systems should be on a much greater scale, that there are disincentives for take-up in terms of returns, and that landholders are still handicapped by unrewarded externalities.

[Download Joel Fitzgibbon's address.](#)

The chair of the National Landcare Advisory Committee, Sue Middleton, outlined the current priorities of the Committee as identifying the economic impacts of Landcare and processes for resilience, and helping the community understand why Landcare and 'Landcarers' matter. These are significant issues but they alone will not lead directly to a reinvigoration of Landcare.

Policy and program innovation

The last presentation for the day from Tony Gleeson was about capturing synergies between environmental management, agricultural competitiveness, and profitability. It was about capturing synergies between public and private investment in land management, and how Landcare could operate effectively across these spaces.

Tony observed that, notwithstanding there being a broad consensus on the need to establish market-based policies and programs, the majority of land management

programs are structured in ways that fail to capture long-term, measurable, cumulative benefits as an integral part of day-to-day business. They also fail to adequately link improvements in environmental outcomes with improved on-farm productivity and increased competitiveness in domestic and global markets.

He listed the opportunities for improving policy settings and program designs as arising from political, market, technological, and mindset factors, with innovations required to:

- improve on-farm productivity through better farm ecology—the soil-plant-animal interactions
- improve marketplace competitiveness through better risk management and through verifying ‘green’ and other credence factors, helping market forces to drive sustainability
- increase leverage of private-sector investment through encouraging and enabling integrated production and conservation planning and execution, and through better alignment of public and commercial drivers of continuous improvement
- reduce financial and skill transaction costs in delivering public- and private-sector support programs, in part through providing ongoing support for better outcomes
- strengthen monitoring and recording of outcomes to guide adaptive management.

Tony made a compelling case for an accelerated national roll out of the Certified Land Management (CLM) system as designed, proven and refined by the not-for-profit Australian Land Management Group (ALM Group).

[Download Tony Gleeson's address](#), which includes references to six major recent reports supporting the direction taken by the ALM Group.

Tony took the opportunity to reference work being done by the ALM Group to develop an Australian Natural Value Index (ANVI) to monitor the ecological health of landholdings. The intention is that, in due course, the ANVI will inform the CLM verification processes. [Read more about the ANVI](#).

Additional information

Jock Douglas: Ph. 07 4622 1490 Email: jock@australiandesertlimes.com.au

Tony Gleeson: Ph. 07 4666 4112 Email: tony.gleeson@almg.org.au

Visit almg.org.au or youtube.com/CertLandManagement to find out more.