



COVID-19 employment recovery through Landcare

A proposal to address employment, training and sustainability in regional areas
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Recovery after the COVID-19 crisis will require employment programs to assist in the renewal of regional, rural and remote communities, such as those dependent on tourism. An employment program focused on **Employment and Training for Sustainability** is an ideal regional development solution for short term and long term needs of communities affected by COVID-19. It can deliver economic security, social integration, enhanced skills and qualifications and ecological sustainability in one package. The **Local Government Association of Queensland** has identified environmentally focused employment projects as a key opportunity in their COVID 19 stimulus strategy¹. Landcare Tasmania is well placed to deliver such a program as part of State and/or Commonwealth initiatives to assist recovery from COVID-19, while at the same time contributing to Australian achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Rural **employment, health and education** indicators in Tasmania are all below par. The cost of disengaged, dysfunctional and unqualified/low skilled community members is high both economically and socially but is avoidable in many cases. One solution to the existing seemingly intractable problem, exacerbated by COVID-19 economic impacts, is to establish an employment program focused on employment and training in environment, land management and sustainability in regions with either long term under- and unemployment, or in those that have been heavily impacted by the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Previous Green Army and Green Corps projects have provided strong anecdotal evidence that purposeful, strategic and well-organised conservation land management activities, combined with accredited TAFE training units such as Conservation Land Management (CLM), will achieve excellent economic, social (including improved mental and physical health), educational and environmental outcomes in disadvantaged rural and other affected communities. However, longevity of outcomes from past programs has been patchy due to lack of **integration of program activities into existing community networks**.

Landcare Tasmania believes that an employment program accessible to all age groups (Green Army was restricted to 17-21 year olds) and that reflects the economic impacts and needs of regional communities is needed. However, to be effective and to provide long term employment and sustainability outcomes, it is critical that it is integrated into existing community networks that are linked into a Statewide operation. The existing community Landcare network run by Landcare Tasmania is an ideal vehicle to achieve this, and Landcare Tasmania is well placed to deliver **a high-quality employment and training program**, supported by a code of best practice, that provides long-term participant and community benefits.

Landcare Tasmania has a strong track record of running well managed, purposeful and strategic environment, land management and sustainability programs across Tasmania. It also has long term and substantial grass roots community connections across the State as evidenced by the 260 community groups who are members of Landcare Tasmania and their **4,900 members and volunteers**. In addition, Landcare Tasmania has established relations and partnerships with local government, business organisations, the

¹ <https://www.governmentnews.com.au/qld-councils-draw-up-battle-plan-against-covid-19/>

educational sector and other relevant non-government organisations. An employment and training program managed and coordinated by Landcare Tasmania will build on these community relationships to deliver well planned and implemented on ground conservation projects. Local ownership of issues projects will help ensure that outcomes are maintained after any supported program has ceased or reduced.

There is a currently a very large unmet need for more people on the ground to deal with problems, e.g. weeds, which are well beyond the current resources of Councils, government agencies, businesses, landowners and managers. In response to this need Landcare Tasmania has developed a **Project Bank**² comprising a list of already planned community driven projects that will deliver environment, land management and sustainability outcomes. Many of these projects face barriers to their commencement that can be addressed by a suitably focused program of employment and training, but once established will be maintained into the future by local communities.

The Project Bank means Landcare Tasmania is uniquely placed in Tasmania to be able to rapidly roll out beneficial on ground environment, land management and sustainability projects that are beneficial to the environment and production, while also reflecting local community needs and priorities and enhancing skills and qualifications. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected some sectors of the economy more than others, with rural, regional and metropolitan areas all impacted. The opportunity exists to help people affected by these impacts by providing focused local employment and accredited training in areas such as:

- * Project planning and management
- * Financial services
- * Communications
- * Weed management
- * Community engagement and development
- * Safety
- * Monitoring and data management
- * Practical on ground skills
- * Extension services

Availability of these skills and services to support local both Landcarers and those impacted by COVID-19 will greatly increase their productivity and capacity for projects that will benefit the local economy and will be maintained into the future. Many members of rural communities enjoy doing outdoor practical work, have skills that are relevant to undertaking environment and land management activities, and will gain the benefits of **greater social connection, improved physical and mental health, and skills and qualifications.**

The **UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration begins in 2021**, with strong links to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. An Employment and Training for Sustainability program would be both timely in recognising this initiative in Australia and in helping address the economic and employment impacts of COVID-19. Creating more opportunities for participation in land management will mean projects can be scaled up as well as supporting existing community Landcare activities and the needs of local communities.

In short, Landcare Tasmania can quickly **coordinate with key partners to design and deliver a targeted employment and training program** into economically distressed regional communities while also achieving significant environmental, land management and sustainability outcomes.

Further information:

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² https://www.landcaretas.org.au/eoi_map