

Abstract for 'Celebrating our history, growing our future' Landcare 25th anniversary conference September 17-19th

'AUSTRALIAN LANDCARE MOVEMENT: LET'S CELEBRATE THEN RADICALLY REDESIGN FOR THE NEXT 25 YEARS'

Dr Charlie Brennan

Charlie is the Coordinator of Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance (a regional partner of the Great Eastern Ranges initiative), lectures in Ethics & Sustainability & Sense of Place at Southern Cross University, as well as being a horticulturalist and Permaculture designer.

Conference topic(s) - Environment – Sustaining and improving physical environment, A celebration of Landcare's History, Community/social environment – volunteering, collaboration, building & sharing knowledge, Embracing our future

Presentation type – individual presentation and/or part of a panel discussion

charlie.brennan@scu.edu.au

Mobile no 0403296317

<http://www.charliebrennan.info>

<https://www.facebook.com/JaliigirrBiodiversityAlliance>

<http://www.greateasterranges.org.au>

<http://www.bellingenurbanlandcare.org.au>

The Australian Landcare movement, through its 25-year history, is a truly outstanding example of effectively putting conservation ideas and ideals into practice. That the movement has been largely community-based, bipartisan and has able to respond to, and draw upon, local resources, communities and values has no doubt been a key factor in the movement's significant and continued success.

Landcare, as it evolved in Australia, is a part of a broad set of global environmental concerns and activities dating from 1970's onwards. Since then peoples' desire to take action to be more sustainable has been expressed through a range of activities that also include intentional communities, self-sufficiency, rainforest preservation, bush regeneration, Biodynamic agriculture, whole-farm planning, Permaculture, community gardens, food localisation and Edible Streetscapes. It is of interest how many of these now global sustainability movements have their origin in Australia.

The achievements of the Landcare movement, from individual farmers and community members, through to projects and catchments are impressive and incontrovertible. Farms, creeks, forests, towns, coastal areas and whole catchments have been transformed – made more ecologically sustainable. Creeks have been improved but so too have the skills, knowledge and values and general ecological social capital of individuals and communities. (The author's personal 20-year experience of the regeneration of Cemetery Creek in Bellingen, NSW is a set of experiences the author finds almost too big to convey). In short, the Landcare movement is an outstanding example of, in the words of Gandhi, 'being the change you wish to see in the world'.

However, if the Australian Landcare movement is to survive, or even flourish, for another 25 years, it needs to enter into an honest reflective process and be prepared to change. Relying upon past slogans, arrangements, aesthetics and practices will not work. Indeed Landcare *has* changed through the 25 years; Landcare committees and volunteers have aged and the sector as a whole has become more professional. The volunteers of the past are now often employed in professional capacities as coordinators or contractors. Both the administration of projects and the carrying out of on-ground works now require semi-professional skills. The number of

Landcare groups is in decline and the next generations are more likely to express their desire for sustainability by becoming involved in community gardening. Overall the movement has become less community-up and more top-down and the zeitgeist of Landcare has arguably shifted from altruism to one of compliance.

The Australian Landcare movement originated as a truly radical redesign of the people/environment nexus. It is essential that this innovative spirit be rekindled, but how? Firstly, a culture of critical reflective practice, one that is found in social sciences and social ecology, needs to be encouraged. Secondly, there needs to be an renewed respect for community approaches and peoples' knowledge gained and accumulated through decades of dedication to Landcare practice. Thirdly, the notion of what actually constitutes 'Landcare' should be widened to encompass other expressions of sustainability. Fourthly, cross-sectoral alliances, such as the Great Eastern Ranges initiative should be fostered and lastly, and no doubt all Landcarers would agree, there needs to be a stream of funding purely dedicated to the upkeep of established projects!

496 words

ABC -

Radical:

- Joining of Rick Farley & Philip Toyne, farmers & conservationists
- Putting 1970's ideas and ideals into practice
- Genuinely community-based
- Real outcomes reaching into – people, communities, environment, places, Aust psyche & identity
- Deep connection with nature and landscapes (not easy in Aust)
- Creation of new sustainability practices (exported also)

Me/BULC:

- My ideal job!
- Massive altruistic community effort
- Transformed landscape and town
- People identify with the regen places
- Special therapeutic places

Celebration:

- Restoration
- 10's millions of people around the world working for social/env change
- Communities working together
- Aust ecology restored, valued

Issues:

- A lot has changed in 25 years!
- The need for secure funding
- Landcare groups, committee members, volunteers aging (social inclusivity, new generations, move with the times)
- Challenge of caring for existing sites
- Social/env capital being lost
- Landcares needing to cope with professional levels of bureaucracy and on-site practices
- Awkward with critical reflexivity in conservation/NRM/sustainability field

Radical possibilities:

- Funding & re-funding of successful projects
- Limit bureaucracy, send officers to see Landcarers and Landcare projects
- Widen scope of land-caring
- Acknowledge and collect Landcare skills, stories & experiences
- Be more socially inclusive – Aboriginal, poorer, multi-cultural & younger communities
- Move with the times – aesthetics, digital technology, social media, make it funky/sexy
- Embrace connectivity conservation – connectivity corridors, cross-sector collaborations, inter-community

Stephan Hajkovicz CSIRO foresight/futures lead scientist

- **New mega trends**
- Innovation imperative/6000 staff/19 trends to 5 trends/outside headspace
- (Ken Robinson education Ted X)
- More from less – resources diminishing
- Going, going gone – Extinction
- Silk Highway – Asian growth
- Forever young – changing demographics
- Great expectations – experiences over materials
- Virtually there

Conference -

1 - Opening slide/name & logos:

Hi my name is Charlie Brennan and I work for/contract to a range of organisations. My interest is in putting sustainability ideas and ideals into practice....

I completed a PhD thesis on this very subject a few years ago....

Because our greatest challenge, on a range of levels, is to put our sustainability ideas & ideas into practice

2 - Celebration:

And that is what 25 years of Landcare is – the taking of a great idea then being put into practice right across Australia as well as overseas

25 years of Landcare is 20 years of Bellingen Urban Landcare for me. This has been a life shaping set of experiences. For my community but for me also. So much so that these experiences are almost too big to convey...people, places, efforts, projects, characters, mistakes, successes. Year after year

We can learn a lot from reflecting upon our experiences. Michael Pollan, American writer on food and the environment, immerses himself before writing. This helps us to look ahead critically & imaginatively

I'll come back to the photo soon....

3 - Global env/social movement for the 1970's:

Australian Landcare movement of part of a global movement of putting 1970's ideas and ideals into practice.

Some years ago I re-read many of the texts that inspired me and many of my friends and colleagues. They were so inspired, idealistic, romantic

These 1970's inspirations have found expression in - intentional communities, self-sufficiency, rainforest preservation, bush regeneration, Biodynamic agriculture, whole-farm planning, Permaculture, community gardens, Edible Streetscapes....

Bellingen, NSW – a sustainability town & its of note that many of these sustainability practices originate in Australia...

4 – Be the change:

Landcare movement is an outstanding example of, in the words of Gandhi, 'being the change you wish to see in the world'

Of Putting conservation ideas & ideals into practice. Also community ideals.

That the movement has been largely community-based, bipartisan and has able to respond to, and draw upon, local resources, communities and values has no doubt been a key factor in the movement's significant and continued success.

And for me. For a decade or so I found one of my life niches. What better job!! Helping a community rehabilitate and rejuvenate public waterways through my town.

5 – And Landcare *has* changed the world:

Farms, creeks, forests, towns, coastal areas and whole catchments have been transformed – made more ecologically sustainable

Creeks have been improved but so too have the skills, knowledge and values and general social & ecological capital of individuals and communities

6 – Issues faced:

Weeds, Floods, Bureaucracy, Difficult community dynamics

Camphor Laurels, madeira vine, balloon vine, floods,
Again and again

The energy required to face these challenges has been as strong as the landscapes we have been working in...

7 – Restoration:

Environmental restoration is also restoration of people. Van Weiren (2008)

Cemetery Creek before & after. That was after just 10 years its now 20 years. The trees are now 15-20 metres high. Some of inspirational idealistic and ever-energetic leaders, such as my friend David in this picture, who have now passed on.

However, if the Australian Landcare movement is to survive, or even flourish, for another 25 years, it needs to enter into an honest reflective process and be prepared to change. Relying upon past slogans, arrangements, aesthetics and practices will not work.

Indeed Landcare *has* changed:

Landcare committees and volunteers have aged

The sector as a whole has become more professional. The volunteers of the past are now often employed in professional capacities as coordinators or contractors.

Both the administration of projects and the carrying out of on-ground works now require semi-professional skills.

The number of Landcare groups is in decline and the next generations are more likely to express their desire for sustainability by becoming involved in community gardening or something along those lines

And arguably, overall the movement has become less community-up more top-down

And the zeitgeist of Landcare has arguably shifted from altruism to one of compliance.

8 - The need for critical reflection:

The Australian Landcare movement originated as a truly radical redesign of the people/environment nexus. It is essential that this innovative spirit be rekindled, but how?

A) A culture of critical reflective practice, one that is found in social sciences and social ecology, needs to be encouraged.

This will lead to a renewed respect for community approaches and peoples' knowledge gained and accumulated through decades of dedication to Landcare practice.

To create imaginative (radical again?) possibilities for the next 25 years

9 - Make it easier for Landcarers

B) Make it easier for Landcarers - Fund projects! Dedicate a stream of funding purely dedicated to the upkeep of established projects! & Cut the bureaucracy

10 - Re-scope Landcare

C) Thirdly, the notion of what actually constitutes 'Landcare' should be widened to encompass other expressions of sustainability like community gardening, renewable energy, artistic expression. Also be consciously socially inclusive - Aboriginal people and communities, Socially disadvantaged people & places, urban multicultural communities.

11 – Move with the times & be connected !

A lot has changed in 25 years!

D) Landcare needs to be part of, and comfortable with, the hyper-connected world. People, places & organisations are connected via digital and other media. Aesthetics, ideas and networks are forming and shifting.
Cross-sectoral alliances, such as the Great Eastern Ranges initiative are a Great example of this.

Connectivity conservation – connecting fragmented landscapes to increase resilience to threats such as climate change. Whole of landscape land management & Cross-sector collaborations & Inter-community communication leading to projects

Examples (In Aust) are:

Great Eastern Ranges/Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance
Gondwana Link (WA)
Habitat 141 (SA & Vic)
Naturelinks
Trans Australia Eco-link
Tasmania Midlandscapes

(O/S) include:

Yellowstone to Yukon in Canada & US

12 - Tens of Millions:

Tens of millions of people around the world are working towards constructive change. Taylor (2010)

Images of Bellingen Urban Landcare volunteers & Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance event earlier this year.

13 - Contacts & links:

For contact details for me and the organisations referred to in this presentation

14 – References:

For anyone wanting more information about any references from this presentation

General notes from Gary H:

GER more flexible, bring in other partners

Landcare local & community connections

GER brings into partners wider networks and info & science

GER different configuration as opp to Landcare

General notes from Julie W:

Landcare national unable to respond to funding changes ½ million defunded

North coast v successful with networks of coordinators

Nice people

Why not bi-partisan??

Tension between volunteerism & professionalization

The need for renewal of bottom up

General notes from Rob Dunn:

Landcare NSW part of GER wanting to become a lead partner

Crowd funding initiative

GER community – led movement

Landcare central to GER