
Central Tablelands Landcare District

History of the Central Tablelands Landcare

Central Tablelands district began as “Orange Bathurst Landcare” back in the early 1990’s. It was one of the first districts in Australia to have a Landcare Coordinator. At the time there were 4 landcare groups located between Orange and Bathurst. This was considered large enough to warrant a paid staff person to help the community find the information and funding they needed to do more landcare projects.

The early days of this district had the fame and fortune of being the location where Bob Hawke (the then Prime Minister of Australia) launched the ‘One Billion Trees’ program by planting a native tree in the Panuara Four Mile Creek Landcare Group area.

Since the early 1990’s through to the early 2000’s the number of Landcare Groups grew to over 70. During this decade other districts had also applied for funding for their very own Landcare Coordinators. Even though this district took the lead we soon realized that other districts were coordinating smaller areas and smaller numbers of Landcare groups. Unfortunately the district was deemed to be ‘covered with a support person’ so no further division or expansion of the staff numbers was ever achieved.

About half the Landcare Groups have, over time, had one or more members participate in the Central Tablelands Landcare Management Committee (CTLC) which were the legal employers of the Coordinator and aimed to discuss and act on what approach would suit Landcare in the Central Tablelands. This CTLC Management Committee has met bimonthly, almost without a break for more than 15 years.

Landcare Coordinators

The Landcare Coordinators have all serviced the district with incredible passion and interest. Justin Jarrett, Kate Lorrimer-Ward, Michelle Higgins, Kim Mitchell, Margie Crowther and David Hardwick. Government changes meant that in 2004 the position that had always been employed by the local community was rearranged so it was an employee of a larger landcare body and then the Catchment Management Authorities. Today the CTLC Management Committee and each Landcare Group tap into these CMA staff and the CTLC Management Committee still employ some contract staff to implement larger projects. In July 2007 the CTLC Management Committee, chaired by Robyn O’Bryan, moved to dedicate a great deal of the success of Landcare in the district to Kim Mitchell who died suddenly on June 4th 2007 age 35. Kim was well regarded by so many and is missed greatly. Just before he died he had offered to help with these history pages. We can only imagine what his input would have been as he was a very talented and well respected journalist.

Landcare Groups

The Landcare Groups in the Central Tablelands have varied from numbers of members, to issues covered, to locations. Some preferred to remain mostly linked with their style of landholdership – be it mostly rural, mostly small holdings, urban or school and others saw the different people as potential new members. About half the groups have applied to funding bodies for grants. Most were successful at receiving grants for projects such as planting wildlife corridors, investigating salinity, willow control, developing property plans, fencing off riparian zones, etc. Many groups who did not ever go for funding also participated in such projects of their own. Funding has never influence the success of a project but rather influences the scale of the projects conducted.

One of the greatest projects, which can probably be seen from space now, is the amazing link of wildlife corridors throughout many individual properties like those in the Charlotte Vale Landcare Group. Some of the most inspirational stories of projects have come from people and groups in the Central Tablelands who have just made tree planting or willow control part of their individual or group routine, instead of waiting for funding to take action. Several urban groups have taken on areas of amazingly valuable and rare natural ecosystems in sites that would have otherwise been completely over run with weeds or cleared for development like those areas cared for by the Daroo Orange Urban Landcare Group and the Boundary Road Reserve Landcare Group in Bathurst. The “Save the Bush Tool Kit” has many of its authors within the district of the Central Tablelands.

Education

Education of the general public, schools and organizations has always been a part of Central Tablelands Landcare. The coordination of displays at shows and the Australian National Field Days was a part of the calendar when the district had its own Coordinator. Display material always filled the tent and required several trips to transport. Developing and promoting interesting field trips and farm walks has helped with the understanding of issues at paddock and catchment scale. As a network we have and can continue to attract very phenomenal speakers. During 2000 and 2001, Central Tablelands Landcare contracted the energetic David Newell to deliver the comprehensive Earth Education program to many school classes on behalf of our local Landcare network.

Since the change from having our own Landcare Coordinator to tapping into CMA staff, many Landcare Groups have continued and many have adjourned. This is also partly to do with the CMA funding arrangements that opened the door for more individuals to receive grants. Many people do find managing the paper work and legalities for a community group tiresome and welcomed the change, while others have continued because they value the benefits of locals having a committed reason to link ideas and share knowledge.

Support for local people

Regardless of the combinations of people or resources, the CTLC Management Committee has always aimed to provide support for local people to find the information they need to work with others and improve the sustainability of the natural resources of this area. Caring for natural resources does require a lot of caring for people and caring for groups. The lack of continuity in this caring formula has been a constant constraint. The strength of the landcarers, Landcare groups and the CTLC Management Committee actually lies best with our own sense of identity that is not connected to the ever-changing support. Managing this dichotomy can be exhausting for those who need to keep abreast of the changes and just want to enjoy the experience of volunteering and making a difference.

The future

The future will require all of us spending as much time focused on our own identities as landcarers, Landcare Groups and an effective Management Committee as we do spend time on working out what is actually out there to help us achieve our goals. The benefit is, the community - you and your group - own it, and this is a very empowering way to lead and make a difference.