

**MAJOR GENERAL THE HONOURABLE  
MICHAEL JEFFERY, AC, AO(Mil), CVO, MC (Retd)**

**PATRON, LANDCARE AUSTRALIA**

**DELIVERS THE OPENING KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**AT THE 2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE CONFERENCE,  
BRISBANE CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE,  
MERIVALE STREET AND GLENELG STREET, SOUTH BRISBANE**

**THURSDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2018 – 9.10 AM**

- Thanks Pip.

Mr Doug Humann, Chairman Landcare Australia  
Distinguished Guests  
Landcarers All

- It's a pleasure to be here to officially welcome you to Brisbane for this important National Conference.
- My first task is to thank you all from the bottom of my heart – for your passion, your commitment and the sheer hard work involved in being a part of the Landcare movement.
- The country literally could not do without you.
- Landcare Australia has grown from a very small, some would say, very “green” organisation in 1985 where today, there are over 5400 Landcare and Coast care groups operating across the country.
- It is also very pleasing to note that there are over 20 other countries who have adopted the Australian Landcare model of community ownership, bipartisanship and involving all those who live or work on our landscapes – our farmers, environmentalists and the general population.

PAUSE

- This year, of course, has been a time when you've been needed most.
- The drought is awful in its breadth, its length and the drastic consequences it's had on farmers, businesses, families and trade.
- We've all experienced first hand the vast expanses of clapped out paddocks and seen the ribs of too many hungry animals scratching around for food and drink.
- Australians – as they always do – have responded with incredible generosity, from the big food retailers to the little kids dressing up as farmers and handing over a few dollars to the numerous drought appeals.

EXPLAIN: My sister; my wife; Rural Aid (Charles Alder)

- In a way, 2018 I believe has been a watershed for many farmers and regional communities who care about their country.

- Because more farmers are now looking to maximise drought proofing of their farms through regenerative alternatives, to work out how to maintain permanent vegetation cover, retain more precious water in their soils – where it does its job - and reduce or, in some cases, even eliminate the overuse of chemicals, pesticides and inorganic fertilisers.
- Good land care management is the key to dealing with most landscape degradation problems. By that I mean successfully integrating the management of our soils (microbial, nutrient and fungal function), our water (the hydrology) and our plants (diversity rather than monocultures). Monocultures mine the soil, diversity enriches it.

Explain water situation. 100 drops, excised streams, riparian zones.

Explain carbon situation

- The historical collaborative approach between farmers and Landcare is a shining example of how farmers, regional communities and knowledgeable and committed Landcare workers can help bring about long term, sustainable change.
- It is possible that the media and the public will eventually experience drought fatigue, and the focus will shift to other issues, especially when it rains again.
- But that doesn't mean that you and I will stop our work, and neither should it.
- Despite the weather, our commitment to restoring, maintaining and protecting our vast landscapes must remain consistent and innovative; indeed as the National Advocate for Soil Health, I have put to the PM a national objective “to restore and maintain the health of our agricultural landscape, by integrating the management of our soil, plants and water assets.
- My other hat, as Chair of Soils For Life, chronicles the stories of farmers who made often drastic changes over many years to overturn some of the more traditional ways of farming.
- I am delighted to report that some of our recent case studies and interviews are with farmers who are technically in drought, but thriving, with full vegetation cover and – as one farmer put it – no need to “back up the feed truck”.
- They have essentially drought-proofed their farms.
- I am constantly inspired by our case study farmers, and we're seeing more reports of the take-up of regenerative practices by neighbours and even whole catchments.

- Their goal? **Sustainability**.
- Your program over the next few days includes some fascinating presentations about smarter farming, soil health, biodiversity, water and – something very close to my heart – enabling the next generation of Landcarers.
- **Sustainability** is at the core of those presentations, and I'd like to reflect on what that word means.

## PAUSE

- What does it take to make a farm or a patch of remnant bushland sustainable?
- For a start, the carers of that land have to take a very long term view.
- They'll need to ask themselves what works and doesn't work to maintain a healthy ecosystem, healthy pastures, healthy animals, taking into account the recurring Australian themes of droughts, floods, pest invasion and as mentioned earlier, the fact that 50% of all rain which falls in our country is needlessly wasted through evaporation and run off, because it cannot transpire through the soils, into the plant roots, off the leaves and back into the atmosphere. This is often caused by the loss of soil carbon.
- Add the consequences of climate change and you're looking at some pretty serious forward planning requirements.
- I'll put my Soils For Life hat on and assert that the answer to landscape degradation is, of course, healthy soils.
- Our work has shown farmers how to regenerate their soils, by maintaining top cover, maximising water filtration into the soil, planting the right perennial vegetation, pasture cropping, riparian zone repair, wetland rehydration, and adopting some age old methods of moving their animals regularly from paddock to paddock, now called controlled cell grazing.

## EXPLAIN Beetaloo Station

- But achieving sustainable pastures and paddocks on farms and bushland goes beyond that.
- That work represents a life time commitment to restoring and maintaining those healthy soils, but sustainability also needs to be registered at the kitchen tables, at

the accountant's office and in the saleyards.

- ***Economic sustainability*** for our farms, nature reserves and remnant bushland is just as important.
- Simply, if farms and other well maintained landscapes don't pay for themselves, regenerate or make a profit, the other forms of sustainability – the healthy soils, animals and crops – cannot be maintained.
- I've spoken to numerous farmers – and you can find some of them in our Soils For Life case studies – who have spent or foregone significant amounts of money to make their places sustainable.
- In one case, on Three Rivers station in the Gascoyne Rangeland near Meekathara, the owners of the 480,000 hectare property removed *all of their stock* for a time to allow their fragile country to recover.
- It cost them around one million dollars in lost business, and almost sent them to the wall.
- But their grasses recovered, and they gradually re-stocked the property and have continued to do so.
- Other farmers talk about spending thousands of dollars on new fencing required for cell grazing, or bringing in big expensive earthmoving equipment to repair their incised creeks and slowing down run off via contour ploughing and leaky weirs. Farmers need support when they undertake such restoration measures.
- The work is ongoing and they need to be vigilant about changes in weather, vegetation, pest invasion and all other other natural elements in order to remain sustainable, not just for their immediate family, but to teach the generations to come.

#### PAUSE

- I'm sure that many, if not most of you, have come across these inspiring people in your work.
- And they need you.
- The historical collaborative approach between farmers and Landcare is a shining example of how farmers, regional communities and knowledgeable and committed

Landcare workers can help bring about long term, **sustainable** change.

- Our farmers are the carers of around 60% of our landscape, and the growing band of regenerative farmers have much to teach their communities.
- You, as Landcarers, are a crucial part of those communities, and you have much to teach our farmers as well.
- It's a two way street.
- Between you, the future of sustainable agriculture in this country is bright.
- I am extremely proud of the work that you do, and to be your Patron. Let me leave you with a long term wish, and that is to see Landcare become one organisation and that we endeavour to more closely link its endeavours to the 54 NRMs and to Regenerative Agriculture.
- Thank you, welcome and let's learn together over the next few days.