



# Hunter Region Landcare Network and Dungog Shire Council Memorandum of Understanding

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Memorandum of Understanding

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**More information**

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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Context</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Partnering organisations</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Background</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Partnership statement</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Governance</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Goals and objectives</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Partnership foundations</b> .....	<b>4</b>
7.1	Common purpose .....	4
7.2	Complementary skills and resources .....	4
7.2.1	Hunter Region Landcare Network (HRLN) .....	4
7.2.2	Dungog Shire Council (DSC).....	5
7.3	Shared values.....	5
7.4	Principles.....	5
<b>8</b>	<b>Delivery</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Relationship review</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Partnership benefits</b> .....	<b>7</b>
10.1	Benefits for the partner organisations include: .....	7
10.2	Benefits to the broader community: .....	7
<b>11</b>	<b>Communication and media</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Commencement, duration and termination</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Status of MoU</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Signatories</b> .....	<b>8</b>

## 1 Context

Over thirty years ago, the then Australian Government recognised that effective land rehabilitation and management required broader community engagement, supported by government to work together on addressing the nation's land degradation problems. As a result, Landcare was born, along with government structures that engaged, supported and maximised the efforts of Landcarers.

There were a number of Landcare groups in the Hunter Region that took up the challenge of land rehabilitation in this state, such that some of the oldest Landcare groups are in this region. The formation of the Hunter Region Landcare Network (HRLN) in 1996 came from an expression of concern that Landcare groups, formed in the Hunter Valley since 1989, were not being heard or not receiving support for their activities from those bodies which acted as sources of funding, knowledge, skills instruction or other support. Since that time, HRLN has acted as a voice for issues and problems that groups have encountered and as a conduit for funding on-ground works required to enable positive outcomes for the environment.

A well-resourced, engaged Landcarer can make a considerable contribution to natural resource management on public and private land, across a wide range of land-uses. A group of Landcarers working together, to address local issues, is even better. A network of Landcare groups, that provide structures to support Landcarers is capable of working together to address catchment, district, regional and state level issues.

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been developed to support the partnership between the HRLN and Dungog Shire Council (DSC). Both organisations are reliant upon external resourcing to enable their operations. The design and delivery mechanisms of State and Federal programs impact on the operational capacity of both organisations, at the state and regional scale.

This MoU documents the foundation for a relationship between HRLN and DSC at a local level and provides guidance for the building of similar effective relationships from the model at a state level.

## 2 Partnering organisations

This MoU is between:

**Hunter Region Landcare Network (HRLN)**

and

**Dungog Shire Council (DSC)**

## 3 Background

### HRLN

The Hunter Region Landcare Network is the local reflection of a unique community-based approach to managing and restoring Australia's natural environment, improving the sustainability of agricultural activities, and building the resilience of communities. In the Hunter Region this refers to any community-based group operating in the sphere of sustainable agriculture and natural resource management including but not limited to groups that describe themselves as Landcare, Bushcare, Coastcare, Dunecare, Friends of groups, and Producer groups. There are currently around 300 such groups in the Hunter Region. Established in 1996, HRLN is the voice of grassroots Landcare and is incorporated under the *NSW Associations Act 2009*. It exists to improve the resourcing of, and support for, community led action to improve natural resource management, promote sustainable agricultural practices, and increase community resilience. HRLN is a participating member of Landcare NSW which is governed by a member Board comprised of endorsed representatives from all regions of NSW. A small executive committee oversees the operations of the HRLN organisation.

Investment in Landcare from the Landcare NSW/ Local Land Services Partnership to 30 June 2023, amounted to \$22.5 million. This third phase of the Partnership 2023 – 2027 has been doubled to \$59 million over the next 4 years. This provides an estimated economic return of \$3.70 per dollar of investment, providing Landcare Coordinators to support Local Councils, Landcare groups, and private landowners investing in conservation.

## 4 Partnership statement

HRLN and DSC as a government and community partnership are stronger together in achieving outcomes for communities and landscapes.

## 5 Governance

It is recognised that the relationship between HRLN and DSC is vital to deliver on the partnership statement. The President of HRLN and the Coordinator of Environment and Regulatory Services of DSC, jointly have the responsibility and accountability to manage the partnership and the relationship. The specific governance requirements for each program or project will be collaboratively developed by the partners and will become an addendum to this MoU.

## 6 Goals and objectives

The goal of this MoU is to establish a foundation for collaboration between HRLN and DSC on a broad range of natural resource management issues.

The objectives of this MoU are:

- to provide guidance and a framework to ensure a productive partnership that builds the capacity of both HRLN and DSC. In doing so communities are empowered to take effective action and assume leadership roles in the sustainable development of their respective communities and landscapes;
- to provide consistency of underlying principles across the Hunter Region whilst allowing flexibility for each local government area to implement actions in a way that respects the unique attributes of their area and its peoples, and incorporates the desires of the communities within the local government area; and
- to establish methods consistent with this MoU to harness the skills, knowledge and resources of both HRLN and DSC to meet our common goals, objectives and vision.

## 7 Partnership foundations

This MoU articulates the intent of HRLN and DSC to work collaboratively while building on existing relationships, principles and co-contributions, forming a Community of Practice. The partnership between HRLN and DSC in the Hunter Region of NSW is nested within a broader context and the key foundations of common purpose, complementary skills and resources, shared values and principles of a community of practice.

### 7.1 Common purpose

HRLN and DSC share a common purpose in addressing significant challenges faced by land managers and communities in NSW across natural resource management, biosecurity, farm productivity and community viability. At a state level, the vision of Landcare NSW is to ensure Landcarers have the leadership, skills and resources to care for our land, environment and communities. This common purpose provides guidance to the establishment of enduring and productive relationships.

## 7.2 Complementary skills and resources

HRLN and DSC recognise and acknowledge that they are working towards a common objective and often their work is interdependent. Each party can bring complementary strengths to this relationship to enable effective collaboration. For this purpose, the particular relevant strengths of each party are:

### 7.2.1 Hunter Region Landcare Network (HRLN)

- Developing local ownership of issues, solutions and landscape changes;
- Broad recognition and good reputation in the community;
- Informal structures that enable flexibility and the capacity to quickly respond and adapt to emerging issues and changed circumstances;
- Good local knowledge that supports local innovation and solutions;
- Ability to leverage financial and in-kind resources; and
- Access to skills within and from the community.
- Landcare Coordinator staff in an advisory capacity, capacity building and support to Landcare groups, and to present Landcare group enquiries to the DSC Coordinator of Environment and Regulatory Services at quarterly meetings.

HRLN can provide:

A Landcare Group Kit with the paperwork necessary for the formation of a Landcare group:

- Toolkit of papers on our website or from LNSW,
- Landcare Coordinator support in the use of tool-kit and establishment of group,
- Registration with HRLN (and with Council).

For incorporated groups working on Council land, access to insurance cover (if this is not provided by Council):

- This may be an attractive alternative to Local Council provision of insurance.

For Landcare groups in making grant funding submissions (this may be extra to Council funding):

- Training for members of Landcare groups (training day or workshops) to complete applications,
- Landcare Coordinator assistance with the application process,
- Making groups aware of funding opportunities through website/ facebook/ The Scoop monthly newsletter.

Sourcing funding from other community groups for environmental activities:

- Canvassing clubs, etc, to find sources of funding for specific projects,
- Approaches to other service groups in the community, including corporations.

Advice from Landcare Coordinators or other appropriately qualified Conservation and Land Management personnel:

- Assistance with plant identification advice and training days in the region to support this,
- Development of ties with Aboriginal community groups for the development of bush tucker gardens, fire hazard reduction through cool burns,
- Opportunities to develop an understanding of the Cultural ties to the environment,
- Support from groups such as Intrepid Landcare to assist on specific projects.

### 7.2.2 Dungog Shire Council (DSC)

Mission Statement: to manage, enhance, and protect the resources of the Dungog Shire in consultation with the community:

- Local perspectives of landscapes and communities;
- Engaging communities and other stakeholders in developing and implementing plans for landscape enhancement;
- Institutional and organisational capacity;
- Enablers of practice change; and
- Technical skills and expertise in natural resource management, agricultural production, biosecurity and emergency management.

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Dungog Shire Council can provide:

Coordination of activities on Council lands:

- Activities are appropriate and in keeping with current legislation,
- Nominated Local Council staff member as the one point of contact for all Landcare enquiries for HRLN,
- Local Council written permission and support in case of conflict.

Dungog Shire Council access to funding sources associated with environmental aspects of land under Local Council control:

- Some funding is for Councils only and some funding may be tied to community involvement (provided by an active landcare group),
- Identification of specific needs through Landcare group activities (weeds, erosion control, etc), tackling hard to do tasks such as specific weed removal and chemical spraying on a merits basis.

Community layers:

- Consulting the local community that live around the park/ bushland/ Landcare site,
- Landcare listing on DSC website to encourage greater community engagement.

The partnership between HRLN and DSC brings together the resources and complementary skills and values of the respective organisations to strengthen delivery and maximise delivery capability.

### **7.3 Shared values**

Both parties aspire to a relationship based on trust, respect, connection and understanding. To be successful this collaboration is founded on agreed values, intentions, practices and working together towards a common purpose.

HRLN and DSC aspire to be:

- Conscious of local and regional diversity;
- Local, long term and simple;
- Leaders;
- Complementary;
- Innovative;
- Adaptive;
- Supportive; and
- Resilient.

### **7.4 Principles**

HRLN and DSC recognise that the success of this partnership will be enabled by:

- Shared and agreed common goals;
- Appropriate and strategic collaboration;
- Aligning funding and other resources for shared purposes;
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities;
- Effective communication between parties;
- Strong capacity and leadership within community groups;
- Sharing knowledge in a framework of trust;
- Measuring, acknowledging, promoting and celebrating achievements;
- Investing time in relationships;
- Transparent decision making;
- Practical support being provided for leaders, and staff;
- Diverse and resilient groups and networks; and
- Strong and effective, accountability and leadership.



## 8 Delivery

This partnership is founded and builds upon the successes achieved to date and the strengths of the existing relationship between HRLN and DSC. This MoU sets the partnership foundation for strong leadership at the local and regional level which will inform, guide and support local and regional relationships and natural resource management activities.

The objectives of this partnership will be delivered through:

- Open, regular and effective communication processes between the partners including:
  - Dialogue between HRLN Committee and DSC;
  - Collaborative networking opportunities at the local and regional level;
  - Clear local and regional communication pathways;
  - 2 yearly MoU review
  - ½ hour zoom call session scheduled quarterly to provide updates/ communicate any issues from Landcare groups.
- Development, alignment and adaptive improvement of strategic planning processes through collaboration and sharing of information and knowledge;
- Development, refinement and implementation of innovative community capacity building strategies through collaborative and open processes;
- Identification and securing of investment and resources using the strength of the partnership to leverage greater outcomes;
- Establishment of a collaborative partnership approach to implementation through support of local delivery processes which capitalise upon the strengths of the respective partners;
- Active and collaborative promotion of the capability provided by the partnership to Government, investors and key stakeholders;
- Provision of mutual support for each other as genuine and respected partners;
- Active support for the local government areas and regions to develop effective monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement mechanisms to accurately report on resource condition including community capacity change; and
- Adaptive management which will monitor, review and evaluate the success of the partnership to guide adaptive improvement.

The measurable outcomes of this MOU may include:

- Number of Landcare groups working on Council lands (increase/ stable/ decline)
- Number of persons involved in community Landcare activities
- Training sessions for work-safety issues
- Funding provision for purchase of trees and shrubs for Landcare sites
- Number of locations in the LGA where Landcare groups are at work
- Funding opportunities identified as appropriate for sites

- Grant applications submitted
- Grant applications successful
- Number of meetings between DSC and HRLN with regard to this MOU
- Number of meetings with community service groups or other possible funding sources
- New Landcare groups formed
- LGA report of Landcare group activities for the year
- Visit by other supporters (eg: Intrepid Landcare/ urban rural exchange programs)
- Community/ Public recognition and celebration of achievements, eg: awards, publicity, Landcare Muster.

The mechanisms listed above provide leadership, guidance and support to inform the development of local and regional relationships.

## 9 Relationship review

HRLN and DSC acknowledge the importance of ensuring this MoU remains relevant to the needs of their collaborative working relationship at the state, regional and local scale. As such, they will consult on an ongoing basis on possible variations of the MoU with the aim of making arrangements for its continuing and effective implementation. The primary purpose of this relationship review is to ensure this MoU is used at all scales to frame the partnership and enact collaboration.

This MoU will also be supported by a monitoring plan including key performance indicators that can be modified over time to reflect both the needs of the parties and the requirements of the current programs that support both HRLN and DSC.

The President of HRLN and Coordinator of Environment and Regulatory Services of DSC will jointly review this MoU every two years or within another period as mutually agreed.

## 10 Partnership benefits

Through adoption and delivery of the principles and delivery components espoused in this MoU, the mutual benefits will need to be tangible for the partnership to succeed. This partnership is anticipated to provide a range of benefits, as outlined below, to the partner organisations and the broader community:

### 10.1 Benefits for the partner organisations include:

- Skills and knowledge of the respective organisations harnessed for better outcomes;
- Coordinated, innovative and supported approach to planning and delivery at the relevant scales;
- Stronger relationships between Landcare groups and members and DSC;
- Mutual support and acknowledgement;
- Reduced potential for conflict resulting from collaborative, adaptive, innovative and outcome focused relationships;
- Symbiotic outcomes achieved across program design;
- Greater volunteer support and increased on ground outcomes; and
- Effective and efficient delivery of local and regional plans and achievement of organisational strategies.

## **10.2 Benefits to the broader community:**

- Greater public value from investment of public funds;
- Actively engaged, supported, empowered and resilient communities;
- Greater awareness of support available and appreciation of the organisations roles and functions;
- Enabled local communities that are aware, engaged, active, supported, skilled and resourced;
- Simple and flexible processes to support landholder and community engagement; and
- Sustainable, productive agricultural industries and improved natural resource condition.

## **11 Communication and media**

HRLN and DSC agree to inform each other with respect to any communication with the media or third parties, and any public communications, that involve issues of mutual interest or issues which concern the other party. Where possible, where a matter involves issues of mutual interest HRLN and DSC will work together to develop a joint and consistent approach to the communications strategy.

## **12 Commencement, duration and termination**

This MoU commences on the date it is signed by all the parties and remains in force until it is terminated in accordance with the paragraph below.

### **Termination**

- a) This MoU may be terminated at any time however, termination requires at least 3 months' written notice of an intention to terminate or such other notice as agreed.
- b) Any termination may only be affected by the President of HRLN and the Coordinator of Environment and Regulatory Services of DSC.

## **13 Status of MoU**

This MoU is administrative in nature and is not intended, in whole or in part, to create, maintain or govern legal relations or obligations between the parties. Any obligations arising under legislation for each organisation are not affected by this MoU.

Nothing in this MoU or activities carried out pursuant to it give rise to or create a legal partnership or relationship of principal and agent between HRLN and DSC.

This MoU does not create an exclusive relationship between HRLN and DSC. Any existing agreements between the parties and other entities are not affected by this MoU, and each party may engage with any other individuals or community groups to form relationships or partnerships with respect to the same or similar subject matter in this MoU.

## 14 Signatories

Each party signs this MoU to acknowledge that it will use its best efforts to work collaboratively with the other party to reach the objectives stated in this MoU.

Hunter Region Landcare Network	Dungog Shire Council
Name: Stephen Thatcher	Name:  <b>Gareth Curtis</b>
Title: President HRLN	Title: General Manager Dungog Shire Council
Signature: 	Signature: 
Date: 6 September 2023	Date

