

Review of “*Building resilience in local communities: The wellbeing benefits of participating in Landcare*” Report

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1. Understanding Landcare



Landcare is a national not-for-profit movement that has been working since 1986 for the wellbeing of the communities across Australia by promoting sustainable land management practices and environmental conservation. The Landcare sign is ubiquitous across several landscapes concerned with enhancement and conservation of land, water, soil, coasts, natural habitat restoration, farming systems, protection to threatened species, and more. Landcare partners with stakeholders that provide funds to the Landcare community and support capacity-building activities for the protection and management of the environment. The functioning of Landcare is almost impossible without the committed contribution of volunteers, communities and individuals that maintain the existing conservation spaces and create new ones.

The Landcare community consists of approximately 6,000 Landcare, Coastcare, Bushcare, and environmental care groups and 140,000+ volunteers and facilitators across Australia.

Landcare groups across Australia are represented collectively by the National Landcare Network that involves members from each state and Territory Landcare peak body *viz.* Landcare NSW, Landcare ACT, Landcare Victoria, Landcare Tasmania, Landcare Association of South Australia, WA Landcare Network, Landcare NT, and Queensland Water and Land Carers.

Working for the conservation and maintenance of Landcare is of immense value as it has a positive impact on the growth and betterment of our natural resources; but the impact of caring for Landcare on people working for it, is hardly discussed. Therefore, research had been carried out by Landcare Australia together with KPMG Australia to find out the consequences of caring for Landcare on volunteers and communities.

2. Commencement of Research for understanding Landcare benefits

The non-environmental impact of Landcare on people involved in it requires qualitative and quantitative information about the diversity of different organizations that make up Landcare - like the location of group/organization (rural, or urban, near coasts, small cities or farmlands), number of people involved (group of volunteers to large organizations), the total cost of a Landcare project, and outcomes of the project. Thus, to assess Landcare at the national level joint qualitative and quantitative assessment was used that involves the core elements of the methodology and their purpose (Figure 1).

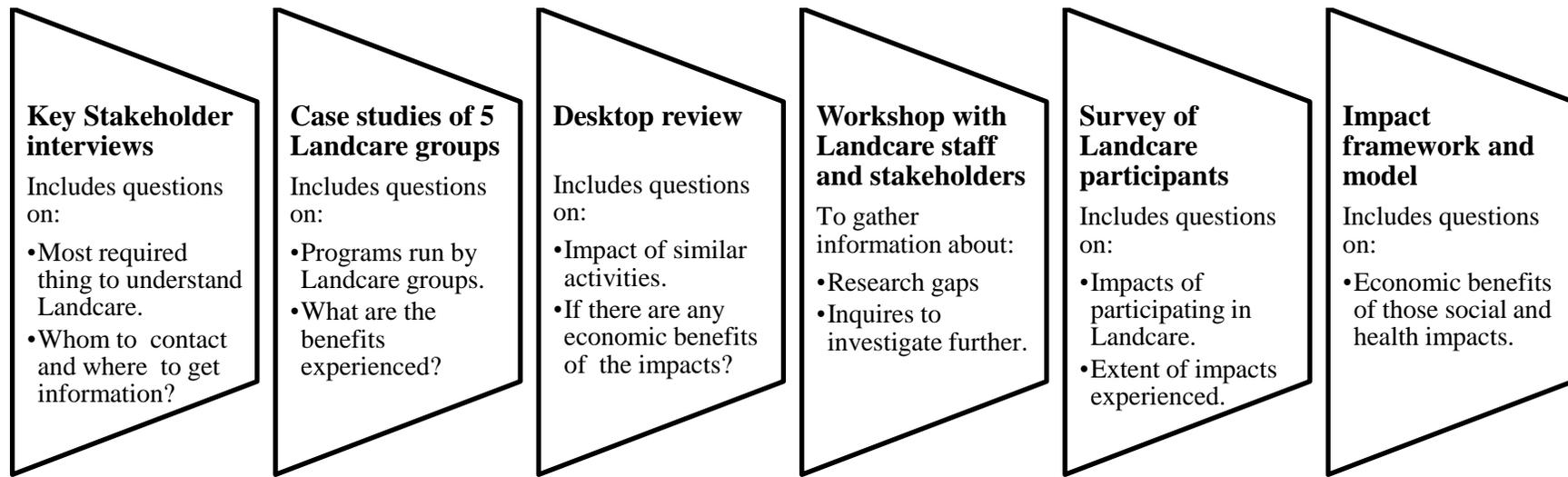


Figure 1. Methodology for understanding Landcare benefits.

A. Key Stakeholders interviews and case study of Landcare groups

For identifying the most required thing to understand Landcare and areas of impact experienced by the people involved in Landcare, key stakeholder interviews were conducted with experienced Landcare people and with individuals researching on Landcare. Five different groups were selected by Landcare Australia for case studies based on geographical location, representing a range of populations including groups highly reliable on volunteers to groups having paid employees. These groups were:

1. Capricornia Catchments and Capricorn Coast Landcare Groups based in the Yeppoon Community in Central Queensland
2. Holbrook Landcare Network in Southern New South Wales
3. Landcare Broken Hill in Western New South Wales
4. Noosa and District Landcare in Queensland
5. The Northern Yarra Landcare Network in the Yarra Ranges in Victoria

Interviews in each group were conducted by the project team. NVivoTM software³ was used for this purpose. Advanced management application and query tools in NVivoTM software enabled the identification of common impact areas identified across all the interviews. On the basis of these, top impact areas were selected as shown in Table 1. Any additional impact parameter was identified by the desktop review.

Table 1. Top impact areas selected through case studies

Rank	Impact area	Example	Total interview count
1	Sharing knowledge and support	Knowledge transfer from older to younger generation; from established farmer to the newer one	12
2	Connection to the community	Through newsletters to events	11
3	Hands-on experience	Doing activities like Landcare management and planting trees	10
4	Connection to people	Meet and connect to like-minded people	9
5	Connection to nature and country	Experiencing nature and understanding its connection to country	9
6	Community collaboration	Connecting with other community-oriented local businesses to tackle community-wide problems	8
7	Economic benefits	Drawing funding from the private sector to help a community in developing low-cost solutions (e.g., improved soil quality)	7
8	Community resilience to natural disasters	Seeking and utilizing disaster relief funding	7
9	Improved mental health and wellbeing	Providing feeling of empowerment, belonging and purpose	7

B. Desktop review

The desktop review analyzed the already published sources about Landcare and helped to understand what already has been researched in this area. These publications predominately concentrate on regional and rural communities - farming, environmental volunteering, climate change, and the benefits of taking part in Landcare. Out of the several sources referred for reviewing, some were quite noticeable and these include:

1. GHD, Multiple Benefits of Landcare and Natural Resource Management
2. Jacki Schirmer and Kimberly Brown, University of Canberra, Climate Change, Drought and Regional Wellbeing
3. Australian National University, Sustainable Farms Initiative
4. Hugo Ottesen, The Value of Community Landcare: A Literature Review, Prepared for National Landcare Network

These reviews provide the key insights into the contribution that Landcare brings to its people.

C. Stakeholder workshop

A workshop was organized with stakeholders, Landcare staff, participants of case studies, representatives of government agencies, and land carers to review and critique the impact areas identified by key stakeholders and case studies interviews together with survey questions before its finalization. Workshop attendees were informed about the impact area identified so far which leads to several questions with regards to benefits to different categories of people as mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2. Benefits of Landcare according to the category of people

Category of people	Benefit
Youth	Provided employment opportunities and support for young farmers.
Indigenous	Supported Indigenous young people to get back to the country and provide mental health benefits.
Disaster affected	Reducing isolation, improving mental health resilience, encouraging community participation, social support, and funding.

D. Survey of Landcare participants

An online survey of Landcare participants was conducted by Landcare Australia between 12th and 27th May 2020 using the SurveyMonkey4 tool. Survey design for respondents was planned in keeping view of three categories – demography; impact area and demography; and co-relation of impact area (Table 3). Several questions were included in each area mentioned in Figure 2. The survey was promoted through the Landcare Australia website, e-newsletters, and social media channels as well as existing networks within the conservation and land management sector.

Table 3. Division of categories for the survey of respondents

Categories	Details included
Demography	Age, location, type of involvement in Landcare, length of involvement with Landcare, the average number of hours per month spent on Landcare, and the respondent’s employment status
Impact area	Connection with people, environment, and community; Economic and community impacts; and physical and mental health impacts
Demography and co-relation of the impact area	How impacts are experienced by different groups of survey respondents

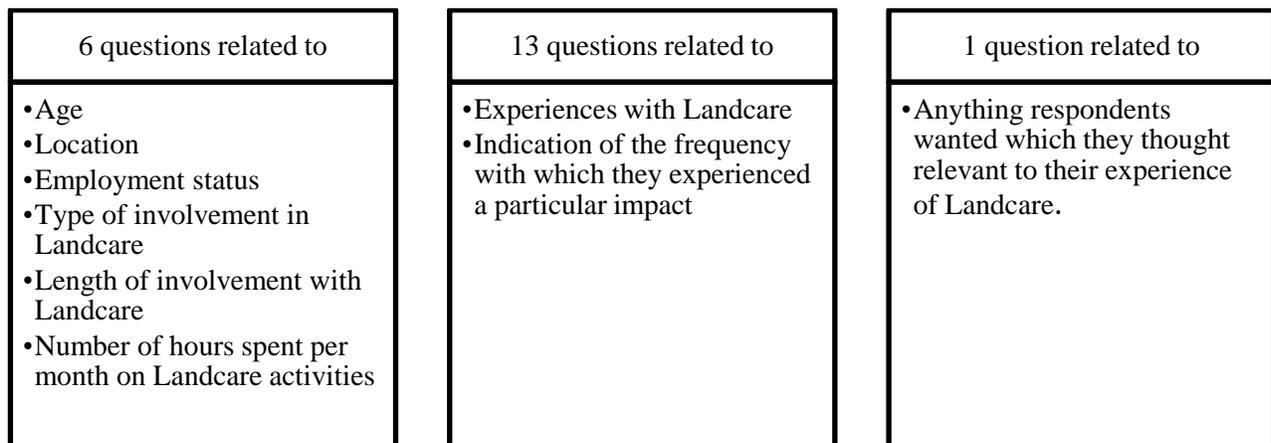


Figure 2. Type of questions asked to respondents

Survey results: Demography

The demography of the respondents was the most important aspect to be included in the survey to ascertain their experiences and the extent of benefits. Aspects related to the demography of the respondents are as follow:

a) **Location:** Survey responses were divided based on state and territory (Figure 3).

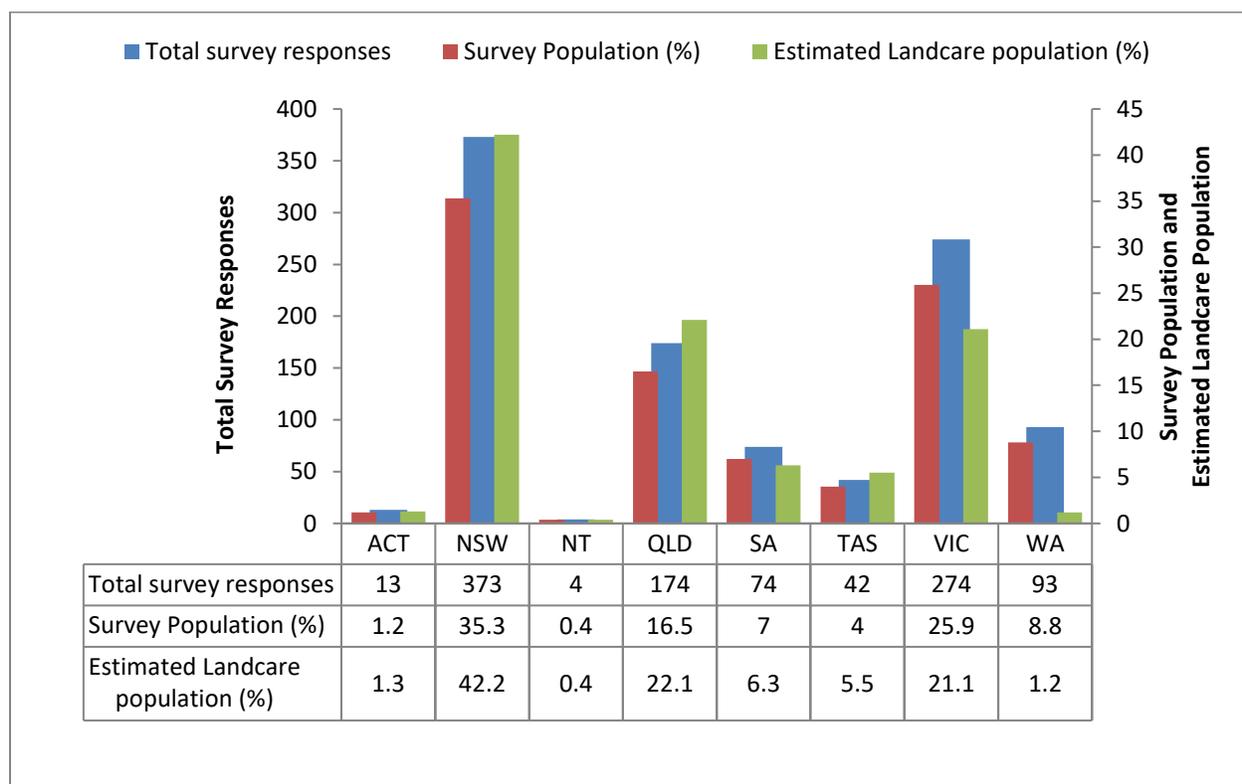


Figure 3. Survey responses based on estimated Landcare population (%) in each state

b) Age

Most of the survey respondents were above the age of 40 which suggests the involvement of the older population more than the younger population.

c) Type of investment

The majority of the participants were working voluntarily, however, there was hardly any difference between the benefits achieved by volunteers and paid workers.

d) Length of involvement

The majority of respondents were found to be involved in Landcare for more than 10 years which means more experience with Landcare and more accuracy in survey results.

e) Level of involvement

Most of the participants (approx. 71%) work for Landcare occasionally, spending between 0 to 20 hours/month. Respondents from remote and very remote areas spend more hours in Landcare activities when compared with participants from major cities.

f) Employment status

The large Landcare population was older thus many were not involved in any labour force. However, some participants were employed with full time work.

Survey results: Impact Area

a) Connection with people, community, and environment

The survey showed the involvement of 62% of respondents in land management and environmental activities at least once a month. Although the involvement was low, the positive impact on respondents was quite impressive.

b) Economic and community contribution

Almost 70 % of respondents agreed that Landcare groups supported the local economy by providing an extensive network that increases the chances of employment. Not only this, some of them developed informal skills while some got formal training. Connection and partnership with other local communities were also observed.

c) Mental and physical health and wellbeing

Improvement in mental and physical health was observed in 50% of the respondents. Further analysis indicated the strong connection between mental wellbeing and the environment.

E. Impact framework and model

Desktop review and responses of the survey helped in designing the impact framework and model. The approach to undertaking this analysis is illustrated in Figure 4.

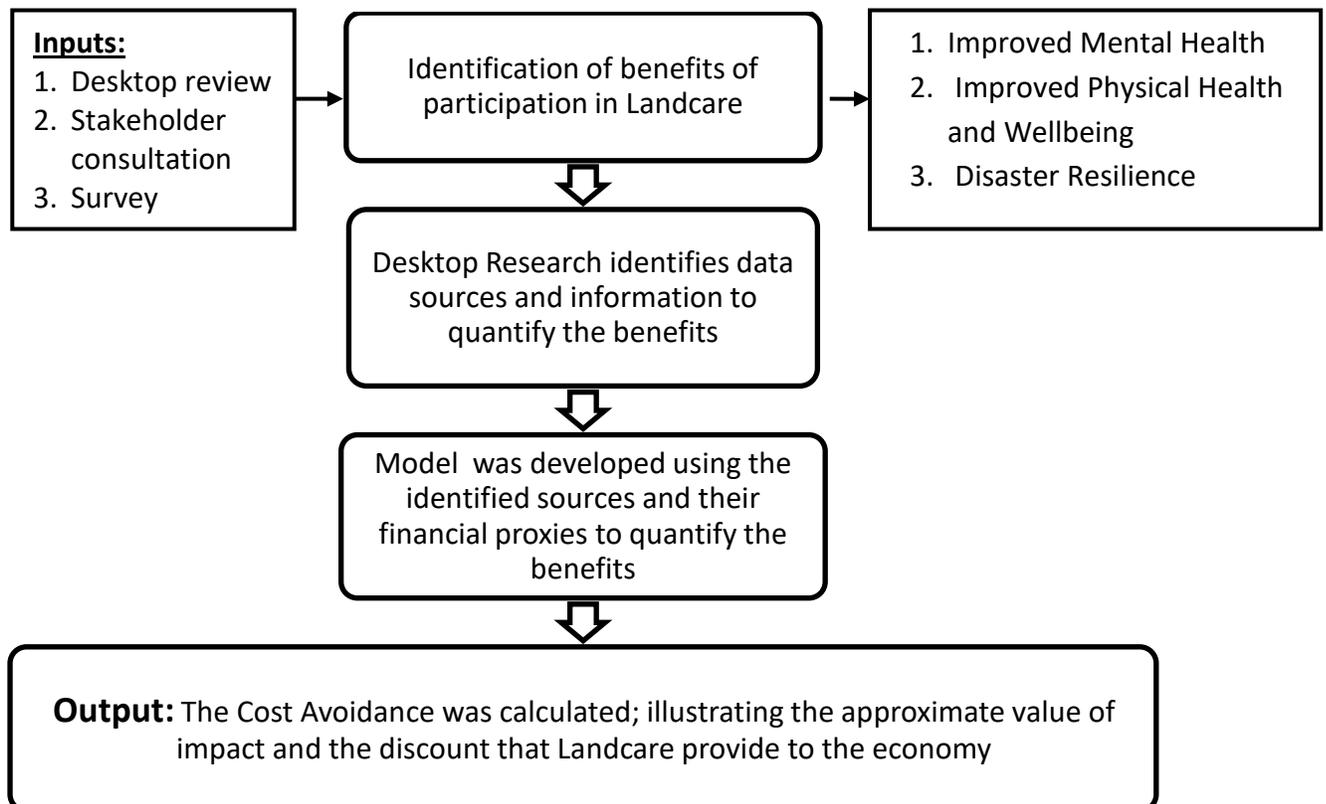


Figure 4. Impact framework and model (<https://landcareaustralia.org.au/wellbeing-report/>)

Quantification of benefits of participation in Landcare was carried out based on the approach to develop an impact framework and model (Figure 5).

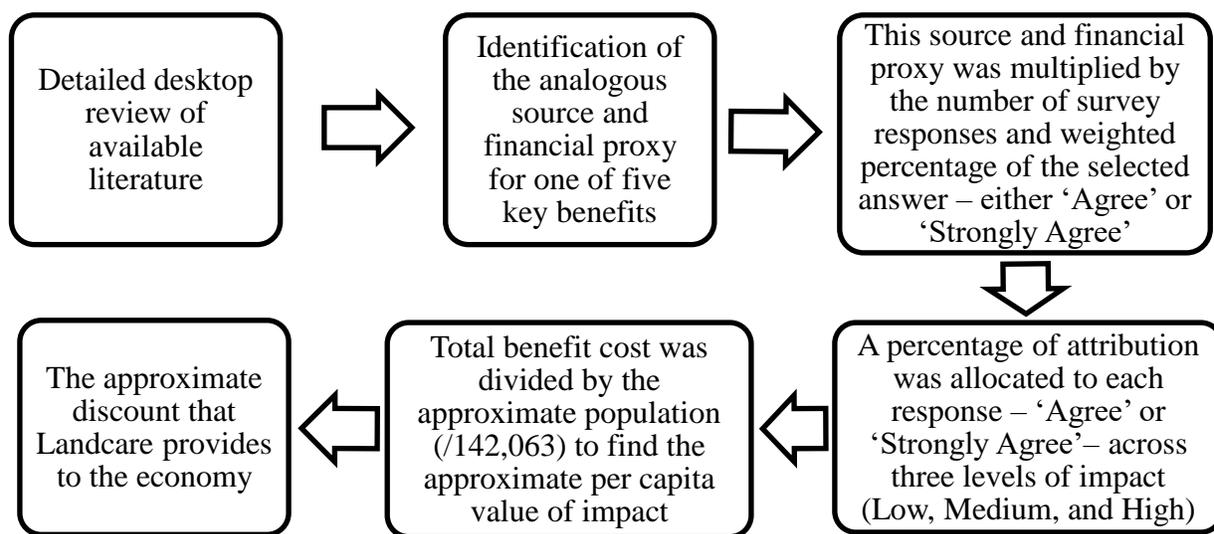


Figure 5. Methodology explanation for Quantification of benefits
(<https://landcareaustralia.org.au/wellbeing-report/>)

Total economic impact

The total Landcare population across Australia is approximately 140,000 which suggests that the total economic benefit/savings of participation in Landcare can be estimated on its basis. To make it easy to understand, financial proxies were divided into three categories:

1. Saving related to physical health impacts
2. Savings related to the economic cost of natural disasters
3. Saving related to mental health impacts

Each of these categories contributes to discounts for each member of the Landcare population including discount/ savings in health care cost, improved productivity through improving mental health, avoiding cost on physical health caused by inactivity, and reduced cost to the economy on disaster recovery.

Table 1. Total discount Landcare provides to economy (per Landcarer)

Value of impact (per unit)	Units of impact	Population Size	Total Approximate Discount (\$)
\$ 8,101	Per Landcarer/ Per Year	142,063	Low scenario: \$1,347 Medium scenario: \$2,182 High scenario: \$3,018

3. Benefits of participation in Landcare

In the survey Landcare volunteers and coordinators experience several benefits including:

1. Strong connection with communities, people, and environment that resulted in improvement in mental wellbeing.
2. Reduced use of physical health services thus reduction in healthcare costs.
3. Knowledge sharing between groups, from older to young, from experts to the learner.
4. Disaster resilience and recovery.

5. Benefits to people living in big cities as they don't come across natural resources often, these people feel more connected to the environment.
6. Potential economic benefits were observed. For the most conservative 'low' scenario there is a \$1,347 per person per year economic benefit from participation in Landcare.

4. Negative impact of Landcare

Most of the participants observed some sort of positive impact in their life after working with Landcare but still, there are people (3%) who felt a negligible or negative impact on their mental health. Comments indicate that these respondents don't even feel connected to the environment or to their communities. Another aspect where the Landcare participation doesn't contribute much was in providing or improving employment prospects. Most of these people were of older age (55+), thus they are at the mature stage of employment or had left their jobs, therefore a low level of employment benefits among older participants is quite obvious.

5. Future prospects

Although this extensive study disclosed the non-environmental benefits of participating in Landcare by identifying almost every aspect of impact areas, still there are some limitations involved. These shortcomings can be easily overcome by including more demographic information about the impact on respondents located in remote areas. In addition to this, the participation of the younger population in the survey will be further beneficial as it will provide details about the improvement in mental health, employment status, and development of skills by younger participants. Further, the questions related to benefits on particular ethnicity and genders were not considered, and that could help in developing a better understanding of Landcare. Lastly, the impact of disasters on Landcare groups and their work can be discussed more fully, in future studies.

References

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