

**Poster Paper for  
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## **Changing the World: A Tasmanian Perspective**

In a far corner of the planet, on an island an overnight's ferry ride south of mainland Australia, is a place where the Landcare movement has not only thrived but may be a leader in helping to change the world. Why is this so? Why has Landcare been so successful in Tasmania?

Across the globe more and more people are living in sprawling metropolises and nature is distant. Where once people had a grandparent, cousin or uncle that earned a living from the land, now generations of people are growing up with lives quite disconnected from natural and farming environments.

Many people find it difficult (or seemingly irrelevant) to relate to global issues such as climate change, deforestation, water pollution and sustainable agriculture. Those who are aware of the issues often feel a sense of alienation and disempowerment – *“What can one person do in the face of such huge geo-political issues?”*

**In Tasmania the global trend of disconnection and passivity is being reversed and Landcare has been a major vehicle for this turnaround.**

In a State where pro-logging and pro-conservation issues have long polarized the community Landcare has been a uniter.

Landcare has not only brought farmers together in remote districts (where they may never have previously seen their neighbour's properties), it has brought sceptical locals, government officers and “greenies” together in care groups to look after whole catchments. Peri-urban Landcare groups have formed (bringing diverse urbanites together) for visionary public good projects and Tasmania has a strong coastal Landcare movement that is linking up stakeholders previously at loggerheads into cooperative partnerships.

Through Landcare people in Tasmania are working together in new networks that have started to break down long held social stereotypes like never before.

So why has Tasmania been able to adopt the Landcare ethic and model so successfully? What is the motivation for some of the leaders of the Landcare movement? What can the rest of the world learn from Tasmania?

### **Motivation: a Sense of Place**

In Tasmania a ‘sense of place’ has been suggested by some in the Landcare movement as a key ingredient for motivating people to be involved in Landcare; my feeling is that having a sense of place is potentially *the* most powerful ingredient (but it is certainly not the only ingredient for success).

Many people feel deeply connected to their local environment which has led to a powerful cognitive *and* emotional attachment to it. When the *head* and the *heart* are combined many people are unstoppable in their determination to look after their Landscape.

It appears the deeper the sense of place one has for landscape, the deeper one's commitment is to care for it. This undefinable attachment to the landscape has also led many to have a deep sense of *duty* towards the environment.

Without a sense of place, there is less connection to the environment and thus less ownership of issues; and without ownership of an issue there is little to motivate people to act.

Tasmania offers the opportunity for deep connections to the environment and a correspondingly high level of motivation not only because there is so much land here that is not urbanized, but because many of the people who are managing these lands have been doing it sustainably for generations.

For example, Julian Von Bibra is part of a family that has been managing a significant area of the Midlands of Tasmania since early 1900's. He has been involved in the Landcare movement since its earliest days. His family has developed not a five or ten year plan for their property, but a '*generational Landcare plan*'.

Julian suggests that a 'sense of place' makes Tasmania different and a fertile ground for good Landcare:

*"You can have a sense of pride and belonging and enjoyment in living in Tasmania. A sense of the future here gives you heart."*

*"Tasmania is different; the footprint of environmental degradation is not as big here as it is on the mainland and for me that inspires a sense of responsibility."*

*"We have the opportunity to do it right here and that is a big motivator."*

*"I have the desire to hand on the farm in good health. I want to address the negative impacts on the environment so they are not handed-on to the next generation."*

*"A sense of place is definitely important. The longer you have an association with an area, the deeper the connection. I think some of the older generational families around here want to pass onto the community their philosophies of how they have managed the land sustainably and to show the links with the past – they want to show the way."*

*"We are very lucky here. We are able to have pride for our environment and to marry landcare with the need to be profitable - and this is the ultimate aim, to have a profitable **and** environmentally sustainable business that we can pass on to our children."* (pers. comm. 2006)

Tom and Cynthia Dunbabin have been managing their property on the Tasman Peninsula since the 1970's and feel that 'a sense of place' is a key reason for their long involvement in landcare; their family has been farming in the same area since the mid 1800's.

They use a term that many farmers would not normally voice when describing their relationship to their local environment; they describe their sense of place and motivation to look after their landscape as *spiritual* in origin.

*"The land has spirit. Indigenous Australians have known this for millennia. Theirs has been a close association with the land - seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching and thinking about it.*

*"For me, my everyday existence is entwined with the land and I cannot help but be powerfully affected by its spirit. It defines my sense of place, my belongings in life. I belong to the land – it doesn't belong to me. I am a steward of this land and I have a fierce passion for and a sense of responsibility towards it.*

*"This spiritual connection underpins my actions as a farmer and drives my NRM actions and activities."*

*"Not surprisingly I have found this passion for the land, this strong sense of place, is shared by other farmers and they agree that this deeply personal aspect of our lives must be talked about.*

*"It is my belief that we have to talk about and recognise peoples' sense of place in order to achieve the environmental outcomes we desire and that are so urgently needed." ('Sense of Place - Connections to the Land', by Cynthia Dunbabin, 'RipRap', June 2006.)*

### **The Economic Driver**

The other key ingredient that has motivated people to get involved in Landcare in Tasmania is economic. Achieving greater productivity and profitability is a great motivator to getting farmers to initially get involved in Landcare and sustainable land management. But in the long term I think economics is a less important as a motivator than the influence of a sense of place and a deep connection to the landscape.

Farms must be economically sustainable to survive - this is fundamental, but the motivation for land managers to go the extra yards to manage their farms sustainably (and get involved in more abstract things such as catchment approaches to natural resource management) goes beyond economic rationalism.

Economics alone does not drive people to form volunteer Landcare groups, to have weekend working bees, to have monthly meetings, to fill out countless forms, to apply for grants year after year, to sit on committees and to learn how to communicate with bureaucratic institutions.

In the end it is a sense of place and 'love for the land' that drives many people to think, breathe and eat Landcare and to make Landcare a way of life rather than simply a government program or natural resource management 'delivery model'.

(A warning – motivation is fickle and can be undone by external processes. Landcare, like all relationships, takes hard work and trust to keep it healthy and evolving – it cannot be taken for granted. As soon as the community feels undervalued or mistrusted, motivation is quickly undermined.)

### **Compulsion**

What does **not** motivate people? A suite of tools are currently used to assist and persuade people to manage the land sustainably (i.e. incentive programs, grants and regulations). Regulations are the poor cousin of motivation and commitment; they seldom inspire people and can be counterproductive. Regulations have their place, but they run the risk of undercutting the relationships and trust land managers may have developed through the Landcare process.

Regulation can quickly undo much goodwill that has been built up in communities. It is acknowledged that regulatory approaches are sometimes necessary (for instance when land ownership changes and the new owners do not have the same sense of place or land management history as the previous managers) but regulations must be developed in cooperation with the community for them to be ultimately successful.

The *process* by which regulations are introduced to communities and the *details* of *how* they will be implemented must acknowledge that many farmers have successfully managed environmental values on their properties in the past without compulsion.

### **Size Matters**

Tasmania's scale is important. Because Tasmania is a small place people feel they can quantifiably make a difference. By operating at comprehensible scales people are not overwhelmed by the immensity of issues – they feel they can genuinely change things for the better.

*"People feel they have power to effect on-ground change here. People see results quickly.*

*"People work at their own level and fulfil a role where they can contribute the most. They feel valued and appreciated.*

*"Tasmania is small enough to notice other projects and see that efforts are making a big difference. Everyone personally knows someone who is involved in similar situations; this helps people draw more support and get positive feedback."* (Cynthia Dunbabin, pers. comm. 2006)

Perhaps it is also the close interface between the environment and politics in Tasmania that works towards Landcare's advantage; there is no hiding away

from natural resource management issues in Tasmania – farming, forestry, national parks, mining, rural lifestyles and livelihoods, coastal development pressures, water management dilemmas - these things are discussed in parliament and are front page news every week in Tasmania. Environmental issues are ‘in people’s faces’ day in and day out and everyone has an opinion about issues.

### **Empowerment**

Having Landcare issues be a daily part of people’s lives has led to a deep level of ownership of issues and many people have a powerful sense that they *can* make a difference here.

There is a feeling in Tasmania that ‘we can do it right here, we can farm sustainably, we can look after our environment *and* we can have one of the best lifestyles in the world.’

The feeling is positive among practitioners - both land managers and advisors. Having a positive attitude is very much to Tasmania’s advantage too. As well, the ability to link and network well (‘everyone knows everyone in Tasmania’) is an advantage in Tasmania – new ideas with key players can be quickly developed, discussed and implemented here.

The Landcare movement and its networks represent a huge (and often undervalued) investment in the social capital of Tasmania. There are over 260 Landcare groups in Tasmania (including Coastcare, Waterwatch and ‘Friends of’ groups) that contribute an estimated 500,000 volunteer hours per year – a figure equal to 250 full time workers. These groups are linked up through their own association, email, regular newsletters, annual conferences, regional bodies, web pages, field days and on-ground projects. There are also a large number of individuals who are not members of groups who are participating in Landcare activities and networking with industry, productivity groups and other organisations not normally associated with Landcare – this has extended the Landcare ethic widely into the Tasmanian community.

Another key to Landcare’s success in Tasmania includes the island’s isolation – this has forced people to be external-oriented, to search out, sift through and find world’s best practice and then be innovative to suit local needs and international niches. Isolation has led to great thoughtfulness and creativity by groups and individuals here.

Tasmanians have also learned that the solutions to Landcare issues are not simply technical, but are reliant on goodwill, people, their commitment and ingenuity.

### **Changing the World**

After nearly two decades of Landcare in Tasmania, there is a sense that the ethic is not going to go away; caring for the land by individuals, groups, industry and institutions is now a fundamental part of the island’s ethos and way of life.

And it is important to recognise that this way of life is not wholly dependent upon government and related funding programs – I believe this is another strength of Landcare in Tasmania.

“I think the huge success of the Landcare movement is that it has been community-driven in the past and not simply government-driven; people have felt that they have been recognised contributors to an urgently needed solution to our environmental issues.” (Cynthia Dunbabin, pers. comm. 2006))

So what can the rest of the world learn from Tasmania?

A contagious feeling of empowerment exists here and this is a power that can change the world.

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