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## **RE: Landscape Reform**

Dear Minister Speirs,

Thank you for the opportunity to again provide input into the impending NRM reforms and the new *Landscapes South Australia* legislation.

The Conservation Council of South Australia (Conservation SA) is an independent, non-profit and strictly non-party political peak body organisation representing around 60 of South Australia's environment and conservation organisations. Conservation SA has been a strong advocate for the protection of native vegetation and biodiversity in South Australia since 1971.

Facilitating the SA Nature Alliance (SANA), we are committed to delivering improved nature conservation outcomes, a community better connected to nature, and a stronger conservation sector in South Australia through a collaborative approach. Members of SANA include: Greening Australia SA, Trees For Life, Nature Conservation Society SA, Landcare Association of SA, Nature Foundation SA, Nature Glenelg Trust, Friends of Parks, The Wilderness Society SA, National Trust SA, Zoos SA & Conservation Volunteers Australia.

Conservation SA welcomes the opportunity to make a further submission in the reform of natural resource management in South Australia. We also acknowledge and welcome our ongoing participation in the reform process through the NRM/Landscape Partners advisory group.

We have welcomed the strong sense of unity and common purpose from a range of interests through the NRM reform consultation period. There is a strong commitment from all the NRM/Landscape Partners, including ourselves, to identify common ground and work in partnership.

### **Overall vision**

Our vision is a co-designed model for landscape management in SA that empowers people to love and protect natural assets for the long term benefit of our wellbeing, our economy and our biodiversity.

## **Priority areas**

Our specific Landscapes/NRM priority areas include:

- Community empowerment, which means shared ownership and involvement in decision making and increased funding support to deliver
- Biodiversity/nature outcomes delivered at the landscape scale with a focus on improving connectivity and climate change adaptation
- An increase in overall government expenditure in SA's environment and NRM outcomes accessible at all levels beyond the levy.

## **Re-empowering regions**

While welcoming the intent to increase the sense of community ownership and control over the new Landscape Boards, we acknowledge a range of challenges with an elected board process, including:

- cost of running an election process
- challenge of maintaining diversity
- regional representation (risk of concentration of representatives from more populated areas)
- potential for politicisation of landscape management
- appropriate skills mix

We believe some sort of oversight of membership by the Minister should be retained to ensure the Landscape Boards can reach their potential.

## **Landscape resilience at scale**

We strongly welcome the focus through the reform process of a 'whole of landscape' approach and the acknowledgment that to ensure that practical, on-ground works achieve the best outcomes, we need to think and operate at landscape levels, beyond the scale of individual patches or properties.

We again emphasise that a landscape approach requires commitment to landscape scale programs which:

- Follow international standards of nature conservation planning – the Open Standards for Conservation is one example methodology;
- Are multi-partner, multi-year projects with multiple benefits (social, economic & ecological);
- Are driven by local community and partners aspirations and leadership;
- Are adequately resourced and supported to achieve the outcomes over realistic timeframes;
- Cross boundaries and borders;
- Focus on managing for climate change impacts;
- Are outcome-driven and evidence-based with monitoring, evaluation, learning for change and improvement embedded into programs;
- Are adaptable and efficient with transparent governance and delivery;
- Are at scales that are meaningful to ecosystems or species;
- Have multiple participation pathways where all interventions (from small to large)
- Link to landscape outcomes (Landcare focus); and,

- Evolve out of community-led processes such as Conservation Action Plans, where the science suggests strong partnerships between organisations would be beneficial for threatened species recovery or the protection and extension of under-represented ecosystems.

We acknowledge and recognise the vital importance of water, soil and pest plants and animals to effective landscape management. In addition, there are a number of other key threats and assets that should be integral to the work of the Landscape Boards and new Act, including climate change, biodiversity and people.

To ensure appropriate recognition, these elements must be made Objects of the Act. The ongoing stewardship and restoration of our natural, biodiverse ecosystems is at the heart of building landscape resilience at scale, and essential for ensuring productive farmland and healthy natural assets.

There has been some discussion about the potential for the creation of a new Biodiversity Act. We see this as sitting alongside the new Landscapes Act, not replacing the importance of biodiversity in the Landscapes Act. There needs to be a specific reference to protecting and enhancing biodiversity in both legislative instruments. We would welcome the opportunity to be involved in further consultation about what a Biodiversity Act could look like and achieve.

As has been recognised through the consultation process, climate change must be central to the landscape approach adopted by the new Landscape Boards. We need living landscapes, and climate change remains the single biggest threat to that.

In support of the MERI reporting methodology, a legislative commitment to align with the Australian Government's commitment to accountability, reporting on program outcomes and adaptive management in natural resource manager and biodiversity conservation is welcomed.

We recognise the importance of all aspects of compliance and applaud the engagement approach currently being utilised. Whilst we recognise the limited resources available in this area it is our desire that compliance matters be maintained with a consistent approach state-wide.

### **State-wide coordination**

We welcome the recognition that there needs to be state-wide coordination, alongside regional empowerment.

The suggestion of an appropriately resourced cross-sector advisory body makes sense, and we would welcome the opportunity to participate in that. Ensuring the Department of Environment and Water has the capacity to provide a range of support services to the Boards, such as policy and legislature support, monitoring and evaluation and cross regional coordination is also needed.

The new Landscape Priorities Fund is a tremendous opportunity to ensure cross regional and state-wide priorities have the funds to create impact. To support

greater community input and ownership the Fund should not just be limited to projects that include the Board as a prerequisite.

### **Community capacity building**

The Nature of SA Principles provide an excellent reference point for the reform process. This includes investing in the community capacity building and social infrastructure, e.g. leadership development.

While the Landscape Boards can facilitate planning, the reforms underway should formalise opportunities for the environment non-government sector and other community partners to deliver projects and have direct involvement in investment decisions. There are a range of locally tested and successful planning approaches such as Conservation Action Planning that are a viable mechanism for achieving enhanced outcomes and community buy-in.

We strongly support the recognition that Aboriginal peoples should have a greater leadership and implementation role in landscape management. This needs to include appropriate representation in decision making bodies, viable partnerships and devolved delivery of on ground outcomes.

### **Appropriate resourcing**

Through NRM reform Conservation SA would like to see appropriate levels of government investment made available for all scales of endeavour that complements current public investment (via levies). This will unlock the community driven approach to landscape scale conservation that the reform is intended to achieve.

A core operating principle should be an increase in the proportion of NRM levy revenue dedicated to on-ground works. Devolving delivery to efficient community partners is an opportunity to stretch levy funds further.

The reforms underway must increase the ability to seek national and international funding through co-benefit, shared value methodology including dollar matching collaborations; strengthening collaboration across boundaries with all levels of government, business and philanthropy sectors. An advantage of including biodiversity as a specific reference in the Act is an increased ability to leverage other funding opportunities from outside the state.

We would encourage the State Government to consider matching the Grassroots Grant program dollar for dollar to ensure greater leveraging of the enormous contribution of time, energy and expertise committed by volunteers, community and no-for-profit groups.

## Green Adelaide

The creation of Green Adelaide is an exciting opportunity for city-focused ecological restoration and enhancement. It will also deliver significant liveability and economic benefits to our biggest city.

The Nature of SA process has identified a range of principles and approaches that should underpin Green Adelaide.

We would urge you to consider a high level of developed delivery and community ownership through the governance and operating approach of this new initiative.

The London National Park City is a fascinating example of a community driven approach to city-wide landscape protection and enhancement. Increasing the sense of ownership by the community of Green Adelaide will significantly increase the opportunity for positive change. That sense of ownership needs to start at the governance and decision-making level.

There are a number of member organisations who have the capacity to deliver urban corridors, urban engagement in novel ecosystems and urban peri-urban community capacity building in support of a similar vision, and are poised to assist.

We look forward to consulting more thoroughly with our sector on the NRM reform.

For more information or to discuss this matter further, please don't hesitate to contact me at [craig.wilkins@conservationsa.org.au](mailto:craig.wilkins@conservationsa.org.au) or (08) 8223 5155.

Yours sincerely,



Craig Wilkins

Chief Executive