DEVELOPMENT OF A COEXISTIVE EVALUATION MODEL FOR LANDCARE QUEENSLAND

Kate Roberts
Centre for Integrated Resource Management
University of Queensland
1998

Contents

BACKGROUND

The National Program (NLP) was implemented in1992 through the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry and Energy (now Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia) as part of the Decade of Landcare initiative. The NLP was established to encourage community involvement and on-ground action that would promote sustainable land, vegetation and water management.

The commonwealth initiated a review of progress and its contribution to NLP in 1994 and, as part of this review, sought a broadly applied and ongoing process of evaluation that:
- contributes to the better management and operation of Landcare; and
- ensures that the objectives of the National Landcare Program, as stated in the *Natural Resources Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992*, are pursued in the most effective manner.

The objectives of the project were:

- **Provide an enhanced framework for the operation of Landcare/NLP (Queensland) that:**
  - clarifies the scope and priorities of Landcare and NLP;
  - gives better coordination of Landcare activities within and between the community groups and government departments;
  - creates a mechanism for determining priorities for funding with the Queensland Landcare Council (QLC) and others; and
  - clarifies the process of Landcare project development.

- **Develop evaluation criteria for Landcare/NLP that:**
  - better assessed the impact of Landcare/NLP;
  - better met the needs of stakeholders involved with Landcare/NLP; and
  - better met the evaluation needs of Commonwealth and Queensland.

- **Facilitate the implementation of enhanced, user -friendly evaluation processes of Landcare for stakeholders, through training and other appropriate instruments, that:**
  - ensures stakeholders are better equipped to evaluate their programs and projects.

The objectives of the project were achieved by the development and testing of an evaluation model that:
- interrelated the activities of Landcare participants;

- involved the stakeholders in the development of the evaluation process and that ensured their evaluation needs were met; and
- used the process of development and data collection to train members of Landcare in planning, participation and evaluation.

Eight stakeholder groups participated in the full evaluation process. They were:
- Landcare groups;
- integrated catchment management groups;
- the Queensland Landcare Council;
- regional and State assessment panels;
- the State Government;
- the Commonwealth Government;
- nature conservation groups; and
- rural industry bodies.

Landcare groups, made up of a cross-section of local community members. There are approximately 180 groups in Queensland at the time of the study. They are set up by the community but formally recognised by government as a mechanism for dealing with land degradation.

Integrated catchment management (ICM) groups, as their name suggests, are community groups within a river catchment whose members focus on whole-catchment management issues. Their prime responsibility was to develop catchment management strategies and plans which Landcare, other groups and agencies can access and respond to. There were currently 32 catchment groups at the time of the study.

The Queensland Landcare Council began as an awareness advisory committee for the Queensland community and government. It still retains its role as an adviser to the government, but has extended its task by also setting direction and making policy on key land-use issues such as tree clearing and grazing capacity of the land. It represents all Landcare interests in Queensland of which the Landcare groups are only one. It is largely made up of community members, but is administered by government.

Regional and State assessment panels, have a role in assessing applications for Landcare project funding. Prior to the inception of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) in 1997, were made up mainly of community members who had an orientation towards land use for agriculture rather than for nature conservation. The NHT provides much greater funding now for nature conservation than did the previous National Landcare Program, and the membership of the regional and State assessment panels are required to reflect this change.

The Queensland Government, through its departments of Natural Resources, Primary Industries, and Environment, provides policy input and is responsible for coordinating and administering Landcare Queensland. The Department of Natural Resources now has

the lead role in administering the process of the distribution of funds and the assessment of projects.

The Commonwealth Government is responsibility for funding sustainable land and water-use projects and nature conservation projects through its two departments that have responsibility for primary industries and conservation. Both departments develop policies and guidelines for the distribution and use of funds.

Nature conservation and rural industry bodies are mostly represented in Landcare by members who held dual membership of their organisation and a Landcare group.

METHODS OVERVIEW

Introduction

To achieve the objectives of the project, stakeholders of Landcare participated in the design and implementation of an evaluation model which is described in detail in the next chapter. The participative approach and encouragement of Landcare stakeholder involvement simultaneously provided a training mechanism to familiarise the stakeholders with participation and evaluation. It is also served to encourage stakeholder ownership of the evaluation process.

The model needed to collect data that could be quantitatively and qualitatively analysed according to the preferred methods and experience of the stakeholders. It also needed to preserve the perspectives on the Landcare of each of the stakeholders. A range of techniques was used to gather and analyse data which allowed unforseen issues to emerge and be included in the evaluation.

Techniques used to develop the model of evaluation

A number of data gathering techniques were employed as follows:
- interviews;
- participant observation;
- questionnaires;
- iteration;
- a review of written documents and literature; and
- action learning.

Interviews

- Semi-structured interviews were used throughout the project. A reflexive method of questioning -to check that information had been correctly understood - was also used to gather data. Approximately 150 interviews were conducted with 110 interviewees across the spectrum of stakeholders to determine that main issue in relation to an evaluation of Landcare. These were done by telephone and personal contact.

participant observation

This project used a natural participative approach to observation. The evaluation coordinator did not interfere with what was being observed but, nevertheless, acknowledged that her presence had an effect on proceedings.

Observations generally took place at meetings, workshops and field days. Critieria for observation included:
- consistency between the external description of Landcare and what stakeholders thought was Landcare;
- issues that were not identified in the Landcare literature or through statements from members of Landcare but had natural resource management implications;
- the stakeholders' skill and level of participation and evaluation; and
- the diversity in perspective among the stakeholders.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used twice (surveys 1 and 2).

Survey 1 asked for confirmation and modification of information already gained about what Landcare stakeholders wanted from an evaluation of Landcare. The survey was a single-page questionnaire accompanied by a two-page information sheet containing basic information about the evaluation process and a brief report of interim findings for Landcare groups and the regional assessment panels. The questions on the survey form asked whether the members of Landcare who had not yet participated in the development of the evaluation could understand the proposed process as described in the accompanying brochure.

Survey 1 was distributed in January 1996 to all the Landcare groups, all integrated catchment groups, the Queensland Farmers' Federation, Greening Australia and the Queensland Conservation Council. It produced questions and suggestions, for Survey 2, and the evaluation process.

Survey 2, the primary instrument of the evaluation model and hereafter referred to as the Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire, was designed to collect comprehensive evaluation data from the stakeholders relevant to their needs and perspectives. For this survey, a process was sought that could be easily upgraded and repeated for ongoing cycles of evaluation after the project finished.

The Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire was sent to all stakeholders. It comprised of 60 pages which included a compilation of questions from all the stakeholders. Stakeholders only answered their section of the questionnaire though they could see what inforamtion the others had asked for. Responses to this questionnaire were solicited in writing and by telephone.

A questionnaire process was used because a large number of people needed to be contacted in a relatively short space of time. Given the diversity, geographic area involved, and the remoteness of some of the Landcare stakeholders, it was considered the most efficient and effective method of data collection. The approach was also attractive because it provided data that could be analysed by the quantitative and qualitative methods currently used by many participants in Landcare.

Iteration

Iteration was used throughout the project to check and validate what stakeholders stated about the model, its content, and its process. Stakeholders were asked to respond to written material about the model, to critique what others had stated, and to suggest how it could be modified. This approach is slightly less formal than the method of convergent interviewing described by Dick (1990).

Thirty-six individuals, drawn largely from government and from stakeholder Landcare groups, undertook ongoing reviews of the written material. Ten of these were involved with the composition and revision of the one-page questionnaire and two-page information brochure (Survey 1). The remaining 26 individuals reviewed and revised the questions for the Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire (Survey 2).

Review of the literature

Most reviewing took place at the beginning of the project, but it was found that constant reference to written material and other research was needed for clarification of observations throughout the project. The literature was most useful in revealing the groups and individuals with whom Landcare stakeholders interacted.

Action learning

The action-learning reflective process, as illustrated in Figure 1, was used to clarify the meaning of data throughout the project. The evaluation coordinator used it with stakeholders individually and with groups.

Figure 1. The action learning cycle

Change/assessment

Next cycle

Action

Reflection

Observation
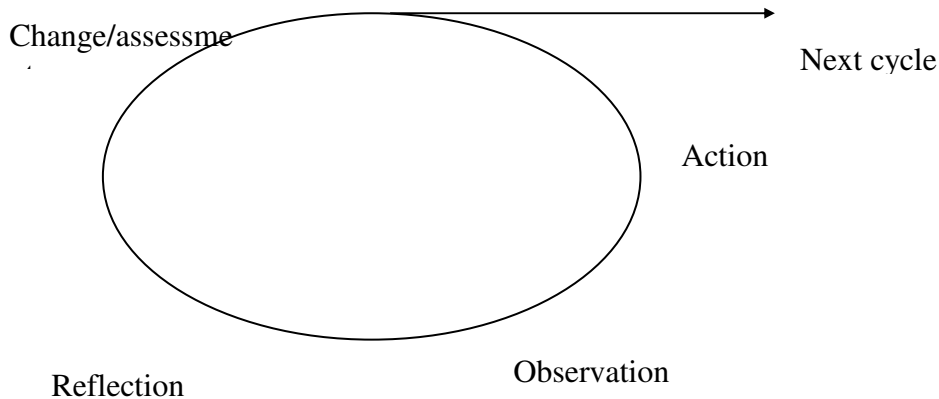
Figure 2 shows how the various techniques interacted with the Landcare stakeholders, and the process of analysis of the information they had provided.

A COEXISTIVE MODEL OF EVALUATION OF LANDCARE: METHODS IN DETAIL

Background

At a broad level, all stakeholders have an obligation to address the Landcare goals as stated in the national and State Decade of Landcare plans and by the National Landcare Program. But the specific detail of what these goals mean and how they can be achieved is different for each stakeholder. Research into Landcare showed that it was made up of a number of very different stakeholder groups. It revealed that stakeholders have different visions of Landcare and varying opinions on how these visions should be realised. While these visions did not conflict, they were not necessarily complementary either: they coexisted.

A review of the literature found that to respect this diversity among the stakeholders and to allow others to emerge, certain principles needed to be observed.

The following section presents a model of evaluation for Landcare in Queensland that observes these principles. The model allows stakeholders to progress their own vision of Landcare in parallel with the visions of others. The model encourages coexistance by raising awareness of difference and ensuring that the difference is preserved; each stakeholder is allowed to nominate what they want from an evaluation of Landcare and then to interpret their data from the evaluation.

The model (Figure 3) is divided into three phases and, like most other evaluation methods, deals fundamentally with:
- the identification of stakeholders;
- what is to be evaluated;
- designing the data collection process; and
- interpretation of data.

To preserve a participative approach, the above fundamentals are best expressed in the form of the following key questions:
- Who are the stakeholders?
- What do they want to know from an evaluation of Landcare in Queensland?
- From whom do they want this data?
- In what form do they want the data so that the information can be analysed and interpreted according to their preferred evaluation methods?

Phase 1 of the model represents the planning phase which identifies the main stakeholders. It also identifies what they want from an evaluation and an appropriate data collection method.

Phase 2 is the operational phase where information is collected, compiled and distributed.

Phase 3, the interpretation phase, is designed to encourage stakeholders to undertake their own interpretation of the results and negotiate the effects and outcomes from the interpretation as they impinge on other stakeholders or individuals.

The evaluation model for Landcare described here took into account the diversity of the stakeholders, their current evaluation and the methods of evaluation with which they are familiar. All steps of the model must be reviewed every time it is used to ensure the model remains relevant. For example, some stakeholders may want to leave Landcare and others may want to join. Stakeholders may also want to change their questions.

Phase 1. Planning

The responsibilities for an evaluation coordinator in this phase are to identify:

- the stakeholders in Landcare;
- what they want out of an evaluation of Landcare; and
- how the evaluation should be done.

The responsibilities of the stakeholders are to:
- nominate themselves and others they think should be stakeholders;
- confirm the nominations of other stakeholders;
- review the stakeholders list on an ongoing basis to see if any should subsequently be added;
- review their own involvement with Landcare;
- nominate what data they want, from whom they want it collected, and how it should be collected (based on what method of interpretation it needs to complement).

```
┌──────────────────────────────┐
│  1.  Identify stakeholders    │
└──────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
│  2.  Develop data content and collection │
│  methods with the stakeholders individually │
└──────────────────────────────────────┘
```

PHASE 2   Data collection and distribution

3. Collect data

4. Compile and collate data collected from the evaluation

Add in corrections for

5. Return compiled data to stakeholders

PHASE 3 Interpretation

6. Stakeholders use their evaluation methods and

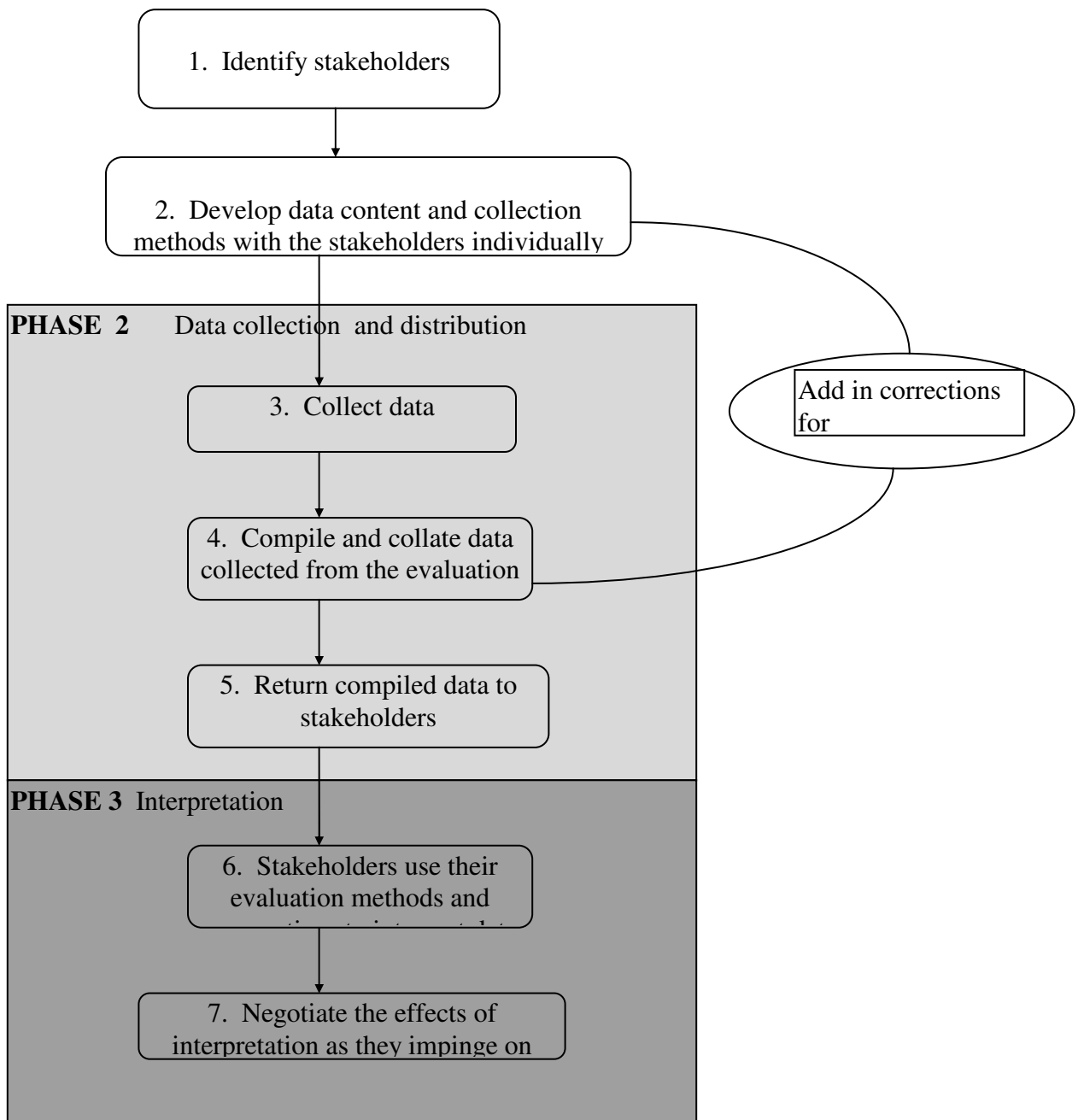7. Negotiate the effects of interpretation as they impinge on

Figure 2. The model for coexistive evaluation

Step 1. Identify Stakeholders

Eleven stakeholder groups of Landcare and the National Landcare Program were originally identified for the 1996 round of data collection. However, only eight were ultimately involved. They were:
- Landcare groups;
- integrated catchment management groups;
- the Queensland Landcare Council;
- regional and State assessment panels;
- the State Government;
- the Commonwealth Government;
- nature conservation groups; and
- rural industry groups.

There were other groups in the rural community, who are not well represented in Landcare. These include Aborigines and non-English-speaking land- holders. Government providers of employment for Landcare activities were also not well represented.

Provision should be made for the addition of stakeholders from other organisations that contribute to Landcare, but which have less obvious links with the Landcare process. As well, existing stakeholders should be reviewed each year to confirm their interest.

Step 2. Develop Evaluation Content And Collection Methods

Content: Data Stakeholders Needed

Stakeholders were surveyed separately through interview and questionnaire (Survey 1) rather than through a collective data gathering mechanism such as focus group discussion or workshops. This was because previous studies (Kilduff 1990; Mitchell & Beach 1990) showed that individuals tend to adopt the views of the group rather than offer their own. Landcare stakeholders each had different perspectives and the information they need from an evaluation can therefor also be different. To collect information from them as a group, whether as a group of individuals from one stakeholder group or as a group of individuals from different stakeholder groups, could cause some of that difference to be lost.

Even so when stakeholders were asked what they wanted from an evaluation of Landcare their needs fell into three broad categories:

- where the money had been spent;
- whether Landcare was making a difference; and
- whether Landcare is addressing priority issues.

To provide stakeholders with meaningful data in response to these concerns, survey questions were formulated so that they could be analysed according to the preferred methods of the stakeholders. For example, the stakeholder groups received questions in either graded-scale, yes/no, or open-ended formats. As data had to be collected from the most relevant sources, stakeholders were also asked to nominate from whom they wanted data.

Landcare groups wanted information from each other and from other stakeholders about projects, achievements and group operations. They stated they needed ideas from others about what projects to undertake and how to motivate their groups. To provide them with meaningful and detailed data, all were asked about projects, achievements and group operations through open-ended questions.

Integrated catchment management groups needed to know about catchment management planning processes and the usefulness of their plans. Open-ended and graded scale questions on planning were asked to provide these groups with meaningful data.

The Queensland Landcare Council, while concentrating on reviewing its internal operations, was also interested in finding out what individual Landcare members thought of the council. Questions about the council were asked of most stakeholders; these reflected the council's objectives and role statements.

Regional and State assessment panels also concentrated on a review of their internal project assessment operations. Most other stakeholders were asked how they perceived the activities of the panel and how much contact they had with their panels. Questions were a mixture of graded-scale, yes/no and open-ended questions.

The State Government personnel most involved with this model of evaluation were the Landcare facilitators and the coordinators of the seven schedules associated with the implementation of the Queensland Decade of Landcare Plan and the partnership agreement. Most of these coordinators wanted to know if the educational materials and activities produced by their sections were useful and appropriate. Both graded -scale and open-minded questions were used to gather this data for them.

The Commonwealth Government wanted to know about progress against the National Landcare Program goals, and the goals stated in the partnership agreement between the Commonwealth and the States. They asked questions of each of the stakeholders. The questions were mostly open-ended and reflected the wording in the goals.

Nature conservation and rural industry groups were uncertain about their role in the evaluation of Landcare, though the Department of Environment was interested in knowing if the funds were being spent effectively, which was also a major concern of some Landcare groups.

Methods Of Collecting Data

As previously noted, data collection had to take into account the methods of evaluation that stakeholders were already using, as well as what was most effective, efficient and appropriate for the model given that it needed to preserve the diversity of the stakeholders.

The literature on evaluation refers to four fairly distinct methods of evaluation, namely experimental, goal-orientated, goal-free or mapping, decision or user-focused, and participatory or responsive evaluation (Guba & Lincoln 1989; Patton 1986; Popham 1993;Stecher & Davis 1987; Wadsworth 1991). Stakeholders of Landcare currently use these four methods to gather data for themselves (see Figure 4). The coexistive model, therefore, sought to build on these existing evaluation techniques, rather than to force the adoption of new or unfamiliar ones.

Experimental evaluation examines the results of an activity using a control group and an experimental group. It is used by Landcare groups and government to carry out field experiments (e.g pasture trials and water quality assessment).
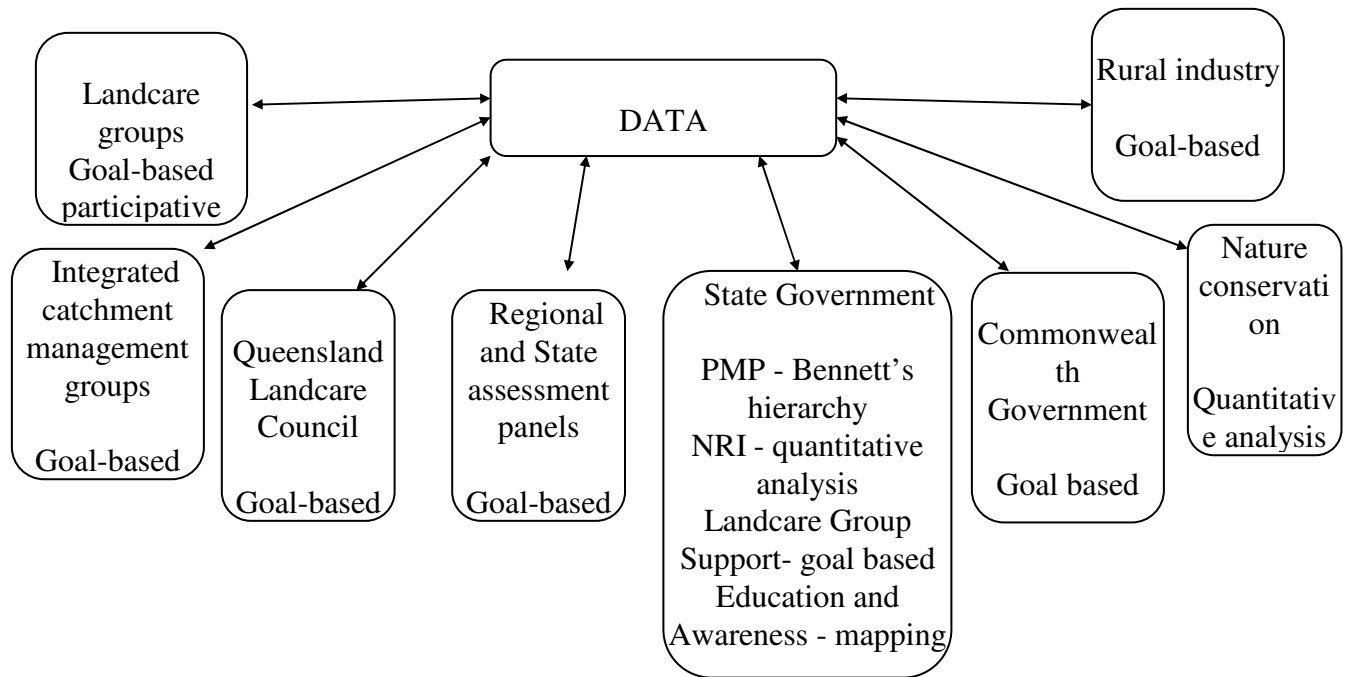
Notes: PMP = Property Management Planning; NRI = Natural Resources Inventory

Figure 3. Evaluation methods used by Landcare in Queensland

14

Goal oriented evaluation sets goals-objectives at the beginning of an activity, develops indicators of success, and measures success against the objectives and indicators at the end of the project. This method was used extensively by most stakeholders, and most particularly by government. Bennett's hierarchy-inputs; activities; participation; reactions; knowledge, attitudes and skill changes; practice and behaviour change; end results - (Patton 1986, p 170) is used with goal oriented evaluation by government (Property Management Planning) to structure observations and measure incremental changes in the progress towards the achievements of goals.

Goal-free or mapping evaluation is where an evaluation is done with no preconceived ideas about the effects of an intervention.

Decision-focused or user-oriented evaluation is where stakeholders are involved in the design and interpretation of the evaluation. While the concept is understood by some sections of government, there is not much evidence of its use. Bennett's hierarchy of change can also be used with this type of evaluation method to structure observations about the incremental changes that can lead to progress.

Phase 2: data collection and distribution

This phase consists of three steps as shown in Figure 5.

PHASE 2 Data collection and distribution
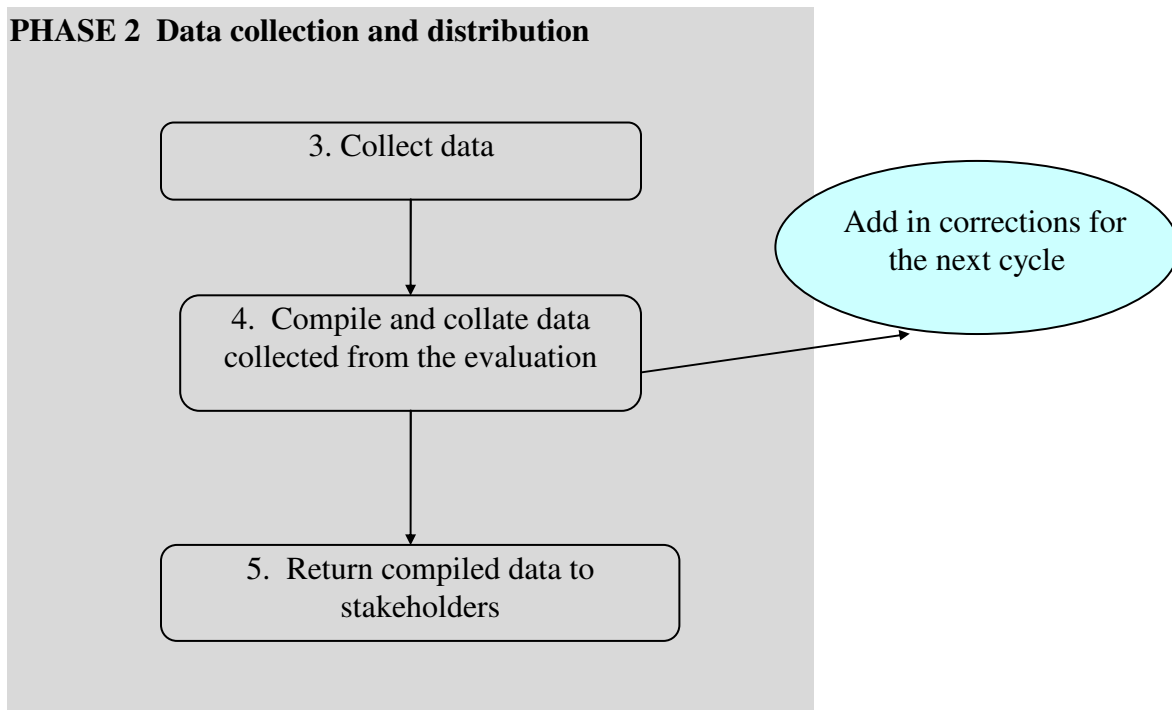
Figure 4. Phase 2 of the model

The responsibilities for the evaluation coordinator were to:
• establish a mechanism for administering the three steps;
• set up and conduct an optional phoned response to the questionnaire from 40 Landcare groups chosen at random; and
• prepare a database to receive the data from the returned questionnaires.

The Murilla Landcare Group, at Miles, offered to administer Phase 2 of the model in 1996. The project officer of the group coordinated the process.

The data collection, compilation and distribution processes and their timing is summarised in Figure 6.
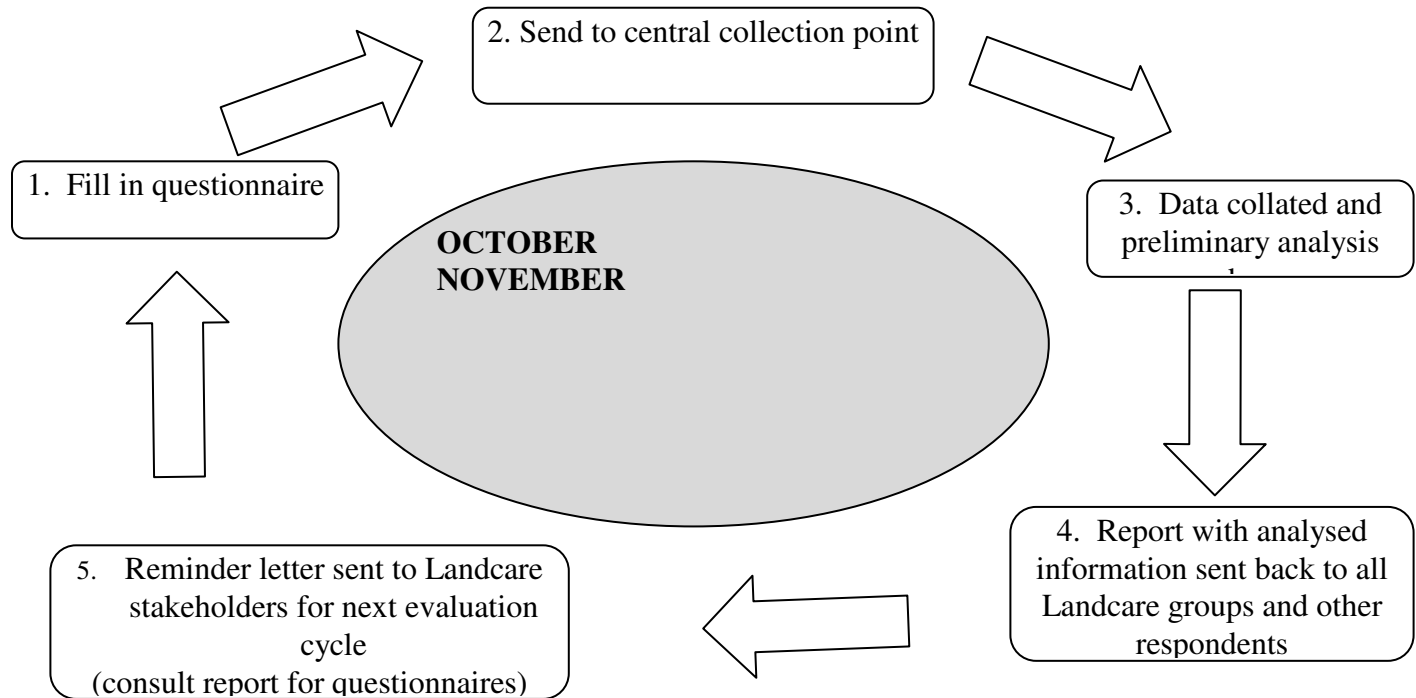
Figure 5. The data collection and distribution cycle

Step 3. Collect Data

In this step of the model stakeholders were asked to respond to the Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire (Survey 2) in writing or by phone.

Response rate

The overall response rate to the questionnaire from all stakeholders was 28 per cent from a total of 305 questionnaires sent out to all stakeholders. The participating stakeholders were: Landcare groups, integrated catchment management groups, the Queensland Landcare Council, the regional and State assessment panels, Property Management Planning coordinators, integrated catchment management coordinators, Landcare facilitators, Education and Awareness coordinators, government managers (as nominated by the Landcare facilitators), the seven NLP schedule coordinators, the Commonwealth Government and nature conservation and rural industry.

A high response rate of 60 per cent was achieved with the Landcare given the option of a "phoned response", even though only 10 of these groups took up the offer.

This compared with a response rate of 14 per cent from the other 136 Landcare groups surveyed, and a 38 per cent response from other stakeholders. The contrasting results underline the importance of phone or personal contact with respondents.

Step 4. Compile And Collate Evaluation Data

The data needed to be compiled so that information would be readily accessible for the various stakeholders but not collated to the extent that the detail of important facts was lost. Data were reported verbatim.

For the 1996 Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire cycle, the database design, data input and the design of the data output (results) was undertaken by a land-holder associated with the Murilla Landcare Group who had experience in this area. Proofing, decisions about the interpretation of handwriting and meaning, and preparing the results report for printing was done by the evaluation coordinator. Entry of the 85 responses onto the database and the production of the results report took about 200hours.

Step 5. Return Complied Data To Participants

Various constraints affected the timing of the evaluation cycle. Many members of Landcare stakeholder groups had particular planning and funding cycles to which they needed to react and the evaluation data was seen to be useful to support those activities. Therefore, data needed to be collected and returned to the stakeholders in time for them to be interpreted and made ready for use. The main activities that were mentioned were the

government budget cycle for which information was needed by April, and the Landcare funding cycle which began in October of each year and ended the following April.

Consequently, the evaluation cycle began in August 1996 and ended in February 1997. The Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire (Survey 2) was mailed in August and returned by the end of November, data collation and compilation took place between October and January, and the results were returned by the end of February. For subsequent evaluations, government officers have asked that the cycle begin and end earlier. They prefer to have information by January of each year.

Recommendation: The timing of the Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire cycle should be brought forward to commence in July so that results can be sent back to respondents in January.

Phase 3: Interpretation

The interpretation phase of the model is the final phase. It consists of the interpretation of the data by the stakeholders and the negotiation of any intrusive effects from the decisions made from these interpretations (Figure 7).
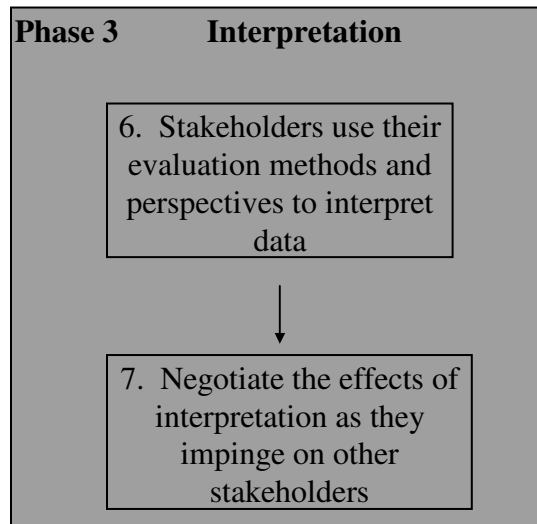

Phase 3   Interpretation

6. Stakeholders use their evaluation methods and perspectives to interpret data

7. Negotiate the effects of interpretation as they impinge on other stakeholders

Figure 6. Phase 3 of the model

Step 6. Stakeholders Use Their Methods Of Evaluation And Perspectives To Interpret The Data

The specific responses from stakeholders are compiled in Landcare Evaluation: Queensland, Part 1 (Roberts 1997), the results report.

The activities for the stakeholders in this step were to use and interpret the data the had received as they saw fit.

To encourage and assess the use of results, a further cycle of interaction between the stakeholders and the evaluation coordinator would have been beneficial. Given the time frame the project and that its focus was mainly on producing an evaluation process, this was not possible. However, at the request of government, a workshop was held to encourage the seven State Government schedule coordinators to use their data.

The workshop proved valuable for a number of reasons listed below.
- During their discussion about results, the schedule coordinators identified for themselves where they need to cooperate and plan together.
- Participants learnt how they could make best use of their own and other stakeholders' data, and how they could expand of clarify their direction in the coming year.
- They reinforced with each other the concept of interpreting their own data, those familiar with the concept explaining it to the others thereby reducing dependency on the evaluation coordinator.
- Each schedule coordinator shared their planning and evaluation methods with the others, which highlighted who were and were not planning and evaluating, and that the situation could be improved by the coordinators supporting each other.
- The process highlighted the need for training in a variety of evaluation and interpretation methods.

Step 7. Negotiate Effects Of Interpretation

The final responsibility of the stakeholders was to negotiate the effects and impacts of their interpretation with other stakeholders. The project ended before any effects of this part of the model could be assessed. It must be stressed though that these effects may not surface for some time and many may never surface.

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE COEXISTIVE MODEL

There are limitations to the model in that:
- there is lack of awareness among Landcare stakeholders of their own diversity and, therefore, a lack of motivation to preserve it;
- the model is conservative in its present application and may not capture all stakeholders or the more radical elements within the Landcare program;
- the model requires a high level of participation which in turn requires ongoing training; and
- the absence of Landcare community project evaluation guidelines, criteria, and data recording processes currently limit the power of the model to provide a rigorous or more quantitative evaluation of the impact and outcomes of the Landcare program.

Awareness

There is a lack of awareness about the diversity and the need for difference in Landcare in Queensland. Some comments were made by respondents about the value of having the different perspectives in Landcare, but other comments reflect anxiety about the tension that these different perspectives cause. This model will go some way towards providing a place for the different perspectives to voice themselves yet still preserve their uniqueness. Landcare has itself been a model of coexistence but it has also shown that coexistence needs tolerance, awareness and considerable effort.

Lack of awareness of diversity can be overcome by stakeholders being asked to review the current stakeholder membership through ongoing application of the Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire. This would not necessarily mean that other stakeholders or interests would be included immediately but it would serve to raise an awareness of others in the minds of the current stakeholders. A question relating to awareness was not asked in the 1996 evaluation but was included in the questionnaire prepared for use in 1997, or at a later date.

Inclusivity

Other participative mechanisms and evaluation methods could be added as appropriate. An example would be mechanisms that allow more effective protocols to be established

between the evaluation coordinators and the Aboriginal and non-English-speaking communities.

Level Of Participation

Participation and negotiation take time and energy. There is a danger that the high level of participation needed for this model will reduce the number who ultimately take part.

Training

The model requires that more stakeholders be trained in evaluation, participation, and interpretation, and encouraged towards an appreciation of diversity. It also needs trainers who are committed to what the model is trying to achieve in terms of preserving diversity and flexibility of evaluation.

Project Evaluation Criteria And Data

Data about incremental changes in landscape, knowledge and social conditions due to Landcare community project activities is not yet systematically collected. Such data could be collected without much extra knowledge about evaluation. Regular recording of the incremental effects of projects and activities would allow data aggregation for more rigorous evaluation at the program level.

Recipients of funds in the Landcare community should be required to regularly collect data about the effects of their projects in the area of social, educational and landscape change. Data can be recorded in a journal or diary. Funding recipients can be given guidance about how to collect the data through written guidelines of through their Landcare facilitators. Guidelines would ensure that Landcare stakeholders collect the same type of core data in a complementary way. These data can then be used to answer questions in the Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire about the benefits of projects.

Recommendation: Recipients of NLP and Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funds should be required to record data regularly about social, educational and landscape change caused by their projects.

ADMINISTERING THE MODEL

The following activities need to be considered in the context of the coexistive model of evaluation (Figure 1), which ensures that stakeholders determine what data they need to make progress on their implementation of Landcare activities.

PHASE 1 Planning

1. Identify stakeholders

2. Develop data content and collection methods with the stakeholders individually

PHASE 2 Data collection and distribution

3. Collect data

4. Compile and collate data collected from the evaluation

Add in corrections for next cycle

5. Return compiled data to stakeholders

PHASE 3 Interpretation

6. Stakeholders use their evaluation methods and perspectives to interpret data

Figure 8 The coexistive model of evaluation

7. Negotiate the effects of interpretation as they impinge on
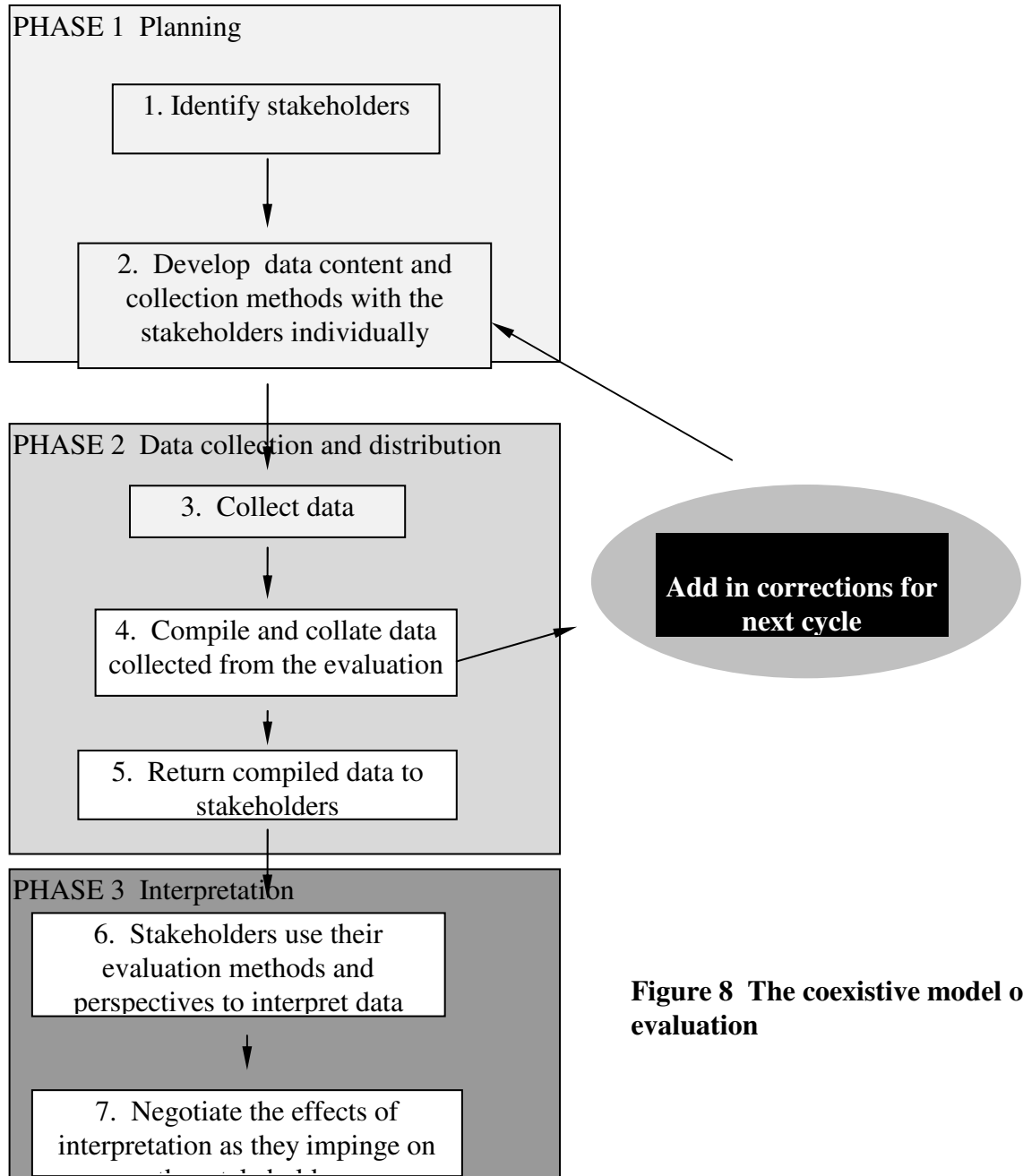
The model is designed to be used for ongoing evaluation on an annual or biennial basis, depending on the wishes of the stakeholders. It has in-built, self-review processes for some of the steps, such as the identification of stakeholders (Step 1) and the development of the evaluation content (Step 2). At the present stage in the evolution of the model an evaluation coordinator needs to review and develop its other activities each time it is used. These include the development of data collection processes (the second part of Step 2) and four of the five other steps: data collection, data compilation, return of data to the stakeholders, and the interpretation of data (some guidance only). The final step needs no review. It describes what happens to decisions that arise out of interpretation of evaluation data if these decisions impinge on the activities of others.

Phase 1: planning

This phase occurs in April-June.

STEP 1. IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

REVIEW STAKEHOLDERS

Review stakeholders' comments about the inclusion of other groups in the section, 'Questions about the evaluation process', in the Landcare groups section and at the end of the questionnaire. (These data were not available from the 1996 evaluation but will be available after 1997.)

Review stakeholders whose commitments to an evaluation of Landcare in Queensland seems uncertain. These are rural industry groups, nature conservation groups, Environment Australia, and Department of Environment (Queensland).

INCLUDE NEW STAKEHOLDERS

Begin the process of including new stakeholders in the evaluation by contacting them, explaining the evaluation process and determining their interests in evaluation.

EXCLUDE SOME FORMER STAKEHOLDERS AT THEIR REQUEST

Self-exclusion from the evaluation process is the right of every stakeholder. Excluding them at their request is only a matter of leaving them off the mailing list. The level of interest of some stakeholders may need to be reviewed as has already been mentioned and this is done by direct contact.

STEP 2. DEVELOP EVALUATION CONTENT AND COLLECTION METHODS

If new stakeholders indicate an interest in being part of the evaluation then ask them the following questions.
• What do they want to know from an evaluation of Landcare in Queensland?

- From whom do they want these data?
- In what form would the data be most useful for their evaluation?

Some of their questions may need reworking and editing. All stakeholders will need to be asked about their current evaluation and research practices so that questions can be designed to collect the appropriate data. For example, stakeholders may need data in a form that can be quantified or they may need data in the form of comments they can analyse.
Former stakeholders were given the opportunity of reviewing their questions through the section, "Questions about the evaluation process".

URGENT QUESTIONS

Receive any additional questions which cannot be held over to the following year. Updates to questions will come directly from stakeholders and can sometimes be stimulated by workshops where the use of data is discussed.

Phase 2: Data collection and distribution

The first three parts of Step 3 occur in July, and the rest (phone surveys, inquiries, and data preparation) occur in August. The first part of Step 4, up to and including any changes made to the questionnaire, occurs in September-November. The rest of Step 4 occurs in December-January. Step 5 occurs in February.

STEP 3: COLLECT DATA

SEND OUT REMINDER LETTERS

These letters are to remind stakeholders to complete the questionnaire which most of them should already have received. Landcare groups and the Queensland Landcare Council will have the questionnaire as part of the results report. All other stakeholders will need to be sent a questionnaire. While some government staff will have a results report, personnel change so quickly that there is no guarantee that the respondent from 1996 will still be in the same position, and the new person may not know much about the process.

Rural industry and nature conservation groups may need special attention given the lack of interest in the 1996 survey.

INCLUDE UPDATES

Include updates as addenda to the questionnaire and the reminder letters. Some examples of updates for the next evaluation are provided later in this guide.

MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THE EXTENT OF THE PHONE SURVEY

Results from 1996 survey indicated that phone contact with respondents made a significant difference to the likelihood of a response. Only Landcare groups were given the option of a phoned response and recent comments from rural industry suggests that they would also have appreciated the opportunity of a phoned response.

PHONE SURVEYS

Set up the phone surveys by establishing contact and making a time that is convenient for the interviewer and the respondent. Give respondents the option of responding in writing if they wish, or not responding at all.

INQUIRIES

Deal with any inquiries that may arise from potential respondents.

PREPARE FOR DATA INPUT

Preparation for data input can occur earlier in the year but it is most logically described here. Data from the questionnaires need to onto a database. A database was prepared for the 1996 survey by Des Gray who is associated with the Murilla Landcare Group at Miles.

STEP 4. COMPILE AND COLLATE EVALUATION DATA

The tasks in this step in 1996 were divided between the evaluation coordinator and the person entering the data into the data base.

RECEIVE QUESTIONNAIRES

Experience gained through the 1996 questionnaire showed that leaving the envelope attached to the questionnaire was valuable. Respondents are asked to identify themselves but they sometimes forget or their name is illegible so, in the absence of any other identification, their location was helpful.

RESPONSES FROM EACH QUESTIONNAIRE ENTERED ONTO A DATABASE

The main task for an evaluation coordinator is to interpret illegible hand writing or jargon and decide about appropriate grammatical corrections.

COLLATING SOME OF THE RESPONSES INTO GRAPHS]

Some of the data lend themselves to collation. Even so, care must be taken that not too much detail is lost in the collation.

PROOFING TRANSCRIPTIONS

Respondents need to be assured their comments will be transcribed verbatim. This was the case for the 1996 evaluation and is a core value of the model. Only obvious spelling and grammatical errors are corrected when proofing.

DESIGNING THE DATA OUTPUT REPORT

For the 1996 evaluation, this task fell to the person putting the responses onto the database. The person needs the skills to carry out the task.

CHANGES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Changes to the questionnaire are made according to the requests and suggestions of the respondents reported in the "Questions about the evaluation process" section of the questionnaire. Respondents are asked a number of questions about the content and the process of the evaluation.

PREPARING REPORT FOR PRINTING

For the 1996 evaluation, the task of attaching title pages, introductions and summaries to the report, ensuring that pages fell correctly when printed and separating the stakeholders' data with interleaving pages rested with the evaluation coordinator.

In 1996, the data were arranged according to the questions in the questionnaire rather than reclustered to suit the stakeholders.

The report included, the data for all stakeholders, evaluation guidelines, and the questionnaire for the following year.

ARRANGE PRINTING

It was found that printing firms need four weeks lead time and four to six weeks to print the reports required for the evaluation. For the 1996 survey, the report was about 300 pages and 250 reports were printed.

STEP 5. RETURN COMPILED DATA TO PARTICIPANTS

Reports are mailed to all who responded and to all Landcare groups whether they responded or not.

Phase 3: interpretation

Phase 3 occurs in March.

STEP 6. STAKEHOLDERS USE THEIR METHODS OF EVALUATION AND PERSPECTIVES TO

INTERPRET THE DATA

Facilitate the use of data as appropriate through group workshops and individual contact. These workshops and contacts are not meant to interpret data. They are meant to encourage stakeholders to look for the responses to their questions and to look at other responses to see if they are useful for them. Some stakeholders, such as Landcare groups, may not use their data immediately. Others, like government, need to use their data to enhance the decisions they make in their budgets and planning rounds.

STEP 7. NEGOTIATE EFFECTS IF INTERPRETATION

Stakeholders will carry out this step themselves in their accustomed manner. They may not be aware that it is part of an evaluation process; therefore, they need some explanation so that they understand its appropriate place in evaluation.

Considering the overall process, the timing of the evaluation cycle may need to change as stakeholders change the timing of their various budget and planning activities.

2. Send to central collection point

3. Data collated and preliminary analysis

1. Fill in questionnaire

OCTOBER
NOVEMBER

5. Reminder letters sent to Landcare stakeholders for next evaluation cycle
(consult report for questionnaire)

4. Report with analysed information sent back to all Landcare groups and other
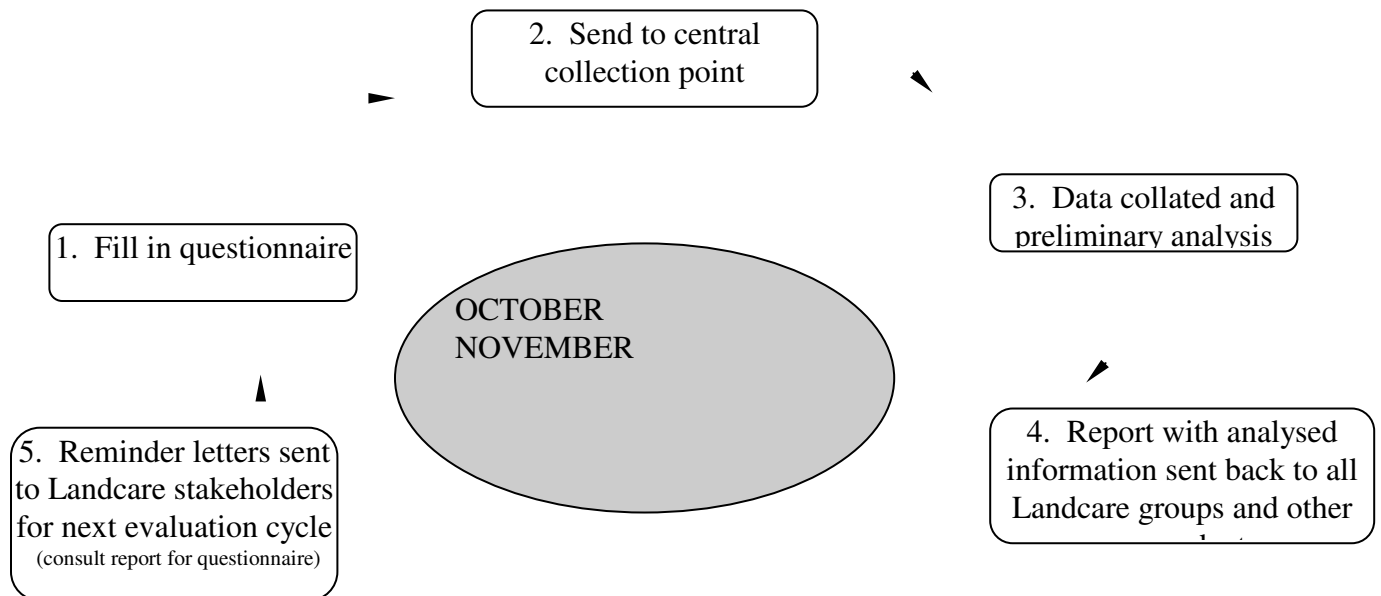
Figure 9 The annual cycle of the model

1996 LANDCARE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE: RESULTS SUMMARY

The full results obtained in the questionnaire are provided in the publication Landcare Evaluation: Queensland, Part 1 (Roberts 1997). These results are a resource for all stakeholders to use in their own future evaluation of Landcare.

Only selections from the data are reported here to highlight some important opportunities for enhancing the operation of Landcare/NLP. These are not meant to take the place of stakeholders carrying out their own interpretation of the data, but rather provides a more generic summary of the data from what the evaluation coordinator believes to be the perspectives of the Commonwealth and State Governments. Comments and recommendations on the evaluation criteria and evaluation process developed through this project are also given at the end of this section.

Data collected on this specific issue asked for by stakeholders for some of the Landcare sectors, such as Property Management Planning, Landcare Group Support and Education and Awareness, are not addressed here in any detail. Readers may access this and other detail by referring to the above publication.

Core elements of the questionnaire are briefly revisited to remind readers of the context.
- The eight stakeholders of the Landcare community surveyed were the Landcare groups, integrated catchment groups, the Queensland Landcare Council, the regional and State assessment panels, the State Government, the Commonwealth Government, nature conservation groups and rural industry bodies.
- The Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire used for the survey gathered data on three primary issues: where the money has been spent, whether Landcare is making a difference, and whether it is addressing priority issues.
- More focused questions in the questionnaire sought information on achievements, planning, funding, stakeholder needs, and the structure of Landcare.

Achievements: Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth wanted to know about progress measured against the National Landcare Program goals as stated in the National Decade of Landcare Plan and the partnership agreement. The national Landcare evaluation coordinator, Land Resources Division, Department of Primary Industries and Energy (DPIE), selected the most relevant goals from the DPIE's perspective and asked for progress against the following five NLP goals:
 a) to promote community, industry and government partnership in the management of natural resources in Australia;

b) to assist in establishing institutional arrangements to develop and implement policies, programs and practices that will encourage sustainable use of natural resources in Australia;

c) to assist in enhancing the long term productivity of natural resources in Australia;

d) to assist in developing approaches to help resolve conflicts over access to natural resources in Australia; and

e) to put effective and appropriate economic legislative and policy mechanisms in place to facilitate the achievement of sustainable land use.

Additional goals (f) and (g), dealing with nature conservation, are listed in the National Decade of Landcare Plan:

f) assisting with the maintenance of Australia's biological diversity through vegetation conservation and re-establishment; and

g) promoting the integration of habitat and wildlife conservation into land use practice.

The preservation of biodiversity and integration of nature conservation with agricultural practice is an integral part of Landcare. For this reason, it was decided that progress against these goals should be assessed as part of an evaluation of Landcare in Queensland, though not specifically asked for by the Commonwealth.

Goal A: Promoting Partnership

LANDCARE GROUPS' RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 31)

Of the Landcare groups who responded to this question, 87 per cent stated that they promoted partnerships through combined activities. These combined activities were with people from government, local government, rural and nature conservation advisers and other rural producers and included activities such as:

- tree planting;
- weed control and weed information sharing;
- field days; and
- Property Management Planning activities.

OTHER RESPONSES (STATE GOVERNMENT, INTEGRATED CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT GROUPS, ETC.)(TOTAL RESPONSES = 19)

Of this group, 48 per cent stated that they promoted partnerships through their interaction in integrated catchment management groups.

Landcare groups are involved in direct action with a variety of other organisations, and they state that it is their way of promoting partnerships, whereas government and the integrated catchment management groups see partnerships as being activated more through membership of integrated catchment management groups.

Goal B

Goal (b) was not assessed in the 1996 questionnaire.

Goal C: Enhancing Productivity

LANDCARE GROUPS' RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 35)

Seventy-seven per cent of the respondents were involved in direct action related to long term productivity; the remainder were involved in general awareness about a variety of Landcare practices. The categories in which action occurred were:
* weed eradication and management - 31 per cent;
* revegetation and pasture improvement - 20 per cent;
* erosion control - 14 per cent;
* stream bank and water course rehabilitation and management - 11 per cent; and
* other - 23 per cent.

A project officer reported that one of her group's found it difficult to link their projects with the idea of the "productivity of Australia's natural resources". It was not until the government language was translated for them that they understood what was required to answer the question. It was only then that they realised how many of their activities were directly related to fulfilling this goal. Another two groups stated that participating in the evaluation process had actually made them realise what the national goals were.

These comments highlight lack of awareness of the national goals for Landcare. The comments made in the meetings of regional assessment panels also supported this.

OTHER RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 28)

Eighty-two per cent of these respondents assisted through involvement in education and planning activities. The distinct polarity or responses on goal c from Landcare groups and the "other respondent" group strongly reinforces that on-ground action is perceived as the primary domain of Landcare groups, and that education and awareness is the domain of government and the integrated catchment management groups.

Goal D: Conflict Resolution

LANDCARE GROUPS' RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 13)

Some of these respondents stated that they resolved conflict through:
- discussion (one stated that they forced the discussions to occur); and
- the integrated catchment groups.

OTHER RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 24)

These respondents stated that they resolved conflict through:
- general discussion, education, mediation - 44 per cent;
- through Integrated Catchment Management groups - 25 per cent;
- administering relevant legislation - 8 per cent; and
- other - 23 per cent.

The comments from the Landcare groups in this case is consistent with the responses from the rest of the Landcare community.

Goal E: Economic Policy And Legislation

This was not given to Landcare groups.

OTHER RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 30)

Seventy-four per cent of respondents stated that the current mechanisms were inadequate. Thirty-nine per cent of these comments were about the provision of economic incentives, or the building of a better economic environment for rural producers.

The supporting comments suggested that "social and economic changes must be part of the shift to sustainable resource management" and that governments did not fully appreciate the needs of the rural community when formulating legislation and policy.

Five comments implied that current legislation was not strong enough to have any real impact in the areas where it was needed.

Goal F: Maintaining Biodiversity

LANDCARE GROUPS' RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 33)

Several groups were involved in more than one activity encouraging biological diversity:
- re-establishment of native vegetation - 61 per cent;
- weed eradication - 15 per cent;
- education and awareness - 12 per cent;
- protection of remnant vegetation - 9 per cent; and
- wildlife corridors - 6 per cent.

OTHER REPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 25)

These respondents assisted through:
- support for Landcare group activities - 24 per cent;
- education and awareness - 16 per cent;
- revegetation - 16 per cent;
- tree clearing guidelines - 16 per cent;
- planning - 8 per cent; and
- "very little" - 8 per cent.

Again, there is evidence that Landcare groups involved in direct action whereas the rest of the Landcare community is involved in supporting activities.

Interestingly, when these responses are compared with those on "improving productivity", there is the same level of direct action for the conservation of nature as there is for increasing Australia's productivity. However, funding for rural production and related activities is 40 times that for nature conservation. It seems that Landcare groups relate well to on-ground activities that integrate production and nature conservation objectives and are willing to devote their Landcare energy to it. The Commonwealth may need to take this into account when thinking about the suitability of their funding process for Landcare groups carrying out on-ground works for sustainable agriculture.

Goal G: Habitat Conservation

LANDCARE GROUPS' RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 25)

Respondents promoted the integration of habitat and wildlife conservation with other land-use practices through:
- education through field days, advice and newsletters - 36 per cent;
- revegetation programs - 32 per cent;
- Property Management Planning - 8 per cent; and
- other - 24 per cent.

OTHER RESPONSES (TOTAL RESPONSES = 25)

Some of these were involved in more than one activity:
- education, promotion of the concept and PMP - 64 per cent;
- direct action through planting - 12 per cent; and
- other ("research and planning", "very little", etc) - 24 per cent.

An interesting comment from a Roma (State Government) stakeholder with regard to this question was:
"This strikes me as the urban perspective on Landcare NOT the rural one."

Achievements: State Government

The State Government requested data about achievements in the seven NLP program schedules through which it implements the goals as agreed to with the Commonwealth Government. These seven are:
Landcare Group Support; Property Management Planning; Education and Awareness; Natural Resource Information; Small Town Water Supply and Waste Water Treatment; and Floodplain Management.

Only the first four schedules listed were assessed through the survey. Natural Resource Information had recently carried out its own survey and the last two had concerns with the assessment process that required direct response from government, rather than solutions from a broad scale evaluation of Landcare. Therefore their questions were directed to the regional assessment panels and to managers within State Government.

Landcare Group Support

Questions directed to Landcare facilitators and coordinators and their responses on five Landcare Group Support issues are summarised in the table below.

Landcare Group Support also wanted to know what the Landcare groups needed from their facilitators and what skills the facilitators needed to make them more effective with their groups.

Table 1   Responses of Landcare facilitators and coordinators

Issue	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Landcare groups are having an effect on sustainable land use.	2	10	4	0	0
Groups are forming in the best way for adoption to occur.	4	3	8	0	0
It is appropriate to use groups as an extension tool for government.	3	9	2	2	1
Groups are involving their community in activities.	1	11	4	0	0
Consultation between government and groups is improving.	2	9	6	0	1

What Landcare Groups Needed From Facilitators (Total Responses = 29)

Landcare groups said they needed:
- information and advice on funding, appropriate activities, and specific technical issues - 59 per cent;
- encouragement, support, care and guidance - 28 per cent; and
- other - 14 per cent.

The strong responses regarding the need for information suggests that groups currently rely heavily on their facilitators for guidance about both access to funding and ideas about suitable projects.

When asked what they wanted from their project officers, 81 per cent (total responses = 16) of respondents stated that it was to keep the group functioning.

The Landcare groups were also asked what it was that they appreciated from Landcare facilitators, government and community. They answered that they appreciated the financial and other support they received.

What Facilitators Think They Need To Help Their Groups (Total Responses = 17)

Facilitators responded by stating that to help their groups they needed:
- facilitation skills;

- conflict resolution skills;
- people skills (interpersonal skills)
- technical knowledge;
- meeting procedure skills; and
- willingness to work hard.

It seems that the Landcare facilitators do not always realise what an important link in the information chain they are, nor how strongly their groups rely on them for information. All facilitators mentioned the need for facilitation and human resource management skills.

Property Management Planning

Only eight of the 56 PMP coordinators (14 per cent) responded to the survey. They questions for PMP centred on the content and delivery process for PMP.

Perhaps the most interesting point to make about the PMP is the isolation sometimes felt by the coordinators, and the fact that community Landcare members do not readily associate their group activities with PMP. However, many who have been to PMP workshops are seeing changes in their community directly associated with it.

There are further data associated with PMP in the results report and the Queensland PMP coordinator is independently interpreting these.

Education Awareness

Education and Awareness wanted to know if the coordinators were confident with what was available and whether the Landcare community was using the prepared materials.

All five Education and Awareness coordinators responded to the questionnaire. Two stated they were unsure about the full range of educational and promotional material that is available.

The materials nominated for the questionnaire were:
- TAFE courses;
- GRASS Check;
- Understanding Soil Ecosystem Relationships (USER);
- Waterwatch; and
- WaterWise.

Landcare groups exhibited a fairly high level of awareness that the material listed above existed but was at a low level. When respondents were asked if the material met their needs only the Waterwatch and WaterWise material rated more than one positive response.

It was usual for individuals who had accessed Waterwatch material to have had hands-on experience with the material though activities with their local school or Landcare group in measuring the quality of water in creeks and rivers. The apparently more limited use of the other materials may be because they are genuinely unsuitable, they have not been extended or promoted to the landholder community, or simply that the respondents had not had any practical experience with them. It is an issue worth exploring further particularly if any modification of the materials is planned.

Integrated catchment management planning

Stakeholders in the area of integrated catchment management planning were interested in:
- the level of awareness of catchment plans and their usefulness; and
- the types of planning occurring within ICM groups and supporting organistions.

When Landcare groups were asked about their awareness of catchment plans and their usefulness a total of 45 responded. Of these, 71 per cent stated that they were aware a catchment plan for their area. Only 31 per cent, however, explicitly stated that the plans were if some use. This response is not surprising given that only five of the plans are in a completed or partly completed form.

The more relevant information was that 31 per cent of respondents stated that NLP funding should always be linked to a catchment plan and a further 44 per cent said funding should sometimes be linked to a catchment plan. This shows that up to 75 per cent of respondents would link their activities to a plan. This view is also supported by observations and interviews conducted for the development of this evaluation model, and by the study done by Smyth (1993). That study also revealed that east of the Great Dividing Range most Landcare-associated individuals were supportive of catchment plans, whereas support for catchment plans west of the range became less consistent. Does this reflect the higher population density and development east of the Great Dividing Range, and possibly perceptions that sustainability is a more urgent issue for the presumed "environmentally endowed" zone than for areas further inland?

Catchment plans set out the priorities for a catchment. It may be concluded that with the regional assessment panel support, most NLP funding activities would be linked to catchment plans. The Northern Regional Assessment Panel goes part way towards this by giving special consideration, but not automatic priority, to projects that help implement the Johnstone, Herbert and Pioneer rivers' catchment plans. The Lockyer Resource Management Group implements its business plan through the Landcare assessment process. Projects that have a catchment focus have, at times, been initially assessed by this group for suitability before being passed on to the regional assessment panel. A comment from a Landcare facilitator suggests that project application in this catchment are unlikely to be successful without endorsement from the Lockyer Resource Management Group.

In reply to questions about catchment planning, 75 per cent of 16 State Government respondents believed that the plans affect government planning. Other comments were focused either on the lack of a specific plan, or on the support needed for these plans.

The Commonwealth Government's response to catchment plans is that they are aware they exist and are encouraged that groups are adopting a more strategic and comprehensive view to natural resource management.

Generally, it would seem that there is growing support from all levels (Landcare group, the State Government and the Commonwealth Government) for catchment plans to be the basis for prioritising project funding. The implementation of these plans relies on the regional assessment panels funding suitable projects.

Additional research in this area by the evaluation coordinator found that links between ecologically sustainable development (ESD) goals, NLP goals and catchment plans were not generally understood. It is recommended that these links are made explicit and that catchment plans are then used to set priorities for funding.

Recommendation: Foster recognition that catchment plans are an appropriate vehicle to identify and set Landcare priorities at property, catchment and regional levels so that they can provide an integrated and rational basis for Landcare funds allocation providing they support ecologically sustainable development (ESD), NLP and NHT goals.

This could be achieved by:
- integrated catchment management committees being aware of the ESD, NLP and NHT goals and ensuring their plans clearly state links with these goals;
- all relevant sectors in the departments of Natural Resources, Primary Industries and Environment encouraging and supporting committees in their efforts to develop and implement plans that support ESD, NLP and NHT goals; and
- regional assessment panels accepting projects that clearly align with ICM plans.

Funding

The Landcare facilitators reported that Landcare groups want more funds to implement Landcare practices on the ground. The following comments are in response to the question, "After scrutinising the list of applicants who have been funded for the 1996/97, to what extent are you satisfied with where the money has been spent?"

A total of 20 Landcare groups responded to this question and their responses were as follows:

- 43 per cent wanted more for on-ground works and group projects rather than for government projects (in response to another question about needs, 84 per cent stated that they needed more funds for on-ground works); and
- 19 per cent wanted better accountability and assessment processes.

Until 1996 there was very little funding available for Landcare group projects that dealt with on-ground works directed at sustainable land and water use. Even now, funding for on-ground works is only available for the implementation of catchment plans (DPIE 1996; Walker 1996; Venz 1996). Even though the guidelines have changed, advisers to applicants and the members of the regional assessment panels seem largely unaware of how to implement the change.

With regard to funding, 55 per cent of Landcare group respondents (total responses = 35) stated that they received more than 50 per cent of their funding from the National Landcare Program. Some groups (33 per cent) stated they do not use any funds from the National Landcare Program. Ninety-seven per cent of groups believed that their funded projects were addressing priority issues in their district.

Recommendation: Ensure Landcare groups are more aware of funding that is available for on-ground activities in the area of land use.

This could be achieved through the administrators of the NLP/NHT in the Queensland Department of Natural Resources ensuring that regional assessment panel coordinators, Landcare facilitators, and others who advise applicants for funding are aware of the opportunities both when applications are called and when applications are regionally assessed.

Needs

Questions on needs included the areas of:
- information; and
- group operations.

Information

Earlier in this chapter it was established that Landcare groups rely on Landcare facilitators for a variety of information. The individuals and groups who supply the information wanted to know how best to reach the Landcare groups. Landcare groups responded that most of their information comes through:
- Landcare facilitators;
- newsletters;
- newspapers, radio;
- government advisers; and
- conversations with each other.

Responses suggest that easier access to information and data is a key issue for Landcare group members.

Group operations

Landcare groups stated that what was most needed to make their groups function better was continued support and guidance from facilitators and project officers. They also need support from industry and their communities.

Lack of funds for on-ground projects that involve groups of land users appears to persist as a perceived impediment to more effective Landcare operations and activities, although this may be due to a lack of awareness about changes that have occurred in funding guidelines. This survey and other reports (Curtis et al. 1997) clearly show that weed eradication, for example, is the preoccupation of many Landcare groups, yet securing funding for community weed eradication projects seems problematic. A concurrent but interim evaluation of the Drought Landcare Program has indicated that such on-ground, community-based activities are of a high educational value.

This report recommends that degraded land in Queensland, whether from weeds, soil compaction, wind or water erosion or any other cause, be used to provide practical and educational experience on land restoration for communities of adjoining land-holders. This approach has the benefits of:
- restoring degraded sites;
- increasing the knowledge and experience of the land-holders involved;
- introducing land-holders to appropriate advisers and learning techniques;
- building an ongoing learning community around those land-holders; and
- increasing the monitoring and evaluation skills.

Recommendation: Degraded land on private and public property should be used for practical and educational experience for groups of land users and advisers.

Structure of Landcare

The best structure for guiding the Landcare program and its project activities has been mush debated since its inception. For example, Roberts (1992) found that the role of Queensland Landcare Council, while clear to government, was not so clear to, or clearly accepted by, the Landcare groups. It seems that Landcare groups are now supportive of the Queensland Landcare Council's present role because 40 out of 45 groups answered "yes" to the question, "Does the current organisational structure of Landcare meet the needs of your group?"

Just over half of the respondents stated that they had some contact with the council. One of the longer established groups suggested that the council should be accountable to the Landcare groups and one group suggested that integrated catchment management should be incorporated into the structure of Landcare.

The Evaluation Process

Two significant outcomes from the first implementation of the Landcare Evaluation Questionnaire were that it:
• stimulated action in planning among some Landcare groups; and
• was administered by a Landcare group.

Almost 30 per cent of the 40 respondents to a question about the usefulness of participating in the questionnaire stated that it stimulated them to carry out their own planning and evaluation.

The process of receiving the questionnaires, putting the data onto a database and designing a report for the data output was done by a land-holder associated with the Murilla Landcare Group. Even though this person had a high level of computing skills, there were others in that group who had adequate skills and could have supported him had the need arisen. This is worth noting, because there is a perception in government that the community does not have the skill or resources to carry out administrative tasks of this sort.

The process was completed on time within budget. It involved putting the responses from each questionnaire onto a database, collating some of the responses into graphs, proofing the transcriptions, designing the data output report, preparing it for printing, and mailing the printed reports.

The involvement of the evaluation coordinators was minimal. The only tasks that fell to the evaluation coordinators were to make judgments about the interpretation of illegible hand writing, provide comments about the design of the data output, proof the transcription of the responses, prepare the report for printing, arrange the printing and mail the reports. Any of these tasks could have been done by the project officer of the Landcare group.

The involvement of the Murilla Landcare Group was also minimal suggesting that it is a simple process to administer. The only task for this Landcare group was to receive the questionnaires and pass them on.