

Community

Health of the Hills and Fleurieu landscapes is intricately tied to the communities that visit, live and depend on them. A healthy environment is vital to the community's identity, wellbeing and economic prosperity; just as the community's relationship to and care for the region largely shapes the condition of its land, water and nature.

Fostering recognition of this two-way dependency and strengthening people's respect and capacity to care for the region's landscapes is one of five priorities in the *Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Plan 2021-26*. This regional snapshot provides a brief assessment of four Focus Areas important to improving community's role in landscape management:

- P.1. Foster a regional culture of landscape stewardship
- P.2. Walk alongside First Nations in looking after Yarta/Ruwe (Country)
- P.3. Strengthen shared understanding of landscape management challenges
- P.4. Increase community capacity to manage our landscapes

This summary draws on a mix of information sources, including published and unpublished reports, internal datasets, anecdotal observations and qualitative assessments by landscape officers and other specialists.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

We have limited data about the relationship between the Hill's and Fleurieu community and the region's environment. What we know is based largely on anecdotal information, case studies and a few surveys; mostly not representative. Over time we hope to understand more about this relationship and how it is progressing.

P1. Culture of Landscape Stewardship

The region landscape, including its land, water and biodiversity require consistent attention, care and

maintenance to remain healthy and productive. As millennia of First Nations custodianship attest, landscape health is built on an intimate awareness, knowledge and respect for the environment, its complex processes and the place of all living things within it – community included.

Building a strong culture of landscape stewardship is critical to ensuring our region's land, water and nature remain healthy.

A culture of landscape stewardship reflects the general level of engagement, understanding, sense of responsibility and effort to nurture and protect the region's natural and productive assets - including its cultural heritage.

VALUING AND CONNECTING TO NATURE

Community connection to nature is an important part of building a culture of stewardship. Studies show people's relationship to nature is linked to pro-environmental behaviour and is considered a precondition for commitment to environmental protectionⁱ. There are also benefits to people's well-being associated with nature connection. Involvement in land management activities gives people a closer relationship to nature and is correlated to a higher sense of well-beingⁱⁱ. People who connect with nature are generally happier and healthierⁱⁱⁱ.

About this document

This snapshot summarises regional conditions relevant to the 'Community Priority' – one of five priorities in the [Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Plan 2021-2026](#).

To read the Landscape Plan or the other regional snapshot documents on land, water, nature and climate, follow the links and go to www.landscape.sa.gov.au/hf

Regional data on nature-connection is limited but some evidence suggests the Hills and Fleurieu community generally places a high value on the natural environment. For example, a 2016 survey^{iv} covering greater Adelaide and much of the Hills and Fleurieu showed 89% of respondents indicated they like interacting with nature. And on average, compared to metropolitan respondents, those living in the region placed a greater value on the environment; with those living on farms and/or volunteering in the region giving the highest values overall. A recent follow-up survey^v in 2021 also showed that people in the region are generally more concerned about the environment than the state average with the River Murray, Water quality, agricultural production and parks identified as the most important environmental assets. More than 60% of survey respondents from the region also expressed interest in helping create a more sustainable natural environment. The 2021 survey also stated that 94% of respondents are interested in the environment at some level.^{vi}

There is opportunity to accommodate the interests of this group who want to learn more through education and promotion.

Compared to Total SA (68%), those from the Adelaide and Mount Lofty NRM region (74%) are more likely to be concerned about environmental issues in South Australia.^{vii}

Evidence of people valuing the environment in the region is also seen from the community sentiments expressed in consultation documents and council and industry plans. For example, see:

- [Community input to the board's Landscape Plan](#)
- [Mt Barker Community Priority Directions](#)
- The 12 Community Priorities from the Yankalilla DC ['What We Heard'](#) report
- [Southern and Hills LGA Indicators of community wellbeing report](#)
- Primary producer recognition and restoration of ecosystem services such as [Native insect pollination](#)

SUSTAINABILITY AS A REGIONAL IDENTITY

Concepts like sustainability are consistent with building a regional culture of landscape stewardship, particularly where sustainability is linked to a sense of place and integrated into how people understand themselves and their community.

While data does not exist on regional identity, there is evidence, sustainability is important regionally. For example, there is a greater promotion and identification with sustainability in the tourism and primary producer industries. Because this pattern is linked to the maintenance of landscape amenity and health, it is consistent a culture of landscape stewardship. E.g. as seen in:

- The region's clean, natural environment increasingly recognised as a key drawcard by the tourism industry
- The strength of local industry support for environmental initiatives such as [Sustainable Winegrowing Australia](#).
- The promotion of sustainability in local industry plans; such as the [Adelaide Hills & Fleurieu horticulture regional Strategy, 2020 to 2025](#), and [Adelaide Hills regional strategic tourism plan](#).

RESPONSIBILITY FOR LANDSCAPE HEALTH

Responsibility for the environment is another dimension that sheds light on the strength of landscape stewardship. A 2021 survey^{viii} suggests that respondents see natural resource management as the responsibility of the Department of Environment and Water (56%) and local councils (54%). This compares to DEW (9%) and local councils (32%) in 2016. The 2021 survey also suggests that this in a regional area were more likely to mention Landscape Boards as having some responsibility for natural resource management.

In 2016, 11% of respondents said farmers/landholders have some responsibility and in 2021 this figure increased to 20%. In 2021, 39% of those in the Adelaide and Mount Lofty NRM region suggested farmers/landholders have responsibility (this was 3% in 2016).^{ix}

It is unclear from the results how this perception of responsibility links to action taken or levels of public satisfaction.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONNECTION TO NATURE

Fostering young peoples' connection to nature is a way of building a new generation of landscape stewards. Research also suggests that giving young people tangible ways to address environmental issues can help mitigating anxiety and distress caused by looming climate and ecological crises^x.

There is little local data on the connection between young people and nature or involvement specifically. However, studies outside the region show young people tend to be more concerned about environmental issues and place a higher value on the environment than the population average. This is reflected in *South Australians and the Environment Report - 2016*, particularly around climate change. Similarly, the 2018 UN Youth Australia survey *Australian Youth Representative Consultation Report* highlighted young South Australian's felt most passionate about climate change ranked 5th.

Within the region, there has historically been strong engagement with school-aged children through nature education programs and with those connected to Environment Centres. YACCA (*Youth and Community in Conservation Action*), who operate from the Willunga Environment Centre, have successfully engaged with and built the capacity of hundreds of school aged children over multiple years, building a greater appreciation and care for nature amongst this youth cohort.

Other avenues for youth engagement include The *SA Youth Environment Council* which provides young people a voice in key environmental issues facing South Australia and opportunities to take action. More than 600 students in years 7-11 have participated in the program.

P2. Looking after Yarta/Ruwe

The dispossession of Aboriginal people and resulting loss of connection to Yarta/Ruwe (Country) has profoundly impacted First Nations

people in the region. Connection to Country is central to Aboriginal spirituality and a fundamental cultural responsibility^{xi}. Re-building this relationship is of critical importance to the traditional custodians of the Hills and Fleurieu – the Kurna, Peramangk, Ngadjuri and Ngarrindjeri.

First Nations groups of the region have repeatedly



Fig 2. Children monitoring *Gahnia Filum* – habitat for the endemic sedge skipper butterfly.

expressed desire^{xiii} to be involved in managing landscapes, protecting cultural values, having access to Country, sharing their knowledge and learning about managing Country. This is evidenced in publications such as *Ngarrindjeri Wurrurwarren, a world that is, was and will be*^{xiii} and *Ngarrindjeri Lakun*^{xiv}; both written to explain *Ngarrindjeri* connection and care for Country.

FIRST NATIONS' INVOLVEMENT IN LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

First Nations groups in the region have a strong desire to re-connect to Country, re-learn lost traditional knowledge and share this with landholders, whilst ensuring ongoing generational succession. Ensuring First Nations involvement in landscape management is a critical part of this.

Currently however, opportunities for Aboriginal involvement in land and sea management are limited and often ephemeral.

As articulated in the *Ngarrindjeri Sea Country Plan*, First Nations aspirations for the region include:

- Traditional use of resources in Native Title areas;
- Protection of cultural/intellectual property;

- Equal contribution to, and involvement in decision-making on management of traditional Country, including joint management of Parks;
- Increased Aboriginal employment and economic opportunities;
- Involvement in fire management and cultural burning; and
- Involvement in research.

Work needs to be done to put these aspirations and those of the other Nations groups into practice.

FORMAL COLLABORATION

There is limited formal collaboration between First Nations and non-Aboriginal land managers. However, some steps have been made to address this at both a community and institutional level. For example, formalised working partnerships now exist between the Landscape Board and three of the four nations. The Board is also collaborating with the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board to support the fourth (Ngadjuri) going forward.

A multi-board working group with Ngarrindjeri has also been formed to ensure a regular forum for engagement and partnership. This partly aims to help integrate Ngarrindjeri cultural values, spiritual beliefs and authority with contemporary landscape management planning and implementation practices in projects delivered on Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar Ruwe. It will also help bring Ngarrindjeri knowledge into conventional land management to improve understanding of the landscape and how best to care for Country.



Fig. 3 Mark Koolmatrie leading a tour on Ruwe at Yundi

FIRST NATION'S ACCESS TO COUNTRY

The involvement of Aboriginal people in the management of their traditional lands is important for advancing reconciliation, maintaining traditional practices and improving cultural site protection. However, it is not known how many First Nations people in the region have meaningful access to Country.

The South Australian model of land co-management has typically involved partnerships between the State and Aboriginal groups to help manage national parks. This model is now evolving with environmental NGOs and private landholders increasingly interested in co-managing land with traditional owners.

One example is at the 92ha 'Watchalunga' Nature Reserve in Finniss, where the Nature Foundation and Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation formed a co-management agreement in 2021.

Another example involving a bi-cultural partnership between Ramindjeri (Ngarrindjeri) and a private landholder in McLaren Vale has been documented in the brochure *Aboriginal Values in Fleurieu Swamps* launched in May, 2021.

CULTURAL AND HERITAGE AWARENESS

Community awareness of Aboriginal cultural and heritage assets is generally poor. Even the Register of Aboriginal Sites and Objects, which is part of the Central Archive in South Australia lacks a comprehensive coverage of significant sites.

Cultural awareness education events have been, and will continue to be delivered to key partners, landholders and volunteers to help raise awareness of and responsibility for, the protection of significant cultural sites in the Management Unit.

P3. Shared trust and understanding of landscape management challenges

Long-term landscape health depends on whole-of-community stewardship. But in order for the community to 'buy-into' and work toward common goals, important ground work is needed. Building

an understanding of landscape issues is an important part of this. People are unlikely to support, let alone participate in landscape management if it is not seen as relevant. Similarly, developing common approaches relies on forming shared priorities; something that can't be built without an understanding of the issues.

Trust in landscape management decision-making is another pre-requisite for community buy-in. Addressing regional challenges inevitably involves decisions and trade-offs relating to highly emotive and complex issues. Two examples include needing to reduce the grazing impacts from kangaroos that are damaging crops and habitat, and managing fire risk while protect habitat.

Finding 'solutions' that have legitimacy and broad support is likely to depend on some level of common understanding of the issues as well as trust; trust in decision-makers, the processes used as well as for those in the broader community that share different views.

COMMUNITY TRUST AND INVOLVEMENT IN LAND MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

An assessment of community trust in land management decisions can't be made on the data available. However, common complaints to the board suggest a section of the community have low trust about decision-making on:

- How levies are spent
- Controls on water extraction
- Which pests should be controlled

Navigating the complexity of landscape issues has typically been left up to technical experts with land management decisions, sometimes with community stakeholders asked to respond to pre-formed ideas rather than participate in decision-making. Evidence shows decisions will have more trust and buy-in if stakeholders are more involved in the decision process.

NAVIGATING CONTENTIOUS ISSUES TOGETHER

Navigating strong differences of opinion among stakeholders will be a necessary to address landscape challenges. Anecdotal evidence from Landscape Officers, complaints to the Board and

conversations with community and agencies suggest the following issues are particularly polarising:

- Protecting habitat and biodiversity versus urban development or bushfire fuel-load reduction.
- Individual rights to take water versus maintenance of aquatic waterway health or common water needs (eg. for shared commercial, amenity or cultural reasons).
- Landholder responsibilities for pest plant and animal control.
- Controlling impact causing animals, including some native species (like kangaroos and corellas) versus animal welfare concerns.
- Proponents of urban development versus habitat and rural amenity concerns.

In most cases, the perspectives at the heart of these issues have not been explored or brought together. Until this is done, finding solutions that all parties can live by won't be possible.

P4. Community land-management capacity

Building the capacity and involvement of community in land management is vital to improving landscape health. Landholders and volunteers already practice many forms of landscape management but there is a substantial way to go before the most effective and long-lasting practices are widespread. In many ways farmers, volunteers, technical experts and even First Nations reconnecting to country are learning as they go. Over the last few decades there have been big shifts in what is considered 'best-practice' and the biggest gains in sustainable land management are likely still to come. Building capacity across the community requires this learning to be celebrated and shared.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN CARING FOR LAND, WATER AND NATURE

Lack of data prevents an assessment of overall community landscape management capacity.

However, surveys conducted over the last 10 years give some insight into landholder activity.

Landholders primarily gain land management knowledge through their social networks. A 2016 survey^{xv} in the previous AMLR NRM footprint showed the most common sources of knowledge were family (approx. 50%) and other landholders (40%). 18% of respondents sourced knowledge from online sources while a similar number had accessed training in the five years previous. Younger (<55 YO) and full time land managers were more likely to have attended training.

These results show landholders can gain knowledge through multiple sources, but it is unclear how often this occurs or what translates into practice. Additional results suggest many landholders don't see a need for new information. Of the 82% of landholders who had not accessed land management training or education the most common reason (>50%) was a belief they did not need additional knowledge.

Results from land management training provided by the Landscape Board indicates there has been a steady increase in the proportion of participants applying skills learned since 2011. However in 35% of cases, knowledge gained is not put into practice^{xvi}. The most common reason for lack of application was lack of time (24% of cases), a barrier that has increased over time.

Volunteering

Volunteers play a critical role in addressing land management issues on public and private land. Most volunteer groups in the region conduct work like weed removal and habitat improvement. However, they also perform other roles like data collection ('citizen science'), erosion control, waste removal and raising environmental awareness in the broader community.



Fig. 4 Snapshot of volunteer activity in 2021

Although, a in 2021^{xvii} indicates there is still low engagement with attending a tree planting or other environmental volunteer event, compared to 2016^{xviii}, there has been an increase of 14% of those who would never participate to those who would now participate.

PARTNERING AND PEER TO PEER LEARNING

While individual landholder capacity is important for landscape health, cross-sector partnerships and peer learning is critical for spreading knowledge, skills and experience, and for scaling-up the positive work being done.

Peer-to-peer learning can foster meaningful connections and knowledge-sharing between like-minded individuals; helping to mobilise volunteers, landholders and community effort at the landscape scale. This is exemplified by the partnership between Biodiversity McLaren Vale and the newly-formed 'Hills Biodiversity' group. As described in their words:

"With the mentorship of Biodiversity McLaren Vale, Hills Biodiversity, vigneron and a growing number of private landholders in the region are banding together to restore creek lines and paddocks as part of their 'Springs to Summit' project, expand the bushland that is needed to protect against species loss and rebuild healthy and diverse ecosystems."

Cross-sector partnerships are another mechanism that has proven effective in fostering innovation in the region. The *Wildlife for Wine* cluster project is one successful Example. This initiative supports local research and education in the viticulture industry to facilitate learning between growers and environmental specialists. It encourages grape growers to integrate wildlife, soil health and biodiversity benefits with the practice of viticulture. Outcomes include better insect pest management, improvements in habitat and biodiversity and meeting industry sustainability standards.

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- ^v Green Adelaide, 2021, South Australians and the environment survey – Hills & Fleurieu – Draft Report
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