

A National  
Framework  
For  
Sustainable  
Agriculture



The Landcare 11  
February 2008

**The Landcare 11 team**

The Landcare 11 is a multi-disciplinary team with national expertise and experience in sustainable agriculture. The team includes specialists from on-farm to national perspectives in: agricultural production; sustainable farming systems; sustainable natural resource management; ecosystem service trading; farm management systems, and natural resource auditing.

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The Landcare 11 met on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 2007 to work together to propose a new direction for Sustainable Agriculture in Australia. The Landcare 11 identified the high priority need for the development and implementation of a National Framework for Sustainable Agriculture to enable sustainable food and fibre production; sustainable natural resource management, and resilient rural communities. Such a framework requires national leadership and recognition from the Australian Government and Agricultural Industries to succeed.

**Context of sustainable agriculture**

Promoting the uptake of sustainable agriculture involves many Australians ranging from farmers, individuals, landcare groups, regional NRM bodies, industry bodies, and all levels of Australian Government. A key issue identified in recent national reviews and research is the barrier to the uptake of sustainable agriculture in Australia as the lack of recognition for primary producers who undertake NRM activities. Adding to this pressure is the inability to demonstrate public benefit and ameliorate financial costs associated with producing more sustainably, through the supply chain.

Enabling sustainable ecosystems requires farmers to be good stewards of the natural resource base with the expectation that the resource base should be protected for future generations an essential part of the farming enterprise operation. There is increasing discussion around the concepts of 'right to farm' and of ecosystem services. Where provision of sustainable ecosystems is expected and delivered beyond the stewardship role of farmers there is the potential for establishing markets for ecosystem services as one way to address the issue of recognition and sharing financial costs.

NRM programs and to some extent the policy structure governing those programs, are also currently under evaluation. Whilst funding decisions on the next generation of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT3) and the National Landcare Programme (NLP) have been announced, as well as a commitment that both programmes will build on approaches to date, future priorities and implementation details are still being developed by the Australian Government. In this context, the Landcare 11 propose a new approach to better align NRM programs to agricultural production through the development and implementation of a National Framework for Sustainable Agriculture. The Landcare 11 propose such a Framework would tackle the issue of market failure and provide a means to capture market opportunities for rural communities in ecosystem service delivery.

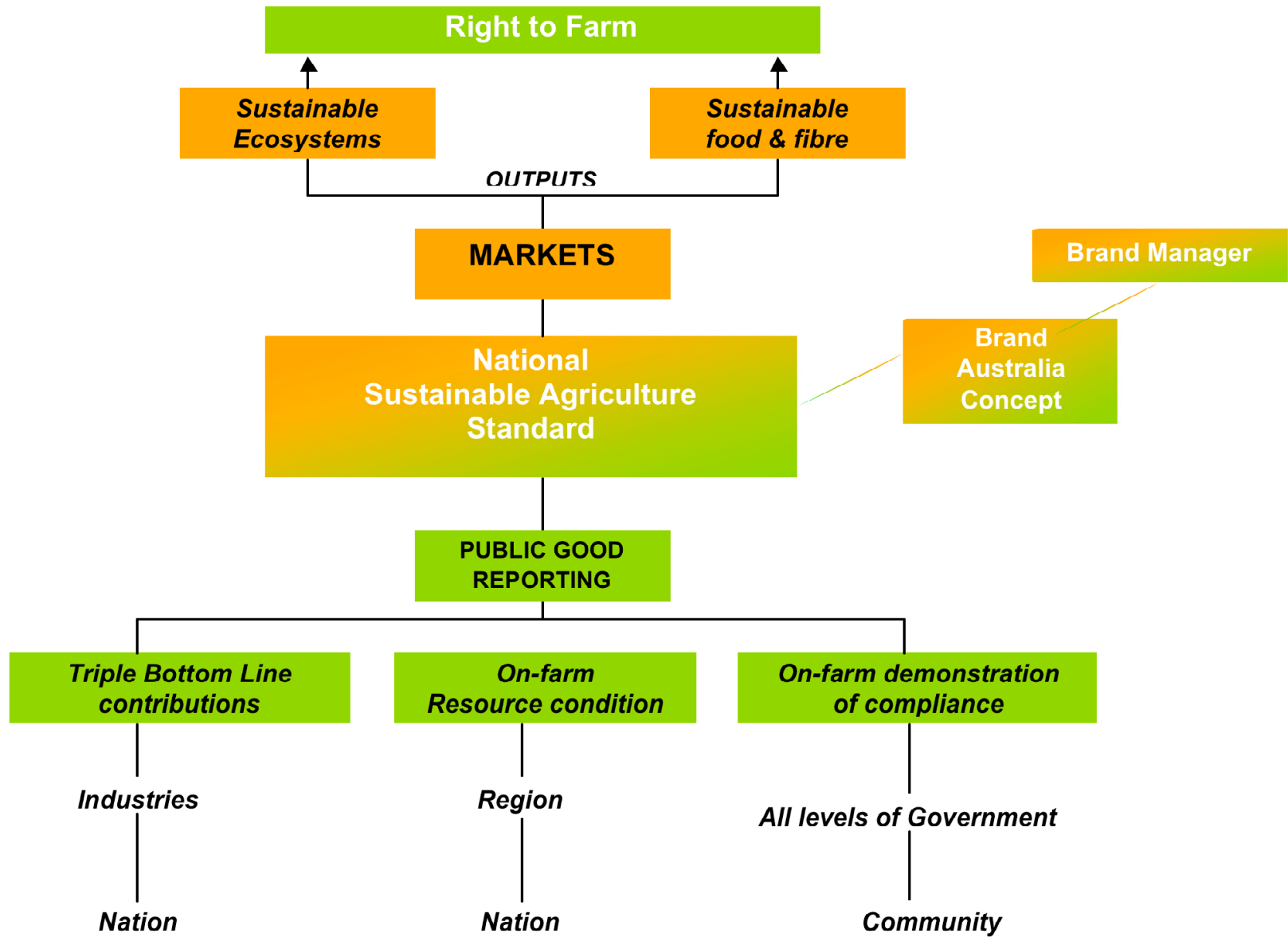
**Recommendations**

A new vision for the role of agriculture in the Australian landscape is required which will bring greater confidence in the marketplace and in the broader community. The Landcare 11 identified that to enable *Sustainable Agriculture* requires an overarching framework providing broad strategic directions for industry and government. Such a framework requires national leadership of the Australian Government through coordination coupled with aligned policies and programs. *Sustainable Agriculture* needs to be considered in the context of an outcome as the management of our natural resources and supply chains in order to provide triple bottom line benefits. *Sustainable Agriculture* results in productive, sustainable farming systems that do not harm the environment in ways such as damaging soil, water and biodiversity resources. Rural enterprises often deliver services other than traditional food and fibre production, and it is evident that works that are promoted and imposed to meet public good demands should receive increased remuneration for these services delivered through the management of healthy landscapes, rivers, wetlands and estuaries. *Sustainable Agriculture* relies on: the **resource base** consisting of natural (land, water and air) human (people), social (communities), financial and physical (plant and infrastructure) capitals; **value** consisting of agricultural produce (food and fibre), healthy ecosystems (environment), human capital (capacity of people) and human well-being (farms and communities), and **markets** consisting of buyers, sellers and producers (domestic and overseas consumers, supply chain partners, government and communities) and their needs (e.g. existing and new produce markets, environmental condition and societal well-being).

Facilitating the delivery of *Sustainable Agriculture* requires the consideration of important trends including: the decline and shifts in resource condition; changes in ecosystem processes; increasing degradation of the landscape; negative trend of farmers terms of trade; larger corporate farmers with economies of scale; climate change/variability; diversifying markets; competitive pressures; the need to demonstrate ecologically sustainable development, and structural change such as demographics/population and resource competition.

*'Standards Reporting Systems' Logic.*

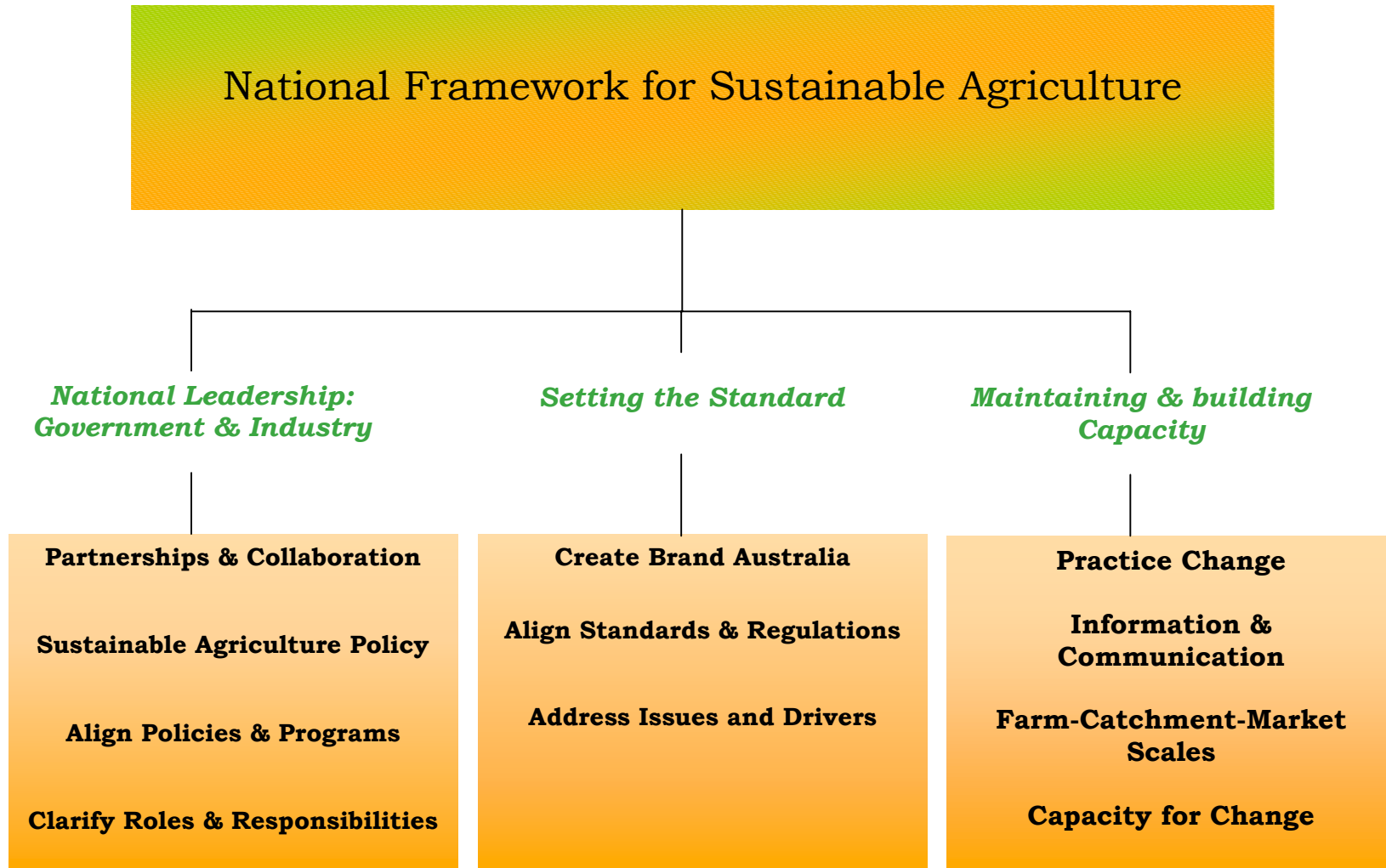
*Supporting Farmers To Farm Sustainably.*



**The Landcare 11** propose a ‘*Sustainable Agriculture Brand Australia*’ focus and identified **eleven** key principles required to build the National Framework:

1. Shared Leadership
2. Partnerships and collaboration for change
3. Aligned policy, programmes and structures
4. Clear roles and responsibilities
5. Brand Australia
6. Aligned standards and regulations
7. Address issues and drivers
8. Practice change
9. Information/communication/decision support tools
10. Define Farm to catchment to market linkages
11. Build and maintain capacity

**These principles form the critical elements of the proposed National Framework for Sustainable Agriculture under the core themes of National Leadership; Setting the Standards, and Maintaining and Building Capacity. The Landcare 11 request the Australian Government to consider the development of a National Framework for Sustainable Agriculture to assist in the delivery of future NRM; agricultural and rural policies and programs. The following diagram and table provides further direction to enable the framework.**



<b>National Leadership</b>		
<b>Principles</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Leaders</b>
1. Shared Leadership	Develop a shared vision for sustainable agriculture through the development and implementation of the National Framework for Sustainable Agriculture.	Australian Government & Agricultural Industries Partnership.
2. Partnerships and collaboration for change	Develop partnerships to establish and implement the elements of the National Framework to address market failure and achieve public good outcomes.	Australian Government & Agricultural Industries Partnership.
3. Align policies, programmes and structures reporting to a sustainable agriculture policy as the common goal.	<p>Develop a sustainable agriculture policy as the common overarching goal for sustainable NRM; agricultural industries and rural communities.</p> <p>Align and harmonize existing policies, programmes (including incentives) and institutional arrangements to implement the overarching sustainable agriculture policy.</p>	Australian Government & Agricultural Industries Partnership.
4. Clarify roles and responsibilities to enable Sustainable Agriculture.	Develop a framework that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the Australian Government and its agencies; the states and territories and their agencies; the agricultural industries; the value chain; the regional NRM bodies, and the individual farmer in demonstrating and enabling sustainable agricultural production and trade.	Australian Government & Agricultural Industries Partnership.

Setting the Standard		
Principles	Actions	Leaders
5. Create 'Brand Australia' to establish a clean/green image of Australian food and fibre to deliver the promise of sustainable agriculture domestically and overseas.	<p>Establish a clear definition of Sustainable Agriculture beyond SCARM (1998).</p> <p>Facilitate the development of a recognised 'Brand Australia for Sustainable Agriculture' that is consistent with the national and international marketplace to trade sustainable food and fibre and ecosystem services. This would involve the development of a standard; the creation of a Brand Manager, and the establishment of a consistent recognised set of indicators and monitoring systems.</p>	Australian Government & Agricultural Industries Partnership.
6. Align standards and regulations with each other at the farm and catchment scale to enable benchmarking to measure progress and to demonstrate compliance with regulations.	<p>Establish a nationally consistent set of recognised standards, indicators and monitoring systems translated to farm and catchment scale. These would be used for on-farm and catchment benchmarking; demonstrating contributions to public good NRM, and demonstration of compliance. The standards are to be aligned with the Regional NRM process and with Industry standards.</p>	Australian Government & Agricultural Industries Partnership.
7. Address issues and drivers	<p>Ensure that the development of the National Framework for Sustainable Agriculture responds to current issues and drivers. Engage with value chain actors to address issues of economic sustainability.</p>	Australian Government & Agricultural Industries Partnership.

<b>Maintaining &amp; building capacity</b>		
<b>Principles</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Leaders</b>
8. Practice change	Facilitate the delivery of programs designed to address resource outcomes and production drivers through sustainable agricultural and environmental management practices.	Australian Government; Agricultural Industries & NRM community Partnership.
9. Improved information and communication	Facilitate the improvement and harmonization of sustainability information to ensure improved quality, range, consistency and availability of all forms of information.  Facilitate the improvement of communication access and quality supporting all facets of sustainable agriculture.	Australian Government; Agricultural Industries & NRM community Partnership.
10. Farm-catchment-market scales	Ensure the National Framework recognises and defines sustainable agriculture at the farm, catchment, sector and market scale including consideration and recognition of regional landscape diversities.	Australian Government; Agricultural Industries & NRM community Partnership.
11. Capacity for Change	Ensure that the National Framework enables the maintenance and building of capacity from the farm-catchment-sector-market scales through adequate investment, education and innovation programs.	Australian Government; Agricultural Industries & NRM community Partnership.