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13th November 2020

Dear Andy,

**Re: *Bushfire Community Recovery and Resilience Fund - Phase Two Stream 2*
Upper Deua Landcare Group - Araluen Creek Community Resilience Project
NSW Soil Conservation Service Letter of Support**

NSW Soil Conservation Service, Nowra / South Coast Unit (SCS Nowra), supports the Upper Deua Landcare Group's application to the *Bushfire Community Recovery and Resilience Fund - Phase Two Stream 2* to increase the capacity for the community to respond to major natural events, and address instabilities in their local creeks resulting from post-bushfire rainfall in 2020, mostly following the major flood event in June 2020.

Heavy rainfall events in 2020 (January, March and June) have caused very high runoff events in the Deua / Araluen Catchments due to this rain falling on extensively burnt catchments. The severity of fires in the area has seen rainfall impacting bare ground over very large areas in the catchments upstream of Araluen Valley. The heaviest of these events occurred in June 2020. The severity of the fires has in a large proportion of the catchments, completely consumed and killed the crowns of trees, destroyed undergrowth / shrub layer and sterilised the ground, meaning that regrowth will be very slow and that downstream systems and communities will have to deal with this situation for many years to come.

The June 2020 runoff event has revealed underlying creek bed and bank instability in Araluen Creek and its tributaries, and accelerated its detrimental trajectory at many sites along the creeks. Also in many areas the creek vegetation has been completely burnt. Given how severe these fires have been in causing suppression of regrowth, increased runoff from "normal" rainfall events is likely to be the situation for the medium-term future. If nothing is done to provide resilience to these riverine systems, the loss of creek sediments to the downstream river will likely be very great. Unfortunately, once these processes have been triggered, good land management practices, including fully intact riparian vegetation, do virtually nothing to prevent further environmental degradation. Degradative processes also have the tendency to move through systems quickly and in an upstream direction, meaning that this problem will not stay isolated in these creeks for long, and will move further into upstream creek systems depending upon rainfall. Sediment loss and subsequent downstream effects will persist for many years or decades.

What is needed is a comprehensive community resilience approach from multiple partners, including in-stream works, bank protection, riparian enhancements, stock control, off-stream water sources, community driven replanting and maintenance. Soil Conservation Service has been approached to partner with Local Land Services to assist the Upper Deua Landcare Group

with survey, design and construction of in-stream and bank interventions aimed at providing permanent resilience enhancements to the channel and riparian area – we have considerable experience and expertise in this field. We provide cost-effective total solutions to difficult environmental problems, and where possible, partner with local landholders and organisations to compound the positive outcomes across farms, communities and landscapes.

This application's aims of empowering the community to arrest and reverse severe environmental degradation caused by unprecedented bushfires is supported by SCS Nowra, and we are very pleased to have been considered as a project partner. Without intervention at this stage of degradation, Araluen will suffer significant loss of community disaster resilience. At present, even small or "normal" rainfall events will cause accelerating degradation to the area's natural assets – a major storm event could lead to severe and long-lasting damage.

Given the current economic issues of 2020, and the push for stimulus and local economic resilience, this community-based environmental restoration project is off the shelf and ready to go. Under NSW Government procurement policy, Soil Conservation Service use local contractors and source local materials, so any stimulus input feeds directly into the local economy.

Coming into a period of *La Niña* there will be markedly increased rainfall and runoff events. The community's resilience to deal with environmental events is being undermined by untreated degradation triggered by the severe bushfires of 2019/20. The community is ready to act, as is LLS and SCS, to implement an holistic land management project in this small town so severely impacted by natural disaster.

If there is anything about this correspondence you wish to discuss, please contact me on 0437 112 604.

Yours sincerely,



Lyall Bogie
Senior Environmental Officer
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
NOWRA and SOUTH COAST