

LANDCARE BROKEN HILL Inc.

Imperial Lakes Nature Park + Environmental Sustainability Expo Hub

PROJECT OVERVIEW & VISION STATEMENT

Landcare Broken Hill acquired a 145-acre freehold property in January 2023 to create an extraordinary Nature Park, with a wide diversity of proposed activities and infrastructure now in developmental stage. The Nature Park property is a former reservoir site, decommissioned by Essential Water in early 2022. It is situated just to the north of urban Broken Hill, with an entrance about 800m from the edge of town on the Barrier Highway, travelling east towards Wilcannia and on to Sydney (See Google Maps for pinned location).

As part of its landmark **Greening the Hill Mk2** initiative launched in April 2019, the **Imperial Lakes Nature Park** with its proposed **Environmental Sustainability Expo Hub** are now Landcare Broken Hill's flagship projects. Designed to be, together, a major community engagement initiative, Landcare's Nature Park is likely to become one of the most frequented ecotourism destinations in Western NSW, potentially nationally, whilst concurrently contributing to the liveability of those who live in Broken Hill and its region.

The **Imperial Lakes Nature Park** with its **Environmental Sustainability Expo Hub** has no equivalent in Australia, being the development of an integrated environmental expo site with four core foci: nature conservation, passive recreation, ecotourism, and environmental vocational training & education. Under each core focus there will be a wide diversity of project components. The Nature Park will include all the usual public park passive recreational facilities for walking, bush-running, picnicking, lake canoeing, an Outback-themed children's playground, together with a wide range of hands-on biodiversity conservation projects. The many additional components of the Nature Park range from: a proposed major arboretum; wildlife nature trails, including an extensive nature trail along the restored Willa Willyong Creek; threatened species biodiversity conservation reserves; a large saltbush hedge maze; a reptile sanctuary; art trails and exhibitions; and an ecumenical multi-faith outdoor bush chapel. Every opportunity will be created to incorporate nesting boxes, small mammal refuges, floating islands on the lakes to protect waterfowl breeding, all designed for wildlife conservation whilst concurrently providing experiential education for Park visitors.

Within the Expo Hub itself will be established a large native plant propagation nursery (to be the largest in Western NSW); a commercial-scale seed bank; an enclosed botanical garden designed as a sensory garden as a place of respite; 100 raised community garden plots; a diversity of hands-on citizen science display areas, like Pollinators' Patch; a large enviro-technology exhibition pavilion to display cutting-edge innovation in environmental technology; a natural history museum & gallery; a bush tucker restaurant; green & food waste processing and associated instructional displays; renewable energy displays incorporating wind, solar & battery storage; and an outdoor 200 seat performing arts facility with a retractable cinema screen capability. With multiple environmental vocational training opportunities planned, at the hub of the Hub a unique solar Meeting Tree, under which 80 can gather, is designed as the epicentre of activities and a place for outdoor lectures and educational presentations.

Throughout the Nature Park, its natural history, be it botany, fauna, avifauna, entomology, aquatic life, and geology, will be described and promoted in signage and via phone apps providing the common Australian names, the Aboriginal name, and the English scientific name. Visitors will be able to choose an app focussed on their interests, be it plants, birds or insects etc.

Dedicated areas of the Nature Park will also showcase plants of traditional importance to the Aboriginal community including bush tucker and bush medicine plants, together with plants used for art and craft. The 1.5ha island in the Western Lake is proposed to be a dedicated place to foster respect and understanding of traditional Aboriginal culture. Intended to be guided by the traditional owners, visitors to the island will be introduced to Aboriginal knowledge and the lore of plants valued for traditional food, medicinal, ceremonial & functional usage, with immersive indigenous cultural experiences. Engagement with the Aboriginal community is also intended to provide vocational training for young Aboriginal youth. With this offered training experience it is hoped that lifelong careers can be assured such as in park management and environmental land management,

These flagship projects are, in essence, a hands-on exercise in communication about responsible environmental custodianship and management, providing visitors with experiential learning to better understand and tackle climate change, to understand & safeguard biodiversity and celebrate traditional culture - all whilst enjoying a range of stimulating and inspiring experiences. The projects are linked to associated projects across the community which are all directed to awareness raising and community engagement & education. Engagement components include radio programs, newspaper articles, social media postings and public community meetings.

These projects, albeit led by Landcare Broken Hill, are projects “of the community, by the community and for the community”. Although proximity will mean the Broken Hill community will be hugely benefited by the Nature Park with its Hub, it is nevertheless being designed to benefit the whole of Western NSW, and via its exemplary model, the rest of NSW and Australia.

Landcare’s vision for its **Environmental Sustainability Expo Hub + Imperial Lakes Nature Park**, is for them to become a precedent for all Regional Australia, a model for NSW and an exemplar for the Nation. If we can make these projects happen in the harsh, increasingly challenged Arid Zone of the NSW Far West, the concept should have the capacity to be replicated elsewhere.