

## **Long-term Ecological Research (LTER) Community of Practice (CoP) Leadership Meeting**

4 August 2021

**Attending:** Bek Christensen, Glenda Wardle, Cassie Thompson, Nicole Gallahar, Stefan Arndt, Richard Loyn, Pep Turner, Jope Facelli, Chris Roelfsema, Aaron Greenville, Sally O'Neill, Camila Driberg, Birgita Hansen, Peter Green, Ben Penhallurick, Andrew Thomas, Joel Williams, John Morgan, Jayne Balmer

**Apologies:** Amanda Elledge, Euan Ritchie, Chris Dickman, John Hunter, Ross Peacock, Stephen Sarre

### **1. Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledged the traditional owners of country across Australia and paid our respects to culture and elders past, present and future. The group at the meeting were in many different places including: Dharug, Gundungurra, Gadigal, Wurundjeri, Kurna, Woorimi, Yorta Yorta, Wadawurrung, Turrbul and Yuggera country.

### **2. Introductions**

Everyone introduced themselves, stating where they work and what they would like to do to support LTER in Australia.

This group represents a diverse mix of work – all levels of Government, CSIRO, Unis, Community Groups, citizen science, species-focus, location-focus, urban, terrestrial, aquatic, marine, atmospheric etc.

Themes emerging from introductions and what people want to do:

- Ongoing support for each other
- Learning from each other
- Open data
- New mechanisms for long-term financial support
- Keep people motivated and participating
- Improve communication between stakeholders (researchers, and users of research)
- Integrate social science

### **3. Definition of LTER for the Community of Practice (CoP)**

- We want to be inclusive, so grey area / fuzzy boundaries is ok; but need at least a loose idea of what we're talking about so there is a shared foundation
- Working definition of LTER so far is: "Long-term ecological research includes studies that "systematically and regularly collect field data" from a particular set of sites or populations for more than 10 years."
- Arbitrary timeframe in working definition unhelpful – 'long-term' should be relative to something e.g. generation time, pace of change.
- Paleoecologists would find even our longest 'long-term' dataset very short term. However difference with paleoecology is that the dataset/record is there, and you go and 'mine' it. The long-term work we are talking about here is about creating continuity and creating a database right now and into the future.
- Continuity as a concept is worth exploring more. There is a mindset that research has a start and end. But that's not what we are talking about.
- Some discussion of the terminology of 'research' and 'monitoring'. Words can be important – you may be able to get funding for research, but not monitoring. People sometimes think monitoring is only about compliance. Should reiterate that 'research' can be broadly thought of as learning about something, and it encompasses monitoring.
- Long-term research is also the stuff that sits outside the norms of funding and political cycles.

- Long-term studies can't predict what the data will be used for, we learn things along the way that weren't our original purpose, and there are things we can't have envisioned as important when we start that turn out to be important as we progress.
- Value of Long-term study is that people can go back after decades and use the data to answer new questions.
- How do we design long-term projects that are robust enough to be useful in 20 or 50 years time?

**New working definition could be:** "Long-term ecological research includes activities that collect field data from a particular set of sites or populations over a timescale appropriate to the pace of change in the study system."

#### **4. What does the CoP Leadership Group want in the short-term?**

- Patience to get to know each other. Don't expect to save the world in one day.
- Telling stories about our work can enable us to learn from each other, and also build our profile with 'outside' audiences.
- Raise awareness of existing L-T projects and data and promote their use.
- What are our objectives?
- Who are our stakeholders?
- Who are our natural allies?

#### **Opportunities for CoP:**

##### **Immediate:**

- Develop Terms of Reference for the leadership group of the CoP
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- National Research Infrastructure Roadmap currently in development. Are there particular infrastructure needs for long-term ecological research that should be highlighted in this process? (NB – "National research infrastructure comprises the assets, facilities and services to support research...", i.e. funding for research activities is out of scope)
- This group needs to keep meeting – part of the community formation process. Suggest meetings have a focus topic of conversation for whoever can attend to explore.
- Mailing list for LTER CoP (already have this from survey)

##### **Other:**

- Hub for long-term data. E.g. Koonamore data published in TERN Data Portal, Gov data may be held internally, citizen science data in other systems like eBird, other research data may be in institutional repositories or not at all. Catalogue what's there, where is it, and how to access it.
- Hub for methods to collect long-term data that can grow over time. E.g. building on existing TERN protocols.
- Share our stories. Some of the Koonamore story is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag7mXeDWVBo> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47xEEyAfQfg>
- Position paper about LTER, its unique value, and what's needed to support it further in future.
- Identify successful and unsuccessful LTER programs – what worked, and what didn't?
- Special issue of Austral Ecology
- Learn from other organisations / disciplines – e.g. Climate Council – how are they organised and how do they maintain support? How do long-term health/medical research projects maintain their work and prosecute their case?

- Shifting the narrative from rewarding individuals to rewarding projects, and from short-termism to long-termism

**5. We would know we're succeeding as a CoP if in 5 years' time if:**

- We're still here,
- It's clear to the outside world what our aim is,
- There is knowledge transfer and capacity-building amongst our community (up, down, sideways),
- We are prosecuting the case for LTER, and
- We are the 'body' for people to come to when considering starting/contributing to or using long-term ecological data. Provide guidance material for ecological research/monitoring projects - case studies and examples as well as lessons from what has already been done.

**6. Next steps:**

- Call for suggestions for focus topics of conversation at future meetings
- Set up some meetings where anyone who's available can drop in to discuss the focus topic
- Call for volunteers for a small group to organise an online workshop / meeting / symposium for ESA2021
- Call for volunteers for a small group to start collecting stories of LTER in Australia
- Call for volunteers to draft a ToR for the leadership group