

# Taking the Long View: Vision and transformation in an age of change

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Memorial Lecture

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Both Beth and Gib of the NW Foundation raised some challenging and pressing environmental issues in the questions that they asked me to consider in my presentation to you this evening.

These questions were:

## **Slide 2**

*How do we best work from the grassroots up?*

*How do we ensure successful programs continue?*

*How do we identify those programs?*

*And*

*How do we keep people in the field?*

**Slide 3 Gippsland pictures**

So, in response to these questions I would like to share with you my Gippsland story and what I believe to be the key elements that have contributed to our achievements in protecting biodiversity.

I see the underlying aspects for a successful landscape change program and one that will contribute to creating permanent pathways into the future as being:

**slide 4**

- **An ongoing long term commitment with legislative backing**
- **A team of skilled and talented leaders**
- **An appropriate model or approach through which they can deliver**

In Gippsland the delivery of these aspects has been through three components:

**(slide 5 showing these three dot points)**

- 1) ***Increasing Permanent Spaces for Biodiversity Conservation:***
- 2) ***Establishing Conservation Management Networks***
- 3) ***Mobilising local leaders***

While each is not new, what is unique and is making each component more effective are the results of integrating the three.

**(slide 6 venn diagram again)**

## **1) Creating Permanent Spaces for Biodiversity Conservation**

I have been delivering the permanent protection program across Gippsland for the last 16 years.

Increasing **public and privately owned spaces** that are **permanently** conserved is important because it secures what we have got and allows for ecosystems to adapt to changing conditions, now and in the future.

**Slide 7 showing TFN covenant sign and covenanters)**

Permanent protection, that is legally binding, stops threatening processes and secures positive land use change which transforms the way the community relates to these areas.

Protection can be achieved through mechanisms such as conservation covenants, state and federal land purchase programs and the TFN Revolving fund.

We can achieve ecosystem resilience if these dedicated areas are:

- strategically placed,
- are of a viable size
- become linked

and

- have ongoing management

**Slide 8 Aerial slide of protected sites on the Gippsland plains**

In this photo of the Gippsland Plains, between Bairnsdale and Sale, we have targeted sites which have grown into a cluster and then expanded to become a protected area or a reserve system, with the ultimate aim of linking the coast to the Alps.

We have two protected areas in this part of the Plains: one is centred around the Moormung flora reserve and the other around Providence ponds flora reserve.

These sites combined are the foundations of the Conservation Management Network, of which I will talk later.

The slide shows the importance of both public and private land in creating a reserve system..

Covenants **which are legally binding are** outlined in red, and the protected public land in green,

### Slide 9

It isn't enough though on its own to protect a site through legally binding agreements; we also need to ensure that appropriate restoration and ongoing management occurs and that landowners are supported.

The ongoing Trust for Nature stewardship program:

- provides training, education and financial assistance to the owner
- ensures the transfer of knowledge across owners and over time

- Ensures the upholding of the covenant
- provides baseline inventories and long term monitoring at the site

The program is effective because it works to change destructive behavioural patterns through developing **long term relationships** and training land owners in biodiversity management.

### **Aerial photo Slide 10a**

**So, what is the glue that holds these sites into a collective?**

### **Slide 10b venn diagram**

The second component, Conservation Management Networks is one way to integrate that landholders, government, agencies and communities that own or manage these sites.

Back in 1999, I saw the need in Gippsland to bring people together with the sole purpose of protecting and representing biodiversity. So I facilitated the establishment of the first Conservation Management Network in Victoria, the Gippsland Plains CMN and then in 2006 the Rainforest CMN.

### **slide 11 CMn LOGo and site**

**What is a CMN?**

Put simply, the CMN model brings remnant vegetation sites and their owners together into a biophysical and a social network.

Our public land reserve system does not adequately cover all threatened vegetation types, such as grassy woodlands.

The CMN model arose to address this gap.

### slide 12

These threatened vegetation types are characterized by being:

- poorly reserved
- scattered and fragmented across the landscape
- Predominantly found on private land.

### Click with

- An uneven spread of skills and money

A National Park has an even spread of knowledge and resources and it is owned by one management body.

### click

A CMN aims to bring the managers and owners of these **fragmented** sites together to provide a better coordinated and managed system and to address this uneven distribution of resources.

A CMN is comprised of

- *the biophysical network.*
- *The social network*

### slide 13

The **biophysical network** is the collection of remnant vegetation sites.

**slide 14**

The **social network** is the collection of owners and managers and interested groups such as the members of the Gippsland Plains and the Rainforest CMN's as shown here.

These networks have improved partnerships between government, agencies and the community which has resulted in biodiversity gains on the ground and has provided a framework for the continuation of partnerships as managers and owners of the protected sites change.

An example of this improvement is within the East Gippsland Shire.

**Slide 15 of shire project**

In East Gippsland there is strong push for development from within and outside of the shire with previously very little focus on biodiversity.

The East Gippsland Shire are now:

- committee members of both the Gippsland Plains and the Rainforest CMN's
- have increased the number of shire owned land dedicated to restoration

and

- have a CMN facilitator on their Environmental Sustainability Advisory Board;

**slide 16 of deer program activity**

**The CMN has successfully brought divergent groups together. Such as  
*Conservationists and Hunters.***

The rainforest CMN Deer Management Program has brought together the Australian Deer Association, the local hunters and landholders. Differences of opinion and beliefs have been overcome to tackle the issue of over browsing in rainforest gullies.

**slide 17**

*An finally the third component which has occurred out of the development and activities of the first two components:*

***local leaders***

Through the CMN and the other programs that we are delivering we have provided a framework that has mobilised leaders and skilled people within the community.

It has become apparent that by training and mobilising influential people, we are facilitating change at a quicker rate.

This is not a new concept **but** what is new is **that the approach we have taken in Gippsland** has catalysed the **bringing together** of some key community leaders as an unexpected side benefit.

**slide 18**

Through the programs we have

- trained and supported local leaders within agencies and government
- placed leaders into the community and
- worked with the committed landholders to find greater assistance so they can achieve much more.

**Here are some of our local leaders, apologies to those I have not included:**

- **Neil Stringer:** A respected and influential farmer with a teaching background now employed as a covenant extension officer, getting new sites protected within the farming community.
- **slide 19**
- **DR Trish Fox,** GPCMN facilitator, has been instrumental in bringing businesses and farmers together through such projects as the Peregrine Recovery Project
- **Craig and Andrea Bush:** Influential sheep farmers within the farming community, now covenanters and undertaking restoration works. Craig is also a part time ABC radio compare. They are leading the way within the conservative : “Right to Farm” group of which they are members.
- **Peter Murrell and Les Goldsmith:** Landholders and volunteer Rainforest CMN committee members who have become our rainforest specialists through training from our ecologist, Bill Peel. They are now training others through field days, workshops and by example
- **Brett Mills:** Our Trust for Nature ranger. An influential local leader who has been successful in bringing disparate groups and individuals together and is training landholders and changing attitudes.
- **Don Love:** A retired school principal and farmer, he is now a volunteer CFA brigade Secretary and chairman of the Trust for Nature Reserves committee. He locally promotes the work we do and with training from our ranger is now

taking on more and more volunteer work on our reserves, freeing up our ranger to further train other key people within the community.

## **But There are Challenges**

The challenges we face in keeping successful programs like these going and in expanding these programs over larger areas are:

### **Slide 24**

#### **Short term funding**

- This is the biggest barrier that stands in our way every year, the bottom line is, none of us within our team know if we will be employed from year to year,

#### **Time wasted in funding applications**

- A huge proportion of time is spent every year on writing funding applications and reports instead of on program delivery

#### **Insufficient resources**

- As for achieving onground works we have very limited dollars to put towards restoration programs and securing more sites through fencing, covenanting and purchasing.

#### **Scarce Resources spread thinly over lots of different approaches**

- This is the accepted government approach but is very inefficient

- **Insufficient monitoring at the landscape level** there has been little investment in undertaking monitoring at the landscape level to provide feedback as to how we are progressing.

### Slide 25

As with anything within our environment our local achievements and the steps we are taking are against a backdrop of urgency where *the window of opportunity is closing at a faster rate than the changes we need to make are occurring*. There is **an urgency to expand successful programs quickly** to avoid the mass extinctions that are inevitable at the present trajectory we are on.

### Slide 26

And this requires concerted effort on the part of all three levels of government, local communities, organisations, as well as individuals to address these fundamental problems and to create institutional changes to give **ongoing support** and **recognition to successful people and programs**.