

# A personal journey to innovation

Doug Humann

It is more than 40 years since I developed a consciousness of environmentalism and a concern for nature and natural resources. It is roughly the same amount of time since I developed a consciousness of Indigenous rights and awareness of the special relationship Aboriginal people have with country; this came through family association from my childhood with one of the 'stolen generation'. Our individual circumstances and experience bring strong perspectives and I have been asked to share my journey on innovation in conservation in the twenty-first century.

My mentor in conservation was a teacher-cum-dairy farmer in the Upper Yarra Valley, east of Melbourne; Dr Alec Scholes. In the 1970s, Dr Scholes had a vision for a corridor along the Yarra Valley to link farming land in the valley and adjacent state forest to the Alps beyond: integrating farming, conservation, tourism and other businesses. In 1978 this formed the subject of my geography honours thesis (Humann 1978). The linkage of conservation-focussed land management with other land uses, and the importance of collaborative rather than oppositional relationships, has stayed with me ever since.

My sense of the wider environment beyond Victoria was built through tales of my brother on summer hikes to Tasmania's South West in the late 1960s; he was lost for five days on the Cracroft River in 1972, so the impressions are vivid. Later that year my father donated money in order to have a film made of Lake Pedder for awareness-raising purposes. Sadly Lake Pedder was soon lost under the Huon-Serpentine Impoundment, and the Green political movement was founded in Australia on 23 April 1972.

In 1979, I had a formative trip around much of central, northern and western Australia, supporting a friend who was contributing to the first Atlas of Australian Birds (Blakers et al. 1984). We saw Kakadu in the year of its proclamation as a national park, visited many remote Aboriginal communities and witnessed the remarkably unspoilt landscape of the Kimberley.

Through school, university and my first career as a teacher of geography and politics, I worked in the bush and volunteered with many conservation groups observing their strategies at close quarters.



Wataaru Indigenous Protected Area, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in far north-west South Australia. © Photo: Doug Humann

The conservation arena in which we work today was largely framed during this time in the 1980s and 1990s. We saw Aboriginal land rights, resource booms, defined public policy on building the protected area estate (e.g. the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia – IBRA) and biodiversity (e.g. the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* in Victoria), catchment management authorities, Landcare, a massive growth in the parks system, and various assaults on the protected area estate as well.

Non-traditional alliances were beginning to be born including through the nationalisation of Landcare with Phillip Toyne (Australian Conservation Foundation) and Rick Farley (National Farmers Federation). It was a privilege to later have Rick (until his untimely death in 2007) and Phillip (as President of Bush Heritage Australia) share their practical, no-nonsense approach on the board of Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) in the mid 2000s, as we grappled with new innovative opportunities (see chapter by Bourke in this publication).

In 1990, keen to give expression to my belief in the need for more focus on our national parks and greater community understanding in them, I left teaching and became the first full-time Director of the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA), lobbying for more parks and better park management, but also encouraging VNPA to look beyond the parks model.

In Victoria in the 1990s we were embattled under the Kennett regime; national park after national park after natural area was targeted for development of some sort or another. Karen Alexander joined me at VNPA in 1996 to lead the campaign and develop the tactics for stopping a hotel and other developments at Wilsons Promontory National Park; including the brilliantly conceived and executed public event and photo opportunity that effectively stopped the development and Premier Jeff Kennett in his tracks on 29 December 1996. This campaign became a *cause célèbre* as it built up a range of linkages across, social, political, economic, regional and media sectors; linkages which Kennett could hardly have imagined.

It was a great reminder of the value of alliances in getting a positive outcome; enabling the hearing of others' perspectives, and building a powerful case. The victory at 'the Prom' had another reminder: we need to celebrate the wins. Having said that, it can feel that we seem to be re-fighting battles, winning some, but losing the war; for example, still today there is the umpteenth revisit of cattle grazing in Victoria's Alpine National Park

(Humann 2011) and the continuing need for protection of key areas from logging and mining.

By the early 1990s, funding to public protected areas was declining and by the mid 1990s large extensions to the national park estate were slowing down – in Victoria at least. Public land protection was hard enough (and it still is), but my mind was turning to the private land estate and necessities across tenures and land uses if we were to adequately conserve biodiversity across the length and breadth of Australia. Innovations were clearly needed, to take us beyond constant reaction, and activism; important though those things are.

This is the exciting space I have been in since I commenced at Bush Heritage Australia in 1997. Bob Brown and others had seen the need and opportunity to act more widely through philanthropy, and in 1990 Bob drew on experiences he had witnessed in the United Kingdom and United States to start what is now Bush Heritage Australia. Bob's purchase of the Liffey Valley blocks in Tasmania with his \$50,000 Goldman environment prize is well known (Brown 2004).

In 1991, Bush Heritage's budget was \$35,000. In the same year Martin Copley started what is now the Australian Wildlife Conservancy with his own money, and on the back of inspiration from John Wamsley, whose own innovative model – Earth Sanctuaries Ltd – shortly after lost its way.

I vividly remember arriving in Hobart in 1997 to take up my role. We had a remote island to manage in Bass Strait, along with other properties scattered across Australia. The innovations that followed at Bush Heritage in subsequent years were built on a number of key factors. Most importantly, Bush Heritage's founders built a solid fundraising and marketing model that we nuanced and developed but never fundamentally changed.

Other factors differentiated Bush Heritage and gave it strength. The model was built on a simple business proposition summed up by the slogan: 'We don't beat around the bush, we buy it'. This spoke to a need and an ability to protect areas that protest and advocacy could not. As an independent entity it was not perceived as being 'from the government' so we could sit down and negotiate with landholders and offer flexibility and options often difficult for government. Our donors and supporters respected and trusted us. They still do. We kept telling stories of achievement of which they were a part, however small, in building our program.

We were aware how national trusts had become over-encumbered with property and had seen in the national parks estate instances where land management requirements exceeded management capacity. We presented ourselves as – and we were – financially competent. We operated within our means and built long-term assets for risk avoidance. This is very important for investors who want to know there is a sound strategy, and good financial management.

Finally, the National Reserve System (NRS) Program with its generous two-for-one funding model for strategic acquisitions has been a major and critical innovation in stimulating the private land conservation sector in Australia, and is unparalleled anywhere. It has inspired bipartisan support and, by the end of the 1990s, successfully moved outside of the public land protected area framework to support Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) and private land conservation through the fantastic leverage it affords private donations. In 2002, when I was describing this program to a TNC (The Nature Conservancy) audience in Maine, New England, one gentleman couldn't get his cheque book out fast enough when he heard first, the relatively cheap price of high conservation value land in remote west Queensland, and second, that the Australian Government would match his gift two-for-one!

Initiatives at BHA which enabled us to innovate in coming years included the following.

We initiated engagement with and through key individuals associated with Aboriginal Australia and pastoral Australia to broaden our network. We established contact with the Indigenous Land Corporation (then and now the major land acquisition body for Aboriginal people), writing a memorandum of understanding in 2002. This initiative was the first in a series of developments that brought Indigenous staff and board members to BHA. Guy Fitzhardinge, a respected grazier on the Board of Meat and Livestock Australia and well-known throughout Australia, became an invaluable adviser over the next eight years as we acquired a string of pastoral leases for conservation, including more cups of tea and stories than I care to remember. Over time we re-configured the board to a broader mix, adding Rick Farley and then a number of corporate individuals with financial expertise and business networks.

We developed closer relationships with other organizations, and especially TNC. Rob McLean, Max Bourke and David Thomas were critical to bringing TNC

to Australia in the late 1990s and introduced key TNC staff to Australian non-government organisations and governments. For me a new world of opportunity, optimism and audacity opened up. If there was one group being innovative globally in our space it was TNC. If there were lessons to learn, and pitfalls to avoid, TNC had seen them all.

Now of course, we have in Australia, not only a plethora of home-grown non-government organisations operating in this space including the state covenanting bodies, but also science and research institutions, and most of the BINGOs (big international environmental non-government organisations): WWF-Australia, The Nature Conservancy, Flora and Fauna International, Conservation International, together with Humane Society International, Ecotrust and Pew. This provides tremendous opportunity for innovation and collaboration, as well as some risk of duplication and confusion in our 'market-place'.

When a \$1.3 million untied philanthropic gift from the John T Reid Charitable Trust landed at Bush Heritage in late 2000, the opportunity to lift our sights was immediately provided. With only 2,000 hectares under ownership at that time, larger areas and leasehold areas became of interest – as well as freehold land. We initiated a search in the Brigalow Belt of central Queensland, then subject to some of the highest rates of land clearance in the world.

Through anguished breath and fear of exposing Bush Heritage to financial ruin, the Bush Heritage Board approved the purchase of the 60,000 hectare Carnarvon Station in south-west Queensland for around \$1.5 million. However, the purchase of Carnarvon Station was in fact seen as an inspiring bold statement and supporters responded to it very warmly – and, to our great relief, the funds rolled in.

This event also coincided with the secondment of Kent Wommack from TNC in the United States who joined Bush Heritage for three months. His stay was a huge learning curve for me and again encouraged audacity and ambition. Kent had just come off a US \$60 million fundraising campaign in his home state of Maine; about 20 times our then annual budget.

Therefore through key partnerships at various levels – with landholders, with the NRS Program, with TNC, and with key donors and Bush Heritage's broader support base – we built momentum and a series of acquisitions occurred rapidly over several years along with engagement in our first corridor project in Gondwana Link.



Hands off Wilsons Prom. ©Photographer Jerry Galea, Fairfax Syndication

The key to each one of these projects was the creation of alliances and each was innovative in its own way. Two examples follow, firstly in a largely intact environment and second, in a fragmented environment.

1. The purchase of Charles Darwin Reserve came with a novel fundraising idea from Chris Darwin (Charles Darwin's great-great-grandson). 'Patrons' of the Reserve essentially adopt a portion of the Reserve and provide a continuing income source for management through an annual gift program. This has encouraged private, philanthropic, corporate and international funders. The patrons model, with its regular opportunities for visits and activities, has caused much thinking about alternate models that might provide better for long-term management. For this is the real nut to crack: how to build the land estate and provide adequate means for management at the same time. We have since toyed with time shares, and property trust arrangements and the like, which would give more resilience to long-term management funding.
2. In Gondwana Link a strong body of local support was inspired through the efforts of Keith Bradby and his team and in 2003 we took part in the then largest revegetation project in the region (see chapter by Bradby in this publication). Here we have also adopted the model of supporting management planning and implementation on private landholders' land.

Alongside initiatives such as these, BHA was developing a new long-term strategy. It was strongly in line with the international directions of landscape-scale conservation partnerships across a variety of land tenures and uses. BHA called the strategy 'Anchors in the Landscape': where 'anchors' referred to both the areas of high conservation value being actively managed, and the five regions around Australia where Bush Heritage was focussing. In a bid to meet an audacious goal – a target of owning and managing 1% of Australia by 2025 – it had three key elements:

1. To increase engagement of Aboriginal people in the running of BHA's business.
2. To increase ownership of land by BHA.
3. To develop partnerships where BHA could support long-term management of other people's land for conservation purposes. The focus for this work was to be on two sectors: Aboriginal and pastoral. Consideration was also given to how extensive lands held by Australia's Department of Defence, and the interests of mining companies, might also be engaged. This element became known as BHA's 'Beyond the Boundaries' program, and was a specific funding focus of The Thomas Foundation and The Nature Conservancy's David Thomas Challenge.



The 'Anchors in the Landscape' strategy was regionally based and targeted, with an ability to work anywhere in Australia through partnership where conservation values were sufficiently high. The strategy would involve higher-risk projects beyond the original Bush Heritage model whereby BHA was the title-holder. BHA would still undertake property acquisition and focus these in the 'anchor' regions of the Southwest Botanical Province, Southeast Grassy Box Woodlands, Tasmanian Midlands, Queensland Uplands and Brigalow Belt, and Gulf of Carpentaria to Lake Eyre. However working 'beyond the boundaries' of BHA properties and 'anchor' regions, conservation-based management initiatives and outcomes would be supported through mechanisms such as management agreements, covenants and contracts.

Soon after Max Bourke and David Thomas visited Ethabuka in 2004, The Thomas Foundation (TTF) joined a three-year program to support BHA. This was leveraged with funding from TNC. The Thomas Foundation and TNC supported the 'Anchors in the Landscape' strategy over its first three years, and have continued to do so, including through matching grants from the David Thomas Challenge. The strategy is unlikely to have gathered the momentum it did without TNC, TTF and the National Reserve System, along of course with huge public support.

With other alliances that have been created over the course of the years many innovative projects have ensued – all at landscape-scale and always based on a partnership of one form or another – usually with a mix of philanthropic, business and government support, and all backed by generous public donations. Some examples follow:

1. BHA was approached early in the Anchors strategy to support a number of Indigenous communities in their aspirations for 'caring for country' on their land. These communities recognised BHA's management and administrative skills and management frameworks. BHA supported the implementation of management for the Kaanju Ngaachi Indigenous Protected Area on Cape York Peninsula, gave administrative support and encouragement to traditional ecological knowledge reporting and fire management in the Cape, management support in the Top End, and assistance in writing an application for NRS funding which led to an acquisition with the support of the Indigenous Land Corporation near Cobar. Each of these projects demonstrated BHA's bona fides to Aboriginal communities whilst building conservation momentum. The targets for BHA became progressively more strategic as time moved on.



2. Boolcoommatta and Bon Bon pastoral leases in South Australia were acquired with support from the NRS and South Australian Government, along with support from the Nature Foundation SA Inc. At Boolcoommatta the negotiations for settlement involved regional pastoralists and the seller in negotiations that government would likely have found more difficult – or impossible – without an NGO partner
3. The Midlandscapes project in Tasmania became a joint initiative of BHA and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy with support from the Myer Foundation, John T Reid Charitable Trusts, and private donors (see chapter by Males in this publication). The innovative model developed was of a conservation fund to work directly with Tasmanian graziers on the protection of landscape values.
4. Arguably the most exciting project was the development of the Kimberley-based *Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Plan 2010-2020* (Moorcroft et al. 2012; see chapter by Moorcroft in this publication). The release of the Plan in 2011 coincided with Native Title confirmation, proclamation of the first stage of the Unguu Indigenous Protected Area, and the signing of a ten-year memorandum of understanding between BHA and Wunambal Gaambera to undertake conservation management. This work was supported by a matching grant from the David Thomas Challenge.

Drawing on these experiences I think the following are critical to consider in preparing for the future.

- Keeping alert to external thinking and ideas
- Taking calculated risks to test new ways of working
- Developing broad cross-sectoral partnerships and alliances
- Ensuring Aboriginal Australians are fully engaged in operating models
- Engaging within philanthropic circles to explore linkages for investors who have an interest in both environmental and Indigenous issues
- Following climate change developments and regional social, community, environmental and economic implications of climate change
- Considering other income streams to support management beyond philanthropy and government, including tourism, carbon and co-investment with business
- Increasing volunteerism in conservation and particularly increased engagement with youth and with retirees
- Identifying opportunities for landscape connectivity.
- Engaging better with whole of government, not just environment agencies; with particular focus on tax initiatives, to better support conservation (as in the United States)
- Improving community understanding of the place of fire in the landscape

- Developing a response and proposal for better engagement with the mining sector to avoid 'death by a thousand cuts' across the landscape, as we have seen with forestry
- Developing a national approach to covenanting and leasehold land conditions that provides for more transparent monitoring of management activities
- Developing more coordinated strategies for management, and methodologies for ecological outcomes reporting and management evaluation. Through Open Standards, Bush Heritage has adopted a management and reporting framework with scorecard reporting which will streamline management decisions, implementation and reporting.

I was particularly moved in the early 1990s by the collection entitled *Wisdom of the Elders* (Knutdson and Suzuki 1992) and its call to listen and act on sources of wisdom in our society and traditional cultures in particular.

It reminds me, for a network such as ours, that we are sadly lacking in Indigenous representation and in sufficient numbers of younger people to hear the stories and be part of the future. This is a challenge for us.

Across the sector we have enormous capacity and wonderful resources and networks. We represent an incredible set of networks: of NGOs; government agencies; ministerial councils; advisory boards to government; philanthropic links; and carbon-related networks, among others. This is our opportunity.

Working together will assist us meet our shared objectives and innovate.

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## Biography

Doug Humann is an independent protected area specialist focusing on community engagement in natural resource management and protection of natural and cultural values. He provides advice and support to a range of groups including indigenous bodies, private enterprise, government and non-government organisations, ensuring sound strategy, governance, financing options and reporting. Doug sat on the National Wildlife Corridors Advisory Group reporting to Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke, is a member of the World Commission for Protected Areas, and a member of the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Council and Desert Channels Queensland NRM Board.