

# habitat

Australia

Volume 43 Number 3  
DECEMBER 2015

# 50

 **ACF**  
acfonline.org.au

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#### IMAGES

Throughout this special issue of *habitat* we're proud to feature photography from Heartland — our beautiful book celebrating 50 years of ACF.

These images were donated by the MAPgroup of Documentary Photographers. [mapgroup.org.au](http://mapgroup.org.au)

You can order your own copy of Heartland here: [acf.to/iPmq48](http://acf.to/iPmq48)

*habitat Australia* is published by the Australian Conservation Foundation, authorised by Kelly O'Shanassy CEO Inc. ABN 22 007 498 482

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ISSN 0310–2939

#### Cover artwork

Yarra River VIC.

Photo: David Johns/MAPgroup

*habitat* is printed on FSC® certified paper.



Wentworth NSW. Photo: Dale Mann/MAPgroup

# In this issue

A CELEBRATION

*'If you're wondering about the meaning of life, it's right there before you — and inside you. It's nature. It's the great beautiful common cause. Know it, love it, enjoy it — and do all that you reasonably can to rescue and protect it: but don't delay'*

Michael Leunig in *Heartland*.

Welcome to this special edition of *habitat*, as we celebrate the first 50 years of the Australian Conservation Foundation and take this opportunity to look forward with hopeful hearts and minds to the next 50 years of this vital organisation.

For this issue, we've put aside most of our regular segments and got together five special features for our five decades.

Happy Birthday everyone.

Rita Walsh and Sara McMillan  
*habitat* Editors



# THE DISTANCE

Interviews by **Sara McMillan**

Mount Ainslie ACT.  
Photo: Julie Millowick

\*Auspoll 2010

**Our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday** is a good time to look with a hopeful eye to the future.

In 2010 we learnt that an overwhelming 89 per cent of Australians were “concerned” that “politicians have not communicated a vision or

plan to protect our natural assets while maintaining the economy”\*. Five years on, we ask three prominent Australian environmentalists to provide insights into their vision for a thriving life for today and 50 years forward.

Known for being a member of the much-loved and lauded band Midnight Oil, **PETER GARRETT** had two terms as ACF President between 1989 and 2004, and brought to the organisation his passion and commitment to a wide range of issues including anti-uranium, Indigenous rights and Northern Australia. He is also an ACF Patron.



**Peter Garrett.**  
Photo: Sophie  
Howarth

***What drives you to get out of bed in the morning?***

The knowledge that each day of living life as fully as possible is a precious gift.

***What brings you joy when in nature?***

All of it, whether I'm in a remote national park, or sitting on a rock wall on Sydney Harbour. The spirit of life, of flux and re-birth, and the aesthetic wholeness of nature always does it for me.

***If there was one thing that we as a community could do that would make a positive impact on our future, what would it be?***

Make sure young people are given the opportunity to experience, and understand the natural world, from which they will become its greatest ambassadors.

***Do you believe that we, as a collective, have the wherewithal to achieve this positive impact and why?***

Yes. It might not seem like it in the day to day but history's march, in spite of its ups and downs, is towards greater respect for difference, and deeper appreciation of the extraordinary riches of nature. But we must move with urgent conviction and make sure the powerful institutions in our nation get the message.

***Who have been the greatest mentors in your life and why?***

Ordinary people, like ACF supporters, doing extraordinary things, without saying 'look at me'.

***How do we make positive ideas more widespread?***

Talk to more people, make more friends and share the joys of nature with them.

***What is your message of hope for our environment in 2065?***

We can and will place taking care of the natural world at the centre of our thoughts and actions, and with passionate hearts and minds champion this course. The world will be a healthier and happier place to live in by our efforts.



Anne Poelina.  
Photo: Ian Perdisat

***What gets you out of bed in the morning?***

The opportunity to work with a network of fellow Australians, combining collective wisdom to create sustainable living for world citizens. Helping our communities to address ‘wicked problems’ like coal seam gas and ‘fracking.’

***What brings you joy when in nature?***

I find joy in being in big diverse Australian landscapes that are full of life, information and energy.

**ANNE POELINA** is a traditional custodian from the Fitzroy River Region—known as the Mardoowarra. Anne was instrumental in the campaign to save James Price Point. Anne is a social and biophysical scientist and is working to develop a cultural and conservation economy in the Kimberley region of WA. She has just been elected to ACF Council.

***How do you think we can overcome the hurdles facing nature?***

Funded by the government, we need a proper planning process at regional levels. Everyone needs a seat at the table. We must be informed about the impacts of any development on the rights of nature to co-exist with our human rights.

***If there was one thing that our leaders could do that would create foundations for a healthy world, what would it be?***

Our leaders could better invest in science, culture and conservation projects and support Indigenous Australians to co-manage our diverse and unique Australian landscapes, guaranteeing not only sustainable development but sustainable life.

***Describe what an Australia led by visionaries would look like?***

An Australia led by visionaries would stop the development of new coal mines and ‘fracking’ for shale oil and gas. Simultaneously, they would introduce tax offsets for a Green Fiscal Reform and support the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy like wind, solar, wave, and in some areas geothermal.

***What is your message of hope for our environment in 2065?***

Remember to nurture, protect and value all life, not just human beings; the trees, the birds, the animals, and our living land and water.

**GEOFFREY COUSINS** is ACF's President and an Australian community leader, businessman, environmental activist and writer. As an environmental activist he is best known for his contributions to the successful campaigns to stop the Gunns pulp mill in Tasmania and the proposed Woodside gas hub in the Kimberley.

**Geoff Cousins.**  
Photo: Vincenzo Amato

***What drives you to get out of bed in the morning?***

Following on from my previous working life, having the luxury of some free time and a voice which I didn't expect to have, I'd like to use this voice to get something done that is positive for the community.

***What brings you joy when in nature?***

Silence and sound which sounds contradictory but isn't. Silence from man-made machines and other sounds of that kind. The wilderness brings a certain type of silence but I find joy in the sound of trees and leaves and footfalls when industrial noise is gone. The sound and effects of industrial noise is what urged Francis Ratcliffe, 50 years ago, to gather a group of people concerned about the impacts of industrialisation, forming ACF.

***If there was one thing that our leaders could do that would create foundations for a healthy world, what would it be?***

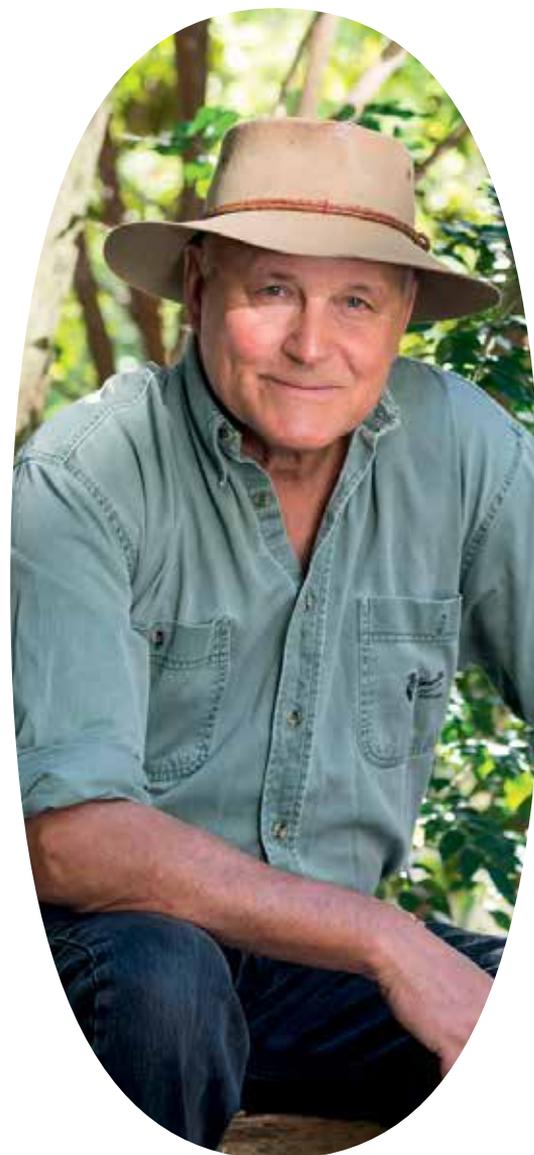
It would be to understand the unbreakable connection between nature and human wellbeing. I hope soon we will all be able to see the economy is a result of having a healthy natural world, not the other way around.

***Describe what an Australia led by visionaries would look like.***

There would be lots and lots of new jobs. They'd be cleaner, safer jobs. No one will be burning fossil fuels. We would be nurturing and protecting our native forests and expanding rather than contracting them.

***How do we make positive ideas more widespread?***

Easy ... People need to speak out and participate. There aren't enough people who do that. I would regrettably single out the business community. There are a lot within this community who believe in what I've been saying but aren't prepared to do something about it. I believe that this will change.



***Could you deliver a message of hope for our environment in 2065?***

Despite, rather than because of, politicians and the political process there has been a very positive increase in interest in environmental issues over the past two years. ACF is a prime example of that; we've gone from around 80,000 to 280,000 supporters. That kind of movement is going to sweep around the world.

# WONDER UP CLOSE

ACF's media adviser Josh Meadows tracks down three committed conservationists — Sian Prior, Murray Wilcox and Dailan Pugh — and learns about the places, people and passions that keep them keeping on.



Port Campbell VIC.  
Photo: Brian Carr/  
MAPgroup

**Sian Prior** recently spent three months travelling up and down Australia's east coast in a campervan, taking in stunning views and sea breezes, enjoying waves, sand, birds and animals. "Spending time near salt water is immensely rejuvenating for me," Sian says. The trip should have been blissful. And it was. But it was bittersweet. "I couldn't help fretting about

how many of these glorious beaches could disappear in coming decades as sea levels rise."

Those of us who love nature also tend to carry the burden of knowing—and worrying—about the damage humans are doing to the natural world. What keeps environmentalists motivated? And how do they recharge their batteries?

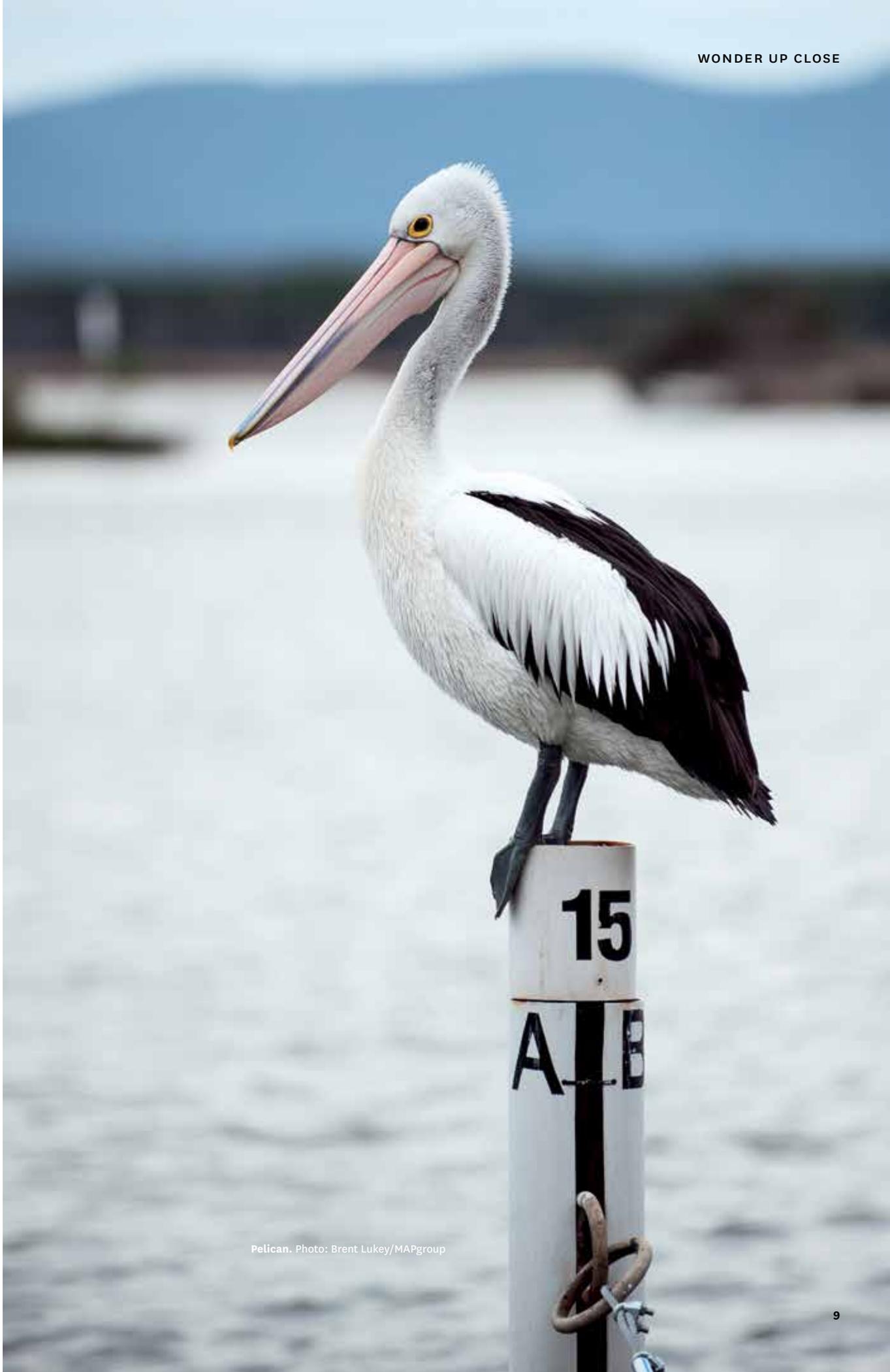
Sian Prior is a writer, broadcaster and teacher who worked for ACF between 1987 and 1989 on ozone depletion and global warming.

"ACF was leading the pack in Australia in its recognition of the serious threats posed by these human-induced global environmental prob-

lems," she says. "We were pretty effective in our ozone campaigning back then but the effort to persuade political leaders to take climate change seriously has proven to be more difficult."

In 1990 Sian led an ACF youth delegation to the UN conference on ozone depletion in London, an experience she says was "wonderful and terrible."

"Wonderful to meet and work with that group of idealistic young people, some of whom have gone on to become very



Pelican. Photo: Brent Lukey/MAPgroup

effective and creative campaigners. Wonderful to watch how Dallas Kinnear, the initiator of that project, saw it through to fruition. Terrible to witness the reality of how decisions are made (or not made) at that level of international negotiations; particularly the selfishness and short sightedness displayed by the wealthiest nations in the face of a global threat."

Murray Wilcox, the highly respected former Federal Court judge and ACF President from 1979 to 1984, tells me about a place that is special to him—Myall Lakes in NSW.

"Over several years while my children were teenagers it was the practice of a group of fathers to take our kids there, during the week

before Christmas. We camped on beautiful unspoiled beaches and sailed catamarans in the clear waters of the lake."

The lakes sang with extra significance for the lawman. In 1973 he had acted as counsel for ACF and other environment groups at the inquiry that successfully halted a push by resource companies to mine the Lakes' high dunes.

"It was wonderful to enjoy what had been so threatened."

Dailan Pugh, forest conservationist and joint winner of ACF's Peter Rawlinson Award in 2001, also knows about the satisfaction and connection that comes from having helped protect a precious place.

Dailan, the father of ACF's Community Organising Program Manager Asren Pugh, co-founded the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) in 1989. He spent much of the 1990s using every method available to stop logging in rainforest and old-growth in



north-east NSW. Site assessments, research, submissions, blockades, lobbying, legal proceedings and more.

## To see, to know, to witness can be heartbreaking. But, as Sian observes, special places can also renew our spirits

Chaelundi, north of Dorrigo, is an area of rich biodiversity that is special to Dailan. The North East Forest Alliance's 1990 blockade and court case forced the Greiner Government to put a logging moratorium over the area's 180,000 hectares of old growth forest. In 1991 NEFA was instrumental in getting endangered species legislation introduced in NSW.

"With the election of the Carr Government in 1995 we engaged with the Comprehensive Regional Assessment and by 2003 had added 700,000 hectares to national parks, with another 300,000 hectares in exclusion zones in state forests," Dailan says.

"John Corkill and I were given the (Rawlinson) award on behalf of the hundreds who contributed to this long campaign." (He doesn't mention he's also had a frog named after him: *Philoria pughii!*)

Clearly special places motivate these three conservation champions. As do special people.

Sian Prior tells me she is impressed by "the large numbers of my former fellow campaigners

Broome WA.  
Photo: Silvi  
Glattauer/MAP-  
group

(many of whom have become my lifelong friends) who are still hard at it, 25 years on. If only we could bottle their stamina and determination and optimism and share it around. The world would be a much better place.”

Dailan Pugh names local volunteer Susie Russell. “She has worked consistently for over two decades on a volunteer basis to achieve the best for our forests and wildlife. I admire her tenacity, persistence and pragmatism.”



Gippsland VIC. Photo: Susan Gordon-Brown

**“I was involved in all ACF campaigns during that period but the Franklin River campaign dominated all others until the High Court decision in June 1983,”**

**Murray Wilcox**

Asked who inspires him, Murray Wilcox names Dr Bob Brown, who led The Wilderness Society during the landmark campaign to stop Tasmania’s Franklin River from being flooded by a massive dam.

“We discussed it at every Council and Executive meeting and individually spent much time on the campaign. Although to many people The Wilderness Society, ably led by Bob Brown, was the public face of the campaign, ACF did a lot of important work too. We developed proposals for alternatives to the Gordon-below-Franklin Dam and we spent much time in political lobbying.

“It was obvious that we had no chance of persuading the Tasmanian government to abandon the dam; the only chance was federal intervention. The problem was to find a constitutional basis for that.”

It was Murray’s idea to base the historic court challenge on the fact that the Franklin was within a World Heritage Area. Some considered this a legally controversial approach. With the assistance of a retired legislative draftsman, Murray devised the Bill that passed the Senate on the last night Parliament sat before the 1983 election.

“ACF persuaded Bob Hawke to promise that, if he became leader and won the 1983 election, Labor would bring that Bill into law. Those two events came to pass.”

All three conservationists say the current political push to separate environment groups that engage in ‘on ground work’ from those involved in ‘advocacy’ is a false distinction, as both are essential.

Dailan puts it well. “While regenerating bush is personally rewarding, it takes years of work to undo the damage a bulldozer can cause in a day. The North East Forest Alliance has often resorted to on ground work in the form of blockades to stop logging of particular patches of rainforest and old growth forest, though resolving the broader issues of protecting all rainforest and all old growth forest and getting them added to national parks depended on public campaigns to force political action.”

Being immersed in nature rejuvenates us. It also motivates us to get involved in its conservation. And the burden of seeing the threats amongst nature’s beauty doesn’t go away.

“I keep trying to focus on other aspects of my life, though invariably I get sucked back in when I see things going wrong,” Dailan says.

Why does he do it?

“Someone has to stand up for the voiceless, enforce environmental requirements that are otherwise ignored and provide a counterpoint to the vested interests which dominate the media. I know that by standing up and speaking out I can make a difference.”

→ **Work to protect the places you love and become a member of ACF [acfonline.org.au/membership](https://www.acfonline.org.au/membership)**



# We're helping to build a healthy planet

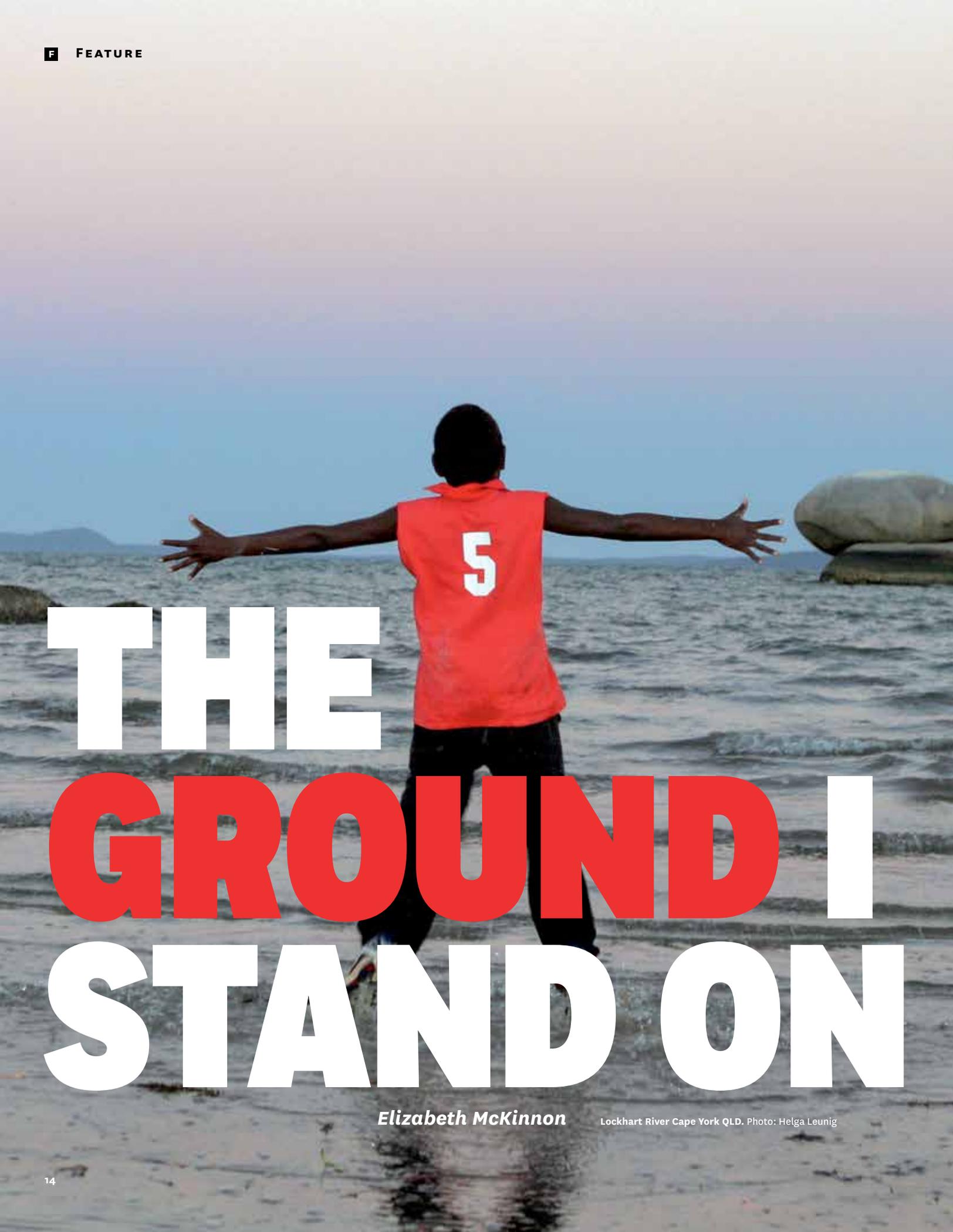
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# THE GROUND I STAND ON

*Elizabeth McKinnon*

Lockhart River Cape York QLD. Photo: Helga Leunig

**The past two years** have been as difficult as any in the past 50 years for those who speak up for nature, a safe climate and for future generations.

Environment groups have found themselves under pressure from all angles. It has never been more important for organisations like ACF to stand our ground on the right to apply the law and free speech to protect the environment.

There have been calls for changes to the Competition and Consumer Act and the Corporations Act to restrict the advocacy of Australia's environmental organisations. Environmental Defenders Offices across the country suffered devastating funding cuts resulting in the near folding of some offices.

The Federal Environment Minister has launched a formal inquiry into environment groups, responding to calls from Federal Council of the Liberal Party, Coalition MPs and representatives from the Minerals Council of Australia and the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), which want environment groups to be stripped of tax deductible status. Nearly 5000 ACF supporters wrote submissions to the inquiry to condemn this move and others attended a rally in Melbourne. Over 6000 people wrote personal letters and hundreds made phone calls to their MPs, calling on them to ensure they didn't dilute environmental laws.

Most recently, we saw the extraordinary move of the Federal Government to remove standing (access) rights to the courts that allow Australians to seek enforcement of environment laws where the Government fails to do so.

This move was in reaction to the Federal Court's decision to overturn approval for the Carmichael coal mine, a court case which the Attorney General has labelled 'lawfare' brought by 'vigilante litigants' designed to frustrate growth and development, despite the facts which show that the Minister for Environment conceded he had made an error in his decision to approve the mine. But for the court action of Mackay Conservation Group, this error would never have been exposed. In the face of this, the Government tried (and failed) to rush a bill through Parliament to remove the standing rights in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The Minister subsequently re-approved the Carmichael proposal. At the time of *habitat* going to press ACF had launched a Federal Court challenge to that re-approval.

These government actions are the continuation of persistent and troubling attempts to silence environment groups and reduce dissent and scrutiny of decisions by our political leaders that are harmful to Australia's natural environment.

From the creation of Landcare more than 20 years ago, to the rejection of mining in Antarctica, to the expansion of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, to World Heritage listing of forests in Tasmania, governments from all colours of politics have taken

steps to protect the environment—but that only happened as a result of advocacy campaigns by environment groups.

It follows therefore, that silencing communities will deliver a death blow for protecting nature. We must stand our ground on free speech, the rule of law, and the right of us as citizens to enforce it.

We wait in anticipation to see if Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull will take the opportunity to steer a new course, working with the environment non-profit sector, instead of against it. Further, there is a real opportunity for the Government to work collaboratively with the community to shape a healthier environment and a thriving economy.

**Some of Australia's most important environmental outcomes over the past 50 years — protecting the Kimberley, the Murray Darling and old growth forests in Tasmania — have only been achieved when conservation organisations like ACF have informed the community, advocated for conservation, and when necessary applied the law**

→ **At the time of ACF's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, our voices are as important as ever. Donate to the ACF and support our ongoing work to protect the environment: [acfonline.org.au/donate](https://acfonline.org.au/donate)**



**“.. the more I looked the more I realised that never in my life  
or dreams had I been in such incredible country.”**

**Francis Ratcliffe, ACF Founding Member, 1965**

Uluru NT. Photo: Krystal Seigerman



# LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SKY

*James Norman*

Mallacoota VIC. Photo: Alan Atwood



**Flicking back through earlier editions of this magazine is a revealing exercise. Revealing in the sense that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Or rather, the inevitable slowness of humans to change our way of life and our collective impacts on this delicate planet. But when I think about all the work and passion that ACF staff and supporters have put in over the past 50 years I'm often stunned at what we can do when we put our minds to it.**

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### Early warnings

Many of us think of global warming as a largely modern crisis. But scientists were already ringing alarm bells when ACF formed 50 years ago. As far back as 1974 an article in *habitat* titled CO<sub>2</sub> by Dr Sylvia J Mainwaring warned about the imminent dangers of climate change.

"Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is not a gas normally considered as dangerous or even slightly harmful," she began. "CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations, on the other hand, have, since the Industrial Revolution in the mid-19th century, been increasing steadily. It is this worldwide increase and its climatic implications that have focussed concern on CO<sub>2</sub>."

"Since the advent of industrialisation in the 1860s, fossil fuel burning has increased annually. This increase has certainly paralleled the increase in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and is popularly assigned to be the cause."

The prescient article concluded by discussing the changes in temperature that would accompany ongoing increases in CO<sub>2</sub>, causing significant impacts including rising temperatures globally and melting polar ice caps.

Dr Mainwaring concluded her article: "there are energy sources other than fossil fuels that do not produce CO<sub>2</sub> ... it is to these we should concentrate our attention in the future."

### Gradual path to change

It took several more decades before the climate message started to really resonate in mainstream discourse. In 1988 the UN formed its panel on climate change, a body designed to

assess all available scientific data and potential broader implications of climate change and propose global responses.

The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 is often viewed as a watershed moment when thousands of government and non-government representatives came together with a strong focus on finding alternative sources of energy to coal, oil and gas. An important achievement of the conference was an agreement on the Climate Change Convention that would lead to the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

### Political leadership

In his famous clean energy speech in 2008, US President Barack Obama echoed what many were waiting for our global leaders to articulate when he asked: "Will we be the generation that leaves our children a planet in decline, or a world that is clean, and safe, and thriving? Will we allow ourselves to be held hostage to the whims of tyrants and dictators who control the world's oil wells? Or will we control our own energy and our own destiny?"

As we prepare for one of the most important climate summits, in Paris in December, many Australians will be wishing our governments had paid heed to the warnings in Dr Mainwaring's article sooner. Instead of serious leadership from our politicians, the science of climate change has become mired in highfalutin political contest.

Guy Rundle, Crikey writer-at-large, and author of *A Revolution in The Making: 3D Printing,*

*Robots and the Future* (Affirm Press) says the political quagmire in Australia and elsewhere has deep historical roots.

“As liberalism superseded conservatism, and incorporated conservatism, an old testament idea of man and nature took over—the latter was there to serve our needs and be exploited by us. So the more argument there is for energy to be generated by forms that are ‘being-with’ nature, rather than extraction from—and the more that makes economic sense rather than just being good—the more hysterical the debate becomes.”

**“The idea of smart economies has broken down fear of newfangled energy.”**

**Guy Rundle**

However, Rundle believes this type of ideological response to climate change is losing ground among everyday Australians, and that recent Australian governments have misjudged the amount of support in the broader community for clean energy.

“Anyone under 35 has more or less grown up seeing turbines and solar panels in the suburbs and country towns. The idea of smart economies has broken down fear of newfangled energy. This as well as the attraction of cost savings, and the spreading idea of universal responsibility have all caught the Government napping.”

**The change is happening now**

Far removed from the daily grind of federal politics, Australians are busy in towns and cities making the types of changes we need to face a clean, prosperous future together.

According to Australia’s Clean Energy Regulator (CER) there are now about one and a half million solar panel systems installed in Australia. In 2001 there were less than 300. In a little over a decade we have seen a solar revolution in Australia powered by everyday folk like you and me.

And the news gets better. It was recently announced that Australia would be the first place where the electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla would sell its Powerwall home energy battery system. This will allow users to power their

entire homes independently of the external power grid, by the end of 2015.

The Tesla Powerwall is a unit that will sit on an interior wall in the home, containing a lithium battery used to store energy from solar panels. The technology means that even in areas with intermittent renewable energy sources, they may become an alternative to relying on coal or gas-fired energy grids.

“We have this handy fusion reactor in the sky, called the sun,” said Tesla founder Elon Musk when releasing the Powerwall, stressing that solar power is the best way to end the world’s reliance on coal, oil and gas and head off a disastrous future in which we are overwhelmed by CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere.

At the same time, we have seen rapid movement in the capacity of solar cells to capture energy through new materials such as graphene, which has the potential to raise solar cell efficiency from their current level of around 45 per cent to 100 per cent. This combined with developments in 3D printing mean it is now possible to print out solar cells, making them accessible to anyone with a 3D printer.

“The only real alternative, we were told, was nuclear power ... but the discovery of graphene and other new materials, and the myriad uses to which they can be put, busts those limits wide open,” writes Guy Rundle in his book.

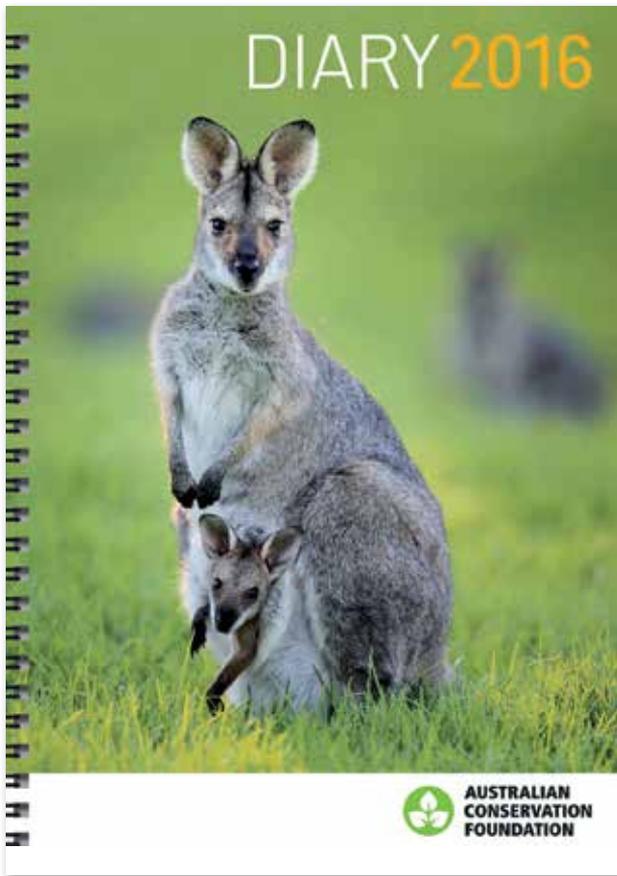
In other words, almost in spite of the inaction and backflips at the federal political level in Australia, and despite the malevolent forces that have conspired to slow climate progress globally, we may be better equipped than previously thought to finally take heed of Dr Mainwaring’s sage advice way back in 1974.

And now is the moment that, by sharpening our gaze and using the new emerging renewable energy tools we can indeed ‘concentrate our attention’ away from coal, oil and gas and back toward the awesome clean power potential hovering above us in the clear blue sky.

**→ Join our Climate Action community here and read up on the People’s Climate March: [www.action.org.au](http://www.action.org.au)**



Byron Bay NSW. Photo: Brent Luky/MAPgroup



# 2016 Diary on sale now!

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Each purchase supports our work to achieve a healthy environment for all Australians.

\$25 each + postage



You can leave a gift of a healthy planet and a healthy future in your will.

Your legacy will be a world where majestic ancient forests stand tall. Where a healthy climate supports all living things.

An Australia full of wild places, clear flowing rivers and abundant wildlife. Where people live in harmony with the environment and face a better future, together.

With your enduring commitment and support ACF can achieve this vision.

Your living legacy—an exceptional gift indeed.

To leave a living legacy through your will please contact Susie Prain today at ACF 1800 223 669 or [bequests@acfonline.org.au](mailto:bequests@acfonline.org.au)

# *Tangled in bush and birdsong*

*Everyone has a story. It may be one of love. One of sadness. One of madcap adventure. Or, like all the best stories, it is one with ups and downs, twists and turns, challenges and triumphs. Interspersed with a thread of hope and unbridled enthusiasm, a great story takes the reader or listener on an unforgettable journey.*

**Jacqueline Donaldson**

Olkola Country QLD. Photo: Kerry Trapnell/Olkola



Dambos leading to the Kangaroo Rat Story mound springs. Photo: Kerry Trapnell /Olkola

**The recent** Journey to Olkola Country—the brainchild of the Olkola Aboriginal Corporation and realised with the assistance of ACF and Intrepid Travel—is a chapter in one of these great stories. What happened previously spans over a century and involves events both tragic and avoidable. But in this new chapter, one that’s being written as you read this, everyone looks to the future with optimism.

As a result of their work, on December 10, 2014, the Olkola people were handed back 633,630 hectares of their ancestral homelands in south-central Cape York Peninsula. The Olkola Aboriginal Corporation could now put into action their plans for economic self-sufficiency, to manage their own land and give Olkola youth the opportunity to learn practical land management skills on their traditional country.

From an idea sparked during a campfire yarn and developed by the Olkola Aboriginal Corporation, this pilot trip to visit Olkola traditional lands came to pass in September 2015: The Journey to Olkola Country. Hundreds of ACF supporters registered their interest in this new enterprise for Olkola, a partnership between Olkola, Intrepid Travel and ACF, with 11 people from across Australia making it to Cape York to be part of this new chapter. I was lucky enough to be one of them.

**Welcome to Country**

Along with guides Roger de Vos, Dave Mead and ACF’s Northern Australia Program Manager Graham Tupper, our group left behind an overcast Cairns on a Monday morning and travelled

*The Olkola took on what seemed like insurmountable challenges and have met them head on with a grace that rarely exists out of the pages of fiction*

This story’s main characters are the Olkola Traditional Owners. Their work to have Olkola land returned to them, bolstered by the support of family and friends, has spanned 30 years. Eternally optimistic, the Olkola took on what seemed like insurmountable challenges and have met them head on with a grace that rarely exists out of the pages of fiction.



dusty roads to Killarney Station. On arrival we received a warm welcome from Traditional Owner and Station Manager Andrew Malcolm, who in the space of a few sentences turned us from people on a tour to guests in his home.

Later, around a crackling campfire, Olkola's Mike Ross joined us and shared the background of how this trip on country—hoping to showcase the area's nature, history and living culture—had eventuated. Each of us then shared our own story, which worked to cement us all as fellow advocates of this exciting venture.

The next morning took us to nearby Marianne Camp, where a traditional welcome to country was performed by Mike and fellow Elder and Traditional Owner, Jack Lowdown. The Olkola are the freshwater people and this ceremony by a waterhole was not only powerful, but an event that I'm sure left us all humbled.

For the next three days Mike, Jack and Andrew, along with rangers Hamish, Glen and David, opened up our eyes to the abundance of this land and how life-giving it could be if you knew what to look for. While we only saw a taste of the some 1,000,000 hectares that make

**Olkola Traditional Owner Mike Ross telling stories of country.**  
Photo: Oliver Pelling, Intrepid Travel/Olkola

*Hundreds of ACF supporters registered their interest in this new enterprise for Olkola, a partnership between Olkola, Intrepid Travel and ACF*

up Olkola country, we were introduced to the fruits, roots and bark of various trees and their traditional uses, the diversity of landscapes, the challenges faced by managing the land,



Lunch looking out over Olkola country; Alice Matthews at Jungle Creek; camping at Maryanne Camp; Journey participants

and the warmth, knowledge and positivity of the land’s Traditional Owners.

*The Olkola are the freshwater people and this ceremony by a waterhole was not only powerful, but an event that I’m sure left us all humbled*

There were also myriad experiences to savour: the powerful welcome to country ceremony, being invited to walk through bora grounds where millennia of Olkola people have held significant cultural rites of passage, Jack singing to Olkola ancestors to let them know we came as friends before climbing Kimba Plateau to see ancient rock paintings. We learned about bush tucker and the significance of local plants from Mike and Jack, secret women’s business (aka swimming at Jungle Creek), the artistic temperament of termites and Graham’s skills as a ‘termitologist’. We witnessed upwards of forty endangered *Alwal* (Golden-shouldered Parrot) at Maryanne Camp, Roger’s deep knowledge

of Cape York and its various cultures, Dave’s birdwatching prowess and sitting around the campfire as the stars surfaced and sharing what it meant to all of us to be welcomed to Olkola country and what we would learn from this journey.

And a big thanks goes out to ACF supporters Alan, Alice, Dick, Gaille, Jim, Jo, Peter, Rosemary, Sonja, Sue and Vikki, who travelled the distance to Cape York and played an integral part in this story’s chapter. Open, wise, passionate and compassionate in turn, each one brought their unique life’s journey to this place and embraced the experience fully. Together with the Olkola people, our talented drivers and fellow guides Roger, Dave and Graham, we not only enjoyed a wonderful adventure but created a story that I hope sets the tone of many more journeys in Olkola country.

**You are part of it too.** ACF’s supporters have also contributed in writing this chapter. For more than 50 years it has been the ACF community of dreamers and doers who have transformed the fabric of Australia by advocating for national parks, campaigning to stop mining our beautiful land and supporting Traditional



*Alwal*—the threatened Golden-shouldered Parrot.  
Photo: Kerry Trapnell/Olkola

*You are just as much a part of this journey  
as the people who were there*

Owners as they worked to get their land back. You are just as much a part of this journey as the people who were there.

And we are only partway through the story. Next year there will be more journeys to Olkola country. They will not be a polished tourism venture, but a real experience that forges respect and understanding between all involved.

If I took only one thing away from this trip, it's that when we are positive and open we have the power to transform. This is what the Olkola have done and in doing so have created something special. They are working to bring their people home in a way that can transform not only their lives and story, but everyone who wants to be part of it.

- **You can register your interest in further journeys to Olkola country here: [www.action.org.au/olkola](http://www.action.org.au/olkola)**
- **Read more about the work ACF has done in our beautiful north over the past 50 years in Graham Tupper's campaign update on page 31 or visit: [olkola.com.au/tours](http://olkola.com.au/tours)**

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# THANK YOU ...

Kelly O'Shanassy

**What a privilege** it is to be part of this wonderful organisation that over five decades has protected the places we love; places that make Australia special.

The protection of the Great Barrier Reef and the wet tropical rainforests of far north Queensland were top of the agenda when ACF was formed 50 years ago. Both now enjoy world heritage protection and are some of Australia's most visited and most loved places.

Over five decades, ACF's work has stretched across our vast continent and beyond to the Antarctic. From preventing the industrialisation of the Kimberley to stopping the logging of the Tasmanian wilderness. From saving the Murray-Darling to the formation of the marine parks that now surround our country. From Landcare which has touched every corner of this continent to the laws we've helped create that reduce pollution and waste.

Can you imagine an Australia without ACF?

We owe a great deal to those that came before us. Leaders like Garfield Barwick, Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam in the beginning, followed by Phillip Toyne, Peter Garrett and Don Henry. And quiet leaders like Felicity

Wishart whom we sadly lost earlier this year and who touched the hearts of everyone she worked with.

We stand on the shoulders of giants and it is their legacy that we work hard to protect today.

There is no shortage of work to do. Bringing our threatened species back from the brink, rehabilitating landscapes like the Great Dividing Range and solving climate change are the great challenges of our time.

But today, rather than a small number of great leaders, we also have millions of Australians on our team, working for a better future, planting trees, installing solar panels, and divesting from fossil fuels.

While the stakes have never been higher, never before have we had a greater willingness of the people to act and create change.

**It is this willingness that gives all at ACF the determination and courage to create a better future. I can't wait to see what the next 50 years holds.**

→ Become a member of ACF today:  
[acfonline.org.au/membership](http://acfonline.org.au/membership)

Inverloch VIC.  
Photo: Jamie Murcia/MAPgroup

# ... AND WELCOME

**ACF Council** elections are now complete. We were honoured to have a record number of people nominating for Council, demonstrating passion to—and commitment for—our beautiful environment.

We're also proud that our new 21-member Council is made up of many more women, two Indigenous Australians and includes a diverse range of ages and backgrounds. Nine of those 21 are returning from the immediate past Council.

We congratulate and **welcome** our new ACF Council:

ACT: **Jonathan Miller**

NSW: **Daisy Barham, Timothy Chapman, Jonathan King** (returned)

QLD: **Samara Cassar, David Hood, Michael Williams**

SA: **Allan Holmes, Nadia McLaren** (returned), **Susan Richardson**

TAS: **Erika Avellaneda** (returned), **Christian Bell** (returned), **Wendy Heatley**

VIC: **Jim Le Cornu** (returned), **Ian Penrose, Nicola Rivers**

WA: **Anne Poelina, Piers Verstegen** (returned), **Simon Whitehouse** (returned)

NT: **Jimmy Cocking** (returned), **David Morris** (returned)—elected unopposed

On behalf of the entire ACF community, we **thank** the outgoing councillors for their amazing work over the past three years and in some cases much longer. We look forward to continuing our relationship with these dedicated people into the future.

We'd like to especially acknowledge Rob Fowler and Geoff Mosley who have been a part of the ACF Council for 16 years since 1985 and 28 years since 1987 respectively.

**Irina Cattalini** (WA—also outgoing Vice President)

**Peter Christoff** (VIC—also outgoing Board member)

**Peter Dart** (QLD)

**Rob Fowler** (SA—also outgoing Vice President)

**Robyn Gulliver** (WA)

**Kim Hudson** (QLD)

**Kees Hulsman** (QLD)

**Margaret Killen** (TAS)

**Paul Leadbeter** (SA)

**Stephen Lightfoot** (NSW)

**Christine Materia** (TAS)

**Geoff Mosley** (VIC)

**Mark O'Connor** (ACT)

**Kim Peterson** (NSW)

**Gemma Plesman** (QLD)

**Cameron Power** (WA)

**Andrew Reilly** (SA)

**John Rolls** (SA)

**Richard Sanders** (QLD)

**Wayne Smith** (ACT)

**Mark Snell** (NSW)

**Kelly Spence** (TAS)

**Ross Tzannes** (NSW)

**Jocelyn Uiho** (NT)

→ Find out more about our new Council on our website:  
[acf.org.au/council](http://acf.org.au/council)

Along the Murray.  
Photo: Krystal Seigermen/MAPgroup

# CAMPAIGN



**Jonathan La Nauze,**  
Healthy Ecosystems program manager

**WHEN I WAS BORN** ACF

had already helped protect some of the places I now love the most, with National Parks declared in Tasmania’s South West and the NSW Border Ranges. By the time I joined my first campaign at Friends of the Earth 20 years later, that

list had grown to include the Alpine National Park where I walked every summer and skied every winter. And the plight of the Murray, the river where my family swam, picnicked and pumped our water from, was in the news thanks in no small part to ACF.

These are just some of my favourite places that ACF has been a part of protecting in its 50-year history. They’re not necessarily the most famous or celebrated but they’re special to me. I’ll bet most Australians have a place they love, for which they can thank ACF or one of the many other organisations that make up Australia’s environment movement.

This year we started a new campaign to link up many of these important places along the Great Dividing Range. The natural systems that support life along the Range are too big and complex to manage in bite-sized pieces. Managing their natural connections and the cumulative impact of developments is vital for the future of 70 per cent of Australia’s threatened species and the water supply to people in our country’s largest cities.

In July we attended the Commonwealth Government’s Threatened Species Summit. There we presented Environment Minister Greg Hunt with our recent report into the failure of threatened species protections along with signatures from 47,000 people calling for him to strengthen these protections and invest more public money in preventing extinction.

In August, we launched a ground-breaking report on the importance of the Range to life in the whole of South-Eastern Australia, along with a beautiful film that features stories of love, hope and connection from environmentalists along the Range. I urge you to watch and share the film with your friends.

→ **Read more about our Great Dividing Range campaign and watch our film here: [action.org.au/the-range](http://action.org.au/the-range)**



**Victoria McKenzie-McHarg,**  
Climate Change campaign manager

**WHILE THERE IS** no silver bullet when it comes to action on climate change, it’s inspiring to look back in our 50<sup>th</sup> year and see how ACF’s climate campaign has evolved along with the times.

As James Norman mentions in this issue, when the first article on climate change appeared in habitat 41 years ago it noted that only through education would action on climate change be possible.

By 1993 ACF had turned its focus to the policies that would be required and for the first time adopted an energy policy. And in 1996 the first ACF Government Greenhouse Scorecard was released.

In 2006, we partnered with Al Gore to launch the Australian branch of The Climate Reality Project and in the years since we have trained hundreds of community, business and government leaders to speak up and engage people on climate change. At the same time, ACF convened the Australian Business Roundtable on Climate Change, which brought together some of the biggest and most influential businesses in Australia.

Today, the variety of activities and tactics we undertake is as diverse and as influential as ever.

ACF was one of 10 organisations representing business, unions, the social sector, investors, energy companies and the environment that came together in June this year as the Australian Climate Roundtable. Together, we demonstrated to a divided parliament and electorate that the challenges that unite us are bigger than the issues that divide us.

And now, in the lead up to the the international climate negotiations in Paris this December, ACF is leading a major collaboration of more than 130 organisations to coordinate the People’s Climate March in Australia as part of a global weekend of action in capital cities everywhere.

Together, we’ll build an alliance so strong and a community movement so bold, that regardless of what our politicians do or don’t do at Paris, our message will be clear— we will hold you to account, and we will get on with the job of an energy transformation ourselves, whether you’re ready or not.

It’s been an incredible 43 years since Dr Sylvia J Mainwaring’s article on carbon dioxide first appeared in this magazine. The next 43 years must and will bring a brighter future for us living under the influence of our beautiful sky.

→ **See the latest on the international climate negotiations in Paris and the People’s Climate March: [action.org.au](http://action.org.au)**

# UPDATES

**Asren Pugh,**  
Community organising program manager



**I'M PROUD** to have recently joined ACF. We have a strong history of bringing communities around Australia together to protect the places that we all love.

In the 1970s ACF was instrumental in mobilising the community in opposition to whaling and uranium mining and helped empower Traditional Owners in Australia's beautiful north to exercise their rights to their land.

In the 1980s ACF mobilised thousands of people in communities around Australia to stop the damming of the Franklin and entered into an unlikely but powerful alliance with the National Farmers' Federation to create Landcare.

In the 1990s and early 2000s ACF really started focussing on engaging the community to promote environmentally sustainable values and building our capacity to mobilise the community around campaigns like the Murray Darling as well as stopping climate change.

Our new community organising program is the next iteration of our plans to build community power.

Over the past few months, it has taken great strides forward once more.

We have now trained more than 280 community leaders in how to have meaningful conversations with their friends, families, networks and communities about the issues facing our land, water and nature.

We have held forums in the suburbs of Brisbane on the impacts of climate change on nature, attended by more than 70 people.

We have been very focussed on building our capacity to get people out to the People's Climate Marches on November 27-29. Our Climate Leaders have continued their magnificent work in engaging and educating their networks on climate action.

Our community leaders have also held regular stalls at their local markets and held 'environmental-issue film' screenings and Q&A sessions. More than 350 people have attended these events. These were all to build up to the big People's Climate March in late November. We also held two great launches of our organising campaign for the People's Climate March in Melbourne.

At the time of *habitat* going to press these marches were fast approaching, and by the time you read this they will have taken place and our world leaders will be meeting for the international climate negotiations in Paris.

We have every hope that they will have been a huge success.

I look forward to seeing you at an ACF event soon and continuing our proud history of building powerful communities.

→ Discover more: [action.org.au](http://action.org.au)

**Graham Tupper,**  
Northern Australia program manager



**TO FLY** over our beautiful north in 2015 the landscape below may not have changed much in appearance since 1965, apart from some ugly mining scars, a few lonely outback roads and the odd large dam. Remarkably, northern Australia remains home to the largest most intact tropical savanna system left on earth. But down on the ground there have been massive social and conservation changes. Australians now understand much more about the timeless heritage of this country. More than half of the land area in northern Australia has been restored in some form to the original custodians. And in conservation, huge progress has been made in partnership with Indigenous communities.

For example, over the past 20 years the Cape York Peninsula Land Tenure Resolution Program, supported by ACF through the vagaries of political cycles, has achieved the return of 3.2 million hectares of land to Aboriginal ownership, with 1.9 million hectares of this being jointly managed national parks. It includes the magnificent rainforests of the McIlwraith Range and the savanna woodlands and cultural sites of the new Olkola National Park. With their land returned, Indigenous communities are now creating new jobs and livelihoods in tourism (including the recent Olkola trip which Jacqueline Donaldson writes about in this issue), land and sea management, and in the emerging carbon markets.

In Kakadu, ACF worked with the Mirarr Traditional Owners to halt the planned Jabiluka uranium mine and assisted Jeffrey Lee to protect the Koongarra area from uranium mining. More recently ACF supported the Traditional Owners at Muckaty Station in the NT to successfully resist government attempts to impose a radioactive waste dump on their Country. Our campaign for more responsible radioactive waste management continues.

Over these 50 years it has become obvious that we who live in this ancient Country can learn from the wisdom of elders who trod softly and kept Country healthy so that all that followed could be sustained by its gifts. We look forward to continuing to work for and learn from our beautiful north.

→ More about our northern Australia program:  
[acfonline.org.au/na-nuclear-free](http://acfonline.org.au/na-nuclear-free)

*Know it, love it, enjoy it – and do all that you reasonably  
can to rescue and protect it; but don't delay.*

MICHAEL LEUNIG

# HEARTLAND



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