

ALCA National Private Land Conservation Conference, 24-25 Nov 2016

First, a little about the Australian Land Conservation Alliance. Their raison d'être is based on the facts that... with an unprecedented and continuing decline in biodiversity, we can no longer rely on public protected areas for biodiversity conservation; much of the decline of Australian biodiversity occurs on private land; and private landholders manage 77% of the land, including some of the country's most important ecological assets.

See also <http://www.alca.org.au/about-us/>

The ALCA National Private Land Conservation Conference that I attended at the end of November last year was largely concerned with methods of facilitating conservation on private land by a variety of means including covenants, easements, reserves, trusts, Indigenous conservation partnerships, conservancies, and offsets. It also devoted time to the planning, prioritisation and management of conservation from the point of view of policy-making. The latter included an emphasis on the creation and cultivation of innovative partnerships between conservation NGOs, policy-makers, the farming community, philanthropists and other stakeholders.

A good example of collaboration was the story of the Night Parrot rediscovery in western Queensland (<http://www.alca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Jim-Radford.pdf?x20930>). The presentation doesn't tell you very much, but basically this was about the QLD govt pulling their finger out very quickly – they created a new pastoral lease category – to enable a 'rapid conservation response' that also involved Bush Heritage, the landholder and Fortescue Metals. The landowner, a new owner with plans for increased productivity, was paid a stewardship fee while a conservation reserve was set up so he didn't lose out during the process.

There were speakers from America and New Zealand, where National Trust areas are protected from mining! There was a huge focus on economics, including from the angles of corporate social responsibility and philanthropy. 'Markets' (for example, in water management) and 'deals' were commonly used words. Phrases such as 'market-based conservation schemes' and 'revolving funds to protect nature' also give you the flavour. Victoria's Trust for Nature define the aim of their revolving fund 'to purchase unique properties in the market with conservation value, protect them with a covenant, and then sell them on to new owners. All proceeds from property sales are put directly back in the Fund, forever recycled by the Trust to purchase and protect more and more properties.'

Many Conference delegates were aware of Bimblebox. Paola's photograph against a Bimblebox backdrop came up on the screen during the session overview (introduction) at the start of one of Friday morning's concurrent sessions on 'Initiatives in the Policy Landscape'! Speakers at that session included Sue Higginson on NSW's new Biodiversity Conservation Act (she's CEO of EDO NSW – <http://www.alca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Sue-Higginson.pdf?x20930>). She attempted to answer a question I asked, which stressed the great investment of private landowners (not only financial but also in terms of effort and time), and the futility of their efforts, hence reduced incentive, given the lack of security. The second part of my question was, when could we expect equal weighting for nature conservation, along with jobs, health, education, etc, in the political arena. None of the Q&A panel picked that one up at all. Sue didn't have any concrete answers to the first part of the question. I spoke to her after the session. She stressed the importance of plugging away, as we do, and keeping going because coal will soon be unviable! I think my question was the only reference to the reality of existing nature conservation agreements, so much was the emphasis on future paths. There was no

forum in which to raise the issue of the legal options for existing conservation areas under threat.

Penelope Figgis of Oceania IUCN described Queensland as leading the way in terms of categories of Protected Areas, which came as a surprise to those of us from the state! She had seen a headline about Steven Miles' announcement about Special Wildlife Reserves. Afterwards, I told her that his plans were not retrospective and still not wholly protective if there were competing mining or other resource development interests.

Other speakers I spoke to included Phil Collier and Robin Garnett, who organise Tasmania's support network for the Tas equivalent of NRs. They have since sent me the questionnaire they devised to persuade the state government to send out to landholders (to get around the privacy of information stumbling block) and the results, which revealed that landowners did want communicate with other landowners.

This leads me into the practical potential I brought away from the Conference.

1. Phil and Robin's experience is a method we could use to consider getting in touch with other NR owners in Queensland. They also organise get-togethers and events, which is a lot easier in Tassie than QLD, of course.

2. The Trends in Conservation Philanthropy talk was interesting, by Amanda Martin of the Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network. It's worth taking a look at their website because this is something we may need to consider if we have to garner funds quickly. Their website includes a resource of all enviro orgs in Australia, and BNR is listed. We might like to consider updating the minimal basic information (there is editing potential on the website once you have a login) to give potential philanthropists a better idea of Bimblebox's situation. We could get advice from them about how to go about finding a wealthy supporter.

3. Most of the presentations at the Conference are still on the ALCA website at <http://www.alca.org.au/getting-involved/national-private-land-conservation-conference/>. The visual presentations, some of which are quite informative, are on there at any rate, but unfortunately not the lectures. This year's conference is in Hobart. ALCA are open to suggestions of topics for the agenda. We might like to suggest a topic such as the challenge of updating enviro law to protect PAs. We could suggest Chris McGrath to be a speaker (with particular reference to Queensland).