A HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENT MOVEMENT

Lake Pedder, Kakadu, Fraser Island, Green Bans, forests, urban pollution—environmental issues have been at the forefront of Australian politics since the 1960s. This book traces the development of the environment movement in Australia from the first visionaries who pressed for preservation of native fauna and for sanitation in cities to a mass social movement that challenges the most powerful interests in society.

The authors examine the social bases and traditions which contributed to the rise of an environmental ethic in the late nineteenth century and show how the environment movement evolved as a social movement, becoming a sophisticated actor in the political process and developing a coherent philosophical direction. Decades of activism produced recognition that environmental issues are interconnected with many others, such as the ANZUS alliance, Aboriginal land rights, civil liberties and social justice.

Drew Hutton is a lecturer in the School of Humanities at Queensland University of Technology. He is the editor of Green Politics in Australia (1987).

Libby Connors is a lecturer in Australian history at the University of Southern Queensland. She is a co-author of Australia’s Frontline (1992) and has contributed to two edited books on Australian colonial history. Both authors are prominent members of the Australian Greens at state and national levels.
A HISTORY OF THE
AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENT MOVEMENT

DREW HUTTON
LIBBY CONNORS
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, vic 3207, Australia

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521456869

© Drew Hutton and Libby Connors 1999

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication data
Hutton, Drew, 1947–
A history of the Australian environment movement.
Bibliography.
Includes index.
ISBN 0 521 45686 X (pbk).
   I. Connors, Libby, 1960. II. Title.
   363.7050994


Transferred to digital printing 2010

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Information regarding prices, travel timetables and other factual information given in this work are correct at the time of first printing but Cambridge University Press does not guarantee the accuracy of such information thereafter.
Contents

Abbreviations vii
Preface ix
Map xii

Introduction 1

Part I The First Wave: 1860s to World War II 17
1 Professors, Learned Assessors 24
2 Sane Citizens and Sanitarians 61

Part II The Second Wave Builds: World War II to 1972 89
3 Old Meets New 92

4 Taking to the Streets 128
5 Taking to the Bush 145

Part IV The Professional Movement: 1983–1990 165
6 Fighting for Wilderness 169
7 Urban Issues and Pollution 197
8 Greenies and Numbers Men 223
vi CONTENTS

Part V Dancing in the Dark: The Movement in the 1990s 241
9 Counter-Moves 243
Epilogue 262

Notes 267
Bibliography 296
Index 313
Abbreviations

AAAS  Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science
ACF   Australian Conservation Foundation
ACTU  Australian Council of Trade Unions
AOU   Australasian Ornithologists Union
CALM  Department of Conservation and Land Management (WA)
CART  Citizens Against Route 20 (later Citizens Advocating Responsible Transport)
CESS  Campaign to End Sewage Smells
CNFA  Coalition for a Nuclear-Free Australia
CROPS Concerned Residents Opposing Pulp Mill Siting
CSIR  Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CSIRO Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DURD  Department of Urban and Regional Development
EIS   Environmental Impact Statement
ESD   Ecologically Sustainable Development
FIDO  Fraser Island Defence (later Defenders) Organisation
GBRC  Great Barrier Reef Committee
GBRMPA  Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
HEC   Hydro-Electric Commission
IUCN  International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LPAC  lake Pedder Action Committee
NCC   Nature Conservation Council (New South Wales)
NDP   Nuclear Disarmament Party
NF&FPC Native Fauna and Flora Protection Committee (RSSA)
NP&PAC National Parks and Primitive Areas Council
NPAQ  National Parks Association Queensland
NPWS  National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POOO</td>
<td>People Opposed to Ocean Outfalls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAOU</td>
<td>Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATS</td>
<td>Residents Against Toxic Substances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSSA</td>
<td>Royal Society of South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>Stop The Ocean Pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWP</td>
<td>Socialist Workers Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNFAG</td>
<td>Terania Native Forest Action Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWS</td>
<td>The Wilderness Society (previously Tasmanian Wilderness Society)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VNPA</td>
<td>Victorian National Parks Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLPSA</td>
<td>Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPSQ</td>
<td>Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

In early 1980 I attended a talk by a young academic on ‘The New Militarism’. The speaker turned out to be Drew Hutton. As Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher reinvented the Cold War he was presciently attempting to re-engage the vestiges of Queensland’s anti-Vietnam War and anti-uranium movements against the new threats to peace. At the time I was on the fringes of Queensland’s civil liberties and anti-uranium movements, unsure of how to express my sense of political indignation. Soon after Drew founded a local branch of the War Resisters’ League and when the British aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious darkened Brisbane skies as its huge bulk filled the arch of Brisbane’s Gateway Bridge, he was in a canoe on the Brisbane River along with Ian Cohen and Eleri Morgan-Thomas and other members of the Brisbane Peace Fleet as I looked on from the safety of the accompanying river bank protest. While Greenpeace was making international headlines with its protests against environmental and human destruction both east and west, Drew was incorporating peace studies into his teaching and into Brisbane local politics. In 1985 Drew stood as a Green candidate for mayor and the first of what was to become hundreds of local residents rang him to seek help over an inappropriate development next door to her suburban home. Dredging of the river, clearing of urban bushland, destruction of wetlands, loss of low income housing to urban gentrification, the ruin of heritage streetscapes by new freeways – the list of campaigns was extensive. It was Drew’s complaint to Queensland’s Criminal Justice Commission over the illegal disposal of toxic liquid waste which probably brought him the most state-wide attention. Here was irrefutable proof of the failure of various levels of government to manage industry with dire consequences for the state’s waterways and from a political channel that was difficult for the powers that be to ignore.
x

PREFACE

Drew and I married in 1986 and I was also involved in many of these campaigns. Our lives have not been an unbroken succession of conflicts; there were periods of retreat for family, study and work reasons and periods of accommodation when group representatives sat down with government or industry to resolve environmental conflicts. To people who do not share our sense of moral protest, the breadth of these activities will seem an inexplicable jumble of causes, the bandwagon or rent-a-crowd image so over-used by unfriendly politicians and media commentators. For those of us directly involved, however, these activities were not an expression of unthinking militancy. Even when causes were seemingly thrust upon us because of their immediacy there was a growing sophistication in movement responses as our practical understanding of how political processes operated was refined and our articulation of grievances improved.

In this sense our personal history intersects with a wider national history for our specific local causes were repeated in many different settings around the country and elsewhere too activists were learning from their own successes and failures and eagerly appropriating new strategies from others. This book is an attempt to explain the pattern of historical development of the environment movement in Australia. Its internal logic has been dominated by the responses of Australian governments, by the emergence of new threats but most decisively by the ways in which campaigners learn from one another, borrow each other’s successful strategies and try to avoid one another’s mistakes.

We know that writing this book while teaching full-time and remaining active in many campaigns nearly drove various staff at Cambridge University Press to the limits of their patience as we repeatedly stretched deadlines to the utmost. We want to begin with our thanks to them, especially to Phillipa McGuinness who in 1993 was sympathetic to the idea of the history of the environment movement but never expected it to be still hanging over our heads so many years later.

In a book about the importance of grassroots political activity to our national life it would be wrong not to acknowledge the groundwork that goes into such a production as this. We are most grateful to the kind assistance we received from librarians and archivists at the Battye, La Trobe, Mitchell, News Ltd, Australian Consolidated Press, National, John Oxley, Fryer and Southern Queensland and Central Queensland University Libraries and the Noel Butlin Centre Archives and Tasmanian Archives Office. The courtesy we received from these librarians is a tribute to their professionalism. In comparison our obligations to the many volunteer and underpaid office workers at regional and state conservation councils around the country who assisted us are even greater. They not only helped us with records and recommended interviewees but allowed us to take up precious time on overworked photocopiers in under-resourced offices. The Australian Conservation
Foundation is owed a special debt for giving us access to its records at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre as is Louise from Habitat who helped us with photographs. We also wish to thank our respective universities, Queensland University of Technology and the University of Southern Queensland, for providing us with funding to undertake this research and also the School of Humanities at Griffith University (in particular its head, Mark Finnane) and the Department of Government at the University of Queensland (particularly Ralph Summy) for supporting each of us for spells as visiting fellows while we were working on this project.

Many people who have been active in the movement gave up valuable time to be interviewed for this project. It was wonderful to finally meet people whose names had become so well known in environment movement circles and a great privilege to hear their recollections of events. We are very grateful to everyone who agreed to be interviewed. A full list of their names appears in the bibliography but there are two caveats that need to be noted. We were not able to interview every leading environmental campaigner of the past few decades and so there are some regrettable omissions of environmental ‘leaders’. Those whom we were able to speak to will not necessarily agree with the approach we have taken in this book. That is a feature of most writing projects but philosophical diversity is a particularly strong feature of social movements.

Social movements are the combined actions of hundreds of people who work towards common goals most of the time without even knowing one another. Although we have both been involved in social movement activity in Queensland for over 20 years, and with the formation of the Australian Greens at the national level for almost a decade, we know that as active members or as academics we do not ‘own’ the Australian environment movement. No one can own a social movement – not a particular organisation, nor any number of charismatic individuals, nor the academics who analyse it. Or perhaps it is more correct to say that everyone who participates in social movement activity owns the movement. For this reason we want to dedicate this book to all those hundreds of supporters who have worked behind the scenes in campaigns around the country but whose names do not make it into this book. The strength of the movement nationally resides in the personal convictions of hundreds of Australians who individually do not receive public recognition but who collectively have changed the way Australians relate to their environment. So we dedicate this book to everyone who has ever been prepared to take a public stance in defence of the biological integrity of this planet and of our own little neck of the woods.

Libby Connors