

## **6. Establishing new directions for the Malleefowl Preservation Group, Western Australia**

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### ***Abstract***

A strategic review conducted by the Malleefowl Preservation Group (MPG) Board has reflected that the condition of Western Australia's natural resources, including threatened species like the Malleefowl, continues to decline despite much effort and expenditure both public and private. We listened to our members concerns 'not to monitor the Malleefowl into extinction' and that 'we should be out there doing something positive for conservation more broadly'. With a strong landholder base, we are well-placed to understand viscerally that both the problems and the possible pathways to better futures lie in holistically addressing the social-ecological system, not just the ecosystem.

Examining the twenty-two year history of the MPG allows us to understand what is required to shift our trajectory as a community organisation. We learned much about natural resource management more broadly and strongly desire to help reverse the decline in the resource base over which we, as a society, have presided for two centuries. In 2013, the MPG Board resolved to adopt adaptive management processes as the default framework in which we do our work. Aiming to increase our influence this way, we have sought the requisite experience and thinking to support the development of interdisciplinary and cross-scale approaches internally and to enable focused and effective collaboration with the community, civil society groups, academia and government in working towards common objectives.

### ***Introduction***

I just want to say we're all in this together and in this presentation, I'm going a little bit up scale, I'm sorry Uncle John Hill isn't here with us any longer as I wanted to thank him personally for opening his heart up to us. I know there are a lot of people with big hearts in this room, most people here are volunteers and you've got to have a big heart to do this kind of work. Like Uncle John Hill, I'd like to pay tribute to my ancestors, not my own personal ancestors but those who had custody of Malleefowl conservation efforts before me, particularly at the MPG, I mention Susanne Dennings, who most of you will know, if you have been around the Malleefowl scene for any time at all, I've only been here for about 14 or 15 months myself. It takes a very special and particular kind of person to create, grow and maintain a conservation NGO and having done so for twenty-two years is an amazing feat.

### ***The Strategic Review***

So going up scale with this talk, I wanted to ask you if you wanted the good news or the bad news. We were 21 years old when I came on board and the Board asked me to do a strategic review and we decided we'd better set ourselves in the context of what was going on out there in the wider world. We've all read that, and we saw that, Malleefowl were really part of the bigger system and all, not all, but most of the environmental indicators were trending south despite our best efforts. That's what was coming out of the northern hemisphere but I guess it still applies here. And the reason why those indicators are trending south are known and apparent to all of us. It's because of the dominant paradigm in our society. I find it interesting that people have been talking about these problems in the US. For example there were some dreadful floods in the mid-west in 1883 and it was obviously a god or Green Peace or the Malleefowl group or somebody telling those horrible timber cutters that it's all your fault. There was a drowned city so it was a very important social and economic problem of the time. That's one of the things that in my work with the MPG we are trying to understand and bring those social and economic dimensions in to what we do, because there's another big element in this system and it's sitting here right in front of me, all of us, and it's what we do that's caused problems that have brought us here to work on Malleefowl, so in attempting to solve these problems it's pretty important for us to focus on people. It's people that are going to do the work but by focusing only on the animals we're ignoring a big part of the problem and a big part of that problem is how we're organised and the paradigms under which we work. This takes a shot at big business, you can have a bit of a chuckle at

that before we see more figures of how badly we're doing here in Australia, but remember even the greenest amongst us have that particular human trait that is cognitive distance. You can believe 'this' absolutely but at the same time you can believe 'that', and the 'this' and 'that' have no overlap and your mental system can harbour both equally well. That is one of our biggest problems, I reckon. So, for example this slide is of a lady who is trying to save the whales and rescue the elephants but she's applying pesticides to kill the slugs in her garden. We all know these situations but it is something that worries me a bit. Another problem is that we are treating the planet more or less as if we have to get everything out and solve straight away.

You know we're trying to be able to do things a bit better in the future and I'm feeling it might be nice to save a few of these things until we can deal with them a bit better. Because we are going to need to, if we have a look at the graph of population growth. And if that doesn't tell you how urgent everything is, well, nothing will. But against all that, we looked at this background and we decided we can only start where we are used to what we have, and do what we can, and that came from the famous Aussie environmentalist Arthur Ash. Okay, we decided that we could sit here and do nothing or stay here and do more of the same. We decided the government isn't going to save us and there must be a better way. You can see how corporates enjoy government regulation so much and we're seeing it in our strategic landscape these days. We also decided single species conservation was really not going to float anyone's boat anymore. It's the way people think. It's not the way government and funders think and nor is it the way landscapes work. So increasingly, people are talking about systems and landscape and realise that Malleefowl are only a small part of the system and people are a bigger part, and sometimes we don't understand what we're doing. We have kind of a perverse conscience.

Do you recognise we are intimately tied to what's going on here? I remember members telling us don't monitor the Malleefowl into extinction, let's do something about it and, yes Joe and Tim, we are still going to continue monitoring because that's essential as you say, but we have to add these other things in and our members want us to. They want to go bush and they want to work with likeminded people, people that don't have dissident views.

### ***The future***

So in conclusion, I say we need to work on and in the system where the Malleefowl live, we need to work with and for the people there and, I'm refusing to use the word stakeholder, we need to work on our organisation, not only do our Malleefowl work, but try and get our organisation better adapted to new piecework. Never losing focus on the Malleefowl, which is what brings people together, we're going to focus on the future through the lens of the Malleefowl. In order to do that I reckon we have to enhance its iconic status, until the Malleefowl is as popular as the koala nobody in this room should rest. Because, although we can say it is unique and wonderful and everybody loves it, that is a very small everybody. They might be everybody in this room and everybody who hears about it. Many of the groups are doing a lot of public awareness work and agencies are as well, but I reckon it should be a much more popular powerful icon. And we are part of the bigger system too, the whole world is concerned about the things that we're concerned about, so we've decided we're going to focus more on becoming a doing organisation and on being better collaborators. We're always going to try and give more than we get from collaborations, to learn better to look at our data, analyse it and try and grow what we know. The Board accepted these principles as our default operating system just a year ago and to inspire others, especially the young. I look around this group and it's really great there are some young people here, I spoke to Birdlife Australia in Perth the other day and 60% of the people, sorry 90% of the people were over 60 the other 10% were over 50 and I know that many conservation NGOs share a similar demographic, so we're all facing that death by demographics. If we can't find ways to make our stuff relevant to the younger people we're going to be in trouble, but you can make a difference, thank you.