

Listening to the land: an extraordinary Australian story

Farmer and environmental visionary, Peter Andrews, was the subject of one of the most popular *Australian Story* programs ever broadcast on ABC TV.

Back from the Brink: How Australia's landscape can be saved is the background story to that program, detailing Andrews' lifelong investigation into what he believes is the best way to rescue Australia's farming landscape from the ravages of salinity, soil infertility and loss of plant biodiversity.

At first, there seems nothing new about his premise: that 200 years of European farming practices have upset the delicate balance between land, climate and people on the earth's driest inhabited continent.

Where Andrews' thinking departs from the mainstream, however – and that includes scientists and government agencies – is in the solutions.

Using his own farm as a laboratory and drawing on his family's experience of

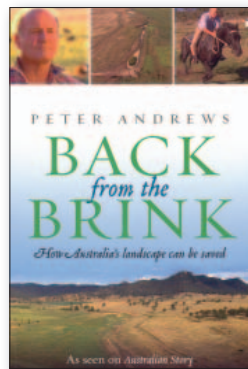
working the land, Andrews has spent decades reading, observing and experimenting with radical ways of restoring what he sees as the two primary values of our landscape: plant biodiversity and in-ground water, particularly wetlands.

What's so radical about that? When Andrews talks about biodiversity, he is referring to weeds (including willows), which he has used to mulch soil and protect the surface from salinity.

He has also developed simple interventions to recreate natural hydrological processes on his farm, which have resulted in restoration of a flood plain, and year-round stream flows.

In fact, Andrews' theory – now known as 'natural sequence farming' – has produced such outstanding results on his NSW farm that he is now being taken seriously by scientists, politicians and the community (see page 18, this issue).

This book documents the incredible journey of a man



Back from the Brink
How Australia's landscape can be saved

Peter Andrews

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who dared to 'think outside the box' as one eminent scientist put it, pursuing his vision with a single-minded determination and a passion that makes this first-hand account a compelling read.

Here is an extract from the book that gives you a taste of Andrews' lively style:

'All the research I did, all the experiments I conducted, led to this conclusion: there were two things in the ancient Australian landscape that made it self-sustaining.

'One was biodiversity. The other was inground water. Australian farmers have generally ignored both. Neither has any place in modern farm management.

'How many farmers make any attempt to create or maintain biodiversity on their farms? Very few.

'Even fewer farmers make any attempt to understand the hydrology of the land they own – that is, the movement and storage of water below the surface.

'If they did understand it, they'd be able to manage not only the water but also fertility, salinity and just about everything else that impacts on their land.'

Sorting the greenwash from 'true green'

The GreenPower accreditation program has been running nationally for seven years, giving Australians the chance to help reduce greenhouse emissions by increasing the demand for electricity from renewable sources.

Only electricity from approved generators can be sold as GreenPower, but in recent years a number of much cheaper, non-accredited products – with misleading 'green' product names – have appeared.

As a result, companies offering genuine accredited products can lose market share to companies with non-accredited products, which are unlikely to make a difference to Australia's greenhouse emissions.

For example, purchasing investment in 'mature' renewables such as hydroelectricity does not contribute to the growth of renewables such as wind and solar, which need to be ramped up quickly to meet

mandatory targets.

For some non-accredited products, the same electricity being offered to consumers as 'green' is 'double counted' in that it is also contributing to mandatory renewable energy targets.

The Green Electricity Watch site enables consumers to make a more informed choice about their power by star-rating energy products according to their contribution to renewable energy growth in Australia, the clarity of consumer product information, the retailer's rate of uptake of GreenPower and the proportion of accredited GreenPower in the product.

You can check out the star-ratings of products by state (just click on a map) or by supplier. You may be surprised by what you find!

The product rating system and site is a joint effort of the Total Environment Centre, the Australian Conservation



www.greenelectricitywatch.org.au

Foundation and the WWF.

Additionally, the site contains succinct tips on making energy savings around the home (lights, heating and cooling, fridge, washing machine, etc).

The site has a link to the government GreenPower accreditation scheme website, which provides further information about the GreenPower 'tick' label.