

Community power holds the key

Charlotte Francis

Written to address the public's lack of understanding about the scale, urgency and long-term implications of the conservation challenges facing Australia, *On Our Watch* is an extensively researched, highly readable and arresting account of the state of our natural environment.



On Our Watch
The Race to Save
Australia's Environment
Nicola Markus
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What distinguishes this book somewhat from many others on the topic is its in-depth discussion of the key organisations in the conservation arena, and the reasons why current approaches are not working.

The book's central argument is that we cannot assume government and industry will change their ways fast enough to fix the problems. Neither can we rely solely on non-government organisations to pick up the slack. We, the voting public, are the ones who can, and must, influence change.

Author and zoologist, Dr Nicola Markus, is Chief Conservation Officer at Bush Heritage Australia, after leading the Species Conservation program at WWF-Australia. In first tracing the decline of Australia's natural assets from the arrival of the First Fleet to the present day, she covers land clearance, agricultural and industrial practices, the spread of biological disease, the invasion of pest weeds and animals, and climate change impacts. The work draws on some staggering facts and figures.

Markus moves on to highlight the inadequacies and inconsistencies in environmental law and the failure of government to ensure its rigorous application. The coverage of other factors preventing lasting progress, including a lack of long-term investment in conservation initiatives, unrealistic or politically expedient species recovery plans (such as that for the high-profile orange-bellied parrot) and the powerful sway of lobby groups in industry and agriculture, also stand out.

Citing examples of successful community-led initiatives, the book ends with a list of 10 ways to make a difference. Encouraging increased political engagement at the local, state and federal level – ‘no organisation speaks as loudly as the voting public’ – the author appeals to all of us to make real and sustained changes in our consumer and lifestyle choices.

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