



Australian
Koala
Foundation

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**THE BUDDHA OF THE BUSH
'WHAT THE KOALA HAS TAUGHT ME ABOUT A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE'
BY**

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**for the
WOMEN CHIEFS OF ENTERPRISES INTERNATIONAL
ANNUAL CONFERENCE,**

**'INTELLIGENT OPTIMISM: WOMEN LOOKING FORWARD'
FRIDAY 9TH OCTOBER, 2009**

SLIDE

Last year I wrote to His Royal Highness Prince Charles and told him about Koala Beach our sustainable housing estate in Pottsville New South Wales.

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His people wrote back and asked if I would like to visit Poundbury – HRH's sustainable project in the Duchy of Cornwall.

I said yes and I went there in July 2009.

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Koala Beach has 500 houses nestled in amongst the gumtrees alongside a koala population and 26 other endangered species.

What these projects have in common is that they are the beginnings of a sustainable future.

AKF started ours in 1992 when I went to the Developer Brian Ray and said "this land is fabulous koala habitat – how can we work together". Everyone thought we were both mad and we were both on Sixty Minutes because people in the green movement just couldn't believe we would dare. It is the only sustainable koala project in the country. Even though many developers come to us and want our involvement, they are never prepared to do what is necessary to get it right.

There are no koalas in Poundbury and in fact the absence of wildlife was an issue for me and I shared that with my guide as I walked around. But what is in Poundbury is the beginnings of how people can live and work and play in a sustainable way. Nothing happens there without a vision of its impact on the planet.

I would encourage you all to look at the website about this visionary place, but in essence this is the Prince's vision of a truly sustainable future where people and the land work in harmony. They are very few and far between.

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If you go to Koala Beach you can see wallabies hopping around the streets, a curlew living on the corner of Sassafras and main street (in fact the people who sold this house recently would only sell to people who would take care of the curlews)

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and of course koalas descendant from one of the men in my life "501". He taught me everything I know about koalas and koala society. His son was Arnie (the alpha male at the time). 501 was the elder who appeared to have the ability to roam the whole site, but spent most of his time in his favourite tree (he actually was found dead under it). Coincidentally a child called Luke built a cubby house in that tree and 501 appeared to "enjoy" watching the children playing. He loved the new gum trees we planted and I can still see his mark – when I look at the trees that he used when he put his big bottom in a tree not quite ready for his weight. They have a better spread because he often broke the main trunk.

Lulu – one of the females on the site mated with Arnie – and had a joey to him. Mating with the alpha male allows you access to his territory. She sat there for one breeding season and the following one, mated with Arnie again, but on the way home had a rather lovely affair with Dennis. Which just shows you that Intelligent Women Looking Forward can work out that if you fool two blokes that you have their children, they will both give you access to your home territory with resultant food and shelter.

In scientific language – this is how a female makes sure that there is no inbreeding in the colony.

SLIDE –

I could entertain you for hours on the koalas I have known and what I learn from them.

If they are in the bush, then by and large the bush is still sustainable. If they are gone – No Tree No Me.

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Let me show you what is not sustainable.

Koala cut in half.

Goats in Charleville

Burnt koalas

Koala stuck in Pool Fence

Koala dead on the side of a road

Koala dead by a dog

Kuta – dead from all sorts of things

Ward River in Charleville

I was in Charleville last week, These red gum trees – that are dying - are the lifeblood for koalas – and ironically they are for or us too. I see this stuff every year, year in and year out. I have been watching our country slowly die for the last twenty years.

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I am not sure where I got my love of the bush, but I know I was destined to get this job. My Mum and Dad saw the last Tasmanian Tiger in the Hobart Zoo and Dad always used to talk about the sadness he felt, not only for the Tiger, but for the Aboriginal Race that was basically exterminated in Tasmania and Australia in the 1800's. This was visionary thinking for a man and a woman of that time, but I feel privileged to have had them as parents. They were both musicians and they taught me a love of music, fun, laughter and the odd glass of champagne.

Interestingly enough the Australian Government listed the Tasmanian Tiger – called Benjamin in July, 1936 and he went to extinction on September 7th, 1936. Three months.

I fear this for the Koala. I can tell you there is nothing in place by any Government in Australia that is capable of protecting the koala and more importantly its habitat.

Why is that important.

The Koala Tourism brings \$1b annually to the Australian economy
A healthy landscape brings \$5.5B worth of food annually
And
No-one on this planet can imagine the world without them.

They are the charismatic mega-fauna. Elephants, Whales, Gorillas, Tigers, Orangutan. They are up there with the best of them.

SLIDE

Norman Lindsay knew this when he wrote The Magic Pudding. Dorothy Wall knew this when she wrote Blinky Bill. May Gibbs knew this when she wrote Snugglepoot and Cuddlepie.

In fact all these books were written because of the fur trade – (photo). In Black August – which articulates the killing of millions of koalas – it showed that politicians of the day did not understand how much the koala meant to the people and elections were won and lost on the strength of them. Mr. Goss in 1995 found this to be true.

SLIDE - He knew that this marvelous little character was a symbol of us – Australians. The aboriginal people have a dreaming that says if the koala is harmed, then drought will come to the land.

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I know that drought is coming – not just for Australia, but for the planet – and worse.

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Mother Nature and Father Greed have collided and it is going to take Intelligent Women and Men to look forward into the future to lead us to a sustainable future.

The education of women and the empowering of women is paramount to that and why I feel privileged to be a member of Women's Chiefs of Enterprise. It is time for women's visions to be seen and more importantly heard. And probably even more importantly to be acted upon and taken seriously.

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Firstly we have take personal responsibility and in my everyday life, just like everyone else I struggle with my own carbon footprint and my unsustainable existence. By and large I try to live a sustainable life – water tanks, cat enclosures, big water tanks, even bigger water tanks, trying not to take plastic wherever it is offered. Carrying my own chopsticks so I don't have to throw them away.

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These actions seem so small, but they are the first step. Next time you throw away a glass bottle, remember the glass came from beneath a koala tree in Port Stephens. Everytime you go traveling – take one water bottle and challenge yourself. I will only use this one for the whole trip and re-fill it, not buy one every day. Little things can make such a difference.

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I want cities to be filled with food – but I would need a whole day to explain that dream. Another day perhaps. Nothing makes me happier than seeing a garden on the rooftops in New York City.

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I know that I and my team could help to heal the Australian landscape, but our Governments are intent on same old same old. They are working under an old paradigm and sometimes I despair at their entrenched thinking. There are powerful forces that keep that in place and I suppose none of us should be naïve to those forces. I sometimes think we are. We tend to see the world through rose coloured glasses. I have taken mine off.

This is how Australia should look.

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I am confident that the global financial crisis, the environmental global crisis and even the new carbon economy will only be resolved if we decide to look at a new way of thinking. Not words about this, not "emperors new clothes" type thinking, not ponzi type schemes, but genuine vision for how things interact.

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We have to preserve, protect and restore our environment.

How the koala is us. How we are the koala. How we are all connected.
Norman Lindsay painted himself as a koala as his last drawing before he died.

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Germaine Greer says the world will heal when there is "unprecedented levels of co-operation between men and women".

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Men listening or reading to this. Catch up. You are lagging behind. Not our young sons, but you the elders. You are still living in the old way and we need you to step up to the Intelligent Women that are trying to lead the way.

This was brought home to me so vividly when I stayed at a beautiful old club in London last year – and the ladies are not allowed in the gentleman's dining room.

We were not even allowed in the business room and as I swished through the lobby on my way there after being warned by the concierge that "no ladies are allowed in there".

I said "never mind, I am going in".

Thank you.

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