

Keynote Speaker at the first annual Kachana Landscape Management Workshop, 4-6 Sept 2002: Kester A. Baines, B.H.Sc., N.D., Dip.Hom.

Kester is a Fellow of the Australian Natural Therapists Association. He is member of the Homoeopathic Education & Research Association, the Orthomolecular Medical Association of Australia and the Natural Health Society of Australia. He and his wife Suzanne manage the Raphael Centre of Natural Healing in Geelong, Victoria. Kester offers us the benefit of 22 years of experience in his field. He has particular interest in clinical nutrition, functional medicine, and herbal and homoeopathic therapies, and is currently working on a plan to make natural therapies more accessible in outback Australia. Other interests include agroforestry, organic farming and gardening, natural history, and restoring habitat to a small property in the Otway foothills.

Kester visited the Kimberley in October 1999 when he addressed the Rotary Club of Kununurra.

Talk 1 – Introduction/’Food for Thought’

– **Kester A. Baines** B.H.Sc., N.D., Dip.Hom.

I’ve been asked by Chris to talk about the connection between the health of our soils, the integrity of the food we eat, and the health of our families. Thank you, Chris and Jacqui, for the invitation and for your magnificent hospitality. It *is* great to be back in the beautiful Kimberleys and to get away from the 14-degree days (with a couple of 0-degree mornings) we’ve been having in southern Victoria lately.

Most of what I have to say will be later in the program but I thought it would be useful to make a few points tonight by way of introduction. I hope you’ll excuse me for using notes, because I’m not a public speaker and I don’t have a glitzy presentation. However, I do have some things to say that I passionately believe in and I hope the lack of polish in my talks will be made up for by the understanding that it is coming from the heart.

At first glance, it seems odd to have a naturopath speaking at a landscape management workshop. Perhaps it IS odd, but too bad, you’re stuck with it and it’s three days’ walk to the nearest road!

Actually, it’s not as silly as it sounds, because we as natural therapists try to take a holistic view of the world, and the health of the people can’t be seen in isolation from the state of the whole biosphere – including the forests and all other terrestrial environments, the oceans, the atmosphere, climate, flora and fauna, soils, rivers, and man-made environments such as cities, towns, homes and workplaces, economies, businesses, industries and social and political structures.

The influences and interconnections of all those environments could take up many conferences, as could the discussion of the degradation and damage that is occurring in them. Specifically, at this workshop, we are looking at the way humans and other animals can act together to restore degraded land, by deepening and revitalizing soils, stopping

erosion and encouraging the return of plant and animal biodiversity, and, by doing those things, to increase the harnessing of sunlight to improve the productivity of the land for humans and other species in perpetuity. The result we seek is a healthy ecosystem, healthy people and healthy animals.

A word that I only came to understand the meaning of in recent years is **hubris**. My Concise Oxford defines *hubris* as “Insolent pride or security; (Gk tragedy) overweening pride leading to NEMESIS.” “Overweening” is defined as arrogant, presumptuous, conceited, self-confident.” “Nemesis” is the goddess of retribution. The word *nemesis* has come to mean “retributive justice, or downfall that satisfies this”. So *hubris* could be said to mean, in contemporary terms, an arrogant conceited self-confident pride leading to downfall by means of a punishing justice.

Never in my experience have six letters conveyed such depth of meaning as when the word *hubris* is used to describe the way we have treated the natural world over the past two hundred years and the consequences now increasingly evident. I am reminded of a cartoon we used to have on a wall at the clinic. A grinning hippo has dived from a high springboard. He is a few milliseconds away from impact into a small bathtub of water. The caption reads, “Nothing is obvious to the uninformed.”

With extraordinary arrogance and ignorance we have cut down, dug up, transported, paved over, exploited to the brink of extinction and beyond, depleted, wasted, drained, flooded, caused to be blown away, compacted, rendered saline, overfertilised, poisoned, irradiated, genetically altered and otherwise damaged the physical environment and the life-forms within it with barely the slightest idea of what the long-term consequences may be. Even where ill-effects were immediately or gradually obvious, the “tragedy of the commons” and the imperative to make money in the short-term ensured that the exploitation did not abate, unless, in recent decades, the abuse was so blatant that governments were forced to regulate and industry was dragged kicking and screaming to a higher, but albeit totally inadequate, level of accountability.

The levels of comfort and abundance that the majority of citizens in first world countries enjoy has come from our consumption of the environmental and resource capital of our own and future generations, and much of it has been what we have siphoned off from third-world countries. Mahatma Gandhi said that if “it took half the resources of the planet to make Britain as rich as it is, how many planets would it take for a country like India?” Even an economist understands that to consume your capital is unsustainable. But global business is now so powerful and unaccountable to democratic controls that only if business can begin to take a more ethical and responsible position on the consequences of its activities will the situation start to be turned around. The primary function of business is to provide products and services of value to the society at large, and by so doing, to make a fair and reasonable profit. Business’s primary responsibility is to the society which grants it the opportunity to do this. It is not a responsibility to maximize monetary returns to shareholders where the methods used are unsustainable or damaging to environmental or social values.

Jerry Kohlberg, a partner in a company called Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, became dismayed that his company had changed from a friend of innovative small companies to a predator. In a statement he made on withdrawing from the company, he said, "Around us there is a breakdown of ... values in business and government ... It is not just the overweening, overpowering greed that pervades our business life. It is the fact that we are not willing to sacrifice for the ethics and values we profess. For an ethic is not an ethic, and a value is not a value, without some sacrifice for it, something given up, something not taken, something not gained. We do it in exchange for a greater good, for something worth more than just money and power and position."

Author and businessperson Paul Hawken writes that: "Business has three basic issues to face: what it takes, what it makes, and what it wastes, and the three are intimately connected. First, business takes too much from the environment and does it in a harmful way; second, the products it makes require excessive amounts of energy, toxins and pollutants; and finally, the method of manufacture and the very products themselves produce extraordinary waste and cause harm to present and future generations of all species including humans.

"The solution for all three dilemmas are three fundamental principles that govern nature. First, waste equals food. In nature, detritus is constantly recycled to nourish other systems, with a minimum of energy and inputs. We call ourselves consumers, but the problem is that we do not consume. Each person in America produces twice his weight per day in household, hazardous and industrial waste, and an additional half-ton per week when gaseous wastes such as carbon dioxide are included. An ecological model of commerce would imply that all wastes have value to other modes of production so that everything is either reclaimed, reused or recycled. Second, nature runs off current solar income. The only input into the closed system of the earth is the sun. Last, nature depends on diversity, thrives on differences, and perishes in the imbalance of uniformity. Healthy systems are highly varied and specific to time and place. Nature is not mass-produced."

Hawken goes on to say, "Without doubt, the single most damaging aspect of the present economic system is that the expense of destroying the earth is largely absent from the prices set in the marketplace. A vital and key piece of information is therefore missing in all levels of the economy. This omission extends the dominance of industrialism beyond its useful life and prevents a restorative economy from emerging."

I believe this is starting to change and companies involved in a restorative way of doing business are starting to prosper. I have my superannuation in an ethical fund which invests in businesses doing "green" power generation, waste recycling and other socially and environmentally responsible activities. This fund has performed much better than the general market over the past couple of years.

As I said, Hawken proposes a three-pronged approach using natural principles to reconstruct the economy for a sustainable future. To reiterate, and to expand a little more, first, he says we need to "obey the waste-equals-food principle to entirely eliminate waste from our industrial production. This not only saves resources outright, but it rearranges

our relationship to resources from a linear to a cyclical one, greatly enhancing our ability to lead prosperous lives while reducing environmental degradation. Instead of organizing systems that efficiently dispose of or recycle our waste, we need to design systems of production that have little or no waste to begin with.

“The second principle is to change from an economy based on carbon to one based on hydrogen and sunshine. This is primarily achieved by reversing the historical incentives surrounding the production and consumption of energy, away from the cheapest combustion towards the most enduring production. This is the “soft path” Amory Lovins described nearly twenty years ago, but the imperatives for implementation are even more compelling now because of our greater knowledge of ozone loss, global warming and destruction of forests due to acid rain. It doesn’t matter how many hundred years of supply we have of coal and oil, because if we combust it, we will raise CO₂ levels eight to ten times higher than normal, a level that the most stalwart environmental skeptic would find alarming.

“Third, we must create systems of feedback and accountability that support and strengthen restorative behavior, whether they are in resource utilities, green fees on agricultural chemicals, or reliance on local production and distribution. Conversely, we have to look at how our present economic system consistently rewards short-term exploitation while penalizing long-term restoration, and then eliminate the ill-placed incentives that allow small sectors of the population to benefit at the expense of the whole. This should not be done through stifling restrictions, but through standards that release creativity and productivity...

“All three recommendations have a single purpose: to reduce substantially the impact that each of us has upon our environment.”

I don’t propose to examine in detail the areas of deep concern regarding environmental degradation. Anyone who has travelled to a remote place like Kachana for a land management conference will hopefully be well aware of them. The issues fall into perhaps five main categories, which can be summarized as:

1. Overpopulation
2. Global climate change
3. Environmental pollution
4. Loss of biodiversity and habitat
5. Loss of arable land.

All of these issues are interrelated, but at this workshop, which is primarily to look at Chris’s work on land restoration with Holistic Management, we will be focussing especially on biodiversity, habitat, sustainability, soils and productivity. I do, however, also want to bring in the issues of petrochemical and heavy metal pollution, because these have such an important bearing on human and animal health and on land degradation in other areas, particularly agricultural areas.

The reality in regard to the environmental consequences of our current practices probably lies between the two extremes of the doom-and-gloom greenies on the one hand and the free-market, “technology will fix everything” brigade on the other. I agree with Hawken when he says: “The underlying principles informing such cautionary predictions are largely correct, while the timing and nature of humankind’s destiny with earthly limits is still unknown. This means that the optimists who say we will be taken care of in the future will be correct for the time being, until the day they are wrong, when we will all be in big trouble. The environmentalists, warning of impending catastrophe, will usually be wrong with regard to specific predictions, but are right in principle. What does this tell us? It suggests we find a path of existence that honors both camps; that recognizes limits while using our innovative capacity to invent and reimagine our world to increase efficiency, decrease harm, improve our existence. In other words, we need to create an economy and way of relating to our material world that is not an either/or argument, but a means to create the best life for the greatest number of people precisely because we do not know the eventual outcome or impact of our current industrial practices. In other words, we need an economy based on more humility. What ecology offers is a way to examine all present economic and resource activities from a biological rather than a monetary point of view, including the impact that our present lifestyle will have on generations henceforth.”

Modern agriculture and the so-called “green revolution” have given us (at least in the developed world) affordable and abundant food. The question is, “At what cost?” This is an issue which I will explore in the next session. We will look at some alternative approaches to food production which are sustainable, rejuvenate the soil, protect the environment, restore rural communities and produce foods that are tastier and more health-promoting than the current products of industrial agriculture.

There are many parallels when one examines the ecological health of the environment, the causes of damage and their potential remedies, and, when one attempts to take a holistic approach to the health of human beings, looking at the causes of ill-health and working to correct those factors rather than merely taking a symptom-suppressing approach. Modern medicine professes to eliminate causes, but all too often I find that this is not the case, that there is no understanding of process and function being demonstrated, and I believe modern medicine fundamentally lacks a coherent philosophy of healing. It is interesting that so much of the doctor’s information comes from the drug manufacturers and medical technology companies, and many of these same companies are either directly involved in or have links into the petrochemical, biotechnology and agribusiness sectors.

In the final session that I will facilitate, we will examine the present medical system, its triumphs, what’s wrong with it and why it must change if the system is not to collapse. We will look at more holistic and cost-effective approaches to health care, a philosophy of health and healing as opposed to disease treatment, and what steps we can all take to enhance the health and longevity of ourselves and our families. What does this have to do with cows, dung beetles and erosion? Very little, but, hey, it’s my field of expertise!

Does anyone have any comments about the issues that I've raised in the last 15 minutes?

Some questions to ponder or discuss? -

Is there really a problem or it really just a bunch of greenies who want to spoil the party?

Are we beyond the point of no return – is the environment spiralling down and nothing we can do will stop that?

How realistic is it that change can happen fast enough to retrieve the situation?

Will we only act when disaster is staring us in the face?