

Graeme Sawyer

The Serventy Conservation Award was presented to Graeme by Suzanne Medway and Clive Williams. Graeme was actively involved in the establishment of the Australian Association for Environment Education (Northern Territory) in 1987 and has maintained an active involvement in it ever since. He is Vice-President of the Australian Association for Environmental Education (nationally), and President of the Northern Territory branch. Graeme was responsible for developing innovative programs such as a multimedia information system about wildlife and habitats, which became part of a display at Questacon, Canberra for six years. He is the co-founder of Frogwatch and has been heavily involved in community awareness and education campaigns about biodiversity, and about frogs, cane toads, and reptiles. He has also been instrumental in the formation of Toadbusters and of Reptilewatch. He has been the community representative on the National Cane Toad Taskforce. Graeme's work has led to several West Australian Government initiatives to stop the western movement of cane toads. Graeme was Lord Mayor of Darwin from 2008-2012.



Acceptance speech by Graeme Sawyer

It is a wonderful surprise and a fantastic honour to be awarded the Serventy Conservation Award for 2016. I have always had a great love of wildlife and the natural wonders of Australia so to win an award named after great conservationists, the Serventys, is especially rewarding for me. It is also very humbling, but energising experience. Much of the verve that fosters the community engagement and activity underlying this award comes from a number of people in my Community. Especially people like Ian Morris OAM who has been a mentor and partner in many of my endeavours and scientists like Dr Mike Lentic and Dr Sean Doody who are so willing to talk about issues, refine concepts and to share ideas. They are examples of the increasing numbers of scientists who understand that community has a vital role to play in moving the conservation effort forwards.

Education has always been a passion of mine and especially in relation to the natural systems in Australia. From indigenous projects in Arnhemland to school and community education work it is wonderfully rewarding to see young people respond to our natural world. Even more interesting is the way a mix of the natural world and certain technology-based educational approaches have led to the most powerful learning outcomes I ever saw in my years as an educational adviser.

People like Aldo Leopold, indigenous peoples, and many others, understood the power of the human/nature connection. Researchers today are slowly revealing the innate strength of this bond. As educators and mentors, we need to understand that bond and

nurture it. One item that resonates with me is Sir David Attenborough's statement that he has never met a child that is not fascinated by nature. It is worth thinking for a moment how we can stop people losing this fascination and grow it into their adulthood and the sustainable lifestyles and business practices we need.



Dr Clive Williams, Graeme Sawyer, Suzanne Medway

It is clear to me that we have some really big challenges in front of us as a society if we are going to protect biodiversity and achieve sustainability. Education must be front and centre in our strategy. Not simply formal education but community education as well. We need to build an informed, thinking community, not people with the mindless belief characterised by religious dogma or unregulated capitalism, but attitudes that lead to change and adaptation.

The community response to the FrogWatch project in the top-end and the Community Cane Toad Initiative has given me great hope that even though governments have collectively dropped the ball on biodiversity, there is still enormous energy and interest in the community. We need to use this to unwind the biodiversity decline that is becoming so dire and the government ineptitude that constrains funding and opportunity for people to engage.

It can truly be said of Graeme, once a teacher but always an educator.