



THE MULLOON INSTITUTE

"following nature for the benefit of future generations"

The Order of Australia Association

27th National Annual Conference

Panel Contribution

Tony Coote, AM

When I received my honour 25 years ago in 1988 I decided to dedicate my future to service for the benefit of future generations – our grandchildren's grandchildren.

As recognized achievers yourselves you will identify with a saying by the philosopher Goethe, 'every person above the ordinary has a certain mission that they are called to fill'. Mine has been to build a sustainable and profitable farming model set in a regenerated and rehydrated landscape, and with a 30 year vision, to be able to create climate change into an opportunity rather than a threat.

Our not-for-profit research and education foundation called The Mulloon Institute conducts this work in association with the ANU and the University of Sydney, using our farms as the 'living laboratory'. Our farms cannot be sold as I have bequeathed them to the Institute so the work can go on well beyond me. We are doing our best to live by the belief that 'we are what we do, not what we say', while also recognizing that if you think you have influence, try ordering someone else's dog around!

Michael has put the cards on the table so clearly showing that if we don't change direction we'll end up where we're headed as we leave a troubled legacy to future generations while we spend and spend their natural assets. Past civilizations have disappeared because they have done this, and yet we are fast tracking it.

I quote him; '80% of our essential wetlands drained, massive destruction of forests and woodlands, riparian zones have been destroyed, flood plains made inoperable, over use of chemicals and leaching into rivers, overgrazing etc...salinity...a football field per hour ... wasteful ... surface water at over 50% of rainfall, five times that of all our water in our rivers...70% of forests...that have a major influence on temperature, precipitation and soil fertility...denuded'.

Climate change, indicated by our fire and floods recently, and extreme weather around the globe, is not caused only by industrial emissions. For example, some recent findings show that one third and up to 40% of sea level rise is due to drained water tables from eroded river systems, and that even the planet's winds are created by the forests that are disappearing. These have little to do with industrial emissions.



THE MULLOON INSTITUTE

"following nature for the benefit of future generations"

The health challenges Michael mentioned costing over \$110 billion annually now, is nothing compared to what our children and grandchildren will inherit – and our economies will not be able to afford the health bill. It is now being predicted that our descendants will live shorter lives than we do.

This is all pretty serious stuff!

A 12 year old girl, Severn Suzuki, addressed the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, speaking on behalf of the worlds' children.

She said; 'Losing my future is not like losing an election...you are deciding what kind of world we will grow up in...at school, even in kindergarten, you teach us to behave in the world. You teach us not to fight with others, to work things out, to respect others, to clean up our mess, not to hurt other creatures, to share and not be greedy. Then why do you go out and do the things you tell us not to do?'

This leads me to my main point and one on which I would like to hear constructive dialogue today. It is the issue Michael raises about governance, at every level of society, but especially at the highest levels. Why do so many of those we put in positions of leadership 'go out and do the things they tell us not to do'?

Children can ask us;

- Do you have a 100 year, 50 year, 30 year vision for this nation?
- If you're making these commitments affecting us and our children now, what plans do you have?
- On the really key issues such as water, soil, food security etc, which are far too important for petty party politics and interstate bickering focused on the next election, why not get together in dialogue, rather than debate, looking for true resolution where all can win, rather than compromise where nobody does. As kids now and parents and mentors of the future we won't care which party was in power in 2013.
- What did you do when you got the warnings? You grown ups have now had the warnings. Get on with it.

I think we all have great confidence in these future generations. They will find the way ahead based on our great and unique Australian ethos. But we have so much to do to help and not hinder them.

'If not us, who? If not now, when?'

Thank you.