

► LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

The new breed of extension

BY LILI USHER CHANDLER



I am a 21 year old biologist and conservationist who supports forestry. A statement likely to have never been published. It only took me 3 months in my position as a forestry extension officer trainee to learn the potential of sustainable forestry. But before I started I was a lot more reticent about the industry. I am part of a pilot program run by the Queensland State Government and the Queensland Farmers Federation which involves placing six graduates with six relevant host organisations. I was placed with Private Forestry Service Queensland, the only host organisation which specialised in forestry. The program was designed to train new extension officers and to encourage landholders to reduce run-off into the ocean and improve water quality for reef resilience. I am a biologist, I am a social media user, I am a forestry trainee and, I am the new breed of extension. In this article I hope to provide my insight as each version of myself.

Tech Heads

Every night televisions, mobile phones and numerous other technological devices blare and whirl, feeding their user a new story, their evening meal of information overload. Although technology and social media has changed the game in many ways, how the information is conveyed remains to be the single most important aspect of story-telling. There is a time for relaying detailed facts and tutorials, but these techniques alone will not reach a wider audience nor will it instigate keen interest. There is extension for the engaged, the landholders, but there is also

extension for the community and general public. Extension in agriculture to the wider community is largely overlooked, even though the general public has a much wider pool of potential supporters and landholders. The rest of the community are major stakeholders too. Therefore a story is used to engage the unengaged. It's a spark, a spot-over (the kind you hope for and which doesn't cause intense panic).

What makes a good story? A story has relatable characters, imaginative imagery, carefully designed and clearly expressed wording, and a purpose. A short interesting video can capture all of these

features and it is the best way to engage an audience. If making a video is not an option, still imagery can be effective. For example, an infographic with relatable symbols, colourful shapes, audience-tailored text and an important topic can be used as well. If you do not have visual information you will not succeed in the modern world. If you then couple visual information with social media, you reach the next level. Social media is not imperative, but it acts as an accelerant. You may reach one person with a single post but that person is connected to maybe hundreds of potential supporters. The key to effective social media is frequent activity – interacting with your audience every day.

The Eco Trend

It is a new fad to buy anything with 'sustainable' or 'eco-friendly' stamped on the packaging. A whole new market has opened up to this new trend and I believe forestry can benefit. Unfortunately, in the past, forestry and the 'Green Movement' have not always got along. Lack of education is, as usual, the biggest obstacle, creating a large separation between conservation and timber production. The issue with conventional media is that its purpose is to sensationalise issues to create feedback, positive and negative. My suggested use of social media is to have a diplomatic and more purposeful approach. This also applies to communication with conservation groups. As a conservationist



► Aerial drone footage of skidder sorting logs at a log dump.



► Aerial drone footage of Forest Red Gum for Species ID Video Series.

and a forestry trainee, I support objectives on both sides and I believe compromise and consideration is vital. Forestry should want the support of the ‘Green Movement’ and its expanding market and the conservationists should want the support of primary producers and their already providing market.

With the near future predicting depletion of non-renewable fuels and consumer demand in sustainable resources rising, more and more people will be interested in investing in forestry, and conservationists will change their stance on forestry.

But the time to act is now. The world is at a tipping point and the timber industry needs to lead the way and push for educational extension that is targeted at the general public and supported by conservation groups.

For example, the environmental research community is compatible with forestry, and funding should be supplied to encourage honours, masters and PhD students to study forestry and how it benefits environmental values. This could provide support for establishing forestry as an effective tool for conservationists/biologists when managing environmental, economic and social goals.

Before I was accepted into this program I was solely a biologist. Now I am a proud supporter of conservation and forestry, and I believe the two should no longer be exclusive. Education in both disciplines

PFSO **HOW DO WE DETERMINE WHAT TREES TO KEEP?** **Native Forest Management Guidelines** **PFSO**

- Species type**
Certain species produce better quality timber
- Wood quality**
Straight logs (>6m), with limited scars, defects, bumps or fire and insect damage
- Habitat tree**
Hollowed, feed and/or nest trees provide habitats for wildlife
- Healthy, uniform, dense crown**
With limited dead branches, mistletoe and/or epicormic shoots
- Dominant tree**
Or at least co-dominant in canopy

For more information go to www.pfsq.net

► Basic infographic posted on social media to inform landholders on tree retention.

needs to be effectively disseminated to all stakeholders, whether they be foresters or the common peoples. To achieve this goal the potential of social media and the compromise required between industry, landholders and environmentalists needs to be realised.

Programs like the one I am involved in and the encouragement of other young people in their respective fields is one way to kick-

start progress. These young people, if mentored well, can become what extension officers like to call champions. These young champions, whether they be farmers or scientists, can use their social media and extension skills to create change and inspire other young people to do the same. I for one intend to be one of those champions. A champion for forestry and conservation.