

## Symposium Presentation No. 12

# *Building biolinks using market instruments*

**Paul Dettmann<sup>1</sup> and Jeroen van Veen<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Director, Cassinia Environmental <sup>2</sup> Manager, Bush Heritage's Nardoo Hills Reserves

*Summarised by Dr Peter Mitchell, Biolinks Alliance*

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### **Paul Dettmann**

Paul started a company called Greenhouse Balanced in 2000. The focus of Greenhouse Balanced was on carbon and what they thought were going to be world-changing ideas about the ways carbon and landscape change could be integrated. After a few years they realised they were in the landscape space rather than the carbon space, so changed their name to [Cassinia Environmental](#).

The big vision of Cassinia Environmental is to re-imagine a landscape where environmental, social and agricultural outcomes are integrated. If we had the early surveyors with us now, knowing what we know now, and thinking about the ways we would engage with landscapes, we would do it a lot differently. We would consider connecting fragmented landscapes, storing carbon, and protecting habitat and water quality.

Cassinia had the idea of developing and bringing people together for a big 100 year plan to reconnect our significant native vegetation, then slowly work away at this big vision - their "Biolinking Australia" plan. Paul describes himself as an entrepreneur. For most entrepreneurs, many of the things they try don't work, and this was one of the ideas that never got traction.

Governments tend to have a silo approach to natural resource management, with goals focussed around carbon or biodiversity or land protection or soil erosion or water quality or whatever. Environmental markets are a way of pulling together in the right way and have the potential to be an ongoing driver for positive change. It would be good if governments took a lead on this; there is a demand from corporate philanthropy and public relations to really do good things in the landscape. But they are getting mixed messages from governments, particularly around carbon over the past 15 years. The efforts of Governments and corporations could be integrated to make a really good environmental story.

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Cassinia had identified priority areas for biolinks, but they needed to develop some sort of credit fuelled by environmental markets and government endorsements. Re-creating biolinks is a really good low-hanging fruit for private investment. It should happen, but it has been really hard for Cassinia to get buy-in for the project. They would love to see public and private investment come together to look at their 100 year plan. But it took a long time to get around to addressing these issues and it will take us a long time to get where we all now realise we should be.

The idea has now been dropped and they are back to being Cassinia Environmental. Cassinia works in the carbon space, in offsets and in the biodiversity markets, and in re-imagining landscapes including conservation-focussed agriculture.

One of their early projects was a 180 ha site at Baynton with the Bendigo Bank as an early partner. Bare eroding hills were direct seeded and now have a good cover of vegetation. Among many other projects since then, Cassinia purchased a 1000 ha property near Wedderburn – the Koorong Ridge Conservation Estate James and Trudy Nelsson (see the previous talk) are among the 8-9 landholders are now managing the land in a beautiful cooperative way. Paul said it has been a real honour and pleasure to see the community develop on this land. They have removed all the fences and now have a 1000 ha no-fences and revegetated landscape with everyone working together. Part of the process for protecting the land was to put a Trust for Nature Covenant on it. And, after the Robust Greenhood (*Pterostylis valida*, previously considered extinct) was found on Bush Heritage land in the Nardoo Hills, the same species was found on this property - another bonus. The property has been “re-imagined”.

Overall, Cassinia Environmental has protected about 6000 ha and revegetated 4000 ha. Paul has also been involved in developing Africa’s first forestry project under the Kyoto Protocol treaty on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Jeroen van Veen**

Jeroen is the Manager of Bush Heritage Australia’s Nardoo Hills Reserves, but before that he worked at Cassinia Environmental. He began by saying that Paul Dettmann had downplayed his role in the landscape. Bush Heritage likes to work with trail blazers because they make things happen, and Paul is a trail blazer.

Bush Heritage is a national organisation and brings a national focus to central Victoria. Bush Heritage sees the grassy woodlands on the inland slopes of the Dividing Ranges in Victoria and NSW as a landscape that is severely under threat and under-represented in the national reserve system but still salvageable. So they looked in along the inland slopes – from the Grampians to the Queensland border – for those spots where they could do the best work quickly. Because, as Paul Foreman said in his introduction to the Symposium, we need to work with speed in the face of the biodiversity crisis.

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When we look at places like the northern part central Victoria and consider all the reasons for biolinks from previous speakers – from Veronica Doerr about the 200 km scale we need, Andrew Bennett on rivers as really good links, Paul Foreman’s concern for urgency, and Kylie Durrant bringing together opportunity and people – for all those reasons this country jumps out as a landscape where we can do really good work really fast.

The area encompasses St Arnaud, Dunolly, Inglewood and Wedderburn. James Nelsson in the previous talk touched on Wedderburn and Inglewood with the Kooyoora Connections project. Kooyoora State Park and nearby nature conservation reserves have some of the highest quality remnants of native vegetation in central Victoria. Wychitella NCR to the north is still pretty good, and further south is the brilliant Kara Kara National Park. And Bush Heritage also realised that the people who operate in this area were the people they could work with to make really quick changes.

So Bush Heritage started to buy land 13 years ago. They work closely with Trust for Nature to protect the various parcels of land and have several restoration projects in areas of up to 100ha and more.

The area also has some very active community groups such as Wedderburn and Kara Kara Conservation Management Networks that do lots of projects revegetating hundreds of hectares. The North Central Catchment Management Authority is another valued partner and they also have many revegetation projects. And there are some really interesting new private operators with big offset projects in the area. Paul Dettmann (Cassinia Environmental) is one of the new operators. There are now eight or nine private revegetation projects, all over 100ha, that are funded by commercial and not government money – the new world.

Put all this together and it starts to add up and re-connect the landscape. That is another reason why Bush Heritage is active in the area – to be a part of all this activity to connect and improve the health of the environment.

One example of the success of this work is the expansion of Southern Scrub-robins from restricted patches of dense mallee out into the dense revegetation sites around the area. This is a real outcome of all the work being done across the area.

More information on Bush Heritage’s Nardoo Hills properties can be viewed [here](#).