

Eugene Eades

How did you come to be involved in NRM?

I first became involved in NRM in 2006 through the Gondwanalink/ Greening Australia program based in Albany and working on country. My first responsibility was to bring Noongar elders together and facilitate their meetings with landholders and stakeholders. That process led to other projects including cultural assessments with elders on country. The elders also wanted to share with the youth and provide accredited training so that they could be "carers of the country" too.

Who or what inspires you?

It came to me one day when I was at the Nowanup meeting place, and the word was "boodja" (the land). I thought, "looking through my past today, I am looking for a brand new way. First I must learn to read and write and then I can stand up strong. My boodja is speaking to me, saying I am the way. I will teach you of the old people's ways and then your culture will be back to stay. Our boodja is speaking to you and saying I am the way."

What are your biggest achievements in NRM?

Bringing elders back onto country and getting them involved in their rightful way. Under the old policies, some of the old people were separated from their families, culture, heritage and language. I'm a strong believer in reconciliation and healing. There has to be a coming together with a focus on leadership and



mentoring. That's why the bush university at Many Peaks was established in 2008. We have around 3,000 people at a minimum visit Nowanup every year. The meeting place is about empowering people to be a part of the reconciliation. Nowanup is a healing place and has mubarrin (special power).

What do you hope to achieve in the next five years?

I would never have got involved in NRM if I wasn't working towards empowering Noongar people to become involved in sustainable land and water management, and to help them develop partnerships to achieve this. I also want to develop pathways for our younger generation to become land managers, custodians, rangers, guides and the like. We need to be honest about the state of affairs of the country because it's more unwell than we realise. When I walk the path where the snake has crawled and see damaged land and chemicals in the waterways, and find artefacts of the first Noongar caretakers at the same time, it brings a lump to my throat.

What are the biggest challenges facing the South Coast environment and how can these be met?

I think the biggest challenges are the use of chemicals in agriculture, dieback, and salinity. Since clearing those million acres back in the 1950s, the salinity issues we've got now are massive and many different species of animal life have been seriously affected. We need to develop a specific kind of program so we can heal our land and heal ourselves along the way. We must learn from the past and not make the same mistakes again.

Eugene is a descendant of the Banjelungup clan, from the Stirlings to Ravensthorpe area.