

Down to earth



WENDY Craik is a conservationist and optimist. She is also an enthusiast, which explains her numerous part-time jobs beyond being the managing director of Earth Sanctuaries Ltd.

"I get bored easily – I just enjoy juggling," Dr Craik, executive officer of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority from 1992 to 1995 and the National Farmers Federation from 1995 to 2000 said in Townsville on Wednesday.

Dr Craik, 51, was in Townsville for the Australian Water Association's *Sustaining Our Aquatic Environments* conference, at Jupiters Hotel and Casino.

Chairwoman of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority since last year, she told the conference she believed Australia's northern waters could sustain "significant national industries".

Later, she told the *Bulletin* her conservationism, leading directly to her taking the helm of Earth Sanctuaries Ltd at a perilous stage of its brief life, had begun while counting fish on the Great Barrier Reef.

She arrived in Townsville in 1978 after winning a university medal for zoology at the Australian National University and studying the migratory habits of fish for her doctorate in Canada.

She joined the Greater Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority as a research assistant, helping to survey coral trout, then became a marine park planning manager.

"I really enjoyed the management stuff," she said.

"I decided there were many people in the world better at research than me and moved into planning and organisation."

She became director of research and monitoring in 1984, director of planning and management in 1990 and executive director in 1992.

Along the way she also became a practical conservationist, an advocate of sustainable fisheries, basically to ensure food for the world now and in the future.

She carried this philosophy through her five years with the

Wendy Craik describes herself as a practical conservationist and believes the challenge for a sustainable future is to get the private sector involved. IAN FRAZER reports

National Farmers Federation in Canberra and into her role as chief executive of Earth Sanctuaries Ltd, Australia's first and only public company dedicated to saving Australian wildlife.

Three weeks ago she succeeded founder Dr John Wamsley as managing director, with the challenge of turning around a \$13.6 million loss last financial year (see separate story).

"The challenge is to get the private sector involved in conservation," she said.

"The government does not have enough money to do it all."

Farmers were leading the way, with 30 per cent in Landcare groups and many trying to make their operations more sustainable.

"At the end of the day it will be a

matter of balancing production and environmental sustainability," she said.

Dr Craik told the conference on Wednesday she welcomed ecological risk assessments of fisheries being carried out by the Commonwealth, covering impact on bycatch and protected species.

Different so-called "wild-harvest" fisheries were moving at very different rates in cutting unwanted catch and assessing the impact of their gear on the targeted and other species.

For example, many of the prawn fisheries in northern Australia had introduced turtle excluders and bycatch reduction devices.

"Closures of habitat and juvenile breeding grounds are increasingly on the agenda with all

known seagrass beds in the Gulf ... being closed to operators in the Northern Prawn Fishery," she said.

"Further protection for these areas is important and will be assessed by the Commonwealth.

"The issues being faced by the fisheries sector are a microcosm of the issues being faced by all sectors – security of success and sustainability of the marine environment.

"The key challenge for the nation is how to manage development across a number of industries while ensuring sustainability."

She also discussed environmental risks posed by the 12,000 ships which carry 400 million

tonnes of freight annually to Australia from 650 overseas ports.

She welcomed last year's federal review of ship safety and pollution prevention measures for shipping in Torres Strait and inside the Great Barrier Reef.

Urgent action was needed to stop foreign vessels from discharging ballast water along the coastline, with more than 200 introduced marine species detected and a new one accidentally introduced every 20 weeks.

"Clearly this is a critical national and international technological and scientific issue," she said.

Commenting on tourism, said to be worth \$1 billion per annum on the Great Barrier Reef, she said visitor numbers had been static since the mid-1990s.

"The challenge in the future will be to maintain and enhance visitor numbers and experiences without compromising the sustainability of the resource," she said.

Dr Craik, who moved to Adelaide last November when she became chief executive officer of Earth Sanctuaries Ltd, said she hoped to return to Queensland permanently some day, but probably not to Townsville.

"I miss the lifestyle, the weather, the sun. We had so much rain (in Adelaide) this winter," she said.

"I miss the people, miss the coast."

She said The Strand looked fabulous, but somewhere in southern Queensland would be more central for her travels.

At present these include her duties as a board member of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, in Townsville, and also on the board of the Co-Operative Research Centre for Coastal Resources in Brisbane.

She said living in the North after a childhood in Canberra had helped her understand regional exasperation with remote bureaucrats.

But she did not see herself as remote, or as a bureaucrat – more a busy manager with a good personal assistant.

Wildlife reserve plan for the North

EARTH Sanctuaries Ltd plans to open new wildlife reserves along the east coast, and perhaps the North, says managing director Wendy Craik.

"Ultimately we'd like to have one in North Queensland," Dr Craik said in Townsville on Wednesday.

The world's only listed conservation company, founded by native fauna advocate Dr John Wamsley, Earth Sanctuaries has established 10 reserves on

92,000ha around Australia, with 15 threatened species under care.

The company said in September that it would sell two of its South Australian sanctuaries after announcing a \$13.7 million loss.

Dr Craik said after her appointment three weeks ago that the company would in future build reserves close to large population areas to draw more visitors.

Shares in the company, issued at \$2.50 last year, were quoted at 43c on Thursday.

In Townsville this week, Dr Craik said restoring the company's fortunes was a challenge.

"The important thing is that the basic conservation model is sound.

"It's now a case of building the commercial model on top of the conservation model," she said