

SAVE PEDDER FOR OUR GENERATION
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OUR world is precariously sitting on the edge of ecological collapse. We may tread lightly into 2021, departing a year plagued with the extreme consequences of a zoonotic disease becoming a global pandemic, but this forthcoming decade is not one for quiet inaction. We have entered the critical 10 year window of opportunity to halt the climate and biodiversity crisis. 2021 to 2030 is the United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, a single decade to stop environmental destruction and over-extraction of natural resources and initiate repair by restoring and rewilding degraded land and marine environs into functioning ecosystems, the integral pillar supporting our life on earth.

“To restore stability to our planet, therefore, we must restore its biodiversity, the very thing we have removed. It is the only way out of this crisis that we ourselves have created. We must rewild the world!” declared sir David Attenborough last year. But in thinking globally we must first act locally.

Tasmania has an opportunity to be a global leader in ecological restoration by breathing life back into the original Lake Pedder. The unique glacial outwash lake, one of the world’s natural wonders up there with Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef, was flooded in 1972 to create a hydro storage impoundment. The outcry sparked a global political movement with the world’s first Green party, the United Tasmania Group formed to try to save it.

While calls to restore Pedder have persevered since the controversial flooding, the latest campaign is significantly different due to the proactive involvement of a younger generation who have only ever known Lake Pedder as an imposing geographical oddity of an inland sea that is the Huon-Serpentine impoundment. Despite not being old enough to have ever visited the original Lake Pedder or walked its iconic pink quartzite beach, we call for its return. This campaign goes far beyond nostalgic arguments based on scenic beauty. Pedder not only has an unquantifiable ecological value, it has the potential to be a flagship project for the United Nations Decade of Restoration.

Underpinning the campaign are essential biodiversity credentials which would increase the ecological values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, as highlighted in Dr Anita Wild’s 2020 Ecological Scoping Study.

Three threatened flora species, the Pedder Bristlewort and Shortleaf Milligania, both endemic to the region and the Gondwana relic Dune Buttercup, would have their critical habitat increased, as would the local platypus population, the species themselves facing decline nationally as their habitat is eroded by over-extraction of water, urban sprawl and new dams.

The Serpentine Valley, often forgotten next to the scenic gem of Pedder, was once composed of flat-lying moorlands and wetlands, one of the globe’s most threatened ecosystems and a natural carbon store, one of the most powerful organic solutions in mitigating global warming. Rehabilitating the Serpentine would contribute to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal of restoring 20 per cent of these freshwater ecosystems by 2050.

Removing, or de-watering the dams and re-establishing the natural watercourse of the Huon and Serpentine rivers would bring health benefits to the two systems and the ocean beyond,

through sediment flow and nutrient transport. Would it be possible that the critically endangered Pedder Galaxias could once again swim the Serpentine?

Dam removal is a new innovative concept for Australia, but across the US, dam deconstruction has upscaled rapidly over the past decades with a record 90 dams removed in 2019 alone. As the structures reach their 50-year average life expectancy maintenance costs outweigh the benefits, and future liability for owners and downstream communities becomes too great. The Huon, Edgar and Serpentine dams reach their 50-year milestone in 2022.

The inferno and pandemic which consumed 2020 were examples of the dire consequences of our environmental negligence. Our perceived norm is unsustainable. We must deviate from business as usual with transformation impetus if we are to make meaningful improvement to our natural world. Luckily nature's resilience is equal to our own amid disaster, but it too requires complete commitment, government support and adequate funding.

Tasmania can reap the rewards of investing in restoration and rewilding economically with the creation of meaningful long term employment opportunities, through the growing regenerative tourism industry and associated new business opportunities, as well as socially with the intrinsic interface between ecological wellbeing and community welfare outlined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Large scale, enterprising regenerative projects are exactly what it is going to take to halt the climate crisis and restore biodiversity. This in turn will restore health to our earth and ourselves, preventing further pandemics and ensuring future generations inherit a liveable planet. At 15,000ha, restoring Pedder would be the largest environmental restoration project Tasmania has done and one of the biggest in the world. It would be an ambitious enough project to be a decisive pivotal initiative which sparks local and global action toward reconnecting the complex ecological chain which will repair our earth.

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