



# Australia's future lifestyle at risk

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Today's Australians may be inflicting huge costs on future generations, says a senior CSIRO scientist.

"Not only are we incurring costs for our children but we are missing out on opportunities for a better lifestyle, because we don't know about or ignore values and services coming from nature," says Dr Steve Cork of CSIRO Wildlife and Ecology,

"Biodiversity has real value for humans," says Dr Cork, speaking at the second of *Biodiversity: the Big Picture* seminar series in Canberra. "But we don't take the value and the benefits enough into account when managing natural resources."

According to Dr Cork, it is biodiversity in natural ecosystems that ultimately maintains human life.

"It is the processes called 'ecosystems services' that are the real basis for our economic and social systems," Dr Cork says.

'Ecosystem services' include the provision of clean air and water, natural fertilization and nutrient cycling in soils, pollination, pest control, genetic resources, food, mitigation of climate, and cultural, aesthetic and social benefits.

"Australia's natural resource accounting systems are improving rapidly, but we still fail to account for many of the values of biodiversity, and the increasingly large economic costs of their repair or replacement," says Dr Cork.

"This is placing us at risk of losing the very things that make life not only enjoyable, but possible," says Dr Cork.

These costs include increased food and health costs, increased use of fertilizers, pesticides and other agricultural chemicals, water treatment, and repairs to buildings and equipment damaged by ecosystems that are not working properly.

"One reason that our accounting systems fall short is that many of biodiversity's values do not pass directly through markets. We don't get economic signals when these values are degrading until we find there is a huge cost to fix or replace them. Some policies and practices even make things worse.

"But perhaps the biggest reason is that policy makers, managers and Australians generally do not have enough information about what there is to value about biodiversity," says Dr Cork.

Dr Cork says potential solutions for the problem involve:

- better education of all sectors of Australian society, based on knowledge about the role of biodiversity in ecosystems,
- innovative approaches to creating markets for biodiversity's values, and
- development of flexible, responsive and adaptive institutions.

"The problems are large, but so are the opportunities. The solutions are not economic, scientific, policy, industry, or community ones alone. Lasting solutions will only come from all of these groups working together", he says.

With funding from the Myer Foundation as part of the Sidney Myer Centenary Celebration 1899-1999; CSIRO, Environment Australia, the National Farmer's Federation, the Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation and a range of other individuals

and institutions are collaborating in a major new project to assess the values coming from nature in a range of ecosystems around Australia.

***More information from:***

***Steve Cork 02 6242 1731***

***Katrina Nitschke 02 6246 5323***

***0417 240 261***

***Monica van Wensveen 02 6242 1651***