



From pickle to political profit



**Political columnist
MICHAEL MOORE heads
north and into the bush**

**to see the proceeds of politics at
work. And he's impressed.**

IT was not the first financial bind for Senator Bob Brown when the Greens Leader was recently ordered by the Courts to pay \$240,000 to Forestry Tasmania. He said he could not afford to pay – opening the possibility of bankruptcy and the consequential loss of his seat in Parliament.

In early June, within a few days of this announcement, Australian entrepreneur Dick Smith promised to bail him out and was followed by more than 1000 donors with pledges that covered Brown's legal bill. From a very awkward pickle Brown reaped the benefit of strong political support.

On a previous occasion in 1990, Brown used his Goldman Environmental Prize money to personally pay a deposit of \$50,000 to purchase two forested properties in Tasmania adjoining the Wilderness World Heritage Site rather than have it logged for wood chips. On that occasion, others also came to support him – giving birth to Bush Heritage Australia. In both cases his clear motivation to protect the environment resulted in strong positive outcomes for the environment and for his own agenda.

In the arid and desert areas of SA there are some interesting examples of how Bush Heritage Australia and similar organisations are working to restore bio-diversity to badly denuded pastoral leases.

Bush Heritage Australia recently purchased Boolcoomatta. It is one of about two dozen of their properties. I was invited to visit and to observe efforts being made to rehabilitate a property that until 2006 was still being used as pastoral land for the production of wool and meat. The conservation challenges are great.

For anyone who has driven along the Barrier Highway from Adelaide to Broken Hill, the overwhelming impression is of wide, stony plains, a few kangaroos and emus and endless arid land with some covering of saltbush. Drought, over grazing and the invasion of foxes, goats and rabbits has damaged the area. Brown's legacy means that Bush Heritage Australia with ongoing support from both large and small private, public and commercial sources is one organisation that is in a position to intervene to provide

protection even at the eleventh hour.

Boolcoomatta is a vast property of 63,000ha adjacent to the Bimbowrie National Park. The process of rehabilitation has started by removing the introduced pastoral animals and the next stage to protect flora and fauna will focus on controlling the pest animals.

With recent rains there is evidence that the range of native flora is already beginning to significantly increase. Peter Ashton, a former National Parks ranger, leads the on-the-ground team that comprises him and wife Emma, who work with a handful of carefully selected volunteers. Amongst the myriad of other tasks they have been using a systematic GPS-based approach to map rabbit warrens so that eradication efforts can be effectively evaluated.

There is some government funding for very specific projects but Bush Heritage Australia is largely supported by donations from the public.

North of Lake Eyre in the Simpson Desert another similar organisation, Australian Wildlife Conservancy has purchased Kalamurina, a property of more than 650,000ha with parallel aims to those at Boolcoomatta. Australian Wildlife Conservancy, which was founded by the current chairman Mark Copley, also owns more than 20 conservation properties. The Kalamurina property, managed by Tess and Mark McLaren provides a link between National Parks now providing a conservation area across two States covering more than seven million hectares. Without stock, this property is also starting its own carefully guided rehabilitation. There is evidence of an increase in local native fauna and the bird life that is part of the water flows is abundant.

Cynical though we may all be about political motivation from time to time, it is refreshing to see these outcomes that have resulted from altruistic personal drive and commitment.

For further information visit www.bushheritage.org.au and www.australianwildlife.org

Michael Moore is a former independent member of the ACT Legislative Assembly and minister for health.