

# CHRIS PHILLIPS

By Dr Andrew Harper

Since he explored forests, streams and coastlines as a child in Victoria, Chris has always felt a deep connection to the environment. His father had set a powerful example, caring for injured birds in the bush. Today, Chris and Diana Phillips live in a small town out of Bunbury WA, where they are energetic participants in the community and enjoy their natural environment.

By 1989, chemical-injured people had sought Chris's advice on their legal rights. He pursued many personal injury claims, gave speeches, and wrote and published a paper to educate lawyers and the public about chemical injuries. It was with notable courage and steadfastness against intimidating opposition that he acted for the AMWU, and laid the groundwork for the eventually successful settlement of claims by workers against Alcoa for chemical injury. In the words of one Alcoa employee:

"Chris has a real passion for defending the environment and people who have difficulty living in chemically charged artificial environments. He has a genuine concern for people's health and wellbeing that goes beyond his professional duties.

Chris championed the cause for people with chemical sensitivities before these causes were recognised."

Chris helped to promote the Australian Chemical Trauma Alliance which, among other objectives, aims to help the chemically injured and prevent chemical injury. In 1995 (the same year he joined APLA), Chris, Diana and three others founded a charitable environmental reform organisation, Pristine Ecoscene Ltd; Chris has been chairman of directors since its inception.

The aim of the organisation is to promote the return of the Australian environment to a pristine condition, to promote biodiversity and to prevent avoidable environmental illness.

Pristine Ecoscene promotes environmental education at all levels. In partnership with a local university and the Australian Association of Environmental Education, the organisation is promoting use of sustainable energy and conservation of energy in a number of local schools. In addition, it promotes sustainable farming practices (organic, anti-salinity, GM-free); environmentally responsible urban transport options (walk, ride, rail); learning from traditional owners of the land; and environmental industrial standards and auditing. Chris has also actively promoted the idea of a



Bill of Rights which preserves biodiversity as a first priority and gives private individuals the legal basis to sue and protect the environment. He promotes recycling, dramatic reduction in landfill of wastes, and extending the obligation of manufacturers to take responsibility for their own waste.

Chris's approach to environmental law has been aptly put by an industrial colleague:

"He always pursues the truth of the situation. Chris emphasises that it is important to 'tell it as it is' and make everything transparent, as this is the only path to success.

Chris wants an open playing field and feels that the truth is always the best strategy."

Those of us who have the privilege of knowing Chris are aware of the keen and focused attention he gives everyone. His unassuming manner, modesty and his spirituality are deep-seated. He loves to discuss and hear your side of things. He is compassionate and consistent – he is the same person at work as on weekends. His respect for nature and humanity is reflected in his life with his friends and community, as well as in his professional contribution to law and the environment. Chris embraces the wholeness of nature. ■

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