

*How did you come to be involved in NRM?*

I grew up in a cultural environment under my grandfather's influence. I learnt a lot about the land and its stories over the Banjelungup (traditional name of Bremer Bay). Having that emotional connection to the land is really important for our wellbeing.

In 2000, I saw an advert for an Indigenous NRM Facilitator role with SCRIPT (now South Coast NRM) and thought 'wow'. I worked to employ Aboriginal people in the planning processes and to maintain the engagement in a meaningful way. The protection of the environment and natural resources is a responsibility for everybody. We all have a duty of care and South Coast NRM is really critical to that.

*What are your biggest achievements in NRM?*

I am proud of our achievements in developing the original Southern Prospects strategy looking at the environmental, economic, as well as cultural aspects of NRM. We put a lot of historical context into the background paper and a whole lot of needs were built into it for the future.

After South Coast NRM, I was approached to set up the Southern Agricultural Indigenous Landholder Service (SAILS) within the Department of Agriculture and Food. That was the brainchild of four years of SCRIPT planning and was aimed at improving the long term profitability of indigenous owned estates. I now support the management of up to 16 land estates in the South Coast region which will grow to 20 in the next two years.

*Who or what inspires you?*

I look back to the past and in WA there have always been strong links between Aboriginals and agriculture. Aboriginals were contractors and

wage earners in the early 1900s but some of these experiences weren't so good. Cultural heritage played a part in some of those failures - many felt pressure not to live like the white fella. But the traditional elders wanted a better life for their families and that gives me a lot of motivation. I try to understand why things failed and how I can change that at a policy and a planning level today.

*What do you hope to achieve in the next five years?*

I want to build upon those early successes. I'd like to still support planning processes with South Coast NRM and continue my commitments to DAFWA. We want to keep pace with the growth and demand and grow the business. The key to successful planning is consultation and bringing science and Aboriginal knowledge together through common goals.

*What are the biggest challenges facing the South Coast environment and how can these be met?*

We need to understand that the impact of settlement here over the last 200 years has been profound. The removal of our ancestors from their families has had an enormous impact on subsequent generations. We've lost a lot of the cultural landscape because beliefs, customs, laws and traditions have been eroded and we've been left with gaps in knowledge. The challenge is to bring together the majority of Noongars who want to help piece it together. I think that's happening.

We've got away from sharing and caring and this is an unfortunate characteristic of contemporary Aboriginal life. I think of it as an "emotional illness", a lack of belonging and nurturing. We need to assimilate and to strive for accountability and open processes. Our emotional wellbeing will increase when we have a voice, when we have shared ownership, and shared responsibility. Grandfather said "you have to listen to the place, it will guide you." I get it now.

*Kelly is based in Albany and has traditional links to Banjelungup (Bremer Bay). He is a descendant of the Wudjari people.*

