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ABSTRACT

What might 'Truth-telling' look like, for the environment profession?

This paper aims to start a conversation about Indigenous knowledge, environmental management and colonisation. Injustices and misunderstandings, whether inadvertent or intentional, firstly need to be acknowledged, before they can be addressed. Truth-telling for our profession might include such topics as:

- Acknowledging the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly in relation to land ownership, Indigenous knowledge systems and traditional environmental management practices.
- Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) - how much of our scientific knowledge of the Australian environment has been built on Indigenous Knowledge, and how should we acknowledge this?
- The lasting impacts of dispossession - how much has Australia's environment been damaged because Traditional Owners had been dispossessed from their lands and waters, which they had been responsible for managing for 65K + years?
- Consultation, meaningful participation and 'Free Prior and Informed Consent' –have market-driven timeframes disrespected Indigenous decision-making processes ?
- Environmental management obligations inherent in 'Caring for Country' - can we change from an extractive and reactive paradigm, responding to threats and damage, to a more pro-active and sustainable ethic, learning from Indigenous 'Caring for Country' obligations?

Other topics will be included as contributions and debate-starters from EIANZ's Indigenous Engagement Working Group (IEWG) in the coming months prior to the Conference.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. It is time for EIANZ to lead the environment profession (and associated scientists and industry) in defining and exploring 'Truth-Telling' in relation to environmental management in Australia
2. We firstly need to scope out what it means ... what topics of relevance to environmental management might it include?
3. Injustices and misunderstandings need to be acknowledged, before we can start to address them

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Dr Alan Chenoweth

Dr Alan Chenoweth CEnvP RegLA HLMEIANZ FAILA FAIH FPLA is a Brisbane-based landscape architect and environmental planner with more than 40 years experience in consultancy, teaching, and public sector roles, acts as expert witness in visual assessment and vegetation ecology, and has a PhD in professional ethics. He has been president or chair of four professional institutes and associations including Australian Institute of Horticulture (AIH) and Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA), and is currently President of Friends of Parks Qld. Alan chairs the EIANZ Fellow and Honorary Member Review Committee and co-chairs the Indigenous Engagement Working Group (IEWG). He is also a member of the Indigenous Peoples Section of the International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA), and in that capacity attended meetings in Bologna in May 2025 which resolved to update IAIA's Best Practice Principles on Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Knowledge.

Liz Clarke

Liz Clarke, Principal Environmental Consultant, Senversa Liz is a Gunggari Aboriginal woman based in Meanjin (Brisbane), Queensland. Liz has over 16 years of professional experience in environmental regulation, impact assessment and compliance. Liz is a CEnvP, member of EIANZ's Indigenous Engagement Working Group, and a member of the EIANZ 2025 Conference Technical Committee. Liz is passionate about truth-telling, including educating others through her lived experiences. Liz is also deeply invested in advocating for the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples.