



Environment Institute
of Australia and
New Zealand Inc.

IN MEMORIAM | EIANZ MEMBER TRIBUTE

Emeritus Professor Ian Spellerberg HFEIANZ

Nature Conservation Scholar | Environmental Profession Builder | EIANZ Honorary Fellow

Ian Spellerberg passed away peacefully on a Saturday morning, surrounded by family. The environmental profession in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond has lost one of its most consequential figures – not simply a distinguished scholar, but a person who helped construct the very foundations on which that profession now stands.

Not long before his passing, Ian was able to attend Lincoln University's 50th anniversary of graduating resource and environmental managers – and to be present for a special tribute delivered by Roy Montgomery at the commencement of the Parliamentary Commissioner's State of the Nation's Environment speech. It was a fitting occasion for a fitting recognition.

As Lincoln University Dean Professor Emma Stewart reflected: “We have lost one of the Faculty's founding scholars. Kua hinga te tōtara o Te Waonui a Tāne” – a tōtara has fallen in the great forest of Tāne.

The Profession Builder

Some people participate in a profession. Ian Spellerberg helped create one. In the early days of environmental practice in New Zealand, he looked at what was emerging under the Resource Management Act and saw a risk – without enforced professional standards, the sector would face a race to the bottom. Rather than accept that, he acted.

Ian was a founding member of what would become EIANZ. Alongside Peter Skelton and Ton Bührs, he convened early meetings at Lincoln University that set the Institute's founding logic in motion. He then undertook widespread consultation throughout New Zealand, a Steering Committee was formed in 2001, and in January 2003 the New Zealand Chapter of EIANZ was formally established – a milestone for the environment profession in this country.

Ian's contribution to EIANZ did not stop at founding. He served on the inaugural New Zealand Executive Committee, became Vice President (New Zealand),

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established the first CEnvP review committee in New Zealand, and served on the inaugural CEnvP Committee. He reactivated the Students and Young Professionals Standing Committee. In 2010, EIANZ awarded him an Honorary Fellowship – recognising his outstanding contribution to the environment profession, and placing him among only nine people to receive this distinction to date.

The Scholar

Ian's academic career was both distinguished and genuinely international. He completed his BSc and MSc at Canterbury University before a PhD in Conservation Biology at La Trobe University in Melbourne, followed by a Humboldt Fellowship in Germany. His career in England began in 1972 as Lecturer in Biology at Southampton University, where he later became Director of Environmental Sciences – a role he held until arriving in New Zealand in 1994. He brought all of it back: rigorous science in the service of practical environmental management.

At Lincoln he served as Director of the Centre for Resource Management from 1993, became Professor of Nature Conservation in 1994, and directed the Isaac Centre for Nature Conservation from 2002 to 2012. He co-established joint international master's programmes with Göttingen University in Germany and BOKU University in Austria. His publishing record spanned 20 works including multiple volumes of the Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability.

His standing beyond New Zealand was reflected in fellowships of the Linnean Society and WWF (UK), membership of the IUCN Ecosystems Commission, the 2008 Science Communicator Award from the New Zealand Association of Scientists, and the Lincoln University Global Science Medal.

The Person

Those who worked with Ian will remember a man who embodied his values completely. He had calculated his personal carbon footprint – reportedly three acres. He grew his own food. He attended professional development sessions for Consents Planners not because he had to, but because he was genuinely always learning. He was immaculate in his presentation and exacting in his thinking.

His former students recall the famous appointment system – knock on his door unannounced and the answer was always “do you have an appointment?” Book one, and you would wait two weeks. But when that appointment came, you had his complete, undivided attention. For those who could keep up with

his thinking, the intellectual challenge was, as one colleague put it, “exhausting, but very rewarding.”

[His legacy lives forward.](#)

The professional body Ian helped build now serves environmental practitioners across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Every standard upheld, every CEnvP credential awarded, every young professional who finds a community in EIANZ – these are the compounding returns on what Ian started, and sustained, over decades of quiet, determined work.

In true Ian form, he asked for no funeral. Instead, he wanted a tree planted.

If we each did that, it would be beautifully fitting.

EIANZ invites members to share their memories of Ian. Please forward any messages to Tracey.Shields@lincoln.ac.nz to be included in a tribute book at Lincoln University.

