

ACF'S ENERGETIC CRUSADER

BY TOLY SAWENKO

Anyone who has seen a performance by rock band Midnight Oil will know that live wire lead singer Peter Garrett is someone who does not stand still. Off stage it's just the same. Appointed as the new president of the Australian Conservation Foundation in June this year, Peter hit the ground running and has not stopped since. Along with a constant round of media engagements and his first ACF council meeting, Peter is currently undertaking a national three month tour of universities, colleges and secondary schools to spread the conservation message.

Peter believes his most important role as president will be "to communicate to the Australian community the ACF's policies and future goals. I want to communicate these things to young people, who I have had a relationship with over the years through Midnight Oil, and also to other groups, not just the converted. I want to reach people who maybe haven't taken conservation as seriously as I think it needs to be taken", he said.

Peter's outstanding credentials as a communicator, particularly with the young, make him an appealing, if somewhat daring, choice for the ACF presidency. Foundation director, Phillip Toyne, said that, because of the prominence now being given to environmental issues, the ACF needs a president with vigor and skill. "We couldn't think of anyone who had the capacity to do it better than Peter", he said.

Married with two children, the thirty-six year old Garrett is also a qualified lawyer and lives in Sydney. Midnight Oil, the band for whom he is lead singer, were formed in the late 1970s. The 'Oils', as they are popularly known, have recorded numerous albums and achieved international success with recent tours of the US, UK and the USSR. Their music is characterised by a concern for the environment, indigenous peoples and youth issues.

Peter is the youngest ever ACF president – and the "ragiest", as he remarked with a laugh at his first press conference. Past presidents include judges, a chief justice, a Queen's Counsel, a distinguished physicist and state governor and none other than the Duke of Edinburgh. Peter feels honoured to follow in such a fine tradition. In particular he has paid tribute to the outstanding work of his prede-



□ Photo by Janusz Molinski

"Life's too short not to get involved".

New ACF President, Peter Garrett

cessor, Hal Wooten QC, who resigned last year to become a Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Peter is not new to the ACF. For the past two years he and fellow Midnight Oil band members have helped to fund the Foundation's campaign project on genetic engineering.

Peter has long been an outspoken critic of Australian nuclear policies. He was a prominent member of the Nuclear Disarmament Party and came close to winning a Senate seat in the 1984 Federal election.

He sees the nuclear issue as the "number one environmental issue" but recognises that in terms of regional geography, Australia's major environmental problem is degradation of our land and soils.

"This problem has come about from a variety of things, including extraordinary

loss of tree cover and land use policies, and of course it ties into national and global problems such as ozone depletion and the greenhouse effect."

Peter acknowledges that the magnitude of our global environmental problems may make some people feel powerless. But he remains optimistic and positive about what can be done.

"The first thing that an individual can do is to realise that just as the problems we face have been largely created by actions of people so too can they be solved by people."

"We can't rely on the experts. It is only by ordinary people actively doing things which head in the right direction that worthwhile change will come about. That is why joining a conservation organisation like the ACF is important."

So how does Peter Garrett feel, now that our politicians are paying more attention to environmental issues?

"Nothing delights the conservation movement more than to see the Australian Prime Minister campaigning seriously for a world park in Antarctica. So while I would say that yes, they are responding, the Government still has a long way to go."

Peter is excited by the success of the Green candidates in Tasmania, where they now hold the balance of power. He has no doubts that they will be able to influence government policy and still maintain their integrity.

"They will maintain their integrity because they are people of integrity. Naturally, in the process of politics they will find themselves in situations where they have to trade, but they won't sacrifice those things which they have fought so long and hard for."

Somehow in the midst of his work as ACF president, Peter still manages to find time for his music. Midnight Oil are currently working on a new album due for release soon, which, understandably, will have a strong environmental flavour.

Acknowledging the bold move ACF has made in appointing him, Peter looks forward to the challenges ahead. "I have a lot of energy... I like getting stuck into struggles... I hope I can perform the job with dignity and intelligence." 🌱

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