



SAVE THE BILBY FUND



Addendum to Save the Bilby Fund's Submission – Engaging with Australia's youth

All forms of governments state intergenerational equity as a moral and ethical responsibility. I strongly believe that in future years the children that are now attending schools across Australia are the people who will have the job try to solve the environmental mess we all have created.

Curriculum studies and the integration of wildlife interpretation in schools is still, in my view, an important and missing part of the holistic approach required for threatened species recovery. In 1982 when I first joined Qld National Parks and Wildlife Service we had 'interpretation' officers who would travel to schools sometimes with an animal and talk to children about what they shared their beautiful country with, and how they can play a major role in helping keep them with us for future generations to see and enjoy. This sort of role is no longer funded by cash pressed government agencies and non-government agencies like mine struggle to fund the activity in the absence of this support.

One of the major projects of STBF is to visit as many schools as our small workforce will allow and take a live bilby for the students to see and enjoy. The fund has also developed a crossword competition using Australian endangered Australian animals. This project has run for the last six years and is an educational opportunity designed to help students learn more about Australia's endangered species. The "Face The Challenge" crossword competition, which was mailed to almost ten thousand schools accross Australia on 16th July 2012, also challenges students to refine their research skills. To see the activities involved, please visit: www.savethebilbyfund.org and click on the competition link from the homepage. Feedback about the competition from schools has been very positive and teachers and students alike feel proud that they are helping save the iconic bilby as well as learn about our unique species. This is just one example of the type of activity which could be included in the curriculum nationally to give students a greater insight into Australia's threatened species.

Activities that involve school children interacting with and learning about Australian fauna can also be carried out using technology such as smart phone applications, video conferencing and interactive web interfaces. Camera technologies are advancing and becoming cheaper all the time, and it is now possible to have interactive live footage of threatened fauna going about its 'day to day' business. This could be a compellingly effective tool as children are encouraged to engage with a 'reality TV' version of the much-loved wildlife documentary.

There is also an ongoing need to have inspiration speakers attend school so that children get a window into what is going on in their world and are encouraged to believe that they are the active agents in the world they might want for themselves. After hearing Jessica Watson speak about the amount of plastic she encountered on her round the world voyage, I believe that children will readily engage with the challenges of threatened species conservation if they know about the problems that are occurring.

Conserving wildlife is going to be an ongoing and increasing challenge for all players in a world that will struggle with a variable climate and ever increasing human populations. We believe as a modern society that intergenerational equity is important. I agree, but furthermore feel it is also our obligation to equip future leaders with a love of wildlife and a sense that they are able to do great things and create different outcomes for themselves. With this in mind I recommend that discussions regarding the need to develop and resource threatened species activities in schools also cover off on the need to provide interpretation support for school aged children. And curriculums should include exposure to inspirational speakers who are engaging with the big issues confronting the planet and its wildlife.

I don't believe it will be necessary to set up a new bureaucracy to deal with this, but rather use the existing agencies and concentrate on adequate funding. I would like to suggest that you might consider inviting educators from both public and private educational institutions as well as threatened species experts to examine possible content as well as a funding source. I would be very happy to attend your hearing to explain further my vision.

Yours faithfully

Frank Manthey OAM

Co-Founder of Save the Bilby Fund

for the love of

The iconic Aussie animal, the bilby, is in danger of extinction. Merrin's little boy, Luke, is inspiring others to fight for its survival

Merrin Curnow, 50, Brisbane, Qld

BILBY



The puppet had soft grey fur and a very long, pointed nose. My six-year-old, Luke, just couldn't stop cuddling him.

Ever since we'd come across the toy at a market stall two years earlier, Luke had been obsessed by his furry friend.

Aptly naming the creature 'Bilby' – because that's what he was – it was love at first sight.

From that moment, Bilby went everywhere with Luke and he began learning everything he could about the real-life version of the iconic cutie.

There wasn't much about bilbies my boy didn't know.

His passion even rubbed off on his siblings, Jared, now 12, Alicia, seven, and my hubby Steve, 48. 'They're endangered,' Luke would explain, telling them sadly one day bilbies might become extinct.

If I thought he was going through a phase that would fizzle out, I was wrong! Luke never tired of hearing bilby stories. Now, as we read his favourite bedtime tale together, he clutched his precious puppet tightly with the biggest grin on his face.

A few weeks later Steve and I took the kids to a kite festival in Brisbane and I should have guessed bilbies wouldn't be far from Luke's mind. 'Look over there,' he said, pointing across the field. I realised it was a fundraising stand for his favourite creatures – and there was a live bilby there too.

Luke was thrilled when the man running the stall let him stroke the animal's fluffy body.

'That was the best day of my life,' he said, still beaming when we got home later that day.

Over the next weeks,

that happiness stayed with him. It was wonderful to see.

But four months later, I noticed my boy wasn't his usual bubbly self. Not even Bilby could cheer him up. Still, as nothing else appeared to be wrong, I decided to just keep an eye on him. Two months later though, I saw a strange flickering behind Luke's left eye. It was unlike anything I'd ever seen before and it sent a shiver down my spine.

Rushing him straight to the doctor, we were immediately sent to the Royal Brisbane Hospital for tests. Steve met us there while a neighbour looked after Jared and Alicia.

Suddenly everything around us seemed to be happening at lightning speed. Doctors rushed around and before I knew it, the scans were back.

'I'm afraid Luke has a large tumour in his brain stem,' the specialist said, explaining that because of its location there was nothing they could do.

Collapsing into Steve's arms, my mind raced as everything I'd ever treasured shattered into pieces. We were just a normal family. A tragedy like this couldn't happen to us could it?

Glancing over at Luke, who was fast asleep in his hospital

bed, snuggling Bilby, I couldn't believe it was real.

Devastatingly, doctors had more heartbreaking news.

'It's likely that Luke has just a few months left to live,' they told us sadly. Clinging to Steve, we made a vow – to give Luke the best possible life back home where he belonged.

A few days later, we broke the news to our little boy.

'One day soon you're going to be an angel in the sky,' we told him gently. Luke nodded. As he pulled Bilby closer to him he seemed to understand. We sat Jared and Alicia down too. There were so many tears, so many heartbreaking hugs of sorrow.

As Luke became weaker, we'd all curl up around him in bed and read bilby stories.

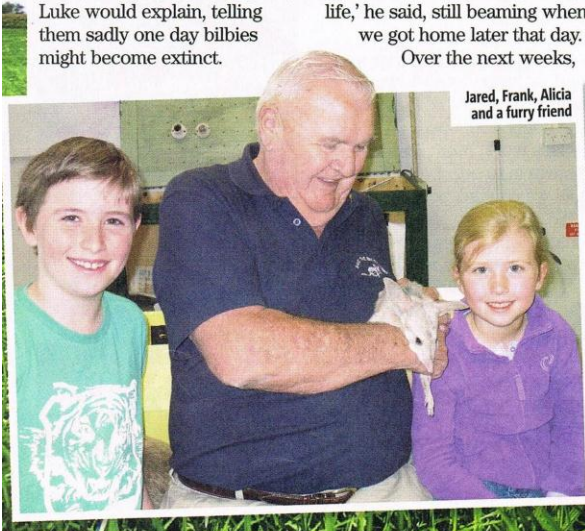
His little face would light up, especially when we reminded him of the day he met a real-life bilby. 'Best day ever,' he'd say, his green eyes wide with happiness.

If only that joy could have been enough to save him.

Three short months later Luke lost his battle to live and passed away in his sleep. He was still clutching Bilby. His furry friend was with him to the end. At just seven years old, I couldn't believe my little boy was gone.

But as Steve and I began to plan our precious son's funeral,

If only that joy could have been enough to save him



Jared, Frank, Alicia and a furry friend



Alicia, me, Luke and Bilby, Steve and Jared

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we were so touched when the community reached out to us. It was then that I had an idea. Instead of flowers, I decided to ask people to donate money for a bilby charity. It'd be our way of doing something positive.

We were thrilled when we raised \$1200 for the Save the Bilby Fund – the charity that had made Luke's dream come true. I wrote a letter to Frank Manthey, the man who'd let our son stroke the bilby at the stall that day. I couldn't believe it when a few weeks later, Frank

knocked on the door. He'd been so touched by Luke's story he wanted to share it – hoping to inspire others to help save the bilbies too.

Of course we said yes! Luke would have loved to be part of something so wonderful.

So we got involved with Frank's fundraising efforts, taking the family to fairs and doing talks about our cute native creature. It helped turn the sadness of losing Luke into something worthwhile.

On the first anniversary of

Luke's death his school, Eagle Junction State School, decided to hold a memorial for our beloved boy. 'I'll take a bilby to meet the kids,' Frank offered. It was such a lovely gesture.

That day, the school pupils made gold coin donations and Frank shared Luke's story.

Tears filled my eyes as I realised my little lad had become a character in the bilby stories he loved so much.

Now it's been three years since Luke passed away. In total we've raised thousands

in his name. For National Bilby Day on September 9 this year, a bilby statue will be placed outside the school in honour of all the work Luke's done.

It'll be a permanent reminder of his legacy – and I know he'd be proud that the fight to save his beloved creature lives on. ●

As told to Rebekah Scanlan

\$600

See story coupon for details

TELL US YOUR STORY

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