

Speech by the Honourable Justice William Cox AC, on the occasion of the launching of Max Angus' book *Pedder: The Story. The Paintings*, at Fullers Bookstore Hobart, 2 November 2008

William (Bill) Cox is a longtime friend of artist Max Angus and a former Chief Justice and Governor of Tasmania. He owns a Max Angus painting.

I am delighted to have the opportunity of launching Max Angus' latest book *Pedder. The Story. The Paintings*. As always, Max has produced a thing of beauty, sharing with us some superb reproductions of the hauntingly beautiful water colours he has painted of the lake over the years, paintings many of which are in private hands and thus not available for inspection save by a privileged few.

In addition he has told the story of the Lake; how it was appreciated first by a few hardy bushwalkers, then, with an access road comparatively close nearby, by a greater volume of visitors who took advantage of the short flight from Hobart to the Lake where its beach was amply broad enough to accommodate the landing of fixed wing aircraft.

However it is a story, as well, of how, in controversial circumstances, what its many admirers had so relished was destroyed by the flooding of the Lake in the late 60s and early 70s.

It is a sad story but not one devoid of hope for future generations. Sad, because its physical beauty has disappeared beneath the waters of what Olegas Truchanas described as the new inland sea, an artificial man-made pond in the middle of the natural wilderness area, and sad because, like Debussy's *Sunken Cathedral* which we can appreciate only in musical art form, we must, without experiencing the Lake at first hand, content ourselves with the beautiful records made of it photographically by artists such as Olegas and Max.

On the other hand, there are two reasons for us to be optimistic about the future: one from a philosophical point of view. As Prince Philip has said:

“In a pioneering society, the principal problems are to survive, to exploit and to develop. The Lake Pedder case marks the end of Australia's pioneering days and it ushers in a new phase of conscious concern by all sections of the community for the long term future of the natural and human environment.”

The saga had a profound effect on the approach of government to development and led to far more stringent assessment of the impact of any interference with the environment. Some would say in respect of some projects that the assessment has not been stringent enough, but it has been subjected to far greater public scrutiny and, unlike the case of Lake Pedder, developments are not likely to be forced upon us as faits accomplis.

The second and practical reason for optimism lies in the fact that the original lake has not gone irretrievably from our sight and experience. As Edward St John said in 1974:

“If Lake Pedder were to be re-exposed, its beauty would return, irrespective of the length of time the lake had been flooded...There is very fortunately, in this case, what lawyers call a locus poenitentiae – an opportunity to repent...if not we ourselves, the day will come when our children will undo what we so foolishly have done.”

A 1995 Commonwealth Inquiry into the draining of Lake Pedder has found that this is technically feasible though the political will is lacking. The Lake Pedder Restoration Committee, which has commissioned this work, looks forward with confidence to a day when that will can be activated.

The story of Lake Pedder is told with great feeling and authority by Max Angus who was intimately involved in representations to halt the flooding of the Lake and has shown a passionate but reasoned concern to right the wrong done to it. For that reason alone this book is worthy of praise and appreciation but the inclusion of so many of his beautiful paintings showing the Lake's many moods make it one which anyone with an eye for artistic merit will be glad to possess. Max's friend Olegas Truchanas' words to him "Paint me a dream of Pedder" are oft quoted and it was an injunction faithfully carried out, not once but many times over.

I congratulate the author and artist, the Committee who commissioned this outstanding work, and all who were involved in its production. It is truly a magnificent product and one which will inspire many to work actively to ensure that St John's prophecy – viz. that what was so foolishly done may yet be undone – is fulfilled.

It is with great pleasure that I commend to you all and to the public at large *Pedder. The Story. The Paintings.* by Max Angus.