

Women's Climate Conversations online 2021 #6 on 10 August 2021

Listening to First Nations Knowledge to inform Earth-centred, collaborative governance

A report and reflection by WCC member Honey Nelson

"You've been here long enough now. Why can't you love the Earth as we do?"

- Dr Mary Graham, Kombu-merri/Waka Waka First Nations leader

A large zoom audience joined this conversation with guests, Dr Mary Graham, a First Nations political science, philosophy and history academic and community leader from SE Qld, and Dr Michelle Maloney, writer and co-founder of Australian Earth Laws Alliance; both working together to raise up First People's law, lore and deep understanding of country, to bring this essential spacious knowledge to the wider community. Mary and Graham were in conversation with Congress founding members Janet Salisbury and Kirsten Anker.

Aboriginal First Law is the sacred Earth-given foundation of human living and morality: the equal rights of all species to their life, the sharing of all Earth resources, the mutual and loving duty of care between the Land and all her human children, our human duty to protect all her other life-forms.

All human-made laws are founded in absolute respect for the maternal Earth's First Law. A beautiful ground to stand upon.

The Values that Settlers have Disdained

The more we learn about the societal governance and law of Australia's First People, the more we can love and admire their wisdom of equity, balance, sharing, duty of care, and law which is neither coercive nor controlling.

Their quiet depth and propriety have been ignored by dominant colonising people for near-250 years. Most of us know nothing at all of their ethos, cosmology, laws, and knowledge of heart, psyche, and relationships.

And the more we learn, we realise that their ancient traditions of reciprocity and respect for the spiritual stature of all life, is a bright light for the invader peoples of Australia. In the gathering roar of wildfires and floods, on the driest continent on Earth, they know intricately how the grasslands, forests and waters need to be cared for, cultivated, and managed safely.

Our Two Guests

Dr Mary Graham has a long life of service and tireless campaigning for her people, native title, reconciliation, and tertiary teaching.

Dr Michelle Maloney is a non-indigenous historian and ecologist, long dedicated to environmental sustainability, working for an Earth-centred culture and governance – as does the Women's Climate Congress. She is a co-founder of the Australia Earth Laws Alliance AELA.

<https://www.earthlaws.org.au>

Both work together for the rights of all life, and to inspire future law and governance founded not in hierarchy and competition, but in a deep connection to country.

Relationalism and Survivalism

It is the Land and her species which evolved us as humans, with our special higher understandings; and gave us our 'sacralised ecological stewardship', the willing mutual obligation of care: a gift of 'Relationalism' from Earth-life.

In Aboriginal terms, the 'Law of Obligation' is the obligation to act for the common good. An example of this in western terms is a National Health Service – where everyone has access to the same high-quality care irrespective of income or status. An example for care of nature is providing a wildlife corridor, or tunnel under a road.

Relationalism entails four aspects:

- Balance: as in women's and men's business, the female and male aspects of mind and spirit
- Autonomy: the self-knowledge and self-regulation of women and of men, and of species
- Place: our reciprocal care for our Country
- Ethos: the Law, and the Lore which are the teaching stories of Law.

Mary contrasts this ethos to the colonists' familiar '*survivalist*' tradition of struggle against nature, to forge a separate defended human stockade.

Michelle recalls that colonising cultures have expanded their dominion of self-interest, superiority, and privilege within only the past few thousand years. And indeed only within the last few centuries have we abandoned the recognition of nature as life-spirit, choosing instead to see the Earth and life as merely property to be exploited, extracted, consumed, demolished, for business and for profit.

In this present planetary life-crisis, we are urged to let go these destructive doctrines, take responsibility for their consequences; and build a deep relationship with our dry and beautiful land and its once-abundant wildlife.

The recent IPCC revelation is a severe warning, to open our eyes and hearts, and undertake cultural transition. We are reminded: China and Japan, among others, made rapid and extreme cultural changes during the 20th century, transforming their self-perceptions and societies. Dramatic change is possible, is necessary.

Women in Governance, Law, and Lore

Our colonial roots are of patriarchy: of exclusive male ownership, inheritance, power, right to rule. Women until very recently had no voice at all; indeed, were even men's property.

Today, predominantly male rule across the world is simply not going to rescue the future. Nowhere near in time. We must insist that this is, profoundly, *Women's Business*: the business of family and garden and protective law and societal morality; and Women must attend in equal numbers with Men, at world crisis talks to plan and shape future direction for all life. Women embody the Law of Obligation.

All organisations, boards, governments should have half women and half men. And Mary advises to include older people too, who have learned deep value from experience.

We do not need to shape ourselves to existing systems ('add women and stir!') As we come out, as we Rise Up, we can undertake the initiative for cultural self-correction. As Mary said: Our momentum comes for determination, and good ideas and arguments, good hearts, good minds, good spirit.

Cultural Transformation

We can recall that many great historic ethical and cultural advances have been made rapidly and rightfully: the renunciation of slavery, racism, animal cruelty, laws to protect children, the protests ending unconscionable wars. Women can be the next rising wave of cultural transformation. We already stand upon our love for Mother Earth, the guardian female spirit beneath our feet.

We can put our heads together to devise strategies to Rise (remember Lysistrata?!)

We Women are the nurturing parents of every child on Earth; and our rightful and necessary place at the decision table for their future, in equal numbers with men, is unquestionable.