

Community highlights

Written by The Conversation USA

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought interesting. Read on for comments and discussions from five articles I thought worth highlighting.

[Young and free? Why I declined to sing the national anthem at the 2015 AFL Grand Final](#)

On Tuesday, Deborah Cheetham posted an article explaining why she declined an invitation to sing the national anthem at this year's Grand Final. She also included new lyrics that made Australia's anthem more inclusive of our country's history.

What followed was an interesting and robust discussion – 294 comments long – that's worth reading over. Rather than quoting any specific examples I thought it best to just send you over there for the complete conversation.

[Want good conservation? Treat animals like trees, and 'plant' them in new areas](#)

Mike Swinbourne [raised](#) some concerns about the article's ideas on conservation and one of its authors, Maggie J. Watson, responded and, in doing so, expanded on and clarified her suggestions.

Mike Swinbourne:

I sincerely hope I have misread this and you are not proposing to introduce animals to areas outside their 'natural' range, because such an idea would be the worst conservation proposal I have ever heard.

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But even if I have misread that idea, I still have concerns about translocations that do not first address the underlying causes of the local area extinction. Animals disappear from an area for a reason. And if that reason is not resolved, then the most likely effect of a translocation is a bunch of dead animals.

Maggie J. Watson:

We are not proposing to introduce animals outside their native range. If you read the paper that this article is based on, there is more detail as to the actual mechanics and species. Basically, when you look at common faunal species, there are areas where they “should” be, but aren’t because the habitat is fragmented (over both space and time). What we are proposing “fills in the gaps” so that these common animals remain common across the landscape. These common animals that we propose to translocate are missing from sites because the animals themselves don’t move very easily (they are not “vagile”). Birds and some insects can fly to new, empty habitat patches, but reptiles and amphibians and some mammals just can’t cross to these sites. We propose to give them a helping hand. Remember, we are not talking about animals on the brink of extinction, just the common animals that are doing fine in patches of the landscape already.

Mike Swinbourne:

That’s fine Maggie, but you haven’t addressed my second point, which is far more important. If you do not address the reason why they disappeared in the first place, such translocations invariably fail and all you are doing is killing the animals.

Further, just because some animals can fly does not mean they will cross a fragmented landscape. There are a number of studies which show the effects of roads and edge effects on species such as bats. They will not venture across gaps because of (it is believed) the potential for predation.

Maggie J. Watson:

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Remember, we are not dealing with animals that are rare. We are dealing with animals that have disappeared in pockets of their range because of vagility issues – they are marooned in fragments and cannot get to the areas of habitat that are now available (through regeneration or replanting).

These animals exist in other fragments in the landscape because they were isolated there through the construction of roads, clearing of forest or urbanisation. The animals that are candidates must be coping with all the other issues that impact upon endangered native animals, and have the life history traits to be persisting in fragments. We are proposing that in certain situations where animals are abundant in some areas in a landscape, be it urban or agricultural, but not present in others because of habitat fragmentation, we simply give them a hand. It is well known, as you state, that the matrix is impenetrable for some species, so we propose to seed the landscape with the common species that should be there but cannot get there. Rather than doing this translocation as a last resort when an animal or a population is on the brink of extinction, we propose to preempt this and start the translocations now (a bit like preventative medicine), before we have to, while they are still common, and we can learn what techniques work and what techniques don't work.

[Careers education must be for all, not just those going to university](#)

On an article arguing for more career education for people not going to uni, Jade McKay [argued](#) that we need to discuss potential class issues in that approach.

One of the major concerns I have with any sort of discussion on “alternative” career education, or not pushing university as the best option for all students lies in the significant class issues it raises that in Australia at least, have been left unquestioned.

Study after study indicates that in their early years, children irrespective of class aspire to roughly the same careers. However, by the time they reach high school, there is a clear class-based demarcation in the aspirations of students. Privileged students overwhelmingly aspire to careers that require some form of higher education, while underprivileged students overwhelmingly do not. Apparently, this is seen as acceptable, despite the fact that university educated individuals can expect significantly higher incomes than non-university educated

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individuals. Given that we are apparently trying to “break” the cycle of poverty, it should be a given that university is pushed to the least privileged students. However, what we see is an ugly assumption that it is “natural” that these students wouldn’t aspire to a university career, because it is easier for middle and upper class Australia to then ignore the very real financial barriers that these students face in even attaining university entrance, let alone completing a degree.

Bullying in regional universities is a serious problem that needs addressing

On Timothy Skinner’s article about bullying in regional universities, Kim Goodrick [shared](#) her experiences with bullying and the problems she faced trying to report it:

As a victim of workplace bullying at a regional university (I believe the same University that reported the 42% rate of bullying amongst staff in 2013), I know firsthand how dangerous bullying is to victims, colleagues and their families. In fact, research in Victoria shows that around 20% of all suicides (around 400 people per year) are due to occupational factors, such as bullying and harassment.

On lodging a formal complaint, my case was “investigated” by a person who had been employed as an HR Manager at that University, was being paid by the University, and was (in part) investigating the actions of HR. None of my witnesses (or other victims of bullying by the perpetrator) were interviewed. Needless to say, my case was “not substantiated”.

At the same time, under a Freedom of Information request I discovered that although 50% of investigated formal complaints of bullying and harassment were substantiated in 2010 and 2011 (6 cases substantiated), NOT ONE was substantiated in 2012, 2013 and to May 2014. I believe this is a direct result of changes in the Workers Comp laws which made it almost impossible for employees to gain workers compensation due to psychological injury.

Thanks to the NTEU and Maurice Blackburn lawyers (combined with the strength of my case), I am fighting this through the Workers Compensation Commission. But let this be a warning to anyone thinking of reporting bullying and harassment at a University (or in any other organisation for that matter). Despite all the policies and procedures and the “zero tolerance to

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bullying” emails from HR, the chances are YOU will be viewed as the troublemaker (not the perpetrator), and your career (and mental health) will be ruined...and let’s not forget that organisations that do nothing to stop bullying are much more likely to see higher rates of fraud, corruption and maladministration such as that uncovered in the Four Corners Report - Degress of Deception in April 2015.

[Coming up blank: the science of writer’s block](#)

I’m being a bit cheeky here. Jenny Graves [shared](#) her tip for overcoming writer’s block. I’m listing here because it’s a bit advice I’d like to remember.

My trick is to write a “zeroth draft”, from beginning to end. Even if I ultimately chuck it all out, I have something to start with. An artist friend described the necessity to “cover the canvas” when she started a portrait - same idea.

Read a comment you thought interesting? Let me know during the week. You can leave a comment below or send me an [email](#) .

Read more <http://theconversation.com/community-highlights-49649>