

Meet our members

Simon Cole



Simon is a very active QLD branch committee member, currently the branch Membership Officer. Simon took a break from his impressive volunteer work, such as running SPA community stalls and billboard campaigns, to speak with us.

SPA: Simon, tell us a little about yourself, your interests and passions.

Simon: I grew up in Melbourne in the '60s (apart from a two year stint in Baghdad) and it was a rocky start with Dad, an English immigrant, dying in '61 and Mum (3rd generation Aussie) having been a scarred, unwanted child. Nonetheless, it was a stimulating upbringing – I devoured the World Book encyclopaedia Mum bought. My middle-class circumstances saw me graduate in Behavioural Science at La Trobe University. I taught English language (TESOL) for 30 years, 14 of them overseas because it appealed to my generalist mentality. Like many of my generation, I grew very disillusioned with how everything has panned out over the years. Inevitably, I turned to sustainability during the noughties and settled in Brisbane to live semi-off grid in the suburbs. I'm semi-self-sufficient, self-funded and semi-retired. Apart from gardening and share housing with my tenants, my passions are learning and writing (I maintain a blog called Equanimity), dancing in the garage gym, playing piano and doing voluntary work in the community. I'm running the local history group at the moment.

SPA: How did you first find out about SPA and what made you decide to join? How has your experience with SPA and, in particular, the QLD branch been so far? What is your current role in the committee?

Simon: I came across SPA through the political party Sustainable Australia, when it was Stable Population Australia in around 2013. I found SPA to be a professional and creditable, science-based organisation I could learn from, both in terms of information and team-work. Its well-rounded approach captured my imagination. I found the calibre of discussion at its events and meetings impressive, so I joined the Qld committee as an ordinary member and am now the Membership Officer. It's been a rewarding experience and I've made some valued friendships.

SPA: You have been very active in SPA this year. What have been some of the highlights for you?

Simon: Definitely the highlight for me this year was seeing the billboard campaign come to fruition on the streets of inner Brisbane in April. I initiated it in September and thanks to the capable people I was fortunate to work with – Vaithehi (Qld), Mick Thompson (ACT), Judith Odgaard (WA), Michael Bayliss (WA) and Peter Cook (Qld) - steered the project to a very satisfactory product. I was also inspired by SPA's submission to the parliamentary inquiry on Migration (Pathways to Nation Building) to compose my own submission of 15 pages and 54 references. I focussed on social cohesion and diversity, citing my behavioural science background. It has been satisfying to have our information stall equipment improve with a square reader and tear-drop flag.

SPA: Why is overpopulation a critical issue for you?

Simon: I'm a solutions guy and I don't like wasting time and energy. Cut the head off the beast, I say. I like addressing root causes. Population is a compelling issue that has never been insurmountable to me because I'm used to looking at the big picture. However, having lived through the 'Population Bomb' era, it's interesting to see the issue evolve into a more complex one requiring a sensitive, nuanced and multi-faceted response. It saddens me that empathy for wildlife appears to be so lacking that we're headed for a planet covered in suburbs, CBDs and parks. The good news is, however, that family planning is a win-win. What human-lover wouldn't want children to grow up truly loved and wanted?

SPA: Why should people join, support and volunteer for SPA?

Simon: SPA is the only Australian organisation that courageously and directly addresses the issue of population. Its research is rigorous and its on-going advisory capacity to government is absolutely an asset to the nation. The people in SPA are friendly, collegiate and open to debate. As an environment advocacy and educational organisation, it could do with being 100 times bigger than it is.

"I think probably the greatest single threat to life on the planet is the over proliferation of us."

- Dr Brian May, musician, campaigner and astrophysicist (interview with Metro, 13 May 2023)