

March 16, 2025

“Now that Dave Burrows is writing my biography, all this long-forgotten material is rising from the vaults like the following:

The late Ian Peter who was co-directing the Rainforest Information Centre with me was a very early adopter of the emerging technology that would one day become the internet. In 1989, he launched **Pegasus Networks** from our RIC offices, the first public Internet service provider in Australia. <https://cas.cat/pegasus.mp4>

However back in the early to mid-80's he already had us connecting via telephone dial up to the US based IGC network and thus, as the only environmental NGO in Australia with an email address, in 1985 we were approached from Washington DC by the Environmental Defence Fund inviting us to be the Australian node in their global campaign to reform the environmental policies of the World Bank and the other Multilateral Development Banks.

We dived in with gusto and one of our volunteers, a veteran of the Mt Nardi, Franklin and Daintree forest blockades, Carol Sherman, led that campaign and would later write the book [“A Look Inside the World Bank”](#). Meanwhile I composed [The World Bank Song](#) which premiered in DC at the first campaign outside the WB HQ in H St. DC. Greenpeace liked the song so they hired the biggest PA in DC and all the World Bank employees had their faces pressed to the glass windows as RAN's banner unfurled and we belted the song out from the street below.

By that time I'd helped start a Rainforest Action Network in the US after several rainforest roadshows where I would appeal for help for the rainforests and show [Give Trees a Chance](#) (a film about our Terania Creek rainforest blockades) night after night in different cities around the country and around the world.

Anyway, I digress. In the course of this we discovered the revolving door between the World Bank and the Australian government's development assistance bureau AusAID and therefore the same environmentally destructive policies were driving our bilateral aid which was 85% of Australia's aid budget vs multilateral aid was only 15% and we started campaign to reform AusAID. To do so, we did theatrical actions in Canberra (old and battered photos of a 1986 action outside the federal Treasury attached). The Rainforest Information Centre then formed a coalition of all the major environmental groups (ACF, TWS, Greenpeace) as well as all the major development assistance NGOs (Freedom From Hunger, Community Aid Abroad, Australian Council Churches) and this coalition lobbied for a senate inquiry into the environmental impacts of the Australian aid program.

The Senate conducted this inquiry and their findings accepted all of our criticisms of AusAID and as a result sweeping changes of AusAID were demanded including that, for the first time, Environmental Impact Studies would have to be conducted for every project and that henceforth Australian environmental laws would have to be obeyed in aid delivery even if the work was taking place in a country without its own environmental laws. And, to our surprise, the Senate called for the initiation of a new funding window, the NGO Environmental Initiative (NGOEI) which meant that AusAID would henceforth provide \$1 million/year for Australian non-government organisations to implement projects that would “create new standards of environmental excellence in the delivery of Australian aid”.

Back at the Rainforest Information Centre, we never thought we'd see any of that money because we had been the main thorn in AusAID's side having hounded them for years and created the coalition which resulted in such drastic reforms.

But, to our surprise, over the next 2 years, AusAID funded every project that we proposed to them and some of the films I will shortly introduce to you are about these very projects. We surmised that AusAID was being so obliging because they thought that we wouldn't bite the hand that fed us – that is, if we were accepting their money we would stop criticising and hounding them for fear that the money might stop.

So, Carol Sherman who had spearheaded both RIC's World Bank and Ausaid campaigns, left the RIC and, with Lee Rhianon from the Freedom From Hunger Campaign, started a new NGO, AIDWATCH which would henceforth keep AusAID honest while the RIC could receive AusAID funding for rainforest conservation and indigenous empowerment projects in [PNG](#), [Solomons](#), [India](#) and especially Ecuador where NGOEI grants funded the creation of the [Los Cedros Biological Reserve](#), The protection of [Galeras Mountain as a national park](#), the protection of the 100,000 Ha [traditional lands of the Awa](#) on the Colombian border and assisting the [Huaorani to gain title](#) to 700,000 Ha. of virgin rainforest, more than 1/3 of their ancestral lands.