
InTransition Episode 92 - Gregory Andrews

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentlemen, welcome once again to InTransition, the podcast that examines the practise of content communication in government and the public service. **Content communication**, who heard the difference? Yes, content marketing in government is a term that we have decided to change.

The reason we've decided to change it, is that it has failed to resonate with audiences, as we've gone about talking to them about this process. Essentially, what we have been talking about is a marketing process. For a government audience, it seems in so many of the engagements that I've had over the last few years, that marketing is just a term that doesn't resonate. It's a term that carries a lot of baggage; not only in the public sector, but at the private sector.

What we've decided to do, is to call it content communication. As I get into the definition, that doesn't change; this notion of engaging and informing, in order to encourage a particular behaviour, so that we can achieve what it is what we need with our policy, our programme, our service, or our regulation. We've just decided to change the name, so from here on in, we'll be talking about content communication as it relates to the public sector, and government and the public sector. That's a change, it's a slight change.

Indeed, we've launched a research project with the Australian National University. I'd encourage you to get onto the Content Group website, www.contentgroup.com.au. Click on the research tab, and you'll see the Content Communication Programme, where we're working with our good friends at the Australian National University, School of Business and Economics; who are looking at the evidence base that sits underneath our process of content communication, and indeed starting to develop the tool kits that we can use, that you can use I hope, into the future, that will help you to get better outcomes.

There's a big change, maybe not a big change, but words are important, as we all know. We need to get better at expressing ourselves, and to create meaning. It is very difficult to create meaning in people's minds. We just felt that that change was necessary. Bye Bye content marketing, as it relates to government and the public sector, and hello content communication.

Today, I have one of the finest communicators in the Australian public sector; has a wonderful reputation. His name is Gregory Andrews, and he is Australia's first Threatened Species Commissioner. His job is to raise awareness of and support Australia's fight against extinction, and leads implementation of Australia's first Threatened Species Strategy.

Before taking up the Threatened Species Commissioner position, Gregory was Deputy Head of Australia's delegation to the United Nations Climate Change negotiations. He's previously worked on social and indigenous policy reform, and has twice taking leave to work on indigenous community development.

His career began with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs in Trade, back in 1992. He has been on postings to China and to Japan. When in China, Gregory worked on environmental issues, including negotiating a bilateral agreement to protect habitat for migratory bird species. He joins me in the studio; Gregory, thanks for joining us InTransition.

Gregory Andrews: Hi, David. Thanks for having me.

David Pembroke: You love communicating, don't you? This is a really important part of your role as the Threatened Species Commissioner.

Gregory Andrews: I do. The terms of reference for the Commissioner; I was appointed in 2014, I should say, as Australia's first ever Threatened Species Commissioner by then, Minister Hunt, and now I report to Minister Frydenberg. I had a clean slate, so to speak, in terms of what my role should be. I had some rather complicated terms of reference that I didn't understand, that had a lot of technical jargon.

My job is really three-fold; the first is to ramp up awareness and concern for the species that we're losing, that define who we are and what we are as a nation. The second is to mobilise resources to fund conservation and saving species. The third is to advise the Minister on threatened species conservation policy.

David Pembroke: What sits under all of those is effective communication, isn't it?

Gregory Andrews: It certainly does. As we were discussing, before they started, more Australians know who the Kardashians are than the 12 mammals or the 65 birds in Australia that are rarer than China's giant panda. One of the biggest risks to extinction, the science says feral cats, for example, are the single biggest threat to our mammals. Actually, the biggest threat to our wildlife is the Kardashians.

That's because they've got 76 million people following them on Twitter and Facebook, and we all know who they are, even those of us who don't want to know who they are. My job, an important part of my job, is to get Australia excited about saving species; aware and excited about saving species.

David Pembroke: What have you learned from the Kardashians, that you are applying to your day job?

Gregory Andrews: I think one of the most important things that I've learned in my job, is a little bit like what you were talking about in the introduction. That's making sure that we're not talking at people, and that we're communicating in a language that people understand. For example, in government and in the Department of the

Environment, everyone would understand what biodiversity conservation is. When I'm talking on the radio, or to channel 7, or to the Sunday Telegraph; I talk about saving species, and fighting extinction.

I think what's really important, is to use language that resonates with people. Also, to find arguments, and find reasons to do things that resonate with as wide a group of people as possible. A few years ago, I was lucky enough to spend three days with Al Gore on his Climate Reality Leadership Programme. What I learned from him was, don't preach to the converted, and don't try to change the minds of the sort of extreme climate change denialists; go with the first principles that everybody agrees with.

In saving species, for example, I often say that we've already lost nine wallabies to extinction, and sixteen more are at risk. We can't keep naming our rugby team The Wallabies and putting a kangaroo on the tail of Qantas, when we lose our animals and our plants to extinction. We put them on our coins, we have them on our coats of arms, we name our sporting teams after them; they define who we are, but we're losing them at unprecedented rates. That's why we need to save our species, because we're losing part of what it is to be Australian.

David Pembroke: How important then, is this sense of emotion in your communication? Interesting, as soon as you just said that, that connected with me at a point where it moved me to think, "Oh. I actually felt that." It was a human reaction to the communication. How often and how clearly are you thinking about that? What priority are you putting it at, to move people, not so much around the facts and figures, but to communicate in a human way, that gets people to feel something?

Gregory Andrews: It's evocative, isn't it?

David Pembroke: Yeah.

Gregory Andrews: Actually, I feel really blessed; the job I have has a wonderful alignment with my own values and personal interests, but also the skills that I have as a communicator. Even I, often when I'm giving a speech, I have to stop because I'm sometimes moved so much that I can't speak. We have 1,900 animals and plants here in Australia that are risk of extinction, so I think emotion is quite a valid thing. So is nationalism, not nasty extremist nationalism; but actually, we all define ourselves through our wildlife no matter what way we vote, no matter where we sit on the political spectrum.

Finding those common reasons that we all share; it's something that I see right around Australia. When I travel to remote communities or regional places and I meet farmers, or local volunteer groups who are saving species, and they're not just young people with dreadlocks. They're nanas knitting, they're the full spectrum of society. Actually, a positive about saving species and fighting extinction, is that it brings us together.

I look for those reasons that resonate with all of us. Rather than telling people that fighting extinction and saving species is something that we have to do, rather than making it about blame and burden; make it about opportunity. Make it about the future, make it about our kids, our national identity, and who we are.

David Pembroke: How big a challenge is it though, that those assumptions are there? As you say, it's the nanas knitting, not just the dreadlocked people chaining themselves to gates. There are a lot of people who are involved in there. There's that risk of assuming, isn't there? There's a risk that assuming that the societal norm is indeed what is that issue. How do you resist assuming things? To make sure that you're being more accurate?

Gregory Andrews: I often bench myself David, against my cousins in Ballina, or my cousin in Dubbo, or my aunties and uncles. I think to myself, "Would my auntie and would my uncle listen to this story? Would it resonate with them?" Of course, I can turn on and talk the language of Canberra, and I do that in board rooms and offices in Canberra, and in the Department of the Environment. I think making sure we use the right language and the right arguments when we're outside of Canberra, is really important. Actually, adding to that, getting out of Canberra.

One of the things that I enjoy immensely about my job, is wading through rice paddies in the Riverina, or tagging turtles, working with indigenous people hunting. I think that gives us an authenticity. Canberra is a bubble, I moved here in 1992. I love Canberra and I call it home now, and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else other than Canberra, but it is a bubble. It's not like the rest of Australia. It's easy to forget what the rest of Australia's like, when you're in Canberra.

I like to ground myself with the community, with people outside of Canberra, and listen to them and understand them. For example, here in Canberra, and indeed all the leafy green suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne; there's a presumption that farmers destroy the environment, and don't care about wildlife. The people who are making those criticisms, are still drinking their almond soy cappuccinos with turmeric. The almond soy is grown in the Riverina by our farmers.

When I meet those farmers, I met a farmer yesterday who came all the way from south Australia, from the mallee country in south Australia. He flew all the way to Canberra to talk to me about what he's doing to tackle feral cats, and to ask me what more I can do, and what he can do, and what we can do together to save the Mallee Fowl. I meet farmers like that across Australia.

I think one of the really important things is not to vilify people, not to make it about blame. The other thing is actually, rather than making it about a threat, making it about that people can be leaders. For example, domestic cat owners; roaming cats are a huge problem. The science shows that domestic roaming cats

kill hundreds of millions of birds every year in Australia, and feral cats are an even bigger problem than that. I often say that domestic pet owners can choose to join the fight against extinction, by choosing to be responsible pet owners, and keeping their cat indoors.

Rather than telling them it's something they have to do and they're bad people, they're not keeping their cat inside; I flip it around, and invite them to actually join the fight against extinction, and play their part. I often say that when I was a cat owner, I thought I was a responsible cat owner because I was letting my cat out during the day, and keeping it in at night; but I wasn't. Actually the RSPCA policy is 24/7 cat containment. Vilifying cat owners, or dog owners, or farmers, or mining companies isn't going to win the fight against extinction.

David Pembroke: In terms of your own practise and your own processes around communication, can you describe what are some of the techniques that you use and some of the tools that you use, that you find get the best results for you as you're telling these stories, as you say, as you're moving around the country, and indeed, I'm sure internationally?

Gregory Andrews: I think that probably the two biggest things that I found that have been successful for my role; the first is to get out into the field, and meet people on the ground, and get down at their level. I've gutted a feral, and I retched and retched as I was doing that, because the insides of a feral cat do not smell very nice. I did that early on, and what I learned was that the word got around that the Commissioner was retching, but he got through it to the end; he didn't pike on that. Getting out into the field.

The second is actually the remarkable power of social media. I should really thank Secretary de Brouwer, Gordon de Brouwer, my Secretary, and former Minister Hunt, and Minister Frydenberg. All three of them trust me to use social media without micromanagement.

Before I became the Commissioner, I didn't have any social media accounts, private or official. I wasn't really interested in social media, I was ambivalent really about it. It's immensely powerful, and I can reach up to 100,000 Australians a week unfiltered, with messages about government policy, and linking what the government's doing on many things to saving species through Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram.

I think social media is immensely powerful. The reason my social media accounts have grown so fast, and I really find it satisfying when I meet people who say something to the effect of, or my wife met someone and they say, "Are you following this Threatened Species Commissioner on Facebook?" That means that it's actually normalising, that it's out there.

David Pembroke: Precisely.

Gregory Andrews: The beauty of social media is that it's instant, and it's unfiltered. I find that I often use social media as a hook to both engineer and influence policy outcomes, but also to secure more funding, as well as raising broader awareness. Just as an example, mining covers 0.021% of Australia, but feral cats roam across 99.8% of Australia. Before I was appointed as the Commissioner, if I'd been asked, "Which do you think is the bigger threat; feral cats or mines?" I probably would have thought it was mines.

Actually, mining covers such a tiny part of Australia. Mines, according to our environmental laws, are required to avoid, reduce, and offset their negative impacts on our threatened species, but feral cats aren't.

I've been able to raise awareness on feral cats, but also promote and thank BHP, which is investing for example, 5.45 million dollars unconditionally, not as an offset for any mining, but nearly 5.5 million dollars to save green sea turtles on the Great Barrier Reef.

One of the things that I'm using social media for is to validate companies like BHP and Google, that are actually already investing in threatened species conservation. Then challenging, gently, and inviting companies like Qantas, and Woolworths, and other companies where there might be great business synergy for them to get involved in Australia's fight against extinction, to join and play their part as well.

David Pembroke: This is great innovation. You mentioned a point there, which I think is very important around trust. We'll come back to your tools and techniques, because I'm really interested to know what works for you in terms of, is it imagery? What times of the day? What sort of stories?

Before we get back to that, trust, which is the point. You were saying that the two Ministers and the Secretary of the department trust you. What did you do to earn that trust?

Gregory Andrews: I think you probably have to ask them. I think part of it is their nature; the fact that they were willing to give me a go, and they understood the value of social media.

David Pembroke: Did you say to them, "Here's my plan, this is what I want to go and do." Or did you say, "I think there's something here, I want to explore it. Are you happy for me to go ahead, without something clearly defined with risk management, and frameworks around it, and all that sort of stuff?" Were you able to get started without a lot of the traditional governance baggage?

Gregory Andrews: The answer is yes. I do have a media protocol, but I can't remember the last time I looked at it, David. Do you know what I do? If I'm ever in any doubt, I think, "Would the Minister, and would my Secretary be concerned?" If either of the two of them are concerned, then I know that I'm crossing a line of either

government policy or the Westminster Separation of Powers. As long as I know that both of them would be comfortable, that's my benchmark.

When I was first appointed, the department gave me quite a few recommendations. They did suggest that I would have Twitter, and not Facebook or Instagram. They would clear my tweets or do them for me. I realised after probably a week, that that wasn't going to work. I just sort of gently started breaking the rules. I am a little bit of a rules breaker, but not important rules.

The department told me not to say extinction. People said, "Don't say anything's endangered unless that's the formal classification, that the species is in the threatened species list." There's all these different categories, like "Near Threatened", "Threatened", "Vulnerable". That actually makes people zone out, so I say things are endangered. I talk about extinction and fighting extinction, and Minister Frydenberg and Minister Hunt both use that language. The department uses that language, so it was an incremental and somewhat experimental process, I think, developing this strategy.

I have to say, I did learn from Hank Jongen, from DHS. I looked at his social media, and I followed that. I've also had a couple of conversations with Hank, particularly about how to manage trolling and inappropriate communication on my social media platforms. I think the key thing was that the Minister and the Secretary saw the value of competing with the Kardashians, and getting the message out there. The way I see it, is the public service traditionally is risk averse with these sort of things; on automatic sort of default. The default setting would be don't participate, because that's risky.

David Pembroke: Correct.

Gregory Andrews: If we don't participate, we're choosing to exclude ourselves from the conversation. If people on my Facebook are going, "Coal mines are really evil. You need to stop coal mining. You need to stop the habitat destruction from the Pacific Highway upgrade." Then I can actually say, "Well actually, the science says the biggest threats to koalas is climate change, followed by chlamydia, not the Pacific Highway upgrade at Ballina."

I could have chose to be risk averse and stay out of the conversation. By being in the conversation, of course we take a risk, but we're getting the real story out there, and we're staying in the conversation. As you would know, Facebook, so much of the news and media has migrated to social media. We can choose to be part of it, or if we choose not to be part of it, we exclude ourselves.

David Pembroke: As you say, this risk averse culture; are you seeing it more broadly change within government? Are you seeing that there are people following your lead, and having the courage to get out there, and rather than ask permission, seek forgiveness?

Gregory Andrews: I know that I'm certainly granted that privilege, and I respect it very deeply and very seriously. A couple of times I've made mistakes, and I felt terrible about that. I know that nobody's been that cross with me, because they see the net benefit. I know that the department and Secretary de Brouwer actually nominated my team for an innovation award. I know this is something that the department and other departments are looking at. If I can provide any assistance in my own humble capacity, I'm delighted.

I can say that I've learned most of it on the run, on the go, and also from young people. For example, if I've got a young graduate in my office ... I have a team of six to seven people, but I usually ask the graduates, "What would be a good idea to pitch for a Facebook, or is this better for Instagram?" They're more savvy on social media, so they've been teaching me.

David Pembroke: Good. In terms of what you've learned, what works for you in terms of telling your story? In terms of times of the day? Are there better times for you to be publishing content? If you are publishing, what works? Is it video that works for you? Is it photos that work for you? What's the mix?

Gregory Andrews: That's a really good question. The great thing about the social media platforms is they have all these analytics that come with you, that you can actually have a look and see. Actually, the people who follow me on Facebook, the time of the day when they're most online is at nine o'clock at night during weekdays. On weekends, they're online more. I think a lot of people actually finish the day, they get their kids to bed, they do the washing up, they sit down, and then they might be watching something on TV, but they're also checking Facebook at the same time.

If I want to get maximum reach for a story, and I can afford to, I'd probably post it anytime after seven or eight o'clock at night. I have fantastic content; I'm blessed with Australia, 90% of our animals and plants are found nowhere else on earth. They're extraordinary, they're beautiful, we're emotionally connected to them. We have more eucalyptus trees in Sydney, than the United Kingdom has total species of trees across its whole country, of all species. We're just bio-abundant. I've got wonderful content. Beautiful images definitely work.

David Pembroke: Where do you get them from?

Gregory Andrews: A lot of them I take myself when I'm out in the field, just with my iPhone or with a GoPro. I've got a fancy camera, but I tend not to use it, I tend to use the iPhone and the GoPro.

I find that Facebook gets the best reach. Facebook reaches everyone, it's mums and dads, as well as the Twitter elite. Whereas Twitter is much more sort of academic, journal, educated sort of elite focus. It's good, it's instantaneous. I like to, for example, tag Annabel Crabb or various journalists with my Twitter, particularly if I've got an interesting story; I'll tag some journalists who I know

are interested. Whereas Facebook, I also use them together, so I'll post a story on Facebook about the endangered mountain pygmy possum, but then I'll tweet a link to my Facebook post, to push people from Twitter to Facebook.

I think generally, it's also quite quirky. I've got a pretty good feeling for what's going to get good reach, but I can also never predict it. The thing that I actually had the greatest reach, where I reached 750,000 people, was actually an endangered crayfish in Tasmania. A gentleman from Tasmania sent me a photo of this huge crayfish, that was about 70 or 80 centimetres long, fresh water crayfish. He said, "Could you put this on Facebook?"

I checked with my team, that it was legitimate, and it's an endangered species in Tasmania. We did a Facebook story on it, and I couldn't have imagined that it would have reached 3/4 of a million people. Interestingly, mammals, sea turtles; but also, you can never predict it. Sometimes a plant, a beautiful image of a flower, an endangered plant that we're saving.

I think images are really important. Having a good image, picking the right time of the day, and my team and the people in the Department of the Environment, in the media area, who give me a lot of support; they advise me, not to put out too many posts. They sometimes tell me I'm pushing out too many photos, too many Facebook posts, and to let each one run its course, before you put out the next one.

David Pembroke: Are you being strategic as well, about your publishing? Are you looking at the objectives that you're seeking to achieve and thinking, "Okay, the next month this is coming, so I'll make sure that I've got content coming for that. This is an issue that's important, so I'll be making sure that I'm using this mix of channels."

It's interesting, you said before that face to face communication is essentially the most powerful channel, where you can get out and get in front of people. Are you taking that sort of strategic view on it, or are you sort of being a little bit more opportunistic as things are arising?

Gregory Andrews: It's a combination of both. Now that I've been in the job for two and a half years, since my appointment in 2014, I'm proud to say that the Australian government's mobilised 210 million dollars for projects across Australia that are saving species.

David Pembroke: From government?

Gregory Andrews: From the Australian government. That's the total funding, that's supporting species from across a range of programmes. The way I work-

David Pembroke: Was that a standing start of 0 to 210 million?

Gregory Andrews: Yes, from 2014.

David Pembroke: Wow.

Gregory Andrews: The way the Threatened Species Commissioner model works is, I don't have a budget. My job is to work across government, I have a budget to pay for my salary, and travel, and the people who work for me. It's roughly, it costs about a million dollars a year to run the Threatened Species Commissioner model.

My job is to make mainstream programmes across ... Like the National Landcare Programme, the 20 Million Trees Programme, the National Heritage Trust. Also, indigenous range of programmes, or the CDP Programme in the Prime Ministers Department. Harness the power of all those programmes, to mainstream better outcomes to threatened species. A little bit like the concept of mainstreaming indigenous affairs, to get better indigenous health outcomes from existing health services.

That's how the model works, and as a result of this model, the amount that we've mobilised since 2014 is 210 million. There's hundreds of projects around Australia that are reversing declines of species, thanks to this model. I'm at a very sweet spot, where a science based, evidence based policy, the Threatened Species Strategy, with hard and measurable targets to recover our mammals, our birds, or plants, to improve recovery governance, and to tackle feral cats, have all been implemented now on an ongoing basis for long enough that we're starting to see significant improvements.

I can report on those improvements, I can share stories of like, the Norfolk Island Green Parrot, where \$300,000 has actually resulted in a ten fold increase in the global population of an endangered species. I'm lucky, that often content comes to me now, where people who have actually received grants that I've supported, and that Minister Hunt or Minister Frydenberg have approved on my recommendation, are now delivering results.

I use all of the social media and my direct engagement with radio and print news particularly, to promote the content of the Threatened Species Strategy, which is very ambitious, and also to share the successes. We definitely do schedule, and we're strategic about it. At the same time, there's quite a lot of content that comes in, that we don't necessarily predict. We need to have a combination of strategic, but also reactive, responses.

David Pembroke: From here on in, we're only a couple of minutes away from closing out today; where are the next bits of this? This has obviously been very successful, and you've used communication to run a very effective operation. Where do you see the next couple of years going? How is it going to continue to change? How are you going to continue to take advantage of communication, in order for you to continue to get the great results you obviously are?

Gregory Andrews: One of my number one priorities, that Minister Frydenberg's asked me to pursue, is to grow support from the private sector. We've all got a role to play

fighting extinction, the Australian government is certainly playing its part now, which is terrific. 210 million is a lot to mobilise, but we've got 19,000 animals and plants on our threatened species list. The list has been growing, so to get things off the list and keep them off the list, we need more support from a wide a source as possible.

Growing private sector, and philanthropic and corporate support for threatened species is a major priority for me. That was the key reason I went to Raine Island last week, which is the world's biggest green sea turtle hatchery, and where BHP is putting a whopping 5.45 million to save those turtles. The turtles were actually falling off a cliff and dying after they'd given birth, and their eggs were being inundated by water as a result of the sand dunes changing. BHP's contributed over 5 million over 5 years to re-profile the sand, to bring in bobcats and fix it all up, and it's working.

I wanted to go there, to actually validate and thank BHP, and show that partnerships where the Australian and Queensland government also have contributed millions of dollars; these partnerships can work. That's one of my major priorities.

David Pembroke: How important will your communication platform be, do you think, to encouraging private sector participation? Where people want to get exactly that type of recognition? I'm not saying BHP did it because they want to be featured in Gregory Andrews' Facebook page, but how important is it, do you think, to your work, that you have this platform in place, effective and working?

Gregory Andrews: Immensely important. I probably spend close to an hour a day myself on the social media. It's a high return, a very high return. As an example, we've got 30 plants that we need to recover by 2020, at least half a dozen of those plants would be ideal garden plants, that could be for sale at Bunnings, and Hardware House, and Mitre 10.

Actually, I've been doing stories and tagging Bunnings, and Hardware House. Tweeting and Facebooking about that, and how I'd like to see endangered plants, and I'm sure Bunnings would love to actually be part of a programme that's commercial. A commercially viable initiative, to save some of Australia's rarest plants, and where people can grow them in their garden, and the immense satisfaction they have from that. I think social media is going to continue to be important, probably even more important than it's ever been for my role.

David Pembroke: Okay Bunnings, you heard it. Gregory Andrews, thank you so much for coming and sharing your story with us on InTransition today. It's a wonderful example of a public servant taking the gift of technology, essentially being your own media company, and using it to get out there and create policy outcomes, and programme outcomes, and delivering massive value through telling great stories, and using content to get out there and do it.

Long may you continue with that, and I hope people get inspired by this. I loved the point there, particularly when you started, it was all about getting out and doing it, breaking a few things along the way. Not really asking for permission through the, "Don't do this, can't say that, be careful of this."; you actually just went out and got started, and then the value was there. Once you got started, you're away. I think that's a great lesson, I think, potentially for many people out there to follow.

Gregory Andrews: Thanks, David. I'm very proud to have been a public servant since 90-92; I've had a fantastic career. More importantly, I've contributed as an Australian government public servant, to some remarkable things that make our country better. I think by getting on social media and other platforms, including mainstream media, we can get these messages out, and we can celebrate the contribution that the Australian government makes, and not undersell ourselves.

David Pembroke: Excellent. Gregory Andrews, thank you very much for joining us. To you, the audience, thank you once again for coming back. What a great story told to us today by Gregory Andrews, really appreciated that.

Thanks for listening to the change there, as we made earlier in the programme, talking now about content communication. Thank you very much for joining me this week, and I look forward to you joining me again at the same time next week. Bye for now.