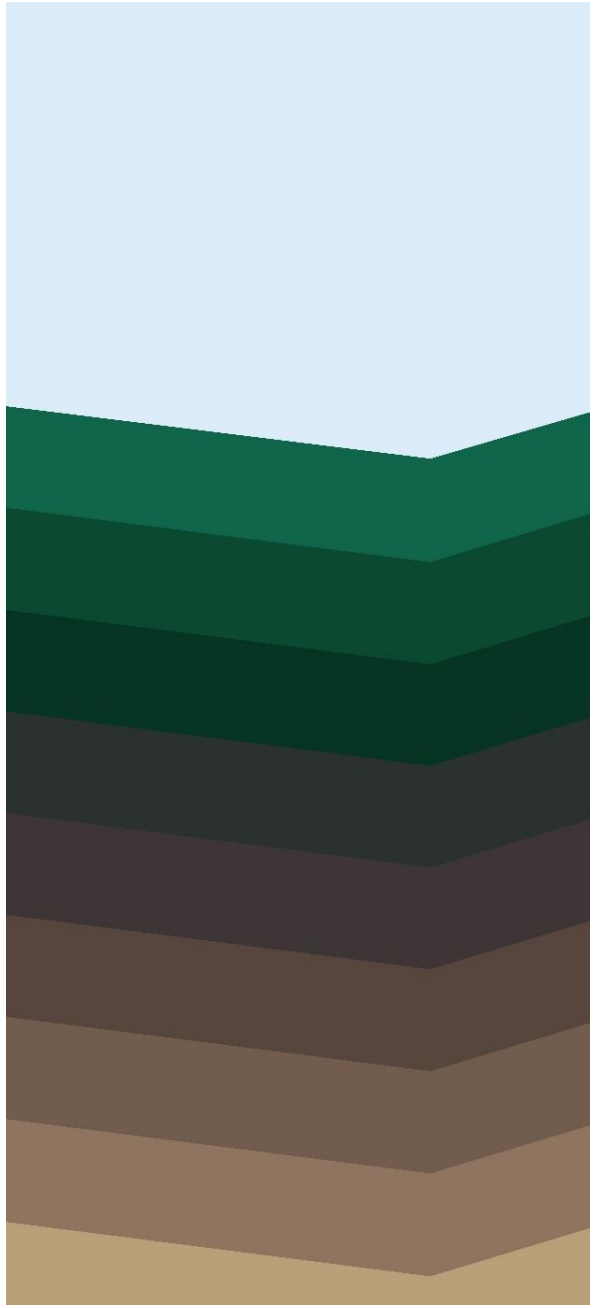
Australian Government
Office of the National Soils Advocate

The National Soils Advocate

Sue Bestow

Office of the National Soils Advocate



What does the National Soils Advocate do?

Role

The position of Advocate was established to raise awareness of the vital role soils play and to provide strong leadership and advocacy on the importance of conserving and improving the health of Australia's soils.

The position contributes to the Prime Minister’s national objective of protecting, restoring and maintaining the health of the Australian agricultural landscape, to enhance productivity, guarantee a food secure nation and sustainable farming communities.

Soil health improvements will also support the national objective to grow Australian agriculture into a $100 billion industry by 2030.

National Soil Strategy – released in May 2021

What does the National Soils Advocate do?

International Engagement

The role of the Advocate also has an international dimension as soil has a critical role to play in addressing global challenges, including food security and adapting to a changing climate.

Recent international engagement includes attending:

- the Final Conference of the Coordination of International Research Cooperation on Soil Carbon Sequestration in Agriculture project
- the 10th Annual Council Meeting of the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases
- the International Network on Salt-Affected Soils
- the Global Soil Partnership Ninth Plenary Assembly.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

GLOBAL SOIL PARTNERSHIP

GLOBAL RESEARCH ALLIANCE ON AGRICULTURAL GREENHOUSE GASES

The Hon. Penelope Wensley AC

- Ms Wensley is a former diplomat and Governor of Queensland.
- Ms Wensley as a long-held interest and substantial experience in natural resource management, environmental and sustainable development matters and is also the Patron of Soil Science Australia and the Soils CRC.
- Ms Wensley was a key contributor to several UN initiatives through her roles as an Australian Ambassador to the UN and Ambassador for the Environment.

So what is in it for me?

The National Soils Advocate does not represent government views, they are independent

- Reporting directly to PM
- Use the Advocacy –wisely

Outcome

The Advocate will create a local enabling environment and incentivise change by seeking to understand issues and influencing national action.

The Office of the National Soils Advocate

Role of the Office

Technical, communications and policy support is provided by the Office (the Office) of the National Soils Advocate. The key role of the Office is to support the Advocate to deliver to her Terms of Reference.

The Office is budgeted to be staffed by up to four staff, one funded by DAWE. These include:

- Senior Advisor
- Communications Adviser
- Policy Officer
- Executive Assistant 0.4 FTE

What do we do all day?

Run events

Go to events

Talk to people

Write things

Advise the Advocate on positioning

Draft speeches for the Advocate

Provide strategic input into initiatives (e.g. National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy)

Report quarterly to the PM and DPM

Work with DAWE to deliver the NSS (including the Steering Committee, Working Group and SAP)

And….

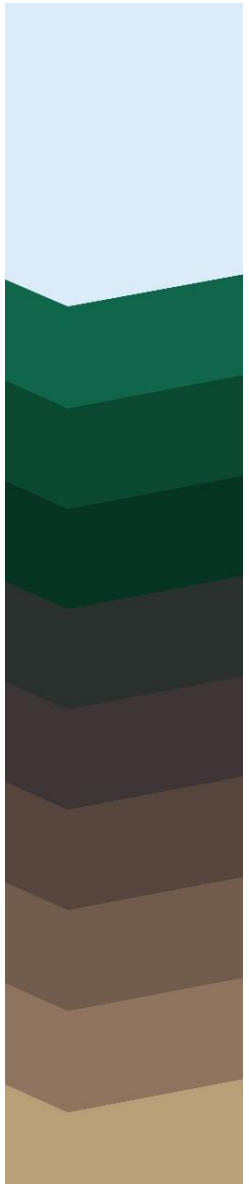
Social Media

The Office established a Twitter account for the National Soils Advocate in January 2021. Since then interactions have been steadily increasing.

While the numbers of followers are not high, credible and influential accounts in the soil-health field have increased.

Current Twitter statistics include:

- 277 followers
- 112 following
- 50 posts



Some philosophy

Sustainable intensification is based on **simultaneous improvements in productivity and ecosystem health to underpin profitability.**

It is not more of what we are currently doing; it requires **significant system changes** towards greater diversification involving crops, forages, livestock, shrubs and trees.

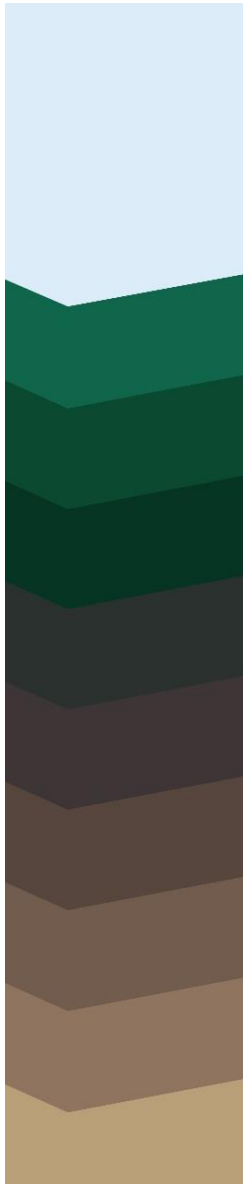
Regeneration of soil health; soil nitrogen, soil carbon and other key elements is required.

Input use-efficiency, water use-efficiency, less energy-rich inputs, integrated pest management and better genetics are all essential components.

The role of agronomists has changed; productivity, profitability, compliance **and sustainability**.

Thinking National and acting local

- Good soil health is vital to meet global challenges, such as food security (both quality and quantity), increasing global population and scarcity of natural resources (water, soils) and climate change.
- **Nationally – there is a lot going on – the operating environment is changing which needs to drive change locally.**
- **Locally it is up to us all to make significant change** to help to meet local sustainability and regenerative issues while improving production and supporting viable rural communities and cumulatively effecting national change.



Think National – Act Local

Urges people to consider the health of the entire nation (planet) and to take action in their own communities

Gets to the root cause of the problem

Underlying premise to prevent what we cannot cure

Cumulative local actions can be the answer to national environmental issues

Build common purpose amongst stakeholders – citizens, communities, elected representatives, businesses – to achieve the impacts that are needed

Some actions

But for you locally, here in the Mary River Catchment and surrounds, what does this really mean for you?

Taking responsibility and making change

Keep the soil covered (plant cover crops, retain stubble)

Maintain living roots all year round

Use no till farming

Rotate crops

Maximise plant diversity

Integrate livestock

Incorporate compost

Reduce inputs (mineral fertiliser, herbicides, fungicides, insecticides)

https://www.bundabergnow.com/2020/03/01/macadamias-australia-share-an-attitude-of-gratitude/

Acknowledging our first National Soils Advocate

Thank You

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