

Kate Hughes: Bio for Clean Up 2024

Kate Hughes is a specialist in communication between industry, government and the public. She has over thirty-five years' experience as a public communicator, an environmental advocate, a program director, a social engagement facilitator and a writer. Her main interest is in communication around public health protection and the remediation of contaminated environments.

Kate's background in history and politics provides her with a unique insight into the relationship between industry and society, where the strong media and policy focus on risk has distorted public perception about what constitutes empirical risks, and made communication about them very challenging. Kate understands the power of education and believes that humanist values rather than science *per se* must be the foundation of decision-making around technology risks.

Kate's core skills cover three interconnected areas: Research, communication and advocacy. She is an author, writing *Quick Poison, Slow Poison* in 1994. It was a book that revealed the parlous state of Australia's pesticide regulations, creating a pathway to much-needed pesticide reform. Kate wrote for leading Australian women's magazines, communicated through radio programs and television appearances and was guest speaker at many and varied public and private events. Her writing and advocacy helped change public attitudes about health risks from hazardous chemical exposure. One of her strongest suites is 'translation' of technical and policy reports. By way of example, she recently undertook a "reader-friendly" version of a Human Health Risk Assessment, creating a document that the public could understand but without compromising the integrity of the technical content

Among the highlights of a long career was when she drafted the Environmental Guidelines for the Year 2000 Sydney Olympics and following on, later directed the Olympic Coordination Authority's Ecology Programs. She worked as specialist community advisor on several iconic remediation sites, and more recently has been contributing to a leading industry magazine, writing and delivering webinars, and presenting occasional lectures.

Kate also likes to pen a poem or create piece of digital art. She is most at home outdoors, in the natural environment, where, for 25 years, she has led community-based invasive weed removal. She holds a PhD in Politics (1977) and in 2020 completed her second doctoral dissertation about risk communication by remediation experts. This body of research was undertaken at the University of Technology Sydney and supported by a scholarship CRC CARE. Here is the link to the thesis which is entitled *The Socially Literate Expert. A New Model of Risk Communication and Social Engagement: Bridging Content and Bridging Process*. <https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/handle/10453/144107>

Kate continues to refine her professional skills, and notwithstanding population pressure, climate change and global pollution, considers that one of the major challenges of our times is to resist a world that is increasingly organised around risk. The German philosopher, Ulrich Beck called this new situation the *Risk Society*. That was in 1986all those years ago. His message about the emergence of a dominant risk framework holds true today.....including around fire management issues, COVID-19 as well as hazardous chemical pollution. ...like PFAS and all the by-now familiar "usual suspects". Kate understands that risks need to be well-managed but not at the expense of everything else. A re-focus on humanist values will help here. Their application can help address the so-called "wicked" issues, including those around remediating contaminated environments.

Watch: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=U3gMkRss-74&feature=youtu.be>

Listen to <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/counterpoint/15-06-20/12348470>