



Australian Government

# THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRIZES FOR SCIENCE



## KERRIE WILSON

FRANK FENNER PRIZE FOR LIFE SCIENTIST OF THE YEAR



### Conservation that works for governments, ecosystems, and people

What is the value of the services that ecosystems provide—services such as clean air, water, food, and tourism? And what are the most effective ways

to protect ecosystems? Where will governments get the best return on their investment in the environment? These questions are central to the work of Associate Professor Kerrie Wilson.

Kerrie can put a value on clean air, water, food, tourism, and the other benefits that forests, rivers, oceans and other ecosystems provide. And she can calculate the most effective way to protect and restore these ecosystems. Around the world she is helping governments to make smart investments in conservation.

For example, in Borneo she and her colleagues have shown how the three nations that share the island could retain half the land as forest, provide adequate habitat for the orangutan and Bornean elephant, and achieve an opportunity cost saving of over \$50 billion.

In Chile, they are helping to plan national park extensions that will bring recreation and access to nature to many more Chileans, while also enhancing the conservation of native plants and animals.

On the Gold Coast, they are helping to ensure that a multi-million-dollar local government investment in rehabilitation of degraded farmland is spent wisely—in the areas where it will have the biggest impact for the natural ecosystem and local communities.

For optimising the global allocation of scarce conservation resources Associate Professor Kerrie Wilson receives the 2016 Frank Fenner Prize for Life Scientist of the Year.

When Kerrie is in a forest she feels calm and inspired. She says that the natural environment is central to what it is to be human. It is also essential to the sustainable development of human society. Not only do we feel better when we interact with the natural world, we depend on the ecosystem services it provides for our survival.

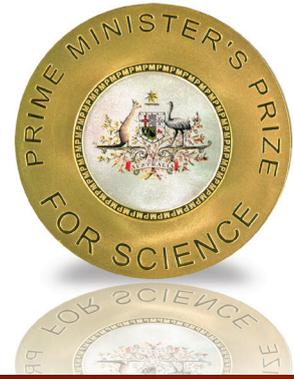
But the diversity of life on earth is being lost at a rapid rate. We face a pending extinction crisis that threatens natural ecosystems. At the same time governments have limited funds to invest in conservation.

So Kerrie and her colleagues at the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions (CEED) are working at two levels to guide the investment to ensure the greatest impact.

Firstly, they are using biology, geography, economics, mathematics, and social sciences to understand the impact of conservation measures. Secondly, they are working with all the tiers of stakeholders including traditional owners, farmers, advocates, and governments, to help them make informed decisions based on sound conservation biology.

Kerrie and her team have generated an impressive series of more than 120 papers with about 7,000 citations. More importantly, they are part of an epicentre connecting the global leaders in environmental decision science.

Kerrie is an ARC Future Fellow, Associate Professor at The University of Queensland, and Deputy Director of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions (CEED).



## Career profile, Associate Professor Kerrie Wilson

### QUALIFICATIONS

- 2004 PhD (Conservation Biology), The University of Melbourne
- 1999 Bachelor of Applied Science (Honours) (Environmental Science), The University of Queensland

### Career highlights

- 2015–2021 Chief Investigator, National Environmental Science Programme Threatened Species Recovery Hub
- 2015 Life Sciences Research Award, Women in Technology
- 2014 SCOPUS Young Researcher Award, Life and Biological Sciences, Elsevier and the Australasian Research Management Society
- 2014 HG Andrewartha Medal, Royal Society of South Australia
- 2013 Foundation Research Excellence Award, The University of Queensland
- 2013 Eureka Prize for Outstanding Young Researcher, Australian Museum
- 2011–2018 Australian Research Council (ARC) Future Fellow, The University of Queensland

- 2010–ongoing Chief Investigator and UQ Node Leader, ARC Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions
- 2010–ongoing Chief Investigator and UQ Node Leader, National Environmental Research Program Environmental Decisions Hub
- 2010 Scientific Visits to Europe Award, Australian Academy of Science
- 2009 Australian Leadership Award, ADC Forum Future Summit
- 2008 ARC Postdoctoral Fellow, The University of Queensland
- 2007–2008 Director of Conservation, The Nature Conservancy Australia
- 1999 University Medallist and ranked number one in graduating class (BAppSci(Hons)), University of Queensland

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### Further reading

- [wilsonconservationecology.com](http://wilsonconservationecology.com)
- @kerrie\_a\_wilson