Acknowledgements

Writing a book is an adventure. To begin with it is a toy and an amusement. Then it becomes a mistress, then it becomes a master, then it becomes a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster and fling him to the public.

Winston Churchill

Writing a book has been a long-standing goal of mine. Upon reflection the ambition is strange in some ways. Alone the goal does not mean a great deal. Why bother? Surely the answer lies in actually having something to say. In the beginning I was not altogether sure what I wanted to ‘fling to the public’. I had a few intuitions and some leftover political/economic/philosophical grievances from my days as a student activist. Yet I was often plagued by the question of whether intuitions and grievances were enough.

As a student, my passion for ideas made engaging with politics at university, and in the environmental movement, slightly awkward at times. I despised the notion of toeing the party line. However, some good did come of my political engagement. Occasionally I was confronted with the question of why it was I cared so much about the state of the natural world. It was a probing question that always made me think a little. Was it the destruction of that creek bed at the bottom of my street when I was seven years old? I liked playing with the tadpoles and frogs in that creek as a kid. Or was it the influence of that teacher I had in Year 4, Mr Meadows. He played a VHS (not Beta) video to the class once about nuclear issues. I remember being scared out of my wits for weeks after that. Or was it when I witnessed those blue-green algae formations growing on the shores of the Hawkesbury River near Sydney when I was ten? Or that documentary screened at primary school in Year 6 by Mr Watson about ozone depletion and greenhouse gases? Or was it the time I saw my first clear-felled forest with my own eyes as a late teenager? Or when, a few years later, I caught a bus from Sydney to the world heritage-listed Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory to visit the planned Jabiluka uranium mine? Or was it that all of the environmentally friendly inventions showcased on that TV programme
‘Beyond 2000’ never seemed to come to fruition? Maybe it was all of the above. Accretion works like that. One thing was for sure; I came to care intensely about the state of the natural world. And as time passed, I wanted to do something about it. In the end, this book is a manifestation of that concern.

There are indeed many people to thank for the creation of this book. Some of them – like Mr Meadows and Mr Watson – have slipped into my subconscious, only to be thought of when strolling down memory lane. However, there are many others who sit firmly at the forefront of my mind. In the first instance, there are five people who truly believed I could successfully undertake this project and, more importantly, told me so. First, my loving wife Catherine Atoms. She is a beautiful, intelligent, powerful, spirited woman who kept me on track even during the dark hours. I thank her from the bottom of my heart for her unwavering support. She holds the power to make me laugh and cry – simultaneously. Second, my mother Joanne Lang. She initially sparked my interest in the written word and the world of ideas. On many occasions, my mother affirmed a belief in my ability to realise this work. She is a great, loving woman and an excellent mother. Third, my father David Cunningham. He taught me lots of things, but above all else to never be ‘a half-jobber’. If a job’s worth doing, it’s worth doing properly (he’d say). A handy lesson indeed. Fourth, Professor Brian Fitzgerald, previously based at the Queensland University of Technology and now at the Australian Catholic University, was an early supporter of my project. I thank him for his foresight in appreciating the merit of undertaking blue-sky theoretical research within the cultural environmental domain. Professor Fitzgerald is a man of copious energy and encouragement. Fifth, Professor Peter Drahos at the Australian National University. A better supervisor a doctorate student could not imagine. He is passionate about ideas, has a sharp intellect and a good sense of humour, is an excellent communicator, abundantly encouraging, and an all-round charming human being.

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Casey Cunningham, Bridgette Cunningham, Charlotte Cunningham and Harper Cunningham. I look forward to witnessing the growth and evolution of each of you in the years to come.

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Dr Robert Lee Cunningham
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The University of Western Australia