

AFTER more than half a century of exploring Australia to identify the best of its natural heritage, I must now reluctantly conclude that, despite the best efforts of conservationists and others determined to leave the world a better place for our grandchildren, we have failed.

Apart from the legacy of a world depleted of resources, we are bequeathing them a world over-populated by people and with a dramatically impoverished natural and cultural heritage.

Fewer than 0.01 per cent of Australians would have seen as much of the continent as I

have. Even fewer would have been assessing the quality of the natural environment as closely or as critically as I have.

I believe that the landscape and all it contains has an enormous value. These values need to be respected and properly considered.

The Australian natural environment has suffered in ways that have gone largely disregarded for far too long.

Australia is a land rapidly losing its wildlife. While the political focus has been on the rarer animal species, particularly those with sex appeal, most Australians are failing to notice that even our more

common species are becoming much rarer.

The laugh of the kookaburra is not nearly as common while the once widespread raptor, the Australian kestrel, is so much rarer.

Most native mammal species are also in decline.

Coincidental with this decline of wildlife have been the dramatic changes in the landscape and the progressive loss of soil and vegetation.

Because most Australians are urban dwellers they have been oblivious to the scale of land clearing.

While our method of farming requires clearing, there has

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been little discrimination in this activity. There has been most ill-advised clearing carried out in semi-arid lands.

Politicians also are almost oblivious to Australia becoming increasingly a land of alien species.

Despite the impact of introduced animals on the ecology and the landscape, the combined impact of introduced plants is even greater.

Our grandchildren are going to inherit a much impoverished landscape because of the practices pursued over the past century (and particularly the latter part) that have transformed it.