



Diane Jean Lucas (Di) – New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects Tuia Pito Ora

Life Membership Citation

Diane Jean Lucas (Di) was born and raised on Bendigo Station, Tarras, in Central Otago –where she developed a love for the whenua that she says helped shape her life and career. Di talks of ‘going home’ to Bendigo. It is her tūrangawaewae.

Di has built a lifetime’s respect for the landscapes of Central Otago and the many corners of Aotearoa where she has practiced. In return, she has won a lifetime’s respect from the people with whom she has worked and whose landscape causes she has championed.

Di’s Bachelor of Science majoring in botany from the University of Otago was an expression of her love of Aotearoa’s natural and rural landscapes and a desire to better understand how they worked. It led naturally to a Post-graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from the then newly established course at Lincoln College.

Di’s first professional landscape architecture appointment was with George Malcolm in the Ministry of Works and Development Christchurch office. Di progressed to the Dunedin office, and then on to the Hamilton office as the Senior Landscape Architect for the Central North Island. Di signalled her values early in her career when she resigned from her role at the Ministry of Works and Development during the Muldoon era saying she could not work under a government whose policies adversely affected New Zealand’s biodiversity and natural landscapes. This stand epitomises her career and sense of conviction.

Di travelled overseas after leaving the Ministry of Works, visiting the UK, Europe, South and Central America and the United States. In 1978 she managed to coordinate travels with representing the NZILA at the IFLA Congress in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. Her year of travel was a time of ‘looking and learning’ about landscapes, land use and cultures.

Di returned rejuvenated and immediately set up Lucas Associates in Geraldine, a practice focussing on sustainable management of rural landscapes.

In 1986 Di received a Lincoln Foundation Award and travelled to Europe to study sustainable land management. On her return she was awarded a teaching fellowship at Lincoln and undertook a Masters of Landscape Architecture. Her research, utilising land typing as a timeless base for landscape assessment coupled with a strong human dimension including tangata whenua values, has characterised her approach throughout her career. It is perhaps best codified in the ‘Pigeon Bay factors’ that she was instrumental in establishing and which remain a foundation for best practice landscape assessment.

Di has made an outstanding and longstanding contribution to the profession and Institute. She was made a Fellow of the Institute in 1987. She served as the National President from 2003 to 2005, championing the profession during a particularly energetic and productive time in her career. She has been awarded over 20 times by the NZILA and other professional organisations including twice winning the Charlie Challenger Award, in 1996 and 2000, which recognises supreme excellence in landscape planning. She has been a pro-active participant in Environment Court hearings, responsible for some of the key principles of landscape practice now embedded in case law. Di continues to bring fresh ideas and energy to the profession alongside her passion and advocacy for the conservation of Aotearoa's landscapes.

Di's contribution also goes well beyond our profession through her energy and participation with a range of organisations, funds, agencies and political bodies concerned with Aotearoa's landscapes:

- Chair of the Nature Heritage Fund, a technical advisory committee to the Minister of Conservation, from its inception in 1990 until resigning in 2017. She played a key role developing the Fund's strategic direction, land protection policies, and standards for protecting nature on private land. During her tenure, the Fund set a benchmark by permanently protecting more than 340,000 hectares of land with significant conservation values;
- Elected to the Canterbury Regional Council, 1989 - 1992;
- Member of Ngā Whenua Rahui Komiti, a fund that assists with protection of indigenous ecosystems on Māori-owned land, 1990 - 2000;
- Member of the New Zealand Conservation Authority, 1990-1993;
- Member of the Ministerial Committee to prepare the New Zealand Forest Policy, 1990; and
- Appointed to the New Zealand Environmental Council, 1982 - 1988.

A hallmark of Di's approach is the importance of community connections with landscape. She forged strong ties with tangata whenua and community groups throughout Aotearoa with shared visions for the protection of the landscape's cultural and conservation values. She has often provided services, at least in part, pro bono because of her commitment to the common good.

Di was recognised with a Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) in the 2019 New Year's honours for her services to conservation, joining a very select group of landscape architects to have achieved such influence and to be recognised in this way.

Di has been a true steward and student of Aotearoa's landscapes for 45 years, exercising kaitiakitanga at every step of her influential and wide-reaching career.

Diane Jean Lucas' award of life membership of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects Tuia Pito Ora, is, therefore, a fitting tribute to her personal commitment to the stewardship of Aotearoa's landscapes and her contribution to the profession and the Institute.