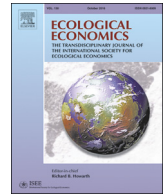




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Ecological Economics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ecocon

Commentary

In Memory of Mick Common (1940–2018)

Daniel McKenney^{a,*}, Charles Perrings^b, Stephen Dovers^c, Roger Perman^d

^a *Natural Resources Canada, Canadian Forest Service, 1219 Queen St East, Sault Ste Marie, Ontario P6A2E5, Canada*

^b *School of Life Sciences, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-4501, USA*

^c *Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia*

^d *Department of Economics, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow G11XQ, Scotland, United Kingdom*

Mick Common (Photos 1 and 2), who helped establish and define Ecological Economics, died on July 9 in Glasgow, Scotland. He was 78, and is survived by his wife Branwen and daughters Jane and Stephanie.

Mick's academic career coincided with the development of sustainability science, and the evolution of the field of ecological economics. He made major contributions in both areas—as a scientist, as a teacher/mentor, and as a responsible and engaged member of his chosen profession. His contributions were wide-ranging, spanning theoretical papers on the relation between sustainability and the stability of dynamical systems (Common and Perrings, 1992), empirical studies of the environmental Kuznets curve (Stern and Common, 2001; Stern et al., 1996), and assessments of the efficiency of environmental policy instruments (e.g. Common, 1992). He published in a wide range of journals including *Ecological Economics*, *Environmental Ethics*, *Journal of Economic Studies* and *Energy Policy*. He authored and co-authored textbooks on Econometrics (Common, 1976), Resource and Environmental Economics (Common, 1996; Perman et al., 2011) and the first, and very well received, textbook devoted to Ecological Economics as a subject in its own right (Common and Stagl, 2005). In addition he wrote an important book entitled *Sustainability and Policy: Limits to Economics* — a must read for anyone interested in sustainability policy and the role(s) of economics (Common, 1995). The book also provides practical insights and advice, reflecting Mick's nature as a pragmatist.

Everyone's path is unique but Mick's was certainly not one of a typical academic. He was born in Walton on Thames in the U.K. in 1940. His father was a specialist welder who, given the times, moved his family around many times before they settled in Shepperton, Middlesex where Mick obtained his early schooling. At the age of 17 Mick joined the British Merchant Navy which took him to places like Trinidad, The Dutch Antilles, Venezuela, Cuba, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Brunei, Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Peru and Ecuador. No doubt his colourful experiences as a merchant seaman allowed him to gain perspectives on the tapestry of life that the world offers, economy and environment interactions, and cultured at least a bit of his appealing crustiness.

In 1962 he left the Merchant Navy and after a succession of jobs started an academic career. His daughter Jane relayed his story that one

day going home from work on a different-than-usual path he found himself standing in front of the main door of the London School of Economics (LSE). “On the spur of the moment, he asked the porter at the door how one went about applying to become a student there. If he'd written an autobiography, he said years later, he'd have called it ‘An Accidental Academic’ as had he walked another route that day in December 1962 his life would have taken a different path altogether.” As it was – and much to his parents' elation – Mick had decided that having a degree might not be a bad idea after all and enrolled not at LSE but at Liverpool University to study Economics, continuing to do graduate work at Southampton.

In 1979 he took up a post at the University of Stirling where he established his career and a reputation as an economist with a strong interest in interdisciplinary teaching and research. In 1988 he moved to the multi-disciplinary Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (now the Fenner School of Environment and Society) at The Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra. The 1990s were an interesting time in Australia. Debate and studies on the subject of sustainable development permeated academia and perhaps more importantly, was a major issue for a government embroiled in a number of environment/economy controversies. Australia's Resource Assessment Commission was established and provided an opportunity for economists to make contributions to the challenge of Ecologically Sustainable Development. Mick was one of them and his reputation grew – he was also an invited member of Australia's Industry Commission while at ANU. His work has touched on issues ranging from taxation of natural resources (Common, 1992); reliability, validity and relevance of non-market valuation to sustainability (Common et al., 1997; Common et al., 1993; Common and McKenney, 1994); biodiversity, natural resources, adjustments to national accounts (Common, 2007; Common and Sanyal, 1998; Common and Norton, 1994; van Rensburg et al., 2002); and climate change policy (e.g. Common, 1995).

Amongst his many professional contributions to the development of his field, Mick played a major role in the establishment and design of the Department of Environmental Economics and Environmental Management at the University of York in 1993. He maintained a close

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: dan.mckenney@canada.ca (D. McKenney), Charles.Perrings@asu.edu (C. Perrings), stephen.dovers@anu.edu.au (S. Dovers), r.perman@strath.ac.uk (R. Perman).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2018.08.023>

Received 22 August 2018; Received in revised form 28 August 2018; Accepted 29 August 2018

Available online 03 September 2018

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Photo 1. Caption: Mick Common - Isle of Bute 2015.

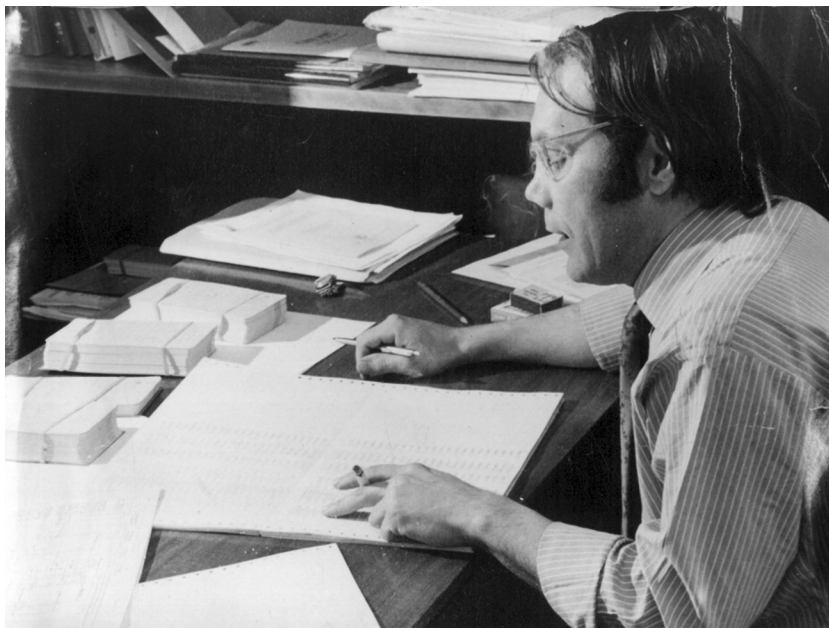


Photo 2. Caption: Mick Common - At work in the 1970s.

working relationship with the department (now known just as the Environment Department) up until his retirement and beyond. Many faculty and students who passed through the Department in those years benefitted from his always clear and often trenchant assessments of their work, from his intellectual generosity, and from his willingness to engage on a very wide range of topics.

Mick returned to the UK in 1999 to take up a post at University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. He “retired” to the Isle of Bute in 2003 where he

remained active, working on new editions of his environmental and resource economics text, reviewing manuscripts, providing a number of commentaries on books for this *Journal*, examining doctoral dissertations, developing research proposals, and returning to the “mainland” to give lectures. He also contributed time to his local Council.

The many who were lucky enough to work with Mick as either colleague or student, will remember him as both forthright and fair in his views. It is safe to say he was considered one of the most

independently minded economists of his time. Although Mick was something of a maverick who thought about many things, he did not gloss over subjects once he tackled them. He was a ruthlessly logical and critical thinker. He had a deep understanding of both the strengths and weaknesses of his discipline and was always willing to test the consistency and coherence of arguments brought by economists. Anyone interested in either the fields of ecological economics or sustainability science should take the time to read at least a few of his contributions. Some of our favourites are listed below. We have all lost not just a friend or mentor, but also a keen intellect and a major contributor to our profession.

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