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CULTURE



# TAKING A stand

WA'S MYLES POLLARD FIGHTS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT  
IN NEW PLAY *EXTINCTION*. BY KRISTY SYMONDS

It tackles the critical issues of conservation and environmental awareness, but Myles Pollard says his new play *Extinction* is "not just a greenie play saying stop burning fossil fuels".

"It just starts the conversation in a rational way and that's what I love about it," says Pollard, who stars in the Black Swan State Theatre Company's latest drama written by Helpmann Award-winning playwright Hannie Rayson.

*Extinction* centres around the fight to save an endangered tiger quoll - the largest marsupial carnivore surviving on mainland Australia - but explores the very human themes of love, mortality and survival, and ethics.

Pollard plays passionate vet Andy Dixon, who begins to question his feelings for his lover, the

determined conservation biologist Dr Piper Ross (played by Hannah Day), who agrees to undertake research paid for by the chief executive of a mining company.

"I read it (the script) and it really stirred me,"

Dunborough-based Pollard says.

"I think the whole environmental angle is something that is close to my heart and it explores those themes in a really non-didactic way. It's not heavy-handed and it's not just whacking you over the head with a blunt political stick."

The 42-year-old, known for his role as Nick Ryan on *McLeod's Daughters*, says the clever play looks at both sides of the coin, tackling the environmental theme from both an economic and moral perspective rather than just forcing an opinion on its audience.

"I don't think you can avoid the politics of it but it's a real opportunity for people to reassess what is important," he says.

For Lizzie Corke, chief executive of the Conservation Ecology Centre in Victoria, the reality is grim. She says Australia's mammal extinction record is the worst in the world, with 29 species becoming extinct over the past 200 years and many more battling for survival.

Those facts are put to good use in the script for *Extinction*.

The story has left Pollard questioning what ramifications there will be "spiritually, philosophically and socially".

He says the arts community would have struggled five to 10 years ago to raise the idea of questioning the Government about its priorities when it comes to the economy and the environment.

"Even as far as the Rudd government and the emissions trading scheme - it was just political suicide and the opposition really exploited that," he says.

"The public, I don't think we're quite there yet. But I think now people are much more plugged into how important the environment is and not just about saving a species but (realising), I think, people are really disconnected from their place in the environment as organic creatures.

"What is it that we don't have, that we're craving for? I think it all comes back to being connected to who we are and that is animals in the environment and I think the play really explores that in many ways but not so literally."

While working on the play, Pollard is dividing his time between work in Perth and family in the South-West, which he is no stranger to doing. He's recently commuted for work on *Home and Away*, Bell Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* at the Sydney Opera House and Murdoch University's Creative Arts Initiative - a film-based project exposing high school students to the industry - so he's accustomed to plenty of travel.

"I suppose that's the challenge but when I'm home, I'm home and it's just that I can turn off," he says.

"I feel like it's a beautiful place there and it's a great community and it seems to work.

"I've got my mum and my sister here (in Perth) too, so I can stay with them and there's nothing like staying at mum's with a home-cooked meal and a hot-water bottle in your bed."

➤ *Extinction* runs September 19 to October 4, Heath Ledger Theatre, State Theatre Centre of WA, Northbridge. Tickets from \$33.13 from Ticketek.