

# Risk aversion is the enemy of innovation

**Science agencies need to take more risks in how they communicate with the public, according to US scientist-turned-filmmaker Randy Olson who will be in Adelaide this week.**

"We have a crisis here in the US," says Olson. "The scientists are trying to communicate about climate change but the general public are not buying it. The environmental movement has failed to make any major accomplishments since 1980.

"At the core is a colossal failure to communicate effectively. And at the core of that failure is a marked absence of interest in and support for innovation.

"The major foundations that support science and environmental work are extremely conservative and risk averse. And risk aversion is the enemy of innovation."

After 15 years as a scientist, earning his PhD in Biology from Harvard University and becoming a tenured professor of marine biology at the University of New Hampshire, Olson took the radical step of moving to Hollywood to explore film as a medium for communicating science.

Drawing from what he learnt at film school about telling stories and acting to reach a broader audience, he wrote and directed documentaries about evolution ("Flock of Dodos") and climate change ("Sizzle: A Global Warming Comedy"), and wrote the book '*Don't be such a scientist*'.

He now works with organisations such as NASA and large public health organisations to communicate science to the public.

In his first trip to Australia since he studied the crown-of-thorns starfish on the Great Barrier Reef 24 years ago, Olson promises to enlighten delegates to the annual conference of the Cooperative Research Centre Association—'**Collaborate | Innovate | 2012**'—with tales of zombies and old war heroes.

The conference is being held at the **National Wine Centre of Australia in Adelaide this week, 15–17 May.**

"Collaboration and innovation are about the two biggest topics I am pushing these days," says Olson. "Once upon a time the US environmental movement scored large victories through collaboration of the major organisations, but since they became more competitive they have little to show."

His next film is about the last surviving officer of the Bataan Death March of WW II—Olson's 94-year-old father.

Randy Olson will be speaking at Plenary Session 1 on **Tuesday 15 May 9:00–10:30am**.

More information about the CRCA Conference can be found here: [www.crca.asn.au/conference](http://www.crca.asn.au/conference)

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Media attending the conference can use the Yarrabee Boardroom at the National Wine Centre of Australia. It is just outside the main entrance on the corner of Hackney Road and Botanic Road, Adelaide.