

BY GILES PARKINSON

Eco warrior

Mara Bun joins some global big guns as she moves to put Green Cross at the forefront of the climate change fight.



MARA BUN, newly appointed head of Green Cross Australia, was presented with two unique opportunities during her first week in the job.

The first was to practice her Russian with Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet president who founded Green Cross International in 1993. Bun studied economics at St Petersburg University in the 1980s, but until meeting Gorbachev she'd had little opportunity to speak the language with anyone apart from a few cab drivers. "It was kind of intuitive," she says. "It's like riding a bicycle; you never really forget."

The second opportunity was witnessing Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans – the site earlier this month of the Green Cross biannual congress – and the depressingly hazardous nature of the city's reconstruction. "It's a chilling place," Bun says. "You wonder how it could have happened. And the second thing

that comes forward is, why haven't they fixed it? Two years later some of these areas have been less than 20% rebuilt."

In many ways New Orleans crystallises the challenges that Green Cross will tackle – the growing intersection of big environmental and humanitarian issues. The environment is no longer a minority or radical issue that can be marginalised. It has gone mainstream – and, increasingly, so has the impact of its degradation.

It won't be too long, Bun believes, before Australia will be confronted with problems of a similar magnitude, ranging from a lack of fresh water or rising oceans to ferocious storms that are expected to increase as climate change continues.

She hopes Green Cross can operate on two levels – first, by pooling environmental, infrastructure and emergency relief knowledge through improved training, support and



GREEN SCENE
Mara Bun, above; Green Cross' US CEO Matt Petersen with high-profile supporters Brad Pitt, right, and founder Mikhail Gorbachev, far right



liaison. "Six weeks ago we had a mini-cyclone in Byron," Bun says. "That's when I thought, wow, the community was completely unprepared. This is going to happen much more."

The second thrust is to develop policies to help prevent and resolve conflicts caused by environmental degradation, particularly forced migration and the security risks highlighted by AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty last month.

Australian farmers have already been forced to leave unsustainable land, Bun says. "That's very much the first wave. We need to build up our policy response ... to make sure it is equal in size to the potential risk. We have to find a way that builds consensus in light of this full-frontal climate impact."

Bun's first major initiative will be a conference early next year to examine the impact of rising sea levels and climate change on dislocated communities, both in Australia and its neighbours. She plans a European-

style "consensus conference" that brings the public into contact with experts from the scientific, business and other communities.

Bun will draw on her experience in the financial world and with groups focused on community and environmental issues. She has worked for financial group Morgan Stanley in the US, Macquarie Bank, Allen Consulting Group and consumer finance research group Canex. She was policy and public affairs manager of the Australian Consumers Association, and has been CFO of Greenpeace Australia and head of business development at the CSIRO. "Gone are the days when people and their careers are tightly defined," Bun says.

As for Green Cross, its 20 affiliated global organisations each has a different business model. The Australian group has already struck up partnerships with a range of business, government and non-government organisations, but you are not likely to see a fleet of Green Cross vehicles. "We won't have the physical footprint that the Red Cross has, but I hope that in five years we will have a natural brand like theirs," says Bun.

For now, the office consists of Bun and an assistant, and lots of ideas. "This is a quintessential start-up," she says, "but it is an idea whose time is right now." ●

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