

## Stephen Bennetts on the *Dark Emu* debate

Few books have had as decisive an impact on the history of Indigenous Australian land management as Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu*. And yet, as Peter Sutton and Keryn Walshe argue in *Farmers or Hunter-gatherers?*, the foundations upon which Pascoe builds his account of Indigenous agriculture may be shakier than first thought.

In his article 'Why Settle for a Mere Farm?' in the August issue of *ABR*, writer and anthropologist Stephen Bennetts assesses not only Sutton and Walshe's criticisms of Pascoe's claims, but also the surrounding controversy that has turned a scholarly debate into another theatre in a culture war. What this political furore threatens to obscure is the long tradition of Australian anthropological research that has been essential to the legal restoration of Indigenous land ownership. Bennetts's piece is thus a plea for a return to an academic culture of public engagement and for wider recognition of the role Australian anthropologists have played in our attempts to understand and respect the past.



### Extracts from Stephen Bennetts's article

'As I was writing this review, cost-cutting measures were announced at the University of Western Australia that would see the abolition of its Department of Anthropology, established in 1956 ... *Farmers or Hunter-gatherers?* is in many ways a defence of this legacy. For Sutton, the uncritical acceptance of *Dark Emu's* flawed version of Aboriginal history highlights the degree to which anthropology and "the authority of the academy has slipped".'



Stephen Bennetts

### About Stephen Bennetts

Stephen Bennetts is a Perth-based writer and anthropologist who has worked on Aboriginal heritage, land, and native title matters in remote areas of WA and the Northern Territory since 1994.

### Interviews

Stephen Bennetts is available for interview. Please direct requests to Peter Rose at [editor@australianbookreview.com.au](mailto:editor@australianbookreview.com.au) | (03) 9699 8822