

Green and bold

Rob Pennicott has a dream – to change the world, one tourist at a time.

FORMER FISHERMAN Rob Pennicott has gone more than 10 summers now without taking a fish from a net or dragging crayfish from tea-tree pots. Instead, he runs a fleet of six custom-designed boats on the Tasman Sea.

These days, instead of fishing, the 43-year-old annually nets about 20,000 tourists, who take his Bruny Island Charters tours. Together they explore the dramatic coastlines of Bruny and Tasman islands, south and south-east of Hobart.

Rob fell in love with the Tasmanian coast at the age of 12, after buying his



Coast guardian.

Tasmanian old salt and entrepreneur Rob Pennicott (above) has a conservation vision that extends far beyond his beloved Bruny (right) and Tasman islands.

first dinghy from his dad and turning his dream of catching and selling fish into reality. More than three decades later, he's following a new dream – to protect the coast he's always held dear.

Two years ago, after discussions with Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania (PWS), Rob established the Tasmanian Coast Conservation Fund, into which he puts a portion of his tours' ticket sales, plus other donations. In 2008, about 13 per cent of his net income went to helping the environment in what is the first private conservation fund to work with Wildcare Incorporated, the largest and fastest-growing environmental action group in Tasmania.

Alongside PWS and Wildcare, the fund provides money for coastal reserve management, marine mammal and seabird conservation, and the promotion of community participation in the marine and coastal environment. This winter, Rob's donation of \$40,000 will kick-start the fund's first project: eradicating the

more than 200 feral cats on Tasman Island (*Lights on at Tasman*, AG 90).

When the last cat is gone, Rob says, "If I do nothing else, if everything flops, we will be able to go past Tasman Island and really think that we were responsible. My children can in 50 years time say, 'We were responsible for that!'"

Last year, AG's founder and patron, Dick Smith, followed Rob's lead and set up a \$1 million trust to maintain the Frenchmans Cap walking track, in the heart of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Rob hopes his business interests will grow into a philanthropic platform that supports many causes, including medical breakthroughs and natural-disaster relief. For him the conservation fund is "just a dot in the ocean. I'm trying to build a series of businesses that mean I have the potential of donating millions of dollars. I think that if you have a dream like that there's a chance it could happen."

DAVID GILCHRIST

