

ERIKA ALIGNO

Erika Aligno is a veteran of community legal centres, where she advocated for social justice, supporting people navigating systems not built for them. Over time, she has expanded her energy toward environmental justice. Her work in the environment sector and her studies in Environmental Management at UNSW led her to Deep Ecology, and in 2023 she began working closely with John Seed, the 'Australian Father' of Deep Ecology. Erika now serves as a Director of the Institute for Deep Ecology, contributing to the organisation's mission to advance ecological consciousness, community practice, and transformative education. As a facilitator, Erika has co-led more than a dozen Deep Ecology workshops in Sydney, Hobart, Perth, and soon-to-be USA, supporting participants to (re)connect with Earth, each other, and their own ecological identity.

My journey so far:

My work sits at the intersection of activism, social justice, and ecological (re)awakening. Originally trained in commercial litigation, I later moved into advocacy and communications roles with community legal centres, supporting people navigating systems not built for them. I volunteered as a lawyer with Redfern Legal Centre providing free legal advice and worked with Inner City Legal Centre as their communications advocate during pivotal moments incl. the 2017 marriage equality campaign and the establishment of Australia's first free Transgender Legal Service in 2018. During this time, I worked and spoke alongside Hon. Justice Michael Kirby (Australian High Court Judge and international jurist) and Hon. Chief Justice Lucy McCallum. Alongside this work, I spent several years as an international conference producer, travelling across Australia, the USA, and South Africa.

Yet, throughout this time, there were what David Whyte calls "questions that have no right to go away," and for me, there was one question that would not leave me; a quiet whisper of my heart: how can I respond and act meaningfully in my own life in a time of spiritual and ecological crisis?

In 2019-20, after the dystopian-like Australia's bushfires where I saw blue skies turn red

days on end and the death of some 1.25 billion animal kin, something in me shifted. I turned my attention toward biodiversity conservation and took on a role within the NSW Government environment sector. In 2023, I began my Master of Environmental Management at UNSW. That same year, I was offered a role as a casual teaching assistant. It was through UNSW that a visionary Professor, Tema Okun, a leader in ecocultural communication and transformation, invited and introduced me to a Deep Ecology workshop at Narara Ecovillage. It was the first time I came across the work of Deep Ecology and John Seed - and I feel deep gratitude for what felt like an invitation from life itself to step into co-creation and participation with Gaia. It was sitting in the Truth Mandala for the first time that I experienced what I would describe as my awakening. It was a direct encounter with what had long been quietly presenting and a recognition of a deeper lineage, that felt-sense of “thinking like a mountain,” and the quiet whisper of my heart grew louder, and the questions of belonging, ecological longing, and a search for deeper meaning became hard to ignore.

I often describe this period as the moment I “stopped sleepwalking through my life.” Three months later I would co-facilitate my first Deep Ecology workshop. A year later in 2024, I immersed myself in a 10-day Vipassana silent meditation, and my inner voice and the quiet whisper of my heart became even louder.

Since then, I’ve continued to reorient myself toward ‘answering’ that question that would not go away; I began to peel back the layers of coping and conditioning shaped by a dominant culture that prioritises economics over nature. Later that year I travelled to Colombia and undertook plant medicine and womb healing ceremony. For the past 3 years, I have worked closely with John Seed, attending over 20 workshops and facilitating a dozen of those. I now serve as a Director of the Institute for Deep Ecology. I have co-facilitated Deep Ecology workshops and immersive group processes across Sydney, Hobart, Perth, and soon-to-be in USA, supporting participants to reconnect with Earth, each other, and their wider ecological identity. I’ve also been an active organiser with Rising Tide (a people-led movement to stop the largest coal port in the world) and more recently focused on ending native forest logging with Bob Brown Foundation and forest protection with Rainforest Information Centre.