



Benalla Sustainable Future Group

Newsletter 5

February 2014

Benalla Sustainable
Future Group Inc.
PO Box 642
Benalla 3672

President's Column

The Heat is On!

Undoubtedly the major topic of conversation during the last few weeks has been the unrelenting heat from successive heatwaves. The heatwave that baked most of south-eastern Australia during mid-January rivalled the intensity of the searing temperatures that preceded the Black Saturday bush fires in February 2009, according to analysis by the Bureau of Meteorology. For Victoria this heatwave ranked alongside those of January-February 2009, January 1939 and January 1908 as "one of the most significant" on record, said the Bureau.

Here in Benalla, while no records for daily maximums were broken we saw a new record for prolonged heat with seven successive days of 38 degrees or warmer, which beat the previous record of five days. Across the state Victoria had its hottest four day period on record for both maximum and average heat. As I write this we have just been through our third heatwave of the year (and our worst fire day since Black Saturday) which is following on from Australia's hottest year on record and a decade between 2001 and 2010 that was the warmest on record.

The Climate Council says the link between climate change and record hot weather is clear. "The rising concentration of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is trapping more heat. Each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850" (*Off the Charts*, January 2014).

The Federal government's position on global warming and climate change is very disturbing as was highlighted by Gay Alcorn in her column in *The Age* on 31/1/2014 titled "*Applying the heat to Canberra's climate stance*".

Gay Alcorn begins her article by saying that Australians generally accept the result of an election no matter which party we voted for. We may disagree

with particular policies and get involved if we feel strongly enough about an issue, but we generally let the government get on with it and wait for the next election.

"But what if there was an issue where you couldn't accept the elected government's position believing it so wrong, dangerous and damaging to the country's economic and social future that to treat it as just part of the argy-bargy of politics would make you complicit in that wrong?" She then argues that climate change is such an issue.

In relation to the government's position she says, "The government says it believes in global warming and the human contribution to it, but everything it has done since it was elected negates that. It's a lie, a wink and a nod and everybody knows it. This government does not believe in the seriousness of climate change and is abrogating its responsibility to inform Australians about how to adapt and make a fair contribution to global action in our own interests."

Continued next page

Next General Meeting

Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc.

Thursday 27th February at 7.30 pm

Uniting Church Hall, Carrier Street, Benalla

Guest Speaker: Kathryn McQualter

Dietician at Benalla Health

Kathryn will speak about her research on Food Security in the Benalla region and inform us about a range of community activities and the opportunities of a local fresh food culture, including improving healthy food access, community gardens and the gardening community, harvest sharing, and cooking and preserving.



Alcorn then lists a number of actions taken by Prime Minister Tony Abbot which negate the government's statement that it believes in global warming. These include: abolishing the Climate Commission; accusing a senior UN official of 'talking through her hat' because she linked heatwaves and bushfires with climate change; planning to abolish the Climate Change Authority and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation; abolition of the carbon tax and the review of the Renewable Energy Target which could lead to it being abandoned.

Alcorn continues, "But the most blatant proof of the Prime Minister's subterfuge is his appointment of Maurice Newman as chairman of his Business Advisory Council. To have as your key business advisor someone who believes climate change is a 'scientific delusion', that Australia was 'hostage to climate change madness', that the key international body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change, resorted to 'dishonesty and deceit' says more than words about the government's commitment to moving this economy to a low carbon one."

Alcorn then asks, "What is a citizen's responsibility in these circumstances?" She argues that ordinary citizens will become more activist and that we will see greater civil disobedience, more protests and blockades as we have seen over coal seam gas and forests. She suggests that, "for some Australians such action might seem the only thing they can do when an elected government seems content to do so little."

I believe this was reflected in the amazing turnout at the climate rally last November where over one hundred people assembled in Benalla to demand greater action on climate change. Maybe we need more actions like this to get the message to our politicians. This leaves me wondering what can I do, as an individual, and what can Benalla Sustainable Future Group do, to influence our current government regarding this crucial issue.

Climate Champions

In relation to the issue of what could individuals do to influence politicians about climate change the Greens have suggested we should become 'Climate Champions' and they have developed a 'Climate Champion's Toolkit'.

While the material comes from a political party there are some excellent guides that do not contain any party political statements. These include a 'Climate Conversation Guide' and a 'Busting Myths About Climate Change' sheet.

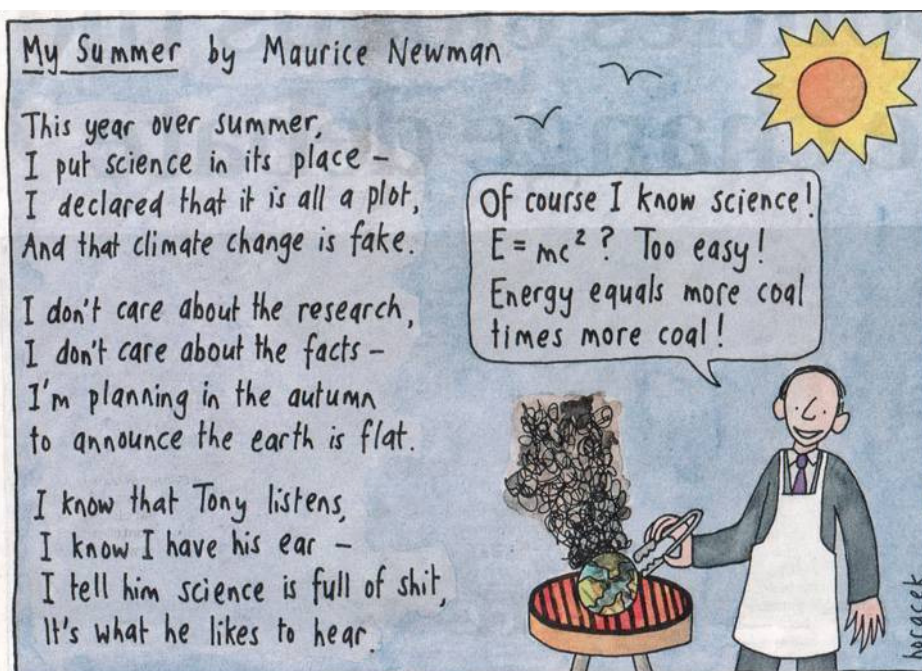
I have mentioned previously how having a conversation about climate change can be a very effective way to change attitudes. The conversation guide provides a five step guide to having powerful conversations about global warming. The 'myth buster' sheet lists some of the most popular myths along with facts that can be used to help bust them.

If you are interested in these guides please email or phone me and I will forward them to you. My contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

Recently a member of BSFG asked if we would consider providing advice and assistance to people who would like to write letters to newspapers, government departments, councillors, politicians, etc. The committee agrees this is a good idea and would be prepared to conduct a workshop if there was sufficient interest. Again please email me if you would be interested in attending such a workshop.

In light of the issues I raised above I would encourage members to consider becoming a little more activist and to start having conversations about global warming and writing letters or making phone calls. (See Wendy Baker's article)

John Lloyd



Renewable Energy Now Cheaper than Electricity from Fossil Fuels

Some good news from Bloomberg New Energy Finance which says that unsubsidised renewable energy is now cheaper than electricity from new-build coal- and gas-fired power stations in Australia. This new ranking of Australia's energy resources is the product of Bloomberg New Energy Finance's Sydney analysis team, which comprehensively modelled the cost of generating electricity in Australia from different sources. The study shows that electricity can be supplied from a new wind farm at a cost of \$80/MWh compared to \$143/MWh from a new coal plant or \$116/MWh from a new baseload gas plant, including the cost of emissions under the Gillard government's carbon pricing scheme. However even without a carbon price wind energy is 14% cheaper than new coal and 18% cheaper than new gas.

"The perception that fossil fuels are cheap and renewables are expensive is now out of date", said Michael Liebreich, chief executive of Bloomberg New Energy Finance. "The fact that wind power is now cheaper than coal and gas in a country with some of the world's best fossil fuel resources shows that clean energy is a game changer which promises to turn the economics of power systems on its head," he said.

Bloomberg New Energy Finance's research on Australia shows that since 2011, the cost of wind generation has fallen by 10% and the cost of solar photovoltaics by 29%. In contrast, the cost of energy from new fossil-fuelled plants is high and rising. BNEF's analysts conclude that by 2020, large-scale solar PV will also be cheaper than coal and gas, when carbon prices are factored in.

Bureau of Metrology Pilot Heat Wave Service

The Bureau of Meteorology has recently introduced a 'pilot' heat wave service which will provide forecasts of heatwaves three days in advance. Severe and extreme heatwaves have taken more lives than any other natural hazard in Australia's 200 year history.

For example, during the 2009 Victorian bushfires, 173 people perished as a direct result of the bushfires, however 374 people lost their lives to extreme heat in Victoria in the heatwave before the bushfires.

Heatwaves have been described as a 'silent killer' because they result in significant stress on vulnerable people. This stress may result in death during the heat event but can occur well after the cessation of the heatwave. Often the cause of death during a heatwave is difficult to determine with many people who succumb often having pre-existing conditions.

Climate projections show that extreme heat events are expected to occur more often and with greater intensity in the future. The Bureau believes that by predicting when a heatwave will arrive it warns people, especially the vulnerable, to make precautions in advance and therefore prevent deaths.

Devastating El Nino Events to Double This Century

Extreme El Nino events, that can kill tens of thousands of people, will be twice as common this century because of climate change. The finding adds to the evidence that global warming will cause ever more extreme weather. Tom Arup (*The Age 20/1/2014*) reporting on an study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, states that an international team of researchers projects for the first time that 'extreme' El Nino events will occur once every 10 years – instead of every 20 years as in the previous century – as the planet continues to warm due to human activity. The El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is one of the most powerful phenomena controlling global weather. An El Nino happens when warm water spreads across the surface of the Pacific, pushing rainfall to the east and causing floods in the Americas and drought in Australia.

The researchers concluded that total occurrences of El Nino will remain largely unchanged, but extreme events will occur twice as often between 1991-2090 as they did in the previous hundred years. "With a projected large increase in extreme El Nino occurrences, we should expect more occurrences of devastating weather events, which will have pronounced implications for 21st-century climate," the study concludes.

The researchers point to El Nino in 1982-83 and 1997-98 as examples of extreme events that wreaked havoc and foreshadow the dangers that increased occurrences would present. The 1997-98 El Nino is estimated to have caused up to \$45 billion in damage and killed 23,000 people. It brought flooding to the Americas and Africa, tropical cyclones to Pacific islands, and droughts and wildfires to Australia and south-east Asia.

India Plans to Build the World's Largest Solar Project

India currently depends on coal for more than half of its electricity production, but it also gets a lot of sun, giving it the potential to become a solar power titan in the future. All it needs is the will to invest in this clean source of energy.

One big step in that direction might be taken soon; a deal was signed between the Indian Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, and the Ministry of Power to set up what they call an 'ultra mega solar power project' in Rajasthan. At 4,000 MW of capacity, it would be by far the world's largest.

Once fully operational, the project should reduce CO2 emissions by over 4 million tonnes per year. The first phase will be for 1 gigawatt, and it should take 7-8 years for all the phases to be built.

From Treehugger 4/2/2014

Divesting from Fossil Fuels?

You may be aware of the organisation *100% Renewables* which is working to encourage Australia's move to renewable energy. *100% Renewables* has recently partnered with a new organisation called *fossilfree* which has been established to help Australians collectively divest their money from fossil fuels, so we can stop inadvertently funding climate chaos and instead build more investment in renewable energy and other climate solutions.

Taegen Edwards from *100% Renewables* says, "I find it amazing that most Australians are unwittingly funding the expansion of the fossil fuel industry through the accounts we have with our banks and superannuation funds. In fact, for many of us our superannuation account contributes more to our carbon footprint than anything else."

"Even worse, often these companies use the profits they make from our money to actively lobby against the climate solutions we support, like the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Renewable Energy Target. That's why we're partnering with fossilfree: to help make sure that as individuals, we're not inadvertently supporting the very projects we're campaigning against."

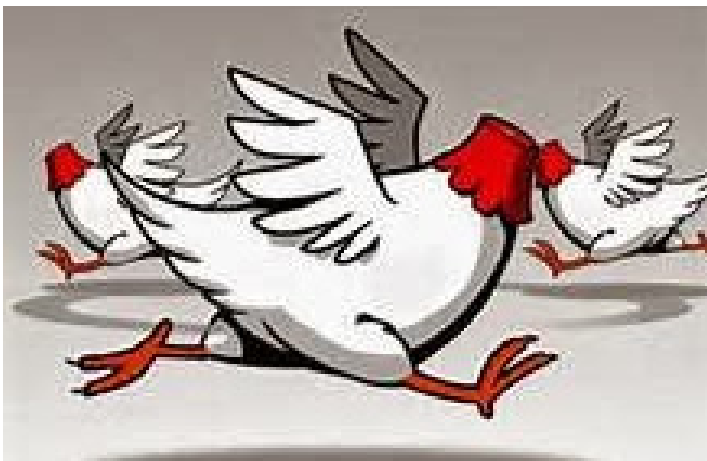
"This is another tool in our arsenal, and it's a powerful one. Imagine if thousands, then hundreds of thousands, and ultimately the millions of Australians who care about the environment moved their money, en masse, out of fossil fuel investments for good."

fossilfree was started by former GetUp! National Director Simon Sheikh to help people divest from fossil fuels. As part of their mission, they'll use the commissions they receive from ethical businesses to help fund climate movement organisations."

"If you want to learn more and sign up, there's no cost to you and no obligation to switch. A representative will get in touch in the New Year to tell you more about how you can go fossil free. I hope you'll check it out and help spread the word:"

<http://www.fossilfree.com.au/100renewable>

Taegen Edwards, 100% Renewables



Prince Charles has described climate change deniers as the 'headless chicken brigade'

2013 Australia's Hottest Year on Record

Following are excerpts from the Climate Council report '*Off the Charts*' released in January:

'2013 was a remarkable year for hot weather in Australia. Not only did we easily set the record for the hottest year since records began in 1910, we also experienced the hottest summer and warmest spring on record; the hottest January and warmest September on record; and the hottest summer day and warmest winter day on record. No part of Australia was spared the heat. For all states and the Northern Territory, 2013 ranked within the four hottest years experienced.'

'Australia's record heat is part of a global longer-term trend. Over the past century, the Earth's climate has warmed and continues to warm. More record hot weather is occurring around the planet. The increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases caused by human activities are the primary cause of the warming. Stabilising the climate requires urgent and deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, especially those of carbon dioxide that result from burning fossil fuels.'

'For Australia, the annual number of record hot days has doubled since 1950 (CSIRO and BoM 2012). In fact, in the last decade, the frequency of record hot days has been more than three times greater than the frequency of record cold days.'

(Trewin and Smalley 2012)

'Although more record hot weather is virtually certain for the next few decades, even higher risks of heat for the second half of the century can be averted by slowing climate change and then stabilising the climate system.'

Timely Climate Change Community Health Forum

Slap Tomorrow, the Shepparton organisation who organised a Climate Change Forum in 2013 is now organising a climate change/community health forum for 27th March. The idea appears increasingly relevant as the world, and those who live upon it, begins to tremble. Heatwaves are killing people, floods are drowning them, arctic-like storms are freezing them and hurricanes are blowing them, and human infrastructure, away.

Convenor and secretary of the Climate and Health Alliance, Fiona Armstrong, is one of three speakers who will address the climate change and community health forum in March. There will also be a speaker from the Australian Youth Climate Coalition while Victoria's Sustainability Commissioner, Professor Kate Auty, will knit the event together as the master of ceremonies.

The ***Climate and Health Alliance*** is a national charity that is an alliance of organizations and people in the health sector working together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions.

Action on Protecting the Great Barrier Reef

By now you would have heard that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has approved of dumping 3 million tonnes of dredge waste in the reef waters near Abbot Point, 50km from the Whitsunday Islands. The waste is due to coal port developments.

It appears that, as with any environmental issue, there is conflicting advice and arguments for and against any proposal. If your moral value is to protect the environment I would encourage you to take a step, no matter how small, to let your voice be heard.

Recently I forced myself to take a step out of my comfort zone and took action. I would encourage readers to take similar action on those issues close to their heart.

Having read a number of articles and received a number of email petitions about the proposed dumping I decided to heed the request and phone the GBRMPA. After thinking about it for days I armed myself with a few facts, plucked up some hidden courage and tapped into a passion...protecting the Reef for the future of all generations and for the future of the planet.

My call was received with interest and openness where my views were listened to and noted. I have since heard that the Authority employed extra staff to deal with the calls of concerned citizens. Although the decision was made to dump (yet I believe the fight is not yet over) I have a sense of pride that at least I made the effort to have my concerns heard.

At a recent forum on asylum seekers I heard Julian Burnside QC state that a phone call or letter to the relevant Authority or Organisation is worth 50,000 signatures on an email petition. I urge you all to write that letter or make the phone call if you are serious about your beliefs and concerns.

I know many of us wonder 'how can I make a difference', or, 'who cares about what I think'. I believe we can make a difference. Remember the "Save the Franklin" campaign....together we won!! How annoying is the dripping tap or the mosquito in the bedroom? The action may be small yet the impact can be significant. Take the step and put your concerns/passion into action. Although my action was small it was a part of a much bigger picture. And it felt good to do it!

For more detail on the issues affecting the Great Barrier Reef see:

www.fightforthereef.org.au and www.getup.org.au

Wendy Baker



Tasmania Bans Supermarket Plastic Bags

From November 1st 2013, the Tasmanian government banned the single use singlet-type plastic bags from all retail outlets in the state. It is the second state to do so, following South Australia's decision in 2012.

Numerous local government areas around Australia are also taking a stand on single use plastic bags, so it is an issue that is starting to gather some momentum, but will only continue if we keep up the pressure on councils and governments to legislate for change.

Despite the positive move in Tasmania, supermarkets have not taken the ultimate step to replace plastic with natural product bags (eg. calico, paper). Instead, they issue "tough" re-usable plastic bags (at a cost) to their customers. These bags certainly last longer, and carry more product, but eventually they become damaged, end up in land-fill, and take much longer to break down, with all the usual environmental consequences.

Future campaigns to ban plastic bags must emphasise the importance of replacing petroleum based products with natural and renewable products – from both an environmental and economic point of view, this decision will have obvious benefits.

Peter Holmes



Contact Details:

BSFG President

John Lloyd
5765 2476
andrewslloyd@iinet.net.au

Vice President

Wendy Hutchison

Secretary

Peter Maddock
0418 135 330

Treasurer

Peter Holmes
0438 625 638
chrispeth@bigpond.com

Committee Members

Christine Holmes Lynne Seamann
Wendy Baker Kevin Smith

Coordinator Benalla Food Co-op

Christine Holmes
chrispeth@bigpond.com

Newsletter Editor

Ian Herbert
5768 2342
limaeaster@bigpond.com