



Benalla Sustainable Future Group

Newsletter 18

August 2017

Benalla Sustainable
Future Group Inc.
PO Box 642
Benalla 3672

Next Meeting

The next meeting of Benalla Sustainable Future Group will be held on

Thursday 24th August at 7:30pm

in the meeting room at the Uniting Church, Carrier Street, Benalla.

The guest speaker will be Michael Staindl from Beyond Zero Emissions whose topic will be '*Climate Change: the Bad the Good and You.*'

Michael, who has degrees in Nuclear Physics, Computing and Biomedical Instrumentation, considers himself a 'tech-head', and when he had his OMG moment about climate change some years ago he initially thought the problem could be solved through exciting new technologies. However he quickly realised that while we had the technical technologies to solve the problem we didn't have the 'soft' technologies - the attitudes and thinking capability.

His presentation will cover the reality of where we are with Climate Change, touch on some of the positive efforts to address it, then introduce concepts such as cognitive dissonance and wicked problems to try to understand why we are not facing this existential crisis. Michael now works full time on climate action and is a producer of the Beyond Zero Emissions community radio program.



President's Column

We have been conned into believing being personally green will combat climate change

Caitlin Fitzsimmons, writing in *The Age*, (*Ethics bought and sold*, 21/6/2017) says, "It's time we stopped pretending conscious consumerism can save the world. The idea is shoppers making ethical choices can somehow wield enough collective clout to make a difference. What it actually does is perpetuate the status quo and distract us from the democratic power we have to effect real change."

Several studies suggest that while consumers profess social consciousness in surveys, that's not matched by their behaviour in a real world. Most people are unwilling to pay a higher price for an ethical item, or accept any compromise in product functionality. That means conscious consumerism, or ethical consumption, will only ever be a niche trend.

If enough like-minded people are determined they can create enough demand to sustain a niche product. But it won't displace the mainstream products that are carrying on with business as usual. These consumers may feel virtuous, but it won't solve the problem. For example, you might buy recycled toilet paper, but the best-selling product on the next shelf will continue to be made of virgin Asian rainforest.

Martin Lucacks in an article in *The Guardian*, (*Neoliberalism has conned us into fighting climate change as individuals*, 18/7/2017) says we should stop obsessing with how personally green we live - and start collectively taking on corporate power.

While we busy ourselves greening our personal lives, fossil fuel corporations are rendering these efforts irrelevant. The breakdown of carbon emissions since

"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed." - Mahatma Gandhi

1988 shows that one hundred companies alone are responsible for an astonishing 71 percent. The freedom of these corporations to pollute – and the fixation on a feeble lifestyle response – is no accident. It is the result of an ideological war, waged over the last forty years, against the possibility of collective action. Devastatingly successful, it is not too late to reverse it.

The political project of neoliberalism, brought to ascendance by Thatcher and Reagan, has pursued two principal objectives. The first has been to dismantle any barriers to the exercise of unaccountable private power. The second had been to erect barriers to the exercise of any democratic public will.

Its trademark policies of privatization, deregulation, tax cuts and free trade deals have liberated corporations to accumulate enormous profits and treat the atmosphere like a sewage dump, and hamstringing our ability, through the instrument of the state, to plan for our collective welfare.

Anything resembling a collective check on corporate power has become a target of the elite through lobbying and corporate donations to obstruct green policies and to keep fossil fuel subsidies flowing.

At the very moment when climate change demands an unprecedented collective public response, neoliberal ideology stands in the way. Which is why, if we want to bring down emissions fast, we will need to overcome all of its free-market mantras: take railways and utilities and energy grids back into public control; regulate corporations to phase out fossil fuels; and raise taxes to pay for massive investment in climate-ready infrastructure and renewable energy - so that solar panels can go on everyone's rooftop, not just on those who can afford it.

Neoliberalism has not merely ensured this agenda is politically unrealistic: it has also tried to make it culturally unthinkable. Its celebration of competitive self-interest and hyper-individualism, its stigmatization of compassion and solidarity, has frayed our collective bonds. Studies show that people who have grown up under this era have indeed become more individualistic and consumerist. We have been steeped in a culture telling us to think of ourselves as consumers instead of citizens, as self-reliant instead of interdependent.

Caitlin Fitzsimmons (*The Age*) also addresses this issue saying, "Personal responsibility is a popular idea among some politicians and business leaders because it means they don't have to take responsibility themselves. But both economic theory and empirical evidence about consumer behaviour demonstrates that individuals cannot solve big, systematic problems. Using your consumer power merely creates a niche within the system, it doesn't change the game."

Martin Lucacks says, "Of course we need people to consume less and innovate low-carbon alternatives - build sustainable farms, invent battery storages, spread zero-waste methods. But individual choices will most count when the economic system can provide viable, environmental options for everyone - not just an affluent or intrepid few."

If affordable mass transit isn't available, people will commute with cars. If local organic food is too expensive, they won't opt out of fossil fuel-intensive super-market chains. If cheap mass produced goods flow endlessly, they will buy and buy and buy. This is the con-job of neoliberalism: to persuade us to address climate change through our pocket-books, rather than through power and politics.

Lucacks argues that eco-consumerism may expiate your guilt. But it's only mass movements that have the power to alter the trajectory of the climate crisis. This requires of us first a resolute mental break from the spell cast by neoliberalism: to stop thinking like individuals.

Fitzsimmons concludes, "My concern is the feel-good factor means people buying ethical products will be so content with their choices, they'll lose sight of the end game. **If you want to save the world, be a citizen not just a consumer.** (My emphasis)

Lucacks sums up his argument with the following:

So grow some carrots and jump on a bike: it will make you happier and healthier. But it is time to stop obsessing with how personally green we live – and start collectively taking on corporate power. (My emphasis)

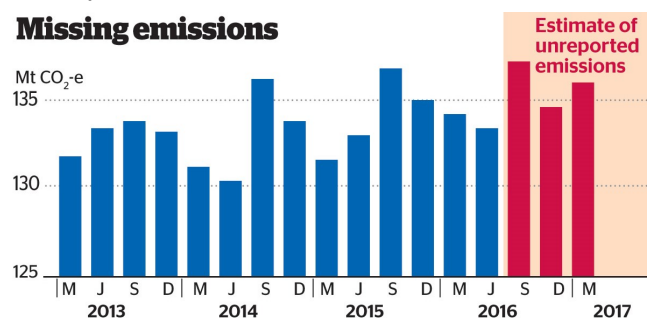
John Lloyd

Greenhouse data not released on schedule

Lucy Cormack, writing in *The Age* on 7th July, (*Key greenhouse data being kept 'under wraps'*) reports that the federal government has been keeping almost a year's worth of pollution data secret, despite it being scheduled for release in May.

Independent estimates suggest Australia's greenhouse gas emissions have risen sharply since the government last released its quarterly data in December - a trend that would make the nation's commitment to cutting emissions more disruptive and expensive.

The chief executive officer of ACF, Kelly O'Shanassy, said the government appeared to be going to "extreme lengths" to remove global warming entirely from the national debate. "Hiding pollution isn't a solution to the Turnbull government's paralysis on climate change and energy policy, but it's exactly what you would do if you knew you were going to fail to meet your international commitments to reduce pollution," she said. "We are concerned Australia is not going to meet its 2030 target to reduce emissions by 26-28 percent."



Australia's greenhouse gas emissions soar in latest figures

Michael Slezak, writing in *The Guardian*, on August 4, 2017 reports that Australia's greenhouse gas emissions are rising to the highest figures seen in years, according to official government figures, increasing 1.6% in the last quarter and 1% in the past year.

The country's emissions in the year to March 2017 are the highest on record at 550.3m tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

After adjusting for seasonal effects, the department of environment and energy says the rise amounts to a 1.6% rise in the quarter. The rise is particularly striking given emissions almost always drop in the March quarter. The only other March rise was more than a decade ago.

The figures reveal a clear trend of increasing greenhouse gas emissions since the carbon tax was repealed in 2014 - a trend that runs counter to Australia's international commitments. Superimposed on promised cuts to emissions made after the Paris climate agreement, Australia appears to be moving further away from being able to meet them - a trend that was predicted by the government's own projections earlier in the year, which found emissions would continue to rise for decades to come.

Labor spokesman for climate change and energy Mark Butler said he wasn't surprised to see the rise in emissions.

"Under the Liberal Government emissions have increased by 6%. Whilst under the last Labor Government emissions were reduced by 10%," he said. "This dramatic increase is no wonder given this government has failed to produce any policy to reduce emissions in the transport, electricity, industrial and agriculture sectors."



Renewable Energy Benalla (REB)

The REB Action Group is currently planning a workshop on reducing energy costs for business. REB has been working closely with Benalla Business Network, Catherine Macmillan, Business Development Coordinator for Benalla council, and Sustainability Victoria to plan this workshop.

REB has developed a questionnaire to survey energy use by business that will be distributed through the Business Network. This will provide some base line data on energy use in the business/industry sector and will help with planning of the workshop.

REB members have started to make some preliminary investigations about a suitable community energy project.

Beyond Zero Emissions (BZE) Involvement

At the recent EcoCity World Summit in Melbourne, BZE launched the Zero Carbon Communities Guide in which REB features, as do the other two communities BZE is working with, Baw Baw and Nillimbuk. I attended the launch as did representatives from the other two communities.

REB has recently received the first draft of a ten year transition strategy to 100% renewable energy. There is much work to be done on this document before it is finalised.

Market Stalls

For the past few years Benalla Sustainable Future Group has had a market stall at the Day in the Gardens market day. From time to time we have also had a stall at the Benalla Lakeside Market. BCFG members have helped to staff these stalls.

The committee has been discussing a number of issues related to conducting these stalls including the type of material we have available. In the past we have had a great variety of Sustainability Victoria material to hand out but the committee now believes we should focus more on our own activities and have materials related to the work of the various action groups.

At the July committee meeting we discussed the possibility of establishing a Market Stall Action Group. This would mean a small group, say 3 - 4 people, would take responsibility for organising market stalls. This would involve sorting out the handout materials, working out how materials should be displayed, seeking information for displays from action groups, organising the setting up of the stall on market days, organising a roster for the stall, and other matters to try to make the stall attractive to people at the market.

The committee believes a Market Stall Action Group would be the best way to make our stalls more effective and we are looking for a small number of people to establish the action group. Please get in touch with me if you are willing to be part of a Market Stall Action Group. Contact details are at the end of the newsletter.

John Lloyd

We used a year's worth of earth's resources in seven months

ABC News reported on 3rd August that there is a date every year when the world's resource bank goes into overdraft. This year, Earth Overshoot Day, as it is called, occurred on August 2. For the rest of year we're in the burning red.

It's the point when the amount of natural resources - think trees, fish and water - humanity takes from the Earth reaches the total that can be regenerated over the entire year. It's when the amount of carbon emitted reaches the amount the forests and oceans are able to absorb. This year it happened in seven months, according to the Global Footprint Network.

That's the earliest it's ever been and it's no thanks to Australia.

If every country in the world lived like Australia, Earth Overshoot Day would have been on March 12, and if everyone lived like Australians, we would need 5.2 Earths for every year of life.

The UN started collecting this data in 1961 when we had a surplus but we reached the break-even point in 1971.

Since then, the date has been creeping further from December - we're demanding more from the Earth while reducing its capacity to regenerate.

The Global Footprint Network calculates each year's overshoot day. The equation has four main factors:

1. How much we consume
2. How efficiently products are made
3. How many of us there are
4. How much nature's ecosystems are able to produce.

According to their calculations, we're using the resources of 1.7 planets every year.

To rein in our ecological spending, we'd need to push Earth Overshoot Day back 4.5 days each year to be living within our single-planet means by 2050.

Europe Moves to ban Petrol and Diesel Cars

A report published in "The Age" on 28th July, (*Petrol vehicles approaching their Kodak moment*) stated that France and Britain have both announced targets to ban sales of petrol and diesel cars by 2040. Germany has called for a prohibition by 2030, and Norway already has a target by 2025 - and the catalytic effect is spectacular - sales of electric vehicles (EVs) in Norway reached 42 per cent of all cars in July.

China has a plan stipulating that zero emission vehicles must make up 8 per cent of total sales in 2018, 10% in 2019 and 12% in 2020 - this is an even bigger "earthquake" than in Europe!

Those German and Japanese manufacturers that do not yet produce EV's -or not enough- face being shut out of the world's largest car market.

Already, the statistics related to EV sales are eye-opening, and the market is not waiting for the deadlines to be reached. This vehicle revolution is already occurring, with battery technology rapidly improving the range of EVs, utilities fighting for control of the lucrative plug-in charging posts (expected to jump from 100,000 to 30 million within 3 decades).

Petrol stations are likely to become scarce in culturally-green areas. Spare parts for fossil-fuel cars will be less easy to find. As these supply risks seep into public consciousness, the switch to electric vehicles will turn into a stampede.

Haulage and trucking is also part of this revolution. Nikola Motor Company in the US has already unveiled an 18-wheeler with a Tesla battery that can run for over 1900 km with the help of hydrogen fuel-cell generator.

Scandinavia already uses electric ferries for short trips and diesel electric motors driven by liquefied natural gas are expected to become common for shipping. Boeing is even working on electric aircraft for short-haul commuter flights.

One by one, the arguments to keep fossil fuels are crumbling.

Peter Holmes

Banning fossil fuelled cars isn't enough

Lloyd Alter, writing in *Tree Hugger*, 1/8/2017, says we have to rethink our transport system. As reported above, France and the UK have recently announced a ban on fossil fuelled cars by 2040.

2040 is a long way away, but a UK government spokesperson said "poor air quality is the biggest environmental risk to public health in the UK and this government is determined to take strong action in the shortest time possible."

Alter reports that authorities estimate that outdoor pollution, much of it from vehicles, causes 40,000 deaths a year in the UK. However Greenpeace (UK) disputes that number and notes: ... while a car crash can be said to be the exclusive cause of an individual's death, nobody is dying purely as a result of air pollution. It could have well had a significant impact on somebody who died from heart disease, but it is likely that other factors, such as diet or exercise, played a part too.

Alter says this is an important distinction. Does a ban on fossil fuelled cars really make that much of a difference? Does it go far enough, fast enough? Is the pollution from cars their biggest problem?

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

UK Green Party co-chair Caroline Lucas notes that the problem with cars go beyond fuel. Ultimately we need a green transport revolution, not another tinker with a transport system that's creaking. Let's aim for towns and cities easily navigable by foot and bike, a fully electric and publicly owned train system and local public transport that's a joy to use - rather than the overpriced, unreliable service that's currently on offer in so many places.

Lucas concludes: "Building a transport system fit for the future won't just save lives that are cut short by air pollution, it will change the way we live for the better. Well-designed transport means strong local communities, safer streets for our children to play in a quicker commutes that free up time for us to do the things we love."

Plastic Wise Benalla

Over a number of years the Plastics Sub-Committee have been meeting irregularly with Larissa Montgomery (Benalla Council's Environment Sustainability Co-ordinator) to discuss how to progress ideas into actions for reducing plastic consumption and reducing plastic waste in Benalla. Rod Sherlock and myself have also travelled to Beechworth a number of times to listen in on the Shire of Indigo's Plastic Wise Committee.

We are very excited to say that progress is being made and we now have a new name for our Group, Plastic Wise Benalla. At the moment the Group consists of three BSFG members, Larissa (Council), Rachel Coley (Benalla Business Network), and a number of interested community members. There are a number of 'Plastic Wise' Groups in the Region including Beechworth, Rutherglen, Wangaratta and Yackandandah.

Our first project is to upcycle scrap/unused/recycled fabric into reusable fabric bags. We have secured the use of a meeting room at the Drill Hall for bag making/cutting sessions for a further four dates throughout August and September. These dates are August 15th and 29th, and September 12th and 26th. The sessions will run from 12.30 pm to 3.30 pm.

It is intended that this Group will be a community driven action group with the potential of bringing together community members who would not otherwise be involved in BSFG. At the moment we have several quilting ladies very happy to share their sewing expertise and there are numerous others who are more than happy to sew the bags in the comfort of their homes. The first session at the Drill Hall was held on 1st August and involved six people busily cutting out fabric and making up 'kits' for others to sew.

Jason at Fobia Industries has very generously supported our project by screen printing the first 45

calico pockets with our logo. The logo is a burgundy square with the words 'Plastic Wise Benalla'. The plan is to sell the bags at particular outlets for a small charge to cover costs, maybe \$2 or \$3.

Already the Group is increasing the awareness of how our society uses plastic in our community and we are providing a platform for action. It has opened a discussion with some people who would not have previously thought much about such issues. And it's fun!

If you would like to be involved feel free to attend a session at the Drill Hall; offer to sew bags at home; or provide us with sturdy fabric that is no longer required ... curtains, tablecloths, calico etc.

The Group is also encouraging cafe owners to become 'Responsible Cafés'. These are cafes that offer a discount on your coffee if you take your own reusable cup. A number of cafés have already signed up. Check the Responsible Cafes website. In the future we will be looking at the consumption of bottled water and drinking straws.

If you require any further information please contact Wendy Baker at wendibaker30@gmail.com

Wendy Baker



Plastic Wise Benalla bag making session

"We are the first generation to feel the impacts of climate change, and the last generation to be able to do something about it." former US President, Barack Obama

Sometimes there is good news....

Like most people I find most items in the news, whether it is in the print media, on social media or on radio and/or television, to be quite depressing. One could be excused for thinking - Well what can I do about all this? Might as well quietly retire to do nothing. Occasionally however, you manage to read or hear something that gives hope and encouragement to people like me, on the ground, as it were, to continue the fight to be heard.

Recently I was leafing through my pile of 'must reads' which included some not very recent editions of the Good Weekend, when I came across an article titled **The Man Most Likely to Change the World: Meet lawyer James Thornton, the soaring force in environmental activism.**

The title caught my eye so I thought I'd best read on. The article was a review, written by Jane Wheatley, of a recently published book *Client Earth* by James Thornton and Martin Goodman (scribe \$35). So what was it all about?

It seems that James Thornton is an American lawyer who believes that the Earth is worth fighting for and in particular, the law can be used a tool to mend the relationship between human societies and the earth. He aims to ensure that environmental laws are enforced.

"Unchecked Governments will always drift towards what companies want, because companies are fantastically more powerful than citizens".

Until 2001, when he left America to live in the UK, he had developed a reputation as a staunch and wily defender of wild places. Some of his achievements included working for the New York based *Natural Resources Defence Council*, which is a group of environmental lawyers tasked with bringing citizen enforcement cases against big industrial polluters. As a young attorney, Thornton was involved with a case against a pig processing plant, Gwaltney, which was slowly but very surely, polluting the waters of Chesapeake Bay. Gwaltney had been violating its permits for discharges since 1984 and no action had been taken. The case went to the US Supreme Court and resulted in a penalty of more than US\$1 million being awarded against them.

Thornton was also involved in pursuing a claim against Bethlehem Steel for violating its permit to dump toxic waste into the waters of Chesapeake Bay. The case was settled out of court with Bethlehem steel agreeing to pay Chesapeake Environmental Charities US\$1 million in addition to US\$500,000 to cover the plaintiffs costs. Not surprisingly other polluters began clean ups to avoid similar costs. The financial outcomes are certainly substantial, given it is over 30 years since they were awarded.

At the time the Good Weekend article was written, Thornton had recently seen the conclusion of a lawsuit which had lasted nearly seven years. He won an injunction in the UK Supreme Court which has forced

Therese May's government to publish a clean air plan for British cities in which atmospheric pollution exceeds legal levels. It appears that these and many more notable victories reflect his fight to save the world's embattled ecosystems. While this is good news indeed perhaps his most notable achievement is the establishment of ClientEarth which he founded in 2007.

ClientEarth is:

... Europe's first public interest environmental law organisation. Now operating globally, it uses advocacy, litigation and research to address the greatest challenges of our time – including biodiversity loss, climate change, and toxic chemicals. Its work is always built on solid law and science.

The ClientEarth website, <https://www.clientearth.org/people/thornton-james/> makes for good reading and I was particularly pleased to see that a News report on 8th August this year tells us that a pending legal case in Australia will test climate reporting duties in the courts for the first time and may have 'global ramifications'. The case is against one of the country's biggest companies, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, on the basis that it is failing to report on the risks climate change may pose to its financial performance. It will be argued that this disclosure is required by the Corporations Act and that shareholders require reassurance that climate risk is being adequately managed. More information about this case and others is available at

<https://www.clientearth.org/australias-world-first-climate-reporting-lawsuit-global-ramifications/>

So overall it was bit of good news and I for one will follow the progress of ClientEarth and its associates. Certainly makes me think that people like us should continue to support professionals such as scientists, lawyers etc. and others who are working to draw attention to what is happening on this planet we call home.

Freida Andrews

Adani loan high risk to taxpayers

Mark Kenny, *The Age*, August 1st, 2017, reports that a \$1 billion concessional loan to the controversial Adani Carmichael mine project could expose taxpayers to a high risk of losing their money, according to an independent assessment conducted by consulting firm ACIL Allen, and commissioned by the Australian Conservation foundation.

The economic assessment of the projects outlook found the collapsing coal price, the uncertain global picture for thermal coal, and the \$21.7 billion project's heavy reliance on external financing contributed to a high risk for taxpayers.

Among the problems was Adani's hope of using the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility to fund a key part of the project - a rail link to Abbot Point - while relying extensively for security on the availability of other, as yet unsecured, debt and equity financing.

Top Carbon Drawdown solution is a Woman; not a Panel

Earlier this year the book [Drawdown](#) edited by Paul Hawken was released. Drawdown is the most comprehensive plan ever proposed to reverse global warming. *Drawdown* maps, measures, models, and describes the 100 most substantive solutions to global warming.

Paul Hawken presented the book and its surprising findings at the March [What's Now: San Francisco](#) gathering. In the video Paul provides a good summary of the top 20 measures to achieve Drawdown which is when we see atmospheric CO2 levels start to come down. Likening relying on slowing down emissions growth to Thelma and Louise going over the cliff in slow motion, we must drawdown CO2 or we're going to crash. As Paul says we need to bring carbon home.

Project Drawdown researchers assembled and presented the best available information on climate solutions to describe their beneficial financial, social and environmental impact over the next thirty years. The project did determine the [top 100 solutions](#) but 20 of these could not be modelled so on the website the [top 80 solutions](#) are tabled.

The table categorises the solutions by sector and the Total Atmospheric CO2 Equiv. Reduction (GT) for each sector is:

Food	321.9
Energy	246.1
Land Use	149.6
Women and Girls	121.3
Materials	111.8
Buildings and Cities	54.5
Transport	45.8

In his video presentation Paul comments that they were surprised that the top opportunity to draw down CO2 was the food sector. And reducing food waste was the biggest food sector contributor followed by a plant rich diet.

Paul does some more detailed analysis of the top 20 solutions in his presentation:

1	Refrigerant Management	Materials	89.7
2	Wind Turbines (Onshore)	Energy	84.6
3	Reduced Food Waste	Food	70.5
4	Plant-Rich Diet	Food	66.1
5	Tropical Forests	Land Use	61.2
6	Educating Girls	Women and Girls	59.6
7	Family Planning	Women and Girls	59.6
8	Solar Farms	Energy	36.9
9	Silvopasture	Food	31.2
10	Rooftop Solar	Energy	24.6
11	Regenerative Agriculture	Food	23.2
12	Temperate Forests	Land Use	22.6
13	Peatlands	Land Use	21.6
14	Tropical Staple Trees	Food	20.2
15	Afforestation	Land Use	18.1
16	Conservation Agriculture	Food	17.4
17	Tree Intercropping	Food	17.2
18	Geothermal	Energy	16.6
19	Managed Grazing	Food	16.3
20	Nuclear	Energy	16.1

The surprising outcome was refrigerant materials at the top of the list and this is due to the high greenhouse warming potential of refrigerants and their potential release from refrigeration equipment, particularly during storage and disposal of old equipment.

Women and girls were included because when girls are educated and with family planning they tend to have less children which could lead to 1.1 billion less people on the planet by 2050.

Educating Girls and Family Planning could not be modelled so the total reductions were split 50/50 between the two sectors.

Note that:

The total top 20 Women and Girls sector is 119.2 which would make Women the best option for drawing down carbon.

In the Q&A a question was asked about Biofuels. Biofuels were not included because they recycled carbon; they did not draw down carbon.

Paul emphasised that all solutions need to be implemented to start bringing down carbon in the atmosphere. These solutions are available now and backed by peer reviewed science. The top 80 solutions have a Net Cost of \$29,636 Billion US\$ and a Net Savings of \$73,874 Billion US\$. Total Atmospheric CO2 Equiv. Reduction is 1051 GT.

Peter Maddock

Swanpool Environmental Film Festival 2017

The fifth SEFF took place on Saturday 24th June at Swanpool Cinema, following the same format since its inception i.e. three sessions each with a guest speaker and selected film. 174 people attended. It is organised by the Swanpool Landcare Group and the Benalla Sustainable Future Group, working in partnership. This year Benalla Permaculture also played an active role.



We'd like to once again acknowledge the support of our sponsors: Gecko CLaN, Granite Creeks Landcare Network, GBCMA and Benalla Rural City (via a community grant to BSFG). Catering was provided by the Swanpool Catering Team and they did a superb job once again.

Attendance this year was 174 which was up on last year. People came from far and near for this event and they went home with much to think about after three films and three guest speakers, from 1 pm to 9.40 pm. We were very fortunate to have speakers of this calibre come to Swanpool. The films on offer this year were also exceptional.

Our first speaker came to us courtesy of our Benalla Permaculture contacts. Dr Richard David Hames set the scene for the afternoon with his talk 'Burying the 20th Century'. The main message was that we need new solutions and strategic thinking to address present day problems. Existing systems are not set up to provide such solutions. The film 'the Age of Consequences' which followed gave powerful evidence for tackling the issues now. The USA military hierarchy agrees even if the President doesn't.

Following afternoon tea Julian Cribb took the stage to talk on 'Surviving the 21st Century', the title of his latest book. The title and the talk itself flowed on perfectly from Richard's theme. Lots of data was presented covering climate change, nuclear weapons, food security etc. plus solutions to tackle these issues. Will they be taken up by politicians and world bodies? Maybe not if the following film is any predictor - 'The Age of Stupid'. Starring Peter Postlethwaite in a future time it looks back from a devastated world on 'archival' footage and asks, as a human race, why didn't we do something?

Time for a break and lasagne dinner supplied by the Swanpool Catering Team. They received high praise for another tasty menu. Video footage drew people back to their seats, including some stunning wildlife photos from the next presenter set to music.

Professor Sharon Beder spoke on 'Business-Managed Democracy' with the talk starting out with slides of her own studies as an engineer on Sydney's sewerage outfall direct into the ocean. Despite attempts to

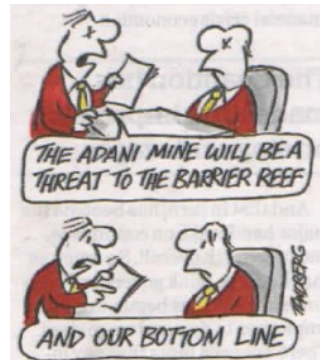
prevent release of her findings they did get into the newspapers, triggering mass protests on Sydney's beaches. The talk went on to explain how news and public opinion is manipulated these days by social media. How then does the general populous hear what's happening and is it factual?

The final film 'The Bentley Effect' follows the successive misses and final successful blockade of gas rigs trying to drill in the Northern Rivers district of NSW. This led to a moratorium on fracking in NSW and in Victoria. Despite a democratic decision by these State parliaments, Federal ministers are still constantly applying pressure to let the rigs back in.

'The Bentley Effect' ended on a high and showed that people power and democracy can prevail in the end. Today a clear majority of people are in favour of more renewable energy and greater action on climate change yet our leaders procrastinate, argue and defer real action to avoid 'The Age of Stupid' as portrayed in the second film.

If you missed the SEFF this year, please do come along next year. The attendees from far and near went away better informed and revitalised to continue the fight for our environment and our children's future.

Ian Herbert



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