



# Benalla Sustainable Future Group

**Newsletter 9**

**February 2015**

Benalla Sustainable  
Future Group Inc.

PO Box 642

Benalla 3672

## ***Next Meeting***

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

**7:30 pm on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> February**  
at the meeting room at the Uniting Church.

The **Guest Speaker will be Neil Garrett** who is the Secretary of the Industrial Hemp Association of Victoria. Neil's presentation will cover the history and uses of hemp for food, fibre and housing and the potential of hemp to contribute to a low carbon world.

He will also talk about the contribution that buildings make to climate change and finally, building a hemp house which he, and his wife Sandy, have recently done. Neil's profession was town planning but he has also been involved in hospitality and most recently has established a 4500 walnut farm in Strathbogie. Neil and his wife sell walnut and hemp products at the Violet Town market.



## ***President's Column***

### ***Global Warming Continues - Despite a Cool January***

As I write this in early February I have been enjoying the unusually mild weather for this time of the year. However this can only be a brief interlude in the context of a continually warming world. No doubt climate change sceptics and deniers will see this as evidence that global warming has 'paused'.

The key lies in the difference between 'weather' and 'climate'. Weather varies considerably from day to day while climate is focussed on long term trends. No doubt we have all enjoyed the cooler than usual weather during January but that does not mean that the climate is cooling. Last year we sweated through the planet's hottest year ever recorded since records began in 1880. 2014 was also Australia's third hottest year since records began in 1910. Recently CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology released a report that indicated that climate change was going to hit Australia harder than the rest of the world. Articles outlining these matters in more detail are in this newsletter.

### ***World Leaders say this is the Year for Global Action***

That was the message from world leaders, delivered at last month's 45th World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos-Klosters. The leaders said: "If politicians, the private sector and international organizations fail to act on climate change and sustainable development in 2015, the opportunity to create low-carbon growth and reduce poverty will be lost."

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

Meanwhile, in the United States, President Obama made some of his most forceful comments to date about global warming. In his 2015 State of the Union address he said, "No challenge - no challenge - poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change. That's why, over the past six years, we've done more than ever before to combat climate change, from the way we produce energy, to the way we use it...

***And that's why I will not let this Congress endanger the health of our children by turning back the clock on our efforts."***

"I am determined to make sure American leadership drives international action," he said. "In Beijing, we made an historic announcement - the United States will double the pace at which we cut carbon pollution, and China committed, for the first time, to limiting their emissions. And because the world's two largest economies came together, other nations are now stepping up,

***and offering hope that, this year, the world will finally reach an agreement to protect the one planet we've got."***

### ***Australia's Position***

Meanwhile, back in Australia we have given up our role as a leader on climate action with the removal of the carbon laws. Since then we have seen a rebound in carbon pollution from the electricity sector. Thankfully the Senate has saved some of the architecture of the previous government's approach to reducing carbon emissions; however the Abbott government's attitude to renewable energy has seen a significant drop in investment in clean energy.

Hopefully the Paris summit in December will result in a new international agreement on post-2020 emissions reduction. US, China and Europe will put forth their pollution reduction targets in March while Australia and others will need to come forward with their contributions by July.

All nations' commitments will be scrutinised against the goal of avoiding two degrees warming. In this light, Australia's minimum target of 5 per cent reduction below 2000 levels by 2020 melts into insignificance against the much bigger reductions needed over coming decades. It already pales against the US's 2025 target, which equals about a 30 per cent reduction from that base year.

The post-2020 target will be a key test of Australia's commitment on climate action, and its approach to global citizenship and fairness.

### ***Positive Signs from the new State Government***

There appear to be some positive signs from the new State Government in relation to environmental and climate change issues. It seems that the new Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, Lisa Neville, may actually be a minister **for** the environment rather than **against** the environment.

So far the state government has banned cattle grazing in the alpine park and is looking to legislate so that it cannot happen again. Recently the Minister has said that contracts for building a private resort in the Point Nepean National Park will be cancelled and that there is no place for private resorts in national parks. She has also indicated that the government will once again be involved in action on climate change. A welcome change from a government whose every move on environmental issues was a backward step.

### ***Colleen McCullough and Climate Change***

On a lighter note it has come to my attention that Colleen McCullough, who passed away recently, wrote about climate change in her book 'Creed for the Third Millennium'. This novel was set in the future when climate change forces the population of the USA to the southern states as it is too cold and snow bound in the north to survive. Colleen McCullough wrote this book long before many had thought about our changing climate.

***John Lloyd***



Prime Minister Tony Abbott was mocked on social media for his comments about his achievements as Minister for Women where he said that the best thing he had done for women was to repeal the carbon tax as women were the ones who worried about the household budget.

## **Climate Council Report**

### **1. 2014 was the hottest year on record globally**

- The global average temperature for 2014 was 0.69°C above the 20th century average, eclipsing the previous record set in 2010 and 2005. Climate change is a major factor in driving these record temperatures.
- The record global warmth of 2014 is part of a long-term trend: the Earth is getting hotter. All of the world's top 10 warmest years have occurred since 1998. 2014 is the 38th consecutive year with above average global temperature.
- Across the world record breaking weather and extreme heat events increase heat stress on people, animals and plants, and well as pressure on infrastructure and agriculture.
- Climate change is a major factor in driving these record temperatures.

### **2. The emission of greenhouse gases is driving record global heat**

- This continuing, long-term warming trend has been driven by the emissions of greenhouse gases from human activities, primarily from the burning of fossil fuels.

### **3. Climate change is a major factor in extreme heat in Australia**

- Hot days are happening more often while heatwaves are becoming hotter, longer and more frequent. This is worsening bushfire danger weather.
- 2014 was Australia's 3rd hottest year.
- An increase in heatwaves and bushfires affects the health of Australians, as well as damaging infrastructure, agriculture and the environment.

### **4. This is the critical decade**

- We are now halfway through the critical decade for action on climate change. To slow and then halt the warming trend, we must cut carbon emissions rapidly and deeply. 2015 is the pivotal year to join global efforts in the lead up to the international climate negotiations in Paris to stabilise the world's climate and reduce the risk of more extreme weather events.



## **Email to Cathy McGowan MP for Indi Cc Chris Bowen MP, Jamie Briggs MP**

*(Email dated 11th Feb 2015)*

Dear Cathy

I am looking for a voice of sanity to give me just a little hope for the future of my country.

The latest observation that plunged me into my present state of despair was that witnessed on the ABC's Q & A last night. A video question came in from a farmer on the Liverpool Plains, NSW. He was standing in the middle of his beautiful crop and telling us that the land behind him was about to be opened up for open cut coal mining - 35 square kilometres of it.

So the question posed was asked of both government (Jamie Briggs) and opposition reps (Chris Bowen) on the panel. I believe that 90% plus of people asked whether this should be allowed would say, "No way". It is just a no-brainer. Why would you ruin such productive farmland forever for a very short term gain?

So what were their answers?

Jamie Briggs first started off by saying it was a state government issue and then he talked about 'co-existence'. How can you have a coal mine **and** a farm? Just ridiculous.

So we go over to Chris Bowen and what has he got to say? He too couldn't give a straight answer saying, "We need to find a way as a nation, to try and get a community support and consensus around extracting this resource because it can be of benefit for our nation." He then moved away from the question, talking about economics and coal seam gas.

John Hamparsum from Breeza, NSW, who asked the question now knows where he stands - it is no use going to either of the major parties. The politicians in the major parties are just not listening.

Cathy, you and I know that there are two other reasons why this should not happen. Apart from the tonnes of CO2 that this coal will emit, the price of coal is likely to plummet as the world wakes up, even Australia, to the need to keep it in the ground. The company doing the mining is likely to simply walk away from it - no state royalty income and no jobs. We don't even need to raise this argument because the loss of farmland alone is so compelling.

Is it possible to change the Environmental Protection Act to protect productive farmland?

Yours sincerely,  
Dr Ian Herbert

Swanpool Community Member

(Note: I should have added that you are also left with one big useless hole in the ground. The question has been assigned to one of Cathy's staff members.)

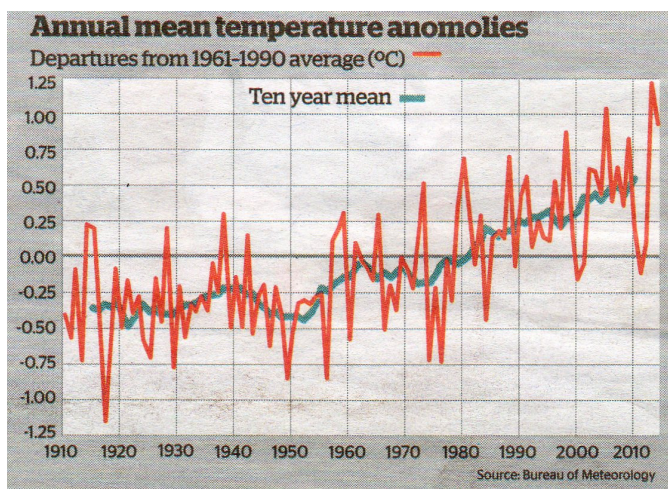
***Ian Herbert***



## ***2014 - Australia's Third Hottest Year - and it will get hotter!***

In Australia, 2014 was our third hottest year (and hottest decade) since national records began in 1910, and this was just twelve months after 2013 set new records for annual highs across Australia.

Neil Plummer from the Bureau of Meteorology said 2014 was characterised by frequent heatwaves and warm spells and a notable reduction in cold weather. Particularly warm conditions occurred in spring which was Australia's warmest spring on record. Mean temperatures across the country in 2014 came in 0.91 degrees above the 1961-1990 average, while those in 2013, our hottest year, were 1.20 degrees warmer than the average. The following graph from *The Age*, 7/1/15, shows this as well as the long-term warming trend.



Professor Will Steffen of the Climate Council says incidences of heatwaves, bushfires and other extreme weather in Australia are increasing. Hot days are happening more often while heatwaves are becoming hotter, longer and more frequent resulting in worsening bushfire danger weather. Professor Steffen says, "Climate change is a major factor in the increase in extreme heat that Australians have experienced over the last few decades. The long-term warming trend has been driven by the increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuels."

***A recent update of the Natural Resource Management report from the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology has predicted that climate change is going to hit Australia even harder than the rest of the world.***

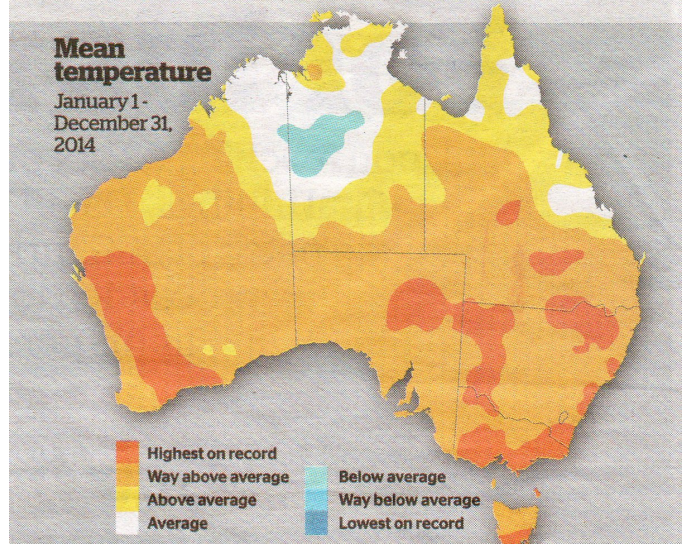
Australia's average temperatures have already warmed 0.9 degrees since 1910, with rising greenhouse gases a contributing factor. Since 2001, extreme heat records have exceeded cold records throughout Australia by three to one for maximum temperatures and five to one for minimums. Further warming and other climate impacts are already locked in for 2030, but the severity and extent of changes beyond then hinge on whether global carbon emissions are reduced.

In short, the CSIRO report says that by 2090:

- Unless Australia takes immediate steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions we could experience a 5 degree temperature rise in Australia
- Australia is on track for sea level rises of 45cm to 82cm
- Rainfall could decrease by as much as 69%
- Our Great Barrier Reef's future is looking 'grim'

This wide-ranging report from the CSIRO and weather bureau comes as governments around the world, including Australia's, are readying pledges to cut greenhouse gas emissions after 2020. The UN wants the promise to be made public by the end of March to add momentum towards a summit in Paris in December to set a new global climate treaty.

## **Record temperatures across the continent**



## ***Helpful Products - courtesy of Renew Magazine***

### ***Seal those wall vents***

Sealing your home from outside air is one of the best ways to reduce your energy use and improve the comfort of your living space. Horizontal wall vents are one common source of draughts in older homes. They were originally needed when homes had unflued gas heaters but are now largely obsolete. In addition to increasing energy bills, these vents allow in unwanted dust, pollutants and bugs.

EcoResults has developed Wall Vent Seals, a simple cover that fits over the vent. They measure 170 x 240mm and are designed to cover all standard flush fitted vents and can be installed in under a minute without tools.

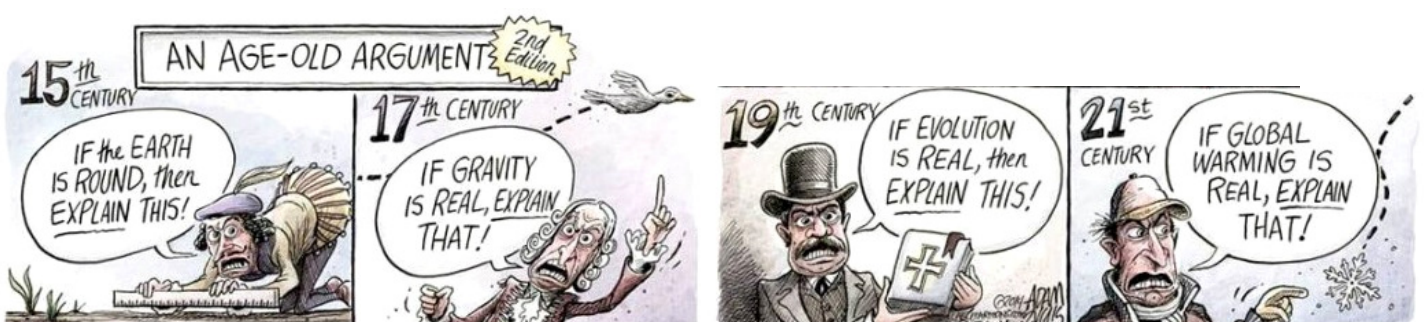
For more information, go to [www.wallventseal.com.au](http://www.wallventseal.com.au)

## Renewable Energy Myths

There are many 'myths' about the unreliability and cost of renewable energy which are regularly used by supporters of fossil fuels and climate change deniers. Dr Mark Diesendorf, Associate Professor, Institute of Environmental Studies at the University of NSW in his recent book, *Sustainable Energy Solutions for Climate Change*, details these 'myths' and a factual response to them. The following myths are a continuation of the article in the November Newsletter.

MYTH: Renewable energy is too diffuse to run an industrial society	There is ample marginal land on the planet to provide all the solar energy required, while wind farms are compatible with almost all forms of agriculture and occupy only 1–3% of the land they span. While not all countries are equally blessed with renewable energy resources, trade in renewable energy by transmission lines and by transporting renewable hydrogen in LNG tankers could supply disadvantaged regions. After all, fossil fuels and uranium are traded internationally.
MYTH: Energy payback periods (in energy units, not money) for renewable energy systems are comparable with their lifetimes	This was once true in the early uses of solar PV in satellites. Nowadays energy paybacks for solar PV modules are typically 0.5–1.8 years and for wind turbines 0.25–0.75 years, depending on location and technology type. The lifetimes of these technologies are about 25 years each. For comparison, energy payback periods for nuclear energy are 6.5–14 years, depending on whether high- or low-grade uranium ore is mined and milled.
MYTH: Danish electricity prices are among the highest in Europe, because of the high use of renewable energy in Denmark	Danish electricity prices are among the highest in Europe, because the tax on electricity is very high in Denmark. This tax goes into consolidated revenue; it does not specifically subsidise renewable energy. When European electricity prices without taxes are compared, Denmark's is in the lowest quartile.
MYTH: The doubling of retail electricity prices in Australia in recent years is primarily the result of the carbon price and the Renewable Energy Target	By far the biggest contribution to the increase in electricity prices in Australian states comes from the costs of upgrading the distribution system (poles and wires) resulting primarily from increasing demand for air conditioning. In 2013–14 the distribution network was responsible for the major part of average retail electricity price, the carbon price 9% and the Renewable Energy Target about 2%. However, the latter would be offset by the reduction in wholesale electricity price from wind farms, <i>if</i> it were passed on to retail customers.
MYTH: Infrasound (sound that is too low in frequency to be heard by the human ear) from wind turbines causes a wide range of ill health symptoms	Despite numerous studies, there is not a shred of scientific evidence to support this claim. Evidence against it is that infrasound from air conditioners, motor vehicles travelling on roads and waves breaking at a beach is generally much greater than infrasound from a wind turbine. Furthermore, a randomised, controlled, double-blind trial shows that people cannot distinguish between infrasound and sham infrasound (silence) and that illnesses attributed wrongly to infrasound can be psychologically induced.

These and other myths about renewable energy are refuted in more detail in Mark Diesendorf's 2014 book *Sustainable Energy Solutions for Climate Change*. UNSW Press, Sydney, and Earthscan, London.





## ***Alpine Cattle Grazing Banned***

Cattle Grazing in the Alpine National Park is over, with the new state government fulfilling a long standing election promise to ban the practice. The government has ended a scientific trial involving about 60 cattle that was being used to test claims grazing can reduce fire risk.

The new Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Lisa Neville, will also put a ban on such trials into legislation to stop future governments reversing the policy. "Our national parks are not beef farms," the minister said. "The Coalition wasted money on court challenges and trial after trial when the science is clear - grazing in the high country is detrimental to the environment and it has no value in reducing fuel loads or bushfire risk."

Following is an outline of the recent history of alpine cattle grazing:

**2004** The Brack's Labor Government announces a plan to ban the 170-year-old practice of grazing in Victoria's Alpine National Park. At this time about 6000 to 8000 cattle regularly graze in the park.

**2005** Thousands march on the steps of Parliament to protest the incoming ban.

**2010** Liberals win government and announce plans to let grazing begin.

**2011** About 400 cattle released into Alpine National Park as part of scientific trial.

**2012** Federal Labor's Environment Minister, Tony Burke, uses federal environment law to ban the state plan.

**2014 March** Coalition Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt approves a grazing trial.

**2014 December** Newly elected state Labor government announces an end to the trial and a ban on grazing.

Source: Liam Mannix, "The Age", 29/12/14

## ***RET Review - Investment in Renewables Declines Sharply***

A report from Bloomfield New Energy Finance says that investments in renewable energy rose to record levels globally in 2014 but fell sharply in Australia because of uncertainty triggered by the Abbott government's review of the Renewable Energy Target.

Worldwide investments in wind farms, solar photovoltaics and other clean energy sources jumped 16 percent last year to \$US310 billion or more than five times the amount of a decade earlier. Australia, though, went the other way, with investment sinking 35 percent to \$US3.7 billion.

Bloomberg said the amount was the "lowest since 2009, as wind and solar project developers delayed decisions while they awaited the government's response to its Renewable Energy Target review."

According to the Bloomberg research these figures mask a much steeper decline in investment in large scale renewable energy plants. Australia's ranking in this area plummeted in 2014, dropping behind much poorer nations such as Panama, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Investments in large-scale wind, solar and other clean energy sources dived 88 percent in 2014 to \$240 million, the lowest level since 2002, the energy consultancy said. Australia's global ranking sank 28 places from 11<sup>th</sup> with almost \$2 billion invested in 2013 to just 39<sup>th</sup> last year.

Darren Gladman from the Clean Energy Council said, "Australia is not just at risk of falling behind the rest of the world on renewable energy, we have already slipped off the back of the wave. We have some of the best sun, wind and waves in the world, but this new research shows that we are squandering some of our huge natural advantages."

Source: Peter Hannam, 'The Age', 10/1/15

## ***Euroa Conversations: Climate Change and the Strathbogie Region with Prof. David Karoly***

On February 7th approximately 120 people attended the first in the series of seminars to be held at Euroa in 2015. Professor David Karoly, from the University of Melbourne, provided a detailed and at times, worrying picture on climate change and its implications for the Strathbogie Region.

Those attending were seated at tables with a facilitator to lead discussion following each segment of Prof Karoly's presentation. The facilitators presented back to the wider audience the information discussed at each table. Prof Karoly answered questions from each table and all those attending were encouraged to make a personal commitment to address this pressing issue. Those attending also resolved to write to all levels of government to seek greater, more urgent action on climate change. Strathbogie Voices undertook to do this on behalf of those present. A copy of this letter is available at their website:

**[www.strathbogievoices.com.au](http://www.strathbogievoices.com.au)**

***Further seminars will explore other issues around climate change and sustainability, including local government issues, financial investments, water, health, fire and cultural landscapes. For more information and to book your place see [www.strathbogievoices.com.au](http://www.strathbogievoices.com.au) The first seminar was totally booked out so it would be wise to book early.***

## ***Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc.***

### **Membership renewals are now due for 2014-15**

Your membership fees help to provide the necessary finance to run Benalla Sustainable Future Group so that BSFG can continue to provide a valuable role in the community.

Membership fees are used to provide insurance cover for financial members at BSFG activities, to pay for venue hire and guest speakers, to produce a quarterly newsletter and to meet other running expenses.

One year membership of Benalla Sustainable Future Group (BSFG) is \$20 per household or \$15 if already a member of the Bulk Food Co-operative.

Please complete the membership application below and return to BSFG

### **BENALLA SUSTAINABLE FUTURE GROUP INC. - Membership Application**

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Postcode** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Particular Interest:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in environmental advocacy? Would you like to be informed about the Environmental Advocacy Action Group. If so please tick: **Yes** \_\_\_\_\_

*In applying for membership I/we acknowledge my/our support of the purposes of Benalla Sustainable Future Group and agree to comply with the rules of the association.*

*Signature:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate: Renewal \_\_\_ or New Application \_\_\_\_

*Please note: email is our preferred form of communication and your privacy will be respected.*

One year membership of Benalla Sustainable Future Group (BSFG) is \$20 per household or \$15 if already a member of the Bulk Food Co-operative. Please tick if member of Bulk Food Co-op. \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment method** Cheque : \_\_\_\_\_ Direct Transfer: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc.

*Direct Transfer:* BSB: 063505 Account No.: 10261024 Reference: Surname & initial

Please complete membership form, including membership subscription, or details of direct transfer, and post to:

**Benalla Sustainable Future Group Inc. PO Box 642 Benalla, 3672**

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