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In this issue

Tabatha Fulker

optimism

'optimiz(ə)m
noun: optimism
1. Hopefulness and confidence about the future or the success of something. “the talks had been amicable and there were grounds for optimism”.
   synonyms: hopefulness, hope, confidence, buoyancy, cheer, good cheer, cheerfulness, sanguineness, positiveness, positive attitude
   “such statements reflect the growing optimism among members of the profession”
   antonyms: pessimism
2. Philosophy
   The belief that good must ultimately prevail over evil in the universe.

The word optimism is bouncing about at present. A book titled with the word is even on a national tour. We all hear it, but do we really feel it? How can we with the current continual attack on our environment and social inequality?

If I take the word strictly by its definition, then no, I cannot possibly feel optimistic. But when I look at how I perceive the world and my role in it, then yes, I am an eternal pragmatic optimist who believes that personal and collective action can create positive change in the world.

On his book tour, Bob Brown touches on anecdotes that fill his hope cup. He specifically highlights the Franklin and the suffragette movement.

As a woman who works, votes and fights passionately for environmental and social justice these two campaigns are close to my heart, but in the current face of climate change, the breakdown of our national environment laws, logging of our diminished native forests and cutting a coal port through the Great Barrier Reef I require modern examples of victory to sustain me.

With a Coalition government hell bent on feeding vested interests at the expense of the natural world, I look to my contemporaries for nourishment. Groups like the Pacific Climate Warriors, grassroots and community actions like the Bentley Blockade, the successful campaign against the James Price Point gas hub.

Mostly I look to my ACF colleagues and activist friends, who make it their day’s work, everyday, to put environmental protection at the heart of our national interest. As a pragmatic optimist my view is quite simply this: you are what you do, and there is nothing more hopeful than that.

Letters and tweets

✉ Thank you for another great issue of habitat. You, and people like Josh Byrne, are leading the drive towards sustainability. Thank you.

Ian Freney

✉ I just wanted to say a big THANK YOU for taking action on our behalf in these important matters, fighting for things that you simply cannot put a value on because of how precious and important they are. Sometimes people need reminding of what’s good for them.

Gioia Fiori

✉ Thank you so much for your persistence and perseverance [for Tasmania’s World Heritage forests]. Thank goodness there are some sane people on the planet who can see the right way ahead. This is best news I’ve had for weeks. Thank you once again.

Susan

✉ I just wanted to thank you personally for doing so much to co-ordinate and inform those of us who care about the same things. Without people like you, willing to make this your life, people like us would not be able to be heard and such wonderful victories would not occur. On behalf of the trees, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Sue Lovell

✉ @LibbydeQ was a brilliant essay on futility of crisis talk in recent @ AusConservation habitat mag

Ian Lunt @IanLuntEcology

Giveaway!

All a twitch for this great bird app

We have five free downloads of the Pizzey and Knight Birds of Australia Digital Edition for iPhone and iPad to giveaway. Pizzey and Knight Birds of Australia Digital Edition is a comprehensive bird app with multimedia data on over 900 Australian bird species. It includes a field guide, full bird guide with over 2500 illustrations, 400 photographs, detailed species information, distribution maps, and 1500 bird sounds.

The app is more expensive at $49.99, but is a serious must-have for any keen birdwatcher or professional.

To be a lucky winner: Using the subject line ‘BIRDWATCHING’ email us your favourite Australian bird you watch out for when you go birdwatching and why. Include the name of your favourite Australian bird, explain in 25 words or less why it’s your favourite, and include your name and email address to: habitat@acfonline. org.au by October 30.
Ferns and their allies are the ancient carpets of our continent and, with over 10,000 species (400 Australian), account for most of the world’s vegetation communities. Our fronds in the forest have sensitive ecological preferences that make them perfect barometers of habitat health — ferns are invaluable measures of soil pH and type, light and moisture levels, temperature and humidity. They do much to protect the quality of water in Victoria’s alpine and sub-alpine catchments.
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**Our government is playing politics with our future**

**My first months** at ACF have certainly been action-packed.

First, the wonderful win for Tassie forests. While our political leaders thought these ancient forests unworthy of World Heritage protection, Australians thought otherwise. UNESCO agreed, quickly dismissing the Abbott Government’s irresponsible request to delist 74,000 hectares of these forests and open them up to logging. Tassie’s World Heritage forests are now safe, thanks to you.

Then came the win to stop a radioactive waste dump being imposed on the Indigenous community at Muckaty in Australia’s beautiful north. This was followed by the Palmer United Party’s commitment to protect the Renewable Energy Target, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Climate Change Authority. But we’ve had to face some harsh realities as well.

Our federal government removed Australia’s working price on climate pollution, spurning global criticism. Making climate pollution free goes against the advice of scientists, economists, businesses and community leaders; and was driven by vested interests that make profits from polluting the air we breathe.

I was never more reminded of this than at the recent Climate Reality Training. ACF delivered the training with Al Gore to over 500 community leaders from over 30 different countries. The audience was brought to tears when we heard from Rodne Galicha, a citizen from the Philippines who recounted how his country folk were killed from typhoons made more violent and deadly from a warming world. He reminded us all that global warming affects real people.

Unbelievably, despite a decade of devastating typhoons, Rodne delivered climate action training to his fellow countrymen and women. When hopelessness should have prevailed, Rodne decided to lead.

It reiterated my strong belief that we can no longer rely on our political leaders to protect our magnificent places, our climate or our future. We tried this and it hasn’t worked. We must lead the way forward. A better way is absolutely possible and together we are leading the way.

→ Join our action community: action.org.au
WHO TOOK THE CONSERVATIVE OUT OF CONSERVATION?

Director of environment programs, Paul Sinclair, lists the ten top reasons our environment has slid off the bi-partisan agenda.

The extremism of the Abbott Government sits awkwardly with the legacy of previous conservative governments.

There should be no reason why a conservative government cannot be a good manager of the environment. Creating more renewable energy and reducing dirty and dangerous pollution is good for blue bloods, comrades, PUP-pies and greenies alike.

Good management of the environment secures the natural life-support system that homes, cities and food-producing farms depend on. These life-support systems are created by places we love and species we honour and respect.

It was Robert Menzies’ who signed the first Antarctic Treaty in 1960. Malcolm first declared Kakadu a national park and signed an agreement with Japan to protect migratory bird species.

John Howard’s government established the National Greenhouse Inventory and National Carbon Accounting System, and committed $10 billion to deal with national water security.

Only seven years ago, John Howard’s environment minister said, “...we all know that down the track, by mid-century, we’ll need to be in a world where all of our electricity and most of our energy comes from zero emission sources, we know that”.

Contrast that pragmatic vision with the extreme and regressive approach of the Abbott Government towards the environment. After only a year in office, the Abbott Government has delivered what we think are the worst 10 examples of ecological mismanagement:
WHO TOOK THE CONSERVATIVE OUT OF CONSERVATION?

Repealing the carbon price, leaving Australia without an effective climate change policy

The carbon price not only reduced Australia’s carbon pollution, it also helped bolster global action to cut pollution. Repealing a working national policy to address the most significant threat to our country was a pointless backwards step. Experts don’t think the government’s ‘Direct Action’ policy will work. Australia now has no effective national policy to address climate change.

The government tried to have the United Nations delist 74,000 hectares of World Heritage listed Tasmanian forests. It also took an axe to the historic ‘peace deal’ between conservationists and the timber industry. The peace deal, delicately negotiated over two years, paved the way for a more sustainable future for the industry and the state. The UN, thanks to the efforts of ACF and other conservation groups and our supporters, rejected Australia’s proposal.

Each year the government spends more on subsidising the fossil fuel industry than on public education. In contrast, the investment in clean energy through the CEFC and ARENA is tiny. And the CEFC makes money! The Climate Commission was the body charged with providing accurate and relevant information about climate change to the public.

Reviewing the Renewable Energy Target helps drive investment in clean energy research, development and deployment. It lowers power bills and pollution. Reviewing the RET has destabilised the clean energy industry, delayed billions of dollars’ worth of investment and put at risk continued investment, growth and jobs. The ‘expert’ panel charged with the review is comprised of hand-picked climate denialists and former oil and gas industry heads.

Despite the Coalition’s proud marine legacy under John Howard, who increased protection for the Great Barrier Reef and initiated the Marine Bioregional Planning process, the Abbott Government has sought to review and weaken Australia’s world-renowned network of marine reserves.

Abolishing the Climate Commission and attempting to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, while maintaining fossil fuel subsidies

Reviewing the network of national marine reserves
WHO TOOK THE **CONSERVATIVE** OUT OF CONSERVATION?

**Handing national environmental approval powers to state governments**

**Without national leadership**, our national environmental treasures cannot be protected. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act is Australia’s key federal environment protection law. The federal government’s plans to pass off its duties to conflicted state governments is bad news for the environment, but great news for coal miners and coal seam gas developments.

**Approving the Carmichael mine**

**Carmichael** will be Australia’s biggest mine and will come with disastrous impacts. Coal from the Carmichael mine will be freighted by rail through vulnerable environments and shipped out through the Great Barrier Reef. The mine will take 297 billion litres from underground aquifers and destroy habitat of the endangered black-throated finch. When burnt, coal from the mine will release massive amounts of air pollution.

**Slashing spending on nature protection**

**$483.8 million** has been cut from nature protection programs by replacing Caring for our Country and Landcare with a new, narrower National Landcare Program.

**Abolishing the National Water Commission**

**The National Water Commission** provided independent assessments of government progress to manage water sustainably. Its abolition will create more opportunities to fast-track resource extraction and dam building in northern Australia and weaken environmental safeguards.

**Defunding Environment Defenders’ Offices**

**Defunding** the Environment Defenders’ Offices means Australians are less able to speak up for themselves, ensure the environments they value are looked after and keep political decision makers honest.
Inside the Democratic party’s Hogwarts for digital wizardry

ACF’s own Tabatha Fulker recently came back from the US where she took part in New Media Bootcamp, run by the New Organizing Institute. This article was originally published in The Washington Post.

**Joe Biden** has said a lot of strange things in his time. For the loose-lipped vice president, however, even this was a new one. “Trust me,” he told voters. “You don’t want a Death Eater like Malfoy as your congressman.”

Biden’s remarks came near the feverish end of a heated Democratic primary battle whose candidates included, among others, the son of an impoverished government bureaucrat, a professor of transfiguration and a groundskeeper who’s half-giant by birth. The winner would go on to confront Slytherin incumbent Draco Malfoy in a race to represent the state of Columbia’s 22nd district.

You may already be guessing that the primary was a fiction, perhaps J.K. Rowling’s stab at a “West Wing”-themed reboot of the Harry Potter franchise. You’re right, of course: The 22nd district of Columbia doesn’t exist. Hermione Granger never wound up endorsing Neville Longbottom—and neither did Biden, for that matter.

“Trust me,” he told voters. “You don’t want a Death Eater like Malfoy as your congressman.”

But with the real US midterms fast approaching, Democrats are eager to put more people in the field who’ve been trained in the latest campaigning techniques. That means spreading some of the technological lessons of the 2012 presidential election down to smaller state and local races. It means giving people who’ve never seen a line of HTML the power to write their own. And it means applying the pressure of an actual campaign to be sure those skills stick.

Hence the wargame for Columbia 22. Established by the New Organizing Institute—the left’s think tank for campaign know-how—the annual exercise introduces dozens of recruits to what’s now a standard feature of 21st-century politics: Digital strategy, or the use of data, new media and randomised controlled experiments to enhance a campaign’s performance.

Data science can help juice donor giving, enhance the reach of viral ads and videos, and help eliminate waste and uncertainty. Both conservatives and liberals have been vastly upping their investments in political technology ever since President Obama’s re-election campaign introduced data-driven politics to the general public three years ago. Now, as Republicans have made strides of their own in Moneyballing politics, Democrats are seeking to maintain their edge.

Every night for a week in June, teams of budding progressive activists stayed up past the
witching hour to digest the complex lessons that, famously, helped put President Obama in the White House for a second term. Many had never written a line of HTML before in their lives. Soon they were cranking out e-mails to “voters”—a group of some 600 practicing political strategists—coding websites for their fictional candidates and responding to negative attacks from Draco Malfoy. A progressive’s rendition of “Defense Against the Dark Arts,” you could say.

Political technology tends to make the most difference on the margins: Getting a few more people to share a candidate’s Facebook status, or increasing donor rates by just a few percent. But in the aggregate, all that nudging can add up.

When George Zimmerman was acquitted by a jury in the Trayvon Martin case last year, Steven Pargett had already packed his bags to come to Washington. Pargett, a communications director for a Florida non-profit, was bound for DC to attend NOI’s seventh annual boot camp. But when the court’s decision came down, Pargett sprung into action, putting off his new media training for a year. Reflecting recently, Pargett said staying behind to organise protests around the verdict was still the right call. But he wished he’d had the benefit of knowing then the skills he’s learned now—from how to craft action-driving messages to running controlled experiments with his organisation’s list of 18,000 registered e-mail addresses.

“That would’ve led to us having better conversations with our supporters,” he said. “We would’ve raised more money. It would’ve made such a huge difference.”

Bootcampers began each day with an in-person crash course on the left’s latest tactics and techniques. Many had been honed and tested under real-world conditions in the 2008, 2010 and 2012 US elections. Over time, as political technology has gotten more complex, so have the classes. It used to be, for instance, that testing an e-mail meant tweaking a subject line before sending each version to a small subset of voters—an attempt to see which subject line was better at getting people to open the correspondence. Then the winning subject line would be used in the mass mailing to a wider audience.

Even in the last few years, however, testing has become a multivariate process, said Matt Compton, digital director for the Democratic National Committee.

“Now we’re talking about testing multiple drafts against each other,” he said. “Some of them may be image-based, testing various senders against each other, testing various packets within the e-mail and doing all of that within one single test … The tools have given us much more capacity to do more sophisticated testing.”

Practitioners like Compton dropped by boot camp to explain to trainees how all these tactics worked—but on at least one occasion, they were interrupted by actual politics.

The day NOI taught its campers about e-mail happened to be the same day as former House Majority Leader Eric Cantor’s stunning loss against primary challenger David Brat in Virginia. As news of the upset spread, NOI’s training room turned into a real-life campaign war-room as officials for various organisations scrambled for the doors.

“For a moment, I was like, ‘This is going to ruin everything,’” said NOI training manager Bridget Todd. “But then I was like, ‘Wait, this is actually a great lesson boot campers are seeing.’ That visual of folks checking their phone and rushing into the nearest office? It’s good.”

Pretty soon, the boot campers themselves were putting what they’d learned to use. Their task: Deploy digital tactics to sell Hagrid, Professor McGonagall and a range of other characters to

“The hands-on work is just the most visible part of what the New Organizing Institute, or NOI, claims it does with its annual boot camp. The crash course helps develop a wider talent and knowledge infrastructure that many Democrats credit when discussing their technological gains of the last few electoral cycles.

Graduates of NOI’s boot camp are everywhere (even Australia), subtly influencing the tone and the strategy of hundreds of campaigns and non-profits at every scale. Lessons they learn in the field get fed back into NOI’s pipeline, creating a cycle of learning and self-improvement that affects the wider party.

“Tell your friends, family and even the ghoul living in your attic to get out to vote today,” Luna Lovegood’s digital directors wrote
a group of critical experts who weren’t afraid to give occasionally biting feedback on their performance.

The name “boot camp” is not undeserved. Students received their hands-on assignments each day at around dinnertime (after having already spent the day learning); few finished before 2 a.m. At that hour, relationships grew tense. One trainee, a programmer and immigrant activist named Erick Garcia, joked that there were times he wanted to kill his teammates. Others were forced to unlearn old habits, much to their chagrin.

“I thought I knew everything about writing,” said Eartha Terrell, who worked on Hagrid’s campaign. “When I got here, I was stripped of that ego pretty quickly.”

The feedback from real-world strategists wasn’t random; many, including the trainers, are themselves boot camp alumni. Boot campers have gone on to some of the most prominent left-leaning organisations in America — such as AFL-CIO, Greenpeace and Planned Parenthood, not to mention the White House and political firms like Blue State Digital.

From perches like these, the boot camp graduates often hold two interrelated jobs: To win, and to discover new political tactics in the course of doing so.

For the left, boot camp isn’t just about teaching newbies the basics; it’s about staying a few steps ahead of the Republicans. They might hang onto that technological lead for a while, according to University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato. But probably not forever.

“Mobilisation begets countermobilisation,” Sabato said in an interview. “It’s a fundamental principle of politics. The leadership in campaign technology often moves back and forth between the parties, often depending on which party is more desperate.”

This is also where boot camp alumni come in. In addition to those who take positions at high-profile political organisations, many more spread to smaller advocacy groups and campaigns. Beyond their day jobs, these digitally savvy individuals act as informal listening posts for NOI: What a same-sex marriage advocate learns in one state about tactics and technology will ultimately benefit climate activists in Vermont, and vice versa.

Boot camp has even gone global. Tabatha Fulker is an Australian organiser who came to NOI with an eye toward starting a version of boot camp back home. Australians understand that that political technology is the future, Fulker told me — but they don’t necessarily know how to put it into practice. And the fancy technology and data science won’t help anyone if it’s too complicated to learn.

The fact that each year’s mock election is based on its own theme helps. In past years, the candidates running for Columbia’s 22nd district have taken the shape of Muppets, characters from ‘90s television shows and superheroes.

Personality and community, Fulker and others said, is boot camp’s secret sauce. It’s the foundation for a much larger network of liberals than boot camp itself can reasonably hope to train. Whereas an organisation’s loyalty might otherwise end at its own front door or its state boundary, NOI’s created a self-sustaining organism that ties activists and organisers into a more cohesive crowd that evolves over time.

All that was pretty far from the minds of boot campers’ after six days of campaigning. In a last-minute effort to secure uncast ballots, candidates blasted a final plea to their supporters to get out the vote.

“Tell your friends, family and even the ghoul living in your attic to get out to vote today,” Luna Lovegood’s digital directors wrote. Professor McGonagall announced an eleventh-hour endorsement by the Working Families Party. Joe Biden exhorted his followers to kick Death Eaters out of Congress.

The real race — the Muggle elections — has only just begun

By the time polls closed, it was clear who was going to represent Democrats against the Slytherin machine: Lee Jordan, the Gryffindor Quidditch commentator who was also, it turned out, an advocate for immigrants and house elves. This race was over. But the real race — the Muggle elections — has only just begun.

→ To read the full version of this article download habitat for iPad free at: acfonline.org.au/habitatapp
Right now the federal government is in the process of weakening our national environment laws. Their Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) Amendment Bill seeks to weaken the EPBC and allow for the handover of approval powers for developments that could damage our precious environment to state governments.

If they are successful in pushing this through the chaotic new senate, Australia’s unique wildlife and special places will be put at the mercy of state governments’ development agendas.

The bill is just one element in the government’s plan to implement the big business and mining lobby’s agenda — mine more, dredge deeper, and frack faster, with less oversight.

The lobby is spearheaded by the Minerals Council of Australia and the Business Council of Australia, representing huge conglomerates like Rio Tinto, BHP and Santos. Weakening our national environment laws would largely benefit mining companies who send 83 per cent of profits overseas but leave damage for all Australians.
State governments have proved time and time again that they value revenue-raising development over environmental protection

It’s not that mining is evil. It just needs sensible oversight. Special places like the Great Barrier Reef belong to all of us, and Australia’s national laws should protect them. Currently, the EPBC gives the federal government final approval powers on developments that could endanger Australia’s areas of national environmental significance—unique and threatened species, heritage listed sites, aquifers and groundwater that we rely on to survive.

While the EPBC allows for the federal government to handover approval powers to state governments it only does so on the condition that the state’s environmental laws meet certain standards. The recently released report from the Australian Network of Environmental Defenders Offices, An Assessment of the Adequacy of Threatened Species and Planning Laws in all Jurisdictions of Australia shows that not a single state law or process that will substitute the EPBC approval process when powers are handed down meets the same standards outlined in the EPBC.

The report also shows that in all the states and territories, approvals for developments in environmentally sensitive areas will not be made by the environment minister and major development approvals will bear more weight than protection of threatened species.

State governments are not resourced to enforce national laws. Their laws and regulations do not meet the standards required in the EPBC. And, they can’t be trusted to protect our air, our water and the places we love with mining royalties on the table.

State governments have proven time and time again that they value revenue-raising development over environmental protection. Campbell Newman plans to turn the World Heritage (in danger) listed Great Barrier Reef into one of the world’s biggest coal ports and the WA Environment Minister’s doesn’t think fracking for gas in a Ramsar listed area of the Kimberley requires an environmental assessment.

A key component of the EPBC that is threatened by the government’s amendment bill is the ‘water trigger’, added to the act in 2013 by the Gillard government in response to community concerns over states’ poor regulation of the impacts of coal seam gas and mining projects on water resources.

As it stands under the current law if a project, like a mine, is likely to have a significant impact on water sources, it must be assessed and approved by the federal environment minister. Handing over the keys to this dry continent’s precious water resources to state government’s hungry for revenue from fracking and mining is nothing but reckless.

The Abbott Government made an election promise to turn Australia’s environmental approvals process into a one-stop shop for industry. They claim handing over powers to states will remove duplication, make environmental approvals more efficient and give certainty to business. But put under the microscope, these claims just don’t check out.

Many areas of Australia’s iconic and internationally recognised environments and threatened species transcend state borders and each state has significantly different environmental laws and approval processes. If developments cross state borders or exist in multiple states, industry could be dealing with up to eight different approval systems and complicated inter-state agreements in what would be a multi-stop shop, not a one-stop-shop.

This was a realisation reached by the former Labor government in 2012. They eventually accepted that due to the vast differences between environmental laws in each state, they would in fact be creating an even more complicated system for a developer to navigate than what already existed.

It is far from perfect, but the EPBC is Australia’s key environment protection law. If these handovers proceed, within months, Australia’s special places could be exposed to an unprecedented level of threat.

We need to do everything we can to protect Australia’s unique environment, natural icons and the places we love

What Australia needs is a new generation of environment laws. Not only should powers not be handed over to states—the current EPBC Act should also be tightened and new and better laws introduced to protect our world-class environment. We need independent bodies set up to enforce national environment laws and the future of our natural icons cannot be left up to ministerial discretion and state governments with vested interests.

We need to do everything we can to protect Australia’s unique environment, natural icons and the places we love.

→ For more visit: acfonline.org.au/environmentlaws
There are several lines of evidence that argue in favour—or really against—humans. One of these is the event’s timing. The megafauna extinction, it’s now clear, did not take place all at once, as Lyell and Wallace believed it had. Rather, it occurred in pulses. The first pulse, about forty thousand years ago, took out Australia’s giants. A second pulse hit North America and South America some twenty-five thousand years later. Madagascar’s giant lemurs, pygmy hippos, and elephant birds survived all the way into the Middle Ages. New Zealand’s moas made it as far as the Renaissance.

I can’t fathom why Australia’s giants should have survived innumerable droughts in their tens of millions of years of Australian history, and then have chosen to drop dead almost simultaneously ... and just coincidentally when the first humans arrived — Jared Diamond

It’s hard to see how such a sequence could be squared with a single climate change event. The sequence of the pulses and the sequence of human settlement, meanwhile, line up almost exactly. Archaeological evidence shows that people arrived first in Australia, about fifty thousand years ago. Only much later did they reach the Americas, and only many thousands of years after that did they make it to Madagascar and New Zealand.

“When the chronology of extinction is critically set against the chronology of human migrations,” Paul Martin of the University of Arizona wrote in “Prehistoric Overkill,” his seminal paper on the subject, “man’s arrival emerges as the only reasonable answer” to the megafauna’s disappearance.
In a similar vein, Jared Diamond has observed: “Personally, I can’t fathom why Australia’s giants should have survived innumerable droughts in their tens of millions of years of Australian history, and then have chosen to drop dead almost simultaneously (at least on a time scale of millions of years) precisely and just coincidentally when the first humans arrived.”

In addition to the timing, there’s strong physical evidence implicating humans. Some of this comes in the form of poop. Megaherbivores generate mega amounts of shit, as is clear to anyone who’s ever spent time standing behind a rhino. The ordure provides sustenance to fungi known as Sporormiella. Sporormiella spores are quite tiny — almost invisible to the naked eye — but extremely durable. They can still be identified in sediments that have been buried for tens of thousands of years. Lots of spores indicate lots of large herbivores chomping and pooping away; few or no spores suggest their absence.

A couple of years ago, a team of researchers analysed a sediment core from a site known as Lynch’s Crater, in northeastern Australia. They found that fifty thousand years ago, Sporormiella counts in the area were high. Then, rather abruptly around forty-one thousand years ago, Sporormiella counts dropped almost to zero. Following the crash, the landscape started to burn. (The evidence here was tiny grains of charcoal.) After that, the vegetation in the region shifted, from the sorts of plants you’d find in a rainforest toward more dry-adapted plants, like acacia.

If climate drove the megafauna to extinction, a shift in vegetation should precede a drop in Sporormiella: first the landscape would have changed, then the animals that depended on the original vegetation would have disappeared. But just the opposite had happened. The team concluded that the only explanation that fit the data was “overkill.” Sporormiella counts dropped prior to changes in the landscape because the death of the megafauna caused the landscape to change. With no more large herbivores around to eat away at the forest, fuel built up, which led to more frequent and more intense fires. This, in turn, pushed the vegetation toward fire tolerant species.

The megafauna extinction in Australia “couldn’t have been driven by climate,” Chris Johnson, an ecologist at the University of Tasmania and one of the lead authors on the core study, told me when I spoke to him on the phone from his office in Hobart. “I think we can say that categorically.”

The Sixth Extinction by Elizabeth Kolbert, published by Bloomsbury, is out now.
Walking with the Wuthathi — all the way

The story of the protection of Shelburne Bay on Cape York’s northern tip goes back several decades and involves a cast of many including the local Wuthathi people, former PM Bob Hawke, former ACF CEO Don Henry and countless others. But it is the current Queensland Government, led by Campbell Newman, that is working towards delivering a national park for the area, writes Andrew Picone.

Climbing the immense white sand dunes of Shelburne Bay with the Wuthathi people, behind the big grins, somersaulting kids and photo posing, I saw a profound and palpable sense of pride. Back in 2010 I worked with the Wuthathi people, Traditional Owners of Shelburne Bay, to help them hold one of their largest on country meetings in modern times. With about 60 Wuthathi people in attendance it was the first time many family groups had come together on their ancestral homelands. It was also the first time many young Wuthathi kids had come back to their home turf.

A year later in 2011 we chartered the large catamaran Pelican 1 — to take us to the most sacred of Wuthathi places, Wulungun, also known as White Point. It was here, half way up the immense dunes, struggling in the glare and tropical heat with a camera in each hand that I realised the enormity of the moment.

Before arriving at the dunes, Wuthathi ancestors were notified through song. The cultural significance of these dunes is immeasurable, as is the Wuthathi’s unbroken connection to their country.
This connection has been a driving force in their determination to reclaim ownership of their land through both native title and tenure ownership.

**A long road to justice**

Back in 1985, Don Henry who was then the coordinator of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, challenged a mining application by an Australian-Japanese joint venture over 75,000 hectares of Shelburne. He took the challenge to the Mining Warden’s Court Thursday Island.

Naively, the mining proponents believed there was no Aboriginal interest in Shelburne Bay based on an astonishing assumption that the Wuthathi had all passed away. Henry, of course, had done some legwork and persuaded the then 70 year-old (now deceased) Alick Pablo to give evidence. Based on Alick’s evidence, as well as that of several scientists, economists and others, the Warden’s Court made an unprecedented recommendation against mining.

In response, Queensland’s then Minister for Northern Development, none other than Bob Katter declared, “I will not let the conservation lobby stop the mining of silica in one small part of the Peninsula”. At the time, and as recently as last year, Katter has quipped that the sand is only going to blow into the sea and therefore should be mined.

Realising that a Queensland Government under Joh Bjelke-Petersen wasn’t going to protect Shelburne Bay from the miners, Don Henry and the Wuthathi sought federal intervention. Then Prime Minister Bob Hawke effectively exterminated the project by making it illegal to export the sand.

Narrowly avoiding a disastrous mine, by 1990 the Wuthathi were again forced to defend country along with the support of their Kaanju and Kuuku Ya’u neighbours to the south.

Although Bjelke-Petersen’s reign of Queensland had come to an inglorious end, his mad-capped idea to build Australia’s first spaceport within coo-ee Shelburne’s sand dunes was gaining momentum. Despite the corporate push by the Cape York Space Agency, the Traditional Owners unanimously opposed the development and it was shelved.

As the left-over mining leases approached expiration, then Premier Peter Beattie introduced legislation to the Queensland Parliament that prevented their renewal with the support of the then Liberal Opposition leader Bob Quinn.

With the threat of on-going exploration the Beattie government moved to amended Queensland legislation and declare the entire Shelburne lease a restricted area, thus prohibiting any future prospecting, exploration and mining.

While the Wuthathi have battled to protect their homelands from inappropriate development, they have also been pursuing native title through the Federal courts for over 12 years. In addition, the Wuthathi have sought ownership of the Shelburne lease directly negotiating with the Queensland Government.

**After 25 years, it’s really coming together. It’s Wuthathi people now, and we’re heading back to country — Johnson Chippendale, Chair of the Wuthathi Corporation**

The long road to native title and ownership of their homelands may conclude this year, with the Queensland Government finalising negotiations with the Wuthathi people including the delivery of a new national park. Part of this process includes the declaration of the new 51,370 hectare Wuthathi (Shelburne Bay) National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land).

“It’s been about 100 years since our ancestors were removed,” explains Johnson Chippendale, Chair of the Wuthathi Corporation. “After 25 years, it’s really coming together. It’s Wuthathi people now, and we’re heading back to country.”

With the support of The Myer Foundation and ACF supporters, ACF has worked with the Wuthathi over many years to develop plans for their future prosperity and the management of culture and country.
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WHY AUSTRALIA’S BIGGEST ENERGY COMPANIES ARE AFTER OUR RET

If you’ve heard the burgeoning rhetoric from Australia’s biggest power companies on the Renewable Energy Target (RET) of late, you might be feeling a little déjà vu. It’s not so long ago that these same companies, along with our very own government and a number of other vested interest groups, launched a similar white-ant campaign to demonise our carbon price.

Those same old slogans and sound bites about increasing powers bills, hard-hitting families and legislation that doesn’t work are circulating the airwaves, the tabloids and the rumour mill but once again these claims are nothing more than fiction.

The RET is working and is well on its way to achieving its goal of generating 41,000GWh of clean electricity — or enough energy to power all the homes in Queensland — by 2020.

It has largely contributed to a fall in Australia’s pollution from electricity and to overall pollution growth hitting zero last year. Until the uncertainty around the future of renewable energy, driven by the government’s reluctance to support it, Australia’s investment in large-scale renewable energy projects was huge — at $1.3 billion just last year.

It’s a no brainer really. More investment in renewables means cheaper, cleaner energy in the future. It’s no wonder then that poll after poll shows the majority of Australians support clean energy investment in Australia.

So, why on Earth would the Abbott Government consider reducing or repealing the RET when it is cutting pollution, driving investment for the economy, and receiving support from the majority of Australians?

Enter the ‘Dirty Three’. The three biggest Australian energy companies — Origin, AGL and EnergyAustralia — have become increasingly vocal opponents of the target. They argue that the RET should be reduced to reflect the decrease in energy demand, that is doomed to fail and that it has little point going forward.

But after a little digging, their vehement opposition begins to make a lot of sense. Research conducted by ACF, The Climate Institute and WWF Australia found that the ‘Dirty Three’ stand to reap around $8 billion in profits if the RET is dismantled. These big polluters want to make a quick buck for a small few at the expense of a healthy, sustainable future for all Australians.

The ‘Dirty Three’ will tell you that reducing the RET will save Australians money on their power bills.

Our research shows that while reducing or repealing the RET might lead to a brief drop in the average power bill, by 2025, that bill will be higher than if we simply let the RET keep doing its job. Essentially we pay a small amount now for a cheaper, healthier, sustainable future or we pay the same and suffer the consequences later.

The fact is pollution from burning coal is a 19th century problem with a 21st century solution — clean, cheap energy that doesn’t run out, won’t damage our environment or pollute our air. Origin, AGL and EnergyAustralia stand to make a lot of money from burning coal and there is only one reason for their opposition to the RET — the company bottom line.

The only ones who stand to benefit from a reduction or repeal of the RET are coal-fired power generators
To say it has been a trying year on climate change in Australia is an understatement. We have witnessed plundering of our working climate laws, with no alternative climate policy in place.

What better time for climate leadership training. From June 25–27, over 500 people from 32 countries gathered in Melbourne for three days of training by Al Gore to help shift the balance back in favour of a credible response to climate change.

People attending the training came from all walks of life. They were parents, health professionals, school kids, tradespeople, firefighters, investment managers and sports stars, all with a commitment to lead on climate action.

Concern drives people to become climate leaders. For Andrew Wallace, it’s vulnerability. “It’s our lives here in Wagga. We’re in one of the most vulnerable climate zones in the world”. Others cite angry summers, struggling regional communities, care for their grandkids or stewardship of the land. They have a strong appetite to use their time and influence to push for a stable climate.

Al Gore undertook his first training in Australia in 2006. Over 6000 people have since been trained internationally. A new trainee, Andrew Woodward, said it was “a life changing experience in a world changing movement.” Climate leaders have delivered 70,000 presentations to a global audience of over 7.3 million. To date, one in 58 Australians have seen a Climate Reality presentation.

This is an important time in Australia’s climate history. Australian people have long been leaders on climate change and our
people, if not government, are taking action. Since the June training, climate leaders have already undertaken hundreds of acts of leadership including public presentations, senate hearings and letters to crossbenchers on Australia’s climate policies.

Al Gore’s Australian visit was a catalyst for improving Australia’s clean energy outcomes. After Gore met with Clive Palmer, the Palmer United Party agreed to protect important parts of the Clean Energy Future package. One conversation can literally change the course of history.

“I am hopeful that Australia will continue to play a global leadership role on this most pressing issue,” Al Gore said. “An Emissions Trading Scheme, a strong Renewable Energy Target, and sound guidance from the Climate Change Authority, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency are all highly effective tools in reducing carbon emissions.”

The world has entered a clean energy revolution. President Barack Obama has committed to cut carbon emissions and encourage global action to tackle global warming. China has established emissions trading schemes, along with the European Union.

Australia’s absence of policy is now out of step with the rest of the world. However, while we face some unique domestic political challenges, many climate leaders are optimistic.

Leaders have a strong appetite to use their time and influence to push for a stable climate

Speaking about renewable energy in her home state of Tasmania, Robyn Klobusiak is hopeful. “There is a great deal of hope and opportunity available at our doorsteps for those that want to take advantage,” she said.

While the impacts of climate change are a huge risk on our everyday life, climate action creates new jobs and increases equity and well-being. We can all build critical mass in our communities to enact positive change.

Climate leaders can be proud of their influence in this moment. They are smart, dedicated people whose actions will shape a better future for our country. We can’t wait to see what they do next.

If you are interested in hosting or attending a Climate Reality presentation visit climaterality.org.au
We tackled pollution, boosted clean energy and helped return billions of litres of water to rivers like the Murray.

We helped inspire a sustainability revolution with recycling, energy-efficiency and rooftop solar panels. We created Landcare with farmers and helped facilitate the return of 2.2 million hectares of land to Aboriginal ownership on Cape York.

Despite this incredible progress, nature remains under severe pressure and many important steps towards a better future are being undone.

What is heartening is that there are people like you who are taking a stand. Millions of Australians share our vision to protect nature, secure a safe climate and build a sustainable economy. And they’re ready to act.

As we turn 50, we’ll work harder than ever to fuel the people power we need to put the environment back on the agenda.

And because we couldn’t do any of this without you, we want our 50th year to be all about our supporters—the people that are the force we need to create change.

In August we asked you to imagine the Australia you want to create together over the next 50 years. We’ll be taking all of that on board to create a shared vision for release on our anniversary.

Throughout our 50th year, we’ll be hosting a suite of exciting events where you can reconnect with ACF, meet other members, and get to know more about our campaign priorities.

Stay tuned for more information about how you can be involved. We look forward to celebrating our birthday with you.

From humble beginnings 50 years ago, the Australian Conservation Foundation has grown from a handful of concerned individuals into a national movement for nature protection.

Over the last half-century, together we have achieved some amazing things for the Australian environment.

We won stronger protection for the places we love like the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu, Antarctica, the Kimberley, Cape York and Tasmania’s forests.
In mid-June a small group of Traditional Owners in the Northern Territory won a huge victory for Australians everywhere when the federal government announced it would not develop a radioactive waste dump at Muckaty.

The government’s decision not to proceed with the Northern Land Council’s nomination of the Muckaty site was announced during a high profile Federal Court case initiated by Traditional Owners and supported by law firm Maurice Blackburn.

The surprise development was widely and loudly welcomed, with Kylie Sambo capturing both the relief and resolve of the Traditional Owners.

“They’ve finally heard us. Tennant Creek, where my people, the Warlmanpa and Warumungu live, won’t become Australia’s first waste dump. We’ve been fighting for eight years to stop the dump, and the government did nothing about it. Finally, we had to take them to court before they understood that we were serious, that we didn’t want a waste dump in the Muckaty area.”

The decision is an important win for the community, the environment and responsible radioactive waste management in Australia. It is also a tribute to the tenacity and courage of the many Traditional Owners who have been tireless in their defence of country and culture since their struggle began in 2007.

The campaign against the dump included national speaking tours, regional rallies, community delegations, political advocacy and extensive media and public profile work. This combined effort saw a profound environmental and human rights abuse in a remote region on the national radar and won the support of civil society and the wider community.

Muckaty was always a bad deal based on a broken promise and as Dianne Stokes conveys, it is a great relief that it will never be a done deal.

“Top to bottom we got bush tucker right through the country. Whoever is taking this waste dump into our country needs to come back and talk to the Traditional Owners. We’re not happy to have all of this stuff. We don’t want it, it’s not our spirit. Our spirit is our country, our country where our ancestors been born. Before towns, before hospitals, before cities. We want our country to be safe. We want to keep talking about it and continue to fight it until we are listened to. We say a big capital NO.”

The success of the Muckaty campaign is also a stark reminder of the failure of successive federal governments to advance an effective and responsible approach to radioactive waste management. ACF and other organisations including the ACTU, the Central Land Council and the Public Health Association have long called for an independent, evidence-based and public examination of options for responsible radioactive waste management in Australia. After decades of division and secrecy, it’s time to look for new and better options to an old problem.

ACF will continue our work to ensure that the message of Muckaty is not lost. We have a collective duty of care to all Australians—including future ones—to finally get this issue right.

We need to avoid the divide-and-rule approach that sees compensation for a dump on Aboriginal land as a valid alternative to the provision of basic services and infrastructure.

Only time can take the heat out of radioactive waste, but trust, transparency and talk can help take the heat out of the radioactive waste debate.

→ For the full article and an interactive slideshow download habitat for iPad at acfonline.org.au/habitatapp
“With so much potential for renewable energy in Australia, why aren’t we closing coal-fired power stations?” — David

Despite having an abundance of renewable energy, Australia continues to produce around 75% of its electricity from old, heavily polluting coal-fired power stations.

Energy efficiency, solar PV and large-scale renewables now mean Australia can generate more electricity than it requires. Put simply—we just don’t need as much coal anymore.

But instead of driving investment in renewables and reducing our country’s dependence on coal, the federal government is attempting to scale back or abolish the Renewable Energy Target (RET) in favour of policies that benefit the coal industry. If the RET is abolished, coal-fired generators are the only ones who’ll benefit.

Coal-fired power is currently cheaper than it should be because the industry doesn’t pay many of the costs it should. With the recent axing of the carbon price, pollution is again cost-free and coal-fired electricity generators no longer pay for the harm caused by their carbon pollution.

On top of avoiding their bill for pollution, the industry receives an estimated $3.8 billion in subsidies annually. The closure of coal-fired generators would cost the industry huge sums for mine rehabilitation costs and worker payouts. With government support to continue profiting off pollution, coal-fired generators have no incentive to close.

The good news is that Australia is well on its way to exceeding the renewable energy target of 20% by 2020. In 2013, nearly 15 per cent of Australia’s grid electricity was produced using renewable sources and more than two million households in Australia now have a solar electricity or a solar hot water system.

Maintaining support for clean energy requires that we retain and build on the RET, implement a price on pollution, remove unjustified subsidies, enforce stricter pollution controls and require coal-fired generators to close once they reach a certain age.

Doing nothing will result in more pollution, discourage investment in newer and cleaner technologies and ultimately pose a risk to the stability of energy supplies in Australia.

Dugald Murray

For the full answer download the free habitat iPad magazine at the App Store: acfonline.org.au/habitatapp
The guiding principle of business is to enrich shareholders. Sounds fair, after all shareholders have invested their money and expect a return on that investment. But what if there’s more to business than the hunt for ever larger and faster profit?

Paul Polman, CEO of global business giant Unilever thinks there is, and has staked both his reputation and job on it. Unilever abandoned quarterly profit reporting, prioritise long-term thinking instead. The result? Unilever has boosted returns, reduced its environmental footprint and increased its positive social impact.

Dove, one of Unilever’s fastest growing brands, is just one example, running a positive self-esteem marketing campaign aimed at helping women and girls realise their full potential.

The central premise behind creating shared value is that the health of a business and the health of the community around it are co-dependent. Instead of profit above all else, shared value focuses instead on the right kind profit, creating societal benefits rather than diminishing them.

Businesses like the Impact Investment Group (IIG) and Small Giants take their mission to create longer term prosperity a step further, establishing as benefit corporations, or B Corps.

To qualify as a B Corp, a business must have an explicit social or environmental mission, and a legally binding responsibility to take into account the interests of workers, the community and the environment as well as its shareholders.

The certification process is comprehensive, covering things such as the supply chain right down to green measures like dual-flush toilets.

Critically, in this time of increasing inequality, treatment of workers and the disparity in pay between lowest and highest-paid employees, healthcare cover, and whether the office is close to public transport are all part of the B Corp certification. Community engagement such as philanthropy and support services are also fundamental to the B Corp approach.

IIG is a leading Australian impact investment funds manager and is the first Australian fund manager to become a B Corp. It is proving that a new model of business is possible.

“Our vision is to advance a new model of business — one that intentionally promotes economic, social and environmental prosperity,” IIG CEO Christopher Lock said.

“We are a young company but we are have already demonstrated that we can generate strong commercial returns alongside positive social and environmental outcomes through our investments. This includes investing in energy efficient buildings, devoting capital to substantially improve the social and environmental performance of buildings through environmental upgrades and tenant engagement, investing in a community wind farm and most recently, our support of Tindo Solar.”

In July, IIG and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation announced they would invest up to $20 million in Tindo Solar, Australia’s only solar module manufacturer, to help break down financing barriers to rooftop solar.

The investment will be made via the Solaire Income Fund, a fund established by IIG and Lighthouse Infrastructure which is designed to provide long-term stable returns to wholesale investors through investment in solar power purchase agreements and related assets.

Embedding shared value as the central element of a business will not address all problems. Some businesses and industries are not suitable to the B Corp approach, instead requiring regulatory intervention to protect the interests of the community. And just as some business fail, some B Corps will fail to return a profit or to achieve their social or environmental missions.

But the light bulb moment is happening for more and more of the smartest business leaders. Whether it be not using resources wastefully or the B Corp approach, the businesses that will remain competitive, that attract and retain good employees and that have a respected place in our society will be those that see the social and environmental agendas as an economic opportunity.

More information on Australian B Corps can be found at: bcorporation.com.au
Planting seeds

Matt Pember, Little Veggie Patch Co

A little know makes abundant grow

Open a pack of seeds and potential life comes spilling out. If you are in the habit of collecting your own seeds, then you know just how abundant these things are and at what little cost they come. However, even for the standard punter, a pack of seeds offers the best value and knowing how to use those seeds is an essential skill.

Select seeds based on the season, the type of light the plants will receive, and what you like to eat. For example, I like to eat lots of leafy greens and they seem to do pretty well in my dark and boggy yard. If you don’t know what to grow, have a look over the neighbour’s fence or even ask them what they recommend. If you prefer a less invasive approach, seed packaging will generally describe the ideal environment for the plant in question.

Once you’ve settled on what to plant, it then becomes a question of where and how. Again, a little research and experimentation will help to determine which seeds to sew directly into the patch and which to propagate in trays. The same goes for planting location. We do, however, have some rules of thumb:

**RULE #1**
Soak seeds with a hard coating (beans, peas, nasturtium, etc ...) overnight. This accelerates germination and improves the probability that your seed will, in fact, yield a plant.

**RULE #2**
Plant seeds to a depth twice the diameter of the seed in question. This is a rule that generally applies to larger seeds like broad beans, peas, and beetroot. For example, a broad bean is about 2cm in diameter, therefore you should plant it 4cm deep. Check the package for spacing information and plant away.

**RULE #3**
Last but not least, don’t forget to water the newly planted seeds. Ideally, get to them first thing in the morning and continue daily watering until plants mature. Take a cup of coffee with you and make it part of the morning routine. Watering is a nice way to be seen and look like a responsible citizen. Admire your work and wait for the compliments to start rolling in …

→ For planting videos and interactive content download habitat for iPad free at: acfonline.org.au/habitatapp
and management. Teaching not just about sustainability but for sustainability, Students learn maths by analysing the solar and wind turbine data they collect themselves. They discover history and geography by investigating how landscapes have changed over time. They analyse how advertising can change minds to promote sustainable consumption, giving them invaluable skills in critical thinking and writing.

Studies show natural-terrain schoolyards also have significant benefits for students’ minds and bodies. Students at Bentleigh Secondary College attend a mindfulness meditation program in their Meditation and Indigenous Cultural Centre. This practice promotes student well-being, reduces stress and builds resilience, helping them navigate their teenage years and giving them invaluable skills for life.

As I watch students learning by the billabong, connected to nature and to their education, with not a yawn in sight — I know we’re on the right track.

With this in mind, Jess Karlsson, Chief Executive Officer (pictured), has been quick to jump on the solar bandwagon.

“Here in Alice we have over 300 sunny days per year so I thought why not harness all that energy to power the centre?”

“The 20kW solar system that I’m looking at could save us over $10,000 per year”.

With the solar sorted, Spark have our sights set on other energy hot spots that are often overlooked; lighting; sealing hot air out in summer; sectioning off cool areas; and switching off energy hungry appliances.

We’ll also work closely with staff to help them understand how energy is used around the centre and how their behavior can impact the Y’s energy costs.

“It’s really exciting to think about the dollar savings we can make and how we can use that money to provide better services to our members.”

Keep track of the many other Y’s that Spark is working with, and how they’re progressing at sparkonline.org.au

ACF is a member of the Australian Education for Sustainability Alliance. We manage a Department of Education project that works with teachers, educators, government and other organisations to integrate EFS across the Australian curriculum.

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The Education for Sustainability project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Education.

Caroline Hughes

The YMCA of Central Australia is one of our newest recruits in round three of the Spark program and our most remote endeavour yet.

Part fitness centre, part early learning centre, and part rock climbing facility, the centre is the only one of its kind in Alice Springs, serving almost all the town’s 2000 residents.

Like many centres in rural and regional Australia, the facility spends a large proportion of their total operating costs on power.

I remember well stifling yawns as a child in an airless room, rote learning maths equations to the slow tick of a clock.

My school days are light years away from the classrooms in Bentleigh Secondary Collage in Melbourne’s southeast. Here, learning often takes place in the school’s urban forest, a 2500 square metre outdoor classroom. Other lessons are held in the wetlands, examining the rainwater bio filtration system or studying the Eastern Long-Necked Turtles and miniature invertebrates that call the billabong home.

Bentleigh Secondary is just one of many schools across Australia to embrace Education for Sustainability (EFS).

EFS is not a separate subject, tacked on to a school’s curriculum — it is embedded across all learning areas, as well as the school’s operations and management. Teaching not just about sustainability but for sustainability, Students learn maths by analysing the solar and wind turbine data they collect themselves. They discover history and geography by investigating how landscapes have changed over time. They analyse how advertising can change minds to promote sustainable consumption, giving them invaluable skills in critical thinking and writing.

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Diane Boase peeks into the progressive habitats of the Education for Sustainability program

Schools of thought

→ Keen to learn more? Visit: educationforsustainability.org.au

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It’s been 10 years between my trips to New York City and change was overwhelmingly in the air. The air was actually cleaner. In the 1990s the city introduced a series of environmental policies to address energy, waste and air quality. New York is now one of the most energy efficient cities in the country and consumes less energy per-capita than any other US city.

New York’s notoriety as glamour capital sets guys and dolls across the globe dreaming about hitting the city’s wise streets in fabulous outfits, feasting upon art for lunch and cocktails at dinner. It offers honky-tonk to cowgirls and burlesque to the unabashed.

And now New York is also home to the largest hybrid bus fleet in the country, and those famous yellow cabs are now hybrid too. As a beacon of hope even the Statue of Liberty is powered by wind.

The premise of my holiday was to jump into the worm hole of the apple and see if the city that taught us Andy Warhol was cool, breakdancing was an art form and tutus were made for street wear could match the excitement its name inspires.

At JFK airport I used the hotel shuttle bus service available at the not-quite-living-up-to-its-namesake Welcome Desk. Pick up the phone handset, give the operator your hotel address, and wait for a person to appear holding up your name alight on an iPad. The service is $20, less than a third of a cab, and with up to eight other passengers a far greener way to travel.

Jetlagged but euphoric I was delivered to my hotel door. I stayed at Ink48 in Hell’s Kitchen. The area is made famous by West Side Story, though the gangs have long been danced out of town. It’s nestled beside the Hudson River, just a 10-minute stroll to Times Square.

I let Google help me search for an eco-hotel in the weeks leading up to my trip. Ink48 was high on the interwebs recommendation lists, promising me some holiday luxury, an oasis of calm
in a high energy city, locally sourced organic food, snacks and products, energy efficient lighting and waste minimisation management systems. One of the Kimpton Group of hotels, it was also recently awarded the Corporate Citizen of the Year Award for sustainability.

It offered all that it promised and more. What I hadn’t bargained for was the view. The Press Lounge is on the 16th floor. Rated one of New York’s best rooftop bars, I was stunned at the 360-degree vistas of Manhattan and it’s free for anyone to enjoy. You don’t need to be a guest to catch an elevator ride high above the city. Just order yourself a cocktail and take in sunset over the city.

I was a high heel’s throw away from all the action of Chelsea, Greenwich and Soho. I spent my day traipsing the pavement eating my way through Chelsea Market and exploring the green redevelopment of the discussed rail tracks at Highline.

On a serious note coffee is sold in supersize as a norm and to order ‘a coffee’ means the percolated variety. To get the espresso super-strength variety that coffee connoisseurs take for granted one must always expressly request a latte. This is the greatest piece of information I feel I can impart upon you.

Caffeined up, the shortest distance between Hell’s Kitchen, Greenwich, the East Village and Central Park is always the street newly travelled. Madison, Fifth and the Avenue of the Americas. Take your pick and your entertainment is set for the day.

The streets are awash with street vendors hawking bags, jewels, hotdogs and pretzels. Summer’s a fiery beast in the apple, but step into any one of the cold pressed juice bars, paleo-organic cafes, or organic gelato shops and cool your heels with change from $10. Hu Kitchen serves unprocessed, organic, gluten-free delicious meals for a song. In New York you quickly realise just how inflated Australia’s food prices truly are.

A trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art will set you back what you would like to pay. It’s a nominal fee to spend a day trawling Matisse, Picasso, Miro and Degas. When your proverbial cup runneth over, step outside into Central Park and delight in people delighting in the joy of playing in the city’s lungs. Dancing, roller skates, chess, picnics, bikes, bubbles and boom boxes are the sport of choice for New Yorkers. The park is a feast of fun and is huge—expect to get lost in its rambles and ensure that you do. Central Park is the essential greenie destination—Mother Nature highly approves. I even caught Australia’s own John Butler playing a show on the park’s summer stage.

Another highlight was a Saturday spent across the Hudson in Williamsburg. Smorgasbord at Williamsburg is a ‘Brooklyn Flea Food Market’ set on the banks of the river in a disused carpark, with over 150 specialty food vans servicing your culinary needs. Organic ice-cream sandwiches wedged between buttermilk biscuits as big as a small dog’s face are $2.50. Vegans, vegetarians, paleos and meat eaters looking for grass fed brisket will all find a fitting feast to behold.

My eight days in the city sat too brief to allow depth to my probing fingers. The big apple I took a bite out of this time was cleaner, greener and definitely free-ranging organic. This is a city that can be whatever you want it to be, and if environmentally sensitive travel is the way you like to explore, then New York can be high on your adventure list.

Standing back on the outside of the wormhole, I’m reminded of the fireflies in Central Park at dusk. It’s a vision so fleeting, yet utterly exciting.
Before the new Senators had a chance to warm their cross-bench seats in July, we made sure it’s clear they had a choice; either they keep our climate laws that cut pollution and protect our health or they repeal it and protect polluters’ bottom lines.

In June, community leaders representing Australians from all walks of life — including mums, dads, youth, educators, and firefighters — personally shared their stories to their representatives in Parliament House, including Federal Environment Minister, Greg Hunt.

Days later I celebrated with 525 freshly trained Climate Leaders the announcement that, thanks to the intervention of the new Senators, Australia’s clean energy laws were here to stay.

Two weeks later, with a disheartening lack of foresight, the government repealed Australia’s carbon price. It isn’t over. The new Senate is not a rubber stamp for the government. Many Senators, especially independents on the cross-bench, are yet to make up their minds about what is in the best interests of all Australians.

In August, our campaign to protect the Renewable Energy Target revealed the coal and gas power companies that stand to gain the most at the expense of households and small business if the Target is weakened or abolished. Within a day, over 18,000 emails were sent to power companies urging them to protect the future of renewable energy.

We met with Climate Leaders who were keen to accomplish 10 Acts of Leadership since their training with Al Gore. The 24 Hours of Reality broadcast and the rallies in key cities globally paved the way for Ban Ki Moon’s Climate Summit in September.

We’ve started to re-ignite power in our communities. Together we’re creating a collective voice for a safe climate that elected officials, specially the new Senators, will hear loud and clear.
Our Beautiful North has clearly struck a chord... in August over 7,700 ACF supporters fired submissions into the federal government’s taskforce preparing a *White paper on the development of northern Australia*. Big thank you! Backing up this strong collective voice, ACF provided the taskforce with a detailed 38 page submission setting out our vision for a better future for people and nature in the north. ACF will continue to strongly advocate our pathway to a better future to policy makers in Canberra, and with our partners across northern Australia.

In June, after seven long years of campaigning, the federal government’s plan to dump Australia’s radioactive waste to Northern Territory’s Muckaty was finally abandoned during a Federal Court action bought by Aboriginal Traditional Owners. However, like the waste itself, the issue is far from dead. ACF is urging Minister Macfarlane to adopt a more responsible approach to radioactive waste management — based on science, transparency and informed community consent.

In July, the Yawuru people in the Kimberley voted to oppose the plans of Buru Energy to drill exploratory wells and undertake fracking for shale gas on their country. Meantime, following up the request of thousands of ACF supporters to the Western Australian government, we keep pressing for a full and independent environmental assessment of long-term impacts of shale gas fracking.

In August, 38,070 ha of land was returned to the Thaypan people in central Cape York. This included the creation of the new 8,550 ha Payrrape Nature Refuge that protects high conservation value wetlands and sandstone escarpments around the Morehead River — critical habitat for threatened species such as ghost bats, Cape York rock wallabies and northern quolls. There is more good news coming soon from Cape York, so stay tuned!
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