



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2010 / ISSUE 2

EDITORIAL

The Tempo Rises...

After the brief interlude when the puff went out of the climate change campaign, NGOs felt flat and business interest slackened – the environment issue has picked up again.

A new Prime Minister who at least says clearly she believes in a carbon price puts the ALP at odds with the Coalition and reenergises the debate. That's not to say that Julia Gillard has not been cleverly ambivalent about timing ('a deep community consensus is necessary') but it is a recognition that the ALP needs those Green preferences. Unlike under the Rudd leadership the environment has been re-engaged; and the apparent leadership on climate change is a stronger signal to the community and business.

In another key TEC area – waste and recycling – we are waiting for the Product Stewardship legislation that gives legal substance to e-waste and other product return schemes to pass through the Commonwealth Parliament. It is expected to be introduced in the Spring session, most likely after a federal election. This legislation is groundbreaking being the first national foray into the recycling arena in over a decade.

Last month TEC was a major player in the National Recycling Summit where recyclers, local councils and green groups

debated the most important policies to advance the recycling economy. This pioneering event has presented its agenda to governments and we are urging it be infused into the National Waste Policy plan.

And then there is the container deposits push – a long standing campaign by TEC and other environment groups as well as councils. We are expecting a long campaign after a decision by state and federal environment ministers in Darwin on 5 July. Despite three attempts by us to obtain an important economic study kept under wraps by officials, we were eventually able to obtain the results. When applied to the NSW beverage container situation a \$168m net benefit was found contrary to the dire numbers emanating from the environment department.

With elections at the federal, Victorian and New South Wales levels over the next nine months environmental sustainability is sure to get a guernsey. At our next Green Capital events, 'Politics of Sustainability' in July we are issuing a 10 point agenda for the green economy. Check our website and tell us what you think.

Jeff Angel, Executive Director

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Container deposits campaigning

TEC's enthusiastic new Waste Campaigner, Lisa Wriley, tells us why the Container Deposits Scheme is crucial to a green economy.

Australia consumes 14 billion beverage containers every year and only about half of these make it into the recycling system. We all know how it happens. We are away from home, we have an empty beverage container in hand, and we are faced with the dilemma: where can we put it? Do we drop it somewhere discreetly? Do we look for a recycling bin in a public place? If we are lucky enough to find one, there's always the question of who will sort out all the obviously un-recyclable stuff that's also in there? What's the chance that any of it will be recycled?

Frankly public place recycling is pretty ordinary in most communities and needs a major boost. The obvious solution that has been the focus of years of campaigning is a national container deposit system (CDS).

The logic is simple: if you could get 10 cents back for each container, why would you toss it in the bin? The research suggests that less than 20% of consumers would ignore the refund. This suggests that we could achieve an 80% recycling rate if we introduced a container deposit system across Australia.

Northern Territory Environment Minister Karl Hampton has led the way, announcing in May that NT would introduce 'cash for containers' legislation later this year and begin implementing a container deposit system in 2011.

Five major reports have been undertaken on container deposits over the last decade, all showing significant benefit of a CDS. Scott Ludlam, Greens Senator for WA, questioned whether the

government was going to continue reviewing CDL until it was dead. He compared it to the National Broadband Network, a \$43 billion budget program proposed without so much as a cost benefit analysis.

Veterans of the container deposit campaign have been holding their breath in the lead up to the environment ministers' meeting on July 5 in Darwin. This is the opportunity to make the significant move towards a national CDS. TEC is coordinating a campaign which says it's time for public consultation on a regulatory impact statement, evaluating all the benefits and costs of container deposits. Sounds boring, but it's actually a big step to a formal decision next year.

There are two possible outcomes. If the RIS is given the go ahead then TEC looks forward to participating in the RIS consultations, and applauds the Environment Ministers in taking this important step towards a more sustainable society. If the RIS is delayed yet again it will mean senior bureaucrats have buried this most effective resource recovery system in yet more reports and reviews. Whatever the outcome, TEC will continue to pressure the Federal Government and State Environment Ministers to move towards the most popular system for capturing beverage containers for recycling.

Secret data released by TEC

Despite refusal under an FOI, and by two governments after a parliamentary vote, TEC has been able to obtain important data showing the public value the litter reduction and resource conservation benefits of CD at \$650mpa.

Longwall spreads north

Longwall mining is now proposed for the Central Coast. TEC's Natural Areas campaigner Dave Burgess fills us in.

The water supply catchment of the Central Coast has become the latest battleground over longwall mining with a project application put before the NSW Government in April.

The company Kores has applied to mine thermal coal for 28 years under the Yarramalong & Dooralong valleys near Wyong, which provide for over 50% of Central Coast water demands. According to the Gosford-Wyong Water Authority the catchment is set to become even more significant following completion of the Mardi to Mangrove pipeline and with an anticipated 100,000 people moving into the area over the next 20 years.

Included in the mine plan are a rail loop and a new coal loader that would be built adjacent to the largest growing urban area on the Central Coast, including the planned new city of Warnervale. Kores is also in possession of an exploration lease that allows the company to explore for coal under Tuggerah Lake itself. Combined with the proposed mine, the company holds leases over approximately one third of the Wyong Shire.

Local opposition has been strong and includes the local council, Chamber of Commerce and sitting Labor MP, while the NSW Opposition has also promised to block the mine if elected. Readers may recall the successful grassroots campaign in 2002 that saw the water catchment protected from logging, so it is of grave concern that a very large part of the area would be undermined should the proponent get its way.

Still fighting to save the Sydney catchments

Elsewhere in NSW the section of the Woronora Plateau due to be undermined by BHP Billiton's Bulli Seam proposal, including the precious Dharawal State Conservation Area and yet more of Sydney's water supply catchment, has received a reprieve with the Federal Government ordering BHPBilliton to conduct a further EIS under the EPBC Act. The recently released Ten Year Review of the 1998 McClellan Sydney Water Inquiry also mentioned the damage being done to the catchments and sounded what it described as a "note of warning" over the issue.

Please help our campaign by signing and returning our 'Don't Drain Them Dry' postcards contained within this newsletter.

Toxic TV tide

TEC's senior campaigner Jane Castle reports on the swelling tide of toxic tellys and what should be done about it as the nation goes digital.

The imminent phase out of the analogue signal has already sent 2.8 million televisions to landfill according to the Digital Switchover Taskforce. This only increases the urgency for the national e-waste recycling scheme, announced by Peter Garret in November 2009 and planned to start by 2011.

But poor communications and priorities in government are hampering efforts. Stephen Conroy's Digital Switchover Taskforce refuses to participate in diverting televisions from landfill, and doesn't even mention recycling on its website. Meanwhile, Anthony Albanese, as Chair of the Parliamentary Business Committee, refused the Environment Department's request for "A" status legislation, which means that it's likely to be delayed until September and could be mired in election period quicksand.

The analogue signal gets turned off in Mildura at the end of June then progresses across the rest of the country. To save the yet-to-switch TVs from landfill three simple actions are needed. One: councils agree to put aside the old TVs instead

of dumping them. Two: the television industry agrees to collect and recycle them. Three: Stephen Conroy meets industry halfway with support and education, starting with his own Digital Switchover website.

Beyond getting the legislation in place before the next election, the work of nutting out the national scheme goes on. Total Environment Centre has identified several key priorities. Most important are stringent targets and milestones for collection and recycling. It's also critical that some used computers and televisions don't merely get shredded when they could be refurbished. Recycling standards must also be developed based on international best practice to ensure that difficult to recycle and hazardous material is not merely dumped in landfill.

We know that the long campaigns that result in key announcements are just the first step in actually helping the environment. The devil's in the detail and that's why TEC is following through.

RETURN OF ACTIVISM

Green Capital's senior advisor Murray Hogarth takes the eco-pulse of the nation...

Opinion polling indicates that environmentally and socially concerned voters are looking beyond the main parties, to the Australian Greens.

Among those who care, this reflects a mood of deep disenchantment with the Government and the alternative government (aka the Opposition). Foremost among the disappointments (along with the demonising of asylum-seeking boat people), is that the political mainstream is whistling on climate policy while the planet burns - new Australian and global heat records are being set almost every year.

Voting for the Greens is a readily available protest for Australians to consider within the formal political process. And recent opinion polls show that at 15-16% for the Greens, it's on the minds of an unprecedented number of Australian voters.

But what about protesting elsewhere, including in the streets, at the cash register and online?

The foundations have been laid for a resurgence of green activism and campaigning using all of the tools available to the environmental movement in the 21st century.

Following the 2007 election of the Rudd Government after nearly 12 years of Coalition Government under Prime Minister John Howard, there was a period in which it appeared that years of campaigning for climate action would bear real fruit.

Australia finally ratified the Kyoto Protocol, the US elected progressive Democrat Barack Obama as President, and both

Labor and the Coalition were formally committed to an emissions trading scheme for Australia.

Sympathetic policy-makers, businesses, civil society organisations and members of the voting public all were lulled into a false sense of security, believing that decisive action would follow. Thinking the big battles won, arguing for the finer detail of special interests from all perspectives, became the norm.

Then it all blew apart in the Senate and Copenhagen late in 2009 and then again with Rudd's ETS backdown in 2010. Breakthrough reform evaporated and we've been left with a policy vacuum that neither of the main sides in politics wants to focus on.

Better to argue, it seems, about the fate of a super-profits tax based on the unsustainable exploitation of non-renewable resources like coal, iron ore, coal seam gas, gold and other minerals.

This all represents a recipe for civil discontent. For activist groups, it suggests that mobilising public alarm and dissatisfaction will be an imperative to shake up big business and politicians and get them re-engaged in climate solutions.

Environment groups like TEC are properly committed to working with businesses and policy-makers to shape the solutions needed in the market and at regulatory level. But collaboration can't be taken for granted. Action must follow or out-there activism inevitably becomes the fallback option. Patience and goodwill are running out.

Dirty or safe drinking water?

How safe is Sydney's drinking water, and how secure is the supply? TEC director Jeff Angel lifts the lid on the latest report

Remember the contamination scare over Sydney's drinking water twelve years ago? In late July 1998 the headline, 'Water Alert - don't drink water from taps' greeted Sydneysiders. Behind the story was a state of confusion between Sydney Water (which wanted to minimise the alert) and the Department of Health (which thought the problem was more widespread). Then Premier Bob Carr ordered an immediate public inquiry.

The McClelland Inquiry made over 90 recommendations ranging from the establishment of a new water catchment authority, planning controls, infrastructure improvements and research. He envisaged several barriers to pollution, from a healthy catchment to filtration plants.

In the last six months a high level committee has been reviewing progress on the recommendations. They presented their report on 17 February 2010, but until TEC made a successful freedom of information inquiry it was kept secret. A day after we obtained a copy the Minister for Water released it to the public.

The Review found most of the original recommendations had been implemented including the establishment of the Sydney

Catchment Authority (SCA), divorcing control from Sydney Water. It also drew attention to the fact that a regional environmental plan setting out key responsibilities and assessment processes was not gazetted until 2007. The Panel was concerned that changes to the planning system could reduce the powers of the SCA and warned that 'commercial principles' should not have a higher priority in SCA decision making than 'the health of the community'.

A major problem now is the exposure to contamination of the open Upper Canal which delivers water to the Prospect treatment plant. Several investigations have looked at alternatives but no action. The Review Panel called for a firm decision by the end of 2010 - and the government has agreed. However the Panel also found that upgrading of sewerage plants, the prime source of contamination has fallen behind schedule.

Obviously it is essential that the public have confidence in the management of Sydney's drinking water. We need to maintain vigilance. TEC's freedom of information inquiry forced the release of this important review. You can find it on our website.

Water election?

Water and river management will be key issues at the next state election. TEC's Water Campaigner Leigh Martin wades in with this damming report.

Water management and protection of rivers are shaping as crucial issues in the 2011 state election with campaigns to stop the proposed Tillegra Dam on the Williams River and restore environmental flows to the Snowy River being played out in key marginal seats.

Tillegra Dam has been hugely controversial since its announcement prior to the 2007 election. There is no coherent case for the dam to be built. Despite the long running drought, supply levels have remained high in the Hunter and no water restrictions have been imposed. The original justification for the dam, to supply water for Gosford and Wyong, collapsed when both Councils made it clear that they did not need and would not pay for the costs of building it. It has also become clear that the NSW Government has ignored advice from several of its own departments that the dam was unnecessary and environmentally damaging and that demand management offered cheaper and more sustainable options for long-term water security.

The cost and environmental damage the dam will cause have made it deeply unpopular in the Hunter with several government seats in jeopardy, particularly the marginal seat of Maitland. The temperature has risen with the Opposition announcing that, if elected, they will not build the dam as long as no contracts have been signed. With crucial planning decisions to be made in coming months the pressure is on the Government to match the Opposition's pledge and dump the dam.

While the campaign against Tillegra Dam aims to save a river from being dammed, the fight for the Snowy River seeks to reverse some of the environmental damage caused by Jindabyne Dam. Ten years after the NSW, Victorian and Commonwealth Governments agreed to a program to return 21% of pre-dam flows, progress remains agonizingly slow. Environmental flows are lagging years behind schedule and the crucial natural connection between the Snowy River and its tributary the Mowamba River has once again been cut with the Mowamba diverted into Jindabyne Dam. A crucial opportunity to remove bureaucratic obstacles by reforming the Snowy Hydro water licence has been wasted with the NSW government failing to make badly needed changes.

Unsurprisingly, the health of the river continues to decline with the NSW Fisheries Scientific Committee recently nominating the entire aquatic ecological community of the Snowy River as endangered. Lack of environmental flows (or in other words, the NSW Government) is a major reason for this looming environmental catastrophe. The plight of the Snowy is a key issue in the marginal seat of Monaro with Snowy River communities crying out for help to save this iconic river. Both the Government and the Opposition must show that they are committed to an immediate and sustained boost to environmental flows.

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

TEC Communications Director Ruth Hessey tells us about the challenges.

Australia has been stuck in the intellectual and environmental doldrums for most of 2010. The government we voted in so optimistically has bogged down in the vital space between action and imagination. There's been a lot of talk, and very little action.

Rest assured there is no gap between imagination and action here at TEC. So much of the TEC's extraordinary work takes place backstage, that most Australians are not even aware of us. This is posing an increasing communications challenge to an organisation that has never wasted time promoting itself.

The first step towards focusing more on our supporters, and reaching more of them, was the redesign of the TEC website which we achieved through the efforts of a fabulous bunch of eco-passionate UTS students and their lecturers (thankyou Suzanne Osmond and Vicki Karaminas). The website which went up in January has made all our research archives, media releases, ground breaking reports, and the hard yakka of individual TEC campaigners, so much easier to access.

The new website makes it easier for you to interact with us, but an even bigger problem is how we interact with you: our opponents have a gazillion more dollars to spend on selling their position to the general public, than we do. Take Dungog. The NSW Minerals Council has poured thousands of dollars into the campaign to woo hearts and minds in the Australian film industry by backing the Dungog Film Festival. It's effectively turned the town into a propaganda machine for the mining industry. A street parade featured Dr Nikki Williams, CEO of the NSW Minerals Council and waiters at the film festival events were dressed as miners with headlights in their helmets. The famous "Miners Underground" dance party drew enthusiastic crowds.

But this is no joke. More than 300m tonnes of ore and vast quantities of natural gas are leaving Australia every year. What the numbers don't reveal is the environmental impact this is having on our country. Longwall mining is a destructive subterranean extraction method which shatters millennia old

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underground water ways, drains vital wetlands, and dries out swamps.

Mining NSW may be all over the Dungog film festival, but it doesn't own the town, yet. TEC was able to smuggle its latest campaign material into the town via sympathetic filmmakers: Don't Drain Them Dry - Stop Under Mining Our Rivers is a protest postcard designed by photo media artist Anne Zahalka which Dave Burgess, our Natural Areas Campaigner, handed out at the "alternative" film festival at the Dungog cricket ground. 300 local supporters turned up, and the campaign postcards swiftly disappeared into their pockets. Creating these postcards was a collaboration between TEC, Anne Zahalka, a pro bono public relations workshop at Essential Media, and a generous graphic artist at Hero productions.

At the beginning of 2010 TEC also scored a grant from the forward looking City of Sydney Council to make a short film about waste and recycling. Being wasteful doesn't just impact on industry and agriculture. Look at the amount of petroleum

we throw away in non-recycled plastics each day. Stay tuned for progress on the film, a range of shorts made for watching on mobile phones, easy-as photo-essays on our website, and lots of other new campaigning ideas.

The ultimate challenge for TEC this year is to increase the number of people receiving our message: we can all do something about protecting the environment. Only people power can exert pressure on governments and political parties so that the system starts action-ing sustainable environmental practices, instead of distorting the debate by squabbling over details.

This is why TEC works so hard to provide you with the accurate, detailed and empowering information you need to make your efforts count. We hope you will continue to get involved with our campaigns, and support the fantastic work of the people who make this organisation so effective. If you have anything to offer, please contact us.

Light shone on the NEM – and it's ugly

Current research shows over a billion dollars per year can be saved in Australia through energy efficiency, so why aren't we doing it? TEC's energy campaigner Tee Lim dishes the dirt on the rampant self-interest of Australia's biggest electricity generator

Not content with helping to scuttle the emissions trading scheme, coal power giant International Power Australia has shifted its focus to thwarting one of the Federal government's few remaining prospects for effective policy on climate change: energy efficiency. International Power's assets include coal-fired power stations Loy Yang B and Hazelwood in Victoria, and nationwide electricity retailer Simply Energy. Hazelwood is considered the most polluting power station amongst OECD countries according to WWF, pumping on average 17 million tons of greenhouse gases every year, equal to the total emitted by all 1.4 million households in Melbourne.

In a submission to the Prime Minister's Task Group on Energy Efficiency, International Power said it "rejects any proposal to introduce climate change policy, under the guise of energy efficiency measures, which has the potential to destroy the value of existing investments in the generation sector". The submission was intended to be confidential, but appears on the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency website, along with other submissions including TEC's.

We've seen this scare tactic before, with the CPRS, when International Power and other generators threatened to run down maintenance of the electricity supply, or simply "hand the keys over" for Hazelwood, and then exit the Australian market. This led to over \$1 billion in CPRS compensation being pledged by the government for Hazelwood following negotiations with then opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull. We are now seeing the same ploy used by International Power to threaten potential energy efficiency legislation.

It's not all bad news, however. TEC has been calling for

investigation and energy reform for years, and we were encouraged to see that the Task Group intends to explore potential improvements to the National Electricity Market (NEM), in order to facilitate the step-change in energy efficiency it is tasked with delivering. Initial analysis suggests that most stakeholders have identified the NEM as a real problem – except of course generators like International Power in the electricity network industry.

Left to their own devices, the NEM and its participants like International Power, have established a fundamental bias against energy efficiency, and seen electricity consumption, greenhouse pollution, and company profits from the energy sector all spiral upwards since the '90s. TEC has long maintained that the NEM should mandate energy efficiency and demand management options when it makes both financial and environmental sense to do so. Yet International Power's recent submission stated "the NEM should neither impede nor force the uptake of energy efficiency," and that any proposed changes to the NEM should take into account their impact on current investments that were made in the expectation of a stable regulatory environment.

International Power's hysterics regarding regulatory impacts to its investments like Hazelwood are laughable – it knew exactly what it was getting into in 1996 when it purchased the forty-year-old Hazelwood, which by then was already scheduled to be decommissioned in 2005. That the Victorian Government extended Hazelwood's operating license out to 2031 is testament to International Power's sway, and the Australian governments' inability to make a meaningful transition away from coal to cleaner, smarter energy choices.

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EE opportunity beckons

Energy efficiency is Australia's greatest opportunity to immediately reduce greenhouse gas pollution while saving money and improving national productivity. The International Energy Agency estimates 65 per cent of global emission cuts by 2020 will come from energy efficiency, and even without the climate benefits, current research shows over a billion dollars in savings per year can be saved in Australia through energy efficiency.

TEC's submission to the Task Group points the way for a timely and orderly transition to a low-carbon economy, and outlines key energy efficiency action areas including an ambitious National Energy Efficiency Target and a National White Certificate Trading Scheme, based on the NSW Energy Savings Scheme; a peak demand management mandate on the

intransigent networks; energy policy goals aligned with climate policy goals by merging these two portfolios; and reforming the National Electricity Market.*

In the void left by the collapse of the emissions trading scheme, the Prime Minister's Task Group on Energy Efficiency is well placed to make an impact. The challenge for Greg Combet, Penny Wong and Julia Gillard is to stave off cynical attacks from the likes of International Power, and finally deliver on their climate change promises. We await the Task Group's report in late July, and will be sure to keep TEC supporters up-to-date.

* For further details, see our submission at <http://www.climatechange.gov.au/government/submissions/pm-taskgroup/paper.aspx>

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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