



# TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2010 / ISSUE 3

EDITORIAL

## Interesting times...

The pendulum has certainly swung towards green policies and augers for an interesting 2011.

At the Commonwealth level there will be another, hopefully more politically astute attempt at a carbon price. TEC was an early supporter of an emissions trading scheme and held a number of key forums with environment and industry groups. However the entire rationale with the ETS was stymied by the vast compensation payments to polluters effectively neutralizing its intent.

Now a simple carbon tax (really not so simple), even starting at a low point would be a big fillip to low carbon thinking across the economy. It is extraordinary how the political climate can change quickly; and (somewhat late) the electricity industry discovers and publicly articulates that without a carbon price they would be obliged to invest in expensive carbon weighted power which would do a disservice to their investors.

The other big green tickets on the federal agenda are the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and product stewardship laws. The Murray Plan has been mishandled by the Authority which had not developed clear and substantial responses to the inevitable economic impact and uproar. Apparently they were advised to not take the course of action they did, but ignored it and as a result lost important regional political capital that will be needed to negotiate a good outcome for the Murray and effective structural adjustment. Nevertheless there is still hope for a good result in 2011.

The long delayed Product Stewardship Act which will allow the national e-waste recycling scheme to begin, is still not on the parliamentary agenda. The Act will be the umbrella under which problem products can be regulated with or without industry cooperation. TEC has been sounding the alarm about e-waste for some years with over 230 million items in or on

their way to landfill. Industry, government officials and TEC are working intensively to finalise the program; while at the same time development of the Act lumbers along.

Another key scheme is container deposits which is subject to a complex and cumbersome regulatory impact statement process. If successful it will be four years before an actual scheme begins! Meanwhile over 6 billion beverage containers are dumped in landfill or littered every year, representing a big waste of resources and embodied energy.

New South Wales will see a change of government in March.

Peak environment groups have released a 98 point plan to protect our natural advantage (see [www.tec.org.au/images/natural%20advantage%20241110small.pdf](http://www.tec.org.au/images/natural%20advantage%20241110small.pdf)). It was recently presented to Opposition Leader Barry O'Farrell and environment shadow, Catherine Cusack; and Frank Sartor, Environment Minister and representatives of the Premier's office. Cusack and Sartor jointly sponsored its launch in Parliament House with the environment shadow noting that normally environment groups would be in Macquarie Street throwing barbs at Parliament.

The Keneally Government has been doing its best to improve its green image with the big red gums decision, abandonment of the Tillega Dam, new wilderness areas and over 70,000ha of cypress parks. A lukewarm solar feed-in tariff decision tempered the celebrations but it has certainly been a change from 12 months ago.

We are looking forward to substantial environmental policies at the state and Commonwealth levels in 2011. The combination of minority government, a NSW state election and invigorated environment movement will deliver interesting times.

**Jeff Angel, Executive Director**

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### Newsletter Team

Editors • Jeff Angel, Ruth Hessey

Printing • Breakout

Design • Steven Granger

### Contributors to this Issue

Jeff Angel

Dave Burgess

Tyson Vaughan

Lisa Wriley

Sarah Van Erp

Jane Castle

Ruth Hessey

Tessa Menzies

### Published by

**Total Environment Centre Inc**  
Level 4, 78 Liverpool St  
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 02 9261 3437

Fax: 02 9261 3990

[tec@tec.org.au](mailto:tec@tec.org.au)

[www.tec.org.au](http://www.tec.org.au)

# Don't Frack the Gas

*TEC's Natural Areas Campaigner, David Burgess, discusses longwall mining, and why the insidious development of the natural gas industry in Australia means environmentalists can't go home and relax....*

"The Panel is of the view that it is no longer a viable proposition for mining to cause more than negligible damage to pristine or near-pristine waterways in drinking water catchments or where these waterways are elements of significant conservation areas or significant river systems."

With these words the NSW Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) signalled new benchmarks in the approvals process for longwall mining in NSW. The PAC made it clear that BHP Billiton's plan to undermine numerous streams and upland swamps under Dharawal State Conservation Area, and close to the Cataract River as part of its Bulli Seam Operations, was not tenable.

Following the PAC Report BHPB quickly decided to drop the plan, citing concerns within the community about longwall mining in sensitive areas. TEC welcomes the company's decision and hopes it is a gesture of ongoing sensitivity to mining in these precious areas by BHPB and others. However BHPB has made it clear that new plans to undermine Dharawal – which was promised as a National Park in 1993 by then Opposition Leader Bob Carr - may be submitted later. Environmental vigilance will still be required.

The decision is expected to have major ramifications for two imminent proposals to expand mining in Sydney's water catchment by Gujarat NRE and also for any coal mining companies intending to explore for coal in an area under the Nepean, Avon and Cordeaux Rivers near East Bargo.

Only days after the Bulli Seam announcement, TEC was before the PAC again. We had engaged the Institute of Sustainable Futures (ISF) to review the Risk Assessment process for a longwall mine at Wyong that will impact on about 53% of the Central Coast's supply catchment. In 2008 a Strategic Review

Panel found that rigorous Risk Assessment was the crucial factor in determining mining applications in the Wyong area. Yet ISF found that the Risk Assessment process of the Wallarah 2 proposal failed to meet the Australian standards of risk assessment, and that documents required to inform the assessment process had not been completed at the time.

Another explosive development in longwall issues took place in September when TEC obtained confidential documents belonging to Apex Energy. These revealed joint venture plans between Apex Energy and Peabody Energy to extract coal seam methane (CSM) from longwall areas close to the Waratah Rivulet. They also exposed plans to extract CSM from around the edges of Lake Burragarang.

TEC brought the documents to the attention of the Sydney Morning Herald and posted the key document on the TEC website. It makes for alarming reading: exposing an agreement between the coal miner Peabody and Apex to hide their partnership, one which would compound the impacts of longwall mining in the catchments.

Coal seam methane mining can use an extraction technique called 'fracking' which injects millions of litres of water, sand and chemicals into aquifers to help release the gas. It has become a major issue in NSW with both farmers and environment groups including TEC, calling for a moratorium until independent environmental assessment and a statewide strategy has been developed to avoid irreparable damage to high value catchment and agricultural areas.

TEC's Don't Frack the Gas Out of Us campaign was launched in early November. For more info: [www.tec.org.au/natural-areas](http://www.tec.org.au/natural-areas)

# THE DIRT ON COAL POWER

*Most people agree we need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, not increase them. Yet there are 12 new coal-fired power plants currently being proposed around Australia. Tyson Vaughan, TEC's Electricity Market Advocate, asks why?*

There have been plenty of exciting wins for TEC in recent months: the decision on longwall mining in the Southern Coalfields; BHP's admission that a carbon price is necessary; the Victorian government's decision to cut carbon emissions by at least 20% below 2000 levels by 2020; and the formation of a cabinet level joint party committee in Canberra. Signs are appearing that a shift may be occurring in the political landscape on climate change and energy.

But even though both government and industry have publicly acknowledged that anthropogenic climate change is real and urgent, recent policy decisions on coal-fired electricity production indicate a widespread case of cognitive dissonance.

We need to be reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, not increasing them. Yet there are 12 new coal-fired power plants currently being proposed around Australia and many are receiving varying levels of government support. The new HRL brown coal plant in Victoria, for example, has received \$150 million collectively from State and Federal governments and is expected to produce 3 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions each year. Carbon capture sequestration will be too expensive, too late, too impractical and too non-existent to prevent carbon emissions from these plants, which means Australia's high carbon emissions will increase by 7% if all these plants are brought online.

What's worse is that these new plants aren't even leading to the phase-out of existing coal fired power plants. Instead older plants are having their lives extended.

Munmorah power station on the north coast of NSW was originally planned to be phased out in 2014 but current projections now see it being used and upgraded for another 20 years. The NSW government has recently approved a half a billion dollar upgrade of the power station, increasing its generation capacity by an extra 100MW and allowing the station to run on a mix of coal and natural gas.

The NSW Department of Planning's assessment report says that this upgrade will increase the state's greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 1.8% if it ran on 25% coal and 75% gas, and 2.5% if it ran on coal alone.

The Department of Planning justified this increase because they fear that without the plant the state will not be able to keep up with the increasing demand for electricity, and could not meet this demand with renewable generation.

Even though the use of natural (not necessarily CSM) gas is necessary during the transition to a low carbon energy system, and this project is dependent on developers meeting a swathe of environmental conditions, it is a perpetuation of antiquated governance which locks in carbon emissions into the future.

## Why?

There are two main reasons coal-fired power still exists in Australia: the traditional myopic planning of the energy system, and the separation of climate change and energy

portfolios, resulting in split-personality decision making.

The National Electricity Market is set up in such a way that generators, transmission and distribution network service providers and the government, increase their profit the more electricity is sold. Politicians also fear brownouts and blackouts, which often lead to knee-jerk policy decisions on energy.

Consequently, there is a focus on increasing the supply-side of the market by increasing the amount of power stations that generate electricity and poles and wires to deliver it. This is

exacerbated by extreme neglect of the demand-side. Politicians see peak demand increase and so build more and more poles and wires and power stations to avoid brown outs. But we are building billions of dollars of excess infrastructure purely for these times of peak demand: 10% of the electricity grid is used for 1% of the year. Spending all this money on more and more poles and wires is the primary reason for the recent spike in electricity prices – nothing to do with renewable electricity generation.

## What's the alternative?

Demand management would allow for these spikes in peak demand to be smoothed over, while energy efficiency measures would lower overall demand for electricity. Energy efficiency and demand management, in combination with renewable technologies, will lower greenhouse gas emissions and allow us to provide people with the electricity services they need, without the need for more coal-fired power stations. To achieve this, generators, retailers, and transmission and distribution network service providers should be rewarded when they invest in demand management and energy efficiency projects. At the same time demand management and energy efficiency need to be comprehensively integrated into the planning of the national electricity market.

But these changes face serious opposition because of the widespread cognitive dissonance that pervades government – the people in government who work on climate change policy are separate from those who handle energy policy. This is most evident in the split portfolios of Energy and Energy Efficiency in the Federal Parliament. Greg Combet is the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, but energy planning lies with Martin Ferguson and the other members of the Ministerial Council of Energy. Climate change policy relates directly to energy planning, yet bureaucrats involved in energy planning are often reluctant to factor in climate change initiatives because they have focused so long solely on energy security and supply.

Effective governance will not occur if climate change policy is formulated and executed separate to energy planning. However on a more optimistic note recent wins indicate it could be only a matter of time before all government planning takes climate change into account.

# Beverage Leverage

*TEC's Waste campaigner Lisa Wriley wants to end the use of "waste" as a noun. And she's working with a campaign character called Bev the Bottle to change the way people think about what we waste.*

My recent visit to Adelaide for the National Association of Charitable Recycling Organisations' (NACRO) conference provided a great opportunity to visit five community recycling centres, four of them run by the Scouts, and Supercollector Statewide Recycling.

Of course the face of our Ca\$h for Containers campaign Bev the Bottle, was in her element in Adelaide. Bev is passionately working to create respect for used beverage containers, and the public responds to her with enormous affection where ever she goes. Members of the community just kept on coming in with their bottles and cans; busy workers sorted and counted the bounty and gave the lucky people a ticket to take to the office window, and they walked away with money!

The Container Deposit Scheme is simple, it works and in South Australia it is so normal that people are bemused that you want to talk about it and take photographs of it. (Next year it will be introduced into the Northern Territory). Our EPA driver joked that the streets had been cleaned up just for us. I saw two bottles on the ground in three days of extensive travels and I knew that they would be picked up in no time at all. Interestingly I could have counted on my hand the number of other litter items that I saw.

What a contrast to the rest of Australia where litter is so common we think it is normal (but ugly and irritating). Recyclable containers routinely get mixed up with other rubbish when we are out and about or left in the streets, in trees, on fences and in our waterways. Our kerbside recycling is working to a point but we are only rescuing about 50% of our beverage containers. This is way too little.

A National Container Deposit Scheme is such a neat solution. It will increase our beverage container recycling from about 50% to 80% (putting 330,000 tonnes of material back into circulation), reduce litter and climate pollution, help charities, establish hundreds of convenient community recycling centres for containers and other items including e-waste and batteries and my favourite benefit: provide a way for beverage companies to share responsibility for the whole life cycle of their containers.

So Bev the Bottle, has big plans: she is going to hit the streets, spread the word, hand out postcards, distribute ten cent pieces with the facebook site and web addresses and be ready with her wheelie bin to rescue any lost recyclable containers along the way.

Want to help Bev on her mission? She has created many tools for you which are available on the Boomerang Alliance website or by phoning the TEC office.

- Postcards
- Bottle = 10 cents fliers
- T shirt order forms
- Theme song and music
- Bev Christmas cards for your local member of parliament

You can make a donation to the campaign, volunteer to help in the office or on the streets, join the email list of supporters or invite Bev to visit your community. The online letter to the Environment Minister can be found on the Boomerang website [www.boomerangalliance.org.au](http://www.boomerangalliance.org.au) and if you are a facebooker check out the Ca\$h for Containers facebook page.

## Dammed If You Do....

*Recent developments in the Snowy and Tillegra campaigns offer hope of redressing the environmental damage done by large dams, says Leigh Martin, TEC's Water Campaigner*

Recent developments in the Snowy and Tillegra campaigns offer hope of redressing the environmental damage done by large dams, says Leigh Martin, TEC's Water Campaigner

In the Hunter Valley, the proposed Tillegra Dam on the Williams River has now been dumped. A raft of independent reports and previously hidden internal government agency advice surfaced panning the dam as unnecessary and environmentally damaging. Crucially, they have revealed that Hunter Water has understated the impact of the dam on RAMSAR listed wetlands in the Hunter River estuary.

With the dam highly unpopular, cracks have begun to appear in the Government's resolve, with a local Labor MP publicly

questioning the proposal. The NSW Opposition announced it did not intend to build the dam. There are also serious questions as to whether the dam will pass Federal EPBC Act scrutiny due to its impacts on the RAMSAR listed wetlands downstream.

The long running battle to restore environmental flows to the Snowy River has received a boost too. As part of Federal Election commitments the flow in the river will be upped to 6% of pre-Jindabyne Dam levels. A major release of water from the dam is set to take place, simulating natural spring snow melt and helping to flush accumulated sediment from the river

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bed. The Federal Government has also promised to pay off water 'debts' with Snowy Hydro that have held back progress on environmental flows.

However, much remains to be done. The current releases of 6% of pre-Jindabyne Dam flows are well short of the 15% 2009 flow target legislated as part of the corporatisation of Snowy

Hydro. There has also been no progress on environmental flows for the Upper Snowy River in Kosciuszko National Park even though these are crucial to restoring the health of alpine aquatic ecosystems.

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## TEC Turns Dirty Old Buildings Green.

*Sarah Van Erp describes the second phase of TEC's award winning Existing Buildings Project: what commercial properties are doing to green their existing older stock.*

In 2007 TEC launched a pioneering (and subsequently Climate Change Leadership award winning) project to engage with the commercial property sector to improve the environmental rating across their existing building portfolio. The Existing Buildings Project signed up industry leaders from some of the major building groups in Australia including GPT Group, Lend Lease, Becton and the Local Government Super Scheme.

We're now going back to garner the lessons from these leaders (and there have been some impressive results) so we can share the learnings with others in the sector, with a particular focus on application to older buildings which make up much

of the existing commercial property market in Australia. As suggested by the Warren Centre's Low Energy High Rise (LEHR) project, they have a greater energy saving potential per m<sup>2</sup> than the higher grade buildings.

The embodied emissions of existing buildings are a sunk cost that needs to be capitalised upon in order to optimise environmental outcomes. With this project, TEC recognises that the most climate friendly buildings are not new buildings designed for maximum energy efficiency but existing buildings that have been upgraded to achieve substantial greenhouse performance gains.

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## I SEE DEAD TVS

*Why are the streets swelling with dead TVs and discarded computers, and why isn't the government doing anything about it? Senior Campaigner Jane Castle tells it how it is.*

A national scheme for Televisions and Computer recycling is so near, yet so far. Bureaucratic sluggishness, an election and a new minister have combined to put at risk one of the most promising environmental achievements in years.

The importance of follow-through in campaigning is starker than ever. Once again, TEC is seeking alliances with the television and computer industries, recyclers and local government to ensure the delivery of the scheme as promised.

There is a desperate need to get the legislation written and passed but the Department of Sustainable Environment, Water, Population and Communities has been glacial, with constant delays to the release of a draft. Another critical issue is the scheme's targets which are currently being decided behind closed doors by industry and Government. On e-waste recycling standards, Australia is lagging behind the rest of the world. The Stockholm Convention has now banned toxic Brominated Flame Retardants (BFR) and is about to ban the use of recycled BFR plastic in new products. Yet the proposed recycling standard will allow the use of BFRs, extending by decades the amount of time Australian households are exposed this and other toxic chemicals.

One of the biggest underlying problems is that the bureaucratic process has absorbed industry at the expense of transparent consultation. This is inappropriate as it has been community and industry pressure that has triggered action, and without community input industry will lose its social licence to operate.

The other deep-seated problem is fear-driven bureaucratic behaviour that is allergic to real community consultation. While this tends to slow the process, it is not an obstacle as environment groups including TEC are well versed in how to create social change through the media, and by consistently putting forward sensible answers. If that's the fallback – so be it.

By applying continued pressure, we expect the legislation and regulations to be introduced into Federal Parliament in the February-March sitting and for the scheme to be rolled out before the end of 2011. This will be the least Minister Burke has to do to keep the Government's promise – in the meantime you will continue to see dead TVs in the streets.

# What are we saying, and how?

*An update on our video and film efforts to reach out from the Communications Director, Ruth Hessey.*

Communications at TEC ramped up the pace in recent months with some major projects and events. Our collaboration with students from several tertiary institutions, including UNSW, UTS and University of Wollongong, not only brought a lot of vibrant young energy into the office, it left us with some great campaign tools – tools we didn't have the budget to pay for, but which we urgently needed in order to interact with modern media and reach a wider audience.

Competing against almost 100 different briefs for many different organisations, TEC was fortunate enough to attract three teams from the UNSW Communications department. One team went to work creating an animation about how a swamp works, and why it is such a valuable and vulnerable natural asset threatened by longwall mining. Another worked for three months on creating an animated signature for TEC – a very concise visual exploration of what TEC stands for which can be used to brand all our film and video material on the website, youtube etc. The final group looked at the TEC campaign for a container deposit scheme. Working closely with our waste campaigner, Lisa Wriley, they created two mini ads for her to use.

These materials were ready in time to screen at the TEC fundraiser for its newest campaign: Don't Frack the Gas Out of Us which was held at the Chauvel cinema in Paddington on November 11. Palace Films collaborated with TEC to preview their new hit feature documentary Gasland, and we were very

fortunate to have the American director Josh Fox join us to present the film. He gave a generous Q &A after the screening, and partied on for several hours after that (last sighted singing Elvis Costello's Alison at a karaoke bar in town). TEC engaged the environment activist bluegrass band The Lurkers to set the mood for the party after the screening.

The event was a tremendous success, both as a fundraiser and as a chance for us to meet more of our supporters and create some new ones. It gave would be supporters a chance to talk with our director Jeff Angel, and our other campaigners, who were all there. It was also a fabulous team effort from TEC and Green Capital staff, particularly Tessa Menzies who rallied the troops, and Bev the Bottle who made an unforgettable appearance. Alcohol was generously donated by Poole's Rock Wines, with organic beer from Harkham Winery. This was a new venture for TEC, and one we intend to repeat next year – stay tuned.

Meanwhile work continued on TEC's Waste Not (working title) short film project which was funded by the City of Sydney. The film exceeded all expectations, burgeoning from its original 5 minute length to a TV half hour packed with interesting interviews about recycling. Having attracted a superior crew (including producer Sophie Alstergren, cinematographer Bonnie Elliott, and editor Aden Young), the project should be ready in time to enter the international short film festival Flickerfest in January 2011.

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## WHO CARES ABOUT GREEN CAPITAL?

*TEC's corporate program Green Capital is based on provoking debate and exploring solutions. Tessa Menzies who runs Sustainable Events and Marketing explains how it works*

Green Capital focuses on engaging business in creating a more sustainable economy and the ways in which Australia can move towards it and a vital part is our interaction with our event audiences. They typically comprise people from a range of sectors with the largest group made up of business professionals, both in-house sustainability specialists and general business operations and management staff. We also attract people working in emerging green sector businesses such as environmental and sustainability consultation, and carbon offset companies. Throw in a sprinkle of local council and state government representatives, an array of other interested environmental NGOs, some academics and researchers, and a few reporters, and you have the typical Green Capital crowd.

It's this mix which keeps our events vital and lively. We provide unparalleled access to innovative thinking as well as nuts and bolts pragmatism. We also give our attendees a chance to network beyond the immediate sphere of their own business, and engage in high level discussions on a wide range of corporate sustainability issues.

Green Capital's final event for 2010 will pitch thought-leaders Paul Gilding, independent writer, advisor and advocate for action on climate change and sustainability up against Simon Longstaff, St James Ethics Centre debating 'Money vs Morals: Can corporate social responsibility delivery sustainability?'. This is a crucial debate that we will see repeated in coming years - check out our report on the green capital website.



## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

TEC and the environmental battle can be greatly assisted with your volunteer time and skills.

If you can help, please return this coupon to:

Volunteers Coordinator,  
Total Environment Centre,  
PO Box A176, Sydney South NSW 1235

I would like to volunteer to help TEC with:

- Reception/support
- Phone marketing
- Research/submission writing
- Other

My previous work has been .....

My qualifications / skills are.....

My environmental interests are.....

I am available (per week)  half day  one day  
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Name: .....

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Phone: (day).....(evening).....

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I wish to donate:

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or Please deduct \$..... monthly from my credit card until further notice

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Phone: (day) .....(evening) .....

Return this form and payment to:

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## Consider a Bequest

Please remember TEC in your will. The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording: "I bequeath the sum of \$..... to TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE Inc. for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being of Total Environment Centre Inc. shall be complete discharge to my executors in respect of any sum paid to Total Environment Centre Inc. "

news letter

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