

TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2009 / ISSUE 1

EDITORIAL

Pushing the BIG waste

While the big picture is looking gloomy in terms of emissions trading and greenhouse gas reduction targets, other important environmental impact campaigns are making some progress.

One of the most practical, led by TEC and the Boomerang Alliance, is aimed at massively increasing resource recovery as part of an economic stimulus package to grow the recycling industry, jobs, and national income.

Environment Minister Peter Garrett recently announced that state and federal governments will be developing the first National Waste Policy (NWP) since 1992, and this has galvanized action around a number of separate waste campaigns.

Because millions of computers and TVs now end up in landfill, TEC has been focussed on e-waste: working to reform the National Packaging Covenant and impose a container deposits scheme; eliminate dangerous methane emissions from landfill; institute national waste levies on landfill dumping; and prevent mercury from fluorescent lights (including energy efficient ones) from contaminating the environment.

TEC has also released 'state of waste' reports for Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria. All three states have old or lapsed waste strategies. New South Wales continues to be an embarrassment with a failure to meet targets and effectively implement its product stewardship legislation.

Action is urgently needed because so little has been done in the last decade to make significant inroads into the growing waste mountain from municipal and commercial sectors, and combat new types of waste.

At the same time the recycling industry is being buffeted by reduced commodity prices and a limited and diminishing domestic market. It's also been disadvantaged under the Rudd government's emissions trading scheme, which favours users of virgin materials, rather than recycled product.

There are of course significant institutional barriers. State governments like to promote national action to deflect pressure from them; while the commonwealth environment bureaucracy is intimidated by the anti-regulation forces from industry and economic departments. All have been contaminated by the narrow ethos that if environmental measure increases costs to business then it's bad for everyone – no matter how smart and effective it is. (The notable exception is South Australia) The fact is, inaction is far worse for community and environmental health.

We are hoping that if the state governments endorse the NWP then environment ministers (and with them good waste policy) will not be excluded from the key decision making process, with action, not inaction, as a result.

Some of the big policy results TEC is campaigning for include:

Recognition of and assistance for the recycling industry's economic contribution

- Introduction of container deposits to lift beverage container recovery
- Banning organics from landfill and diversion to composting and green energy
- Greater use of recycle by the packaging industry
- Extended producer responsibility schemes for electronic waste, tyres, CFLs and used lead acid batteries

TEC believes that by campaigning hard we can lift our management of waste to a new environmentally responsible level.

Jeff Angel, Executive Director

2009 Issue 1

p1 Editorial - Pushing the Big Waste

p2 Water Running Backwards

p3 Urban Explosions

p4 Sydney's future looks like garbage

p5 Eco-tourism – is it as green as it's cracked up to be?

p6 S3i Incentives, Innovation & Investment for Long-term Sustainable Growth

p6 Can NSW be Australia's California?

Newsletter Team

Editor • Jeff Angel

Printing • Breakout

Design • Steven Granger

Contributors to this Issue

Jeff Angel

Dave Burgess

Jane Castle

Leigh Martin

Helen Kerley

Sarah Van Erp

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

www.tec.org.au

Water Running Backwards

Leigh Martin, Water Officer

Recently there has been a disturbing shift away from sustainable water management and protection of rivers in NSW.

Water management in much of the latter half of the 20th century treated rivers as resources to be plundered for industry, agriculture and domestic use. Progress in these spheres came at a considerable environmental cost. The Murray-Darling system was ravaged by the construction of new dams and over-allocation of water. The massive Snowy Mountains scheme changed the once mighty Snowy River into a degraded shadow of its former self with 99% of flows diverted inland to irrigation districts in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys.

In the 1990s it started to look as if environmental campaigners were changing this exploitative mindset: dam building projects largely ceased; the restoration of environmental flows to rivers was recognized as vital; demand management and water conservation took preference to building new dams. After a long battle agreement was reached between the NSW, Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to provide environmental flows to the Snowy River.

Sadly, some of these hard won environmental gains are now being wound back by a combination of political panic over drought and climate change, Treasury greed, short-sighted water management, and lowest common denominator politics.

The program of restoring environmental flows to the Snowy River is in jeopardy as governments use drought as an excuse to do nothing and bow to

Treasury greed for dividends. The environmental flow program is years behind schedule while the current water management licence has allowed a crucial aspect of environmental flows to slip backwards.

As part of the program of restoring environmental flows to the Snowy River below Jindabyne Dam, the diversion of the Mowamba River into Jindabyne Dam was decommissioned in 2003. This meant that an average of 6% of pre-Jindabyne Dam flows were returned to the Snowy River each year, with vital natural variation in flows.

In 2005 the Mowamba diversion was recommissioned to allow Snowy Hydro to use the water for electricity generation, with the 6% flow provided directly from Jindabyne Dam. This was supported by Treasury and the NSW Government which wanted the additional revenue that electricity generation brings.

The result has been a reversal of the environmental gains observed in the years the Mowamba was allowed to flow free to the Snowy River.

In November 2006, amid panic over low water supply levels on the Central Coast the NSW Government announced its intention to build the massive Tillegra Dam on the Williams River in the Hunter Valley. If built it will be the first new dam in NSW in decades and will create a lake bigger than Sydney Harbour. The environmental impact on the Williams River and the RAMSAR listed wetlands in the Hunter Estuary

continued on page 3

continued from page 2

will be catastrophic.

When the Central Coast adopted an alternative solution to its long-term water needs Tillegra Dam became a project looking for justification. The argument shifted to protecting the Hunter's water supply from the effects of climate change and drought. This was despite the fact that Hunter Water's supply levels remained at around 90% throughout the drought.

There are also plenty of sustainable alternatives for providing long-term supply security.

In reality, the government's determination to forge ahead with the dam is driven by a desire to fatten the cash cow of Hunter Water dividends to Treasury, married to political timidity over embracing recycling, water conservation, and permanent water savings rules.

Clearly there is an urgent need for renewed effort in the campaigns to protect and restore our rivers and to seek sustainable approaches to water management.

Climate change and drought should not be used as an excuse to repeat the mistakes of the past, but as an incentive to embrace sustainable water management for the future.



Urban Explosions

By Helen Kerley, Product Stewardship Officer

Ever seen an exploding garbage truck? These urban terror events are more common than you think. If you've got a rusty old gas cylinder sitting in the garden shed, and you decide one day to surreptitiously slip it into the garbage bin – the next exploding garbage truck could be caused by you.

This is why TEC has prioritized the creation of a take back scheme to tackle end-of-life management of gas cylinders, utilizing cylinder exchange sites.

Throughout March TEC will be working with other stakeholder groups to identify a disposal pathway that ensures unwanted gas cylinders are recovered for reuse and recycling.

Currently large numbers of cylinders are sent to landfills, packed away in storage, and dumped illegally.

The biggest risk is posed by cylinders crushed in rubbish and

recycling trucks, and concealed in loads processed by metal shredders. The explosions that result risk lives as well as destroying expensive equipment, affecting profits and incurring regulatory repercussions.

The best solution lies in product stewardship schemes, which in the case of gas cylinders means a network of easily accessed cylinder exchange providers. TEC is advocating the development of such a network to make a take-back scheme possible, supported by land fill bans. Preliminary costings show that this is a feasible response to the issue.

Stakeholders have been well represented in discussions, with the significant exception of the Department of Environment and Climate Change. The government should be at the forefront of efforts to introduce extended producer responsibility, instead of nowhere to be seen.

SYDNEY'S FUTURE LOOKS LIKE GARBAGE

Sarah Van Erp, Waste Minimisation, Resource Recovery and Climate Change

Picture pristine Sydney as an unhygienic cesspit – everything we throw out in the daily garbage piled up in landfills surrounding the city.

Most of us don't think twice about it, but what we throw away is on the rise and within five years experts predict that Sydney's looming waste crisis will be very serious. It's already clear that NSW will not meet its state targets for increasing resource recovery, and the landfills which receive so much of our unrecycled household waste, are rapidly reaching maximum capacity.

The solution is not as simple as enlarging the landfills and relaxing the conditions which surround what goes into them. They are already full of dangerous e-waste (discarded computers, mobile phones and televisions) which are leaching toxins such as mercury and lead into the environment.

The recycling sector has not escaped the credit-crunch and is struggling to survive a huge fall in demand for its commodities, at home and abroad. The impact of any Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is also a factor for future consideration. Stimulating local recycling markets and jobs with appropriate investment is urgently needed for stability in this sector.


One solution is to increase waste levies on landfill, making it more expensive to dump waste, than recycle it. TEC has written to all state governments urging action. NSW recently increased waste levies, and committed to further increases, which has sent a strong signal to investors in resource recovery, but the revenue raised has yet to be effectively used to fund infrastructure, and waste minimization programs.

SA is way ahead of NSW in this regard – \$1.5 million has already been invested by government for recycling and recovery. This will create six times more jobs than sending the equivalent waste to landfill¹ would have, and lend a whole new weight to the concept of Australian Made: the increased availability of recovered resources will create a larger base for local recycling operations, and less reliance on imports.

With the Federal government currently working on a National Waste Policy, it is important that NSW government work with it – not against it - by focusing on achieving targets and finally ending landfill as the default answer to our very serious waste problems.

¹ Towards a Green Jobs Strategy, Response from Friends of the Earth Scotland, 2004.





Eco-tourism – is it as green as it's cracked up to be?

Dave Burgess, Natural Areas Campaigner investigates the state of our National Parks as developers eye them off.

It's a scandal which will outrage millions of Australians, including the many thousands whose worked so hard to create the national parks in NSW. Without any public consultation the NSW Government has adopted pro-tourism industry recommendations that put our national parks at risk. Changes to the National Parks and Wildlife Act (1974) are being developed to encourage the spread of private cabins, lodges, 'eco-resorts' and large-scale wilderness tours in our national parks.

Since the 2000 Olympics there has been lobbying from parts of the tourism industry to redress the alleged "poor performance" of tourism in NSW. The O'Neill Review into Tourism in NSW singled out national parks, calling for a shift in 'philosophy' away from protection as the priority, to opening up parks to private tourism development.

A subsequent report from the Taskforce on Tourism and National was adopted in its entirety by the government as soon as it was received. This report recommended changes to National Park and Wilderness legislation so that private developers can build accommodation, resorts and other facilities in parks and run tours in wilderness.

This comes after radical changes to NSW planning laws that weaken public participation and environmental assessment of

new developments. The introduction of legislation is imminent with the Government seemingly convinced that private development in parks is necessary to boost the tourism industry and provide extra funds for park management.

There is absolutely no evidence however, to support these notions. In fact the evidence shows that national park visitation is one of the strongest performing sectors in NSW tourism, it's already experiencing a growth trajectory, and that what visitors want most is pristine, undeveloped parks.

Environment groups are lobbying for a stronger nature tourism industry in NSW so more people can enjoy our parks without over-developing and/or destroying them. This can and must be achieved.

TAKE ACTION!

1. Write to your local member
2. Contact Environment Minister, Carmel Tebbutt
dp.office@tebbutt.minister.nsw.gov.au
3. Help us get others involved!

Go to www.npansw.org.au for more information and to lobby your minister online.

S3i Incentives, Innovation & Investment for Long-term Sustainable Growth

TEC's Green Capital program seeks to engage business in sustainable solutions by helping to move the economy:

- Away from unsustainable short-termism in business and market thinking and activity, and
- Towards long-term sustainability as the foundation for high quality growth.

Our new project - S3i focuses on three key dimensions – incentives, innovation & investment.

INCENTIVES

- Tax reform to accelerate an orderly transition to a low-carbon economy by rewarding good environmental performance and penalising harm
- Re-packaging executive and employee performance and remuneration to reward environmental and social excellence alongside financial
- Creating economic and/or market-based instruments such as take-back deposits, energy efficiency and renewable energy certificates, and a price on carbon

INNOVATION

- Actively promoting technology R&D and behavior change research to increase the economy's eco-efficiency as an intrinsic contribution to its long-term growth and success

- Training and other skills development to expand the green economy and allow accelerated changeovers to more sustainable appliances, installations, construction, equipment and practices

INVESTMENT

- Directing government spending, including economic stimulus and restructuring measures, towards the efficient and effective use of energy and resources e.g. demand management for energy and water, materials reuse and recycling, re-skilling in sustainable products and services
- Where new physical infrastructure is required –whether through public or private investment - focus first on proven technologies that will:
 - Mitigate environmental and societal harm including greenhouse gas pollution
 - Adapt human and natural systems to climate change and a resource-constrained economic operating environment, and
 - Provide a platform for further and accelerated innovation
- Embedding sustainability principles and objectives in decision-making by investors and investment managers, and also among other key influencers e.g. market regulators, fund trustees, analysts and commentators

Check the Green Capital website for updates.

CAN NSW BE AUSTRALIA'S CALIFORNIA?

Australia's largest state economy is developing a new Climate Change Action Plan to take it into the next decade. Is this an opportunity to retake the mantle of leadership on climate action within Australia that NSW held several years ago?

Environment, business and government stakeholders have been taking a very close look in recent years at the world's foremost jurisdiction in terms of sustained action on pollution reduction and energy efficiency, the powerful US state of California.

Early in this decade NSW wore the mantle of being the nation's leading jurisdiction on climate change action. The 2003 introduction of the world's first mandated emissions trading regime, the Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme (GGAS), created a carbon market which became the second largest in the world behind the EU's.

With the Federal Government's CPRS suggesting that Australia is headed for a low-ball emissions reduction target of between 5 and a maximum 15 percent of the 2000 baseline by 2020, there's a new opportunity for state-level leadership.

The new climate action plan will need to bridge the end of the first Kyoto target period (2008-2012) and the start of whatever comes next. The plan will be released in the middle of this year, well ahead of the crucial United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen in December, which is tasked to map the post-2012 path for the Kyoto process.

Already the early days of the new Obama Administration in the US suggest that in the post-Bush era, significant change is afoot. The rest of America may play catch-up with California on major activity areas including energy efficiency for buildings, fuel efficiency for vehicles and promotion of

green industries and green jobs, not to mention carbon trading. Meanwhile, the whole carbon-aware world is now waiting to see what the Obama Administration will bring to the table in Copenhagen.

In Australia, once again, there is an opportunity for NSW to carve a leadership position on climate; one which complements the growing federal initiatives (although some of these are quite weak), while also moving ahead on some key fronts where states can still push the pace, setting the agenda for future rounds of national policy innovation.

For 2009 and beyond, it now needs to be governed by:

- Effective integration with the CPRS and Kyoto processes
- Alignment with national targets for renewable energy, energy efficiency etc, and in some cases going beyond national targets where these are inadequate and/or poorly conceived and executed
- Orderly transition to a low-carbon economy & ability to lower the cost of the transition while supporting economic advancement
- Growing focus on adaptation e.g. sea-level inundation and storm surges for coastal areas, storms for major urban areas and drought for inland, adverse impacts on biodiversity and 'climate-proofing' action for natural eco-systems

NSW has made a good start with the announcement of its energy efficiency target scheme where power retailers will be required to reduce electricity sales by set amounts, reaching 4%pa by 2014. This overcomes one of the key problems with the National Electricity Market (that sponsors growing demand) and will make the retailers now addicted to growth, into modern energy service businesses.

HELP THE ENVIRONMENT TODAY FOR OUR FUTURE

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
 occasionally
other

Name:

Address:

Postcode: Date:

Email:

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

Make a tax deductible donation to

TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE INC.

Yes, I want to help the environment
campaign work of TEC.

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

I wish to pay by:

- Cheque payable to Total Environment Centre Inc
- Visa Mastercard

I wish to donate:

- \$1000 \$500 \$100 Other \$.....

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

Card Number: _ _ _ _ / _ _ _ _ / _ _ _ _ / _ _ _ _

Card expires:

Name on card:

Signature:

Phone: (day) (evening)

Return this form and payment to:

The Administrator

Total Environment Centre Inc

PO Box A176

Sydney South

NSW 1235

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. "

newsletter

Return address:
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE
PO Box A176
Sydney South
NSW 1235

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA



**TOTAL
ENVIRONMENT**