



# TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2008 / ISSUE 2

EDITORIAL

## The ETS battle

You can't escape the issue of emissions trading (ETS) with industry blaring out their exaggerated concerns about its impact. Demands ranging from 'it will wreck our asset value' to 'we aren't ready' to 'delay it' to 'the public won't like it' are filling the airwaves. The Opposition chimed in trying to distinguish itself from the Rudd government with worries about short term impacts on working families (and the future of leader Brendan Nelson and the Gippsland by-election). When the recent Newspoll showed the public would wear increased costs under an ETS, some changed their tune with expressions of general support for an ETS, 'with qualifications'.

But basically what we are seeing are vested interests trying to stop the ETS from causing market support to shift from polluting activities to green economic activities. They are running a campaign to scare the government into adopting a weak ETS. There has never been an environmental measure that is so important and so mainstream. We have to defend it.

TEC with the support of Greenpeace, Climate Action Network Australia and Environment Victoria have launched a new website – [www.lowcarbonfuture.org.au](http://www.lowcarbonfuture.org.au) – as part of the effort. We now need to mobilise the community as in coming months they are besieged by economic studies and more industry hyperbole. We also have to carefully watch the Rudd government's response as they have met industry many more times than environmental representatives.

### Energy efficiency takes off in NSW

TEC has been working for a comprehensive energy efficiency program at state and national levels for some years. Finally the NSW government has developed such a plan.

It covers virtually all the bases and of crucial importance is the development of economy wide and electricity industry targets for energy efficiency, backed up by legislation. Electricity retailers and the 200 biggest energy consumers will be required to implement energy efficiency.

The six point program also includes audits and appliances for 220,000 low income and other households and 6,000 small businesses and a \$20m training plan for green plumbers, electricians and other tradespeople.

Industry criticised the announcement by Premier Iemma because they thought they had a national agreement that they would not be required to implement energy savings plans and that with an ETS, you won't need extra measures like energy efficiency. The theory being that the additional carbon cost injected by an ETS would be enough to encourage energy efficiency. However, electricity prices are at such a low base that expected increased costs are likely to be quite small in impact, especially in the early years of an ETS.

We need to do energy efficiency now – it's practical and can make big inroads into greenhouse gas emissions quickly.

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

Jeff Angel, Executive Director

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## Existing Buildings Project grows from strength to strength

Cameron Eren, Industry Partnerships Program

The final week of May saw the second phase of the Existing Buildings Project come to a successful close. With the workshop series stage of the project now behind us, TEC is firmly focused on ensuring that the project continues to make an indelible mark on the carbon intensity of Australia's existing office building stock.

The project was launched in December 2007 when 5 giants of Australian property committed to upgrade their entire domestic office portfolios to achieve cuts in greenhouse gas emissions of up to 40% below the market average. As the first wholesale attempt to address the sustainability challenge of existing buildings, these commitments received considerable attention.

What received considerably less attention however was that another 20 groups agreed to participate in a series of workshops in which experts from around the country presented on the myriad of issues that climate change presents for Australian property- the importance of existing buildings, how emissions can be reduced from existing building stock, and how commercial property is exposed to climate change more generally.

The final workshop explored the development of climate policy in key international property markets- the US, Canada, the EU, UK, New Zealand, Japan, and China. As groups begin to move in Australia it is likely that they will increasingly turn their attention to their international exposures.

Buoyed by the knowledge that upgrading all Australian office buildings to a National Australian Built Environment Energy Rating System (NABERS) energy rating of 4.5 would be the emissions equivalent of permanently retiring Australia's entire heavy trucking fleet, TEC looks forward to collaborating further with those building owners that would like to join the leading ranks of the industry and match the emissions reductions commitments of the 'first five.'



# DECC Leaks, India gets 'Roid Rage

Dave Burgess, Natural Areas Campaigner

A timely leak from within the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) has thrown a stark spotlight on mine subsidence damage in NSW. Subsidence induced by longwall mining headed a list of 11 key issues faced by the Department in regard to the NSW coal industry.

As the Southern Coalfield Inquiry's findings are handed over to the NSW Government prior to public release, the report prepared for the DECC executive confirms that calls by TEC for protection zones around key natural features have been heard at the more senior levels of government and within at least some government departments. Major issues raised within the document include:

- a need for DECC to assume greater involvement in the planning stages of coal mining development.
- the real economic costs of mining impacts are not adequately considered and that impacts can be "long-lasting and a legacy for future generations."
- DECC does not currently have a policy on subsidence.
- there are concerns within DECC over the integrity of impact assessments being conducted by consultants for the mining companies.
- there are very different interpretations of what constitutes "acceptable impacts", particularly between DECC and the Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

TEC is campaigning for state-wide changes in policy governing longwall mining. Only a preventative approach to the damage being caused can establish the NSW Government's credibility on issues such as healthy rivers and water security.

This credibility took a further battering in May when a document entitled "India on Steroids" was posted on the Australian Securities Exchange website by Indian steel giant Gujarat NRE. The document shows the company, whose

holdings in the Southern Coalfield rival those of BHP Billiton, intends to conduct one of the most intensive longwall mining operations yet seen in NSW, including mining directly below the Cataract Dam and using "multi-seam" mining, which environment groups have called for to be banned. In April, NSW Mining Minister Ian Macdonald appointed the chairman of Gujarat NRE to the somewhat informal position of NSW ambassador in India.

Mining is yet to be approved over a large area of the leases acquired by Gujarat NRE, all of which lie within Sydney's water supply catchment. But that hasn't prevented the company from announcing that it is in the process of purchasing six bulk carriers to ship the coal back to India. This news, along with the generous assistance provided by the Federal Government to help Gujarat NRE establish a foothold in Australia, means we will have to fight all the harder to protect the hydrological integrity of the Woronora Plateau.

## FOI Reveals north coast land dealings

Documents obtained under FOI by TEC have raised questions regarding the Planning Minister's role in releasing land for development on the Mid North Coast. A draft briefing memo from senior Government staff shows that two controversial parcels of land in particular were only included in proposed development maps specifically after the developers, Hardie Holdings, Walker Corp and the Roche Group, had discussions with the Minister. Both are large donors to the Labor Party.

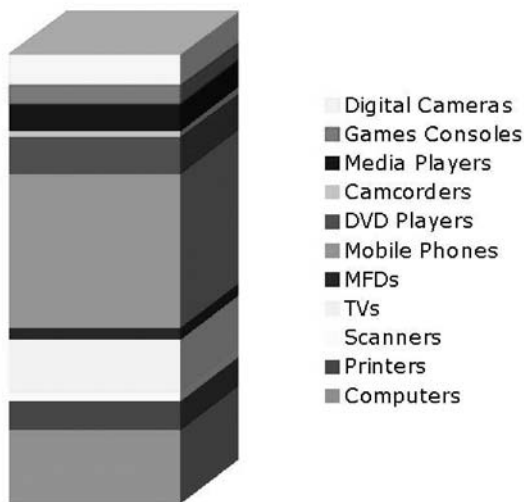
The release of the Mid North Coast Regional Strategy is due imminently.

# The E-Waste Epidemic

Jane Castle, Resource Conservation Campaigner

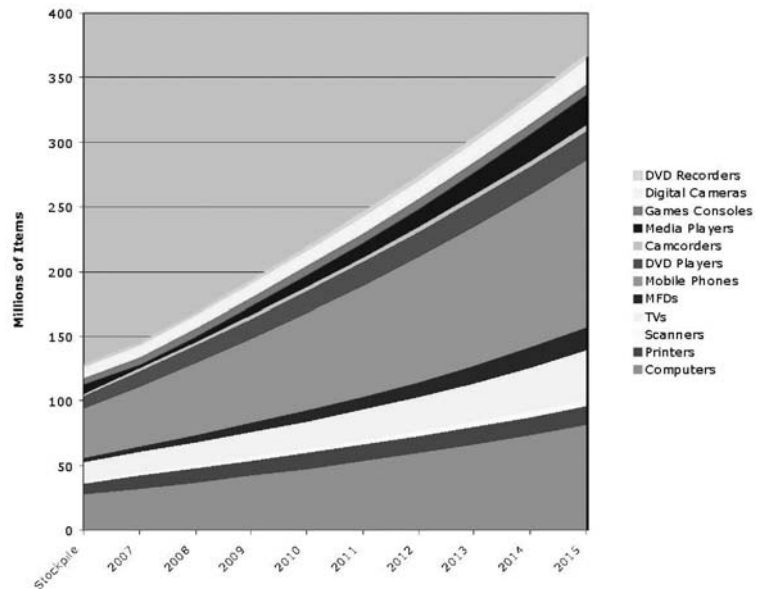
Federal and state Governments have been talking for years about toxic electronic waste (or 'e-waste'). But they have done next to nothing. While they've been talking a huge stockpile of e-waste has been building up. Many millions of disused, hazardous products are either in landfill or on their way there.

## Australia's current e-waste legacy:



Our appetite for digital devices is voracious, and sales continue to spiral. Last year Australians spent \$5 billion on digital devices alone. This year's sales are predicted to top \$6 billion. This helps explain why electronic waste is growing at three times the rate of other household wastes. In 2007 25 million new hi-tech products were sold. All have variable life-spans from 18 months for mobile phones, 2 – 3 years for music players and an average of 4 years for computers. It's all adding up.

## Australia's growing e-waste legacy:




This is a snapshot of our e-waste legacy: 28 million computers plus another 4.5 million sold last year; 38 million mobile phones plus another 9 million sold last year. As time ticks on this stuff just keeps building up. TEC is focusing on e-waste because of its toxic content, its highly complex nature and its massive amounts of embodied resources: energy, water, materials and greenhouse emissions. Most developed countries have laws on e-waste, but Australia is lagging behind. A stand-out in the shame-file is the NSW Department of Environment which has overseen the degeneration of its Extended Producer Responsibility law into a farce of inaction and finger-pointing. April's meeting of Environment Ministers was also a debacle. Despite being flagged for priority action over the last few years, e-waste wasn't even on the agenda.

The e-waste mess has gone beyond crisis-point. A radical gear-shift is now required to move from bureaucratic inertia to inspired action, proper resourcing and political will. We'll keep campaigning, and just last month Environment Minister, Peter Garrett assured us it was now on the agenda.

# Confused about Carbon? Unsure about offsets?

There are few things worse than paying extra to do the right thing for the environment than finding out that the money you spent did next to nothing. As climate change really starts to bite, people are keen to do more, but there is a shortage of information on what products really make a difference. This is what TEC's Carbon Offset Watch in partnership with the Institute of Sustainable Futures is about: helping consumers discern good quality carbon offset products by ranking them on the basis of environmental quality.

Expected to launch in September, the ranking will help consumers navigate the confusing jungle of products and claims. It will also pressure the emerging industry to lift its game by shaming poor performers and recognising authentic carbon reducing products. Sixty-two companies selling carbon off-set products have been invited to respond to a rigorous set of questions including: carbon footprint and emissions reduction calculation methodologies, accreditation, verification, auditing, additionality and the security of reductions.



## Tillegra Dam: not part of a sustainable water future for the Hunter

Leigh Martin, Urban Campaigner

A proposal by the NSW Government to construct a massive, environmentally damaging dam on the Williams River in the Hunter represents a disturbing shift towards outdated and unsustainable urban water management.

The proposed Tillegra dam, which will be bigger than Sydney Harbour, will destroy the Williams River, threaten the health of migratory bird habitat in the Hunter River estuary and impose a massive cost burden on Hunter and Central Coast Water customers.

The original justification for the dam was to provide supply for the drought affected Central Coast, however, Gosford and Wyong Councils have adopted a cheaper and more effective approach to securing water supplies in the region.

The Government is now claiming that the dam is needed to secure supply for the Hunter Region. This is despite the fact that, despite the worst drought on record, Hunter Water's supply levels are close to full and on no restrictions.

Justification for the dam is now being based on a massive downgrading of the estimated yield from current supplies as a result of climate change and refusal to accept demand management, water restrictions and recycling as a sustainable

alternative. This is despite many estimates of the impact of climate change predicting an increase in rainfall in the Hunter and the availability of a wide range of demand management and recycling opportunities.

This downgrading of yield and refusal to accept demand management and recycling as sustainable alternatives is being reflected in water management decisions around the country. The development of the Traveston Crossing Dam in Queensland and desalination plants in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth are a direct result of this disturbing return to 1950's water management thinking.

TEC is campaigning to stop the environmentally damaging Tillegra Dam and to prevent a return to outdated and unsustainable water management practices in the Hunter and elsewhere. A sustainable response to climate change will require ongoing demand management initiatives and a major effort to increase water recycling.

# How to buy Green Electricity

Alison Karwaj, Communications Officer

Green electricity is one of the more contentious issues when it comes to greenwashing by energy companies. Following TEC's complaint to the ACCC about Energy Australia's misleading branding of "environmentally friendly products", the Department of Water and Energy have released a fact sheet about buying accredited green electricity.

There are many Green Electricity products available on the market, however not all of them provide the same level of environmental benefit and their claims about renewable energy can be confusing. It is important that households and businesses buy accredited GreenPower products that have been certified by a third party to not rely on the burning of fossil fuels. Non accredited renewable energy is not audited and therefore green claims are often untested.

Accredited renewable energy should cut your greenhouse gas emissions; reduce your contribution to climate change; help drive demand for greener energy; and develop the renewable energy sector, helping it to compete with less costly, but more polluting coal and gas based generation.

There are several key points to purchasing green electricity as outlined by the fact sheet which include:

- Only buy GreenPower products (the only currently accredited scheme), so look for the GreenPower tick logo.
- Shop around at different retailers and ask for an estimate of the likely cost per week based on your energy usage.
- Check what proportion of the product is GreenPower, you can choose from 10, 20, 25, 50, 75 or 100 per cent of your electricity account to suit your budget, although to best eliminate greenhouse gas emissions, 100% is recommended.

- Check the terms of the contract and whether it is fixed term or flexible.

- Reduce the cost of your electricity bill by implementing small changes such as switching off lights and appliances, heating and cooling only the spaces you use and buying energy efficient appliances.

So whether you are looking to purchase green electricity products or you are unsure about your current product, read the fact sheet at [www.tec.org.au](http://www.tec.org.au)

Other helpful websites

- To compare the environmental credentials of green electricity products, visit Green Electricity Watch at [www.greenelectricitywatch.org.au](http://www.greenelectricitywatch.org.au) (an independent website run by a consortium of environment groups)
- Visit the GreenPower website if you need any information and to check the national list of accredited renewable energy products at [www.greenpower.gov.au](http://www.greenpower.gov.au)
- For price comparisons, contact not-for-profit consumer association Choice on 02 9577 3399 or log onto [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au) - For information on consumer rights and business rights and obligations, contact the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) on 1300 302 502 or log onto [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au)

## Green Capital collaborations working towards sustainability

### Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre

The Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre (SCEC) joined forces with Total Environment Centre – Green Capital to progress event sustainability with a forum on Thursday 19th of June. The SCEC is one of only two convention centres in the world to achieve the Green Globe Benchmarked Convention accreditation. Now its environmental program Ecowise, with the help of Green Capital, is focused on becoming a green leader within the event organising field.

Green Capital's is providing advice on environment issues, sustainability and organisational change and how these can be used by the SCEC to improve business practices, be more cost effective, inspire staff and differentiate itself from competitors. A workshop is also being developed on how sustainable decisions can be incorporated and encouraged in event delivery to SCEC clients and through their supply chain.

### NSW Architects Registration Board

Green Capital has also begun a collaboration with the NSW Architects Registration Board to promote sustainability initiatives within the field of architecture with focus on: how climate change will affect business; what are the expectations of clients; what government regulations exist; opportunities for reducing cost; resource availability; and how to measure the effectiveness of implementing change.

We will be producing a guide on sustainability, working with three small architecture firms and presenting a series of workshops focused on changing attitudes, engaging staff and collaborations, and cementing a holistic approach to sustainability in the workplace. A template for company environmental auditing will also be produced and used, alongside the results of the project, by the Registration Board to educate, inform and inspire current and future registered architects.

# 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

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

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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. "

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