

# chain reaction

Issue #138

May 2020

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The National Magazine of Friends of the Earth Australia

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

## Coronavirus crisis a wake-up call for system change

'Miracle cows' highlight risks of gene editing 285,640

Australia's Black Summer

A national offshore wind strategy

How to transition out of the gas industry

Nuclear dump decision trashes indigenous rights

Recording FoE's 45 years of creative resistance

Scorecard gives Australia's environment 1 out of 10

Sand mining fuels murders and devastation

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Friends of the Earth (FoE) Australia is a federation of independent local groups.

You can join FoE by contacting your local group – see the inside back cover of Chain Reaction for contact details or visit [foe.org.au/local-groups](http://foe.org.au/local-groups)

There is a monthly FoE Australia email newsletter – subscribe via the website: [www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au)

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## ANZ – the largest financier of fossil fuel industries in Australia

*Emilia Martin, a volunteer with FoE Melbourne, writes:*

In November 2017, a number of NGOs in the Netherlands successfully brought the first climate change complaint before the Dutch National Contact Point (NCP). It was made against the ING bank for its investment in fossil fuel industries. The Dutch NCP in its final statement expressed the need for ING to steer its portfolio towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and ING committed to completely phase out investment in the coal industry by the end of 2025.

Inspired by this, early this year, Friends of the Earth Australia along with a number of bushfire victims brought a similar claim against the ANZ bank, the largest financier of fossil fuel industries in Australia. The basis of the claim is ANZ's breach of OECD Guidelines, a set of principles and standards for multinational enterprises. Australia is a signatory to the OECD Guidelines and the Australian NCP is the body responsible for hearing complaints in relation to corporations' alleged non-observance of the OECD Guidelines.

The OECD Guidelines require that businesses set their environmental targets in line with international standards. Thus the claim argues that the most current and relevant international standard is the Paris Agreement and as such ANZ must bring its environmental policies in line with the Agreement.

The Australian government is a signatory to the Paris Agreement but has not yet passed any legislation to implement the provisions of the Agreement into Australian law. ANZ has also publicly acknowledged the aims of the Paris Agreement to limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5°C which requires a transition to net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases by mid-century.

The complaint demonstrates that while ANZ has publicly endorsed the Paris Agreement, its environmental policies contradict the bank's publicly stated commitment to the Agreement in a number of respects and that ANZ's overall conduct only reflects a partial commitment to the targets set out by the Agreement. For instance, ANZ remains the biggest financier of fossil fuels among the big four Australian banks at A\$6.36 billion.

ANZ's financing of fossil fuel stands higher than the combined spending of National Australia Bank and Westpac. Furthermore, ANZ's exposure to coal mining increased 27% percent in 2018 and another 7% in the first half of 2019. In the same period, ANZ has only lent A\$964 million to the renewable energy sector, which provides a ratio of 7.70:1 between fossil fuel and clean energy spending.

The complaint also raises the ANZ's lack of transparency in relation to its indirect greenhouse gas emissions and argues that this lack of transparency is misleading to consumers and prevents them from making informed decisions about whether or not to engage with the bank.

The complainants demand that ANZ honour their environmental commitments by bringing their policies in line with the Paris Agreement which means divesting from fossil fuels and fully and clearly disclosing their emissions. The complainants also raise the insufficiencies of Australia's current legislative framework which provides a particularly low standard in relation to calculation of emissions and has failed to implement any domestic legislation to implement the Paris Agreement provisions in Australia.

*The complaint is online at [tinyurl.com/anz-complaint](https://tinyurl.com/anz-complaint)*

## KUR-World is KURputt!

Stopping this mega resort, planned in the ecologically sensitive Myola valley close to Kuranda near Cairns in Far North Queensland, was a great win for the Kuranda community. The campaign was a huge team effort spearheaded by local community group KUR-Alert and supported by Friends of the Earth Far North Queensland together with other community, environmental and land care groups in the region. Thank you to everyone who put in submissions about KUR-World and for the technical and logistical support from FoE Australia.

Thousands of submissions were sent to the Queensland Coordinator General - including from international environmental groups such as the Forests and Biodiversity team in FoE International. This is a great win but the fight is not over: the developer has been given permission by the local council for a subdivision on this land. The Kuranda community continue to look for ways to stop this happening and so protect the habitat of the irreplaceable wildlife in this area.

## China and India dominate pesticide import breaches on food

Friends of the Earth campaigner Anthony Amis has written a report investigating breaches to Australian food import regulations between the years 2017-19. The data was compiled from 'Monthly Failing Food Reports' produced by the Department of Agriculture.

The main findings include:

- There was a total of 400 pesticide detections at or above Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs), with a total of 47 different pesticides breaching MRLs.
- China was the country with the most pesticide breaches (148), followed by India (93), Vietnam (44) and Thailand (35).
- 201 of the pesticide breaches were insecticides, with 199 of the pesticides being fungicides. The most frequently used pesticide in the world, glyphosate, was not tested for.
- 132 companies transported food to Australia which breached pesticide MRLs.
- Food types with the most MRL breaches included jujube (Chinese dates) 69, red chilli 40, lychees 35, spinach 28, longan 17, okra 17, green chilli 14, and Indian flat beans 13.
- 235 of the pesticides (about 59% of the total) breaching MRLs are defined by the Pesticide Action Network as being "Bad Actors" - pesticides known to be carcinogens, reproductive or developmental toxins, cholinesterase inhibitors, groundwater contaminants or pesticides with high acute toxicity.

The report is online at [www.foe.org.au/china\\_and\\_india\\_dominate\\_pesticide\\_import\\_breaches\\_on\\_food](http://www.foe.org.au/china_and_india_dominate_pesticide_import_breaches_on_food)

## Food for bushfire affected wildlife

Friends of the Earth Melbourne is working on a mutual aid project to help wildlife and support locals in bushfire affected areas. There's plenty of ways to help out and we're looking for anyone who can help either on a regular or one-off basis. We're currently looking for drivers, nest-box installers, wildlife feeders and also people to source food. This is a great opportunity to help those who have been affected by the bushfires, and to build relationships that can hopefully continue to grow into the future and be drawn upon if need be! To get involved visit FoE's Food for Wildlife page [www.melbournefoe.org.au/ffw\\_melbourne](http://www.melbournefoe.org.au/ffw_melbourne) or email [foodforwildlife@foe.org.au](mailto:foodforwildlife@foe.org.au)

## Super funds still destroying the planet

23 April 2020: Major super funds in Australia are continuing to vote against the majority of shareholder proposals that would improve companies' climate risk management. By investing our retirement savings in company shares, super funds get a say in how those companies are run. The latest analysis by Friends of the Earth affiliate Market Forces shows 10 of the largest super funds in Australia supported just 38% of the climate resolutions they voted on at Australian and international companies throughout 2019. Just three of the 10 funds supported more than half of the resolutions, while four funds voted for a quarter or less.

Earlier this year, Market Forces hit a major milestone with over 10,000 UniSuper members signing the open letter calling on the fund to divest from coal, oil and gas companies. Market Forces made sure the campaign received the exposure it deserves by publishing the open letter as a full-page ad in the *Australian Financial Review* and there was media coverage in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Yahoo Finance*, *Bloomberg* and *Financial Standard*.

Read more about Market Forces' work at [www.marketforces.org.au](http://www.marketforces.org.au)

## Beyond Coal Alliance launched

Coal power generation is the single largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Australia. Retiring every coal-burning power station over the next decade - and replacing them with clean energy generation and storage - is one of the most effective ways for Australia to reduce greenhouse emissions. That's why Friends of the Earth Australia has joined together with six other community-based groups to launch the Beyond Coal campaign.

The Australia Beyond Coal alliance member groups represent more than one and a half million Australians. The mission is to empower everyday people with information about the risks of coal-burning power stations, and urge governments and businesses to work with communities on developing a plan for the accelerating transformation in our energy market.

More information: [www.beyondcoal.org.au](http://www.beyondcoal.org.au)

## Click and collect with FoE Melbourne's Food Co-op & Café

The Food Co-op and Cafe is a not-for-profit social enterprise. That means every cent you spend in-store or donate goes right back into keeping us running and supports the environmental campaigns at Friends of the Earth. The FoE Food Coop team continues to provide healthy, affordable food during the COVID-19 crisis, and is open for bulk food shopping and takeaway, with hygiene protocols in place. Visit [www.foefood.org](http://www.foefood.org)



## Uranium in NT drinking water

For several years, Friends of the Earth Australia has been investigating water quality data, from water authorities across the country, with the goal of better understanding which communities are at most risk from drinking water and what substances are regarded as being the most commonly detected in terms of potential health outcomes. The initial results of the work are online at <https://water.australianmap.net>

One of the concerns arising from this work is that a number of communities in the Northern Territory are consuming drinking water with elevated levels of naturally-occurring uranium. The communities most impacted appear to include Laramba, Wilora, Willowra and Kings Canyon. The combined population of these four communities is about 1,100 people.

Ideally, alternative sources of water need to be located and water treatment options provided by the NT government. As a short-term measure, water could be trucked into the communities at most risk and stored in water tanks, where community members could access water. Please email NT Chief Minister Michael Gunner and express your concerns about people being exposed to unsafe levels of uranium in drinking water. There's an email template at this webpage: [www.foe.org.au/uranium\\_free\\_water](http://www.foe.org.au/uranium_free_water)



## Guardians of the Wet Tropics

The catastrophic bushfires in recent months and the untold impact on communities, wildlife and biodiversity highlights the need for local community-based actions that care for and protect the land. The failure of governments to appropriately address climate change and protect our precious environment has created space for communities to take powerful action that make a difference. Here in the Wet Tropics there are many such community-based initiatives.

Friends of the Earth Far North Queensland (FoE FNQ) are focused on the people working to protect and regenerate those lands on the edges of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. FoE FNQ are calling these people Guardians of the Wet Tropics and have commenced a project to link and support the initiatives of 'guardians'.

A CSIRO report of a 2013 regional conservation leaders workshop identified that "landholders have innovative land management actions and can implement changes quickly", recommending creating "opportunities for landholders to lead conservation innovation". The report further identified three requirements for successful community-based biodiversity conservation: (1) public participation & mobilisation, (2) social collaboration and (3) adaptive leadership and co-management.

These key findings shape the FoE FNQ Guardians project, which will link 'innovative' landholders with neighbours and First Nations people to identify and carry out projects addressing threats to biodiversity.

FoE FNQ is well placed to conduct the Guardians project. With a grassroots focus and a strong volunteer base we can work effectively for community engagement and mobilisation. FoE FNQ is connected with a range of individuals and community groups across the Wet Tropics and has a particular commitment to engage with First Nations people. Our priority is to build credibility, trust, long-term relationships and incentives to work together in finding practical, innovative solutions that appeal to landholders. The goal is a resilient and adaptive social-ecological system supported by science to create an ecological and social buffer for a changing environment.

If you want to get involved, please contact Ingrid Marker at FoE FNQ, 0438 688 229, [ingrid.marker@foe.org.au](mailto:ingrid.marker@foe.org.au)

## Koala crisis in south-west Victoria only just beginning

13 Feb 2020: A recent visit to South West Victoria has deeply troubled Friends of the Earth. Perhaps the most haunting image of the crisis facing koalas in the region was a mother and baby holding on to a dead bluegum plantation tree, as Wedge Tail Eagles circled overhead. Thousands of similar scenarios are playing out across the region. The plantation in question had been logged about one year ago.

Last week's discovery of hundreds of dead and starving koalas near Portland is likely to be repeated across the region. Tens of thousands of hectares of retired bluegum plantations are currently being converted back to farmland across the region. The culprits of last week's koala massacre may not be the only landholders in the region responsible for koala deaths. Bluegum plantation companies generally leave a very small proportion of their plantation as habitat trees. This isn't always the case with private landholders, who have also been observed poisoning thousands of coppicing bluegum trees.

The koala population has exploded since the planting of 170,000 hectares of bluegum plantations since the mid-1990s. Almost every bluegum plantation visited by Friends of the Earth over the past couple of days had signs of koala skats and the animals themselves. Tens of thousands of animals are likely to

be populating bluegum plantations, with many animals remaining after the logging is completed. Remnant isolated clumps of bluegums may be the only remaining habitat after a plantation is clearfelled. Friends of the Earth has been warning about this crisis since 2014 and has been alarmed at the explosion of bluegum plantations across of the region since the 1990's.

Remnant vegetation along roadsides near plantations and in the plantations themselves appears to be dying due to overbrowsing by koalas. The recent koala disaster in 2015 at Cape Otway where hundreds of translocated koalas had to be euthanased due to overbrowsing could be repeated across a much larger landscape of south-west Victoria in the near future. The Victoria Government needs to come up with an action plan immediately to stop untold suffering to thousands of animals. The major causes of the problem are translocated koala populations, and planting of 170,000 hectares of koala feed in the form of bluegum plantations.

*Please sign the petition at [www.melbournefoe.org.au/koala](http://www.melbournefoe.org.au/koala)*

*More information:*

*Strzelecki Koala Action Team,  
[www.melbournefoe.org.au/skat](http://www.melbournefoe.org.au/skat)  
[www.foe.org.au/koala\\_massacre\\_occurring\\_in\\_south\\_west\\_victoria](http://www.foe.org.au/koala_massacre_occurring_in_south_west_victoria)*

## Waste to energy

The Victorian Liberal party has come out in support of 'waste to energy'. This is a confusing issue for many people. It seems to promise renewable energy and a solution to the waste crisis. However, FoE Australia campaign Transform Waste is concerned that there are serious problems with waste to energy.

Our major concern is that it isn't "clean energy". In a report prepared for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, it is noted that burning waste doesn't cause it to disappear - 15-25% of the waste that goes in remains as ash at the end. The report further says that the incineration process produces highly toxic filter cake, which will need to be disposed of in hazardous waste landfill. In the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, researchers highlighted "significant risks associated with waste incineration as a form of waste management."

We're also worried that waste to energy will get in the way of better solutions. Our society relies on massive consumption of single use packaging and very low levels of recycling. Waste to energy gives us the impression we can keep on with business as usual, but we need to make massive changes in how we make, consume and re-use resources. We need to transition rapidly away from our reliance on mass production of waste into a 'closed loop' system with greatly enhanced resource recovery and effective recycling systems, better regulation to reduce the production of waste and stronger requirements around corporate responsibility.

*More information:*  
[www.transformwaste.org.au](http://www.transformwaste.org.au)

## #NotHappyDan

In a hugely disappointing turn of events, the Victorian Andrews Government made the decision to end the hard-won moratorium on conventional onshore gas mining and exploration. The moratorium was achieved by the same huge, community-powered campaign that won the ban on unconventional gas mining (fracking), recently legislated. Due to the announcement coming hot on the tail of the federal government's ban on events of over 500 people, a "conventional" rally was not the answer. Instead, we called a digital rally, calling on supporters of the moratorium to post a selfie with their placard on social media. Click here to find out more and join the e-rally: [www.melbournefoe.org.au/snap\\_action\\_fossil\\_fuels\\_vic](http://www.melbournefoe.org.au/snap_action_fossil_fuels_vic)



## Dismantling patriarchy

In a new booklet released ahead of International Women's Day in March, Friends of the Earth International explain the key concepts that help us talk about, understand, analyse and strategise within this area of work. It is the result of three years of collective work, with the contributions and analysis of the Gender Justice Dismantling Patriarchy Working Group of Friends of the Earth International, together with national member groups, regions and international structures.

With reflections and stories from different regions, the booklet shows how gender inequality and injustice impact women in our organisations and how patriarchy interlinks with other systemic oppressions - racism, capitalism, class oppression, neocolonialism, heteronormativity - to structure our societies to the benefit of certain social groups.

We hope this booklet will be a useful and accessible tool for capacity-building, training and political formation. It includes practical ideas for strengthening gender justice, challenging power relations and dismantling patriarchy in your work and organisation.

The booklet - titled *Why Gender Justice and Dismantling Patriarchy?* - is online at [tinyurl.com/smash-patriarchy](http://tinyurl.com/smash-patriarchy)

## Adelaide Green Cities Handbook

The original Green Cities Handbook was first published in 1991 by Friends of the Earth as a discussion starter on how we might change cities to be better for people and the environment. It was published a year before the Ecocity 2 conference held in Adelaide, and was inspired by ideas from Peter Berg (Planet Drum Foundation), Richard Register (from Urban Ecology in the US, convenor of the first ecocity conference), and Peter Newman, who identified the benefits of a low energy, car-free city.

Paul Downton, architect of Christie Walk, a fragment of eco-city, was involved with the Green Cities Project team, comprised of students from the Mawson Graduate Centre of Environmental Studies at the Uni of Adelaide.

The Handbook has been out of print for the past two decades, and the only copies available were photocopies of photocopies. Friends of the Earth Adelaide decided to reprint the original, as a start to revising and updating the handbook for the new millennium. We scanned the original copies, OCR'd the scans, then edited and corrected the resultant text. Some things have changed since it was published, but a lot of the information in the Handbook is still relevant.

We invite you to check out the original, and share your thoughts on how we might improve and update it. FoE Adelaide will be holding a number of workshops to discuss the update: let us know if you're interested in getting involved.

The Green Cities Handbook is online at [adelaide.foe.org.au/greencities](http://adelaide.foe.org.au/greencities)



Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) is a federation of autonomous organisations from all over the world. Our members, in over 70 countries, campaign on the most urgent environmental and social issues, while working towards sustainable societies. FoEI currently has five international programs: Climate Justice and Energy; Economic Justice, Resisting Neoliberalism; Food Sovereignty; Forests and Biodiversity; and Resisting Mining, Oil and Gas.

## Friends of the Earth International Online

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[www.flickr.com/photos/foei](https://www.flickr.com/photos/foei)

**Action alerts:** [www.foei.org/take-action](http://www.foei.org/take-action)

**FoE International's web radio station (in five languages):** <https://rnr.fm/>

### Brazil: First anniversary of Vale mining disaster

Friends of the Earth International supported the Brazilian Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) during 20-25 January - the first anniversary of the Córrego do Feijão mine disaster, which spilt 12,000,000 cubic meters of toxic mud, and collapsed and split over 9km into the city of Brumadinho, and into the Paraopeba River.

The week of mobilisations in Brumadinho were part of the community's resistance, mobilisation, and transformation of the post-disaster reality. Brumadinho has become a symbol of corporate power and the utter lack of care corporations have for human rights and the environment. FoE Brazil is using this moment to help renew and strengthen the campaign against corporate profiteering in Brazil. Brazil has not prosecuted any executive from Vale. Almost half of the 24,000 dams in Brazil are classified "at risk", making it probably for a similar disaster to take place.

*More information:* <https://rwr.fm/coverage-en-2/brumadinbo-vale-continues-operating/>

### International Women's Day of Struggle: Marches for Gender Justice

March 8 was International Women's Day, and people from all over the world took to the streets to demand the liberation and safety of women, and the dismantling of the patriarchy. Friends of the Earth International joined the World March of Women, marching with the slogan "We resist to live, We march to transform".

Activists across the world have been using these marches as a building point for broader campaigns. For example, in Pakistan there was the 10th celebration of the anti-sexual harassment law, while also discussions of how best to support women in rural areas. In Venezuela there was a week of activities including a vigil for the increase of feminicides in the country.

The World March of Women is organised every five years across the globe. In 2020, the March highlighted four themes: resistance against the militarisation of bodies, lives and territories; anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles; opening borders and "denouncing the role of walls" in the persecution of migrants; and calling for the self-determination of peoples, women and territories.

Friends of the Earth International's Gender Justice and Dismantling Patriarchy Working Group released a booklet discussing what gender justice is, and the interconnected systems that enforce the patriarchy. The booklet highlights six ways to promote gender justice within our work. You can view the booklet here: <https://tinyurl.com/wop38ke>

*More information:*

*Voices of FoE activists around the world:* [www.foei.org/international-womens-day](http://www.foei.org/international-womens-day)  
<https://rwr.fm/interviews/8m-world-march-women-5th-action-dismantle-patriarchy/>

<https://marchemondiale.org/index.php/2020/03/01/march-8-the-world-march-of-women-mobilizes-and-launches-the-5th-international-action-2020/>

### Essential measures lacking in UN's biodiversity framework draft

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) is monitoring and contributing to the open-ended working group which is putting together the proposal for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This framework is a new action plan for the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The action plan is due to be released in October 2020 at a meeting in Kuming, China, hailed as the "Paris Summit for biodiversity". The Zero Draft of the plan was released in January, and in February governments met for the first time in Rome to discuss the agreement/framework.

The FoEI team said: "Our initial analysis is that the Draft is an encouraging move towards a system which tackles the root causes of biodiversity loss. However, it lacks crucial means for achieving change, including recognition of rights for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and mechanisms for equity, justice and mitigation of impacts on vulnerable Southern countries."

Key concerns include lack of consideration of economic over-consumption and industrial agriculture, the reliance on financial "ecological services" mechanisms, the lack of legally binding mechanisms to enforce the plan, no plan to halt existing damaging practices such as mining, and a failure to put communities, and especially Indigenous Peoples, at the heart of nature protection.

FoEI and allied groups recently released a 'Do's and Dont's for a Successful Global Biodiversity Framework'. This focuses on a rights-based approach, full and equal participation for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and global equity and financing. You can view it here: <https://tinyurl.com/ujswdbp>

*More information:*

[www.foei.org/features/draft-cbd-global-biodiversity-framework-assessment](http://www.foei.org/features/draft-cbd-global-biodiversity-framework-assessment)  
[www.foei.org/press\\_releases/global-biodiversity-plan-cbd-weak](http://www.foei.org/press_releases/global-biodiversity-plan-cbd-weak)

## Protecting human rights and the environment in the Asia Pacific

Many defenders of territories and human rights are threatened, suppressed or in extreme cases killed. According to a Global Witness study, 164 environmental defenders were murdered in 2018 around the world. From January to September in 2019, 138 more deaths were recorded.

In the past few years, Friends of the Earth Asia Pacific's member groups' staff, activists and supporters have been beaten, sued, kidnapped, bankrupted, defamed, jailed and murdered for campaigning for environmental justice.

To keep defenders safe, we need systemic change and the introduction of practical policies at the local, national and international level, and also within civil society organisations.

A report released by FoE Asia Pacific last December includes seven stories from across the regional network of environmental organisations, each exposing the dire conditions experienced by environmental and human rights defenders.

The report includes cases from Palestine, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Russia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, and serves as an advocacy tool to work at national, regional and international level, together with governments as well as communities, activists, allies, and other actors.

*The FoE Asia Pacific report is online at [www.tinyurl.com/defending-territories](http://www.tinyurl.com/defending-territories)*

*A FoE Real World Radio interview with Malaysian activist Theiva Lingam, regional facilitator for FoE International, is posted at <https://tinyurl.com/theiva-radio>*

*The Global Witness study is posted at [www.globalwitness.org/sv/campaigns/environmental-activists/enemies-state/](http://www.globalwitness.org/sv/campaigns/environmental-activists/enemies-state/)*

## Uganda: Court ruling on Total's environmental and human rights abuses

The Nanterre High Court has handed down its (indecisive) decision on the mega oil project in Uganda proposed by French company Total. The company's plan lies within a protected natural park, and involves drilling over 400 wells to extract around 200,000 barrels of oil per day.

A 1,445 km pipeline will be built to transport the oil, impacting communities and nature in Tanzania as well as Uganda. Already, nearly 5000 people in Uganda have been forced off their land, without receiving adequate compensation. The legal case seeks to prevent these human rights and environmental violations from continuing and reoccurring.

## The laws of land grabs in the Asia Pacific

A report released by six member countries of Friends of the Earth Asia Pacific discusses the land rights security of communities, including but not limited to those who are ethnically indigenous or culturally traditional, as well as those who form as an integral part of rural agricultural groups.

They include the Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights (CELCOR) from Papua New Guinea, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI), Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center (LRC) from the Philippines, Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ) from Sri Lanka and the Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON).

Land grabs are inherently rooted in the inequitable free market forces, attributable to flawed economic and developmental systems. There is also a need to understand how legislative and governance systems of the participating countries respond to such land rights threats and the extent to which they are able to protect community land rights from land grabbing and the violations of community land rights.

Land grabbing is the control of larger than locally-typical amounts of land by any persons or entities; public or private, foreign or domestic. This can be through ownership, lease, concession, contracts, quotas or general power. This control can be acquired through legal or illegal means, for the purposes of speculation, extraction, resource control or commodification. This is often at the expense of peasant farmers, agroecology, land stewardship, food sovereignty and human rights.

*The report is posted at <https://tinyurl.com/land-grabs>*

Friends of the Earth France, along with Survie and four Ugandan organisations, took Total to court. On 30 January 2020, the Nanterre High Court handed down its decision on the summary proceedings, stating that the case does not fall within its jurisdiction, but sits with the Commercial Court. The six organisations strongly disagree with this legal interpretation. The Commercial Court was established to adjudicate on commercial disputes, and the organisations believe it will be unlikely to take into account serious human rights and environmental violations.

## Costa Rica: FoE denounces murder of Jehry Rivera Rivera

FoE Latin America and the Caribbean denounced the murder of Jehry Rivera Rivera, an indigenous leader from the Naso Bröran people in Costa Rica, on 24 February 2020. Jehry Rivera fought for indigenous autonomy in the face of land usurpers and extractive projects such as the Diquís Hydroelectric Project which was negatively affecting the community. Jehry's murder follows the assassination of Indigenous leader Sergio Rojas in 2016. On February 23, there was intrusion and intimidation by armed non-Indigenous people into the Palmira de Cabagra and Crun D'bonn in the Térraba Indigenous communities.

Costa Rican Indigenous Peoples continue to demand autonomy and governmental reaffirmation of their autonomous territories. This includes a call for the government to prosecute the murderers, and the comply with precautionary measures established in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

*More information: [www.foei.org/news/solidarity-denounce-murder-jehry-rivera-costa-rica](http://www.foei.org/news/solidarity-denounce-murder-jehry-rivera-costa-rica)*

## UK: FoE stops Heathrow Airport expansion

Friends of the Earth UK have won a historic legal case to stop the building of Heathrow's third runway on the grounds of its climate impact. The Court of Appeal ruled that UK Government acted illegally in their plans to expand Heathrow, failing to act in accordance with the Paris Agreement and consider the climate impacts of the airport's expansion. Heathrow is one of the largest pollution emitters in the UK, and the expansion would have led to around 700 extra flights per day.

This is a huge win. Local community groups have been resisting Heathrow's expansion for many years, some for over 30 years. For the UK and global community, this case is a landmark, sending a clear message that governments must now consider the climate, and the Paris Agreement, in their plans - helping to stop other climate-harming proposals.

*More information: <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/heathrow-third-runway-uk-government-actions-ruled-illegal>*

# Australia's Black Summer

A digest of significant news and opinion regarding the bushfire crises in Australia in the 2019-20 summer:

## Crisis summer fuelled by climate change: new report

11 March 2020: The Climate Council has produced the first comprehensive overview of the devastating climate impacts Australians experienced this summer. According to the report, Summer of Crisis, the catastrophic bushfires spewed an average estimate of 900 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which is approximately the same as annual emissions from commercial air travel worldwide. "The fires produced more greenhouse gas emissions than Australia normally emits annually," said Climate Councillor and former Commissioner of Fire and Rescue NSW, Greg Mullins. "We must remember that the recent fires took place in a world that has warmed just over one degree," said Climate Councillor Professor Will Steffen.

The report's key findings:

- Climate change fuelled Australia's devastating Black Summer.
- Thirty-three people died in the bushfires, 25 of them in NSW.
- Nearly 80% of Australians were affected either directly or indirectly.
- Nationally, an estimated one billion animals were killed.
- This season's fires were incredibly large in area, even compared to forests all around the world. Around 21% of Australian temperate broadleaf and mixed forests was burnt. The average annual area burnt for most continents, including Australia, is well below 5%.
- Catastrophic fire danger ratings were experienced at locations and times of the year never before recorded.

*Abridged from Analysis and Policy Observatory.* <https://apo.org.au/node/277911>

## Weather bureau says hottest, driest year on record led to extreme bushfire season

9 Jan 2020: The Bureau of Meteorology's annual climate statement confirms 2019 was the nation's warmest and driest year on record. It's the first time since overlapping records began that Australia experienced both its lowest rainfall and highest temperatures in the same year.

The average national rainfall total was 37 mm, or 11.7%, below the 314.5 mm recorded in the previous driest year in 1902. The national average temperature was nearly 0.2°C above the previous warmest year in 2013. Globally, 2019 is likely to be the second-warmest year, with global temperatures about 0.8 °C above the 1961-1990 average. It has been the warmest year without the influence of El Niño.

*Abridged from The Conversation.*  
*Full article:* <https://tinyurl.com/tqkd9ef>

## Underlying causes of Australia's shocking bushfire season

Why has this bushfire season been so devastating? Extreme heat and dryness are two important influencers of fire and, on both measures, 2019 was remarkable for Australia.

What role is climate change playing in the risk of fire? In advice issued in November 2019, Australia's National Environmental Science Program was unambiguous. "Human-caused climate change has resulted in more dangerous weather conditions for bushfires in recent decades for many regions of Australia."

Scientists also believe that 2019 was a "standout" year in Australia for the formation of extreme bushfires that became "coupled" with the atmosphere, generating their own lightning and gusty, violent and unpredictable winds. Rainfall is replaced with blackened hail and embers that can be shot out over distances of 30km.

Prof Matt England, of the UNSW Climate Change Research Centre, said: "What we have seen in Australia this year will just be a normal summer if we warmed the planet by 3C. And an extreme summer would be even worse than we've seen now."

*Abridged from The Guardian. Full article:*  
<https://tinyurl.com/v2lpn8x>

## 'It's miraculous': owners say cultural burning saved their property

6 Jan 2020: Phil Sheppard watched with trepidation as a giant blaze approached his beloved Hunter Valley property outside Laguna, near Cessnock. Three weeks ago, he and other owners were forced to evacuate. To his amazement, when he returned two days later, traversing the long gravel driveway on foot after fallen trees blocked vehicle access, most structures remained perfectly intact.

Owners say the property was saved by the traditional Indigenous technique of cultural burning conducted on their land three years ago. Aboriginal cultural fire practitioner Dennis Barber led a series of cultural burns on six hectares of bushland at Ngurrumpaa in 2015 and 2016 - the first burns in the area since a wildfire swept through in 1994.

Unlike hazard reduction burning, cultural burns are cooler and slower moving, usually no taller than knee height, leaving tree canopies untouched and allowing animals to take refuge from the flames. Small fires are lit with matches, instead of drip torches, and burn in a circular pattern.

Mr Barber says the ancient practice is informed by thousands of years of traditional knowledge. "It's more than just putting the fire on the ground - it's actually knowing the country, knowing what's there ... the soil types, the geology, the

*This season's fires were incredibly large in area, even compared to forests all around the world. Around 21% of Australian temperate broadleaf and mixed forests was burnt. The average annual area burnt for most continents, including Australia, is well below 5%.*

trees, the animals, the breeding times of animals, the flowering times of plants,” he said. The timing and frequency of burns depend on the environmental “system”.

Mr Barber says Aboriginal people should be better resourced to lead the implementation of cultural burning across NSW and Australia, alongside existing fire authorities.

*Abridged from The Age. Full article: <https://tinyurl.com/v54udgr>*

## Indigenous Australians’ grief over bushfires deepens the trauma felt since colonisation

17 Jan 2020: Australia’s catastrophic bushfires have not only burnt over 10 million hectares of land, but they have also deepened the trauma Aboriginal people feel over the British colonisation of the country in 1788.

Yorta Yorta First Nations man Neil Morris said Indigenous Australians’ connection with the land is central to their spiritual and cultural identity, and seeing the fires destroy nature in front of their eyes is a reminder that that land was stolen from them 232 years ago.

“I don’t want to reduce anyone’s experience,” Morris said of Australians who have lost their homes or lives in the bushfires that began in September. “What I do want to express is the fact that all Indigenous communities are living in trauma on a day-to-day basis at the hands of living in a colonised society. Our people are already in a deep state of trauma. In many communities, we are in a state of recovery, and that’s a big process, obviously, with the severe disadvantage that our people have been at.”

Indigenous fire practitioner Oliver Costello agreed. He said seeing “all our plants and animals decimated” as a result of the bushfires has been beyond devastating. “They’re our ancestors; they’re our kin,” he explained. “Our cultural knowledge systems mean we’re a part of the land. We’ve been burnt. Our skin is the skin of the earth. We’re in trauma.”

Many Indigenous communities have fled their homes and been evacuated to refuge centres this bushfire season, and Morris said the displacement of communities and burnt land means “you cannot carry out your obligations as First Nations peoples”.

*Abridged from Huffington Post. Full article: <https://tinyurl.com/wofocjx>*

## Fire Country book

*Fire Country*, released in February 2020, was written by indigenous writer, filmmaker, musician and consultant Victor Steffensen and published by Hardie Grant.

Kevin Tolhurst, associate professor in the school of ecosystems and forest sciences at the University of Melbourne, writes:

“Victor Steffensen takes the reader on discovery of the lore, customs, knowledge, and totems that connect Indigenous Australians to the land through the lens of fire. His quest for traditional



Sadly, the Kuark forest in Victoria’s East Gippsland has been badly impacted by fire. Kuark was the jewel in the crown of the recently announced East Gippsland Immediate Protection Area.

knowledge starts by trying to document language and knowledge on video, understanding that much has already been lost and more is being lost with the passing of Indigenous elders. ...

Following years of learning and teaching about fire, Steffensen concludes that knowledge has to be transferred from person to person and generation to generation through direct human interaction “on country”. Being “on country” is important because direct experience and observation is a critical part of gaining knowledge and understanding. It is here that the philosophy of “if you look after the country, the country will look after you” becomes apparent.

“Bill Gammage’s analysis in *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* is largely consistent with Steffensen’s thesis. Gammage demonstrates how traditional owners used fire in a deliberate and skilful way to improve the sustainability of the landscape for a range of objectives, including food, hunting, access and amenity.”

*Fire Country can be purchased at [www.hardiegrant.com](http://www.hardiegrant.com)*

*Kevin Tolhurst’s review is posted at [www.tinyurl.com/fire-country](http://www.tinyurl.com/fire-country)*

## One in 10 children affected by bushfires is Indigenous

The catastrophic bushfire season is officially over, but governments, agencies and communities have failed to recognise the specific and disproportionate impact the fires have had on Aboriginal peoples. Addressing this in bushfire response and recovery is part of Unfinished Business: the work needed for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to meet on more just terms.

In our recent study, we found more than one quarter of the Indigenous population in New South Wales and Victoria live in a fire-affected area. That’s more than 84,000 people. What’s more, one in ten infants and children affected by the fires is Indigenous.

But in past bushfire inquiries and royal commissions, Aboriginal people have been mentioned only sparingly. When referenced now, it’s only in relation to cultural burning or cultural heritage. This must change.

We identify three foundational steps:

- acknowledge that Aboriginal people have been erased, made absent and marginalised in previous bushfire recovery efforts, and identify and address why this continues to happen
- establish non-negotiable instructions for including Aboriginal people in the terms of reference and membership of post-bushfire inquiries
- establish Aboriginal representation on relevant government committees involved in decision-making, planning and implementation of disaster risk management.

*Abridged from The Conversation. Full article: [www.tinyurl.com/fire-children](http://www.tinyurl.com/fire-children)*

## The climate science deniers spreading misinformation about Australian bushfires

13 Jan 2020: Prime Minister Scott Morrison's position on climate policy has been bolstered by a group of fringe climate science deniers pushing conspiracy theories and misinformation about the relationship between the fires and climate change.

Alex Jones' InfoWars / NewsWars: An article on the alt-right website NewsWars makes the false claim that "authorities in Australia are working on the premise that arsonists and lightning strikes are to blame for bushfires that have devastated numerous areas of the country, not 'climate change' as many global warming alarmists have claimed." Independent factcheckers from Climate Feedback (climatefeedback.org) judged the article to be "misleading".

Murdoch media: Murdoch outlets "continue to spread climate denial, attack other outlets providing lifesaving coverage, and ignore local fire threats," according to a report from nonprofit watchdog Media Matters for America (MMFA). MMFA points to multiple commentators on Sky News Australia who refer to those saying climate change is driving the fires as having "joined a cult" and "been brainwashed."

Bots: Multiple reports have also pointed to the role of social media bots helping to spread conspiracy theories to counter the claim that climate change is driving the fires. Analysis by Queensland University of Technology senior lecturer Dr Timothy Graham found a "current disinformation campaign" on Twitter's #arsonemergency hashtag due to the "suspiciously high number of bot-like and troll-like accounts", the Guardian reported.

*Abridged from Renew Economy. Full Article: <https://tinyurl.com/u48exmg>*

*MMFA report: <https://tinyurl.com/mmfa-fire>*

## While Victoria's forests burnt, logging continued

17 Jan 2020: The state government's timber agency was permitted to log Victorian forests as catastrophic fires ravaged bushland and native animal populations. The logging by VicForests occurred on days a total fire ban was in place throughout the state, with waste from felling leaving the area exposed to additional fire risks. Emails exchanged between VicForests and community members confirm that the Central Highlands region ... was logged as part of the agency's ongoing summer operations. Last week a leaked federal government report warned that 31% of the state's rainforests had already gone up in flames, as well as 24% of wet or damp forests, and 34% of lowland forests.

*Abridged from The Age. Full Article: <https://tinyurl.com/tdwumbf>*

## Victoria's Regional Forest Agreements

On 30 March 2020, the Victorian and Federal governments renewed Victoria's Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) for another decade in spite of the horrific impacts of the recent bushfires. For over 20 years, thousands of hectares of forests and precious habitat have been logged under these dodgy agreements. The contracts between the State and Federal government give logging special exemption from Federal Environment law. The logging industry is the only extractive industry that gets this special treatment.

Logging has been suspended in East Gippsland because of the fires, but its due to start up again under these agreements. Forests and wildlife need to be protected to ensure they recover from the bushfires. Every patch of forest that's left in East Gippsland should be protected in light of the devastating fires, and the legal exemption thrown out.

*Abridged from a Goongerab Environment Centre statement: [www.foe.org.au/vic\\_rfa\\_10years](http://www.foe.org.au/vic_rfa_10years)*

## Health effects of Australia's bushfires

Last summer's bushfires exposed about three-quarters of the population to prolonged levels of smoke, causing 417 excess deaths, over 3,000 hospital admissions for cardiovascular and respiratory problems as well as 1,300 emergency hospital visits for asthma alone.

The preliminary assessment, published in the Medical Journal of Australia, found a "substantial" health impact in the fire-hit regions of the ACT, NSW, Victoria and Queensland between October 1 and February 10, 2020.

The researchers studied exposure to particulate matter of less than 2.5 microns in size using public air quality data. The highest reading of 98.5 microns on January 14 quadrupled the national standard and was 14 times more than the historical average.

To identify excess deaths, the researchers compared actual deaths, cardiovascular and respiratory-related hospitalisations and emergency response presentations with asthma against the levels that would be expected on any other day.

Lead author Fay Johnston, an epidemiologist at the University of Tasmania in Hobart, estimates 80% of Australia's population of about 25 million was blanketed by smoke this summer. "The fires were unprecedented in Australia's history, in terms of vast amounts of smoke, the huge populations affected by the smoke and the long duration," she said.

Professor Bin Jalaludin from the University of NSW school of public health and community medicine, and another of the paper's authors, said the excess death estimate was probably conservative. "We only looked at the outcomes where we have strong evidence," he said. "There are many other health effects caused by bushfires, for example, mental health effects, hospital admissions or [emergency department] visits for other conditions which we did not evaluate."

*<https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50545>*

*Last summer's bushfires exposed about three-quarters of the population to prolonged levels of smoke, causing 417 excess deaths, over 3,000 hospital admissions for cardiovascular and respiratory problems as well as 1,300 emergency hospital visits for asthma alone.*

## Pollution experts team up to propose major new study into health impacts of bushfire smoke

14 Jan 2020: Australia's top pollution experts are teaming up to propose a major new study into the long-term health impacts of bushfire smoke. Guy Marks from UNSW said he was not confident in the current health advice offered by authorities because there was very little evidence available. "Are masks even that effective? What about air filtration? Or staying indoors. We're not sure that any of that is right, but they're all testable questions," Professor Marks said.

Marks is putting together a team of two dozen top Australian researchers to investigate the medical fallout from the fires. The researchers are members of a consortium, the Centre for Air Pollution, Energy and Health Research, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

*Abridged from ABC News. Full article: <https://tinyurl.com/t88nz8w>*

## Conservationists and scientists fear bushfires that have ravaged parts of Australia have had a catastrophic impact on flora and fauna

15 Jan 2020: The sheer magnitude of plant and animal species potentially wiped off the face of Australia by unrivalled bushfires is unknown. But when the fires that have torn through a combined area almost as big as England eventually ease, scientists fear a brutal outcome. Most of the animals that escaped the unprecedented crisis will eventually perish.

"Even the animals that haven't immediately been killed from the fires and the smoke, most of those that are displaced will eventually die," said Professor Martine Maron from the University of Queensland's School of Earth and Environmental Sciences. Predators like foxes and cats will thrive, buoyed by easy pickings and room to move.

The fires have claimed at least one billion animals, according to University of Sydney environmental sciences professor Chris Dickman. That figure only takes in birds, reptiles and mammals, excluding bats, frogs, insects and other invertebrates. It is being described as conservative, as government officials and non-government experts rush to map the real toll. Ecosystems that rely on many parts working together could collapse.

*Abridged from SBS. Full article: <https://tinyurl.com/rnedzfg>*

## Microgrids: how to keep the power on when disaster hits

11 Feb 2020: Bushfires, storms and floods regularly leave thousands of Australian homes and businesses without power. One part of the solution is more connectedness, so one transmission line being severed is not the crisis it is now. But just as important is ensuring connectedness isn't crucial.



Lake Conjola on the NSW south coast, New Years Eve, 2019.

This means moving away from centralised systems – powered by a few big generators – to decentralised ones, with many local and small-scale generators. Instead of one big grid, we need many microgrids, interconnected but able to operate independently when necessary.

Power in a warming world: First, hotter and longer heatwaves put more pressure on grids. As energy demand spikes on hot afternoons, so does the incidence of coal-fired generators breaking down. At the same time, heatwaves reduce the capacity of both coal and gas generators. Hotter weather also impedes the efficiency of photovoltaic solar panels as well as the capacity of electrical wires to transport power.

Second, hot and windy weather increases the chance of electrical wires sparking fires by contacting dry plants.

Third, as already alluded to, a warmer climate increases the regularity and intensity of bushfires, floods and storms – events that in recent weeks have cut off power to communities right when they needed it most.

Modern microgrids: A microgrid is simply an electricity grid built to a more local scale. The national electricity grid stretches from Port Lincoln in South Australia to Port Douglas in far-north Queensland. A microgrid might stretch no further than a few streets. It might cover an industrial estate, a town or a region.

Rather than relying on electricity generators hundreds or thousands of kilometres away, it has enough local generators to generally meet local demand. Though "grid-tied" – drawing or contributing power to a bigger grid as needed – it can also "island" (disconnect) and run independently.

Australian demonstrations: There are microgrid projects around Australia. One is in the Melbourne suburb of Mooroolbark. It has demonstrated a single street (of 18 houses) can continue to operate on its own solar panels and battery storage for 22 hours before reconnecting to the national grid.

At a regional scale, the ESCRI project near Dalrymple in South Australia combines a much larger battery array with 55 wind turbines and solar systems. So long as there's enough wind, the system can provide electricity indefinitely to 4,600 customers.

Managing distributed energy resources: Microgrids are not only ideal for isolating regions from blackouts. They also help integrate "distributed energy resources" such as rooftop solar systems and electric vehicles, which pose a challenge to the way centralised way grids have traditionally been controlled. The main investment required for a "grid of microgrids" is for each region to install a battery and microgrid controller (and potentially more local generators). In remote regions this may be cheaper than the cost of maintaining transmission lines.

*Abridged from The Conversation. Full article: <https://tinyurl.com/rxls3no>  
See also 'Bushfire crisis shows the answer to future energy security lies on our rooftops', <https://tinyurl.com/sk2akex>*

# Australia's bushfire debates

Cam Walker

Fires burnt an estimated 18.6 million hectares across Australia during the 2019/20 summer, destroying almost 3,000 houses and taking the lives of at least 34 people. Now that the fires are contained, attention turns to 'what next'? Why were this season's fires so bad, and what can we do to make next summer less destructive? Already a number of inquiries are underway.

Of course, fire has a pivotal role in almost all landscapes across Australia, and this has been the case for millions of years. The continent of Australia is a cultural and natural landscape: it has been shaped by First Nations peoples for many hundreds of generations. Colonisation disrupted this long management and now settler society is trying to understand how fire should be used in the landscape to manage it for biodiversity, human safety and economic production.

There is no doubt that climate change is driving intense fires. Beyond the question of the role of climate change in making this summer's fires so intense, the public debate has revolved around various issues including the role of arson and whether the fires have been worsened by a lack of hazard reduction burning.

## Arson

Arson is a huge problem in Australia – many fires are started deliberately. NSW police charged 24 people with deliberately lighting bushfires this season. However, a conspiracy theory did the rounds on social media this summer which was clearly promoted by anti-environmentalists. They argue that arson was the primary cause of the fires, not climate change. Clearly both factors are at play, yet this argument tends to push the line that only one of these options is possible.

Number crunching by the ABC found that throughout this summer's bushfires, less than 2% of the hectares burnt have been due to arson.

*The Guardian* reported: "Analysis found there is likely a "disinformation campaign" on Twitter's #arsonemergency hashtag due to the "suspiciously high number of bot-like and troll-like accounts".

The problem of arson does not detract from the clear scientific evidence showing climate change is making Australia's bushfire seasons longer and more severe. The Bureau of Meteorology's advice is that climate change is "influencing the frequency and severity of dangerous bushfire conditions in Australia and other regions of the world, including through influencing temperature, environmental moisture, weather patterns and fuel conditions".

## Hazard reduction burning and the culture wars

There are loud voices in the public debate claiming that 'greenies' (and/ or the Greens party) are to blame for the intensity of this summer's fires because they have blocked hazard reduction burns. This argument simply does not stack up.

Firstly, no major environmental group opposes burning, nor do the Greens.

Secondly, the Greens are not in power. Hazard reduction burning is largely the responsibility of state governments. The Coalition and ALP are in power across Australia, not the Greens. So how can a party that is not in power control what governments do?

As reported in *The Guardian*:

*"Hazard reduction is carried out by fire authorities, national park staff and individual property owners who can apply for permits to clear areas around their buildings. Coordination of activities happens through local bushfire management committees. There are 120 committees in NSW. The claim of a conspiracy by environmentalists to block hazard reduction activities has been roundly rejected by bushfire experts, and experts say it is betrayed by hard data on actual hazard reduction activities in national parks."*

Over the past four years, NSW National Parks have undertaken over 75% of all prescribed burning in NSW, and as of December 2019, 88% of all fires that have started in national parks (typically by lightning) have been contained within the park.

Thirdly, it is clear that some organisations, media outlets and political groups are promoting the 'greenies are to blame' narrative for their own political purposes, which is then being amplified by people who are simply concerned about the fires.

Prof. Ross Bradstock, the director of the centre for environmental risk management of bushfires at the University of Wollongong, told *Guardian Australia*: "These are very tired and very old conspiracy theories that get a run after most major fires. They've been extensively dealt with in many inquiries."

## Fuel reduction is a tool, not a panacea

A review of the 2009 Victorian fires is clear on the limited time that fuel reduction has value as a tool to reduce the flammability of vegetation:

*"Probability of crown fires was higher in recently logged areas than in areas logged decades before, indicating likely ineffectiveness as a fuel treatment. The results suggest that recently burnt areas (up to 5-10 years) may reduce the intensity of the fire but not sufficiently to*

*The continent of Australia is a cultural and natural landscape: it has been shaped by First Nations peoples for many hundreds of generations.*

*increase the chance of effective suppression under severe weather conditions. Since house loss was most likely under these conditions (67%), effects of prescribed burning across landscapes on house loss are likely to be small when weather conditions are severe. Fuel treatments need to be located close to houses in order to effectively mitigate risk of loss.”*

A December 2019 RMIT ABC Fact Check stated:

- Hazard reduction burns are highly dependent on weather conditions — some areas go from wet to dry too rapidly to safely conduct burns.
- Research has shown that during catastrophic fire conditions, hazard reduction burns do little to mitigate the intensity and spread of a fire.

Former NSW fire and rescue commissioner Greg Mullins says that hotter and drier conditions, and the higher fire danger ratings, have limited the amount of prescribed burning carried out. As well as climate change narrowing the window to carry out prescribed burning, Mullins said some fires have become so intense they have burned through areas that had been subject to hazard reduction.

Shane Fitzsimmons, head of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, says hazard reduction is important but not a panacea for bushfire risk and has “very little effect at all” on the spread of fire in severe or extreme weather.

A study in Tasmania found that prescribed burn-offs have little impact on reducing the extent and intensity of bushfires. Researchers from the University of Tasmania’s school of biological sciences simulated more than 11,000 fires on a typically dangerous fire-weather day. They found that firefighters would need to carry out prescribed burn-offs across 31% of Tasmania in order to have a significant impact on reducing the threat from wildfires. More realistic smaller-scale burn-offs, however, had almost no effect on the extent and intensity of a wildfire.

Prof. David Bowman, who helped lead the Tasmanian study, said the findings suggested that planned burn-offs were still necessary but not sufficient. He said governments and fire authorities needed to consider taking a more local approach, and introduce on the outskirts of towns and cities clever landscape designs that included irrigation and green fire breaks in the form of parklands, that could work in conjunction with burn-offs to help mitigate bushfire risks.

## Significant issues to consider

There are significant issues to consider if we decide to radically increase the amount of hazard reduction burning we do:

1. The science suggests that the best option for protecting remaining old growth snow gums is to exclude fire wherever possible from this vegetation community.
2. Rainforest is not fire adapted and is badly impacted by fire. So fire must be excluded from remaining pockets of cool temperate rainforests, including their surrounding buffer zones of eucalypt forest.
3. There are areas, like the Errinundra Plateau and Toorong Plateau in East Gippsland in Victoria, that have traditionally acted as bushfire “refugia” sites. Both these areas have been heavily impacted by logging. Logging can increase the flammability of forests, by turning older forests with cool humid microclimates into thick forests of regrowth.
4. Alpine ash and Mountain Ash forests generally don’t like a ‘hot’ burn. They can cope with a cool burn. Often, older forests will have a mixed range of trees from saplings to old trees. There are fears that these forests will collapse under the combined weight of logging, climate change and fire, and any introduction of fuel management fires needs to be considered, and managed, very carefully. Perhaps the best option is to treat surrounding foothills forests with controlled burns in order to slow down any fires that do burn up into alpine ash communities.
5. We need to reconsider how we use or manage fire in declared wilderness zones.

## Should we increase logging to reduce bushfire risk?

Another argument in the public debate has come from the timber industry and the CFMMEU – the union which represents many workers in the sector. They have called for fuel loads in national parks to be aggressively managed through hazard reduction burning and selective logging.

However, logging can contribute to the severity of bushfires in wet forests. This was shown in research carried out after the 2009 Black Saturday fires. Data from areas that burned on Black Saturday clearly shows how extensive logging can increase the severity of bushfires in mountain ash forests. It found that the risk of “crown” fires, which burn severely and spread rapidly through the forest canopy, is greatest in mountain ash forests that have been regrowing for about 15 years. Before the 2009 fires, these young trees were established following clearfell logging.

*Further information – and references to the literature referred to above – is posted at [www.foe.org.au/bushfire\\_disinformation](http://www.foe.org.au/bushfire_disinformation)*

*Cam Walker is the campaigns coordinator with Friends of the Earth Melbourne and a volunteer firefighter with the Country Fire Authority.*

*He said governments and fire authorities needed to consider taking a more local approach, and introduce on the outskirts of towns and cities clever landscape designs that included irrigation and green fire breaks in the form of parklands, that could work in conjunction with burn-offs to help mitigate bushfire risks.*

# Bushfire resilient land and climate care

Dr. David Holmgren – permaculture co-originator

*This is the Executive Summary of a detailed report posted at <https://holmgren.com.au/bushfire-resilient-land-and-climate-care>*



Anglehook State Forest in Victoria following the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires.

*Photo by David Holmgren.*

Whilst devastating, the recent Australian bushfires provide an opportunity to come to terms with both the legacies of colonisation and the unfolding climate emergency in ways that empower bottom up householder and community level resilience.

Fire is an intrinsic part of the Australian landscape. It has become more destructive since European colonisation, and over recent decades, we have experienced even greater destruction due to accelerating climate change and changes in land use. Australia could, and should, be leading the world in transitioning to a renewable energy base to reduce the root cause of the crisis.

Australian landscapes were once subject to the oldest continual land management practices through indigenous cultural burning practices; stopping these practices has left us with denser, fire-vulnerable forests. Traditional landuses of grazing and forestry that contributed to prevention and control of bushfires have declined across large areas of the country and been replaced by residential, recreational and conservation uses in recent decades that increase our vulnerability to bushfire.

Australia arguably has the best fire-fighting capacity in the world. However fuel reduction burning is currently the default land management tool in reducing fire danger. This is effective in some cases, but not in catastrophic bushfires. The season for safe fuel reduction burning is contracting. Further, burning can lead to lower-nutrient, drier soils with more fire-prone vegetation.

A strategic focus on the urban/bushland interface and rural residential areas where bushfires create the greatest economic and

social havoc demands a much broader suit of land management practices than increasing already problematic fuel reduction burning:

- A return to indigenous cultural burning practices, where canopy and soil organic matter are left intact.
- Greater use of grazing animals combined with farming systems that use native pasture species, fire-retardant shelterbelts and silvopasture systems to build soil water- and nutrient-holding capacity
- Managing fuels with chippers, slashers and groomers as well as livestock trampling.
- A greater focus on fuel reduction through decomposition; research is needed on the role of microbes in speeding decomposition, and the effects of lost soil calcium.
- Rehydration of landscapes, using Natural Sequence Farming and Keyline techniques; especially along water courses receiving urban storm water.
- Protecting and managing dense areas of fire-retardant 'novel ecosystems' near towns and urban fringes, including non-native species such as willow.
- The ecologically sensitive thinning of forests; utilising the resultant biomass can also reduce our fossil fuel dependence through carbon neutral Combined Heat and Power systems to generate dispatchable power at multiple scales, especially local scale; and, as biochar – a soil amendment providing long-term carbon sequestration, and improving soil water- and nutrient-holding capacity and microbial activity.

Most of these strategies are more labour-intensive than industrial-scale clearing or fuel-reduction burning so are less appealing to government decision makers but have potential to reform and reenergise community-based activity with government support.

While all these strategies have their proponents and opponents, thinning our forests to reduce fire risk and provide carbon neutral, dispatchable, renewable energy to accelerate the shift to a 100% renewable power grid is by far the most controversial. This idea is seen by most conservationists as inviting another massive degradation of our forests in the pursuit of business as usual.

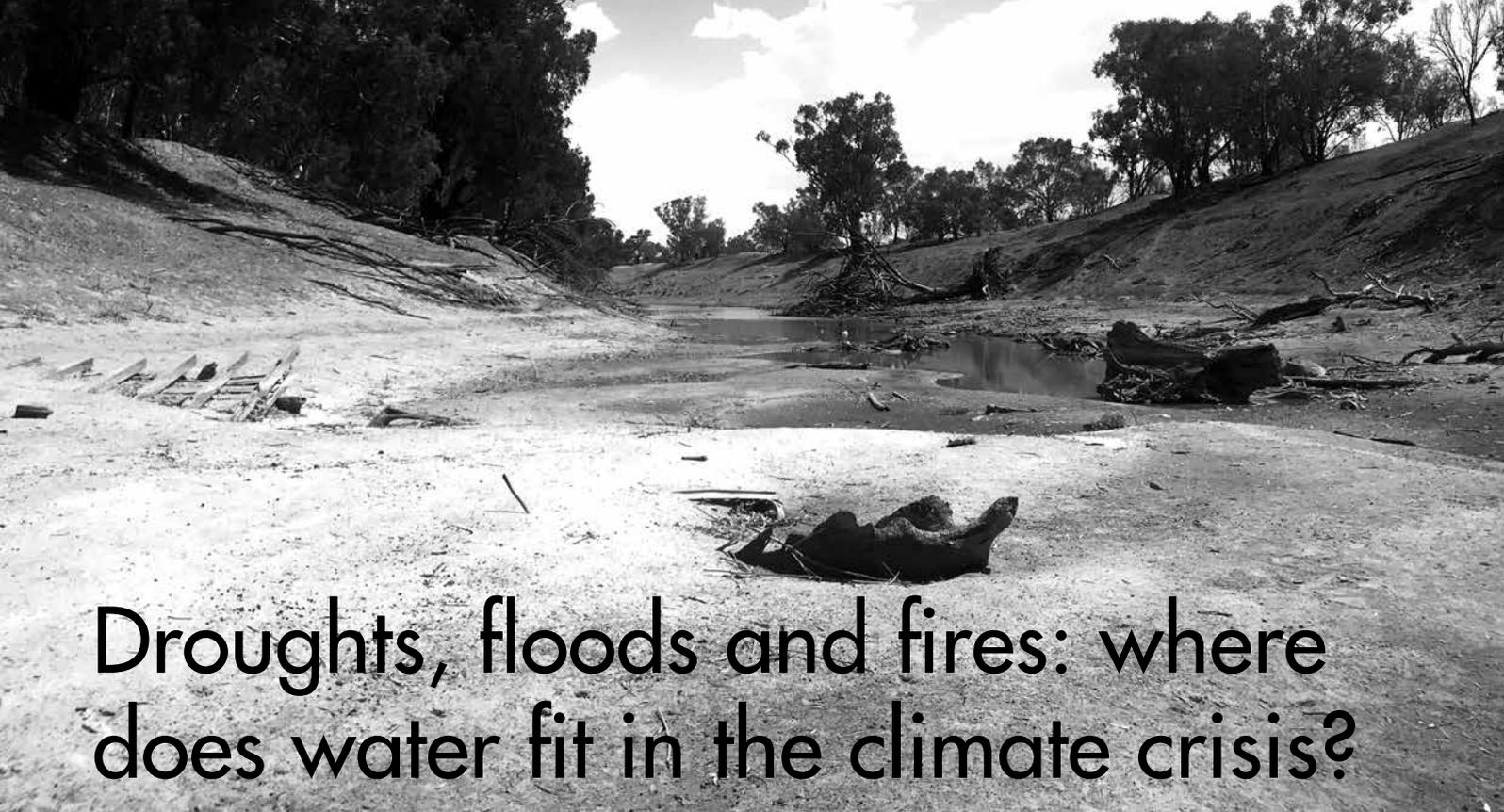
Building confidence that we can manage forests for our own safety and immediate needs while we protect our biodiversity, drawdown carbon and kick the fossil fuel habit is a cultural challenge that requires leadership by environmentalists who understand how the legal fiction of "terra nullius" has distorted the conservation paradigm.

Whatever the hope for adaptive top down responses, households and communities and need to become more self- and collectively-reliant as the capacity of centralised systems to manage escalating crises through command and control strategies declines. Community involvement is critical in managing local landscapes for reduced fire threat, especially in the urban/bushland interface. Flow-on benefits include community engagement, empowerment and resilience, and reduced costs to taxpayers. We need a reform of local laws to allow for small-scale community actions to be undertaken with minimal red tape.

At a household level, a well thought-out and practiced fire plan, and retrofits to buildings and outdoor spaces, allows for staying and defending a property as part of a resilient lifestyle that reduces the load on authorities managing mass evacuations.

This vision could bridge an increasingly polarised debate: empowering those on the libertarian right to manage land for the better; offering the green left a viable alternative for local power generation, bypassing international corporations; and providing the 'sensible centre' a common sense way forward to allow us to finally be at home in this land.

*More information: [www.holmgren.com.au](http://www.holmgren.com.au), [www.futurescenarios.org](http://www.futurescenarios.org), [www.retrosurbia.com](http://www.retrosurbia.com)*



# Droughts, floods and fires: where does water fit in the climate crisis?

Charlotte Borthwick

The severity of the recent bushfire crisis makes it clear that things are no longer 'business as usual'. Bushfires are being exacerbated by our rapidly warming climate and lack of water in our waterways due to drought and over-extraction for irrigation. Dry conditions create more fuel for bushfires and make it more difficult for environments to recover in the aftermath. What is left behind after the fires have gone out presents a massive threat to the health of all living beings.

The recent heavy rainfall has washed ash and bushfire debris into our waterways, polluting our rivers and taking a further toll on our natural environment. Sudden downpours washing down dehydrated river beds stirs up sediment that is carried downstream. Bitter sweet as flows are seen along rivers in the Western NSW for the first time in years, but excess nutrients are washed in and present a huge risk of contamination and with it proliferation of toxic blue green algae.

On the Macleay River, near Kempsey, hundreds of thousands of fish died after heavy rain upstream contaminated the river, creating what one local described as 'runny cake mix'. It is estimated that it will take decades for the river to recover from this one event. Some experts predict this could soon occur along the River Murray.

Out west, the Lower Darling has already been affected by catastrophic blue green algal blooms. Major fish kill events in 2018 and 2019 suffocated millions of iconic fish species, destroyed town water supplies and presents an ongoing risk to human wellbeing.

Is this the future for all Australian waterways? Governments have allowed our waterways to be exploited, polluted and drained for corporate

gain. Now they are suffering as a result of the bushfire crisis. The degree of damage done has been predicted to take decades for our natural environment to recover from, with research indicating that it may never fully recover. We are seeing a trajectory of change whereby the climate is shifting faster than most living beings can endure.

We need to enact transformational change regarding how we treat the land. First Nations peoples have employed holistic land management practices for thousands of generations, and handing control over land management practices from government bureaucrats to First Nations groups is desperately needed to save our precious waterways and ecosystems from total collapse. Indigenous ecological knowledge is internationally recognised as an invaluable resource regarding land management, yet the Australian government has failed to listen to Indigenous voices and knowledge embedded in their communities.

Empowering and resourcing First Nation people's ecological knowledge is a necessary first step in addressing the effects of climate change across the nation. Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation is an Indigenous led network working to reinvigorate the use of cultural burning by facilitating cultural learning pathways to fire and land management. The program aims to work with fire to enhance ecosystem health by improving habitat condition and connectivity within culturally connected landscape.

Support their important work as they continue to provide Indigenous leadership, advocacy and action to protect Country through cultural fire and land management practices by donating at [www.chuffed.org/project/firesticks-alliance](http://www.chuffed.org/project/firesticks-alliance)

*Charlotte Borthwick is a member of FoE Melbourne's River Country collective.*

*Bushfires are being exacerbated by our rapidly warming climate and lack of water in our waterways due to drought and over-extraction for irrigation.*

# 'Miracle cows' highlight the risks of gene editing

Louise Sales



They were the poster children of the gene editing revolution. In 2014, the US company Recombinetics announced they had developed gene edited hornless dairy cattle.

They argued that the genetic modification was just a small genetic 'tweak' and that their cattle shouldn't be subject to onerous safety assessments or regulation. Really this was just a way of speeding up natural breeding – or 'precision breeding' as they called it. Except this wasn't actually true.

Five years later, completely by chance, a scientist at the US Food and Drug Administration discovered that the genome of the cattle contained remnants of the bacterial plasmid used to engineer the hornless trait. This rogue DNA coded resistance to three commonly used antibiotics – posing a potential health risk.

As ABC's Background Briefing recently revealed, everyone thought this was the end of the line for Recombinetics' GM cows. And it was – except in Australia where Recombinetics continued its research in secret, on a farm in Victoria.

So why here? An important clue can be found in a presentation by Recombinetics' subsidiary Acceligen from February 2019. This identifies Australia as a 'focus country' and states that: "Brazil, Canada, Argentina and Australia all have favorable impressions of non-transgenic gene editing and have a defined pathway of 6 to 24 months to allow regulatory approval and commercialization of Acceligen's food animal products."

Significantly, this was written eight months before our Federal Government deregulated a number of gene editing techniques late last year. And

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ostensibly our food regulator Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has yet to make a decision on whether it will also deregulate foods produced using these new techniques.

So what exactly has our Federal Government told Recombinetics, to encourage them to continue their GM cow breeding program here, when the program has been abandoned in two of the most blatantly pro-GM countries in the world – the US and Brazil?

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has argued<sup>1</sup> that the discovery of bacterial DNA in gene edited cattle illustrates why these techniques and food produced using them must be assessed for safety. The agency has warned that unexpected genetic changes could "affect the safety of food derived from the animal." According to FDA scientist Steven Solomon: "Consumers expect the FDA to ensure their food is safe and our international trading partners expect that the FDA will have completed a scientific evaluation that determines that exported products are safe."

European countries will also be regulating these new GM techniques and their products. Surely, we deserve the same protection in Australia?

## Gene editing can result in unpredictable genetic changes

Of the eleven GM calves born in Australia, six contained the bacterial genes and were destroyed. Two of the other five were female. Recombinetics intends to breed from these cows and then to test if their milk is 'equivalent' to normal milk.

It remains unclear if there have been other unexpected changes to the cows' genomes, as a result of the genetic engineering process. Importantly, all gene editing techniques can potentially result in accidental foreign DNA insertion.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, a recent study in mice shows that gene editing can result in multiple copies of new genes being inserted that can't be detected using standard detection methods.<sup>3</sup> Other research has found that gene editing can cause large genetic rearrangements such as DNA deletions and insertions that could lead to important genes being switched on or off.<sup>4</sup>

Genetically modifying animals also poses serious ethical and animal welfare concerns. Gene editing is far less precise than claimed and results in unpredictable genetic mutations in mammals.<sup>5</sup> For example, gene editing can inadvertently cause very low live-birth rates; abnormal sizes – so animals are incapable of natural movement; and respiratory and cardiac problems.

In the case of Recombinetics' GM cattle, only two of the twenty-six original embryos that they implanted survived. Most were spontaneously aborted and three were euthanised at birth because they were 'unviable'.<sup>6</sup>

FSANZ says it will publicly consult on its proposed changes to the Food Code, in the middle of this year. The agency has been coy about what exactly these changes will be, but documents revealed under Freedom of Information laws show that FSANZ plans to allow food products from GM animals to be sold into our supermarkets with no labelling or safety testing. This would completely undermine the agency's primary objectives of protecting public health and providing adequate information to consumers.

## Take action

Keep untested, unlabelled GM animal products off our supermarket shelves: [www.foe.org.au/gmo](http://www.foe.org.au/gmo)

# The cautionary tale of some gene edited cattle

Jonathan Latham

Looking around at the worlds of agriculture, biotechnology, and medicine it is not hard to find voices excited by the prospect of genome editing. Genome editing (a.k.a. gene editing) is the cutting and subsequent repair of DNA at targeted locations in the genome of a living cell. The genetic alterations thereby introduced will be applied, it is hoped, to agricultural breeding or cell-based medical therapies.

We do not yet know how much of all this anticipation is hype and how much will bear fruit. But, alongside it looms another question that has had, undeservedly, far less attention. How should gene editing technologies, especially those that will be applied to agriculture, best be regulated to ensure public safety and food safety?

With any new technology this is a question that inevitably arises. But in this case, it is one that is greatly sharpened by the discovery that an Australian company has begun breeding 'hornless' cattle produced by gene editing. These cattle originate from a company called Recombinetics, based in Minnesota, USA. Recombinetics reported the editing of these cattle in the scientific literature in 2016, as a world-first breakthrough in livestock production.<sup>1</sup>

The special interest of these hornless cattle is that the US regulator of these animals, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), recently

published its finding that some of the cattle edited by Recombinetics contain, along with the intended edits, unintended genetic alterations.<sup>2</sup> These alterations include inadvertent addition of genes coding for antibiotic resistance. Thus, whereas the developer believed that their hornless cattle are the products of precise editing, the FDA discovered otherwise.

The public health significance of Recombinetics' blunder is still being debated. What the FDA has shown clearly though, is that regulating gene edited organisms intended for agriculture and the food supply will not be simple.

In a statement accompanying its discovery of the unanticipated antibiotic resistance, Steven M. Solomon, head of FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine, wrote that: "it is necessary for there to be regulatory oversight of intentional genomic alterations in animals, even when the intended modification seeks to replicate a naturally occurring mutation."<sup>3</sup>

In contrast with this statement, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) recently proposed regulatory changes that would exempt many gene edited organisms from all scrutiny. The problem with this approach is starkly illustrated by the Recombinetics example. Under the FSANZ rules, what is or is not regulated will depend on what the applicant seeks to do and believes it has done rather than what it actually has done. In other words, it is regulation based on the fantasy of the GMO's creator. This is not science or science-based regulation and it should not be accepted.

We should all hope that FSANZ, and other regulators in other jurisdictions seeking to oversee gene editing, will resolve these differences on the side of public safety – by taking note of this cautionary tale.

*Dr. Jonathan Latham is a former genetic engineer, co-founder and Executive Director of the Bioscience Resource Project (<https://bioscienceresource.org>) and the Editor of Independent Science News ([www.independentsciencenews.org](http://www.independentsciencenews.org)).*

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**SAY NO TO  
UNTESTED AND  
UNLABELLED GM  
MILK**

**TAKE ACTION!**

# The coronavirus crisis can only be tackled with peoples' sovereignty and environmental, social, gender and economic justice

*A statement from Friends of the Earth International, 15 April 2020*  
[www.foei.org/news/covid-19-coronavirus-crisis-system-change](http://www.foei.org/news/covid-19-coronavirus-crisis-system-change)

Friends of the Earth expresses its deep concern and solidarity as the world faces the COVID-19 crisis, which is already impacting so many peoples globally, especially those affected by structural inequalities. The heavy toll on human lives is profoundly shocking, in a world that was unprepared for such a disaster. This is a crisis that reaches well beyond the pandemic's unfathomable health impacts, exposing systemic environmental, social-economic and gender injustices, and detrimental political causes and consequences.

This crisis is fuelled by the current political-economic system, which exacerbates its impacts and imposes significant obstacles to structural responses. The dire consequences of the coronavirus are the result of the ever increasing concentration of wealth and the imposition of a neoliberal doctrine that sacrifices the preservation of life. It is clearer than ever that the free market based economy is the problem, not the solution.

Neoliberalism has led to the privatisation and weakening of public health and social security systems and public services, the dismantling of workers' rights and flexibilisation of labour, and increased exploitation of women's work. It has given extraordinary powers and privileges to transnational corporations, while reducing the role and position of the State, leaving our world more vulnerable to the impacts of this crisis.

The pandemic is unveiling and aggravating the brutal inequalities of capitalism between and within countries. It is undermining our core human needs and leaving millions vulnerable to a sudden loss of access to a means of survival. Many people simply cannot self-isolate, practice physical distancing or stop working. Evictions will become the norm as people cannot afford their rent and mortgages. The hardest hit will be the rural and urban working class, Indigenous Peoples, women, peoples suffering from racism, migrants, refugees, peoples living in areas of war and conflict, and peoples in countries enduring economic blockades. We will continue to see increasing numbers of workers losing their jobs, and migrants facing a criminal denial of their human rights, as well as higher and longer walls.

COVID-19 is exposing the magnitude of the care crisis in our societies: a crisis that has developed over centuries through the failure of the patriarchal, racist, capitalist system to care for peoples, nature and territories, and its reliance on the work and bodies of women to make up for and fix the damage caused by the capitalist neocolonialist system of exploitation. Through the sexual division of labour, women have been and continue to be socially responsible for, and burdened with, care work. Working class women and families and single mothers are forced to choose between confinement in the home or working to feed their families, at the risk of catching the virus. This is particularly true for women suffering from racism. Front line health workers, of which women make up the majority, are facing even greater exploitation with inadequate financial compensation for the risks they take and the responsibilities they have for others.

The globalisation of the free market system, in which transnational corporations play a major role, has led to a devastating rupture between our societies and nature. The coronavirus crisis is unmasking the true extent to which corporate control of food, energy, forests and biodiversity is the primary cause of the destruction of ecosystems that is contributing to the spread of pathogens that will increasingly affect our health. Agribusiness and agrocommodities production is generating huge public health problems, via the destruction of natural habitats and/or livestock farming intensification. Those affected by respiratory and immunological conditions due to dirty energy and other polluting industries, are particularly at risk from infection.

The devastating impacts of extractive industries in the territories of Indigenous Peoples are making them increasingly vulnerable to COVID-19. Their traditional knowledge systems and practices, including health care, food production, storage and consumption, are being weakened. They have continued to be excluded from health care systems and culturally appropriate information about the crisis.

The pandemic is compounding the consequences of decades of both the inaction of rich countries in addressing climate change and their harmful policies. The eyes of the world are rightly on the current health crisis; but climate injustice related disasters, such as the recent cyclone that hit Vanuatu, continue unabated and must be addressed. Peoples in the global South hardest hit by climate impacts are now extremely vulnerable to contracting and spreading COVID-19, and with a lack of access to robust health systems.

A major food crisis is looming, largely in countries that are import dependent and where lands have been grabbed for agrocommodities. As peoples lose their livelihoods and incomes, they will no longer be able to afford food, which is increasingly becoming an object of financial speculation. The closure of local markets in many countries is preventing peasant, family and artisanal food from reaching the population, while privilege is given to large corporations which prioritise profits over the right to healthy food.

We face this pandemic in a context in which democracy is already under attack, with the manipulation of elections through corporate control of our data and the media and even coups d'état in some countries. The rise of the extreme right and neofascism and their misogynist, xenophobic, militaristic and racist discourses and policies is leading to a direct attack on the rights that have been hard won by popular classes and the feminist movement. Many governments have already started silencing voices that defend true democracies and peoples' power and participation, by criminalising and trying to dismantle social organisations and movements.

Women are enduring a brutal rise in violence and femicide across the world. Directives to stay at home are trapping many women and their children in unsafe homes alongside aggressors and perpetrators with nowhere to go and no avenue for help.

We face even larger threats of increased criminal attacks against Defenders of the Territories and Peoples' Rights, as well as the imposition of new detrimental corporate projects, at a time when public scrutiny and capacity for mobilisation and protest is reduced. Countries with little or no sovereignty in the production of many key supplies are vulnerable. The risk of corporations generating profits from this crisis is huge - through control over health and food systems and medicines. Added to which is the very real danger that public expenditure will be used for corporate bailouts, such as climate and biodiversity wrecking fossil fuel corporations.

## Our demands

To address this crisis and its root causes, Friends of the Earth International joins feminist, peasant, trade union, Indigenous Peoples' and other social movements in demanding that governments immediately end repression, drop austerity policies, stop evictions and expand public budgets, tax justice and income distribution. We echo the call for the cancellation of foreign debt.

The centrality of life and care work must be recognised, with stronger environmental regulations, an end to the sexual division of labour and a systemic response to the crisis framed in environmental, social, gender and economic justice and a feminist economy.

Governments must ensure that fundamental rights to health, social security, housing, energy, water, education, transport, food and care work are guaranteed through public services by the

State. They must support the working classes and communities financially. Any public money must be used to put workers, the climate and the long-term health of our planet and peoples first.

National governments and international economic and financial stimulus and recovery packages must aim to create millions of decent jobs that will help power a just transition away from capitalism and the fossil fuel driven economy, and to secure women's autonomy. Governments cannot offer unconditional bailouts to big polluters, such as fossil fuel companies and airlines. We cannot return to business as usual after this crisis. We must lay the foundations for a better world. We cannot afford another cycle of aggressive capitalism and neoliberal policies that destroy the lives of people and our planet.

Governments must strengthen local food systems, decentralised local markets and direct public procurement programs that can guarantee sales for peasants, family and artisanal production and make food available to those that need it most. Existing public programs for children, people with disabilities and all those going hungry must be dramatically improved and expanded.

The ongoing trend of increased corporate power, benefits and impunity must be reversed immediately, including an end to all trade and investment negotiations that further empower transnational corporations, and securing a legally binding treaty on human rights and transnational corporations at the UN.

The Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanisms that enable transnational corporations to sue governments for taking actions to protect lives, arguing that such public interest actions are discriminatory or an indirect expropriation of their investment, must be urgently abolished.

The medical means for tackling the coronavirus, including a future vaccine must be accessible for all, with an immediate global waiver of all Intellectual Property Rights with regards to medical supplies, devices and treatments, including drugs and vaccines.

## Our actions

Our actions now will shape what comes after this crisis. Friends of the Earth International and our allies know the way forward. We must use this opportunity to fight for and build system change, through the dismantling of patriarchy as well as other systems of oppression and corporate power. We need to strengthen our efforts to advance peoples' sovereignty and environmental, social, gender and economic justice.

This is a moment to reaffirm hope, by nurturing and strengthening new emancipatory and ecological paradigms, centred around justice and the sustainability of life, and a new relationship with care work.

Internationalist solidarity across movements and borders is key, as we build our collective response to this crisis, organising and mobilising our communities, organisations and movements to strengthen our own initiatives and fight for our demands.

Our member groups are building and joining local solidarity committees to support those most affected. They are joining social movement policy platforms together with trade unions, peasant and feminist organisations to fight for the right systemic responses to this and the multiple interrelated environmental, climatic and social crises we face. We will continue to stand united with our allies to fight the injustices exposed and compounded by the coronavirus and build the world we need.

*A statement by Friends of the Earth Australia is posted at [www.foe.org.au/covid19\\_response](http://www.foe.org.au/covid19_response)*

# Open Letter: Fund Aboriginal Responses to COVID-19

*Friends of the Earth Australia is one of the many signatories to the following statement.*  
[www.firstnations-covid19-letter.org](http://www.firstnations-covid19-letter.org)

Dear Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP and the National Cabinet, Aboriginal communities are at high risk of the coronavirus crisis. Right across the country, it is Aboriginal community leaders, councils and organisations that are the first responders to this crisis for their communities. They know what solutions are needed and are informing governments across the country on how to best respond to the needs of one of the most at-risk populations to coronavirus.

To date, we are aware that many of their calls for critical support continue to go unanswered.

The Government must work with First Nations people, respond to the requests of community-controlled organisations on the ground and immediately release critical resourcing needed to keep people safe.

In Australia, Indigenous people carry a disease burden over 2.3 times the non-Indigenous population, high rates of chronic disease not only put First Nations people more at risk of dying from coronavirus but it is a significant contributing factor for the difference in life expectancy that sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people die earlier.

There are now 17 confirmed cases in the Kimberley including health workers, and the rate of infection is almost double the national rates. This is extremely concerning for a region where over half the population is Aboriginal – an outbreak here would be devastating.

From the APY Lands to Yarrabah and Alice Springs, regions are calling for special isolation areas and quarantine accommodations for Elders, chronically ill, and people stranded in major towns to avoid catastrophic impacts of a community outbreak. These calls continue to grow louder right across the country.

Aboriginal controlled organisations, leaders and communities are doing everything they can to keep people safe but shops are running out of food, there aren't enough tests or health professionals, services are underfunded and isolating people in already overcrowded housing is near impossible.

It is a national responsibility to urgently respond to the calls from community organisations.

The high rates of chronic illness and disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities only tell half the story. Some of the most influential determinants of health are access to adequate healthcare and housing, and these have been chronically underfunded.

Successive Australian governments have failed to meet national targets that would save lives, and have left Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people extremely vulnerable to the coronavirus crisis.

The fear of losing a generation of Elders presents a significant and unique threat to First Nations communities – Elders don't retire, they are not only beloved family but also hold culture, language and entire communities together.

The calls from Aboriginal organisations can no longer be ignored – they are the experts and the Federal Government must immediately release critical resourcing and work with communities to implement solutions.

On behalf of our millions of members, we urge you meet these requests from Aboriginal organisations, including:

1. Immediate release of emergency funding from the Federal Government to ensure communities and remote health services are well resourced before a potential outbreak – this includes staff, medical equipment, tests and PPE.
2. Isolation and quarantine accommodation. Elders, people who are chronically ill who are the most at-risk need to be isolated from community outbreaks. High-risk community members who are stranded outside of communities in regional areas must be able to adequately quarantine in order to return home.
3. Clear in-language information about the virus. Translation of public health messages is important and slow work and lead organisations are working hard. The National cabinet needs to better inform all levels of community leadership. Police must also work with leaders and organisations and not rush in to enforce curfews and social distancing that haven't been communicated first.
4. Immediate supply of food and essential needs. Supplies have been severely impacted by east coast panic buying, shelves are empty and now price gouging is also affecting communities – people are travelling into stores outside of lockdown areas putting themselves at great risk to secure essential needs.
5. Prevent black deaths in custody. The mass incarceration of Aboriginal people compounded with vulnerability to coronavirus leads to a high risk of black deaths in custody. We call on the government to urgently release people on remand, people sentenced to six months or less, and those eligible for early release, prioritising those most at risk. Police need to use diversion and communications rather than arresting people and using heavy-handed fines.
6. Fully funding community services. Healthcare and housing are two of the most important determinants of health, and successive governments have chronically underfunded these services, leaving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people extremely vulnerable to this virus. This crisis requires full funding of all community services.

# Coronavirus in the media

## The global pandemic has spawned new forms of activism – and they're flourishing

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the world was experiencing unprecedented levels of mass mobilisation. The decade from 2010 to 2019 saw more mass movements demanding radical change around the world than in any period since World War II. Since the pandemic struck, however, street mobilisation – mass demonstrations, rallies, protests, and sit-ins – has largely ground to an abrupt halt in places as diverse as India, Lebanon, Chile, Hong Kong, Iraq, Algeria, and the United States.

The near cessation of street protests does not mean that people power has dissipated. We have been collecting data on the various methods that people have used to express solidarity or adapted to press for change in the midst of this crisis. In just several weeks' time, we've identified nearly 100 distinct methods of nonviolent action that include physical, virtual and hybrid actions – and we're still counting. Far from condemning social movements to obsolescence, the pandemic – and governments' responses to it – are spawning new tools, new strategies, and new motivation to push for change.

In terms of new tools, all across the world, people have turned to methods like car caravans, cacerolazos (collectively banging pots and pans inside the home), and walkouts from workplaces with health and safety challenges to voice personal concerns, make political claims, and express social solidarity. Activists have developed alternative institutions such as coordinated mask-sewing, community mutual aid pods, and crowdsourced emergency funds.

*Abridged from The Guardian, 20 April 2020, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/20/the-global-pandemic-has-spawned-new-forms-of-activism-and-theyre-flourishing](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/20/the-global-pandemic-has-spawned-new-forms-of-activism-and-theyre-flourishing)*

## Coronavirus pandemic 'will cause famine of biblical proportions'

The world is facing widespread famine “of biblical proportions” because of the coronavirus pandemic, the chief of the UN's food relief agency has warned, with a short time to act before hundreds of millions starve.

More than 30 countries in the developing world could experience widespread famine, and in 10 of those countries there are already more than 1 million people on the brink of starvation, said David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Programme.

Covid-19 is likely to be sweeping through the developing world but its spread is hard to gauge. What appears to be certain is that the fragile healthcare systems of scores of developing countries will be unable to cope, and the economic disaster following in the wake of the pandemic will lead to huge strain on resources.

“This is truly more than just a pandemic – it is creating a hunger pandemic,” said Beasley. “This is a humanitarian and food catastrophe.”

Beasley took his message to the UN security council, warning world leaders that they must act quickly in a fast-deteriorating situation. He urged them to bring forward about US\$2bn of aid that has been pledged, so it can get to the frontline as quickly as possible.

“I was already saying that 2020 would be the worst year since the second world war, on the basis of what we forecast at the end of last year,” he said. Added to that, earlier this year East Africa was hit by the worst locust swarms for decades, putting as many as 70 million people at risk.

According to a report produced by the UN and other organisations, at least 265 million people are being pushed to the brink of starvation by the Covid-19 crisis, double the number under threat before the pandemic.

Money alone will not be enough, Beasley added. It is difficult for relief workers to get through lockdowns around the world and set up air bridges when transport is paralysed. “We need money and access – not one or the other, both.”

*Abridged from The Guardian, 22 April 2020, [www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/21/coronavirus-pandemic-will-cause-famine-of-biblical-proportions](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/21/coronavirus-pandemic-will-cause-famine-of-biblical-proportions)*

*See also:*

*World Food Programme report: [www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises](http://www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises)*

*Global Network Against Food Crises report: [www.fightfoodcrises.net/food-crises-and-covid-19/en/](http://www.fightfoodcrises.net/food-crises-and-covid-19/en/)*

*IPS, 22 April 2020, 'Q&A: Continued Social Distancing and Hundreds of Millions More in Poverty - A New Normal for the World?', <http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/qa-continued-social-distancing-hundreds-millions-poverty-new-normal-world/>*

## Carbon emissions will drop, but experts fear 'revenge pollution'

While the recent drop in carbon emissions is real and measurable, few experts believe the economic shutdown caused by the coronavirus will have any lasting positive impact on curbing climate change.

In China the reduction in atmospheric pollution has been profound. Nationwide coal use this year is down 36 per cent over the same period in 2019, the World Economic Forum reported. According to the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, in the month after the Lunar New Year on February 12, fine particle air pollution was down 25 per cent and nitrogen by 40 per cent compared with the same period a year earlier.

As the virus spreads similar drops are being measured around the world. All of this should be good news, but few experts are celebrating. This is because historically, despite all the rhetoric by governments around the world about the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions, the only time they have ever actually dropped has been during global crises.

A study published in the journal *Nature* found emissions in that country fell by 10 per cent between 2007 and 2009 due to a reduction in the use of goods and services as a result of the financial crisis, while another in *Nature Geoscience* shows the only other falls were caused by the two World Wars and the Great Depression.

Depending on where stimulus money lands, new high-emissions sources could be locked in for the long haul. This process is already apparent in China, which issued permits for more new coal fired power stations in the first two and half weeks of March than it did all of last year.

Li Shuo, a senior climate policy adviser for Greenpeace East Asia, calls the tendency of emissions to leap after crises "revenge pollution". Climate scientists and activists are alive to the threat and are already calling for governments to create "green" stimulus packages.

*Abridged from The Age, 29 March 2020, [www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/carbon-emissions-will-drop-but-experts-fear-revenge-pollution-20200327-p54eft.html](http://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/carbon-emissions-will-drop-but-experts-fear-revenge-pollution-20200327-p54eft.html)*

See also:

*CarbonBrief, 9 April 2020, 'Analysis: Coronavirus set to cause largest ever annual fall in CO2 emissions', [www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-coronavirus-set-to-cause-largest-ever-annual-fall-in-co2-emissions](http://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-coronavirus-set-to-cause-largest-ever-annual-fall-in-co2-emissions)*

*The Guardian, 10 April 2020, 'Climate crisis: in coronavirus lockdown, nature bounces back - but for how long?', [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/09/climate-crisis-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-nature-bounces-back-but-for-how-long](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/09/climate-crisis-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-nature-bounces-back-but-for-how-long)*

*The Guardian, 11 April 2020, 'It's positively alpine!': Disbelief in big cities as air pollution falls', [www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/11/positively-alpine-disbelief-air-pollution-falls-lockdown-coronavirus](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/11/positively-alpine-disbelief-air-pollution-falls-lockdown-coronavirus)*

## Here's what the coronavirus pandemic can teach us about tackling climate change

The global response to the coronavirus crisis shows that governments can take immediate, radical emergency measures, which go beyond purely economic concerns, to protect the well-being of all. Specifically, there are practical lessons and opportunities we can take away from the coronavirus emergency as we seek to tackle climate change:

*Act early:* The coronavirus pandemic shows the crucial importance of early action to prevent catastrophic consequences.

*Go slow, go local:* Coronavirus has forced an immediate scale-down of how we travel and live. People are forging local connections, shopping locally, working from home and limiting consumption to what they need.

Researchers have identified that fears about personal well-being represent a major barrier to political support for the degrowth movement to date. However with social distancing expected to be in place for months, our scaled-down lives may become the "new normal". Many people may realise that consumption and personal well-being are not inextricably linked.

*Spend on clean energy:* The International Energy Agency (IEA) says clean energy should be "at the heart of stimulus plans to counter the coronavirus crisis". The IEA has called on governments to launch sustainable stimulus packages focused on clean energy technologies. It says hydrogen and carbon-capture also need major investment to bring them to scale, which could be helped by the current low interest rates.

Governments could also use coronavirus stimulus packages to reskill workers to service the new "green" economy, and address challenges in healthcare, sanitation, aged care, food security and education.

*Abridged from The Conversation, 27 March 2020, <https://theconversation.com/heres-what-the-coronavirus-pandemic-can-teach-us-about-tackling-climate-change-134399>*

## Coronavirus giving some European governments an excuse to tighten grip on power

In Hungary, which has been steadily transformed into what its Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has proudly declared an "illiberal state", the Government has swept away checks on its power. While the Hungarian constitution provides for special measures during a declared state of emergency, Mr Orbán has instead introduced new legislation which confers upon his administration the ability to rule by fiat. The legislation creates two new crimes. Breaching quarantine is now punishable by up to eight years in prison. And a three-year term awaits those who transgress a new sedition-like restriction on public speech.

In Poland, Bulgaria and Kosovo, the public health crisis has also been exploited as a political opportunity.

In Warsaw, the ruling Law and Justice Party is planning to press ahead with a presidential election in early May. While President Andrzej Duda holds court on television, thanks to Poland's pliant state broadcaster, the Opposition is banned on health grounds from holding rallies.

In Bulgaria, the Parliament granted new powers to the Government to use mobile phone data to track the populace - ostensibly to police the quarantine of those infected or exposed to COVID-19. It has also set up checkpoints around Roma communities - an ethnic minority often pilloried in Bulgarian society.

Kosovo's Government recently collapsed and its prime minister was deposed after President Hashim Thaci, a former militiaman once accused of war crimes, attempted to shift all executive power to an emergency security council which he heads.

*Abridged from the ABC, 2 April 2020, [www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-02/eastern-european-regimes-exploit-coronavirus/12109720](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-02/eastern-european-regimes-exploit-coronavirus/12109720)*

## Australia's energy minister pushing fossil fuel projects

It is a federal government program for which there appears to exist no constitutional or legislative authority, which has no established guidelines for assessing projects and an opaque process for allocating millions of taxpayer dollars. It's something called the Underwriting New Generation Investment (UNGI) program and it's the baby of the federal Energy minister, Angus Taylor. And in recent weeks, as the attention of the nation's media and populace has been focused on the Covid-19 crisis, it moved a couple of steps forward.

One step was the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments, which encompassed a broad range of energy initiatives, not all of them bad in environmental terms. But buried in the various attached schedules to the agreement are measures designed to prop up coal-fired electricity generators and weaken environmental protections.

Schedule F is particularly interesting, promising Commonwealth support through UNGI for three power generation projects in the state – one of them the very old, very dirty Vales Point coal power station.

While Australia's attention has been consumed by the coronavirus pandemic, projects and policymaking has continued elsewhere, largely unscrutinised. Indeed, the crisis has provided cover and a convenient excuse for some contentious, alarming or outright dodgy decisions – particularly on the issues of environment, climate and energy.

For example, at the end of March, the NSW government gave approval for United States coalminer Peabody to extend operations under Woronora Reservoir, which supplies drinking water to parts of Sydney and areas south.

A few days before the Woronora decision in NSW, the Victorian government announced it will end a five-year moratorium restricting onshore gas exploration. Victoria was under heavy financial pressure from the federal government to do this. Angus Taylor made it a prerequisite for federal funding for other energy development in the state.

State governments in South Australia and Western Australia have given big financial breaks to minerals and petroleum companies in recent weeks – exempting them temporarily from having to meet various fees and expenditure requirements.

As Greenpeace notes in an extensive list of exemptions, benefits and special deals done for the resources sector under the cover of Covid-19, fossil fuel extraction has been deemed a "critical industry", even as workers in other sectors of the economy have been instructed to stay home to limit the spread of the disease.

*Abridged from The Saturday Paper, 11 April 2020, 'Angus Taylor's energy projects push', [www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2020/04/11/angus-taylors-energy-projects-push/15865272009679](http://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2020/04/11/angus-taylors-energy-projects-push/15865272009679)*



Image by Perry Tse.

## Beware what's happening under the cover of COVID

While we've been forced into inaction, our governments have taken the brakes off. While we've been meditating our way to our better selves they've been busy beating the bejesus out of the environment.

There's the proposal, currently on exhibition, to destroy seven hectares of parkland, including Yurulbin Park in Sydney, and other harbourside sites including Balls Head Reserve for "temporary" Western Harbour Tunnel construction sites. This dirty tunnel, bringing WestConnex traffic jams to the north shore and toll revenues to the buccaneers, is a project we can no longer afford.

There's the newly approved extension of Peabody Energy's longwall coalmine beneath Woronora Dam, in Sydney's water catchment. Coronavirus offers the perfect excuse to ignore the 10,000-plus petition opposing this mine extension and wantonly "fast-track" jobs.

Similar exemptions apply to fly-in-fly-out mining. These practices send oil, coal, gas and CSG workers into regional and remote communities with no requirements to self-isolate, endangering remote and Indigenous communities that are already vulnerable – simply to entrench our fossil fuel addiction. Wouldn't this actually be a moment to explore distributed and onsite renewable generation?

Then there's the recent advent of genetically modified milk cows in country Victoria. These cows are from sperm that US firm Recombinetics (using the CRISPR-like Talens technology) modified for hornlessness. It's marketed as "animal welfare". In fact, though, it's about time and money; letting farmers crowd cows unnaturally and achieve hornlessness more quickly than by breeding.

The US demands such products be safety-tested as GM. In Australia, the Office of Gene Technology Regulation also regards them as GM but has accepted them. This leaves Food Standards Australia and New Zealand as the last hurdle between this GM milk and your breakfast table. But it, too, proposes to "review" what it prefers to call NBT (new breeding techniques) mid 2020, which could easily put this milk, unlabelled, on supermarket shelves. It's politically clever, splitting the opposition by marketing GMOs as animal welfare. But morally indefensible.

And all this as we learn of a further massive reef-bleaching and a 1200 per cent increase in land clearing in NSW since 2016.

It's like they've learned nothing. As if we'll just bounce right back into the headlong race to extinction that got us here. So by all means stay home, stay safe. But do not look away. Let Scott Morrison pray for us but, equally, let us pray for him. Pray to infuse him with clarity, purpose and integrity.

*Abridged from The Age, 4 April 2020, [www.theage.com.au/national/beware-what-s-happening-under-the-cover-of-covid-20200402-p54gi0.html](http://www.theage.com.au/national/beware-what-s-happening-under-the-cover-of-covid-20200402-p54gi0.html)*

## Coronavirus is not some great leveller: it is exacerbating inequality right now

UK – Coronavirus is not some grand leveller: it is an amplifier of existing inequalities, injustices and insecurities. We hear the constant invoking of the second world war: but despite the horror of Nazi bombs, the living standards and health of poorer Britons benefited from rationing and full employment. In the age of Covid-19, the rubble of economic collapse will fall on those who suffered the most from the last crash: the young, the precarious, the low-paid.

If you are wealthy, you have savings; you may own your property outright, or at least have relief in the form of a mortgage holiday. Renters on the other hand, who even in normal times part with a huge portion of their wage bills, now have the National Residential Landlords Association wagging its fingers in their faces, telling them that the pandemic is not a “green light” for them not to pay their rent. Many find themselves asking what exactly they’re meant to pay their rent with.

As the Institute for Fiscal Studies notes, the better-off may actually increase their savings but poorer households spend much more of their limited income on necessities, leaving them vulnerable to sudden falls in their incomings. Indeed, millions who spend their lives treading water now face being sucked under by strong currents.

The wealthy are also more likely to be able to work from home. In the United States, a study of mobile data reveals that the wealthy are moving around less than the least well-off: they can afford to self-isolate and did so quicker than their poorer fellow citizens.

Then there’s the issue of space. While many middle-class children play in expansive gardens, much of the urban poor find themselves locked away in overcrowded accommodation, risking a police reprimand if they loiter around parks.

Finally, nurses, care workers, bus drivers, supermarket workers are rightly designated the title of “key worker”, but what compensation for years of being undervalued, underpaid and now at particular risk of exposure to a potentially lethal illness.

*Abridged from The Guardian (UK), 10 April 2020, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/09/coronavirus-inequality-managers-zoom-cleaners-offices](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/09/coronavirus-inequality-managers-zoom-cleaners-offices)*

## Five ways coronavirus lockdowns increase inequality

The worst effects of social distancing will undoubtedly be felt by the young, the poor and the socially disadvantaged. Here are five key ways how.

1. Access to money: While older people are clearly more susceptible to the symptoms of coronavirus, they typically have more money at their disposal. More of their incomes will be from pensions, which in the short term at least are less affected by the economic shock resulting from social distancing. Markets are clearly volatile, but have barely erased two years of gains from their recent all-time highs. But those without savings to tide them through the lockdown, including many younger people involved in the gig economy as well as the self-employed and small business owners, are struggling.
2. Access to work: Leaving aside those involved in healthcare and other essential jobs, higher-paid desk-working professionals are most likely to have the means, the opportunity and the know-how to work effectively from home. Lower-paid or blue-collar workers, the self-employed, and small businesses in the hospitality industry – and many trades deemed as non-essential by the state – are having a very hard time indeed.
3. Access to education: Many educational institutions around the world in putting all learning and assessment online, or suspending it altogether for the foreseeable future. This disadvantages those without access to a good internet connection, good IT equipment, a good home study environment, and the technical knowledge essential for online learning, or the means to obtain it.
4. Effects of social distancing on health: There is a large and growing body of evidence showing substantial mental and physical health benefits from taking regular exercise and fresh air in the natural environment. Many people in big cities have no outside space of their own to venture out into, let alone access to the great outdoors, yet more crowded and densely packed housing increases the need to access open space, both for mental and physical health. Now parks are being shut, despite being a lifeline to many. The toll of social distancing on the less advantaged will outlast the time spent in lockdown.
5. Societal division: A disturbing phenomenon of this pandemic is the emerging trend which seems to imply that individual pleasure is not allowed during a national state of emergency. It seems that all of the risks involved with people spending more time outside could easily be addressed by implementing simple behaviour changes. Unless a new approach is adopted, future research will show that current social distancing guidelines caused long-term ill health, inequality, and social division that exceeded the short-term benefits.

*Abridged from The Conversation, 8 April 2020, <https://theconversation.com/five-ways-coronavirus-lockdowns-increase-inequality-135767>*

## Under cover of pandemic, fossil fuel interests unleash lobbying frenzy

A new report by UK-based think tank InfluenceMap summarises fossil fuel lobbying during the time of the pandemic, pointing to specific examples of how fossil fuel interests around the world are using the cover of the coronavirus crisis to advance their agenda.

“The oil and gas sector appears to be the most active globally in the above two lobbying areas, demanding both financial support and deregulation in response to the COVID-19 crisis,” the report states.

*Desmog Blog, 2 April 2020, ‘Under cover of pandemic, fossil fuel interests unleash lobbying frenzy’, <https://www.desmogblog.com/2020/04/02/coronavirus-fossil-fuel-lobbying-trump-influencemap>*

*InfluenceMap report: <https://influencemap.org/report/The-Coronavirus-Crisis-and-Climate-Lobbying-23249d39450ff19b441090a6a50174eb>*

## U.N. releases report on socio-economic effects of coronavirus

As the number of coronavirus cases continues to grow, concerns are simultaneously growing about the current and long-term effects this will have on certain demographics – specifically, women, the youth, migrant workers, and many employees around the world. The United Nations has launched a report ‘Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19’ that detailed how these communities are affected disproportionately by the current pandemic and quarantine.

At the centre of it remains one demographic that likely bear the strongest brunt of it: women. “The fact that women make up 70 percent of the global health workforce puts them at greater risk of infection,” read part of the report. “The current crisis threatens to push back the limited gains made on gender equality and exacerbate the feminisation of poverty, vulnerability to violence, and women’s equal participation in the labour force.”

But just because women make up almost three-quarters of global healthcare professionals, does not mean they’re given the proper respect. According to a March 2019 report by the World Health Organisation, despite having such a crucial role in the public health industry, women continue to face various kinds of abuse or negligence in society, including but not limited to being attributed to a “lower status” or engaging in paid and often, unpaid roles, and being subject to gender bias and harassment.

Meanwhile, given such a large percentage of the workers are women, the requirement of child-care can hinder a woman’s ability to work during the pandemic. According to the Centre for American Progress, currently millions of healthcare workers have a child under the age of 14, who might be struggling to manage between going to work and taking care of their children.

Another demographic that is deeply affected as a result of the pandemic are migrant workers.

“Migrants account for almost 30 percent of workers in some of the most affected sectors in OECD countries,” read the report. “Massive job losses among migrant workers will have knock on effects on economies heavily dependent on remittances, such as El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Tonga, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.”

Beyond migrant workers, the International Labour Organisation estimates that the current crisis in the labour market could see millions of job losses. “The current crisis exacerbates the feminisation of poverty, vulnerability to violence, and women’s equal participation in the labour force,” the report noted, highlighting that even amid joblessness, women will be affected disproportionately.

*Abridged from IPS, 3 April 2020, [www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/u-n-releases-report-socio-economic-effects-coronavirus/](http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/u-n-releases-report-socio-economic-effects-coronavirus/)*

*United Nations, March 2020, ‘Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19’, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>*

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



Health care workers, New York City, 6 April 2020.

## USA: EPA issues unprecedented ‘license to pollute’ during pandemic

The US Environmental Protection Agency has given industrial facilities like power plants, which are required to report their discharge of air or water pollution, permission to monitor themselves at least for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>1</sup> The EPA also will not penalise industries for failing report violations while the policy is in place.

The Trump administration’s roll-back of clean car standards will increase gasoline bills, cut jobs, and stifle innovation.<sup>2</sup> The illegal rollback will lead to a massive amount of carbon pollution; cost drivers more than US\$176 billion at the pump, and harm the U.S. economy. Just as important, automakers already have shown they can meet the standards. The roll-back faces legal challenges.

The Guardian reported on 10 April 2020: “Oil company executives have lobbied Donald Trump for a bailout. Under the cover of the crisis, the White House has rolled back fuel-economy standards for the car industry, the Environmental Protection Agency has stopped enforcing environmental laws, three states have criminalised fossil fuel protesters and construction has resumed on the KXL oil pipeline. The US government’s massive economic stimulus bill also included a US\$50 billion bailout for aviation companies.”<sup>3</sup>

In another effort to undermine the ongoing climate crisis and push an anti-environmental agenda, the Trump administration has released its signature Clean Water Act rollback, the Dirty Water Rule.<sup>4</sup> Trump’s decision to roll back these protections exacerbates the vulnerability of people’s health amid a public health crisis.

Angel Peña, President of the Nuestra Tierra Conservation Project, said: “The Dirty Water Rule is a radical misinterpretation of the Clean Water Act that will wipe out protections for streams and rivers used by rural, urban, and tribal communities for fishing and recreation. Clean water is essential for healthy fish, wildlife, native habitat, and quality outdoor recreation opportunities.”

Mark Magaña, Founding President and CEO of GreenLatinos, said: “Even in times of crisis, when our economy is in shambles and our public health is at risk, Trump continues to push our communities down and feed the pockets of polluters dumping toxic chemicals into our water sources. The Trump administration is taking a huge step backwards on our important water protections, by failing to enforce and weakening clean water rules for corporate polluters.”

1. [www.nrdc.org/experts/nrdc/epa-issues-unprecedented-license-pollute-during-pandemic](http://www.nrdc.org/experts/nrdc/epa-issues-unprecedented-license-pollute-during-pandemic)

2. [www.nrdc.org/experts/luke-tonachel/six-facts-about-trumps-clean-cars-rollback](http://www.nrdc.org/experts/luke-tonachel/six-facts-about-trumps-clean-cars-rollback)

3. [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/09/climate-crisis-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-nature-bounces-back-but-for-how-long](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/09/climate-crisis-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-nature-bounces-back-but-for-how-long)

4. GreenLatinos media release, 22 April 2020, ‘As America Faces a Public Health Crisis, Trump’s Release of the Dirty Water Rule Endangers Lives’

# Towards a national offshore wind strategy for climate action: Opportunities and challenges

Pat Simons

While Australia remains caught in a culture war over action on climate change, the opportunity to kickstart a domestic offshore wind sector could be key to rapidly cutting emissions and creating a new source of good blue collar jobs in the regions.

Over the past decade offshore wind has emerged as a mature industry in the northern hemisphere, particularly in Europe and parts of North America. In the UK, the government has inked a multi-billion dollar deal to guarantee the country gets 30% of its electricity from offshore wind by 2030. In the US the New York State's Offshore Wind Master Plan has laid a pathway to building 2 gigawatts of new offshore wind projects, with plans to secure domestic manufacturing and unionised jobs on every project.

Australia's renewable energy sector has long been dominated by onshore wind, and more recently solar, but has no existing offshore wind projects, supply chain or legal framework at the state or national level. That is now changing.

After much delay by the federal government, marine studies are finally getting underway into the country's first offshore wind farm the Star of the South proposed for Gippsland South in Victoria's east. It was only through public pressure from Friends of the Earth and the Maritime Union of Australia this was made possible, but a key barrier remains the lack of any legislation for the sector as a whole.

During the height of the summer bushfires consultation was announced for a draft offshore wind regulatory framework, with consultation closing in February. As might be expected from a government that has been no friend to action on climate change, the draft framework is a hands-off, market-led approach. This is completely inadequate if Australia is to seize the significant benefits offshore wind represents for the energy system, jobs and climate action. What follows are key steps state and federal governments could undertake to make Australia a leader in offshore wind.

## Put climate front and centre of building offshore wind

After experiencing the most disastrous bushfire season in living memory, there is no doubt we are living in a time of climate crisis. We need to rapidly reign in emissions as a society here and

now. The opportunity to build an offshore wind sector in Australia would supercharge the country's efforts on climate change. The Star of the South project alone has the potential to power 1.2 million homes with renewable energy. Its total generation capacity is comparable to the Hazelwood coal fired power station that closed on the 31st March, 2017. Building the project would create 2,000 direct jobs during the construction phase, around 300 jobs ongoing presents opportunities for local manufacturing, and will have flow-on economic benefits. At a time when the region's aging coal fired generators are likely to close, this would provide an entirely new source of reliable electricity supply for Victoria and blue collar jobs in the Latrobe Valley.

Because offshore wind farms can be built using taller towers and larger components, they can access higher and more stable wind speeds at sea. This is why the International Energy Agency now considers offshore wind a form of 'Variable Baseload' – meaning it has potential to replace coal in the energy grid alongside onshore wind and solar and energy storage. With Australia heading towards 50% renewables by 2030 based on business as usual, offshore wind would be a steep change in efforts to cut emissions.

So the lack of reference to climate change in the draft national framework is a staggering omission – offshore wind could be front and centre of efforts to cut emissions and deliver a fair just transition for workers in the fossil fuel sector.

## Assess the best places for offshore wind, and mobilise the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to help fund projects

Placing emission cuts at the centre of offshore wind policy gives governments strategic focus to proactively build the sector, and maximise the economic benefits for the community. For example, the federal government could undertake a national strategic assessment of offshore wind zones mapping offshore wind resources and identifying the best places to build projects to plug into the grid, minimising impacts on sensitive marine ecosystems. This is an approach many other countries with successful offshore wind industries, such as Denmark and the UK, have embraced. Currently this would be up to the private sector – likely to act as a barrier to entry to new projects, slowing decarbonisation of the electricity system. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation's remit could be expanded to include offshore wind so it can help fund the sector at this early stage, as it has done successfully with onshore wind and solar, securing billions of dollars in public finance. Skills and training packages could be delivered by a Just Transition Authority to ensure communities like the Latrobe Valley, and workers in the existing coal, oil and gas industries are able to access jobs in offshore wind. These are the kinds of opportunities the Morrison government is failing to seize.

## We need a dedicated offshore wind agency – not a fox in charge of the hen house

The most concerning element of the draft framework is the proposal to put the offshore oil and gas regulator, the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Agency (NOPSEMA), in charge of regulating offshore wind.

NOPSEMA is a statutory authority that is funded through cost-recovery measures on the offshore oil and gas industry. This is a polluting industry with a poor track record of protecting ecosystems and workers from industrial accidents, and is a significant contributor to global warming.

Building offshore wind will have huge implications for overall system-wide management of the electricity grid --- how can the community

have trust that an offshore petroleum agency whose existence is tied to the oil and gas industry would manage the transition to offshore wind? This should be the responsibility of a dedicated agency.

Australia remains in the early stages of the development of the offshore wind. If undertaking rapid action on climate change is placed at the centre of a national offshore wind strategy, we can seize the huge opportunity to create good climate jobs and rapidly decarbonise the electricity sector at the same time.

*Pat Simons is the coordinator of the Yes 2 Renewables collective with Friends of the Earth Melbourne.*

# \$2 billion for Coal Seam Gas expansion in NSW

Kristine Philipp

On 31 January 2020, ABC news reported that the federal government coughed up \$2 billion to NSW, the first of many agreements, to expand Coal Seam Gas for gas-fired electricity production across Australia. The water-hungry Narrabri gas project is central to the deal. Expansion is being driven by projected LNG exports for quick and dirty profit.

The Prime Minister is spruiking gas as a “transitional fuel” despite its high carbon emissions. Gas drilling has been leaking more methane into the atmosphere than previously thought according to recent research by ANSTO.<sup>1</sup>

On the ground, extraction means drilling gas wells and laying pipelines across vast tracks of unique Indigenous country and valued farm land, threatening the Great Artesian Basin and the mighty Pilliga Forest.

Raymond “Bubbly” Weatherall, Gunu Gunu clan and Biridja clan, says the Gamilaraay people are fighting Coal Seam Gas for “our water, the environment and the land itself. We have no choice but to fight, because this is our country,

our culture, and the planet we all depend on.”<sup>2</sup> Santos’ Narrabri gas seam project is the largest ever proposed in NSW, laying two feet wide pipes in the Pilliga Scrub, sinking 850 gas wells, out of each well a truck load of salt with nowhere to go.<sup>3</sup> You can view a grim pictorial history of Coal Seam Gas in the Pilliga online.<sup>4</sup>

In NSW, Lock the Gate is actively resisting the Narrabri gas expansion, developing Lock the Gate Tip Sheets with information to help build local campaigns, how to start an action group, and how to keep groups functioning effectively.<sup>5</sup> Like and follow Protecting the Pilliga on facebook<sup>6</sup> or donate to Lock the Gate Santos Appeal.<sup>7</sup>

Pilliga Rising, a 38-minute documentary, gives a heart-warming insight into community resistance to Coal Seam Gas in the Pilliga forest and across north-west NSW. Wherever you are, The Wilderness Society Newcastle invites supportive individuals and groups to host a screening of ‘Pilliga Rising’, at your local community centre, university or in your living room.<sup>8</sup> You can also watch it online.<sup>9</sup>

In Melbourne, Friends of the Earth continues to campaign against fracking and conventional gas drilling. You can Volunteer with FOE to join ongoing collective action with No New Fossil Fuels Victoria.<sup>10</sup> Your voice is more important than ever to protect Australia from gas expansion and shift to a clean, green energy future.

*Kristine Philipp is a volunteer researcher with FoE Melbourne’s Act on Climate collective.*

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# Playing politics on climate action?

Tony Webb

What is needed if our democracy is to tackle the current climate emergency? A major obstacle to change is the way we allow our thinking to be constrained by what we believe to be possible – rather than what we know to be necessary.

Calls for “our leaders to stop playing politics” on the issue and “come together” to achieve results fail to recognise that the politicking is to a very large extent within federal Liberal-National Coalition where internal divisions have blocked every practical policy proposal and unseated leaders when anything came close to being enacted.

On the other side, in government Labor activated the carbon tax that significantly reduced emissions and softened the economic impact on those most vulnerable. An, albeit imperfect, Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) was blocked by the Greens siding with the Coalition. In opposition Labor agreed to support the government’s National Energy Guarantee (NEG) which, while a fifth-rate option, would have delivered a bipartisan framework, supported by industry, that could be built on over time. Opposition from hard core climate-change deniers within the Coalition – playing politics within their own parties killed the NEG and led to another round of leadership change.

Perhaps the call for an end to political games is not just aimed at members of the government because Labor has failed to mount an effective challenge and because it also failed to tackle opposition within its own ranks. It has failed to counter the view that action on climate change is a threat to jobs particularly in the coal industry. It has allowed the debate to be framed by the government and sections of the media in terms of ‘jobs versus the environment’. The reality is that jobs will be lost if we do not make the transition – in energy, transport, industry, housing, agriculture and land use. What is needed is nothing less than a thoroughgoing structural transformation of the technological economic and social base of our society.

The good news is that this transformation can create new jobs in more sustainable industries for the future – but social, economic and environmental justice requires some serious planning and a mixture of direct government and market-driven investment in new technologies and the training, job guarantee/assistance programs and new jobs in the right places. Sections of industry, finance and insurance recognise the need for change but planning and investment is currently hampered by lack of coherent overarching policy and totally inappropriate policy signals.

## The story carries the message?

Successful politics is about being able to articulate a clear intelligible case that can be understood and accepted by the voting population – and increasingly by those who will be coming of voting age within the next few electoral cycles. The activities of those still school-aged in demanding action on the climate emergency is a call for action among those who wish to be elected over the next decade. What we need to hear now from Labor as the potential alternative government from 2022 onwards are arguments that, together, make this case. It has committed to the target for a carbon-neutral (zero net emissions) economy by 2050 – in line with the global commitment to keep temperature increases below 2 degrees and preferably 1.5 degrees. But this alone is not enough. To achieve it will require both interim targets, plans for how these will be met.

The Coalition target of 26-28% emissions reduction by 2030 puts us on track for a 3 degrees Centigrade temperature rise by mid-century. It is around half Labor’s 45% target that the science in 2015 said was needed – by 2022 we will need emissions reduction targets closer to 67%. Even this will mean greater effects of climate change than we are currently experiencing from just 1 degree of global heating. Potentially a doubling of these effects could be ‘locked in’ for future generations. The ‘normal’ most of us grew up with has passed and every year we delay changes increases the risks, the challenge/difficulty and importantly the costs. While accurately modelling these costs is difficult what is certain is that delays now will cost more later.

Alongside this there must be a realistic message of hope and opportunity. The challenge can be met. We know what needs to be and can be done at least in the short run to significantly reduce the pollution that is driving the climate changes. We know how to generate electricity from sun and wind and with a suitable level of storage using batteries and pumped hydro and integrating the domestic rooftop solar into the system as ‘virtual power plants’ we can have a national electricity supply that is cleaner, more reliable, and significantly cheaper than the current antiquated carbon-polluting one. Electrically driven vehicles (EVs) are already cost- and performance-competitive with those powered by petrol and diesel. There is scope for a new Australian car industry based on EVs. We know how to generate hydrogen as a ‘portable’ fuel from water using electricity. It can replace carbon in the smelting process to produce steel and other metals from their ores.

The ‘normal’ most of us grew up with has passed and every year we delay changes increases the risks, the challenge/difficulty and importantly the costs.

Housing comfort can be improved through building codes that mandate better thermal efficiency and bush-fire resistance standards. Land use and agricultural practices present a challenge but many measures regarding land clearing, strategic bush fire management and changes to animal feed that reduce emissions are already understood. A national water management strategy is needed to better manage demands for domestic, commercial-industrial, agricultural, and environmental uses.

The technological and other changes needed will inevitably result in workers in a wide range of existing jobs being affected but they will also create many new jobs. Fair and equitable job-transition policies are needed that expand the workforce skill base and deliver new, cleaner/safer and hopefully more satisfying jobs in the communities affected. Again, the earlier these are developed the easier the transition.

Both current and future policies involve costs and benefits. The environmental and economic devastation from drought fire and flood indicates ongoing costs of inaction. Set against these are benefits from Australia developing, adopting and potentially exporting sustainable technologies. History teaches that capitalism survives, reinvents itself and thrives by adopting new technologies. It also highlights critical roles for government in planning and supporting changes so that benefits are equitably distributed.

Much of the capital needed to finance investment in these changes is currently wasted in 'speculative' activity. 'Casino capitalism' makes money for a few, already rich, leaving less for investment in real wealth and job creating enterprises for the many. A future government must rein in the finance sector - as was done last century in the 'New Deal' era following the 1930s financial crisis and WW2 - and develop programs that draw on both direct government and private investment funds. While Australia's super funds currently participate in the speculative economy to benefit existing members they recognise this reduces investment in real wealth and job-creating enterprises that allow members to contribute to their 'super' in the first place. Wealth-creating opportunities delivering reasonable returns at low risk would be welcomed.

## A challenge for Labor?

Advocating these policies is far from playing politics. Anything less is less than what is needed. Labor must make the challenges and opportunities of climate change central to the debate and future policy so it has a mandate for these by 2022.

It will be attacked. Its policies need to be defended and accepted well before then. Some will come

from within. There is a legitimate need to 'protect' workers and their communities from crisis-driven closures of coal mines and power stations. But it needs to be said that there is no long-term future for these jobs. Domestic and global markets on which they rely are declining and will close within decades. Further investment in these is a waste of money and will not protect jobs (new 'automated' mines often mean job losses in existing ones).

There is no long-term future for thermal coal or electricity from coal-fired generators. Replacing coal with hydrogen in refining of metal ores is necessary. It only needs a plan for research and development of the technology and job-skills to make it happen. Similarly, oil and gas can now only be very temporary transition fuels, with limited future uses predominantly as feedstocks for chemical industries. Starting a discussion about how a 'just transition' to new jobs based on the technologies outlined above needs to start now - not when the crisis makes change inevitable.

Such a political debate will require leadership that speaks truth to power. While getting the messaging right is essential, we need leadership that does not resile from the essentials. Polling and focus-group research can inform but should not define the narrative - particularly when this reflects public opinion distorted by mainstream and social media campaigns from opponents of the climate emergency. It is disturbing that some poll-driven 'research' suggests policy development needs to avoid mention of 'climate' or joining with the global movement for a Green New Deal because it includes the word "green". Whatever we call it we need to develop details of the plans that make Australia 'climate change ready' - plans that explain what is needed and how meeting the challenge will be met and in the process create jobs in all sectors of the economy.

However we 'badge it' we need a policy that defines targets and dates along the path we know we must follow to meet the challenge of carbon neutrality by 2050. We also need policies for financial regulation and government-led programs that direct investment into building this sustainable future. We need a government with a policy mandate to lead by creating this new more sustainable political economy - fairer and more future oriented. A government with a new 'deal', agreement' or 'compact' with the public for action that results in the kind of changes outlined above. One that, whatever colour we chose to label it with, has a clear commitment to being socially and economically as well as environmentally sustainable - something we can be proud to leave to our grandchildren.

*Dr. Tony Webb is a member of the Labor Environment Action Network.*

Such a political debate will require leadership that speaks truth to power.

# Friends of the Earth present to Vic parliamentary inquiry into community action on climate

Leigh Ewbank

*On 26 February 2020, Friends of the Earth had the opportunity to present to the Victorian Parliament's inquiry into community action on climate change. Here's Act on Climate coordinator Leigh Ewbank's statement to the Planning & Environment committee.*

In my time at Friends of the Earth, I've seen the incredible commitment of Victorian communities to tackling the climate crisis.

Friends of the Earth is a community-driven organisation formed in 1974. We have been a strong voice for environmental protection and social justice since then. We have been engaged on the issue of climate change for over two decades and work towards cutting greenhouse gas emissions and building resilience through practical programs and advocacy.

Friends of the Earth's Food Co-op & Café in Collingwood is a case in point. With produce from 150 farmers across the state, the café serves organic, seasonal, and vegan meals to our community every day. The intentional use of local produce minimises the embodied carbon emissions from excessive transportation. Each year the café serves over 24,000 plates of food including to vulnerable people in the neighbourhood. The co-op has also pioneered local organic waste composting to demonstrate ways to reduce methane emissions from food waste going to landfill and encourage low-carbon food production. All compostable waste from the café is transported to a nearby primary school, which is only a couple of hundred metres away, where it is composted and used by the students to grow vegetables and educate them about the benefits of urban farming.

In addition to these practical examples, Friends of the Earth has been actively involved in advocacy. Each night of the week, dozens of community members work together on positive solutions. These groups of community members tackle the problem in a holistic way and seek to cut emissions across the whole economy. Some are focused on decarbonising the energy and transport sectors, while others work for protecting forests as carbon stores. [This] community campaigns to protect forests, rivers, and vulnerable species such as koalas to give the natural world a fighting chance as the planet heats up.

Inspiring community action on climate change can be found in all corners of Victoria. Communities are organising info nights, market stalls, radio shows, podcasts, community energy projects, citizen science projects, tree planting, art projects, community gardens, candidates' forums, policy work, and advocacy.

## Community action

I encourage the committee to pay close attention to the following examples for insights into how governments can support communities.

Citizen scientist Aileen Vening from the Bass Coast Climate Action Network has documented dramatic coastal erosion in Inverloch. The local surf beach has seen 50 metres of beach lost to the southern ocean since 2012. The lifesaving clubs patrol box has been moved several times, at great expense, and has been put onto a sled due to the pace of change. The Bunurong Road and multi-million dollar Surf Lifesaving Club are now at risk. The state government has provided emergency funding to arrest the erosion thanks to community members sounding the alarm. Imagine the situational awareness that the government and authorities could gain by supporting citizen science.

The small rural community of Tarnagulla in the Central Goldfields is also worried about climate impacts. Community members are concerned about increased heatwaves and bushfires – an issue compounded by the fact the CFA has shrunk from 45 people to just ten. Thanks to a small grant from the state government, Linda Kennedy and the Tarnagulla Alternative Energy Group have developed a resilience plan with support from RMIT University. But will it be able to find resourcing to roll it out?

When it comes to climate mitigation, community action in the Hepburn Shire is a stand out example of leadership. The community-owned Hepburn Wind farm produces enough renewable energy to offset the carbon footprint of all the homes in Hepburn Springs, Daylesford, and Leonard's Hill. It has helped Victoria avoid 87,000 tonnes of GHG emissions.

The successful Hepburn Wind farm created a platform for the Hepburn Shire to develop a plan to cut emissions across the whole economy to achieve zero-net emissions by 2030. This outcome would ensure the shire does its share of keeping global warming below 1.5C. Will it be able to access the start-up funding to kick off implementation?

There are many other examples of leadership on community energy and storage in Yackandandah, Newstead, Strathbogie Ranges, Bendigo, Ballarat, and elsewhere.

## Recommendations

Based on our longstanding efforts to tackle the climate crisis and engagement with communities across the state, we encourage the committee to consider the following recommendations:

### 1. Science-based climate policy

The Victorian government can show leadership by centring climate science in policy development. For example, the Andrews government will soon set interim Emissions Reduction Targets for 2025 and 2030. With climate impacts occurring much faster than scientists predicted, the litmus test for the government is whether the targets help keep global warming below 1.5C.

The Combet Report identifies a target of 43 percent below 2005 levels by 2025 and 67 percent by 2030 to give us any chance of meeting that goal. A heavier lift up front of a 75 percent by 2030 would give Victoria the carbon budget needed to meet the 1.5°C challenge by 2050 –the legislated deadline for zero-net emissions in the state.

### 2. Opposition support for the Climate Change Act

People of all political persuasions are taking action on climate. The Victorian Parliament has an opportunity to reflect this fact. Bipartisan support for the Climate Change Act 2017 –which enshrines the target of net-zero emission by 2050 into law and sets out the process for target setting, among other things –is an essential step. A public commitment to the Climate Change Act from the opposition would give communities confidence that efforts to rein in emissions will continue regardless of which party forms government.

### 3. A dedicated Victorian Climate Change Action Fund

The communities demand for start-up funding has outpaced what's on offer and it's time for the government to catch up. In 2017, the Andrews government established a \$4.3 million Victorian Climate Change Innovation Partnerships (VCCIP) Grant Scheme to provide start-up funding for community groups, local councils, and businesses. The grant scheme was dramatically oversubscribed.

Despite receiving more than 240 applications, there was only enough funding to support 24 projects (nine in ten missed out on a grant). Friends of the Earth estimate that a fund of \$70 million would have been needed to support all those who applied.

A dedicated \$100 million Victorian Climate Change Action Fund (VCCAF) would fill a key gap. Given that climate impacts and solutions are highly context-specific, a statewide fund would help communities rollout projects that are relevant to their needs.

### 4. Deliver Victoria's first Climate Budget

Each year the government demonstrates its values and priorities in the budget. And Victoria has never had a budget focussed on driving climate action. If the state is to achieve the objectives of the Climate Change Act 2017, deliver emissions cuts, and implement the forthcoming Climate Strategy and Climate Adaptation Plans, we will need to see a down payment on action this term.

The Climate Budget concept is not just about the level of investment, it's about better accounting and transparency. The government cannot afford



Climate rally, Melbourne, November 2018.

to fly blind when it comes to the climate impact of public spending. The Department of Treasury and Finance will have to adopt tools to evaluate the climate dimension of budget decisions to ensure investment flows to initiatives that cut emissions, not increase them.

### 5. A commitment to Climate Justice

The onus for cutting emissions should be on those most responsible for producing them. It would be unjust to place the burden onto those who have contributed least to the problem and future generations. Victorian politicians can show a commitment to fair and just outcomes by:

- Seeking out the view of First Nations people and ensuring they have the support they need to have an active role in policy development.
- Ensuring communities on the frontline of climate impacts are front-of-mind in the development of climate policy.
- Supporting communities dependent on fossil fuels and extractive industries through the transition.

### 6. Scale up transition support

Tackling climate change means cutting emissions in the electricity sector and across the whole economy. Communities currently dependent on fossil fuels and extractive industries will see a lot of change in the years ahead.

The establishment of a dedicated Minister for Transition and scaling up the Latrobe Valley Authority into a statewide Just Transition Authority are two practical steps to give communities the support they need to prosper as Victoria moves towards a zero-carbon economy.

### 7. A public education campaign on climate action

Leadership from the Victorian Premier and government can emphasise the importance of climate action for the general public and deliver results.

In the 2000s, the Bracks' government undertook a public education campaign to build consensus for tackling excessive water use during the Millennium drought. Victorians rose to the challenge, changed their behaviour, and helped the state achieve dramatic water savings. The Victorian government can draw inspiration from this approach and embark on a public education campaign that elevates climate action as a state priority.

# How can public transport help with climate change?

Tsz Ying Sheung (Tracy)

As we know, catastrophic bushfires around south-east Australia are affecting us all. The burning of coal, oil and gas has increased global temperatures. This climatic change has led to drier and hotter weather, and frequent droughts have led to extreme fire conditions. In particular, south-east Australia has had a 25% decline in average rainfall this year. The dry environment has made vegetation more flammable, increasing the severity of the fires.

So how do we mitigate the effects of the climate crisis? Transport is the second biggest greenhouse gas (GHG) contributor in Victoria, making up 20% of total emissions. It will soon overtake even the energy sector. Meanwhile, it makes up 18.8% of total emissions in Australia, making it the third biggest contributor in the country. The transport sector has experienced the largest growth (64.9%) between 1990–2019. We must urge our leaders to reduce GHG emissions through a better transport plan. This should include:

1. Replacing freight from trucks to rail: Freight trucks cause air and noise pollution. This increases air pollutants and GHG in the atmosphere, and adversely affects public health such as asthma and other respiratory diseases. Shifting freight from trucks to railways would have multiple benefits.
2. More infrastructure for active transport: Our leaders must invest in active transport. Cycling, walking, scooting, skating, wheelchairs – our community needs better access for these methods of getting around. Better bike paths, secured bike parking and better road regulation, such as the minimum passing distance law, would be a great start to increase the safety of cyclists and pedestrians.
3. More investment in public transport: There are three main factors which affect the usage rates of public transport – reliability, convenience and safety. In Melbourne, linking our neighbourhood transport hotspots through better connection between buses and other transport, and the development of a light rail, could increase the connectivity within major suburban employment and activity hubs.
4. Less investment on roads: Our leaders must stop investing in road projects. Due to induced demand, building more roads will only encourage more people to drive. It will cause more serious congestion and the continued burning of fossil fuels. In order to mitigate the effects of climate change, we must invest in sustainable transport instead of roads.

## Positive outcomes

Everyone in Melbourne has the right to contribute to our developing city. This means everyone should be able to get where they need in a safe, accessible and sustainable way. A better transport plan is needed to increase liveability.

Reducing energy consumption from private cars will reduce GHG emissions, and a reduction in car use will also decrease air, noise and visual pollution, as well as congestion. Furthermore, improved access to active transport will strengthen our physical and mental health. Not only will people be able to get from A to B when and how they want, but safer and more accessible places will allow our communities to connect and flourish. These factors compounded would improve our physical and mental wellbeing, and reduce heart and respiratory diseases. In the long run, it will extend the community's life expectancy.

Last but not least, infrastructure projects will provide more jobs for the public. The Melbourne Metro rail project has already created over 7000 jobs and the Mernda Railway extension has created over 1200 jobs. Furthermore, an electric bus manufacturing project could provide over 500 jobs. A sustainable transport plan will have significant economic benefits.

## What's next?

The Melbourne Metro 2 (MM2) rail project is the next logical step for Melbourne's transport infrastructure. MM2 would carry up to 40,000 people per hour per track with 2-minute services. Comparing this to the West Gate Tunnel Project: with six lanes, the maximum capacity in peak times is only 6,000 cars each way. MM2 will bring more direct connection from Melbourne's west to the CBD, and will help make Melbourne more liveable and sustainable.

However, the government has not yet committed to MM2. If MM2 begins in 2021, it could be operational by 2031 or earlier. Please join us to urge our leaders to make the right decision on transport. Sign the petition at [www.getonboard.org.au/buildmm2](http://www.getonboard.org.au/buildmm2) and volunteer with the Sustainable Cities campaign to help fight for a more liveable city for all Melburnians.

*Tsz Ying Sheung (Tracy) is a volunteer with FoE Melbourne's Sustainable Cities collective.*



# Climate Bills in federal parliament



Joss at the Melbourne climate rally, March 2019.

Greens leader Adam Bandt has introduced a Climate Emergency Declaration Bill 2020 to federal Parliament to formally declare a climate emergency.

Bandt's Explanatory Memorandum states: "This Bill declares a climate emergency. All public service agencies will be responsible for acting in accordance with the declaration when developing, implementing, providing and evaluating policies and will be required to report on their compliance each reporting period. The Bill will establish a climate emergency war cabinet to guide the country through the rapid society-wide and economy-wide response to the climate change crisis."

Under the Bill, the government would be required to set up a Climate Emergency Committee (a 'war cabinet') to consult, negotiate, lead and report to Cabinet on the implementation of the Climate Emergency Declaration. Government agencies would table annual reports on how they were meeting their obligations.

Bandt's Bill was seconded by independent MP Zali Steggall, who knocked off former Liberal prime minister Tony Abbott for the NSW seat of Warringah at the last election.

Steggall has introduced a separate Bill to Parliament, the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020, to establish a national climate change adaptation and mitigation framework, and to establish the Climate Change Commission.

The Bill proposes mandating a National Climate Risk Assessment, a National Adaptation Program, and a net-zero emissions target by 2050.

Steggall's website explains the unpinning logic behind the Bill:

- Framework legislation is tried and proven legislation that has worked in overseas jurisdictions like the United Kingdom, France and Ireland. It has reduced emissions, helped those countries adapt to climate impacts, and advanced the climate change debate by taking the politics out of it. It works by setting a long-term pathway to net-zero emissions and helps guide decision-making to meet that target. It does this by requiring interim targets or emissions budgets which set a cap on economy-wide emissions.
- By setting statutory targets, rather than just policy-based targets, it signals a greater level of commitment to emission reduction. Setting targets in legislation will also provide parliamentary scrutiny.
- Framework legislation secures long-term policy and planning and ensures climate change action with changes of government. It does this by mandating the Government of the day develop and implement plans to meet those budgets and adapt to warming, which ensures that plans are not shelved and forgotten. All plans are made with overarching principles like intergenerational equity, transparency, fiscal responsibility and the best available science to ensure these plans are fair, equitable and consistent with best practice.

Steggall, in an opinion piece in *The Age*, wrote:

*"My challenge now is to set Australia on a safer climate future, for my kids and future generations. That is why I will be introducing the people's Climate Change Bill to the Australian Parliament in March, to end a decade of divisive politics over Australia's future."*

*"Part of this framework sets up in law a net zero emissions target by 2050. More than 80 per cent of businesses support this, and all Australian states and territories already have this in law or policy. This bill includes establishing an independent Reserve Bank-style Climate Change Commission, tasked with advising government on the best way to get to net zero, climate risks and the progress towards targets. The new Climate Change Commission will report regularly, independently and publicly without referral, and ensure transparency and accountability for the Australian people."*

*"The bill also fills vital gaps in Australia's policy landscape. It will require regular national risk assessments outlining the effect to Australia from climate impacts such as fires, droughts, sea level rise and extreme weather events, and regional development and employment planning impacted by a transition away from fossil fuels. Five-yearly adaptation plans are then implemented by the government in response to those risks. After the performance of the government in preparing for and responding to this season's catastrophic and unprecedented bushfires, the value is clear in having future-focused adaptation and mitigation plans."*

*Climate Emergency Declaration Bill 2020: [www.tinyurl.com/y78t2ng8](http://www.tinyurl.com/y78t2ng8)  
Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020, [www.climateactnow.com.au](http://www.climateactnow.com.au), [www.zalisteggall.com.au](http://www.zalisteggall.com.au)*

# How can we transition the fossil gas industry?

Jim Crosthwaite

With an unpredictable climate already upon us, achieving net zero emissions by 2050 is not enough. Half the world's emissions have been emitted in the past 30 years, and that "to keep warming below 2 degrees Celsius, about four-fifths of the known fossil fuel reserves must not be dug up and burned." (Aronoff *et al.* p.37). This is arguably allowing too much. Net zero emissions allows for any given level of fossil fuel production to be compensated by an equivalent drawdown of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>e through growing trees, planting kelp forests or building up soil carbon. Such measures should be undertaken in their own right, not as offsets that allow emissions from fossil fuels to continue.

The gas industry in Australia is expanding as evidenced by booming exports of liquid natural gas (LNG) to Asia, new fracking fields and new pipeline connections (West 2020). Gas prices in Australia have risen dramatically from below \$4 to over \$8 per gigajoule as big corporations play the international and domestic markets (Robertson 2019), leading to pressure on firms using gas and vulnerable households. Years of alarmist talk of shortages and political pressure has led Victoria into unnecessarily lifting its moratorium on gas exploration. Yes, winter shortages are likely in Victoria by 2025, but not if demand for gas is dramatically reduced.

Reducing current gas use has received less attention than stopping new gas projects or closing coal-fired power stations. Arguably gas is more deeply embedded into the social and economic fabric of Australia than coal. It may be less visible. There are big challenges to a rapid transition away from fossil gas. Understanding the industry, its customers and the people who work in it is a start.

Over six million households burn gas to cook food, heat water and warm living areas. Two million of these homes are in Victoria, and together these homes have 4.9 million appliances. 80% of all Victorian homes are connected to the gas supply (Energy Networks Australia 2017a). Thousands of community organisations, schools and churches also use gas. Apartment blocks may have gas for centralised hot water heating. In the 10 years to 2015, connections nationally grew from 3.8 million to 4.8 million (*ibid.*). Use of gas for hydronic heating, spa and or pool heating, outdoor heating and open fireplaces is expanding.

It is now cheaper to cook, heat water and heat living areas using electricity than gas (Forcey 2016). Wealthier households with solar

power may be removing gas, but it is not an easy decision for most. In emergencies, households are still replacing gas with gas. Gas and electric hot water heaters are rated equally in building standards, thanks in part to lobbying by the industry.

130,000 businesses in Australia use gas:

- Gas is used for heating commercial premises such as offices, factories, hotels, restaurants and government buildings.
- Commercial kitchens use gas for heat in ovens, ranges, fryers and steamers.
- In manufacturing, gas is used in kilns, boilers, dehumidifiers, ovens, heaters, furnaces and desiccators.
- Mining, construction, transport and electricity generation are also large users.
- Gas is also a feedstock in manufacturing. It is one source of the hydrogen required for ammonia production. Ethane is produced from natural gas, and is the basis for plastics.
- Gas may be used for onsite electricity production (while sometimes cogenerating heat)

Reducing gas use by major users producing aluminium, non-ferrous metals, plastics and chemicals is an obvious priority, and Beyond Zero Emissions has shown the technical feasibility of doing so (BZE 2018). However, the widespread use of gas in households and businesses gives the industry opportunities to defend itself, which it is doing by all means possible.

Going further, by connecting itself to the future hydrogen economy, the gas industry has found a new lease of life. Uncritical support for Australia to become a hydrogen economy (e.g. Garnaut 2019) is giving the gas industry a free hand. After all, their pipelines, storage facilities and LNG ships will be used to transport much of the hydrogen. The gas industry already is experimenting with mixing hydrogen with fossil gas in pipelines to homes and small businesses.

## Jobs

With so many households and businesses reliant on gas, the workforce is dispersed across Australian cities, towns and rural areas. Collectively, the workers produce gas, read meters, do technical or clerical work, engineer systems, transport gas, and install and maintain equipment.

At the supply end, the oil and gas producers claim to support 80,000 direct and indirect jobs (Murphy 2019). There are many gas workers working in construction and offering small-scale plumbing services in cities and towns. At the 2016 Census there were 6,800 specialised gas fitters across Australia, while some general plumbers are also trained in gas fitting.

In contrast to this dispersion, the larger companies in the gas industry are well organised into seven associations: Australian Gas Association (TAGA), Australia New Zealand Industrial Gas Association (ANZIGA), Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association (APPEA), Australian Pipelines and Gas Association (APGA), Energy Networks Australia (ENA), Gas Appliance Manufacturers Association of Australia (GAMAA), and Gas Energy Australia (GEA). The biggest companies like Shell also network internationally.

A speedy transition away from gas requires a coordinated national, indeed international, campaign to confront the power and influence of the industry. It won't succeed unless the transition is also a just one, achieved with the mobilisation of workers across the many workplaces.

In a radical version of a green new deal, Aronoff *et al.* (2019) use examples from the United States, but which could be also found in Australia, to show the need for blue-green alliances, a just transition, a jobs guarantee

“offering low carbon, socially valuable work”, spending to build a new world, reduced working hours, a good life, and unionising green jobs. The challenging work of building international collaboration amongst workers and communities (Cardoso 2018) is also important.

The pathway to these workers in Australia can be through the active involvement of the seven or more unions covering gas workers; they include AMWU (appliance manufacture, maintenance), ASU (clerical workers, meter readers, engineers, network technical staff), AWU (gas production), CFMEU (gas production), MUA (floating storage and offshore vessels), PPTEU (installation and maintenance), and TWU (gas transport, and gas industry workers in SA).

### Just transition

As Aronoff *et al.* (2019) state: “The transition could be brutal for workers in the fossil fuel and related industries – but it doesn’t have to be”. Key to a just transition for workers in the gas industry are commitments to no forced redundancies, job guarantees, and worker transfer schemes where workers are transferred from companies undergoing closure into other viable firms. Cooperative ownership may also be feasible for smaller gas enterprises and groups of gas fitters and other workers to transition out of gas. Earthworker, an affiliate of Friends of the Earth, provides a relevant model.

Retrained gas workers can potentially help meet the enormous demand for energy efficiency upgrades to residential and commercial property in Australia. An estimated 120,000 jobs could be created over 10 years, providing a very real opportunity to find alternative employment for workers in the gas industry (Energy Savings Industry Association 2019).

In the absence of a coordinated national campaign, any assistance to workers is likely to be limited. Past industry adjustment packages have left many people behind with less than half getting equivalent positions, many are not finding work even after extensive retraining, and many end up in precarious jobs that are low paid (Toscano 2019). Once adjustment support is over, governments in liberal capitalist states provide at most the basic level of welfare available to the unemployed, pensioners or disabled.

Success will require overcoming defensiveness amongst working people that has resulted at least partly from insecure work and austerity. Business interests have led the drive to boost profitability of the private sector since the 2008 financial



crash through weakening labour standards, increasing working hours and decreasing job security. In this context, market-driven energy solutions offer at best partial short-term answers, and allow the right-wing of politics to feed off “long-simmering frustration and rage”, resulting in a backlash from ordinary people as well as their demoralisation (Aronoff *et al.* p.182).

### Fixated on market solutions

Industry regulators for gas and electricity are fixated on market solutions. They are beholden to industry, and will not propose measures to deeply cut demand for gas or ensure workers are looked after. The industry has its own vision for 2050 (Energy Networks Australia 2019). Just like other business leaders, those in the gas industry are insisting that action on climate change is on their terms – otherwise they will go out of business or profits will be severely threatened. While new businesses are emerging, better adapted to a low carbon future, they will still defend their commercial interests if they clash with the public and planetary interest (Wright 2019).

Edwards (2019) outlines three forms of power that are critical to understanding the big gas corporations. Their *structural power* refers to their significance in wealth generation and growth of the Australian economy. When government reforms challenge them, as the mining tax

did, the second form of power comes into play. *Ideational power* refers to influencing the public agenda, for example with advertising and extremely well-funded submissions full of data and economic argument.

Gas companies are also versed in instrumental power, using lobbying and other soft power to ensure that officials and politicians hear their voice above all others, as well as employing hard power through funding support, making threats and outright corruption. This power is partly exposed by Market Forces, another affiliate of Friends of the

Earth, when it probes deeply into the annual reports and accounts of the gas industry and their financiers.

It is fitting to end by referencing Eric Olin Wright's book *How to be an Anticapitalist*. Wright (2019) tells us that campaigns against domestic and retail use of gas need to draw particularly on ideas of fairness to low income and vulnerable people, involving people in democratic decision-making, and relentlessly building community. Thinking about gas workers, democratic control over the pathways that businesses take to transition off gas becomes important. Although the climate crisis isn't central to his thinking, Wright (2019) offers a vision of a future society should look like and ways of eroding capitalism and challenging state power. Human values and needs are central to his thinking, which he addresses through ideas about equality/fairness, democracy/liberty and community/solidarity.

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# Australian nuclear dump decision trashes indigenous peoples' rights

Jim Green and Michele Madigan

Earlier this year, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation voted against plans for a deep geological repository near Lake Huron. The Canadian government will respect the decision and will no longer target the site. Sadly, the situation in Australia is the exact opposite: Traditional Owners were denied a right to vote in a 'community ballot' concerning a national nuclear waste dump, and the federal government is proceeding with the dump despite their unanimous opposition.

The federal government announced in February that it plans to establish a national nuclear waste 'facility' near Kimba on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula. It will comprise a permanent dump for low-level nuclear waste, and an 'interim' store for long-lived intermediate-level waste.

Shamefully, the federal government has decided to move ahead despite the unanimous opposition of the Barngarla Traditional Owners, native title holders over the area.

The federal government refused a request from the Barngarla Determination Aboriginal Corporation (BDAC) to include traditional owners in a 'community ballot' held last year. So BDAC engaged the Australian Election Company to conduct a confidential postal ballot open to all Barngarla Traditional Owners. None of the respondents voted in favour of the dump.

BDAC then wrote to the government calling for the dump proposal to be abandoned in light of their unanimous opposition, and stating that BDAC will take whatever steps are necessary to stop it being imposed on Barngarla Country against their will.

The government's 'community ballot' registered 55% support among eligible voters – thanks to a promised \$30 million bribe and the implausible claim that 45 jobs will be created. But if the 'community ballot' is combined with the Barngarla ballot, the overall level of support falls to just 43.8% of eligible

voters (452/824 for the Kimba ballot, and 0/209 for the Barngarla ballot). That is a long way short of the government's own benchmark for 'broad community support' of 65%

"The only reason why there was a yes vote was because Barngarla were excluded, and this has then been used as the justification to allow the facility to be built, entirely ignoring Barngarla's views," a BDAC statement said. "The Barngarla stand with most of the farming industry against this proposal. However, the more important issue now is the fact that voting manipulation has allowed for the decision to occur."

## Racist legislation

The National Radioactive Waste Management Act systematically discriminates against Australia's First Nations. For example, the nomination of a site for a nuclear dump is valid even if Aboriginal traditional owners were not consulted and did not give consent. And the Act has sections which nullify or curtail the application of laws such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984, and the Native Title Act 1993.

The federal government recently announced that it plans to amend the Waste Management Act. While the Act is sorely in need of an overhaul, the planned amendments aren't those that are needed. Clauses in the Act that dispossess and disempower traditional owners will remain untouched.

Indeed, the planned amendments will, if passed, further disempower traditional owners. Barngarla Traditional Owners are lobbying opposition and cross-bench federal parliamentarians regarding the flawed amendments.

A recent report by the federal parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights found that the amendments could breach international law by failing to protect the human rights of Barngarla Traditional Owners and that the amendments pose a significant risk to their right to culture and self-determination.

## Appalling process

The South Australian Labor Party argues that traditional owners ought to have a right of veto over nuclear projects given the sad and sorry history of the nuclear industry in South Australia, stretching back to the British atomic bomb tests at Maralinga and Emu Field. Deputy Leader of the Opposition Susan Close says that South Australian Labor is "utterly opposed" to the "appalling" process which led to the announcement regarding the Kimba site.

Compare that to the federal government, whose mind-set seems not to have advanced from the 'Aboriginal natives shall not be counted' clause in the Constitution Act 1900. As Barngarla Traditional Owner Jeanne Miller says, Aboriginal people with no voting power are put back 50 years, "again classed as flora and fauna."

The current debate follows a history of similar proposals - all of them defeated, with traditional owners repeatedly leading successful campaigns.

In 2004, after a six-year battle, the Howard government abandoned plans for a national nuclear waste dump in SA. The Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta - a senior Aboriginal women's council - congratulated the government for belatedly getting their 'ears out of their pockets'.

In 2016, the plan to import high-level nuclear waste from around the world was abandoned after a Citizens' Jury noted the lack of Aboriginal consent and concluded that "the government should accept that the Elders have said NO and stop ignoring their opinions."

And last year, the federal government abandoned plans for a national nuclear dump in South Australia's Flinders Ranges, a plan that was fiercely contested by Adnyamathanha Traditional Owners.

South Australian Premier Steven Marshall is rightly proud of his record promoting the growth of renewable energy in the state. And he's proud of his significant role in putting an end to the plan to import high-level nuclear waste from around the world.

But the Premier - whose portfolio includes Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation - supports the federal government's nuclear dump plan. He needs, as the Kungkas put it, to get his ears out of his pockets and to respect the unanimous opposition of the Barngarla Traditional Owners.

The fight goes on!

More information: [www.nuclear.foe.org.au/waste](http://www.nuclear.foe.org.au/waste)

*Jim Green is the national nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth Australia. Michele Madigan is a Sister of St Joseph who has spent the past 40 years working with Aboriginal people across South Australia.*

Barngarla Traditional Owners at a protest against planned nuclear waste dumps, Port Augusta, 2016.



# Acting up! Recording FoE's 45 years of creative resistance

Em Gayfer

As part of Friends of the Earth's 45th birthday celebration in 2019, members of FoE Melbourne's Dirt Radio team came together with 3CR staff to host a retrospective hextory\* radio series: 45 Years of Creative Resistance. Inspired by the book of the same name that was released to celebrate FoE's 30th birthday, the series took a look back into some of the stories, issues, people and creative actions that have made this wonderful organisation what it is today.

Over five months and 18 episodes, myself and my co-host Megan Williams took a deep dive into FoE's interesting and eclectic hextory. We wanted to investigate our campaigns over the years: what tactics we have used, how technology has changed, how we have acknowledged country and to take a look at some of the more quirky and interesting stories that have coloured our hextory. Through interviewing a range of people from the early years of FoE in the mid-70s to current volunteers and staff, and everyone in between, we were able to capture some snippets and stories that are truly special.

For myself, some highlights of the series included getting to connect with older generations of former FoE staff and volunteers who were campaigning on radical, intersectional issues in a time before I was even born! Their long-term commitment to fighting for a just and better world gave me hope and made me realise that we have so much knowledge and experience within our networks, we just need to reach out and connect with people to find it.

The series covered a wide range of topics including our core, founding issue - anti-nuclear, FoE's early start working on climate justice in the late-90s, solidarity with unions working on anti-capitalism, FoE's hextory with queer and feminist politics and the connection to Melbourne's gigs and bands scene over the years. And so many more of the campaigns and issues that have made us who we are today. It has been amazing to speak with former FoE staff and volunteers who are still kicking goals in their respective fields and have so much fondness and respect for the work FoE did and still does.

Megan Williams, co-host of the series, said: "My favourite part of the show was hearing about the S11 protest in the year 2000 from Cam Walker, who was explaining the different blocks at the protest that surrounded Crown Casino from Green blocks to union blocks. And long-time union activist Dave Kerrin said that for some people there, they were more than just one group! It really got to the heart of solidarity, intersectional politics and building communities."

We are hugely grateful to everyone who gave their time to come on the show and share a piece of themselves and their hextory with us and our audience. A big thank-you also to Cam Walker and Beth Cameron for their help with formulating the series themes and connecting us with guests, as well as 3CR staff for their support over the series.

Our activist communities are growing and changing all the time, with waves of young fresh energy coming in and older members of the community passing on. As I age, I am reflecting on the importance of sharing stories and connecting with older generations who have such a wealth of knowledge that often goes unrecognised. How we listen to, record and share these stories will be essential in ensuring the longevity and connectivity of our communities. Sometimes as a young activist it can feel like you're the first person coming up with radical ideas or putting your body on the line - but really there are so many hexstories of radical action put there ready for us to listen to, and thinking you're the first one is sort of like trying to reinvent the wheel!

After this series, I am considering how we can keep these conversations going and share these stories far and wide. I hope this series can provide you with some food for thought and inspiration to draw on in our current political climate. If you have any ideas or think we've missed anything, feel free to reach out! We'd love to hear from you, continue the conversation and keep sharing stories.

*You can listen to the podcast for the series on [3cr.org.au/ActingUp](http://3cr.org.au/ActingUp) or on Apple Podcasts: *Acting Up! Read more about FoE's history at [www.foe.org.au/bistory](http://www.foe.org.au/bistory)**

*\* The word hextory is here used to replace "history" or "berstory" in order to acknowledge queer, trans and non-binary legacies and stories and separate the telling of these from the gender binary.*

Campaign Against Freeways Extension protesters blockading the extension of Alexandra Parade in Melbourne in the early 1990s.



# Another Amazonian Indigenous leader murdered in Brazil

Amazon Watch

March 31, 2020 – Zezico Rodrigues Guajajara, a prominent indigenous leader from Araribóia indigenous territory in Brazil's Amazonian state of Maranhão, was assassinated on March 31. His body was found near his village, Zutiwa, in the municipality of Arame, which is home to about 1,000 indigenous people. Zezico was returning to the village on a motorcycle when he was killed with a shotgun. It is suspected that he was murdered by local illegal loggers who had repeatedly threatened his life.

Zezico is the fifth indigenous Guajajara murdered in just the past four months. On November 1, Forest Guardian Paulo Paulino Guajajara was killed in an ambush by illegal loggers within Araribóia territory. On December 7th, indigenous leaders Firmino Prexede Guajajara and Raimundo Benício Guajajara were murdered in a drive-by shooting. And on December 13th, 15-year-old Erisvan Guajajara was found stabbed to death in the Amarante municipality.

For 23 years, Zezico served his people as a teacher and was recognized as one of the Guajarara's most important leaders for his longstanding defense of Arariboia territory. His support for the Guardians of the Forest was instrumental to the success of this group of 120 Guajarara volunteers in their efforts to protect their territory from illegal logging.

Zezico was also an important voice advocating the protection of the Awá-Guajá people, who live in voluntary isolation on Arariboia territory. Days prior to his murder, he was elected coordinator of COCALITIA (Commission of Chiefs and Indigenous Leaders of Araribóia Indigenous Territory).

Sônia Guajajara, of the Guajajara People and leader of the Association of Brazil's Indigenous Peoples (APIB) said: "We lost one more warrior, a great leader of the Guajajara people. Zezico Guajajara was an important indigenous leader, always combative, courageous and committed to the struggle in defense of our people. We demand that the Federal Police investigate and clarify this brutal murder in Araribóia Territory!"

In a 2017 interview with journalist Scott Wallace, Zezico said he feared for his life and those of his people. According to Wallace's notes, he said: "I'm the most wanted of the leaders by the invaders and pistoleiros [gunmen]." After Paulino's murder, Zezico became the Guajajara people's principal spokesperson reporting invasions and attacks by illegal loggers in the region. His village, Zutiwa, was one of the main targets of arson.

Ana Paula Vargas, Amazon Watch's Brazil Program Manager, said: "The murder of Zezico Guajajara, an important leader to his people and a marked enemy to loggers, is not an isolated incident. His killing is linked to the recent murders of indigenous people who have been suffering the consequences of the criminal activities of loggers and other economic groups who invade their lands and threaten their lives with the guarantee of impunity. The Brazilian government is conniving and complicit in these killings."

In an interview with Amazon Watch after the fires, in September 2019, Zezico said that the Forest Guardians needed logistical support, material, and equipment to fight the fires and illegal loggers: "We, the Guajajara people, depend on this land, we survive from it. Our culture, identity, and values are linked to our territory. Our view is that the Earth needs us and we need her. We do not have financial resources or policies of the Brazilian government to support us in this battle for our territory, but we continue to fight because it is the only choice we have."

Zezico stated that logging invasions are mounting in the region, imperiling indigenous peoples and their forests in a recent interview with *Amazônia Real*. "The threats are against almost all of us [who are] leaders and chiefs. The government never takes action. Throughout this period we've lost our warriors without punishment for their killers. [Brazil's indigenous agency] FUNAI knows the whole story, but it also always covered up the cases, that is, it did not ask for further investigation. Thus, the loggers have caught their breath, due to the lack of punishment for their crimes," he said.

Zezico also said that the indigenous people of Maranhão have made several complaints to the state and federal governments and demanded justice against local logging mafias in recent years, without receiving answers.

Since Paulino's murder, feelings of abandonment and insecurity have spread throughout the more than 170 villages of Arariboia territory, an area of 413,000 hectares which has been demarcated since 1990. According to the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, threats and tension are forcing the Forest Guardians to leave their territory. Local authorities decided to evacuate three guardians for their own safety: the group's coordinator, Olímpio Guajajara, and guardians Laércio and Auro Guajajara (one of whom, Laércio, survived the ambush that killed Paulino). The Federal Court in Maranhão state accepted the Federal Prosecutor's complaint against two of those accused of murdering Paulino and made them defendants.

The state government of Maranhão has launched an investigation into Zezico's death. The Coordination of the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI) of Arame requested urgent support from the State Secretariat of Public Security to investigate the murder.

*More information:*

[www.amazonwatch.org](http://www.amazonwatch.org)

*ABC:* [www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-23/battle-to-save-the-amazon-rainforest/12067822](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-23/battle-to-save-the-amazon-rainforest/12067822)

# A major scorecard gives the health of Australia's environment less than 1 out of 10

Albert Van Dijk, Luigi Renzullo, Marta Yebra and Shoshana Rapley

2019 was the year Australians confronted the fact that a healthy environment is more than just a pretty waterfall in a national park; a nice extra we can do without. We do not survive without air to breathe, water to drink, soil to grow food and weather we can cope with.

Every year, we collate a vast number of measurements on the state of our environment: weather, oceans, fire, water, soils, vegetation, population pressure, and biodiversity. The data is collected in many different ways: by satellites, field stations, surveys and so on.

We process this data into several indicators of environmental health at both national and regional levels.

The report for 2019 makes for grim reading. It reveals the worst environmental conditions in many decades, perhaps centuries, and confirms the devastating damage global warming and mismanagement are wreaking on our natural resources.

Immediate action is needed to put Australia's environment on a course to recovery.

## Environment scores in the red

From the long list of environmental indicators we report on, we use seven to calculate an Environmental Condition Score for each region, as well as nationally.

These seven indicators – high temperatures, river flows, wetlands, soil health, vegetation condition, growth conditions and tree cover – are chosen because they allow a comparison against previous years. In Australia's dry environment, they tend to move up and down together, which gives the score more robustness.

Nationally, Australia's environmental condition score fell by 2.3 points in 2019, to a very low 0.8 out of ten. This is the lowest score since at least 2000 – the start of the period for which we have detailed data.

Condition scores declined in every state and territory. The worst conditions were seen in the Northern Territory (0.2 points), New South Wales (0.3 points) and Western Australia (0.4 points), with the latter also recording the greatest decline from the previous year (-5.7 points).

What is most striking is that almost the entire nation suffered terrible environmental conditions in 2019. In each case, the changes can be traced back to dry, hot conditions. Only parts of Queensland escaped the drought.

Comparing local government areas, the worst conditions occurred in Armidale and Gwydir in northern NSW. In contrast, Winton and Townsville in Queensland escaped the overall poor conditions, thanks to the beneficial impact of high rainfall early in the year – although those same events also caused floods killing around 600,000 livestock.

## Extreme drought and extreme heat

So what exactly happened in Australia in 2019 to cause such widespread environmental damage? There were several causes.

Across most of Australia, the environment was already reeling from poor conditions in 2018. Also, cool temperatures in the Indian Ocean delayed the onset of the monsoon in northern Australia and reduced the flow of moisture to the rest of the continent, creating hot and dry conditions. Average rainfall was a mere 229 mm across the continent, the lowest in more than 119 years and probably longer than that.

The heat was also extraordinary. The average number of days above 35°C across the country was 36% more than the average for the 19 years prior.

In eastern Australia, arid and hot conditions pushed farmers and ecosystems deeper into drought. In many regions, dryness and declining protection from wind erosion created the worst soil conditions in at least 20 years. Consequences included several dust storms and widespread dieback of forests, especially in NSW.

The severe drought also affected inland water systems, especially the Darling River and its tributaries. Town water supply reservoirs ran out of water, the rivers stopped flowing, and the heat turned the remaining pools into death traps for fish.

Other rivers in northwest Australia, southeast Queensland and northeast NSW also saw their worst flows in 20 years.

## Unprecedented fires

Of course, 2019 will be remembered as the year of unprecedented bushfires. Nationally, the total area burnt was not unusual, not even when the fires of early 2020 are included. But this is only because fire activity was much below average in northern Australia, where ongoing dry conditions left little vegetation to burn.

The extent of forest fires last year was unprecedented, however. As predicted well in advance<sup>1</sup>, the tinder-dry forests in eastern Australia provided the fuel for a dramatic fire season that

started in September. Between then and the first month of 2020, vast areas of forest in New South Wales, eastern Victoria, Kangaroo Island and the Australian Capital Territory went up in flames.

The fires destroyed more than 3,000 homes and directly killed 33 people. Indirectly, the most hazardous air quality in living memory created major but poorly known health impacts. The fires also damaged the reliability of drinking water supplies.<sup>2</sup>

The ecological damage was also profound. Fires raged through ecosystems poorly adapted to fire, from rainforests in tropical Queensland to alpine vegetation in Tasmania and the Snowy Mountains of NSW. It remains to be seen whether they can recover. Across NSW, 35% of rainforests were turned to cinders.

About 191 species of animals and plants saw more than one-third of their living area burnt, among them 52 species that were already threatened.<sup>3</sup> Thankfully, the last remaining stands of the prehistoric Wollemi pine and the rare Nightcap Oak were saved.

Even before the fires, 40 plant and animal species were added to the threatened list in 2019, bringing the total to 1890. Following the fires, more species are likely to be added in 2020.

## We're not doomed yet

Last year was neither an outlier nor the "new normal" – it will get worse.

Greenhouse gas concentrations continued to increase rapidly in 2019, causing the temperature of the atmosphere and oceans to soar. Australia's population also continued to grow quickly and with it, greenhouse gases emissions and other pollution, and our demand for land to build, mine and farm on.

Whether we want to hear it or not, last year represented another step towards an ever-more dismal future, unless we take serious action.

The current coronavirus pandemic shows that as individuals, and collectively, we can take dramatic action once we acknowledge the urgency of a threat. By comparison, addressing environmental decline will cost less, whereas the long-term costs of not acting will be far greater.

There is much we can do. In the short term, we can help our natural ecosystems recover from the drought and fires. Government agencies and land owners can cull and manage invasive species in fire-affected areas – from weeds, to foxes, cats and feral horses – and stop damaging logging in fire-affected areas.

Individuals can do their bit. We can donate money or time to organisations committed to helping ecosystems recover.<sup>4</sup> Record what you see on bushwalks to help environmental managers monitor and assist ecological recovery.<sup>5</sup>

But the damage of climate change is not limited to natural environments. We must get serious

## World leaders urged to 'step back from precipice' of ecological ruin

February 2020 – Humanity's ongoing destruction of nature threatens the survival of our species, a group of former foreign ministers has warned, calling on leaders to step back from "the precipice" of irreversible ecological ruin and protect the planet.

The planet's rapidly warming oceans must be the focus of increased conservation efforts due to their importance in producing oxygen and food for billions of people, the former ministers added.

In a statement signed by 23 diplomats – including former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright and former British foreign secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind – world leaders are urged to back the draft UN agreement to protect almost a third of the world's oceans and land.

"The loss and degradation of nature jeopardises human health, livelihoods, safety and prosperity. It disproportionately harms our poorest communities while undermining our ability to meet a broad range of targets set by the UN's sustainable development goals," reads the statement, which was released through non-profit thinktank Aspen Institute.

The former ministers highlighted the climate crisis, the "excessive exploitation" of natural resources, and ecosystem degradation as grave threats to international security, warning they "imperil the future for our grandchildren".

"Humanity sits on the precipice of irreversible loss of biodiversity and a climate crisis that imperils the future for our grandchildren and generations to come. The world must act boldly, and it must act now," the statement continues.

"The marine environment deserves special attention, as it covers 70% of our planet, and even people who live far inland depend on the ocean to produce half of the oxygen we breathe, to serve as the primary source of protein for over 3 billion people, and to help maintain a liveable climate," the statement continues.

*Abridged from The Guardian, [www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/18/world-leaders-urged-to-step-back-from-precipice-of-ecological-ruin-aoe](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/18/world-leaders-urged-to-step-back-from-precipice-of-ecological-ruin-aoe)*

about curbing greenhouse emissions. Humanity has the tools, technology and ingenuity to do it and Australia, one of the countries worst affected by climate change, should lead the world.

Beyond that, individuals can also make a contribution: recycle and reuse rather than buy new, choose low-emission and renewable energy technology and reduce waste – it can save money even now. Let governments and politicians hear your voice. Try to convince friends and family that things need to change.

In the long term, we must find a more balanced relationship with the natural world, understanding that our own survival will depend on it.

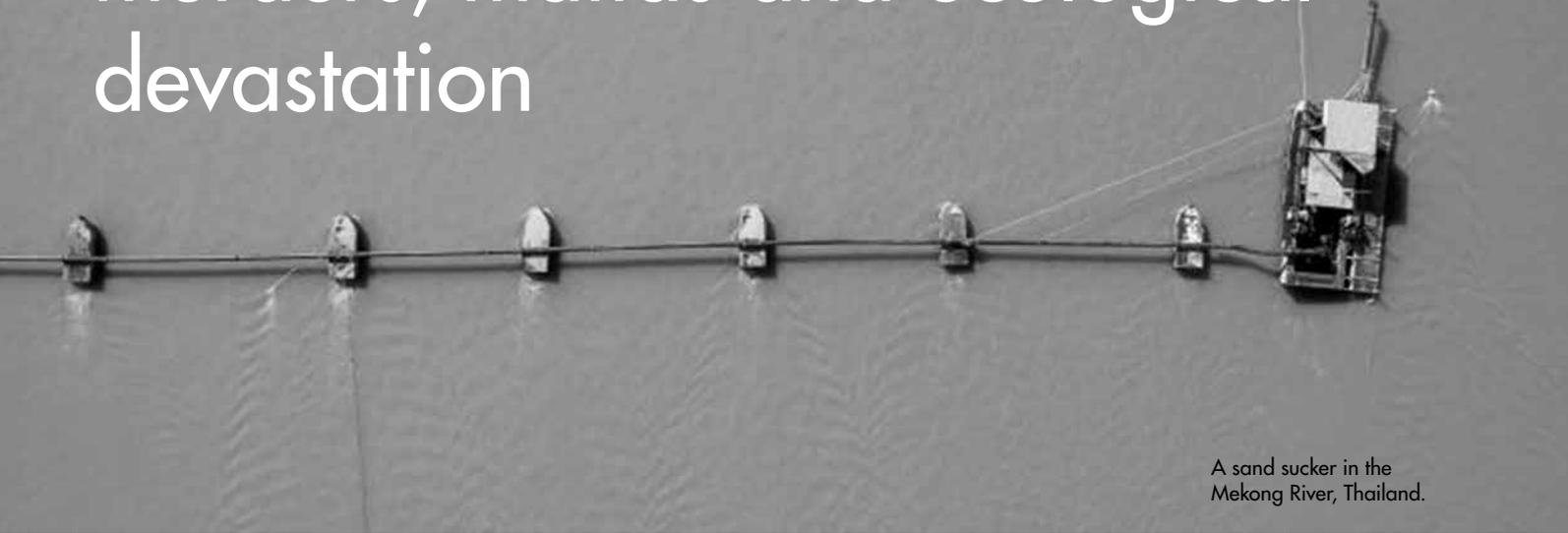
*The findings and data from the 'Australia's Environment in 2019' report, along with an interactive map, are posted at [www.wenfo.org/aer](http://www.wenfo.org/aer). The report is produced by the Australian National University.*

*Reprinted from The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/a-major-scorecard-gives-the-health-of-australias-environment-less-than-1-out-of-10-133444>*

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# Sand mining industry fuelling murders, mafias and ecological devastation



A sand sucker in the Mekong River, Thailand.

Anna Kelsey-Sugg and Taryn Priadko

According to US journalist Vince Beiser, who has written a book on sand and civilisation, the demand for sand is fuelling a sinister and dangerous black-market organisation: a “sand mafia”.

Concrete, which is made out of sand and gravel, is now used to make our buildings, shopping malls and roads. Sand from the desert is unsuitable for construction, so instead we mostly use sand found at the bottom of rivers, lakes, oceans and on beaches. Beiser says the world uses 50 billion tonnes of this kind of sand every year – more than any other natural resource “except for water”.

“When you are talking about quantities that large, sooner or later you’re going to run into shortages, and that is in fact what is happening in a growing number of places around the world,” he says.

University of Adelaide earth sciences professor Alan Collins is somewhat more cautious in his assessment. We are running out of sand “in a way”, he says, “and in particular, in certain places”. “It’s more about the right quality of sand and where it’s found. For various uses we need quite pure sand ... and getting sand that’s that pure can be quite tricky,” he says.

Prof. Collins says the problem of diminishing sand supplies is particularly significant in developing countries. “There’s certainly a lot of over-exploitation of sand, particularly in developing economies that are ... digging it up very quickly,” he says.

Beiser argues that in parts of the world, sand is becoming a very dangerous business. He says a scarcity of sand, and efforts to regulate the sand mining industry, have spawned an illegal trade. “The demand for sand is so intense in some places that organised criminal gangs have taken over the trade,” he says. “And they do what criminal gangs do everywhere to people who try to stop them.”

In India “they call them the sand mafia”, Beiser says. “They have literally murdered hundreds of people, including many journalists, including one that was burned to death recently. Another one was hacked to death with machetes. But it’s not only journalists. It’s also environmental activists, police officers, government officials – and that’s not counting all the ones who have been threatened, who’ve been beaten up, who’ve been chased off their land.”

In 2017 the ABC’s Foreign Correspondent travelled to India to chase the sand mafia, revealing that despite a near-blanket ban on unlicensed sand mining across India, it operates with near impunity.

Beiser says India is not alone. He cites a recent murder in South Africa related to rival gangs of sand miners fighting over sand, the murder of a Mexican environmental activist trying to stop sand mining in his village, and other sand-related killings in Kenya, Gambia and Indonesia. “It’s a worldwide phenomenon,” Beiser says.

Prof. Collins also raises concerns about the significant ecological impact of sand trade and sand dredging. Taking sand from local river systems and transporting it far distances has “lots of implications for energy use”, he says, “and also just ecological devastation”.

“In places such as Singapore or Bangkok where there’s very little sand locally around, the sand’s got to come from elsewhere, internationally,” he says. “So you then get quite a lot of issues around importing sand across borders, and really devastating ecosystems. To get sand out of the rivers you just completely dredge the river and everything in it.”

That includes sediment. And when a river is depleted of that, there can be dire consequences. “Water then goes much faster, you can get much more flooding, and downstream effects can really be quite extreme,” Prof. Collins says.

Beiser advocates tighter international laws on sand mining to curtail environmental damage. He argues that in many Western countries those rules are largely in place, but are “totally missing in a lot of Asia and Africa and the developing world”.

He says we also need to find alternatives to sand. “We have to simply use not only less sand but less everything,” he says. “We know that we are using too much fresh water, we’re cutting down too many trees, we’re taking too many fish out of the oceans, and now we’ve come to find out we’re using too much sand. These are not separate problems. They are all symptoms of the same problem, which is that we are just consuming too much.”

*Abridged from the ABC: [www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-11/illegal-sand-trade-india-mafia-murders-vince-beiser/11779570](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-11/illegal-sand-trade-india-mafia-murders-vince-beiser/11779570)*

# Australia's SolGold pushes ahead in Ecuador despite unrest

Rainforest Action Group

Communities barricaded a bridge in Chical, close to the Colombian border, on January 17 to express their frustration with mining companies continuing to explore despite community opposition. The event took place around 5 kilometres from the Chical concessions of Australian gold and copper mining company SolGold, where they announced significant deposits last year.

“The blockade was the latest in a series of measures by El Pablo community members to protest ongoing exploration attempts by SolGold subsidiary Carnegie Ridge Resources and ENAMI (part-owned by Canadian company Cornerstone Resources). ENAMI's Espejo concessions cover more than 90% of the Cerro Golondrinas Protective Forest which forms the headwaters of five rivers,” said Rebekah Hayden, a member of the Rainforest Action Group – a group investigating the actions of Australian mining companies in Ecuador.

SolGold has a cluster of concessions in northern Ecuador that overlap or border on territory held by the Indigenous Awá Federation. Indigenous territories have added protections in Constitutional law to protect them from mineral and oil extraction.

The Awá community of El Tigre is on SolGold's Chical-1 concession in Carchi, while Awá community El Baboso overlaps the border of the Blanca concession.

“The Awá Federation has consistently held a united front against mining since 2016, resolving to ban all mining on Awá lands, and demanding absolute transparency about the concessions. Despite 6% of their territory being covered with mining concessions (down from an initial 40% in 2017), they claim there has been a complete lack of consultation or information on the progress of the projects,” Hayden said.

The Awá's anti-mining stance was reiterated with a formal statement on mining at an assembly of 450 people on January 19-21, and president of the Federation of Awá Centros of Ecuador Jairo Cantincus was re-elected, a sure sign that the Federation will continue to fight against mining.

“SolGold started exploration on its Chical concession despite a lack of consultation with the community, and powerful community resistance. Exploring without their full and informed consent is against their Constitutional rights, and could be contested in court,” Hayden said.

When Roberto Taicús, president of the Awá community El Baboso went to speak to SolGold

at a meeting in September 2019, they denied the community was affected by their concessions, despite maps showing it to be the case.<sup>1</sup>

“On other SolGold concessions, El Cielito leaders have said that SolGold has divided its inhabitants and blocked the roads to their farms. The Santa Cecilia community in SolGold's flagship Cascabel concession, is also under threat, with SolGold buying up land en masse, and forcing community members out,” Hayden said.<sup>1</sup>

Roberto Taicús was quoted by Ecuadorian journal PlanV saying community members, “have become stripped of their own territories”.

“The Awá Federation has repeatedly sought information on mining projects, but SolGold only refers them to the Government, who refuses to give them any details. The Awá are currently conducting baseline water studies to determine contamination from exploration and mining,” Hayden said.

All this comes at a time when the homicide rate in Ecuador has soared, with InsightCrime stating it has grown by a faster rate than crime capitals such as El Salvador, Venezuela and Brazil.<sup>2</sup> This is the case particularly near the border with Colombia, where criminal groups and ex-FARC rebels compete to move cocaine along Ecuador's ‘cocaine superhighway’. This area is only 20 kms from SolGold's Cascabel concession.

“Illegal and legal miners have inundated the region, threatening townspeople and attempting to bribe leaders. The Ecuadorian army was sent in to the area to secure the area, after miners were moved on from their illegal occupation at Gina Rinehart's Imba-2 concession in July. The Awá have already seen how illegal mining has affected Awá tribes in Colombia, polluting rivers and destabilising social groups, and they do not want to see the same thing happening to their communities in Ecuador,” Hayden said.

“It seems unfathomable that SolGold is continuing to explore in a region so powerfully antimining, and against Ecuadorian law and OECD requirements that they conduct consultation with affected communities. Additionally, attempting to build a mine in a region where organised crime and homicide rates are soaring does not sound like good business practice,” Hayden said.

With InsightCrime stating that this might be the early stages of a sustained increase to Ecuador's murder rate, the Rainforest Action Group is concerned that SolGold's efforts to establish a mine in the region will only amplify the unrest further.

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# All roads lead to lead: the fight for clean water in a Tasmanian town

Tim Slade

TasWater has announced a new plan to pipe treated water to the Tasmanian town of Pioneer within three years. This comes after seven long years where residents have lived with the risk of lead-contaminated drinking water, first from the reticulated supply, and then from lead-painted roofs servicing rainwater tanks installed by TasWater.

The news came during the State parliament's Government Business Enterprise (GBE) committee on 4 December 2019. There was no discussion during this meeting of the facts outlined in a letter from the Tasmanian Director of Public Health, Dr Veitch, to TasWater's CEO Brewster, on 7 December 2018, one year earlier. In this letter Dr Veitch cited the following: TasWater's failure to acknowledge 'foreseeable risk' in relation to lead-painted roofs; TasWater's failure to apply Environmental Health Guidelines; and TasWater's breach of agreement with the residents of Pioneer.

It took TasWater five years to complete the installation of rainwater tanks for thirty-five properties. We now know that in addition to a slow and unreasonable timeline, the work was performed negligently. TasWater were aware from their own tests in 2014 that at least three roofs were lead-painted. Only a handful of roofs were tested at this time.

It was not until late 2019 that TasWater tested every roof at Pioneer for lead paint, following intervention from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in December 2018.

Inexplicably, CEO Brewster waited five months, following the letter of overrule by Tasmania's Director of Public Health, Dr Veitch, before he wrote to the residents of Pioneer, to invite them to participate in the first-ever complete testing program. Sixteen months on from Dr Veitch's letter of overrule to CEO Brewster, not a single roof has been replaced at Pioneer.

Approximately one-third of the TasWater-installed rainwater tanks, the twelve newly discovered to be contaminated with heavy metals, have in recent months been disconnected from roofs, cleaned and refilled with fresh treated water.

CEO Brewster said during the GBE on December 4 that the new plan for Pioneer will cost approximately \$3.5 million. This is a similar cost to the mini-treatment plants built recently in the neighbouring towns of Gladstone and Herrick.

Prior to the December 4 meeting, all members, including parliamentarians, received a detailed, written briefing from me, consisting of my twenty-three-page letter of reply to Chairman Gumley. Not one member of the government asked a question about Pioneer. The announcement of the proposed mini-treatment plant was made only after sustained questioning by non-government member.

At this annual meeting held on December 4, Mr Doug Chipman – president of the Owners' Representatives Group, representing the twenty-nine council-owners – made no comment whatsoever about Pioneer, nor did he protest the early termination of the meeting.

Mr Peter Gutwein, the state government minister with responsibilities for drinking water, and now Premier of Tasmania, failed to attend the GBE meeting. The new plan announced by TasWater for a mini-treatment plan is in contrast to the previous offer to twelve residents in the months preceding the GBE meeting. This offer was for roof replacements, on the condition that structural repairs be paid by the customer. This unworkable solution, whereby some residents were required by TasWater to pay for structural repairs, is contrary to the 2013 agreement with Pioneer.

It would be surprising if anywhere else in Tasmania, an existing customer is required to contribute thousands of dollars in order to continue to participate as a TasWater customer. Yet this was the plan of TasWater's CEO Brewster, and his Board, until now, after seven years of crisis.

Over years the residents of Pioneer have asked the local council of Dorset to assist, but at all times Mayor Howard has refused to write to the ORG; nor would he agree to conduct a community survey in relation to the question of a mini-treatment plant. At the last, Mayor Howard agreed to a community survey, in October, 2019.

There have been no sanctions whatsoever, neither suggested nor directed, to any person at TasWater, DHHS, the twenty-nine owner-councils, the Economic Regulator, nor to the Tasmanian state government. This is notwithstanding Pioneer's seven years at risk of heavy-metal contamination, first from the reticulated supply, and then from lead-painted roofs servicing rainwater tanks installed by TasWater.

This story has been documented by me in my 23 published articles for *Tasmanian Times* (online) since 2013.

TasWater's announcement of its plan to pipe treated water to Pioneer was welcomed by the weary community of approximately seventy residents. However there are some residents who will have mixed feelings, those who were on the brink of having their 2014 contracts with TasWater activated for a roof replacement.

Following TasWater's new announcement in December 2019, the seven-year, four-month-long question continues to be: *When will TasWater deliver safe drinking water to their customers at Pioneer?*

*Tim Slade lives in the north-eastern town of Pioneer.*

*Articles: <https://tasmaniantimes.com/guest-author/tim-slade/>*

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*A longer version of this article is posted at*

*<https://tasmaniantimes.com/2019/12/all-roads-lead-pb-to-rome/>*

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# 45 years of Creative Resistance Friends of the Earth

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