BLACK LIVES MATTER

- Indigenous deaths in custody
- Why we organised a BLM rally
- Juukan Gorge inquiry puts Rio Tinto on notice
- Marine cloud brightening — industry smokescreen?
- Why the Land Forces arms expo must not go ahead
- Minister’s trust in pesticide safety puts public health at risk
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Juukan Gorge inquiry puts Rio Tinto on notice, but without drastic reforms, it could happen again – Deanna Kemp, John Owen and Rodger Barnes

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Black lives, white lies – Lidia Thorpe

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Despite 432 Indigenous deaths in custody since 1991, no one has ever been convicted – Alison Whittaker

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Friends of the Earth Australia News

Victorian cash for containers scheme announcement means all of Australia covered

Friends of the Earth welcome the decision to implement a cash for containers scheme in Victoria. FoE is a member of the Boomerang Alliance of groups who have been working nationwide on the issue for many years. Whilst key design elements and collection arrangements are still to be worked out, the announced scheme means that:

- Responsibility for the scheme is split between the government, the beverage industry and a container collection network
- Victorians will be able to redeem a 10-cent refund on every plastic, glass or aluminium drink container from 2023
- Container litter will be slashed and recycling significantly increased
- Community organisations will be able to fundraise by collecting cans and bottles

Find out more at www.boomerangalliance.org.au

Community led protest camp in East Gippsland goes from strength to strength as new report launched

Protests have continued to halt logging in East Gippsland in a contentious area of forest near the Errinundra Plateau. The area has been identified by the government and conservationists as a critical area for threatened species impacted by the fires, plans to log have been thwarted by community actions which have prevented logging from going ahead.

Goongerah Environment Centre (GECO) worked on a new report with East Gippsland environment groups and Victorian National Parks Association which shows that the Errinundra Plateau is a critical refuge for species like the Greater Glider, which are still threatened by logging where they’re found. Almost 60 coupes are scheduled around Errinundra, and 90,000 ha are scheduled in forest refuges across Eastern Victoria.

Read the full report at www.geco.org.au/forest_refuges_under_threat

Find out about how to support the campaign at www.geco.org.au/save_errinundra

The Goongerah Environment Centre (GECO) is a member group of Friends of the Earth Australia

Friends of the Earth expose horrific koala injuries

Friends of the Earth were alarmed to learn that a koala was horrifically burnt at Alcoa’s Portland Aluminium smelter, in south-west Victoria in late January. The animal apparently entered the facility and ended up climbing some type of attachment in the smelter’s anode room. The burnt koala was removed, put in a bag and then released at a nearby golf course 3.6 km away. Apparently, this is not the first time that koalas have been released at the golf course from the smelter.

The issue forced a response from Alcoa stating that they will:

- Make it harder for koalas to enter the premises by upgrading gates, fences, and monitoring tree growth at the perimeter.
- Update procedures related to handling koalas found on site. A draft of this procedure is currently with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) for review.
- Actively engage with a wildlife carer regarding additional training for personnel who handle wildlife on site. A scope of work for this training is currently being developed.
- Have a meeting scheduled for early March with DELWP and an independent koala specialist to progress Koala Management Plan.

Whilst Friends of the Earth supports initiatives that will improve koala welfare, we are disappointed that most of these steps were taken only after media attention was brought about by local residents.

Friends of the Earth Melbourne have launched a new collective to work to protect koalas in VIC.

Contact anthony.amis@foe.org.au for more information.
More insurers rule out covering Adani

All major projects require underwriting insurance for public liability, plant and equipment damage and workers compensation, among other things. It is very likely that Adani still hasn’t secured the insurance deals it needs to build the mine and rail line, and without insurance it can’t carry out the work.

In June 2020, Lloyd’s of London, the world’s leading insurance market, confirmed that some of its members are insuring Adani. Lloyd’s current policy allows its members to continue insurance of existing coal projects until 2030, despite the climate science.

The Stop Adani campaign has been contacting Lloyd’s members one by one to rule them out. In total, 34 major insurance companies have publicly ruled out insuring Adani’s coal project, including 25 Lloyd’s of London insurance syndicates.

Friends of the Earth’s Tipping Point project and member group Market Forces are supporting grassroots groups putting pressure on insurers and contractors.

Find out more about who has not ruled out insuring Adani at https://www.marketforces.org.au/info/key-issues/theadanilist/insurers-stopadani/

Objection to iron oxide copper-gold copper mineralisation at Ngarndamukina / Lake Torrens

Friends of the Earth supported opposition from at least four First Nations groups, over 20 truckloads of drilling equipment, accommodation units, ground protection matting and ancillary vehicles being delivered to Lake Torrens National Park.

Permission was granted by the South Australian Premier to “damage, disturb or interfere” with a sacred site risks destroying its cultural heritage and puts at risk the unique salt-lake ecosystem.

The full extent of Lake Torrens has been protected as a National Park under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972 since 1991, and is recognised as an ‘Important Biodiversity Area’.

Take action at www.foe.org.au/save_lake_torrens

Protect Bass Strait: No new oil and gas

Despite the dire state of the climate crisis, the Morrison Government continues to pursue both a ‘gas-led’ recovery and the expansion of fossil fuels. This includes opening up the pristine waters of the iconic Bass Strait to polluting fossil fuels companies that are intent on drilling for oil and gas.

The Bass Strait supports thriving tourism and commercial fishing industries.

Southern rock lobster fishers have already expressed their fear that plans to use seismic testing could threaten crayfish populations, and hence their industry.

The best available science tells us that governments must rule out new fossil fuel developments if we’re to avoid catastrophic climate impacts such as the horrific Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20. Allowing commercial drilling is just too risky for marine environments, local communities and businesses, and the climate.

Friends of the Earth are calling on Scott Morrison to protect Bass Strait and ban all new fossil fuel exploration and production and provide permanent protection for the Strait from risky oil and gas drilling.

Join the call at www.foe.org.au/protect_the_bass_strait

Next Climate Strike declared by students: May 21

With large parts of NSW and south-east Queensland experiencing a flooding emergency, and a devastating cyclone in WA this year already, School Strike for Climate have called for another strike on 21 May 2021 to stand with all the people who have been impacted- particularly those who have lost homes and livelihoods, been evacuated or stranded.

“We saw just over a year ago extreme bushfires in our local area,” said Will Potter, Gundungurra man and co-founder of SS4C in the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains area. “This is what climate disruption looks like. This is the climate crisis in our daily lives. It’s already costing us. Our government is not taking action, and so these impacts will worsen into the future.”

The Morrison government could be protecting our climate, land and water, and creating thousands of new jobs by growing Australia’s renewable energy sector and backing First Nations solutions to protect Country. Instead, they are planning to line the pockets of multinational gas companies, which are fuelling the climate crisis.

To find your nearest May 21 Strike head to www.schoolstrike4climate.com/may21

School Strike for Climate is a member group of Friends of the Earth Australia
Final push to secure science-based climate targets for Victoria

With the federal government refusing to act, we need to see greater leadership from states like Victoria when it comes to tackling the climate crisis. Strong emission reduction targets will require more renewable energy, improved public transport, greater protection for forests, create jobs, and more.

Friends of the Earth and University of Melbourne released a report with modelling that shows the Victorian Labor government could create over 50,000 jobs by setting science-based Emissions Reduction Targets.

Read the full report at www.melbournefoe.org.au/report_launch_climate_jobs

Victoria’s fracking ban enshrined in Constitution

Testament to the strength of the community campaign to protect Victoria from fracking and unconventional gas, the Andrews government passed a bill to enshrine existing legislated bans on fracking and coal seam gas drilling into Victoria’s Constitution.

Friends of the Earth (FoE) campaigned from 2011 until 2016 to help win the ban on fracking and unconventional gas drilling. FoE is delighted to see the ban enshrined in the state’s constitution and believe that the outcome is an acknowledgment of the powerful community campaign against gas.

“This was a campaign that was driven – and won – by regional communities. It is a reminder that strategic and determined community campaigning gets results,” said Cam Walker, campaign coordinator at FoE Melbourne.

“This is the first permanent ban on fracking in the country and has provided inspiration to countless people around Australia and the world. It has protected our land and water, farms and landscapes, and stopped greenhouse gases from being released into the atmosphere.”

During the campaign, 75 regional communities declared themselves coal and gasfield free. Some 26 local councils expressed concerns about drilling. Tens of thousands of people across the state built political power that couldn’t be ignored in the leadup to the 2014 state election.

Read more about the historic campaign at www.melbournefoe.org.au/coal_and_gas

Tell Scott Morrison: it’s time to establish a national Just Transition Authority

Australia has traditionally relied on coal fired power stations to meet its energy needs. This is now rapidly changing yet the federal government refuses to accept reality.

Up to five of Australia’s remaining 16 coal power plants could be financially unviable by 2025 due to a flood of cheap solar and wind energy entering the electricity grid.

Will the federal government accept the fact and intervene to support affected communities through the transition, or will it continue to pretend there is a role for coal in a climate change future? Choosing to do so will mean they fail coal reliant communities.

The first stage in responding to the inevitable changes will be the establishment of a national Authority to guide a Just and Fair Transition for all affected communities in coal mining and burning regions across Australia.

Please email our PM to urge him to establish a Just Transition Authority. More details at www.foe.org.au/just_transition_now

Supreme Court action to protect unburnt forest

Wildlife of the Central Highlands (WOTCH) have launched a Supreme Court case against VicForests seeks to protect unburnt habitat for the threatened Greater Glider, Sooty Owl, Powerful Owl and Smoky Mouse. These animals were severely impacted by 2019–20 bushfires and all found to be among the ‘fauna species of most immediate concern’ by the Victorian government’s own preliminary response to the bushfires.

WOTCH needs help to raise $55,000 for expert scientific witnesses to put the best case forward to protect native habitat. These experts are some of the best in the field and the evidence they provide regarding the focus species is critical.

Please help defend critical habitat for these threatened species.

Donate directly to WOTCH via https://chuffed.org/project/defend-whats-left-for-threatened-wildlife

WOTCH is a member group of Friends of the Earth Australia

Vale Chris Fowell

Friends of the Earth were devastated to hear of the loss of Chris Fowell who was found deceased by community members from Camp Errinundra, who together with search and rescue and SES volunteers exhaustively searched for Chris since he went missing from the camp in April.

Chris was a veteran of the Errinundra campaign and Daintree forest blockades of the 1980s.

Our deepest condolences to Chris’ family, friends, those who knew Chris, people at camp, and those who helped with the search.

Lifeline Crisis Support, phone line 13 11 14
Mining companies have operated with a free rein and few consequences for too long

Jamie Lowe – CEO of the National Native Title Council

They were dragged kicking and screaming, but Rio Tinto’s board finally took the crucial first steps towards accountability for the destruction of caves at Juukan Gorge. Cultural heritage destruction is an almost daily occurrence for traditional owners. Mining companies are almost never held accountable. Media coverage is usually scant at best. No wonder Rio thought the story would go away. And no wonder the three executives in question, whose governance failings robbed us of a world heritage significant site, were smug enough to destroy it in the first place.

The Juukan Gorge disaster has unveiled shocking revelations that are everyday reality for traditional owner groups. The enormous imbalance of power on which traditional owners and mining companies sign agreements has become tragically normalised in our sector. Mining companies capitalise on this power imbalance and the deficiencies in legislation to push traditional owners into agreements they mightn’t otherwise sign.

The Native title act (NTA) governs these agreements. Mining companies argue that state law reform is not needed because the NTA already provides a negotiating mechanism for traditional owners to protect their heritage. However, the NTA does not require ‘free, prior and informed consent’, the human rights standard for Indigenous agreement-making. If a company wants to mine on a group’s land, and the group does not consent, the mining company can make an application to the National Native Title Tribunal, which almost always rules in industry’s favour.

Some mining agreements are beneficial to both parties. Many companies have good rapport with local traditional owners. We need to dispel the myth that traditional owners are anti-economic development. But the fairness of the agreement negotiated shouldn’t be left to the whims of a company’s benevolence. And the lack of transparency around these agreements, which can contain “gag clauses”, is highly unethical. It’s an outrage that traditional owners are too terrified of legal repercussions to speak out. It’s no surprise then that so much heritage destruction has historically gone unnoticed. Traditional owners are too terrified of legal repercussions to speak out. It’s an outrage that traditional owners are too terrified of legal repercussions to speak out.

We know of one PBC that has 546 mining tenements on its books right now. For a small PBC to handle that kind of workload with zero government funding and be expected to find the resources to negotiate a mining deal is absurd. This is just a snapshot of the government machinery enabling the destruction of Australia’s cultural heritage. Federal and state laws do not interact effectively, if at all. To any casual observer it would appear these laws are crafted to sanction and expedite the destruction of cultural sites, rather than allow traditional owners to self-determine.

This approach robs an already disempowered people of their cultural responsibilities. Australia, and humankind, are robbed of some of the earliest evidence of human existence. Australia would be aghast at wilful damage to the Opera House. Or the destruction of an Anzac memorial. Yet heritage ten times older than the Egyptian pyramids is detonated regularly.

Mining sector opposes legislative reform

Even with the Juukan Gorge caves in ruins, the mining sector still won’t support legislative reform. They think they can be trusted to self-regulate. Some companies have pledged to improve processes. BHP announced it would set up a heritage advisory council. This is all well and good, but if we could trust them to self-regulate, wouldn’t the Juukan Gorge caves still be standing? Other than shareholder pressure or bad publicity, where is the mining sector’s incentive to change? Australia’s laws give them open slather. The status quo is pretty comfortable for the top end of town.

We hope this will be the mining sector’s watershed moment. When these companies eventually pack up and leave our continent, what will they leave behind? After stripping impoverished traditional owners of their rights and agency, what sustainable, long-term development plan have they negotiated? How will their triple bottom line stack up?

We’re calling on the commonwealth to show some leadership and implement strong cultural heritage laws and more resourcing for PBCs. The National Native Title Council has worked with the Heritage Chairs of Australia and New Zealand to draft a federal cultural heritage policy framework. The best practice ‘national standards’ is based on principles outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, endorsed by Australia. The national standards are comprehensive and would provide more certainty for both industry and traditional owners. We’re also calling on the mining sector to support law reform and an independent, transparent review into agreement-making processes.
Rio Tinto might have been the sacrificial lamb, but the Juukan Gorge catastrophe could have happened to any mining company. For too long they’ve been operating with free rein and few consequences. Rio must now commit to a forensic review and overhaul of its company culture if it is to have any hope of rebuilding its brand and its trust with traditional owners. Let this be a wake-up call to them all: our people were on this continent long before mining companies arrived and we’ll be here long after they’re gone. The decisions made now will determine how much of what makes Australia profoundly unique will still be standing when they go.

Jamie Lowe is CEO of the National Native Title Council and a Gunditjmara Djabwurrung man. He is also elected to the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria, tasked with negotiating a Treaty framework with the Victorian government.

Reprinted from The Guardian.

References:

Juukan Gorge inquiry puts Rio Tinto on notice, but without drastic reforms, it could happen again

Deanna Kemp, John Owen and Rodger Barnes

On the eve of Reconciliation Week in May 2020, news broke that Rio Tinto had destroyed ancient rock shelters at Juukan Gorge in Western Australia to expand one of its 16 iron ore mines in the Pilbara. The public was appalled to learn that a mining company could legally destroy such sacred Aboriginal heritage. Rio Tinto mishandled its response¹, and a national and international outcry prompted a parliamentary inquiry.²

In December 2020, the joint standing committee released its interim report into the incident, entitled “Never Again”.³ The inquiry lifts the lid on a deeply flawed regulatory system. While the report is scathing of Rio Tinto, it concludes that the issues “are not unique” to the company.

Flaws in WA law and the native title system

The interim report recommends major legislative reform to prevent this happening again. The report details significant deficiencies in WA’s outdated Aboriginal Heritage Act⁴, passed in 1972. By excluding Aboriginal peoples from decisions about land development, the law undermines their right to manage their cultural heritage. The report recognises progress made on public consultation of a draft bill that would remove Section 18 of the act, which allows developers to apply for consent to legally damage or destroy Aboriginal sites.⁵

The committee recommends any new legislation ensure Aboriginal people have meaningful involvement in and control over heritage decision-making, in line with the internationally recognised principles of free, prior and informed consent.⁶ The interim report recommends placing a moratorium on any new Section 18 applications until new legislation is passed. It also encourages companies with existing permissions not to proceed with the destruction of heritage sites, but to have them assessed under the new legislation. The findings highlight shortcomings in federal law and recommends major improvements in the statutory protection for Indigenous groups seeking to protect their significant sites.⁷

Gag clauses

The report calls for the removal of the so-called “gag clauses”⁸ in land use agreements, which prevent Aboriginal peoples from speaking out against developers.

In a public hearing, the traditional owners of Juukan Gorge, the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura peoples, explained how their agreement with Rio Tinto prevented them from objecting to the company’s Section 18 application, or seeking an emergency injunction under federal heritage legislation. The report recommends all companies operating in WA undertake an independent review of their land use agreements, in line with calls from investors in mining companies.

The deep flaws in Australia’s native title system are described in the report as “another means to destroy Indigenous heritage”. These flaws are so alarming that Labor Senator Patrick Dodson, a committee member and senior Aboriginal leader, had earlier called for a royal commission. Australia’s current regulatory system approves mining developments on a project-by-project basis. The approvals process does not consider the cumulative impacts to cultural landscapes, such as Juukan Gorge, from multiple and expanding mines. The committee will likely hear more about these issues.
Corporate responsibility beyond legal compliance

After the Juukan Gorge tragedy, Rio Tinto conducted an internal, board-led review\(^7\) of its heritage policies, but did not deliver meaningful recommendations on accountability and fell well short of stakeholder expectations.\(^9\)

The inquiry report concluded that Rio Tinto’s review did not fully grapple with the root causes of the Juukan Gorge debacle and its effects. Rather than letting this slide, inquiry chair Warren Entsch and the rest of the committee doubled down on their interrogation of the company’s senior management.

Through persistent questions in public hearings, the committee probed Rio Tinto’s generic explanations of “missed opportunities.”\(^11\)

Seeing that other mining companies had “taken advantage” of the weak regulatory system, the committee also pressed BHP and Fortescue Metals Group on their cultural heritage policies and practices. This unearthing information that was not included in the companies’ public submissions. Some of this information aligns with our research. For example, many mining companies have not kept pace with their social policy commitments. Across the industry, community relations departments have seen sizeable reductions.\(^12\)

Our research has flagged the risks associated with these issues, but most companies have failed to adequately respond.\(^13\)

In many mining companies, the work of community relations and Indigenous affairs units remains peripheral to mine planning and production processes.\(^14\)

Mining engineers, lawyers and media managers routinely overrule the advice of social specialists — including local experts and Indigenous advisers who work directly with communities on the ground.

It is entirely normal for company personnel with a limited understanding of customary land tenure to dominate decisions about land access and cultural heritage. This knowledge gap is a known point of failure in mine-community relations.\(^15\)

The inquiry process has revealed a deep reluctance within mining companies to thoroughly investigate major social incidents and the impacts of their operations.

We have learned that companies don’t share these findings with the public — unless forced to do so. The report rejects the idea that companies can “feign ignorance” in order to avoid accountability.

What are the prospects for change?

The inquiry has laid bare the overwhelming challenges faced by First Nations peoples when mining occurs on their land. It highlights the urgent need for a rebalancing of power to avoid mining production priorities dominating at the expense of all else.

The report confirms that legislative reform is crucial. But this can be painfully slow and notoriously piecemeal. For example, the industry has already pushed back on aspects of WA’s heritage law review.\(^17\) For Aboriginal groups, these and other proposed reforms do not go far enough.\(^18\)

Pressure may have to come from other places. The report strengthens investor demands\(^19\) for better corporate management of the impacts of mining on communities and cultural heritage.\(^20\) Shareholder and investor advocacy at annual general meetings is only likely to intensify.

Aboriginal leaders and new Aboriginal alliances\(^21\) are also primed to take collective action and push for national best practice standards.

The inquiry’s findings will likely be leveraged internationally, as well. The Apache people in the US have already linked Juukan to their campaign to protect the sacred Oak Flat site in Arizona. This is where Resolution Copper, jointly owned by Rio Tinto and BHP, is proposing a new mine.

Having been put on notice\(^22\), global mining companies are bolstering their communities and cultural heritage teams. But it is not enough to just increase head count. Social specialists and Indigenous people must hold positions of authority and have influence internally to contain corporate self-interest.

Mining companies like Rio Tinto must do better. To avoid future catastrophes, industry leaders must internalise the lessons from Juukan and radically overhaul the way they do business.

Deanna Kemp is Professor and Director, Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, University of Queensland. John Owen is a Professorial Research Fellow, The University of Queensland. Rodger Barnes is the Research Manager, Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, University of Queensland


References:


www.foe.org.au Chain Reaction #139 May 2021
Black Lives Matter

Friends of the Earth U.S. statement

Friends of the Earth U.S. condemns the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery, and the continued state-sanctioned violence against Black people in the United States. Today and every day, we declare Black lives matter. These recent acts of police violence are consistent with a larger system of racism in this country, present since the founding of the nation. We are witnessing the ways in which this systemic racism is manifesting at this moment: the disproportionate and militarized police violence Black people experience when exercising democratic rights to protest; the state’s violent neglect of Black communities during the current Covid-19 crisis; and the active and ongoing suppression of the fundamental right to vote. We also recognize the many ways in which Black communities experience environmental racism, disproportionately bearing the burdens of pollution and toxic exposures. Echoing the demands of frontline organizations, in this moment we call for: the defunding of police departments, the reallocation of resources directly to communities for healthcare, housing, and economic opportunity, and the full prosecution of all police involved in the recent murders of Black lives.

The full statement is online at www.foe.org.au/support_black_lives_defund_police

Friends of the Earth Australia statement

Friends of the Earth Australia stand in solidarity with the uprising for Black lives in Minneapolis and across the United States. We are horrified by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police force. But while we are horrified, we are not surprised. The violence of the police hits African Americans, First Nations, Latinos, Asians and other minorities hardest, and has done for centuries. Sadly this is not just a travesty of justice in the USA. Globally, Indigenous people face the repression of states and their police forces. In Australia, as in North America, the country was established through colonisation characterised by massacres and attempted genocide. This is not a story from the past: At least 432 Indigenous people have died in custody in Australia since 1991. In addition to police violence, Indigenous people in Australia continue to face threats to their lands, waters and sacred places by mining and resource companies. Indigenous people have always resisted. We honour that resistance, commit to be allies in their struggles, and declare our support for Black Lives Matter and the movement to end Black Deaths in Custody here in this country.

www.foe.org.au/support_black_lives_defund_police

FoE statement of solidarity with BLM rally organisers

28 July 2020 - Today, on unceded Gadigal Land, NSW, police arrested and fined Aboriginal family and supporters of the murdered 26 year old Dunghutti man, David Dungany Jr, who were calling for an investigation into his killing whilst in custody. They wanted to present a petition of almost 100,000 names to the parliament asking for charges to be laid against the five prison guards involved with his death. Black Lives Matter rally organisers had said they would consider calling off the rally if the New South Wales premier committed to asking SafeWork NSW and the director of public prosecutions to investigate whether charges should be laid against the guards involved in the death of David Dungay Jr. This seemed like a reasonable request which the government declined. The family and supporters then changed a plan for a protest after NSW police took them to court and had the protest declared a public health risk. Instead of a march, people simply gathered in the Domain to listen to speeches. The organisers made sure that everyone had a mask and were socially distancing. However, NSW Police still decided to make arrests and issue fines to those attending. Friends of the Earth are concerned about the suppression of the voice of Indigenous People who are calling for an investigation into a death in custody that should never have happened. We are concerned that NSW shopping centres and malls, with thousands of people in close proximity and very few face masks, are deemed essential services, yet protests are seen as a public health threat. This seems to be a strikingly blatant attack on the democratic rights of First Nations people and the rest of Australia.
Black lives, white lies

Lidia Thorpe

The subjugation of black lives has not evolved since settlement. But it is not our behaviour that needs to change. Ignoring this fact is a choice.

What can I say that hasn’t been said before? Black lives matter, of course, they do. Does this mean that we have access to basic human rights? Absolutely not. I’m writing this on Tuesday, June 23, 2020. Kris Lovelock was tasered in the face yesterday, at point-blank range. On his knees, hands stretched out, Lovelock appeared to be confused about what was happening to him. Telling police, “I’m not even fighting you? Are you kidding me?”

To understand the situation we find ourselves in, we need to look at the logic used to colonise this country and how this operates today. Despite contact with Indigenous people upon arrival, the British Empire declared terra nullius (uninhabited land) and no treaty was negotiated. Within this system, Aboriginal people were identified as flora and fauna until 1967. Our treatment, now and historically, dates back to this initial injustice.

Fraser Anning’s great grandfather, Charles Cumming Stone Anning, was assisted by police when riding out with firearms to kill Aboriginal people and “clear” us from land that he would then steal and claim as his own. This happened at Reedy Springs, Chudleigh Park, Mount Sturgeon, Charlotte Plains and Cargoon. Any survivors of the massacres would be captured and used as slave labour on their cattle and sheep stations. This wasn’t an isolated incident, it was government policy. The Guardian even created an interactive map of where and when these massacres occurred.

It was Mabo Day earlier in June, the 28th anniversary of the historic Mabo v Queensland. This repealed the legal fiction of terra nullius which laid the foundation for Australian law since 1700. High Court Justices Deane and Gaudron acknowledged that: “…terra nullius and land ownership by the Crown provided the environment in which the Aboriginal people of this continent came to be treated as a different and lower form of life whose existence, indeed, depended on the Crown’s willingness to respect us.”

There were hundreds of sovereign nations in this country, prior to colonisation. When Jack Congo Murrell argued in court that his Nation’s law was the applicable law in R v Murrell (1836), the New South Wales Supreme Court agreed on the superiority of British law and refused to recognise Aboriginal laws. This meant that Aboriginal people were officially bound by laws that offered us no protection, which made it easy for police to brutalise us without consequence.

We were rounded up, slaughtered, and sold like cattle until 1926. While the legal status of Aboriginal people has changed since 1836, the legal system largely hasn’t. For example, in 2014 Ms Dhu (given name omitted in accordance with Yamatji custom – Ed) called the police because Dion Ruffin had violated an apprehended violence order. The police then arrested her and Mr Ruffin. When Ms Dhu literally had a heart attack, Constable Matier continued to say that she was lying and exaggerating while nurses attempted to resuscitate her. Ms Dhu died due to sepsis and pneumonia from an infection in a rib that Ruffin had broken three months earlier. Indigenous women are 34-80 times more likely to experience family violence than the national average, yet it is not safe for us to call the police.

Black deaths in custody are not a secret. Since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, there have been at least 437 deaths in police custody. Zero officers have been convicted. This information is available in the public domain, there’s even an interactive map which tracks every known Indigenous death in custody in every jurisdiction from 2008-2019. Ignorance is a choice. US Correspondent for Channel Nine News, Alexis Daish, told a man protesting George Floyd’s murder that, “I really appreciate you giving your perspective because people in Australia don’t have the understanding of the history of police killings here.”

Non-Indigenous Australians choose not to learn about their nation’s past. Daish’s comment says more about systemic racism than the reality of police brutality in this country. On ABC Radio, I was told that black deaths in custody is a First Nations issue. How is it our problem? Our behaviour is not that which needs to change. The world knows Rodney King and George Floyd’s name, and solidarity with these men is important, but I’ve never heard of an Indigenous American represented under the Black Lives Matter movement. This violence and subsequent silence isn’t an accident. Our lives as Aboriginal people reflect the reality that terra nullius was a lie, we are ruthlessly and relentlessly punished by the system that created this myth.

As Judith Lewis Herman writes: “It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering.” It’s not usual to leave footnotes in an op-ed, but I’m asking readers to read material that backs up what I’m saying. Own our nation’s past. There can be no justice without truth. Decolonise your mind, then maybe we can work towards decolonising this country and making it safe for everyone to live in. This land of “a fair go” needs to change, in fundamental ways, before we can stop black deaths in custody.

Lidia Thorpe is a mother and grandmother from the Gunnai and Gunditjmara nations. She was the first Aboriginal woman in the Victorian parliament, first Aboriginal Senator for Victoria and first federal Aboriginal MP for the Greens.

Reprinted from The Big Smoke, July 6, 2020, https://tinyurl.com/yytv2vku

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Australia still turns a blind eye to Aboriginal people dying in police custody

Celeste Liddle

Solidarity with US protesters following George Floyd’s death is important, but Australia also needs to address its own racism.

In April, after a long battle, the family of Tanya Day achieved a victory. The inquest into the death of their mother following a fall while in Castlemaine police station found that unconscious race bias had played at least some part in her arrest. While the coroner fell short of labelling the neglectful actions of the attending police as such (though they were found to have violated Day’s human rights), she did find that the train conductor had made judgement calls based on Day’s Aboriginality which contributed to him calling the police on her in her intoxicated state.

In other words, had Tanya – who had a valid ticket – been left to merely sleep on the train like so many other intoxicated commuters who aren’t Aboriginal are, she might still be with us today.

This finding followed an earlier victory Ms Day’s incredible children had achieved: that “public drunkenness” would be removed from the criminal code in Victoria. In 2019, the Victorian premier promised this would happen – a mere 28 years after this recommendation was handed down by the royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody because it was found that such laws disproportionately criminalised Aboriginal people. It’s thanks to the family of Tanya Day that all Victorians now have the right to make it safely home, without police interference, no matter what our state.

I mention this case because it’s one that everyone who lives in Victoria, and Australia, should know. Day’s family joined the countless other heartbroken Aboriginal families in this country who have had to embark on a journey for justice for their loved ones who have died in police custody. Over 430 of them, incidentally, since the royal commission findings were handed down. Yet despite the fact that this keeps happening, Australia mainly turns a blind eye to the problem, or bends over backwards to justify the fact that Aboriginal people are the most incarcerated race of people on the planet. It’s therefore been interesting, and disheartening, watching the Australian response to the riots happening in the US following the death of African American man George Floyd while in police custody. The world should be outraged by his death and should be taking action to ensure it never happens again. Yet the 24-7 coverage here shows just how much more newsworthy a Black death in custody from the US is here than the many Aboriginal deaths in Australia.

I’ve had people on Twitter tell me that perhaps if there were riots here, there would be more interest. The thing is, there are riots here. Recently, Palm Island residents were awarded compensation after the federal court found police used excessive force on residents during riots following the 2004 death in custody of Mulrindji Doomadgee. Despite the fact that only Aboriginal people were imprisoned for what transpired on Palm Island, the best Nine News could muster in response to this compensation payout was a news report essentially accusing residents of fraud and reckless spending of “taxpayer monies”.

Redfern rioted after 17-year-old TJ Hickey was killed riding a bike while police pursued him. His body was impaled on a fence. Yet I guarantee you that hardly any Australians remember these riots, let alone his name and the fact that his family are still calling for justice.

Or what about Joyce Clarke, who was shot by police in Geraldton last year as she was apparently experiencing a mental health episode? The police officer who shot her entered a not guilty plea to his murder charge only days ago. Authorities at the time were so concerned there would be a riot following Clarke’s death that their racist solution was to ban alcohol sales to certain locals. How many in Australia would have taken to the streets for Joyce?

Further salt is rubbed in the wound when we see Black Lives Matter solidarity rallies in Australia being organised without consultation with the people whose lives are impacted the most by police brutality on this soil – Aboriginal people. It’s fantastic that people know police actions can’t go on unchecked, and showing solidarity is key to racist institutions being challenged wherever they are in the world, but why is solidarity often lacking when it comes to Australia’s own atrocities? Why did a Black Lives Matter US solidarity rally in Melbourne in 2016...
attract thousands,\textsuperscript{10} yet a rally to shut down Don Dale juvenile detention centre following police brutality enacted on Aboriginal children only two weeks later failed to generate anywhere near that level of public interest, even if that smaller crowd succeeded in closing down the Melbourne CBD until 2am?\textsuperscript{21}

Truth is, a large part of it comes down to Australia’s inability to acknowledge and properly address its own racism. Wave after wave of immigrants can come here and experience Australia’s unique brand of racism yet still manage to be more accepted and higher up the social rungs than Aboriginal people will ever be. It’s too hard to deal with local issues, and therefore pointing at America and saying “but they’re worse” is an easy method of avoidance. Global solidarity for the lives of black people and the fight against institutional racism is so incredibly important. It’s in this solidarity and exchange that we find the strength to continue challenging in the hope that this never happens again. I only wish that while Australia is looking abroad for reasons why it should care, it would spend a bit of time ensuring that things change on this soil as well.

Celeste Liddle is an Arrernte woman living in Melbourne. She is a union organiser, freelance writer and activist.

\textit{Reprinted from The Guardian, 2 June 2020, https://tinyurl.com/y6ydbqqt}

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Despite 432 Indigenous deaths in custody since 1991, no one has ever been convicted. Racist silence and complicity are to blame

Alison Whittaker

Many people on this continent know more about police and prison violence in the US, another settler colony, than the same violence that happens here. Both are deserving of our attention and action, so what’s behind the curious silence on First Nations deaths in custody in Australia?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have raised this concern long before today in the media¹ and social media.² Why do we have to? The reasons are complex, but boil down to a system of complicity and perceived normality in Indigenous deaths at the hands of police and prisons. The settler Australian public simply does not see Indigenous deaths in custody as an act of violence, but as a co-morbidity.

Amanda Porter, an Indigenous scholar of policing and criminal justice, wrote about media coverage of Indigenous deaths in custody in Australia compared with the US.³ She noted differences in the way the media covered the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson,⁴ Missouri, with the killing of Mulrunji Doomagee on Palm Island: “The choice of language is important: it evokes a certain response in the reader and shapes our understandings of events. In the case of Palm Island, the often-repeated meta-narrative of so-called ‘dysfunctional’ and ‘lawless’ Aboriginal communities served to justify further acts of colonial violence.”²³

Why the silence?
Since 1991, some 432 Indigenous people (and possibly more) have died in custody.⁶

In my 2018 pilot study⁷ on a sample of 134 Indigenous deaths in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody,⁸ I found coroners considered referring just 11 deaths to prosecutors and only ended up referring five. Of those, only two made it to court and both resulted in quashed indictments or acquittals. These are monumental figures. They are also stories of deep systemic complicity, both before and after death. What makes Australian silence about deaths in custody so especially bizarre is that, unlike the US, we have a mandatory legal review of every death in custody or police presence. Each case, regardless of its circumstances, goes before a judge called a coroner. Just as public political will is always changing, so is law and legal strategy. Compared to the campaigns for justice for black people killed by police in the US, which have made relative gains, many families here are working in a complex space of honouring their loved ones, proper cultural protocols around death and the dead, and securing CCTV footage to mobilise the public for justice.⁹

Coroners have offered mixed responses, and each state and territory’s coroner approaches the question in a slightly different way. After the death of Ms Dhu,¹⁰ a Yamatji woman, in police custody in Western Australia in 2014, persistent advocacy from the families and media organisations prompted the coroner to release footage of her treatment before her death. Coronor Ros Fogliani did so in order to assist with the fair and accurate reporting of my findings on inquest.¹¹

However, last year, NSW deputy coroner Derek Lee initially declined to release footage showing the circumstances of David Dungay’s death – held down by six corrections officers in a prone position until he died – citing cultural respect, sensitivity for his family and secrecy over prison procedures.¹² Members of Dungay’s family, who had applied to have it released, responded with exasperation. It was eventually shown on the opening day of the inquest, although the fuller footage requested by the family remains suppressed from public view.¹³

Other ways families are silenced
There are other transparency issues that give a legal structure to silence about Indigenous deaths in custody. Recently, there appears to be a new push in non-publication or suppression orders being sought by state parties in coroners courts. In Dungay’s inquest, for instance, the media was ordered not to publish the names,¹⁴ addresses or any other identifying features (including photographs) of 21 NSW corrections staff members. There have been other suppression orders in deaths in custody matters before criminal courts, such as the identity of the officer facing a murder charge in the death of Yamatji woman Joyce Clarke in Western Australia last year.¹⁵

Officers in South Australia are also going to some strategic effort to avoid testifying before the inquest into the death of Wayne Fella Morrison, a Wiradjuri, Kookatha and Wirangu man, or even speak with investigators on the grounds of penalty privilege. So far, they have not been successful in claiming the blanket privilege, despite taking the matter to the SA Supreme Court.¹⁶

Morrison’s sibling Latoya Rule has written: “investigations surrounding the cause of death in prisons can have a great impact for our grieving families to at least get an account of what happened to our loved ones in the absence of our care. It can also raise the spotlight on the behaviours of correctional and police officers – like those that piled atop of my brother’s body.”¹⁷

Outside of coroners courts, there is the threat of subjudice contempt,¹⁸ when media coverage may pose a prejudicial threat to a potential trial. This carries a risk for families who speak out about their loved one’s deaths in a way that
even implies something happened or someone did something. Subjudice contempt poses liability to them personally when they speak out, but also could jeopardise their push for justice.

This puts First Nations peoples at the mercy of what can be raised before a jury, judge or coroner. With lengthy procedural delays, this can also mean a case is hard to talk about publicly for years. This is problematic given that timely publicity about deaths in custody is what drives attention. Taleah Reynolds, the sister of Nathan Reynolds, who died in custody in NSW in 2018, said, “We’re coming up to a year since he died and we still don’t know anything more. I feel like they don’t have any remorse; they hide behind the system. No one’s held accountable, that’s the most frustrating part.”

Combined with plaintiff-friendly defamation laws, media ignorance and racist editorial decisions, and a lack of institutional support for Indigenous journalism, this contributes to some of the hedging language we see around police brutality in Australia, like someone “appearing” to do something captured on video. All of this leaves our public discourse full of blak bodies but curiously empty of people who put them there.

**The power of public campaigning**

Prosecution or referral seems to come only from cases where First Nations families have strong public advocacy and community groundswells behind them and strategic litigation resources (not just inquest legal aid).

As the late Wangerriburra and Birri Gubba leader Sam Watson said of the campaign for justice for the death of Mulrunji Doomagee on Palm Island: “Unfortunately, the government had to be dragged to this point screaming and kicking every inch of the way. Every time there’s been a breakdown in the procedure, the family and community on Palm Island are being subjected to more trauma, drama and unnecessary grandstanding by politicians.”

Right now, three deaths are either before prosecutors or in their early stages of prosecution. All have been part of growing, public campaigns driven by their families and communities — although many others, like Dungay’s family, have done the same and still been faced with institutional complicity. Clearly, there is much legal structure that supports this silence, but the basis of the silence itself is colonisation and white supremacy. As Amy McQuire writes, “Their wounds also testify to this violence. But while this footage has been important for mobilising Aboriginal people, non-Indigenous Australia is still complacent and apathetic. They are not ‘outraged’ because they are not ‘shocked’. There is nothing shocking about racist violence perpetrated by police, because it is normalised.”

When we do hear about the Indigenous lives lost in custody, it is undoubtedly because of the persistence, expertise and courage of their families and communities who mourn them. But it is not enough to hear about justice, justice must be done.

*Abridged from The Conversation, June 3 2020, https://tinyurl.com/yaf6guj49*

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Why we organised Melbourne’s Black Lives Matter rally

Tarneen Onus-Williams, Crystal McKinnon and Meriki Onus

As Black, Brown, Indigenous people and allies in the United States and across the world collectively rise up to end systemic racism and violent police practices, it was necessary for us here in Australia to also rise. This is a global movement, and this is an issue that Australia is a part of too. When the footage emerged of the murder of George Floyd by four Minneapolis police officers, as he desperately pleaded “I can’t breathe”, we were all horrified and outraged, but not surprised. We were immediately reminded of the cries of “I can’t breathe” that Dungutti man David Dungay Jr made as he had the life crushed out of him by officers in Sydney’s Long Bay prison. We thought of Aunty Tanya Day, of Ray Thomas Jr, of Joyce Clarke, of Ms Dhu, of Kumanjayi Walker, of Veronica Nelson and of far too many others.

Last week, we had five days to organise the Melbourne rally that was called for Saturday afternoon. We wanted to do everything to ensure the gathering of people safely. We consulted with our local Aboriginal health services – Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. Both assisted us with our health messaging here in Victoria.

They organised for more than 55,000 PPE masks, 55,000 bottles of hand sanitiser and many thousands of gloves to be distributed by their staff on the day of the rally. Other health groups and organisations likewise set up stations across the rally site and helped distribute sanitiser, masks and gloves. The health of our community is always of the utmost importance to us, and it is especially so in the time of pandemic. We also trust the autonomy of our community and our allies to ensure their own safety and adherence to Covid-19 protective regulations.

Last week, The Age decided to publish unfounded claims by a single “senior government official” that protesters were going to spit on police. Other media outlets grabbed that headline and recirculated it. The Age’s retraction and acknowledgement of their mistake did little to undo the damage, or the surge of negative commentary building against us and the rally. By that afternoon, all types of violent rhetoric were being levelled at us: the Herald Sun branded us as “Covid-idiots”, we were trolled on social media, Victoria Police and Premier Daniel Andrews held press conferences. We were threatened with fines and investigation if we did not call off the rally.

Aboriginal lives, and the lives of Black and Brown people, depend on us making a stand. When their lives are violently cut short, it is our moral obligation to say something and to do something – they need our collective outrage, they need us to rally, they need us to fight. We call on everyone who can to stand and fight with us, in whatever capacity you can. Our collective work together is the only way to build our collective futures.

Abridged from The Saturday Paper, #305.
Read more: www.tinyurl.com/yyt3eu3w
Our struggles, while not all the same, are interconnected

My mother and I were driving through Redfern, a historically black neighbourhood in Sydney with Aboriginal flags visible in the windows of nearby flats and Indigenous children playing in the parks. As we passed the local grocery store, my mother commented, “I wouldn’t want to shop there. Too many Aboriginal people, I would be afraid.”

I had just started my first year of university and was in the process of politicising myself. I’d joined the strike for the staff enterprise bargaining agreement, I was running in student union elections and – perhaps most significantly – for the first time I was experiencing racial consciousness. Every few weeks I would think of another experience: a comment here, a memory there, that reminded me of the fears I had lived with because of my race, my Asianness, for years.

I couldn’t let my mother’s comment go. “You can’t say that, I would go shopping there,” I said. She became angry. And couldn’t understand why her fear wasn’t justifiable. We got into a big fight but eventually resolved that as long as she didn’t say those things around me, we wouldn’t fight about it again. A gingerly-reached compromise.

That was the first time I connected the dots and realised that my experience of racism was part of something much bigger than myself. It resonated with me emotionally that white supremacy in Australia had a starting point: the oppression, dispossession and genocide of Indigenous people, and that if I was against racism and how it had affected me, then I was against what my mother had said.

As my consciousness continued to grow, I learnt that racism isn’t just about individual people, it is a system. A system so much larger than my experience that it touched thousands of different people – refugees and asylum seekers, Muslims, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The more educated I became on its violent manifestations, from Aboriginal deaths in custody1 to Islamophobic hate-crimes,2 the more spurred to action I was.

During my time at university, the Black Lives Matter movement was uncovering a new death by police brutality every other month,3 and class inequality and racialised poverty became the topics of many of my university assignments. When an open letter to Asian parents on the topic of Black Lives Matter went viral on Twitter in 2016,4 the memory of my fight with my mother rose to the surface. The letter articulated so well, the intergenerational longing for understanding I had craved in that moment, so clouded by ignorance and anger.

“When someone is walking home and gets racially targeted by a police officer, that is an assault on all of us, and on all of our hopes for equality and fairness under the law,” the letter read, “Our struggles, while not all the same, are interconnected.”

Bridget Harilaou

www.foe.org.au
In Asian communities across the world, there exists a fundamental lack of understanding and empathy towards black people, born of our own histories of colourism and fuelled by our hearty embrace of ‘meritocracy’ – if we can, why can’t they? We are either apathetic, or worse, active participants in the racist discourse that blames Black people for their experiences of prejudice and poverty.

I jumped at the chance to organise an Australian version of the letter, published a month after the US version, to explain the specific context of anti-Indigenous racism to Asian-Australians. Asian communities have often been used as a ‘model minority’, to juxtapose Indigenous struggles against their ability to climb the socio-economic ladder and aspire to ‘white acceptance’. With this letter, I wanted to highlight the differences between our histories – not to divide us, but to bring us together in the fight for justice and equality.

Asian communities are in a unique position to both understand racial discrimination and have access to certain social privileges, yet too often we neglect to use our empathy and resources to support our Indigenous brothers and sisters. Instead, we are encouraged to keep our heads down, become doctors, lawyers and engineers, and settle into apathy and complacency, all the while remaining vulnerable to racial abuse and discrimination.

I first joined the Anticolonial Asian Alliance (AAA) as an online space to discuss anti-racism. But I quickly realised that the pan-Asian solidarity group was rallying offline too. We painted banners, attended the 2018 Invasion Day Rally, and continue to contribute to social justice campaigns for Indigenous rights.

The Australian Black Lives Matter movement is still fighting against Aboriginal deaths in custody, anti-black racial profiling and hate crimes and police brutality. By supporting black struggles, we hope to build meaningful relationships between immigrant communities and Aboriginal communities – a spirit of solidarity nurtured through educating ourselves, our families and communities, both in simple conversation and political activism.

Through becoming aware of the role Asians play as part of the settler-colony in Australia, over time, my mother has come to understand these concepts, too. From sending me Robert Mugabe speeches on WhatsApp to discussing Muhammad Ali interviews about media representation, my mother has embraced who I am as an anti-racist person. These days, we no longer let these issues come between us. And through some tough conversations, we figured out a way to grow together. This is the work of community building, this is how we show up for each other and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander folks. This is how we pave the way for a brighter and more empathetic future.

Bridget Harilaou is a freelance writer and social justice advocate who writes extensively about politics and race, they tweet at @fightloudly. Reprinted from SBS, 11 March 2020, https://tinyurl.com/y2eu93ac

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We live in dangerous times, not unprecedented times

Dr. Kris. Rallah-Baker

In the words of George Santayana “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” We live in dangerous times, not unprecedented times. This is not the first infectious agent to devastate our Continent, but our collective memory as a Nation and The Great Australian Amnesia have failed us. The consequences will be lethal.

The first episode in our post-invasion history began in the late 1780s and rapidly spread across the Continent. There are written accounts of vast areas around Sydney Harbour where bodies of Aboriginal people were piled high in caves and coves were filled with the floating dead. Smallpox was the agent of apocalypse that time and moved like the Grim Reaper along our highways, song-lines and trade routes from Nation to Nation, leaving societal collapse in its path. So severe was its impact that the early English descriptions of Aboriginal society around NSW reflect a society recovering from collapse. We read in the early journals of nomadic hunter gatherers, living a subsistence lifestyle in humpies, dehumanised, traumatised. Through the bias and ignorance of the English it was assumed that those people had always lived that way and European logic followed that Aboriginal Peoples were therefore inferior. Inferiority justified the conquest of land and confirmation bias enabled it, despite the overwhelming physical evidence demonstrating otherwise. Aboriginal oral history tells otherwise though, of many organised Nations across the Continent consisting of often large and sophisticated societies before the arrival of the English, with extensive trade and economic routes, complex governance and justice systems, permanent and semi-permanent villages, both firestick farming and active tilling of the land, resource accumulation, preservation and siloing of food, water sequestration and controlled borders.

Bruce Pascoe’s excellent book *Dark Emu* provides us with some insight into what pre-pox Aboriginal societies looked like, found in the early English journals written as the invasion front fanned further out and encountered societies restoring their systems and societies. We were still doomed though, with our Continent’s population plummeting from 100% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to the current 3%.

Where the pox had failed, the musket, hate and rifle looked to finish the job.

The second major episode on the Continent came in 1918/19, with the arrival of the Spanish Influenza pandemic. By that time Australia had Federated and its Indigenous Peoples were not counted in the Country’s official statistics. Active massacres and “black hunts” of Aboriginal people were still occurring across the Continent and there was little interest in the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

“Aboriginal people were forced to collect wood for their own pyres in at least four cases of mass burning and their numbers were still occurring across the Continent. There are written accounts of vast areas around Sydney Harbour where bodies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples died of the Spanish Flu but it was likely significant. We do know that around 12,000 settler Australians died. State borders were closed, quarantine stations were established and economic devastation followed. It caused a significant blow to a society recovering from a recent World War and subsequent depopulation of its males. What was absent that time was an aggressive foreign power intent on seizing the Continent for its own purposes. Fast forward to early 2020. Reports were coming out from China of a new, highly virulent virus. We assumed that this outbreak would be contained and disappear, just as SARS and swine flu had earlier. Then we decided to respond by fighting over toilet paper, led by a Prime Minister more intent on attending a football match than engaging in true leadership. …

The most vulnerable in society – the elderly, unwell and Indigenous – will be hit hardest. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples the impact of Covid-19 will be compounded by years of neglect and a failure to address the social determinants of health.

Overcrowding, poor housing, lack of adequate access to clean water, racism and lack of access to services will condemn more of us to an early grave than mainstream Australians. Qualified Indigenous medical doctors, members of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, are already reporting cases of overt racism towards Indigenous patients presenting with possible Covid-19. This is just the beginning of the crisis and we need to get through this together; Covid-19 has no regard for colour or creed. We risk losing more holders of the world’s old living culture, again. Probably time to give our First Nations a fair go, what do you think Australia?

Dr Kris. Rallah-Baker B. Med, FRANZCO is a proud Yugggma/Warangu man, President of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association and Australia’s first Indigenous ophthalmologist.


References:

1 The Guardian, https://tinyurl.com/lb6wa6o
2 AIDA, https://tinyurl.com/yc5vsp38
Africa’s health dilemma: Protecting people from Covid-19 while four times as many could die of malaria

Experts across Africa are warning that as hospitals and health facilities focus on Covid-19, less attention is being given to the management of other deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, which affect millions more people.

“Today if you have malaria symptoms you are in big trouble because they are quite close to Covid-19 symptoms, will you go to the hospital when it is said we should not go there?” said Yap Boum II, the regional representative for Epicenter Africa, the research arm of Doctors Without Borders.

“Hospitals are struggling because they do not have the good facilities and equipment; it will be hard to take in a patient with malaria because people are scared. As a result the management of malaria is affected by Covid-19,” Boum, who is also a Professor of Microbiology at Mbarara University of Sciences and Technology in Uganda, said, pointing out that HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis were also being ignored.

In fact, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned that four times as many people could die from malaria than coronavirus. “With Covid-19 spreading, we are worried about its impacts on health systems in Africa and that this may impact negatively on the delivery of routine services, which include malaria control. The bans on movement will affect the health workers getting to health facilities and their safety from exposure,” said Akpaka Kalu, team leader of the Tropical and Vector-borne Disease Programme at the WHO Regional Office for Africa.

Mamadou Coulibaly, head of the Malaria Research and Training Center at the University of Bamako, Mali, concurred that the pandemic was straining health systems in developing countries. He urged malaria-endemic countries not to disrupt prevention and treatment programmes.

Abridged from IPS, 11 May 2020, https://tinyurl.com/y7mqkgab

Q&A: How Kazakhstan’s transgender and lesbian women are being impacted by Covid-19

The coronavirus lockdown in Kazakhstan, and the resultant limited public oversight and limited publication engagement, has paved the way for the government to propose amendments to the country’s laws around gender that could see the exclusion of the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community. Aigerim Kamidola, Legal Advocacy Officer, ‘Feminita’ Kazakhstan Feminist Initiative in Kazakhstan, spoke to IPS:

Inter Press Service (IPS): How has COVID-19 impacted the LBTQ community in Kazakhstan?

Aigerim Kamidola (AK): We’ve seen two main trends in Kazakhstan regarding LBTQ populations: first one is that the general measures, policies and legislations [around] the state’s response to COVID-19 pandemic didn’t take the intersectional approach at the core of it. As a result, they exacerbated the pre-existing inequalities that disproportionately affected LGBTQ people.

The second trend is measures that specifically target civil society and LGBTQ groups. Despite [the fact] that there was a state of emergency and the quarantine, when there was limited public oversight and civic and social engagement, the parliament and the government actually used the space to adopt certain legislation which actually targeted civil society groups.

IPS: What are some ways in which Covid-19 has affected the health of the members of the LBTQ community in Kazakhstan?

AK: With our allies from transgender initiatives, Feminita completed a big research project on access to healthcare of LBQ women and trans people in Kazakhstan in March. Because of the stigma by medical professionals, there’s a high resentment of the LBQT community for [asking for] medical help and that increases health risks. It’s not only HIV or STIs, which are normally spoken of, but also for other chronic disease and cancer-related diseases. As a result, it makes the group of people more susceptible to health risks [in the event of a] pandemic or other epidemiological diseases.

IPS: Your organisation was denied registration as an NGO last year – how does this affect your ability to operate in the country and to serve the LBTQ community?

AK: We recently received the supreme court decision upholding the previous court rulings, confirming that there was no violation in a denied registration. And it surely affects the organisation’s institutional development because as a non-registered organisation, you’re not eligible to open a bank account, or apply for funding and hence [unable] to maybe be more effective in responding to some urgent calls.

As a result, the initiative operates with a small group of people - most of them work other jobs on the side. And they cannot pay the initial salaries, or operate sustainably or have sustainable activities. And that of course exacerbates in the pandemic.

On the other side, we see a contraction of funding too and it is [being] channelled towards the needs of pandemic response or healthcare needs. Then there’s a contraction of resources to activists and civil society groups and human
Slovenia: Environmental rights ripped up

June 24 – In the shadow of coronavirus, the Slovenian government has ripped up some of the country’s hard-won environmental rights. Last week the list of projects it plans to bulldoze through without checks was announced. These include many gas projects, road construction, large hydro power projects, and a new nuclear power plant – harming Slovenia’s rich nature, protected species, and the climate.

As the population was on lockdown to limit the spread of the pandemic, Slovenia’s government quietly suspended environmental and nature protections, by speeding up construction and development permits. Most of Slovenia’s environmental and conservation NGOs, including Focus/Friends of the Earth Slovenia, suddenly found themselves unable to participate in environmental decision-making for such projects, and unable to challenge them in courts until the end of 2021. By then, many of the projects will be in progress.

NGOs’ rights to challenge development projects that would damage the environment were curtailed without warning or public consultation, and outside of the regular legislative procedure. The measures have no direct effect on coping with the pandemic.

Moreover, construction works will be able to begin on environmentally damaging projects as soon as a permit is issued – without the usual step of waiting to confirm legality regarding environmental and nature protection.

Slovenian NGOs have responded with a (socially distanced) protest in front of the Slovenian Parliament, and several thousand emails were sent by supporters to Members of Parliament. EU NGOs have expressed their concern. And three environmental and nature protection NGOs’ rights to challenge development projects that would damage the environment were curtailed without warning or public consultation, and outside of the regular legislative procedure. The measures have no direct effect on coping with the pandemic.

Malaysia:

Fisher-folk switch to direct distribution

Due to the covid-19 restrictions, Malaysian fisher-folk were suddenly unable to sell their fish as usual. Restaurants, hotels and some markets were forced to close, and middlemen were no longer buying their landed catch. Fishermen lost their customers and their income. The disruption to supply chains led to a spike in the price of fish for ordinary people. However, a few fisher-folk took the initiative to work out new supply chains. They started selling their fish directly to consumers. This helped to stabilise the price of fish, and ensure that consumers could directly benefiting from it.

Activists murdered during pandemic

Since the first case of Covid-19 was reported in Colombia on March 6, more than 20 social leaders have been murdered. With the Colombian government’s focus on the pandemic, The Guardian reports how “death squads in Colombia are taking advantage of coronavirus lockdowns to murder rural activists.”

On top of this, the nationwide lockdown has made many at-risk activists easy targets. Communities and their leaders have been exposed to an intensification of violence in their territories due to the presence of a variety of armed groups, including former guerrilla dissident factions, paramilitary forces, drug squads, and the military.

Already this year, 84 union and community leaders, together with 24 ex-guerrilla fighters in the process of rejoicing civilian life under the peace process, have been killed. On top of killings, there are constant threats and attacks against trade union, peasant and community leaders in all regions of the country. All while those in power do nothing.

Friends of the Earth stands in solidarity with various Colombian peoples’ organisations who are at risk under coronavirus lockdowns. Let’s stand with our brothers and sisters in Colombia to send a message to the Colombian government: Stop the killings.

We want justice for all the leaders of rural and indigenous organisations and black communities defending human rights in the country.

1 http://foeeurope.org/covidalcohol-colombia
2 https://tinyurl.com/qrzta88

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Sahabat Alam Malaysia / Friends of the Earth Malaysia is now working on ways to support the fisher-folk in setting up a new delivery system called ‘from fisher to consumer’. Short food supply chains like this can bypass the traditional role of middlemen, wholesalers and retailers.

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Azrul Faizal Mohamed, from Sahabat Alam Malaysia / Friends of the Earth said:
“We are helping to build a network among local communities and consumers and also take orders online. This system will improve the livelihood of fishermen, promote local food security, and reduce household expenditure for consumers.”
http://foeeurope.org/covidsolidarity-malaysia

Philippines: Pandemic used to shut down protest¹
In the Philippines, coronavirus is being used to shut down protest. The government’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been to impose a lockdown on the general population – but not on forestry or mining industries. This means that questionable contracts and industry activities are still carrying on, but any community resistance to these damaging deals gets shut down. The police and the military are called in under the guise of upholding quarantine guidelines.

During the indigenous peoples’ barricade at OceanaGold’s mining site in Nueva Vizcaya², community members were threatened with arrest for allegedly violating the quarantine rules. After nine months of peacefully blockading the mine without police interference, the community was overwhelmed by the large police presence violently dispersing the barricade – and their leader Rolando Pulido was actually arrested on the grounds of supposedly violating coronavirus restrictions.

The community’s barricade follows the expiration of Canadian-Australian mining company OceanaGold’s mining permit and is a lawful expression of the indigenous peoples of Didipio, local governments, and solidarity groups (including Friends of the Earth Philippines) in support of a local government order suspending OceanaGold’s operations. OceanaGold’s operations have depleted ground water and contaminated nearby rivers of Nueva Vizcaya and displaced countless families.

Friends of the Earth joins international calls for President Rodrigo Duterte to shut down Oceana’s operations and cancel its request for extension.

More than 700 organisations joined the call, and #SOSCampesinado became a focal point for solidarity and agroecology initiatives during the covid crisis. Across Spain, dozens of local campaigns were successful in pressurising their councils and municipalities to re-authorise open-air markets and support food sovereignty.

On April 17 – the International Day of Peasant Struggles – Friends of the Earth Spain explained: “The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the value of the people who work the land to produce our food. The widespread closure of food markets is generating unaffordable costs for local producers, and increasing food waste due to the impossibility of using their products. Fresh and healthy food is not reaching the public.”¹⁴

Some regions of Spain, including the Basque Country, heeded to the demands of #SOSCampesinado, promoting local food supply chains and reopening local food markets; but not the central government.

The strict confinement conditions have now begun to ease conditions for small producers in Spain. But the crisis has helped unite many more voices than ever before in support of local food markets and distribution chains. A movement that will continue.

¹ http://foeeurope.org/covidsolidarity-spain
² https://tinyurl.com/y8b9vz6
³ https://tinyurl.com/y3j7pwa
⁴ https://tinyurl.com/ydd8771b
Policing as part
of the national psyche

Osman Faruqi

There are two striking aspects of Australia’s response to coronavirus: the first is that it’s being increasingly led as a police issue, and the second is that this is happening while the rest of the world works to reform and curtail police powers. As other democracies talk about abolition, we’re sending armed officers into housing blocks and calling it public health.

In the two months after George Floyd’s killing by police, 31 of America’s largest cities implemented policies restricting chokeholds. Cities such as Los Angeles and New York cut their police budgets for the first time in modern history. Minneapolis voted to defund its police force.

New Zealand recently announced it was abandoning a trial of arming officers. In Canada, the mayor of Toronto has tabled a proposal to “de-task” the city’s police force by creating “alternative models of community safety response”.

In Australia, rather than sparking any kind of real debate about the limits of policing, the conversation has focused on a conspiracy theory that Black Lives Matter rallies spread coronavirus. Despite being dismissed by medical experts, this theory has dominated headlines in the country’s most popular newspapers and has even been endorsed by the New South Wales police commissioner.

Police have also prevented further rallies from going ahead, claiming they will be a vector for proliferation of the virus. The fact that the police may have their own interests in shutting down a campaign squarely focused on police violence has barely featured in the public discussion.

Meanwhile, a proposal to raise the age of criminal responsibility and stop the imprisonment of those aged under 14, 60 per cent of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, was recently rejected by the country’s attorneys-general.

In Victoria, far from de-arming, defunding or de-tasking police, the Andrews government has expanded its punitive approach to public health, increasing fines for those who breach public health orders and giving police the power to enter homes without a warrant. Protective services officers – armed officials with just three months of training, who normally patrol train stations – have been given the same powers as police to stop, question and fine individuals.

In comparable jurisdictions, people have been able to respond to the virus while debating and implementing police reform. Australia has done the opposite. The pandemic has been used as justification for an unprecedented increase in police powers.

This phenomenon reflects a bigger trend in Australia: the success of what criminologists dub penal populism. Coined in the mid-1990s, the term refers to the way in which politics can harness and exacerbate community concern about crime to push through laws such as mandatory sentencing and give police more resources and more powers. This form of politics creates a problem and then pretends to solve it, usually with brute force. It is popular with the police and with tabloids, and it works.

Australia isn’t the only country grappling with the consequences of penal populism, but our inability to have a real conversation about its legacy reflects something much deeper in our culture. As far-reaching as many of the current police powers are, particularly those introduced in the context of coronavirus, they aren’t entirely unprecedented.

Policing in this country was first introduced as a tool of colonial repression, to target and vanquish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Militarised, armed and mounted police units existed in Australia before anywhere else in the world.

Before centrally funded and organised police forces were established in Britain or the US, Australian police were enforcing colonial rule and fighting in the Frontier Wars. As the colony expanded, police were used to implement policies of protectionism and assimilation, aimed at further subjugating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Essentially, police in Australia have played a long-term paramilitary and administrative role not seen in most other countries. The legacy of that approach dominates our current thinking on policing and justice. Like police reform elsewhere, until we are able to acknowledge the root cause of inequality and injustice in Australia, we will not be able to properly reckon with this issue. Truly, this is a nation of cops.

Abridged from *The Saturday Paper* #313. https://tinyurl.com/y4mf9e48

Osman Faruqi is a journalist and the editor of 7am, Schwartz Media’s daily news podcast.

Toda Pacific Declaration on Climate Change, Conflict and Peace

In 2018, the Toda Peace Institute and the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (University of Otago, New Zealand) conducted a workshop on “Climate Change and Conflict in the Pacific: Prevention, Management and the Enhancement of Community Resilience” in Auckland, New Zealand. The workshop brought together academics, policymakers, peacebuilding practitioners and civil society actors to discuss the challenges and potential conflict linkages posed by climatic uncertainty in the Pacific. The workshop established the ‘Auckland Climate Change, Conflict and Peace research and policy network’ in order to initiate and coordinate future activities. This ‘Toda Pacific Declaration on Climate Change, Conflict and Peace’ flows from the debates and findings of that workshop.

Preamble
Recognising that the Pacific is a climate change hotspot, with Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) being particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change,
Recognising that terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and the livelihoods of communities are under threat from climate change, including threats to: culture, food, land, water and health, which are intensifying under these pressures,
Recognising that the impacts of climate change are resulting in internal (within a nation) and international migration, seen in the increasing frequency of relocations of entire communities across the Pacific,
Recognising that climate change induced pressures, combined with existing vulnerabilities, can lead to conflict, and even violent conduct of conflict, thus threatening peace, human security and stability, both within countries and at the regional level,
Concerned that in the international debate surrounding the climate change–security nexus, PICs have attracted less attention than other parts of the world, despite the vulnerability of the region to the conflict-prone effects of climate change, Contained that there is an urgent need in the region for policy-relevant research, and evidence-based policy advice, on the issue of climate change, conflict and peace so as to foster the elaboration and implementation of policies and strategies, We declare the following:

Findings, Principles and Guidelines
1. Climate change adaptation and mitigation responses require integrated foundations, based on dynamic and adaptive co-management approaches that bring together the best contemporary and traditional modes. These include the following dimensions:
1.1 Integrating the knowledge and activities of stakeholders from different societal spheres such as: communities, government institutions (e.g. national and sub-national governments), traditional customary representatives (e.g. chiefs, elders and other cultural and wisdom custodians), religious faith communities (e.g. churches), as well as civil society agencies (e.g. NGOs),
1.2 Building the wide variety of significant cultural and spiritual contexts of the Pacific into climate adaptation responses,
1.3 Weaving together traditional ecological knowledge with climate science,
1.4 Linking the international climate legal regime with state and traditional customary laws,
1.5 Building linkages between all levels of climate change governance, from the local to the international,
1.6 Supporting bridging institutions which have the capacity to bring together stakeholders from various governance levels, societal spheres, localities, and with different worldviews. Such bridging institutions can be civil society organisations, in particular in PICs the churches and other religious communities and institutions, educational institutions and/or networks of leaders who are familiar with both the ‘modern’ and the ‘traditional’ worlds.
2. There is a real risk that climate change-related conflicts may escalate across the Pacific. These will include conflicts over land and scarce natural resources, conflicts due to climate-induced displacement, conflicts in the aftermath of extreme climatic events (such as cyclones and floods), as well as conflicts arising from inadequate environmental governance or poorly designed and implemented climate change policies and adaptation and mitigation measures. The impacts of climate change, combined with pre-existing vulnerabilities and other factors, such as population pressures and rapid urbanisation, multiply the likelihood of conflict and even of violent conflict escalation, as well as an increase of everyday violence, in particular gender-based violence. Therefore climate change adaptation responses require conflict prevention and conflict-sensitive approaches that prioritise local contexts and the maintenance of peace.
This encompasses:
2.1 Identifying and mitigating key local, national and international vulnerabilities which, when combined with the effects of climate change, threaten the peace and security of societies and communities, from threats to the sovereignty of states to everyday violence (particularly against women and children),
2.2 Prioritising research which pays attention to the complexity of integrated human (economic, social, political and cultural) and natural systems,
2.3 Including dimensions of the climate change–conflict nexus which so far have been widely ignored or underestimated, such as cultural and spiritual aspects, gender, traditional customary law and knowledge, together with contemporary indigenous knowledge and indigenous ways of climate change adaptation, of conflict transformation and peacebuilding,
2.4 Paying attention to the (unintentional) conflict-prone effects of mitigation and adaptation measures, e.g. reforestation projects that lead to the displacement of communities,
2.5 Developing context-specific conflict analysis and training tools, and organising comparative learning exchanges,
2.6 Documenting cases of climate-related conflicts to identify lessons learned for conflict prevention and resolution, e.g. conflicts resulting from climate change-induced forced relocation of communities, or violence against women which may increase due to resource scarcity.

2.7 Focusing on regional dialogue as crucial to the development of conflict-sensitive climate change adaptation responses.

3. The effects of climate change may require the resettlement of communities (e.g. relocating villages and infrastructure to a higher ground). These processes need conflict sensitive planning, involving affected communities from the onset.

This involves:

3.1 Acknowledging the inseparable connection of Pacific people(s) to the land (vanua, fenua, fanua, 'aina, whenua, enua, fonua, te aba ...) which is fundamentally, culturally and spiritually, linked to identity. Therefore the loss of land means a loss of cultural identity. This worldview needs to be incorporated in responses to climate change challenges.

3.2 Respecting the desire of people to stay and adapt their home territory to the effects of climate change whenever possible, as well as the need to plan for relocation when there are no other options.

3.3 Integrating the needs, interests and expectations of both resettlement and destination communities, as well as other social groups and stakeholders.

3.4 Ensuring that both resettling and destination communities are meaningfully included, and participate fully, in each stage of the resettlement process, based on ongoing dialogue with all parties.

4. There are dimensions that are central to Pacific peoples’ lives and cultures which are not usually addressed in climate discourse. These include: emotions, spiritual connections, traditional laws, knowledge and practices, faith, gender, relationality and the more-than-human world. These aspects are highly relevant for conflict prevention and the maintenance of peace.

An approach that is sensitive to these dimensions encompasses:

4.1 Including differing worldviews in responses to climate change,

4.2 Highlighting the injustices inherent in the impacts of climate change pertaining to communities and nature across PICs, acknowledging that PICs’ contribution to greenhouse gas emissions is negligible, while they at the same time bear the brunt of the negative effects of climate change,

4.3 Overcoming human-centred approaches, which separate people from nature,

4.4 Nurturing the concept of relationality which will deepen connections between people and other living beings and the material and immaterial worlds,

4.5 Nurturing cross-cultural dialogue through engaging and sharing Pacific worldviews, knowledge systems and spirituality, and integrating ‘Western’ and Pacific ways of thinking,

4.6 Acknowledging the rights of future generations to a viable and peaceful planet,

4.7 Acknowledging the rights of nature through the protection of sustainable eco-systems, which in turn support a viable and peaceful planet,

4.8 Focusing on education, including traditional and local knowledge, as crucial for conflict-sensitive adaptation responses,

4.9 Recognising the roles and responsibilities of churches and religious communities as influential civil society organisations across the Pacific and their (actual and potential) leadership role with regard to climate change and conflict,

4.10 Strengthening international climate law to ensure its enforceability and capacity to protect vulnerable states such as PICs,

4.11 Looking at ways in which civil society actors (including religious institutions) can reinforce and help realise national and regional political efforts to respond to the negative impacts of climate change, and

4.12 Holding to account those actors who are responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions that cause immense problems and hardships for the people in PICs, demanding the substantial lowering of emissions and the setting and achieving of meaningful targets for the reduction of such emissions.

Reducing COVID-19 risk through population relocation in Tuvalu

Tuvalu remains free of the coronavirus as of 30th May 2020. Unlike much of the rest of the world where focus is on death tolls and struggling health systems, Tuvalu is currently free of these immediate pressures. However, a potential outbreak is being fended off by the national government through a declared State of Emergency, which includes the closure of borders and enhancing the capacity of the health system to cope with an outbreak.

In addition, the Government is currently advising voluntary population relocation from the capital island, Funafuti, to either Funafuti’s rural islets or the more distant outer islands. Funafuti is the location of the only international port and airport, and so is the most likely site of coronavirus entry into the country. Under the Management and Minimisation of the of Coronavirus Regulation, the government can mandate relocation should COVID-19 arrive in the country.

Internal migration from urban to rural areas is now occurring at an unprecedented rate. As of early May 2020, about 1500 of the capital’s 6500 population have voluntarily moved to the outer islands, with more movement expected. This figure, representing about fifteen per cent of the national population, does not include additional numbers moving from the capital to rural islets off the capital. This paper outlines the role of population mobility in the COVID-19 emergency measures in Tuvalu, in the context of both regional cooperation and national action, and considers how social, cultural, economic and environmental changes may unfold.

Fossil gas – households in hot water

Jim Crosthwaite and Amaryll Perlesz

In the last issue of Chain Reaction, I explained that emissions of fossil gas need to be tackled on many fronts (Crosthwaite 2020a). Here I look at gas used for heating hot water in households.

Household use of gas helps to legitimate the fossil gas industry, which loves to promote gas as clean and natural (ENA 2017a, 2017b), and even warm and cuddly (Mazengarb 2020). The industry will do everything possible to ensure households remain connected to the gas supply. How can the climate movement challenge this?

There is a huge opportunity for massive change away from household gas in the next 15 years. By 2035, nearly every hot water service (HWS) in Australia will be replaced. Their expected life is only 10–12 years. Imagine over three million gas-run HWS being replaced by electric! That should be our ambition with the heat source being a heat pump, solar thermal, PV diverter, direct PV or an instantaneous electric system (RENEW 2017).

In 2014, ABS found an estimated 3.4 million HWS in Australia running on mains gas, and another 387,900 running on LPG/bottled gas. 75% of Melbourne households relied on gas for hot water, as did over 60% of households in Adelaide and Perth and 46% in the ACT, falling to 35% in Sydney and 13% in Brisbane. In regional Victoria, 45% were estimated to use mains gas, and 7% used LPG/bottled gas. Over 10% of households in regional Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia relied on LPG/bottled gas (ABS 2014).

Building momentum away from fossil gas in households will have flow-on effects. As people disconnect from gas, they will become community advocates for a renewable economy. Scepticism about advertising by the fossil gas industry will grow. Reducing demand for gas will be recognised as better than expanding supply to meet so-called shortages.

The problem

Unfortunately, without public intervention, most gas HWS will be replaced with another gas one because of price and decision-making by households, landlords and builders. Continued use of gas for hot water is not a massive source of emissions, but it will delay Australian households going all-electric for cooking, heating and cooling, and disconnecting the gas.

Here are three barriers that will require a strong community campaign to address.

Decision-making process and who is involved.

Going without hot water is most inconvenient, and people who own their own homes will rush to ring a plumber and get a new appliance as soon as possible. They will typically make a snap decision. Weighing up the pros and cons of going electric, and choosing the right type of electrically run service, takes time and energy.

Only 10-15% of new HWS are ‘considered purchases’ by owners. A massive 55-65% are ‘emergency purchases’ after breakdown (E3 Hot Water Systems Roadmap 2018). The plumber or retailer has a major influence on these decisions.

Builders of new houses install the remaining 25-30% of new HWS. They are driven by capital cost, without regard for the running cost to be borne by the household. The owner of an investment property will have similar priorities.

Price. Running costs of electric HWS are cheaper than for gas, whereas upfront costs are higher. However, recent increases in the domestic cost of fossil gas makes the additional capital cost of an electric HWS with a high efficiency heat pump a more attractive proposition in both the short and longer term. The financial impact of going off gas depend on location, household intention and gas price; replacing gas is certainly best if it is the first step towards an all-electric home (Lombard & Price 2018).

Commercial reality of the gas industry, its regulation and standards.

As illustrated above, households do not make decisions about HWS in isolation, if they make them at all. The plumber, the appliance retailer, the builder and even the architect are all likely to be expert in gas systems, rather than the alternatives. They need to be guided and helped as part of a just transition away from fossil fuels.

There are many standards and regulatory issues, at state and commonwealth levels, that need to be addressed. Allston (2020) highlights the hurdles faced in making the shift to an all-electric home in Victoria. These are also clear in Environment Victoria’s report on opportunities to reduce gas use (Northmore Gordon 2020) and in the work of the Greenhouse and Energy Minimum Standards Regulator (GEMS 2018). Meanwhile, gas industry players are writing detailed reports, making submissions or lobbying to maintain regulations and standards that suit them. There are seven associations covering different parts of the industry (Crosthwaite 2020a, 2020b), but most of them have a shared 2050 vision (ENA 2017a), using the promise of hydrogen technology as a cover for continued use of gas (Forcey 2018).

Vigilance is required! Even green energy suppliers have recently moved into selling gas to households. Energy Locals was granted a Victorian retail licence on 6 May 2020, and Powershop some years earlier (see the Essential Services Commission website). Let’s make this an opportunity, as outlined below.

Options for action on gas HWS

Why not ask your group to brainstorm what might be done about household use of gas – get the ideas down, then prioritise them for action.

Emergency advice

• Councils and state government to promote accredited green plumbers and electricians
• An independent hotline to ring for expert advice when the HWS breaks down
• Promotion through council rate notices, community groups, church groups, social media
• Magnetic fridge stickers with the hotline number and other key advice

Green energy retailers

• Produce a public plan with 3, 5 and 10-year targets for shifting customers off gas
• Use the plan to attract new customers keen to get off gas, but who need time to transition
• Use customer notices encouraging the move off gas
• Offer generous support to allow customers to pay off the installation over time
• Partner with Earthworker (see below) in delivering all-electric services using renewable energy and a heat pump

Worker and business support

• Subsidies for training for gas fitters and other plumbers in how to work with heat pumps and solar thermal system (typically with tubes on the roof) and other HWS systems
• Training and other support for plumbing firms to work on heat pumps as well as the hot water tanks and other plumbing
• Working with businesses in the gas appliance supply chain to identify issues, and help shift them away from gas
• Support for worker-owned cooperatives like Earthworker – www.earthworker.com.au – manufacturing, supplying and fitting hot water tanks and highly efficient heat pumps

Financial incentives and disincentives for owners

• Higher rates for premises that replace gas HWS with gas rather than electric. This would require mandatory registration of all HWS replacements by the installer
• Grants to help pay upfront costs of electric HWS, but also to go all electric
• Grants for landlords to go electric if the old system breaks down

Lobbying state governments

• Regulation to require replacement of gas HWS when they break down with electric – after a sunset period, say 5 years
• Public housing packages to give priority to going all electric — new builds & upgrades

Community housing industry

• Regulation to require industry members of Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) to install electric HWS and heat pumps in new and re-furbished community housing builds

Local councils and community groups

• What should climate emergency and similar plans say on this issue?
• What role for councils, groups of councils, local business networks and communities?
• How to maintain vigilance in monitoring gas industry behaviour and government action or inaction on standards and regulations?

Keeping up to date

• RenewEconomy reports frequently on the fossil gas industry
  www.reneweconomy.com.au
• Australian Gas Market Insights, www.facebook.com/groups/AustralianGasMarketInsights
• ‘My Efficient Electric Home’ facebook group, www.facebook.com/groups/MyEfficientElectricHome

Jim Crosthwaite is a member of Friends of the Earth Melbourne. Amaryll Perlesz is a member of Darebin Climate Action Now.

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- Jim Crosthwaite is a member of Friends of the Earth Melbourne. Amaryll Perlesz is a member of Darebin Climate Action Now.
Community vs. gas in a post-coronavirus Victoria

No New Gas Working Group

Extractive industry represents a major threat to the world's ability to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of global systems and triggered an immense associated economic fallout, highlighting a need and opportunity for a radical recovery plan in line with climate justice. In spite, or perhaps because of this, the federal Australian government appears content to remain in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry. It has propounded a 'gas-led' coronavirus recovery that places immense pressure on state governments to 'remove red tape' and open land and waters for gas exploration.

Despite its attempts to market itself as 'natural gas' and a 'transition fuel' through the climate crisis, methane is the second-most significant greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide. Due to poor monitoring of fugitive emissions in Australia (which have risen by almost 46% since 2005), it is likely that gas may be no better for the atmosphere than coal.

The use of gas is moreover uneconomic in the face of falling renewable prices and a broken gas market that sees domestic consumers pay up to 51% more than consumers in export markets. Yet the miseducation surrounding so-called 'natural' gas in the popular imagination has been compounded by federal government lobbying. It has seen the issue of gas emerge as a strategic frontier in the fight for climate justice.

The response: The No New Gas Working Group

In 2018, the Victorian Government released five new oil and gas exploration blocks off the Otway coast, stretching west to the South Australian border. The coastline from Port Campbell to the SA border is home to a major tourist industry. Income comes from whale watching, surfing, and all manner of accommodation, hospitality and service industries which support tourism. These communities are already being hit hard by COVID-19 travel restrictions. Imagine the devastating impacts of a major oil spill on this shoreline.

It is in this context that the No New Gas Working Group was established at Friends of the Earth Melbourne. The group aims to pressure the Victorian government to heed the community’s opposition to gas, rather than the vested interests of the Federal Coalition and big industry.

Our inaugural action was staged on World Oceans Day on June 8: a #StayInPaddleOut virtual paddle out in support of the endangered southern right whales and the south-west Victorian local tourism operators that rely on their migration for revenue in an uncertain economic climate.

On June 8, individuals and communities across the state came together to call on Premier Daniel Andrews and Resources Minister Jaclyn Symes to cancel tenders for offshore gas exploration along the south-west coast. Some took photographs from their homes – in backyards and lounge-rooms with makeshift surfboards and signs. Others participated in socially distant community actions on the shores of Victoria's coastline: such as Surfers for Climate and the Otway Climate Emergency Action Network (OCEAN), a new community group propounding climate action and opposing industrialisation in the Basin.

The event was an impressive show of community opposition to gas exploration in the state, demonstrating that there is no social license for fossil fuels in an uncertain future. Together, we can show the state government that gas drilling is bad for tourism, bad for wildlife, and bad for the climate.

If you would like more information about the No New Gas Working Group or are interested in becoming involved, contact convenor Nikkola Mikocki-Bleeker at nikkola@foe.org.au
Marine cloud brightening – a fossil fuel industry smokescreen?

Louise Sales

The Australian Government is funding dangerous cloud brightening experiments on the Great Barrier Reef through a trust set up by fossil fuel industry executives.

In 2018, Australians raised our collective eyebrows when then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull awarded $444 million to a small private charity – the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, without departmental oversight, or going through a competitive tender process.¹

A subsequent Senate Inquiry into the matter concluded that: “The granting of $444 million to the Foundation was a highly irresponsible decision, hastily concocted by relevant ministers, without proper consideration of risks and potential effectiveness, no consultation with key stakeholders, and without having undertaken due diligence.”²

The Inquiry also raised concerns that the focus of the Foundation Partnership would not be on the key underlying environmental problems – such as climate change – that are the root cause of the poor health of the Reef. The Inquiry recommended that the most appropriate course of action was to terminate the Partnership.³

Needless to say this hasn’t happened.

Project breaches UN geoengineering moratorium

Earlier this year, scientists from the Foundation’s Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program created international controversy by conducting cloud brightening experiments on the Great Barrier Reef. The move defied an international moratorium on the deployment of geoengineering technologies.

Geoengineering is the large-scale manipulation of the environment. The profound risks associated with geoengineering proposals include further disruption of the global climate; unknown feedback effects; floods and droughts in the global south; and its potential to be weaponised by powerful countries.⁴ For this reason, in 2010, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity ruled that “no geoengineering activities should be carried out” until a “global, transparent and effective control and regulatory mechanisms for geo-engineering, in accordance with the precautionary approach” can be put in place. The decision allows exceptions for “small-scale experiments” on several conditions, including that they are conducted under “controlled settings” – which was not the case with the Australian experiment.

The Australian experiment, led by the Southern Cross University and the Sydney Institute of Marine Science, was conducted over a four-day period in a southern part of the Great Barrier Reef. The scientists used a modified turbine to spray trillions of nano-sized ocean salt crystals into the air from the back of a barge. In theory, the tiny salt crystals will mix with low-altitude clouds, making them brighter and reflecting more sunlight away from the ocean surface – creating a localised cooling effect.

Next year, the team plans to test the technology at three times the scale, ready for a 10-fold increase a year later, which the researchers say should be able to brighten clouds across a 400 km² area. According to the Reef Trust Partnership Annual Work Plan, $6.63 million has been allocated to solar radiation management research this year.⁵

The open-air testing of solar geoengineering technology in Australia sets a particularly dangerous new precedent, opening a path to the use of a risky technology that, if deployed at large scale, could be damaging to other regions and even the ocean ecosystems the researchers claim to be trying to protect.

What is Marine Cloud Brightening?

Marine Cloud Brightening (MCB) is a proposed Solar Radiation Management (SRM) technique that aims to create whiter clouds in order to reflect more sunlight back to space and hence creating a cooling effect. To achieve this, MCB proponents suggest injecting salty aerosols into marine cloud layers by sprayings seawater from vessels with nozzles able to turn saltwater into tiny particles.

What are the risks associated with MCB?

While modelling results predict that MCB would reduce average global temperatures, they also show that it could have considerably varied and potentially detrimental impacts in different parts of the world. For example, one study predicts that global mean precipitation could decrease up to 2.3%.

South America is predicted to become warmer and dryer and substantial rainfall reduction over the Amazon basin is predicted, which would be an ecological disaster.

Another study predicts a massive 7.5% increase in runoff over land, primarily due to increased precipitation in the tropics. These studies show the extent to which geoengineering is likely to have major unintended consequences, and how poorly understood those consequences still are.
Marine Cloud Brightening is an expensive, risky technofix

MCB and other solar geoengineering technologies are risky, unproven technofixes that divert attention away from the need for real action on climate change. This is why fossil fuel companies have been funding research into solar geoengineering for decades. It also explains the Coalition Government’s enthusiasm for the project.

In April this year the Federal Government committed $100 million to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation’s Reef Restoration and Adaptation Science Program (of which the MCB experiment is a component). $100 million will come from in-kind contributions from the research institutions involved, and they are hoping to raise $100 million from the private sector.

Shady beginnings

It’s still unclear exactly what steps led to the Turnbull Government’s decision to donate $444 million to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to kickstart this whole project, but the origins of the foundation give ample cause for concern.

The Great Barrier Reef Foundation’s four founders include:

- John Schubert, then director of BHP and Qantas, and former Chairman and Managing Director of Esso Australia Limited (whose parent company Exxon has been involved in advocating against climate science);
- Sir Ian McFarlane, a businessman who sought to develop shale oil projects in Queensland.

The Foundation’s Corporate Partners include major greenhouse gas emitters from both the mining and aviation industries – including BHP, Orica, Rio Tinto, Boeing and Qantas. It also has coal group Peabody Energy (which has also funded anti-climate change activism) on its Chairman’s Panel. And there are myriad other links to fossil fuel operators, including Mitsubishi, Origin Energy, AGL and ConocoPhillips Australia.

One of the Foundation’s largest funders is BHP. Freedom of Information documents revealed that the company vouched for the Great Barrier Reef Foundation as part of the government’s process to approve $444 million donation. In their letter to the Federal Government, BHP stated they had donated $15.4 million to the foundation in recent years, and committed another $12.1 million.

BHP is Australia’s single largest greenhouse gas emitter. In the past 15 years, the emissions from BHP’s Australian coal, oil and gas have produced the equivalent of 2,361 million tonnes of CO2 emissions. In 2018, the indirect greenhouse gas emissions from their global operations were equivalent to $96 million tonnes CO2 – more than the projected emissions of 25 million Australians for the same period.

It is telling that BHP has donated so much to the Foundation in recent years. False solutions such as solar radiation management create a convenient smokescreen for the fossil fuel industry. They give the impression that these companies are helping to “save the reef” while the main driver of reef destruction – climate change – goes unaddressed.

Ignoring stakeholder feedback

On its website RRAP (Reef Restoration and Adaptation Program) pays lip service to best practice stakeholder engagement claiming that “resulting
actions must be understood and co-designed by Traditional Owners, Reef stakeholders and the broader community.”

As part of the project’s Stakeholder, Traditional Owner and Community Engagement Assessment, a national, representative survey of Australians was conducted. The resulting report put an upbeat spin on the results – claiming that “approximately half the respondents surveyed indicated they were generally accepting of the technologies being investigated by RRAP.” However, by inference this means that around half of the people they surveyed either weren’t accepting of the technologies being investigated, or weren’t sure about it. As the survey delved deeper into the potential risks associated with the project, it became clear that the public perceived cloud brightening to “have more risks than benefits”.

This view appears to have been shared by the 24 stakeholders that were interviewed. These included representatives of environmental non-government organisations, tourism organisations and local government. According to the project team: “They expressed greater uncertainty and concerns about the technologies and identified several risks... stakeholders strongly cautioned against over-emphasis on a costly and misguided ‘technical-fix’ at the expense of a more holistic (threat reduction) and community-engaged approach. These sentiments about the relative importance of threat reduction (i.e. action on greenhouse gas emissions and marine water quality) compared with large-scale restoration align with the survey results.”

Stakeholders also appeared understandably suspicious of the motives behind the project with the Assessment reporting: “generally low levels of trust in government motives behind RRAP and in the political level decision-making processes. This has created some cynicism towards restoration, which in the early stages of RRAP was compounded by generally low level of awareness (and perceived transparency) of the program and its intentions.”

Both Traditional Owners and other stakeholders emphasised the importance of genuine consultation. According to the report: “Both stakeholders and Traditional Owners strongly asserted that for risks to be managed, and benefits to be realised, meaningful participation and transparency in decision-making and in the R&D process was required throughout any R&D program.” This simply hasn’t happened. There have already been open air trials of the technology with very little awareness among either reef stakeholders or the broader community about the research and its potential risks. The project team admit that “to date, RRAP has undertaken limited public outreach on specific interventions.”

While some traditional owners are involved in the project, there are more that 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional owner groups with connections to the Great Barrier Reef. There is no way that RRAP have obtained prior informed consent from them all. And yet what they are proposing could have profound impacts, not only on the reef, but in surrounding wet tropical ecosystems.

And then of course there is the opportunity cost of squandering millions of taxpayers’ dollars on unproven technofixes that could be used to fund a rapid transition to renewable energy. We already have the technologies we need to tackle climate change – the Federal Government just lacks the political will to implement them.

Louise Sales coordinates Friends of the Earth’s Emerging Tech Project. emergingtech.foe.org.au

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3 ibid.
4 CIEL (2019) Fuel to the Fire: How Geoengineering Threatens to Entrench Fossil Fuels and Accelerate the Climate Crisis, https://tinyurl.com/y3jyblqw
6 ibid.
14 ibid., p 1
16 ibid., p. 19.
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18 ibid., p. 1 & 13.
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20 ibid., p. 1.
21 ibid., p. 18.
A pivotal case is underway to weigh the worth of a biological reserve in Ecuador. A positive ruling could set a precedent to protect all Protected Forests in Ecuador from mining. Equally, a negative ruling might allow mining companies to destroy them.

Ecuador is unique in the world for having the Rights of Nature embedded in its Constitution, but a case has not as yet been argued in an Ecuadorian court of law as to how to apply these unique laws in legally titled Protected Forests.

On June 21, the Constitutional Court of Ecuador, the highest court in the land, announced it would hear arguments in the case to preserve the threatened Los Cedros Protected Forest from mining development.

The Los Cedros Biological Reserve has always been emblematic. Back in 1988 when it was set with the help of a grant from the Australian Government’s Development Assistance Bureau and the support of Australian not-for-profit organisation the Rainforest Information Centre, it was one of the first reserves of its kind in Ecuador.

Not only does it serve as a place where scientists from all over the world can study the unique plants and animals in the area, but it also safeguards four watersheds and provides a buffer of protection against deforestation and development for the 182,109 hectare Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve to its north.

In Ecuador, Protected Forests or Bosques Porteadores are public, private, or community-owned areas specifically created to protect biodiversity and watersheds where grazing and agriculture are prohibited.

Until 2017, Los Cedros’s status as a legally Protected Forest was not up for debate. All that changed when mining concessions covering 2.9 million hectares across Ecuador were handed to mining companies. This included nearly 735,000 hectares of Protected Forests in 41 reserves, and one million hectares of Indigenous territories – around 60% of all concessions sold.

Canadian mining company Cornerstone Capital Resources was sold two concessions covering two-thirds of the reserve, in collaboration with the Ecuadorian state mining company, ENAMI. Incidentally, Australian miner SolGold put in a hostile takeover bid for Cornerstone on June 30, 2020. Mining giant BHP also holds a concession that covers part of the reserve. This is despite the Ministry of Environment’s own publication citing Los Cedros in its ‘Areas of Priority for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Ecuador’, and attempts for Los Cedros to be incorporated into the Cotocachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve.

While not all the areas covered by mining concessions will end up being mined, exploration itself does significant damage. Concessions can be carved up with roads to enable machines to enter and drill for multiple ore samples across the concession, to a depth of hundreds or thousands of meters.

In June 2019, the local government of Cotacachi won an Action of Protection in the Provincial Court of Imbabura to halt exploration in the Reserve, and ENAMI/Cornstone were stripped of their operating permits.

ENAMI and the government immediately lodged an appeal with the Constitutional Court. This was accepted in February this year, but may take several years for the case to be heard. Meanwhile, destruction at the reserve continues.

Exploration in the reserve has not halted, in direct contravention of the court order, despite overwhelming opposition in the region, and even though the mining companies no longer hold the appropriate environmental registration and mining permits.

The legacy of Los Cedros and other Protected Forests across Ecuador cannot be understated. Los Cedros itself has more than 4,000 hectares of primary forest and is part of the Choco Phytogeographical Zone, one of the most biologically diverse and endemic habitats on Earth. It is home to thousands of species, including the critically endangered brown-headed spider monkey, which has less than 250 individuals left globally. It is a legacy for humanity and the earth that should never have been put at risk. This case is vital. It will further formalise the application of Rights of Nature law in Ecuador, and shape what these rights mean for the ongoing protection of Los Cedros, as well as set a precedent for the safety of all the other Protected Forests across Ecuador.

At a time when the ecological future of the earth already hangs in the balance, this is a case we cannot risk losing.

The Melbourne Rainforest Action Group is working on issues of corporate accountability of Australian mining companies operating overseas, particularly Ecuador, which is the world’s newest hotspot for international mining investment, especially in copper. Most Australian companies who have stakes in Ecuador already have histories of significant corporate abuses in Australia, especially in Indigenous lands and environmentally sensitive areas. For more information visit https://rainforestactiongroup.org

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Melbourne Metro 2: A boon for Eastern Melbourne’s public transport connectivity

Natasha Manawadu

The Melbourne Metro 2 (MM2) is a city-shaping project which will connect the city’s north-east to the south-west quicker and more seamlessly than before. It was first envisioned in Public Transport Victoria’s 2012 Network Development Plan, a 40-year vision to provide Melbourne’s growing population with metro-style services, enabling commuters to turn up and hop on a train.1

You might be asking yourself, what is the difference between MM1 and MM2? MM2 will be another underground tunnel directly connecting the Clifton Hill group lines to the Werribee line via the CBD and Fishermans Bend, with options for additional train stations in the inner north. Whilst there are obvious benefits for suburbs which will be directly serviced by MM2, particularly Fishermans Bend – which currently has no viable public transport options – Melbourne’s Eastern suburbs will also benefit from MM2.2

MM2 will have a whole-of-network impact, increasing Melbourne’s rail capacity across the board. As Melbourne strives towards metro-style train services, full sectorisation of the rail network is imperative to enhance reliability and headways. MM2 will decouple the Mernda and Hurstbridge lines, alleviating pressure at Clifton Hill interchange, allowing for an increase in frequency on each line.

Moreover, this decoupling would prevent cascading impacts from occurring across the Mernda and Hurstbridge line, increasing the reliability on both. Additionally, MM2 will reduce pressure on the City Loop, increasing the capacity of lines which use the City Loop, such as the Glen Waverley, Alamein, Lilydale and Belgrave lines which service Melbourne’s East.3

Currently, using public transport to cross from the east to west is complicated, to say the least. For example, getting from Preston to Fishermans Bend requires a train, tram and perhaps even an Uber. With MM2, this trip would be an easy direct route, allowing for other eastern lines to quickly transfer and hop on at an interchange within the city. Why would someone be travelling from Preston to Fishermans Bend or vice versa? As Fishermans Bend is a major urban renewal area – close to the CBD and other job-dense areas – Fishermans Bend and other inner-city areas are poised to be places of opportunity and amenity for its residents and the wider Melbourne population.

Effective job density, a metric calculated and researched by SGS Economics & Planning, quantifies employment concentrations using density and accessibility of all jobs in a region. Using SGS’s spatial visualisation of effective job density, it is clear that MM2 will connect the less job-dense north-eastern regions to Melbourne’s opportunity-rich inner core.4

While Melbourne’s east will likely not experience the rapid population growth rates occurring in other areas of Melbourne, it is important to ensure that public transport infrastructure keeps pace with Melbourne’s growth, providing a commuter experience which can compete with car travel. Significantly, by increasing the frequency, convenience and amenity of public transport in the north-east, MM2 is poised to reduce traffic to the CBD and to the west by providing a cheaper, faster alternative to stand-still peak hour traffic on the Westgate freeway and Eastern freeway.5

Another exciting possibility which MM2 could facilitate is Doncaster rail. The decoupling of the Mernda and Hurstbridge lines would allow the Doncaster rail line to be constructed via the Clifton Hill interchange, servicing Manningham, Melbourne’s only municipality without a train or tram line.6 Public Transport Victoria’s Network Development Plan highlighted this possibility in 2012, and listed MM2 as a precursor project to Doncaster Rail.

While Doncaster rail might be some years away, without the decoupling of the Mernda and Hurstbridge lines, the chances of Doncaster rail eventuating will become ever slimmer, particularly if the north-east link goes ahead.7

Thus, MM2 is positioned to not only benefit suburbs it directly services, but will have wider ranging positive impacts for Melbourne’s east, particularly if Doncaster rail eventuates. Given the various health, community and economic benefits that public transport has been shown to deliver, why not #getonboard the MM2?

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A convergence of activists from across the progressive spectrum will gather in Meanjin / Brisbane in June 2021 to oppose the Land Forces conference, described as a "killing conference alongside a massive killing expo." Friends of the Earth activists from the Defence of Earth project will join those gathering in an attempt to not only disrupt the conference, but the wider corporate movement for war and militarism.

What is Land Forces?
Land Forces is an arms fair, masquerading as an industry trade show. The accompanying military conference is sponsored by the Queensland Government and the Australian Department of Defence. Some of the world's largest arms and defence manufacturers are expected to exhibit their wares in 2021 at the taxpayer's expense. The event is scheduled to take place from 1-3 June 2021 at the Brisbane Convention Centre. According to the organisers of the last expo, Land Forces in 2018 "attracted record total combined attendances of 15,351 over the period of the event, from throughout Australia and the world (up from 13,450 in 2016)" and promoted "624 companies from 26 countries." There has been a long running resistance to the conference by activists who question the moral right of Land Forces to go ahead as profiteering off war continues to result in death and destruction of people in the global south, exacerbates climate change and the abuse of human rights, with the majority of casualties in modern warfare being civilians. In recent years we have seen the consequences of climate change, famine and war decimate countries such as Syria, resulting in millions of displaced people seeking asylum. The cycle of the military industrial complex can be felt for generations and it begins with the profiteering of weapons designed for no other purpose than to kill.

Defence of Earth – Dismantling Patriarchy
Friends of the Earth believes that peace is a precursor to gender, climate, economic, social, and environmental justice. We understand militarism is an extension of a patriarchal system that is both damaging to people and planet, and thus perpetuates mutually reinforcing and interlinked oppressions of colonialism, sexism, cis-heteronormativity, ableism, capitalism, and racism. In 2018 Friends of the Earth Australia instituted a national project concerned with dismantling this aspect of patriarchy in order to progress system change based on gender, social, and environmental justice.

It has become clear that not only are women and children disproportionately impacted by war and austerity but are also most impacted by the current pandemic. War threatens social infrastructure such as healthcare, transportation, sanitation, and education as well as agriculture systems and the environment. As primary caretakers for the young and elderly, and even in peacetime economically disadvantaged women are at the frontlines of caring for the community as they are during the COVID-19 crisis. Women are often left to protect their, land, their communities and their families in war zones, and are targeted with gendered violence including war crimes such as rape and kidnapping. They often have less representation in political and other power structures within their societies. In fact, women are, in fact, on the frontlines in war, in the fight for climate justice and in the global response to the pandemic, making up the majority of workers in services, health and other care industries, grocery and server sectors, all of which are considered essential services. Also much like in war, women are being severely impacted by the pandemic, facing spikes in domestic, sexual assault and state violence across the globe during this crisis.

Even within the military, women face discrimination and sexual violence. According to a US study published in 2018, "women veterans reported higher rates of lifetime and past-year post-traumatic stress disorder compared with women civilians; men veterans; and men civilians." Defence industries which promise to support post war or post-COVID-19 economic recovery are also male-dominated and notoriously poor at providing workplaces free of sexism and misogyny, with the Australian women in defence industries report stating that "(women) experience high levels of discrimination and sexism, both overt and subtle." War and economies based on extractivism and military violence normalise violence at home and in other sectors of our society. There can be no climate justice or economic justice if we build our economies on industries that perpetuate violence and gender oppression.

Climate change and the carbon footprint
It is a well-established fact that the military is bad for the climate – and they know it.

"Climate change will see higher temperatures, increased sea-level rise and will increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.”

- The Australian Defence Force
We can only estimate the combined emissions from the activity of the above corporations, but even more mysterious is the total carbon emissions of militaries from around the world. What we do know is that the US military is the world’s largest institutional consumer of fossil fuels and the single largest emitter of Greenhouse Gases. Further, under the current ‘Paris Climate Agreement’ reporting of defence emissions is voluntary and readers may not be surprised to learn that military reporting of emissions does not appear to be happening.

Back in 2019, Friends of the Earth wrote to the Department of Defence in an attempt to establish the – ‘carbon footprint’ – emissions of the ADF. Research into that matter continues, but it is clear that – like militaries around the world – the ADF considers its activities above and beyond the scrutiny and accountability required to maintain a safe climate.

Chemicals and Contamination

Our ecosystems are under great stress, as evidenced by the 2019/20 bushfires, and even the ADF acknowledged in their 2016 White Paper that ‘effective environmental management is an important part of successfully managing and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Defence estate.’ But militaristic activity is not only damaging ecosystems but contaminating them with dangerous chemicals and contaminants.

Back in March 2019, Friends of the Earth welcomed a decision to compensate Mr Eric Donaldson for pollution of groundwater used on his property, near the Army Aviation Centre at Oakey in Southern Queensland. However, in a shocking move, the Department of Defence would not make any admissions of liability – despite the settlement. Thousands of “red-zone” residents are now involved in legal action against the Department of Defence.

The Department of Defence is still investigating PFAS contamination from its activity around the country, with AirServices Australia and state governments looking into the potentially hundreds of contaminated sites. Friends of the Earth continues to work with the community on the matter and have a mapping tool tracking contamination sites.

Capitalism and arms divestment

The Federal government in Australia is pushing for our country to become a “top-ten global defence exporter by 2028” expecting to drastically increase the military budget to $175.8 billion in 2022-23. That’s an increase from an already staggering $100 million+ per day to over $480 million per day. State governments currently appear to be vying to take the lead; with Queensland aiming to turn the Sunshine State into the Khaki State while Victoria is developing a weapons and military technology area in the Docklands. Ironically, the push to make Australia a bigger defence player has, in fact, seen Australia increase its defence imports making Australia the world’s second biggest weapons importer behind Saudi Arabia.

State and federal governments are ploughing money into defence industries – imports and exports – while local manufacturing, the arts, healthcare, childcare, education, climate change responses and research are underfunded. The millions being spent to develop Australian tanks, could have been spent on public hospitals, public schools, helped maintain and develop a local renewable manufacturing industry or provided a fair and just transition for workers out of the fossil fuel industry into sustainable energy systems or other care and services industries.

Get involved with #DisruptLandForces

War is incompatible with a healthy environment and contributes significantly to economic, gender and racial injustice across the globe. Arms fairs such as the Land Forces conference is a direct manifestation of this violence and greed. Investment in military capability should be diverted to supporting industries that strengthen communities, centre care and life in our societies and prioritise environmental sustainability. Our governments should not be profiteering off weapons of war but creating a post COVID-19 economy that affirms and centres life and care, investing in peace, justice and sustainability – not the war machine.

Find out more about the planned disruption of the 2021 Land Forces conference at https://disruptlandforces.org

Email phil.evans@foe.org.au if you want to get involved in Friends of the Earth’s Defence of Earth project.

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March 11 marked the 10th anniversary of the meltdowns, fires and explosions at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan. It was an avoidable nuclear disaster, fuelled by Australian uranium and the hubris and profiteering of Japan’s nuclear industry in collusion with compromised regulators and captured bureaucracies.

The Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission – established by the Japanese Parliament – concluded in its 2012 report that the accident was “a profoundly man-made disaster that could and should have been foreseen and prevented” if not for “a multitude of errors and willful negligence that left the Fukushima plant unprepared for the events of March 11”. But overseas suppliers who turned a blind eye to unacceptable nuclear risks in Japan have largely escaped scrutiny or blame. Australia’s uranium industry is a case in point.

There is no dispute that Australian uranium was used in the Fukushima reactors. The mining companies won’t acknowledge that fact – instead they hide behind claims of “commercial confidentiality” and “security”. But the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office acknowledged in October 2011 that Australian uranium was used in at least five of the six Fukushima reactors.

BHP and Rio Tinto, two of the world’s largest mining companies, supplied Australian uranium to TEPCO and that uranium was used to fuel Fukushima. The mining companies have failed to take any responsibility for the catastrophic impacts on Japanese society that resulted from the use of their uranium in a poorly managed, poorly regulated industry.

Warning signs

Moreover, the mining companies can’t claim ignorance. The warning signs were clear. Australia’s uranium industry did nothing as TEPCO and other Japanese nuclear companies lurched from scandal to scandal and accident to accident. The uranium industry did nothing in 2002 when it was revealed that TEPCO had systematically and routinely falsified safety data and breached safety regulations for 25 years or more. The uranium industry did nothing in 2007 when over 300 incidents of ‘malpractice’ at Japan’s nuclear plants were revealed (104 of them at nuclear power plants).

And the uranium industry did nothing about the multiple conflicts of interest plaguing Japanese nuclear regulators.

“Deeply saddened”

Mirarr senior Traditional Owner Yvonne Margarula – on whose land in the Northern Territory Rio Tinto’s Ranger uranium mine operated – said she was “deeply saddened” that uranium from Ranger was exported to Japanese nuclear power companies including TEPCO.

No such humility from the uranium companies. They get tetchy at any suggestion of culpability, with the Australian Uranium Association describing it as “opportunism in the midst of human tragedy” and “utter nonsense”.

Yet, Australia could have played a role in breaking the vicious cycle of mismanagement in Japan’s nuclear industry by making uranium exports conditional on improved management of nuclear plants and tighter regulation.

Even a strong public statement of concern would have been heard by the Japanese utilities (unless it was understood to be rhetoric for public consumption) and it would have registered in the Japanese media.

But the uranium industry denied culpability and instead stuck its head in the sand. Since the industry is in denial about its role in fuelling the Fukushima disaster, there is no reason to believe that it will behave more responsibly in future.

Successive Australian governments did nothing about the unacceptable standards in Japan’s nuclear industry. Julia Gillard – Australia’s Prime Minister at the time of the Fukushima disaster – said the disaster “doesn’t have any impact on my thinking about uranium exports”.

‘Nuclear village’

Signification elements of Japan’s corrupt ‘nuclear village’ – comprising industry, regulators, politicians and government agencies – were back in control just a few years after the Fukushima disaster. Regulation remains problematic.

Add to that ageing reactors, and companies facing serious economic stress and intense competition, and there’s every reason for ongoing concern about nuclear safety in Japan.

Professor Yoshioka Hitoshi, a Kyushu University academic who served on the government’s 2011-12 Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations, said in October 2015:

“Unfortunately, the new regulatory regime is ... inadequate to ensure the safety of Japan’s nuclear power facilities. The first problem is that the new safety standards on which the screening and inspection of facilities are to be based are simply too lax.

“While it is true that the new rules are based on international standards, the international standards themselves are predicated on the status quo.

“They have been set so as to be attainable by most of the reactors already in operation. In essence, the NRA made sure that all Japan’s existing reactors would be able to meet the new standards with the help of affordable piecemeal modifications – back-fitting, in other words.”
In the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon called for an independent cost-benefit inquiry into uranium trade. The Australian government failed to act. Inadequate regulation was a root cause of the Fukushima disaster yet Australia has uranium supply agreements with numerous countries with demonstrably inadequate nuclear regulation, including China, India, Russia, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Ukraine. Likewise, Australian uranium companies and the government turn a blind eye to nuclear corruption scandals in countries with uranium supply agreements: South Korea, India, Russia and Ukraine among others.

Indeed, Australia has signed up to expand its uranium trade to sell into insecure regions. In 2011 – the same year as the Fukushima disaster – the Australian government agreed to allow uranium exports to India. This despite inadequate nuclear regulation in India, and despite India’s ongoing expansion of its nuclear weaponry and delivery capabilities.

A uranium supply agreement with the United Arab Emirates was concluded in 2013 despite the obvious risks of selling uranium into a politically and militarily volatile region where nuclear facilities have repeatedly been targeted by adversaries intent on stopping covert nuclear weapons programs. Australia was planning uranium sales to the Shah of Iran months before his overthrow in 1979.

A uranium supply agreement with Ukraine was concluded in 2016 despite a host of safety and security concerns, and the inability of the International Atomic Energy Agency to carry out safeguards inspections in regions annexed by Russia. (In 2014, Australia banned uranium sales to Russia, with then Prime Minister Tony Abbott stating: “Australia has no intention of selling uranium to a country which is so obviously in breach of international law as Russia currently is.”)

**China**

Australia’s uranium supply agreement with China, concluded in 2006, has not been reviewed despite abundant evidence of inadequate nuclear safety standards, inadequate regulation, lack of transparency, repression of whistleblowers, world’s worst insurance and liability arrangements, security risks, and widespread corruption. Civil society and NGO’s are campaigning to wind back Australia’s atomic exposures in the uranium trade with emphasis on uranium sales to China. China’s human rights abuses and a range of strategic insecurity issues warrant a cessation of uranium sales. China’s ongoing human rights abuses in Tibet and mass detention and forced labour against Uyghurs in Xinjiang are severe breaches of international humanitarian law and UN Treaties.

China proliferated nuclear weapons know-how to Pakistan, targets Australia in cyber-attacks, and is causing regional insecurity on the India border, in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and in the Pacific. BHP’s Olympic Dam is the only company still selling Australian uranium into China. There is a case for the ‘Big Australian’ to forego uranium sales overall and an onus to end sales to China.

A federal Parliamentary Inquiry in Australia is investigating forced labour in China and the options for Australia to respond. A case is before this Inquiry to disqualify China from supply of Australian uranium sales.

**Weapons proliferation risks**

Australia supplies uranium with scant regard for nuclear safety risks. Likewise, proliferation risks are given short shrift. Australia has uranium export agreements with all of the ‘declared’ nuclear weapons states – the U.S., U.K., China, France, Russia – although not one of them takes seriously its obligation under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue disarmament in good faith. Australia claims to be working to discourage countries from producing fissile (explosive) material for nuclear bombs, but nonetheless exports uranium to countries blocking progress on the proposed Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.

And Australia gives Japan open-ended permission to separate and stockpile plutonium although that stockpiling fans regional proliferation risks and tensions in North-East Asia.

**An industry in decline**

Despite liberal export policies, Australian uranium sales are in long-term decline and now represent only 8.9 percent of world uranium usage. With the Ranger mine shut down and no longer processing ore for uranium exports, there are only two operating uranium mines in Australia: BHP’s Olympic Dam copper-uranium mine and the smaller General Atomics’ Beverley Four Mile operation – both in South Australia. Uranium accounts for less than 0.5 percent of Australia’s export revenue and less than 0.1 percent of all jobs in Australia.

One wonders why an industry that delivers so little is given carte blanche by the government to do as it pleases.

**Dr Jim Green is the national nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth Australia. David Noonan is an independent environment campaigner.**

A referenced version of this article was published in The Ecologist, https://theecologist.org/2021/mar/09/australian-uranium-fuelled-fukushima
Agriculture Minister’s trust in pesticide safety puts public health at risk

Richard Nankin

“I say to all Australians all glyphosate products are safe. The standards and the labelling in the United States is different to Australia. The APVMA as the regulator makes sure the directions and the labelling on glyphosate products is quite clear. Our regulations, and our regulatory reform, is as robust as anyone in the world. I am confident the APVMA has provided the right directions, I am confident if Australians use it as per the label it is perfectly safe.”

Federal Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud made these reassuring statements last year in response to news Bayer/Monsanto offered to pay over A$15 billion to settle thousands of class action lawsuits in the US, made by people who claim the company’s Glyphosate Based Herbicides (GBH) caused their cancers.

Investigating the facts surrounding this massive settlement offer reveals Minister Littleproud’s reassurances are wrong on all counts.

Judgements in the original US court case found the safety directions were not adequate and put users of GBHs at risk of serious injury even if the users followed the label’s safety directions in good faith.

The jury concluded that unintended or accidental exposure to GBHs would have occurred, despite following the safety directions, and that exposure whilst following the directions caused or contributed to the plaintiffs’ cancers.1

APVMA’s dismal record

The record of our pesticide regulator, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), is not impressive. The APVMA has a shocking track record of keeping pesticides ‘under review’ and on the market long after comparable regulators remove them.

Neonicotinoids are a current case in point. They have been banned in the EU, NZ and the US because they adversely impact pollinators such as bees, but the APVMA still argues they’re safe in Australia if used according to label directions.

In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and World Health Organisation (WHO) made a finding that long-term low-level exposure to GBHs was a probable cause of cancer. In response, the US Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and Monsanto conspired together to discredit the IARC and debunk its findings.

The APVMA followed in lockstep when it held its own behind-closed-doors review of the IARC/WHO findings. The APVMA findings from that review dismissed the IARC/WHO findings on the cancer risk with justifications identical to the US EPA’s.

Bad smell indicates rot

The US glyphosate court case also found the US EPA acted in collusion with Monsanto and failed to do its regulatory job properly. Neither the APVMA, Littleproud, nor any other relevant ministers have properly addressed the damning court findings against both Monsanto and the failings of the US regulators.

Surely our own National Audit Office has a responsibility to investigate the intimate working relationship between APVMA, the US EPA and Monsanto and the consistent failure of our regulator to fulfil its legislated requirements; especially to properly assess the toxicity of the formulations it approves for use in Australia, as the relevant legislation clearly states they are required to do.

Australian pesticide labelling laws are not much better or different from those in the US. Has the Minister or his advisers ever had a serious look at the label on a bottle of Roundup? Whilst there are some minor differences in how toxic pesticides are labelled in each country, the safety information on the GBHs sold in Australia are woefully inadequate, outdated, obscure and technically wrong.

The label invite users to go online to read a ‘safety data sheet’.2 How many people actually do this? These online guidelines are far more cautious and clearly contradict the inadequate and technically incorrect safety guidelines written on the product label. Worse still, this online Safety Data Sheet, information that the Australian regulator uses, are virtually identical to outdated and incorrect US Safety Data Sheets.
APVMA’s scandalous formula regulation failure

The APVMA is not capable of requiring proper safety directions on the labels of the almost 500 GBH formulations it allows on the shelves in Australia, because it refuses to investigate beyond the studies provided to it by the chemical companies.

Just like the US EPA, APVMA requires no testing of the actual products we all get exposed to, instead only requiring and taking into account safety testing of the so-called primary ‘Active Ingredient’. Neither APVMA nor the US regulator knows, nor seems to care to find out, how toxic the actual formulations on the shelves really are.\(^3\) The scale and implications of its regulatory failure is truly scandalous.\(^5\)

The story of how Monsanto deceived the public and corruptly influenced the US EPA are laid bare in the book that provided the foundations for all the court cases – Carey Gillam’s book “Whitewash”, which is based on a mountain of astounding internal Monsanto documents. The evidence shows the company acted over many years with the intent to manipulate public discourse and deceive the academic and farming communities. It details how they do this by secretly funding front groups and having their own ghost-written studies submitted for publication as apparently independent scientific papers.\(^6\)

Science vs. ‘Regulatory Science’

The APVMA practices what it calls ‘Regulatory Science’. This is a scientifically meaningless and outright deceptive term used to justify why they actively debunk and question the validity of any independent scientific and epidemiological evidence that does not fit the interests of their clients – the chemical companies.

Almost every one of the reams of peer-reviewed independent scientific studies finds GBHs far, far more toxic than found in the studies paid for by Monsanto. Clearly, there are two types of science – “independent science”, which is all the research and studies conducted outside of corporate funding and influence, and “corporate science” – the scientific studies paid for by chemical companies.

The utter failure of the APVMA to consider, accept or take into account independent science is a scandalous failure of such scale and consequence it could well justify a Royal Commission. How far does Monsanto’s influence reach?\(^3\) Who is responsible for allowing our regulator to become so clearly captive to corporate interests?

More to come

Lawsuits claiming GBHs are causing people’s cancers will continue despite the most recent and historically massive settlement offer in the US. After all, the court findings accept the evidence that Monsanto has known for years its products likely cause cancers and other diseases. There are dozens and possibly hundreds of cases still pending in Australia. As for the over 95,000 individuals in the US suffering the historically rare cancer Non Hodgkins Lymphoma, and who have lodged claims there, it appears many claimants will not accept this settlement offer.

Then, of course, there are all the court cases pending in the rest of the world. The ultimate compensation payout looks set to significantly eclipse the current A$15 billion on offer for US claimants and may well bankrupt Bayer/Monsanto. The final payout figure from the injury and premature deaths caused by GBHs will likely make this latest offer pale into insignificance. The damage to our health and our environment from the huge amounts of GBHs being used around the world may well be immeasurable.

It is time for a public investigation to expose and fix the shortcomings and failures of our regulator of pesticides in Australia. It is time we faced the reality that the APVMA is suffering from Regulatory Failure Syndrome and that its systemic failure to fulfil its legislated duties has put at serious risk public health, the health of our environment and the reputation we have for “clean and green” exports.

Richard Nankin is a freelance writer and organic farmer.

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Threnody

Eleanor March

‘Threnody’ attempts both to marry personal grief with the anguish of ecocide and our own complicity in it, and to live towards an answer to Bill McDonough’s prophetic question: “How do we love all the children of all species for all time?”

Sometimes I hate the sky because it steals my children. I stand keening and floddered in the windy grass beyond Hobart airport as they’re borne beyond the silky blue hills, and vanish as wholly as if they’d never been. The wrench is placental; the lochiae of mourning can last for weeks. Comings are short, and goings over-long.

During one quick, rare coming we spent a halcyon day on Bruny Island. Two Tree Point was once the home of the Nuenonne people. Captain Cook watered here. Then came whalers, forest-fellers, a murrain of shacks. While my tribe constructed a sand-city, I beachcombed, probing the disquiet within the idyll.

The sea, luciloquent and turquoise in this sheltered bay, was acidifying. Phytoplankton - a million of these exquisitely diverse plants live in every litre of sea-water - generate half Earth’s oxygen; catalyse cloud formation, hence weather; are a major carbon sink and the basis of the marine food chain. Plankton cannot form skeletons in acidifying oceans; an invisible biospheric matrix, on which human wellbeing depends, is dying.

Acidification is caused by the very carbon dioxide pollution our excursion was generating: the true price of this day at the beach included one flight from Europe and two from Sydney; plus a hire car that embodied the violence, implicit and explicit, of our addiction to private, noisome mobility. We’d google Earthed to see where we were – instant knowledge based on rendering soil, air and water putrescent with radio-active sludge and hazardous chemicals generated by mining and processing the rare earths that are essential components of e-toys. The plastic enshrining those toys is oil-based, fuels ecological mayhem and war. Our e-excrement is traded by criminals and dumped on the poor.

We built driftwood boats, played French cricket, swam, ate home-made sourdough bread with salad and apricots picked in the garden that morning. While the tribe – ears and love-handles scarlet – gleefully diverted Resolution Creek into their moat, I rested, and wondered if our descendants would find our expedition as horrifying as we find colonisation, genocide and whaling, all culturally mandated in their own time. For we too were usurpers, treating not just less privileged humans but the 8.7 billion species with whom we share our only planet, and the entire future, as if they didn’t exist, as if they were Terra Nullius.

If most of humanity is in infantile relationship with Earth – exploitation and dominance – those of us who claim to be environmentally savvy are still adolescent. We push wantonly at the boundaries; are experts at self-exculpation and self-justification; own everything except shit and shadow; simultaneously embrace and maim the biosphere. I perjure myself with an iPhone (second-hand, I whine) which compromises the future of my grandchildren, while simultaneously enabling fluent communication with their stellar, hearing-impaired mother. Where’s integrity in this schizoid straddling?

Integrity requires a radical commitment to living within one’s carbon and ecological footprint, one’s eight-billionth share of Earth’s resources. My son works in human rights in Geneva; every day, his colleagues in Africa, Central Asia, Russia risk their lives – not just their egos, comfort zones and false entitlements – for truth and freedom. This is about truth and freedom too; the non-heroic, impossible, inevitable shift from the narrative of the lie to lifestyles recalibrated in ecological verities and adult accountability. And justice for all the children – whale calves, eaglets, tadpoles, Huon pine seedlings – in perpetuity.

I keen for the whole Earth.

Eleanor March is a Tasmanian writer, crone, teacher, gardener, sailor and grandmother. www.butterflyschildren.com

First published in Australian Options.

1. ‘Threnody’ is an ode or song of lamentation.
2. ‘Floddered’ is irresistible. It means to have a face disfigured with weeping, or the marks left by a flood on a river-bank. From the Swedish flod-a to overflow. (Kacirk, Jeffrey. The Word Museum. New York: Touchstone, 2000).
3. Terra Nullius is land legally deemed unoccupied and uninhabited – a term used by white colonisers to justify their invasion of Australia.
What can creating stories tell us about the future?

Sue Stack

I attended a wonderful series of workshops “Unleashing Alternative Futures” run by Lawrence Barriner II and Grant Williams for the “Wilds Beyond Climate Justice” online conference in June 2020. They invited us to create a character living in a future we desire and muse, dream, or write what that character might be experiencing. There were a range of exercises and sharings that I found powerful and exciting, particularly listening to the imagination of others. The stories didn’t just generate intriguing glimpses of future worlds, but also dilemmas and the ongoing need of humankind to seek and perturb status quo.

This is an invitation to participate in one of the writing exercises:

Imagine a door is opening into a new world with a new story. It is 2080. This world is based on care. You have a descendent, 2 generations into the future, who is living here. You can choose your own adventure:

• a world where communications technologies have collapsed, making long distance communication nearly impossible, or
• a world where communication technologies have accelerated making virtual and in-person interaction indistinguishable.

Who is your descendent? What do they care about/for? What are their dreams and fears? What relationships do they have?

Imagine yourself in their shoes. You might write from their perspective, or about them. Allow for stream of consciousness to surprise you. You might like to have them to write a letter to you, or a journal entry of their day. Or consider a drawing. Any genre goes.

And now the exciting bit – encourage a friend to do this and share with each other. Consider submitting your character and some of their story to the next issue of Chain Reaction where we hope to have a gallery of characters from the future.

Before Long Now

Suse Scholem

We made ourselves into islands.

Or rather, they made us into islands.

Long before now.

It was only when we shored our selves, No longer sure ourselves That we realised we had once been land.

Long before now.

... but in all this time, Had we never thought To question the inevitability of waves?

Now, Before Long...

[...with seismic shifts and symbiotic gifts...]

... We’ll start to become again.

That sand usually quick is thickening, more solid than ever before.

And that tide that pulled is parting and won’t trick us anymore....

Before the moon, Long the land

Now the water within us all.
Nuclear waste and nuclear medicine in Australia

Dr Margaret Beavis
– Medical Association for Prevention of War

Background

Australia’s radioactive waste is produced by the use of radioactive materials in scientific research and industrial, agricultural and medical applications.\(^1\) There are claims that waste storage at the Lucas Heights reactor site operated by the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) is reaching capacity, and that failure to find a new site will impact on nuclear medicine supplies.\(^2\)

We have 535 cubic metres of intermediate nuclear waste, which is radioactive for over 10,000 years.\(^3\)

Key points

Dr Carl-Magnus Larsson, CEO of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency, clearly stated in parliamentary testimony in 2020: “Waste can be safely stored at Lucas Heights for decades to come”.\(^4\) A new facility is not needed for continued availability of nuclear medicine.

Nuclear medicine is used for medical imaging and to treat some cancers. It should not to be confused with X-rays using iodine contrast, radiotherapy or chemotherapy, which are used much more commonly.

Arguments that radioactive waste should all be at one site overlook the ongoing need for hospitals to store clinical waste. After nuclear medicine is used in a patient, the vast majority is stored on site while it decays. Within a few days, it has lost so much radioactivity that it can go to a normal rubbish tip. There will always need to be multiple waste locations.

Countries such as Finland are building deep geological disposal sites for their long-lived radioactive waste, which is world’s best practice.

ANSTO is rapidly increasing production of nuclear waste from its isotope export business. This plan ramps up production from 1% of global supply of technetium-99m, (enough for Australia), to 25-30% of global supply.\(^5\)

When all costs, including final waste disposal, are considered, this business costs the taxpayer and leaves Australia with much more radioactive waste.\(^6\) The government subsidy to ANSTO for 2019-20 alone was $282 million.

Clean cyclotron production of technetium-99m has recently been approved in Canada, and should rapidly become the future of isotope production. It avoids the high cost, serious accident and terrorist risks of nuclear reactors, has no weapons proliferation potential, and creates very little nuclear waste.\(^7\)

Cyclotron isotope manufacture at multiple sites will also be more reliable than our single reactor, which has a record of multiple unplanned outages.\(^8\)

Recommendations

Current plans to move and temporarily store nuclear waste in a regional location should be abandoned.

Australia urgently needs a thorough independent review of both nuclear waste disposal and production. We need a long-term disposal plan that avoids double-handling and unnecessary movement of radioactive materials and meets world’s best practice standards.

Cleaner, safer and more reliable cyclotron nuclear medicine manufacture should be developed and deployed as a priority.

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Film review: Michael Moore’s weird world of renewable energy haters

Review by Jim Green

‘Planet of the Humans’ (PoTH) has been watched by millions, and has attracted an extraordinary amount of commentary, since it was made freely available in April.

The film is a full-frontal attack on renewable energy sources and the environment movement. Sure, not everything promoted as ‘renewable’ is indeed renewable, or sustainable, or socially equitable. And not everyone attaching themselves to the environment movement has environmental protection at heart. But any serious critique in PoTH is lost in a fog of misinformation and overgeneralisation.

Let’s introduce the three anti-heroes responsible for this mess.

PoTH executive producer Michael Moore needs no introduction, other than to note that he evidently knows very little about energy issues and appears to have been dragged along for the ride by his collaborators. “I assumed solar panels would last forever. I didn’t know what went into the making of them,” Moore told Reuters. That’s two good reasons why he shouldn’t be making documentaries about energy issues.

Jeff Gibbs is writer, director, producer and narrator of the film. Gibbs worked on a number of Moore’s previous projects – but in PoTH he takes the lead. Gibbs insists that “everything you see in the film is accurate” even as dozens of articles detail its many inaccuracies. Joanne Doroshow, who worked as a researcher and fact-checker on a number of Moore’s earlier projects, said that Gibbs was “someone we never let near the fact checking process” and “seemed attracted to conspiracy theories and information that was not factual”. She continued: “I cannot speak to what happened to Michael’s films after I stopped helping to ensure their accuracy but it is excruciating to see what has happened now”.

Ozzie Zehner, another PoTH producer and an interviewee, is introduced in the film as a ‘visiting scholar’ at UC Berkeley and Northwestern University. He ought to contribute some facts to counter Gibbs’ conspiratorial muddle-headedness, but the two are as bad as each other. Zehner reminds me of Bjorn Lomborg – an opportunistic self-promoter using contrarianism to grab the spotlight. His ‘critical environmentalism’ echoes Lomborg’s ‘skeptical environmentalism’ and it echoes the ‘death of environmentalism’ that introduced Michael Shellenberger to the world as a self-promoting contrarian.

The far right loves the film

George Monbiot summarises the film’s problems: “The film does not deny climate science. But it promotes the discredited myths that deniers have used for years to justify their position. It claims that environmentalism is a self-seeking scam, doing immense harm to the living world while enriching a group of con artists. This has long been the most effective means by which denial – most of which has been funded by the fossil fuel industry – has been spread.”

“Everyone hates a scammer. And yes, there are scammers. There are real issues and real conflicts to be explored in seeking to prevent the collapse of our life support systems. But they are handled so clumsily and incoherently by this film that watching it is like seeing someone start a drunken brawl over a spilled pint, then lamping his friends when they try to restrain him. It stumbles so blindly into toxic issues that Moore, former champion of the underdog, unwittingly aligns himself with white supremacists and the extreme right.

“Occasionally, the film lands a punch on the right nose. It is right to attack the burning of trees to make electricity. But when the film’s presenter and director, Jeff Gibbs, claims, “I found only one environmental leader willing to reject biomass and biofuels”, he can’t have been looking very far. Some people have been speaking out against them ever since they became a serious proposition (since 2004 in my case). Almost every environmental leader I know oppose the burning of fresh materials to generate power …”

“The film offers only one concrete solution to our predicament: the most toxic of all possible answers. “We really have got to start dealing with the issue of population … without seeing some sort of major die-off in population, there’s no turning back.”

“Yes, population growth does contribute to the pressures on the natural world. But while the global population is rising by 1% a year, consumption, until the pandemic, was rising at a steady 3%. High consumption is concentrated in countries where population growth is low: Where population growth is highest, consumption tends to be extremely low: Almost all the growth in numbers is in poor countries largely inhabited by black and brown people. When wealthy people, such as Moore and Gibbs, point to this issue without the necessary caveats, they are saying, in effect, “it’s not Us consuming, it’s Them breeding.” It’s not hard to see why the far right loves this film.
“Population is where you go when you haven't thought your argument through. Population is where you go when you don't have the guts to face the structural, systemic causes of our predicament: inequality, oligarchic power, capitalism.”

The far-right are falling over themselves to promote the film. “Left-wing greenies turn on Michael Moore. Give him a medal,” a Murdoch tabloid columnist wrote, congratulating the film for “exposing the massive lies behind renewable energy”.

Breitbart described PoTH as “the most powerful, brutally honest and important documentary” of Moore’s career and argued that it could help get Trump re-elected by undermining proposals for a Green New Deal.

So garbled as to be unrecognisable

Even when the film-makers have a reasonable point to make, they mess it up. Promotional videos accompanying the film argue that people in the Global South should continue to develop their economies while those in developed countries need to sharply cut back. Fair enough, there’s plenty of support among environmentalists for contraction-and-convergence approaches. But in PoTH, the argument becomes so garbled as to be unrecognisable.

Likewise, the film-makers’ argument that endless growth on a finite planet is impossible ought not be objectionable: it ought to be the starting point for any serious discussion about environmental sustainability. But in their clumsy hands, the argument trails off into muddle-headed, objectionable Malthusianism.

By all means discuss problems associated with renewables, but how on earth does this cryptic statement by Gibbs in PoTH add to the sum of human knowledge: “It was becoming clear that what we have been calling green, renewable energy and industrial civilization are one and the same.”

Gibbs ties the threads of his arguments together at the end of the film, but again it’s a jumble: “We humans must accept that infinite growth on a human planet is suicide. We must accept that our human presence is already far beyond sustainability and all that that implies. We must take control of our environmental movement and our future from billionaires and their permanent war on planet Earth. They are not our friends. Less must be the new more. And instead of climate change, we must at long last accept that it’s not the carbon dioxide molecule that’s destroying the planet, it’s us. It’s not one thing, but everything we humans are doing – a humans-caused apocalypse. If we get ourselves under control, all things are possible, and if we don’t…”

Nuclear power

PoTH doesn’t discuss nuclear power, but that hasn’t stopped nuclear advocates from endorsing the film’s attack on renewables and using that as a launching pad for nuclear boosterism.

Moore is friends with (and was mentored by) film-maker Robert Stone, who produced the wildly inaccurate pro-nuclear film Pandora’s Promise. They both spoke at a screening of Pandora’s Promise in 2013, with Moore saying he hadn’t made up his mind about nuclear power.

PoTH feels like a set-up. A pro-nuclear sequel to the anti-renewables film, perhaps? But there won’t be a sequel. For starters, the film-makers couldn’t find a distributor for PoTH – that’s why it was dumped on youtube. And in any case, the film-makers expressed skepticism and opposition to nuclear power in a recent online forum.

Michael Shellenberger has enthusiastically promoted PoTH, saying that it exposes “why renewables are worse for environment than fossil fuels” and using the anti-renewables diatribe to promote nuclear power.

Ted Nordhaus, a nuclear power advocate who collaborated with Shellenberger on the ‘death of environmentalism’ in the mid-2000s, criticised Shellenberger and some others for being “so single-mindedly pro-nuclear and anti-renewables that they have cheered the movie’s cherry-picking, exaggerations, and conspiracies while largely excusing its deep Malthusianism.”

Shellenberger has become a favourite of the far-right and the climate science deniers. He was interviewed by Tucker Carlson on Fox TV last year, attacking renewables and in particular the ‘green new deal’. Recently Shellenberger was interviewed by Andrew Bolt – Australia’s version of Tucker Carlson – to promote PoTH and to promote nuclear power.

Shellenberger’s new book suggests his lurch to the anti-environment far-right is complete. The Harper Collins website provides this description of the book:

“The risk of Earth warming to very high temperatures is increasingly unlikely thanks to slowing population growth and abundant natural gas. Curiously, the people who are the most alarmist about the problems also tend to oppose the obvious solutions. What’s really behind the rise of apocalyptic environmentalism? There are powerful financial interests. There are desires for status and power. But most of all there is a desire among supposedly secular people for transcendence. This spiritual impulse can be natural and healthy. But in preaching fear without love, and guilt without redemption, the new religion is failing to satisfy our deepest psychological and existential needs.”

So climate change isn’t such a problem, and those who think it is should support nuclear power (and gas!) … but they don’t for quasi-religious reasons. Where have we heard that before? That’s right – from Tucker Carlson, Andrew Bolt and the rest of the anti-environment far-right.

A longer, referenced version of this article is online in Nuclear Monitor #886, 4 June 2020, www.wiseinternational.org/nuclear-monitor/886/nuclear-monitor-886-8-june-2020
Biotech juggernaut: hope, hype, and hidden agendas

Review by Louise Sales

In *Biotech Juggernaut: Hope, Hype, and Hidden Agendas of Entrepreneurial BioScience*, Tina Stevens and Stuart Newman explore what could lie ahead if we leave the philosophical and ethical debates about the use of emerging biotechnology techniques to scientists. This compelling book is a welcome counter to the uncritical, breathless hype that usually accompanies discussions of biotechnology in what remains of our science media.

In recent years the biotechnology industry has morphed into a multi-billion dollar industry - worth more than $417 billion globally in 2018. In a series of case studies - which include human cloning, human genome editing and synthetic biology - Stevens and Newman reveal how the industry has an almost bottomless war chest it can dip into to further its commercial agenda. This has distorted important societal debates about if - and under what conditions - we should be pursuing these technologies.

Biotechnology scientists can no longer be viewed as impartial pursuers of knowledge. As science journalist Tom Abate observed: “When we spliced the profit gene into academic culture, we created a new organism – the recombinant university. We reprogrammed the incentives that guide science. The rule in academe used to be ‘publish or perish.’ Now bioscientists have an alternative ‘patent and profit.’

Many biotechnology scientists have direct commercial interests in the technologies they are developing through start-up companies and patents. According to science reporter Neil Munro, “these supposedly objective scientists have business interests that overlap with their scientific views.” Munro believes the problem lies with the media “which almost never informs its readers that these supposedly disinterested scientists have great financial stakes in the debate.”

And yet, through their direct roles on advisory panels; through political donations and lobbying; and through well-resourced PR campaigns these scientists are dictating government policy on these technologies. This includes both how - or even if - they are regulated, and how much public funding goes in to supporting this work. This Stevens and Newman hope will change: “In describing perceived and real conflicts of interest in the biotechnology industry, we hope to spark needed conversation about who should be the gatekeepers and framers of public discussion. … Currently, bioentrepreneurs themselves too often monopolize this important role.”

“The organizing committee concludes that the scientific understanding and technical requirements for clinical practice remain too uncertain and the risks too great to permit clinical trials of germline editing at this time. Progress over the last three years and the discussions at the current summit, however, suggest that it is time to define a rigorous, responsible translational pathway toward such trials.”

- Lee Silver, bioentrepreneur, Professor Molecular Biology, Princeton University, 1997

*Biotech Juggernaut* explores some of the more troubling aspects of the rise of bio-entrepreneurialism. These include cloning, “three parent” embryos, gene editing, synthetic genome creation and human-animal embryonic combination. According to Stevens and Newman:

“The U.S. and around the globe, public opinion demonstrates pervasive revulsion at the prospect of genetically modifying the human species. Yet, industry-led discussion leaves the door wide open to normalizing just that.”

In 2018, Chinese scientist He Jiankui drew almost universal ire from the scientific community when he claimed to have produced the world’s first genetically modified (GM) babies using the new GM technique CRISPR. He’s announcement was made on the eve of the Second International Summit on Human Genome Editing in Hong Kong.

In the wake of He’s bombshell, several scientists, including the CRISPR pioneer Feng Zhang and the stem-cell biologist Paul Knoepfler justifiably called for a moratorium on similar experiments. In sharp contrast, the organisers of the Hong Kong summit – which includes representatives of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and U.S. National Academy of Medicine, the Royal Society of the United Kingdom, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences released a statement claiming that:

“The GenRich...carry synthetic genes. All aspects of the economy, the media, the entertainment industry and the knowledge industry are controlled by the GenRich class...Naturals work as low paid service providers or as laborers [Eventually] the GenRich class and the Natural class will become entirely separate species...with as much romantic interest in each other as a current human would have for a chimpanzee.”

Wrapped up in this statement is the blatant implicit – and highly questionable – assumption that genetically modifying humans is an inevitable and broadly desirable goal. *Biotech Juggernaut* discusses the appalling history of the eugenics movement, which led to the forcible sterilisation of tens of thousands of US citizens deemed unfit to reproduce (a disproportionate number of them Black women and Latinas), right up through the 1970s. The authors warn that: “The anticipated genetic revolution could, if left unguided by moral reflection and unlimited by ethical boundaries, encourage a science-spurred version of the same eugenic outcome.”

This potential misuse of new genetic engineering techniques is also clearly of concern to CRISPR inventor Jennifer Doudna. She recounts a chilling dream she had in which Adolph Hitler wanted to learn more about CRISPR, presumably to use it for eugemics.

Human germline modification raises a raft of serious safety, social, and ethical concerns. These range from the prospect of irreversible harms to the health, wellbeing and identity of children and future generations, to concerns about opening the door to new forms of social inequality, discrimination, and conflict. This is exactly why we shouldn’t be letting scientists alone write the rules on what kind of research is ethically acceptable.

**Synthetic biology**

*Biotech Juggernaut* also discusses the emerging field of synthetic biology where synbio entrepreneurs seek to create life using computer designed or artificial DNA. As one synthetic biologist characterised it, theoretically bacteria in a vat can now be genetically modified to create anything traditionally harvested from a plant. However, this raises profound ethical issues. As Stevens and Newman observe: “Such hijacking of microbial processes is resulting in vast fortunes for many biocorporations in the industrial north. But for traditional guardians of plant-based economies, chiefly farming and peasant societies in the global south, synthetic biology as practiced destroys livelihoods and communities.”

*Biotech Juggernaut* highlights the importance of society as a whole participating in discussions and decisions about how - and even if - we use new technologies and how they should be regulated. Instead, the very individuals who seek to commercialise dangerous new GM techniques are being allowed to write the rules about how and if they are regulated.


Louise Sales coordinates Friends of the Earth’s Emerging Tech Project.

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**Official channels**

*Official Channels* – available as a free download – is written by Brian Martin, emeritus professor at the University of Wollongong, and published by Irene Publishing, a non-profit operation, committed to providing works relevant to grassroots social change.

Official channels are things like grievance procedures, ombudsmen and courts. They are supposed to resolve problems and provide justice. However, trust in official channels can be misplaced: in many cases they may give only an illusion of a solution.

In *Official Channels*, Martin tells what he has learned about formal procedures set up to deal with problems associated with whistleblowing, sexual harassment, plagiarism, Wikipedia and other issues. He says it is unwise to put too much reliance on official channels and that more emphasis should be put on developing skills, changing cultures and exploring alternatives.

Martin writes: “After I became president of Whistleblowers Australia in 1996, I heard from whistleblowers every week. Many of them repeated the same story: grievance procedures and watchdogs (organisations intended to stop wrongdoing) were unhelpful. In the early 2000s, I developed the backfire model. When powerful groups do something seen as unjust, they regularly use a variety of methods to reduce public outrage. One of them is to use or set up official channels, such as government-initiated inquiries, that gave an appearance of providing justice, usually without much substance. In formulating this component of the model, I was influenced by my prior experience with whistleblowers, but I soon discovered plenty of evidence that the same methods are used in many other circumstances.”

Brian Martin is the author of 20 books and hundreds of articles on dissent, nonviolent action, scientific controversies and other topics. His website is www.bmartin.cc/index.html
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