

Friends of the Earth Melbourne

spring 2021

Friends of the Earth Melbourne is a community network of activists and supporters who are organising together on environmental and social justice campaigns. We are part of Friends of the Earth International, the largest grassroots environmental organisation on the planet, active in more than 70 countries.

Friends of the Earth Melbourne, our campaigns office, community meeting space and Food Co-op and Cafe are located in Yalla-Birrang, Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge that we meet and organise across many nations spanning so-called Victoria where sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay respects to First Nations elders past and present.



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Why is Action the Antidote to Despair?

By Liz Wade

Why do we despair? We look around and see the state of the world, the layers upon layers of destruction and suffering. And it is hard not to despair. Capitalism and our general dominant culture have taught us that to be happy we just need to be more, do more, work more, consume more, buy more. But this is a false quest. We are actively manipulated and coerced into distracting ourselves from our internal signals that something is not right, with entertainment, technology, objects, comforts.

But it never actually brings us what is promised or what we hope for - happiness, peace, fulfilment. It takes effort to resist and to follow another path. Many people have always held this strength, others of us need to work at this.

Perhaps the first step is to connect deeply with ourselves and find what it is that we really want, what we really need. And to do this we must also meet ourselves where we are at. We may not have a lot of practice in observing all our emotions, regulating, managing, processing our emotions, since for so long we have been taught to, even forced to repress and ignore our feelings - the signals that have been telling us that something is not right.

Despair can arise when we do not give space, time and support to ourselves to work through our sadness and grief, or even our fear or anger. The skills for working with emotions are an area of cultural deficit at this time and an area of great need.

There are supports out there, helping professionals, books, articles, podcasts, videos, even Instagram gurus. We just need to make sure that we don't fall back into the same traps of capitalism, consumerism and the dominant culture and that if we are looking for support, we are actually finding what we really need. To do this we need to keep coming back to our own selves, checking in with ourselves, getting closer to understanding who we really are, and what we really want and need.

This is why I run the Good Grief Network program "10 Steps to Personal Resilience and Empowerment in a Chaotic Climate". I first joined a program as a participant in 2019 and it is one of the ways I have found that really supports me to learn and heal and grow, as I face the challenges of these times

and take meaningful action for change, so that is why I run it, to give others this opportunity also.

For me, this is just one part of what I have found that I need and that I need to do. I have learnt this through reflection, introspection, discussion and experimentation. Overall just taking the time to assess and adjust as needed.

Why do we need to act? Despair comes when we feel powerless, hopeless, helpless in the face of big emotions. But actually we have agency and the ability to make change. Sometimes we just need to find out how.

There are many stories of how change happens and there are many parts to it. If big rallies are not your thing, then you might write letters to your MP, or even take time to organise a meeting. If the idea of this leaves you quaking in your boots, join a group and take on other support roles, or, perhaps, muster some support and some courage to step out of your comfort zone and into the growth zone and feel the fear and do it anyway.

If big rallies are your thing, then these times are hard as we are prevented from gathering in large numbers, but there are other ways to connect and feel part of a crowd and other ways to hold signs and shout chants and make yourself heard.

If one thing is clear, action is needed. This is not the time to stand by and watch and hope that someone will do something about it. You are someone. And you are needed. The bonus is that by acting, by taking your part, you also get the antidote to despair. You get to feel empowered, you get to witness the changes that are happening, each smaller change part of a broader movement, and you get to feel satisfaction that you have been part of it all.

The important thing is to follow your own deepest knowing about what is yours to do. The right action for you may sometimes feel hard and challenging, but it will still feel right, it will feel fulfilling. You will feel supported, part of a team and that you are 110% behind the goal of the action.

For me, I have found this by volunteering with the Act on Climate Collective at Friends of the Earth for the last two years. The values and goals of Act on Climate and Friends of the Earth more generally are in alignment

with my own, and I love working in the collaborative collective structure. I have been challenged, I have pushed through personal obstacles, and I have always been supported and encouraged as I have learned and grown and contributed my little part of a bigger picture that I am so grateful to be part of.

How can we act? For me I have found that I need to work in the area of emotional resilience, I have to come back to this for myself as I continue to grow and I find sharing this work with others absolutely fulfilling.

I also really resonate with working locally on positive, community-based solutions, such as joining in with my local Repair Cafe and running a Cloth Nappy Library. Sadly these kinds of activities have been very interrupted by the restrictions of our times, so I find ways to keep connected with my local community however I can along the way. I also always continue to work on my own personal footprint though I have learned that I need to acknowledge what I can do in this regard and where I feel my efforts are better spent on changing the systems that make it hard for us to make this personal change and to feel like it makes any difference.

Which brings me to that last kind of change, the systemic change. There are so many ways to work for systemic change and at this point we just need all the help we can get to push for the level of change we need. Lastly, I will note that it is also really important to continue to remember that we are each just one human being. It is not possible to work on everything that needs work all the time, we need to keep checking in with ourselves and where we feel we need to contribute our energy and where we need to pull back from one thing to have enough energy for another, and when we need to conserve our energy and recharge.

We cannot change everything by ourselves, but together, we can vision a new kind of future, and do the work that it will take to get there.

Liz is currently coordinating community resistance to gas across Victoria with the FoE Melbourne No More Gas working group and is a trained Good Grief FLOW facilitator - creating spaces where people can lean into their painful feelings about the state of the world and reorient their lives toward meaningful efforts while building resilient communities. Get in touch at liz.wade@foe.org.au



Gasfield Free Victoria: On March 7, 2017, Victoria became the first Australian state to permanently ban the process of fracking to access 'unconventional' gas like coal seam gas, shale gas and tight gas after a decentralised community-led campaign from 2011-2016.

Collective action for flourishing, hopeful and dynamic social movements

By Phil Evans

Have you ever seen a murmuration of starlings or a school of fish? Hundreds of animals appear to move as one, darting in the water or air as a group. These animals demonstrate the concept of 'The Swarm'.

It seems like these animals must possess an extraordinary sixth sense, perhaps a kind of telepathy to make this happen. But in fact they just follow some simple rules:

1. don't get too close to the bird or fish next to you
2. don't get too far away
3. keep an eye out for predators.

These rules help them move in formation, protecting themselves and each other through collective action.

Our understanding of human systems comes from a long line of philosophers who understood that animals and human systems worked like a machine. The machine metaphor and industrialization caused us to design systems that were centralized, and used a 'command and control' structure (where a leader tells us what to do) with each person becoming a component with specified roles.

But a lot of the time, we work more like a swarm. Think of people getting to work at a working bee, children playing or people finding their way through a crowded train station. Human beings have an innate ability to self-organise, that is: **to spontaneously arrange themselves into a system to work towards a shared aim.**

In this case, rather than a 'command and control', it is the rules of the swarm that allow everyone in a cluster or network to **self-organise**. As long as you're following the defined rules of the group (codes of behaviour and agreements that you will work toward the same objective), people can do whatever they want in the system, with the people around them, where it fits into their vision and capability.

Self-organisation can lead to extraordinary creativity. Novel ideas emerge when people with different perspectives come together to work on a problem. Together we harness collective intelligence and create a safe space for testing new ways of working.

A swarm works because of the rules put in place to govern it. In the example of the group of starlings, the rules "don't get too close to the bird next to you, don't get too far away and steer clear of predators" allow for individuals to work together without a command and control structure.

It's these rules that also allow everyone in the group or network to **self-organise**. As long as you're following the principles of the group (working non-violently, with the same messaging, working towards the same objectives) people can do whatever they want in the system, with the people around them, where it fits into their vision and capability.

The trick of getting the swarm to work is finding the right constraints. If the constraints are too tight, you'll stifle creativity and action, if they are too loose, self-organization and action won't occur.

At Friends of the Earth, we believe that autonomy helps us grow and develop as

campaigners and community builders. Responsibility to see what needs to be done and act on it, including experimenting with our own ideas develops leadership and initiative, and soon people are doing things they never thought possible.

During the Gasfield Free communities campaign from 2011-2017. A network of communities came together across Victoria to campaign against invasive gasfields. In order for all these geographically dispersed communities to work together, they followed some simple rules:

- Stick to the messaging, we are here to protect our land, water and what we have for future generations
- Act and speak non-violently
- Always look to attract people into the movement
- Communicate with others

This allowed people to do whatever actions they saw as strategic, as long as they were following those rules. They could exercise their initiative and creativity, and this is what led to the flourishing of a dynamic social movement.

This movement secured a permanent ban on fracking in Victoria, and has recently re-emerged as a powerful force in pushing back against new plans for conventional gas drilling in Victoria.

Phil is a Project Coordinator at Friends of the Earth Australia, and has facilitated countless workshops and skillshares on decentralised organising. Find out more about the gasfield-free movement to stop new gas exploration at drillwatch.org.au



Starlings in murmuration: Much like the starlings, self-organisation gives people ownership over what they are working on. Rather than carrying out an external strategy that you don't understand (or doesn't understand you!) we can work on what we believe will be effective, according to our collective vision, capability, capacity and passion.



Good Grief: Many of us can sometimes feel despair, grief, anxiety overwhelm, and it is important to support ourselves and each other through this, so that together we can keep moving forward in our lives and life work. The Good Grief Network program, 10 Steps to Personal Resilience & Empowerment in a Chaotic Climate, is an amazing, super supportive and deeply valuable program, designed to support us through the heavy emotions of these crazy times we find ourselves to be living in.

"Don't ask yourself what the world needs. **Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that,** because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

- Howard Thurman

Listen Up!

Dig down into the dirt on important environmental and social justice issues on Dirt Radio. Friends of the Earth's radical radio show airs every Tuesday morning at 9:30am on 3CR Community Radio 885AM, and is available as a podcast from www.3cr.org.au/dirtradio.

Stay in touch

- Facebook: @foemelbourne
- Instagram: @foemelbourne
- Twitter: @FoEAustralia

Eat Local Act Global

The Friends of the Earth Food Co-op and Cafe is an active community space, open for bulk food shopping, organic groceries and serving lunches daily. Facebook @foefoodcoop Instagram @foefoodcoop Open Monday to Saturday 10:00 - 5:00 and Sunday 11:00-4:30

Organise with us!

No matter what you want to do: research policy, write poetry, paint banners, fundraise, strategise, plan actions, cook food, volunteer... we welcome you to come in and find out about how you can be part of the Friends of the Earth community. We value all forms of labour and work, and we are only as strong as our members!

FoE Members can form working groups on local issues and join campaign collectives at Friends of the Earth Melbourne.

We use consensus decision making processes in an anti-hierarchical structure to promote decentralised, community-led campaigns.



find out more

Free as a Bird!

By Kristine Philipp

It was 1977 and I was 17 when I first volunteered with Friends of the Earth Melbourne on Saturdays at the Fitzroy office, answering phones and helping with administration. It was the height of the anti-nuclear protest era when I got sacked for printing anti-uranium mining pamphlets at my first office job. Forty-three years later, I was out of work again, so I re-joined a collective of environmentally friendly punks, eco-feminists, activists and old mates fighting to protect the planet, and for social and economic justice.

In 2019 at Friends of the Earth, I reconnected with people committed to recreating the world beyond rampant patriarchal capitalism. Volunteer work gave me a sense of making a useful contribution, it connected me to the wider world and gave me hope. There was no monetary exchange, it was an exchange of time, energy, ideas and knowledge and it restored my self-worth.

I produce the monthly email news, and research and write articles on fossil fuel expansion and why it's such a bad idea during a climate crisis. I am supported, trained and encouraged to learn new systems and skills. Collaborating with staff and volunteers, we work in grass roots collectives on environmental campaigns, a non-hierarchical unpaid dream job come true. Our organising structure is inspired by the murmuration of starlings, thousands of activist birds swirling and swooping together, in balls of movement across the sky, offering safety in numbers and keeping each other in flight. Our main murmuration is made up of smaller groups of around seven starlings, with broader decision making based on consensus. Our efforts reach across the world. It is the antithesis of any workplace I have known and it took some time to adjust. I am like a caged bird flying the coop.

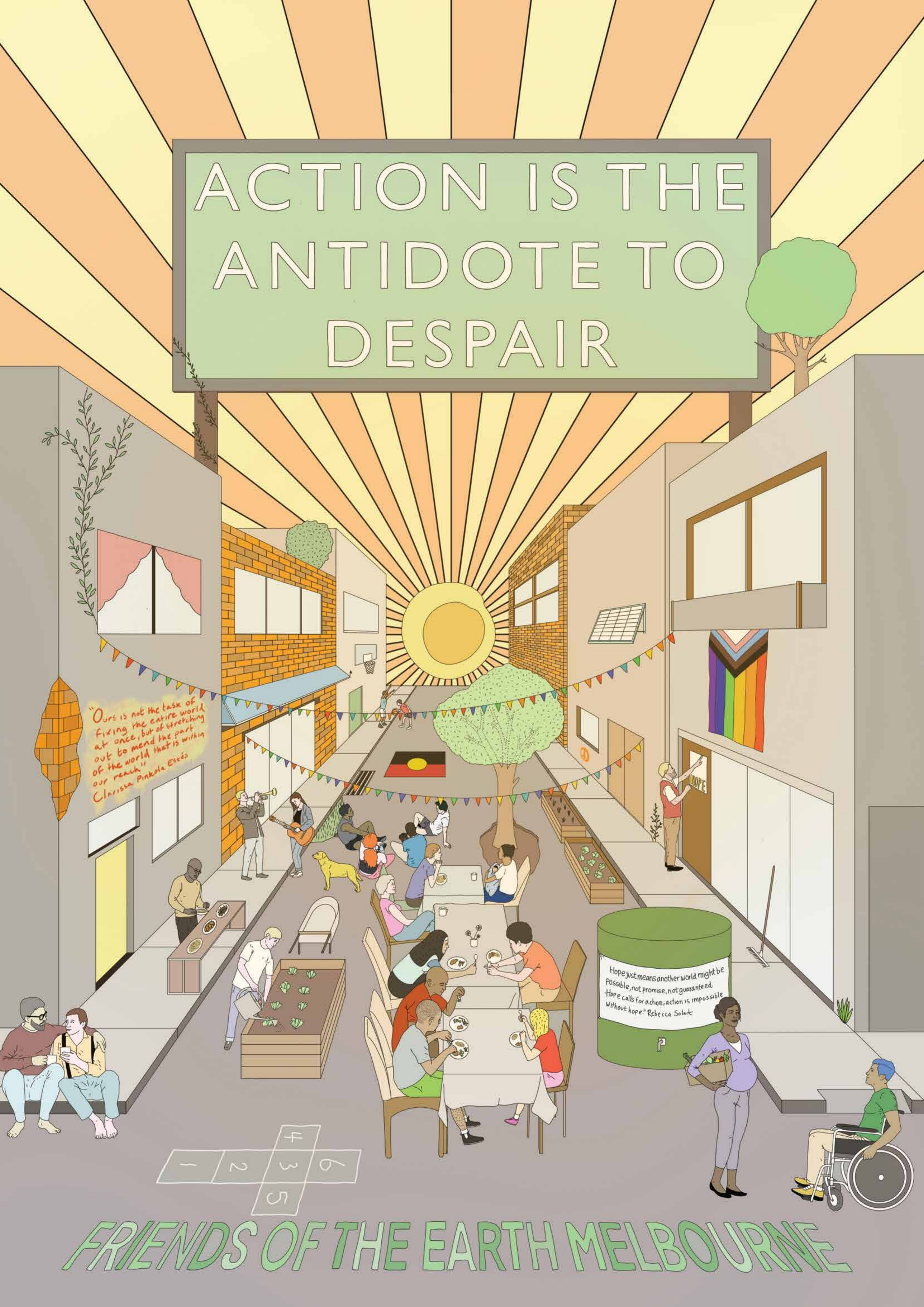
I discovered that there was much more to life when I stopped working and started exploring to find a place to belong. Returning to the environmental movement after so many years was a continuation of my youth, it made me feel like I still had something to offer. That there was a real chance if we worked together, we could save mother earth from profit-driven oblivion. Volunteering at Friends of the Earth reignited that spark of rebellion that had burned bright when I was a young, punk agitator.

As an old, punk retiree, I had no bosses to answer to and no job to lose. I was free as a bird. Join us, because action is the antidote to despair.

Kristine is a communications volunteer at Friends of the Earth Melbourne. Want to get involved? Visit melbourne.foe.org.au/volunteer to find out more.

Artist Bio
Alina Carr is a tattoo artist and illustrator living and working in Bulleke-bek (Brunswick). Her work focuses predominantly on the natural world, often depicting animals, botanicals and humans through a surrealist lens.
Follow Alina on Instagram at @stickaround_____

ACTION IS THE ANTIDOTE TO DESPAIR



"Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach."
Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Hope just means another world might be possible, not promise, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope.
Rebecca Solnit

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH MELBOURNE