



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2011 / ISSUE 1

EDITORIAL

Environmental Futures

The Shooters and the Fishers Party is happy with the abolition of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water in NSW. Is anyone else? Jeff Angel, TEC's Executive Director, analyses the recent shifts in state environment policy.

Barry O'Farrell made some dramatic changes to government departments in his first days in power. At first it looked like he had achieved what no previous New South Wales government in 40 years (Coalition or Labor) thought necessary or desirable: the department of environment was abolished. Further marine parks and catchment management authorities were transferred to the Department of Primary Industries that focuses on the exploitation of land and sea resources, rather than conservation.

The Premier has since explained to environmental groups that he wants to improve the capacity to achieve the triple bottom line. It's true that in the past environment has been the poor cousin of the social-economic-environment platform. It was often treated as a junior partner by developer bureaucracies and their ministers, and in some cases they would simply ignore or fight rearguard actions against environment protection decisions. Inclusion in Premier and Cabinet, O'Farrell claims, has elevated the Environment Protection Authority and National Parks and Wildlife Service, along with their regulatory powers such as pollution control, threatened species, and land clearing laws.

It's still operating so at least the department has not disappeared.

Perhaps the Premier's involvement will ensure we don't step back into the dark ages. There will, however, be some fundamental tests for the government. Will environment now be treated as an equal when there are senior meetings of departments? This is quite possible, with the most senior director-general heading it. Of course, key decisions will still be taken by Cabinet, and we have yet to see if it is sympathetic to advancing environment protection.

One of the key strengths of the previous Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water was its multi-skilled

approach, applied to a broad agenda. It had the intellectual grunt and resources to advocate for the environment. It could bring these to bear across a range of government programs. 'Ecologically sustainable development' was inserted into the environment protection authority legislation by a Liberal minister, many years ago – but never taken seriously. It's often said that environment protection is a matter for all government agencies – will the new arrangements prompt this and will there be a tough monitoring and auditing system?

"Climate Change" has been completely dropped and is no longer anyone's responsibility. This important issue needs a strong voice in government influencing purchasing decisions, planning strategies and natural resources policy. It may be politically convenient to support Tony Abbot's position in his battle with federal Labor over the carbon tax and whether global warming is real - but you can't make the issue go away.

Under the guidance of the previous environment department and the Natural Resources Commission most Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) had environmental integrity that was enhanced by rural stewardship activities. They were developed as much-needed effective change agents in often conservative rural situations. While CMAs don't decide the rules about land clearing it's possible CMA direction and impact will be muted under the Primary Industry agency. As for the Native Vegetation Act, which seeks to control land clearing, the environment movement was assured prior to the election that it will remain intact. The new departmental arrangements must be deployed to enhance its defence.

Marine sanctuaries are under attack with recent legislation to reverse sanctuary protections. The Coalition has promised it will not reduce the boundaries of marine parks (or any other national park) but fish nurseries, vital to aquatic habitat protection, are threatened. This will please the Shooters and

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Fishers Party which represents a narrow sectional interest with no broad social or environmental platform.

The Shooters and Fishers, which continues to have some of the balance of power capacity in the Upper House, also wants to introduce hunting in national parks under the guise of feral animal control. It's a con. They shoot a few ferals on a weekend and then over a matter of months the population recovers. The party has already signalled its intention to push their policy via the balance of power. O'Farrell has repeatedly said in plain and clear terms – there will be no hunting in national parks, nor a duck shooting season, and Dharawal will become a national park.

The fact is, forty years ago the environment was an issue at the margin. This is no longer true. The O'Farrell government won a massive victory on the back of an ALP government that had lost the people's trust and respect. But the environment is now mainstream. Environment protection is not optional, and voters are awake to the consequences. The Premier says he has committed to seeing NSW leading the nation on environment outcomes. Whether the O'Farrell government will become known as an environmental destroyer or carer will be revealed in coming months.

Jeff Angel, Executive Director



CONTAINER RECYCLING CAMPAIGN ON THE STREET

TEC and Boomerang Alliance activists picketed the Sydney HQ of Coca Cola Amatil to pressure change in the multi-national's opposition to container deposits schemes (CDS). Leaflets were handed to staff asking them to help and Lisa Wriley, our waste campaigner appeared as Ken the Can.

During the recent debate in the Northern Territory on a CDS, Coca Cola executives were accused by the NT government of offering to financially support the opposition party to overthrow the legislation. They, along with other big beverage companies also funded radio, newspaper, and TV adverts. Fortunately this did not work and the NT became the second state (after over 30 years in South Australia) to make CDS law (and with unanimous support).

A few days after our action, we obtained a leaked email exposing the latest plans by Coca Cola Amatil to oppose the introduction of container deposits into Australia.

It reveals Coke has roped in the Keep Australia Beautiful Council to relaunch the 'Do the Right Thing' anti-litter advertising campaign. "It's simply an effort to greenwash themselves out of the growing problem of container litter. They also intend to fund some token bins in public places – it's a joke," said TEC Director Jeff Angel.

A container deposit scheme would collect an additional 300,000 tonnes of clean recycle while the beverage company approach collects perhaps 10% of that and it is often contaminated.

NATIONAL ELECTRICITY MARKET IN THE SPOTLIGHT

TEC's executive director, Jeff Angel reports on new light flooding the moribund National Electricity Market (NEM)

In the final weeks of 2004, when most people were buried in end-of-year work or otherwise distracted by the start of the holiday season, the power interests inside Treasury, and the energy bureaucracies, called for submissions to hundreds of pages of recently tabled documents on the National Electricity Law and market regulations. A 'public hearing' to engage the community was scheduled as part of the process on the 7th of January 2005.

As you can imagine, TEC was unimpressed by the timing. Calling for submissions and holding community forums in the peak holiday period is a long standing developers' trick to restrict accountability and public access to key consultation processes.

Total Environment Centre had began its NEM campaign in that year, and this event was the first time we had participated in a NEM process. At the forum we called for greater porosity between the NEM and environmental policies. We suggested it would lose legitimacy if it could not be seen to be serving broader community objectives. Already at that early stage it was obvious that the NEM had all the hallmarks of an insular institution.

For most of the seven years since, it has remained so. Yet recent developments indicate that a new wave of reform to the National Electricity Market could be imminent. The key regulator is the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) and we were invited to address their 'strategic priorities' conference held on April 1 – it could be the beginning of change.

I pointed out that the arguments for reforming the NEM have become overwhelming. Electricity is no longer cheap and efficiency is under serious question as billions of dollars are spent to provide for peak demand that occurs for a few hours a year. Although the NEM is designed to serve the 'long term interests of consumers' by providing reliable and low cost electricity in an efficient manner, it is clear that at least two planks of its social operating licence are fracturing.

TEC is no longer isolated in this view. The Prime Minister's Taskforce on Energy Efficiency 2010 report says:

"To play its part in enabling a step change in energy efficiency, the energy market needs to be both flexible and robust. Ongoing reform of the National Electricity Market (NEM) has improved its consideration of demand-side options (including energy efficiency). But concerns remain that the take-up of cost-effective energy efficiency opportunities are being hindered by the NEM regulatory structure. Achieving a step change in the nation's energy efficiency will require that NEM participants have appropriate incentives, and are equipped to deliver cost-effective demand side measures and

to partner effectively with providers of energy efficiency and demand management services." (Chapter 12, p163)

Most recently, in his 8th update paper, Prof Ross Garnaut stated:

"The recent electricity price increases have mainly been driven by increases in the costs of transmission and distribution.

There is a prima facie case that weaknesses in the regulatory framework have led to overinvestment in networks and unnecessarily high prices for consumers.

In the future, rising network costs and government policies – unless changed – will continue to contribute to large electricity price rises.

The upcoming review of regulatory arrangements by the Australian Energy Regulator presents an opportunity to correct distortions in current regulations."

It is important for the NEM and its institutions to realise that these are high calibre, independent verdicts that cannot be ignored.

The NEM has reached a critical point in its history. If it is to operate in 'the long-term interests of consumers' it will require a redefinition of what those interests really are, and how to address them. In other words the NEM must become part of the solution, not the problem.

TEC's NEM Campaigner Tyson Vaughan, explains our 2011 work on reforming the NEM

When TEC first started its NEM campaign most politicians and bureaucrats didn't have much to do with electricity, and those that did thought it didn't have anything to do with the environment. You would have been lucky to find a single article on electricity every three months and even then it would have been twelve pages from the front in the Financial Review.

Nowadays, so many articles are produced about electricity you couldn't read through them all even if it was your full time job. Exponential electricity price rises and the challenge of mitigating climate change are in the forefront of many politicians' minds, even those who normally wouldn't even know about the NEM.

This year is crucial for influencing government decision-making on demand-side participation in the NEM, and TEC has transformed its advocacy to adapt to these new conditions. Up until now, the majority of TEC's advocacy has involved participation in review processes hosted by government

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departments such as the Australian Energy Regulator, the Australian Energy Market Commission and the Australian Energy Market Operator. TEC has developed a reputation for accurate, original research, analysis and strategy on demand-side participation and environmental outcomes in the NEM, and is often the only environmental organisation invited to participate in these forums.

While these reviews continue to be important to TEC's advocacy, this year we will also increase our interaction with key decision makers throughout the parliament and bureaucracy.

Last year, we engaged state and federal bureaucrats to help inform our political advocacy strategy and undertook a research project focused on communication of NEM issues and solutions to politicians and bureaucrats. This year, TEC seeks to implement its strategy and target a broad range of decision makers directly.

TEC's position as a peak environmental body involved in the NEM also provides it with an opportunity to develop a wider advocacy network on demand-side participation. This year, TEC will seek to increase its involvement with organisations and individuals including non-governmental organisations, research institutions, advocacy groups, commercial organisations, and bureaucrats and academics. The aim is to make our policy more robust, to amplify TEC's voice, and importantly, to unify and strengthen advocacy on demand-side participation in the NEM.

Just a few weeks ago we were able to arrange for Mike Peevey, President of the California Utilities Commission to visit ministers and key advisers in Canberra and NSW. California has a wonderful regulation called the 'loading order' which requires utilities to do energy efficiency first, then renewables and lastly fossil fuel.

This is what Australia needs to stop unnecessary price rises and stop dangerous carbon emissions.

WASTE NOT

*Just before flying to Europe to attend film festivals which have invited TEC's recent doco Waste Not, to screen, TEC's Communications Director **Ruth Hessey** filed this update.*

What keeps a modern metropolis clean and sparkling? How many people think their rubbish simply disappears? Where does all that packaging, and all those plastic items, old TVs and computers go when we are finished with them?

All these questions are addressed by TEC's recent award winning short documentary, Waste Not. The film shows where your garbage goes, who sorts it for you, and what it is worth if it isn't just tossed into landfill. For instance, it's easier and cheaper to retrieve gold from old computers than to dig it up. Organics can be used to create fertiliser and green electricity and yet Australians send 800,000 tonnes of edible food to landfill each year where it is contaminated with chemicals and e-waste. We recycle only 50% of all our waste.

The film also argues that there is an alternative to environmental crisis. Waste Not talks to scientists, workers at waste depots, environment campaigners, gardeners and even a famous chef about how easy it is to save the planet by simply recycling properly. Waste Not looks at the big picture as well as the small: our entire society could be reconfigured if we adopted a zero waste, maximum efficiency economic model. We could create a sustainable, fair and healthy planet if we valued precious resources rather than wasting them. Waste Not introduces us to Michael Mobbs and his inner city Sustainable House, Luke Powell the head chef at Tetsuya's legendary restaurant and a passionate composter, James Bradfield Moody, the head of development at the CSIRO, Jeff Angel, executive director of the Total Environment Centre, and half a dozen more.

The response to Waste Not has been phenomenal. From the start TEC was determined to avoid the common pitfalls of documentary films of this genre (chiefly being dull and boring). The film's goal is to inspire hope, to create that light bulb moment, and motivate people to change the way they think and act. High production values, and feature film creatives were employed to make the film's message compelling and seductive, including the talented composer Peter Fenton. Bonnie Elliott shot the film, which was edited by Aden Young (with additional editing by Lindi Harrison).

Subsequent to the completion of the documentary, City of Sydney commissioned several 'webisodes' amplifying key themes in Waste Not, which were delivered in March 2011. TEC is now pushing Waste Not out into the community on several levels: councils, corporate staff engagement, and the education sector. Big companies such as Fujitsu and the National Australia Bank are purchasing licenses to show the film for staff sustainability education, as well as small community groups. At 25 minutes in length, the film is perfectly pitched for the education sector.

Waste Not has been accepted into the Barcelona International Environment Film Festival, Rodos Island Eco-Film Fest in Greece, St Kilda where it won best doco and Dungog festivals, and the Short Film Corner in the Festival de Cannes (every film festival we've entered so far).

See the trailer on our website:

www.tec.org.au/waste-a-recycling/129-waste-not/928-waste-not-amazing-film-on-recycling

SOLAR BONUS SCHEME DEFENDED

TEC told the NSW Government's Solar Summit that the NSW Solar Bonus (feed-in tariff) Scheme is not a major cause of power price rises and that any changes should be treated with great caution.

It's clear that dismantling of the feed-in tariff won't stop power prices rising rapidly and that more stop-start programs will severely harm the solar panel industry, which should be an important part of our power supply. Just because solar is the new kid on the block does not mean we should ignore the real causes which include absurd levels of spending to service peak power demand and weak energy efficiency policies.

Any changes should merge with the longer term plan. If you withdraw one level of support you want to know that the industry is also maturing and there are longer term drivers in place to keep it growing and competitive.

TEC pointed out that if we took this penny pinching attitude to every new emerging industry and withdrew support when (often) vested interests criticised it, then we would still be in the dark ages. You have to give a new industry the chance to mature and become mainstream and solar can certainly become that.

Nevertheless the O'Farrell government made a sudden and adverse decision and found itself in political hot water with front page headlines. It's both a lesson about how the solar industry with 110,000 home installations has become economically and politically visible; and how you should not make policy on the run.

'BUYING BETTER' CAMPAIGN

Murray Hogarth, Green Capital

Backed by a six-month research and stakeholder engagement project TEC and Green Capital, have found there is a clear need for policies and programs to support consumers to buy better.

Most recently as part of Green Capital's Buying Better Initiative a special survey was conducted with members and followers of the 1 Million Women campaign.

The survey, which attracted nearly 400 respondents, deliberately targeted a 'green leaning' female demographic, with women making over 70% of purchasing decisions that affect household environmental footprint.

Even allowing that the target audience for the survey was more eco-savvy than the mainstream population, a majority of respondents (65.8%) found environmental claims on products difficult to understand.

And many were mistaken in their assessments of where most environmental harm occurs in the 'life cycles' of mainstream products like fresh food, clothing, TVs and washing machines.

In one classic example, the results suggest that a global focus in recent years on 'food miles' – the carbon emissions connected to the distance that food has to travel from paddock to plate – may have misled consumers on where the greatest adverse environmental impacts occur with fresh fruit and vegetables.

There also was very strong support for supermarkets and other Australian retailers to be proactive about stocking and showcasing more sustainable product choices, and also dumping less sustainable ones from their shelves.

Key findings of the survey include:

- While over 9 out of 10 respondents look out for environmental information on products, and nearly 8 out of 10 agreed they would pay more for 'genuinely green' products, nearly 7 out of 10 found environmental claims on labels difficult to understand
- Respondents tended to significantly underestimate how much of the negative environmental impact in the life cycle of key mainstream products – the survey looked at TVs, fresh fruit and vegetables, clothing, laundry detergent, washing machines and printer paper – arises while being used by consumers
- A number of major 'green', 'eco', 'ethical' or 'sustainability' labels had low recognition with the respondents – for example over a third of respondents had 'never heard of' Good Environmental Choice Australia, Forest Stewardship Council and Marine Stewardship Council - with notable exceptions 'Fairtrade' and 'Energy Star' enjoying high positive recognition
- Respondents showed overwhelming support for supermarkets and other retailers to proactively stock and promote more sustainable products and de-stock the most unsustainable ones, but there was a pocket of concern about retailers creating their own 'green labels'.

The survey also found interest in product claims such as 'carbon reduction' and 'carbon neutral' was much lower than for more established generic labeling such as 'free range', 'recyclable', 'ethical' and 'local'.

We are now planning the next stage of the program where we assess several pilot products to test ways of better exposing environmental aspects and informing the consumer.

Gas mining reviews sprout

Queensland has run ahead on the coal seam methane (CSM) industry with hundreds and hundreds of drilling sites proposed for the countryside – almost an industrialisation of the rural landscape. Already there are reports of sloppy practises putting water supplies at risk. Both the National Water Commission and head of the NSW Natural Resources Commission have sounded the alarm about the industry.

NSW is some steps back and has a chance to take a more sober look at the industry. Readers of Total Environment and the SMH will be aware that TEC released confidential company documents showing plans to drill for gas in Sydney's water catchment and next to Warragamba Dam, using the controversial 'fracking' technique that injects thousands of litres of water, sand and chemicals into the ground; and also ejects dirty water onto the surface. With many grants of exploration licences across the state including in and around Sydney, the Hunter Valley and the Pilliga bush - the industry was slipping under the radar.

However, the imminent state election and growing public controversy put the industry into the spotlight. Both major parties jockeyed with new policies that targeted both coal and gas. Farmers were in uproar at incursions into their productive regions and environmental groups pointed to the damage caused by longwall mining and fracking chemicals. The ALP and Liberal-Nationals announced moratoriums and new regional plans in an attempt to bring the industry under control after years of ALP confetti-like grants of mining permits.

The mining industry got the election it deserved – it was on the defensive. We witnessed a sudden change in public rhetoric from the arrogant –we are the 'saviours of the economy and environment and good for everyone' to – 'let's sit down and talk about this in a co-operative way'.

Late in the piece the ALP formed a stakeholder strategy committee on which TEC was invited to sit. A couple of meetings were held before the election and it has now been resuscitated by the new O'Farrell government. It will be given the task of assisting with the regional land use plans that will determine where mining can and can't occur. The government is also moving on its promise of an 'aquifer interference policy' whereby miners need to assess impacts and get permission to harm groundwater systems. This has been a long standing request from TEC and other groups in relation to longwall mining which cracks riverbeds and drains swamps. Fracking of course compounds the threats and, as we discovered in those confidential documents, can occur hot on the heels of longwall coal mining.

Environmentalists and farmers are going to have to work hard to bring the mining industry under control. There have been episodes of review before, but it has always come back – as strong and arrogant as before. It is undoubtedly a powerful industry and we are going to have to bring all the lessons we have learnt in the past, to bear.





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The Administrator

Total Environment Centre Inc

Suite 2, 89 Jones Street

Ultimo. 2007

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

TEC and the environmental battle can be greatly assisted with your volunteer time and skills.

If you can help, please return this coupon to:

Volunteers Coordinator,

Total Environment Centre Inc

Suite 2, 89 Jones Street Ultimo. 2007

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I am available (per week) half day one day

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Name:

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