



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2012 / ISSUE 1

EDITORIAL

The big issues keep coming

Jeff Angel, Executive Director

At the beginning of each year I wonder whether the pace of environmental challenge will slow. Surely there'll be some major changes and green decisions will become the norm? But no, 2011 was a big year for controversy and portends even more for 2012.

The year will see the implementation of the carbon price. The sky won't fall in – it's not that big a tax and with all the concessions and cost of living buffering won't upset budgets – but it does add another hand on the lever of economic policy making. It's no longer the sole preserve of big business, unions and Treasury – a green hand has entered the room.

Expect more outrage from 'old' business and political opportunism triggered by every price rise. The carbon price will need to be defended by environmentalists and the growing green business sector.

Controversy will follow the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. We are hearing that the rivers are back to robust health and bird and fish life is thriving – the best for over 20 years. So why do we need to further cut irrigation allowances ask the rowdy meetings in Griffith and elsewhere in the Murrumbidgee catchment?

Because 20 years is too long to wait for a good drink. Extraction of water and construction of dams for irrigation has massively reduced the mid-range floods that kept key areas wet and sustained. Much of the floodplain and wetlands were in a dire, dry state – close to collapse. And the Murray's salt burden and low flows were intolerable when they entered South Australia.

Whether the politics will align is a crucial question. All previous attempts have seen the triumph of parochialism, both state and irrigation based, to the detriment of an historic and holistic response. The behaviour of NSW and Victoria in 2012 will be watched closely as they jockey to make political capital for the Coalition, and retain their state based systems that have failed to bring about a healthy environmental outcome. In NSW for example, so called 'environmental water' in state water plans is often not delivered to the environment in the desired quantity and at the right times.

One issue that has brought farmers and environmentalists together is coal seam gas. It's the new star of the energy economy promising billions of dollars, hundreds of jobs and lucrative royalties. It has come in under the radar as exploration permits were quietly granted over giant swathes of Queensland and NSW.

So quiet that understanding of its agricultural and water impacts was poor and regulation ill-fitting to properly expose issues and manage threats. Only now after a massive uproar are governments trying to come to terms with the industry and take public concern into account. Some players in the gas industry also agree that cowboy companies and tactics have done them a great disservice.

The age old refrain from mining is that it can coexist with agriculture and the environment. Not everywhere. This has been proven with longwall mining under Sydney's southern drinking water catchments. New technology, 'remediation' of cracked riverbeds, and ongoing monitoring were the recipes for coexistence. They haven't worked – yet because science and regulation fell behind, the catchments will be mined under 20 and 30 year consents with inadequate controls and exclusions.

Perhaps surprisingly, on another front the conservative governments of Victoria and NSW have moved to take a tougher stance on industrial pollution. During 2011 environment protection authorities were upgraded with stronger laws and greater independence. Industry did not expect more regulation - traditionally their lighter regulation approach is endorsed by the Liberal party.

The rolling pollution incidents from Orica produced an irresistible momentum in NSW and new laws on notification of pollution events, monitoring, public consultation and pollution reduction have put the spotlight on heavy industry, when it may have thought it had a comfortable arrangement with regulators.

How this new relationship in our two most industrialised states works out in 2012 will be a test of both coalition governments' commitment to a new era of eliminating air and water pollution as undoubtedly business will assert that too

continued on page 2

2012 Issue 1

- p1 Editorial
- p2 NSW Farmers and Environmentalists Link Arms
- p3 Plastic Not Fantastic...
- p3 Buying Better
- p4 Coal Mine Drains World Heritage Lake
- p4 Cash for your containers
- p5 Lights on, nobody home?
- p6 Green Capital turns TEN!
- p6 Big Dam Addiction Resurfaces, Dammit

Newsletter Team

Editors • Jeff Angel, Ruth Hessey
Printing • Breakout
Design • Steven Granger

Contributors to this Issue

Jeff Angel
Dave Burgess
Leigh Martin
Lisa Wriley
Murray Hogarth
Mark Byrne

Published by

Total Environment Centre Inc
Suite 2, Level 1,
89 Jones Street, Ultimo. 2007

p: 02 9211 5022
f: 02 9211 5033

tec@tec.org.au
www.tec.org.au

continued from page 1

much action will damage their financial viability.

The fourth big national environmental challenge is how to uplift recycling. Australians have done pretty well so far but the bins and streets are being overburdened by tens of millions of unwanted electronic items and eight billion beverage containers, every year.

The good news is that after a seven year campaign a national e-waste collection and recycling scheme has been established under the newly minted Product Stewardship Act. And the e-waste recycling law will require 90% of

the material in the collected electronics to be recycled.

The big challenge will be what to do with the littered and landfilled beverage containers. It's an enormous waste of glass, metal and plastic. The beverage industry are proposing an alternative of more bins and advertising but their targets are fanciful with no hope of reaching the 80+% recycling rate that is quickly achieved by a container deposits.

So, more struggle in 2012. But it is worth the effort – green dreams take a long time to become real.

NSW Farmers and Environmentalists Link Arms

*Government land use policy fails to live up to promises and some people are not going to take that lying down, says **Dave Burgess**, Natural Areas Campaigner.*

The NSW government's new land use policy for mining and coal seam gas has been labeled disappointing, and a recipe for continuing uncertainty, by farmers and environmentalists who have promised to wage an even bigger campaign in the coming months.

The Rules are still in draft form, leaving open an opportunity for the public to make submissions. Some improvements to the system were introduced under the previous government, but the draft rules don't guarantee the protection of the environmental and agricultural values which are essential to future sustainability. Important lands have been mapped and an independent "gateway" process established for strategic agricultural lands, but not key biodiversity areas.

Consequently, the protection of strategic agricultural lands and high conservation values is left to a process which can sideline water protection, and (in language reminiscent of the infamous Part 3A system) be sidelined itself, if the government deems the project to be 'exceptional'.

Importantly, no areas have been placed off limits to coal mining or gas extraction. The NSW Coalition's promised certainty for sustainable agriculture and threatened habitats has not been delivered.

Unfortunately, the nature of project-by-project decision making is essentially combative, forcing communities to keep objecting and campaigning, even as mining companies continue to agitate to obtain exemptions and weaker conditions.

To make a submission visit:

<http://haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/regionallanduse>

Track Mine Threats

TEC has launched its interactive Coal Mines Map online...

The TEC website now has an interactive NSW Carbon Mine Threats Map. Visitors can browse over every single coal mine in NSW to access up to date information on things such as development applications, expansion plans, environmental impacts and links to local campaign groups. It also provides key data, such as prosecutions for breach of licence and carbon emissions.

The map was launched alongside the release of the *NSW: Fossil or Balanced Future Report*, which blasts the industry-perpetuated myth that mining, the environment and agriculture can coexist.

<http://www.tec.org.au/carbon-mine-threats-map>

Plastic Not Fantastic...

Plastic is having a deadly effect on the food chain – are humans next? TEC Director, Jeff Angel wants a new campaign.

TEC has been campaigning on waste and recycling for almost 40 years, but recent events have made us even more determined to act on a looming catastrophe, before it's too late.

The recent summer deluges, which created traffic havoc in city streets, also produced a toxic tide of packaging debris. As it swept through the storm-water system, a slick of plastic pollution choked waterways such as Sydney's Cooks River, strangling the mangroves, and eventually surging into the sea.

The same thing is happening all over Australia, even in our most pristine natural environments, plastic has become ubiquitous. Recent investigations on Lord Howe Island have found a layer of microscopic plastic under the sand. Dissections of dead birds have revealed plastic backed up from beak to butt.

Globally more than 200 species are known to be affected by marine rubbish which is whittling away at fragile ecosystems, all the way up the food chain. Whales, seals, dugong, turtles, sea snakes, sharks, rays and other fish are under threat. Most marine species depend on zoo plankton for food, which are a fundamental link to the phytoplankton which capture the sun's energy. The ratio of plastic in zoo plankton in the major

ocean gyres, which concentrate huge areas of floating material, is estimated to be up to 6:1 by weight. Researchers currently believe plastics are entering the human food chain too, as they are taken up by zoo plankton. Larger pieces of plastic are mistaken by sea creatures as food. This means that plastic ingested by wildlife not only affects them – their guts may be perforated which means they starve to death - but toxins from the plastics may also be absorbed by humans.

Plastics have a long life, requiring about 500 years to completely decompose in the ocean. Their durability and buoyancy allows them to be carried for thousands of miles on ocean currents, as they break up into smaller and smaller pieces. One third of plastic marine debris is from beverage containers. In Australia we landfill or litter 8 billion beverage containers a year.

Anyone who is concerned by the issue of plastics should get involved in TEC's Container Deposit campaign as a first step to stopping the plastic menace threatening our marine ecosystems. Stay tuned for further campaign initiatives. Also keep an eye on the Boomerang Alliance, which is an umbrella for 17 environment groups devoted to increasing recycling and reducing waste.

Buying Better

Green Capital's Buying Better project, which aims to promote and enable a greener market place, has entered phase two – and we want your ideas! Murray Hogarth, Senior Advisor to Green Capital, reports.

The first phase of Buying Better, conducted in 2010-11, highlighted the confusion in the marketplace caused by the proliferation of sustainability labels and certification schemes. Some of these also have competing or conflicting claims and objectives, and raise concerns about whether or not the 'most material' environmental issues are being addressed.

Now with support from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and Sustainability Victoria, the Green Capital team is preparing detailed 'materiality' reports on four key product areas: cleaning products; printer paper; meat and dairy; small ICT electronics – i.e. mobile phones, tablets, laptops, computers, gaming devices

In addition, we are nominating two additional areas for special investigation: packaging environmental claims (i.e. claims about the packaging itself), and small business sustainability accreditation (i.e. whole of business v. products).

The Buying Better exercise is not limited to eco or sustainability labels per se. **The primary objective is to**

enable, promote and support environmentally preferential purchasing by consumers and procurement professionals.

To this end, there are a number of approaches that may be considered, including but not limited to:

- Eco or sustainability labels (including independent and 'own brand' models)
- Other standards, accreditation and certification schemes
- Guides and apps
- Choice editing i.e. removing some products from sale altogether
- Public and professional education campaigns
- 'Watchdog' initiatives and exposing greenwashing
- Extended producer responsibility measures

Once the reports are ready, Green Capital will engage the full spectrum of stakeholders around each product area – and we'd like to receive input on any or all of these focus areas from interested people and parties. An easy way to organise your responses is to answer the following questions:

continued on page 4

- What are the main environmental issues associated with this product area?
- What other significant 'public interest' issues are associated with the product area?
- What life cycle assessment and other environmental or sustainability analysis can you identify that is relevant to this product area?
- What do you identify as the most 'material' issues to be considered for this product area through BB2?
- What are the sustainability labels, certifications, standards, accreditations etc. relevant to this area, and what issues are associated with these?
- Who are the priority stakeholders for this product area across businesses, industry groups, government agencies, regulators, community groups, academics etc.?
- What else needs to be considered?

send replies to: greencapital@tec.org.au

Coal Mine Drains World Heritage Lake

Dropping water levels were blamed on the drought, but new evidence reveals that cracking of underground rock could be the culprit...Dave Burgess, Natural Areas Campaigner

Two newsletters ago we reported on the sudden and dramatic draining of the World Heritage Thirlmere Lakes. In a welcome development, NSW Minister for the Environment Robyn Parker has since announced the formation of a scientific panel to hold an independent inquiry into what has caused the loss of water.

In 2010 the previous NSW Government and the then Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, stonewalled demands for an inquiry by Wollondilly Shire Council and the local community. This was despite the fact that the management plan acknowledged a poor understanding of the lake system. None of the responsible agencies would concede that the close proximity of Xstrata's Tahmoor Colliery – a longwall mine that once drained the Bargo River – might have been connected with the water loss. Instead they blamed "the drought".

However, a new independent hydrological study by Professor Philip Pells concludes the event cannot be caused by drought alone, and says that water extraction at the coal mine may be a contributing factor. Other scientific experts suspect that longwall panels close to the lakes (mined in 2001) fractured the aquiclude (rock layer) beneath the lakes and that the slow permeability of the fractured strata caused the impacts to reveal themselves over the ensuing years.

NSW environment groups have written to the Minister congratulating her for showing a willingness to investigate beyond the previous government. Meanwhile the Lakes have stayed dry despite the region being drenched over the 'big wet'.

For more info visit:

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/water/thirlmerelakesinquiry.htm

Cash for your containers

TEC's long running campaign for container deposit legislation (CDL) is about to climax! Our waste campaigner Lisa Wriley, describes how it will work, and what you can do.

The latest calculations by the Boomerang Alliance peg the number of beverage containers sold in Australia at around 13 billion, with only about 40% being recovered – this leaves nearly 8 billion bottles and cans unaccounted for.

We know where a lot end up – we see beverage container litter everywhere – in the overflowing rubbish bins, on the streets, in parks, beaches, bus stops and along railway lines. Broken glass lies in the gutters, stormwater drains and skate parks – the result of bottles not worth the trouble to pick up and recycle. No amount of public place bins will alleviate this behavioural problem to the same extent as the proven 10c deposit-refund.

After years of campaigning, a national 10c deposit-refund on beverage containers could be within our grasp. To borrow a phrase from Coke's marketing team: It's possible. Two of the

five options being considered by the Environment Ministers at their next meeting in June are container deposit systems. Such schemes have proven effective around the world, achieving return rates of at least 80% of beverage containers. And despite the scare-mongering of the beverage industry people still buy drinks. Countries like Germany have even gone the next step and re-introduced refillable bottles.

To be sure, a new system will take some time to develop. With a YES vote in June 2012 we could expect to start returning bottles and cans for refunds in 2015/2016. It will also take time to clean up the legacy of litter the beverage companies have allowed to develop over a generation, but we will get there. Our communities will be cleaner and our recycling levels will soar to new heights.

continued on page 7

Lights on, nobody home?

Australians are waking up to escalating bills and the idea that our current energy market may not be operating in their interest. TEC's new Energy Advocate, Mark Byrne, sheds some natural light on the dark corners of the NEM.

What piece of infrastructure is costing Australian consumers 50 per cent more over five years, than the National Broadband Network, but receives a fraction of the public attention?

It's the National Electricity Market. In the current five year regulatory period, consumers will cough up \$58 billion for the poles and wires alone, aside from the cost of actually generating the electricity and selling it to us.* This compares with the official NBN construction budget of \$36 billion.

The NEM has been around since 1998. It's a heavily regulated industry, yet the first comprehensive audit has only been released this week. It was commissioned by the Total Environment Centre from the Institute for Sustainable Futures at UTS.

The NEM Report Card ranks the performance of the NEM over the last decade against the National Electricity Objective, which is to promote "the long term interests of consumers of electricity".

By surveying stakeholders and using a newly developed grading criteria, the Report Card finds that the NEM is doing a fair to good job of serving those parts of the "long term interests of the consumer" that are currently referred to in the National Electricity Objective. These are reliability, security, quality, safety and price (and its rating is on the slide).

With the exception of customer bills and level of competition, though, the performance of the network for criteria that are not currently included ranges from fair to very poor.

The worst ranking the Report Card gives the network is for its environmental performance. Based on the network's greenhouse emissions and intensity and the proportion of renewable energy used in the grid, and efficiency it gives the electricity network a ranking of F or very poor and D.

This is no surprise, since the National Electricity Rules basically pay networks and retailers to encourage households and businesses to consume more electricity, rather than to save it. There are few incentives for power stations, networks or retailers to reduce their own greenhouse emissions, or those of consumers.

The UTS report makes some recommendations on how the network and the objective might be reformed, including annual performance reporting on how well the network is meeting its current objective, how it is faring on issues of concern to customers, and amending the objective to incorporate social and environmental criteria.

TEC has been advocating for the last eight years for changes to the rules to encourage more energy conservation and efficiency and demand management. The current federal government has finally got the energy efficiency message, with a range of new grant programs just announced and the likely implementation of a National Energy Savings Initiative

later this year.

More to do

But we still urgently need changes to the rules to give energy companies and consumers more incentives to save energy. Some say they are willing, but the rules are skewed so that the networks can, say, make more money by avoiding investments in demand management in the short term because they can make more money in the long term by building new poles and wires instead.

More importantly, we still need the objective to complement national climate change policy by recognising environmental and social outcomes, so that the Australian Energy Market Commission and the Australian Energy Regulator are forced to broaden their brief. They currently see their job primarily as being to correct market failures or distortions, with some minor tweaks to account for externalities like people and the environment.

The regulators say that their job is to implement, not make, government policy. The NEM is ultimately the responsibility of the Standing Council on Energy and Resources, comprised of the State and Territory energy ministers and presided over by Federal Energy, Resources and Tourism Minister Martin Ferguson.

We need our national energy policy, over which Ferguson presides, to be in sync with our climate policy, instead of being hellbent (if the Draft Energy White Paper is any guide) on exploiting our coal and gas reserves while paying lip service to the government's emissions reduction targets of 5 per cent by 2020 and 80 per cent by 2050.

Nobody is kidding themselves that such modest targets, even if achieved, are likely to lead to a safe climate. We may argue about the mix of renewables, CCS and nuclear energy in the electricity market if a safe climate were its overarching objective, but the irony is that the things that can make the biggest difference most quickly also save, not cost, us money.

That's energy conservation (just saying no, switching off, or "negawatts") and using the energy we do consume more efficiently, including smoothing out the peaks in demand. They are no-brainers, yet they're not nearly as sexy or visual as renewables, so the political will to implement them is harder to achieve.

Still, to paraphrase an old Greenpeace car sticker, there is no electricity market on a dead planet.

* Source: State of the Energy Market 2011, Australian Energy Regulator, 60.

Green Capital turns TEN!

TEC's corporate engagement program was an innovation when it began a decade ago – since then it has spawned many imitators. We look back, and forwards...

When Green Capital began life in 2002, Bob Carr was Premier of NSW, Steve Bracks was Premier of Victoria, and John Howard was Prime Minister of Australia. At a national level, Australia was refusing to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the first proposals for a national emissions trading scheme for carbon pollution had already been rejected, and the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target was a very modest 2% by 2010. The world's first mandated carbon trading scheme, GGAS in NSW, was still on the drawing board. Corporate sustainability and climate change were barely registering on the radar of big business in Australia, eco-labelling was a relative novelty, and offerings like Green Power and voluntarily 'going carbon neutral' were in their infancy.

In 2012, the RET is now 20% by 2020, a national energy efficiency target is being planned, a national carbon trading scheme will start mid-year, and sustainability is a priority for many businesses and brands.

A great deal has changed in the 10 years since Green Capital began ... but we still face some invigorating challenges. 2012 is shaping up to be an exciting year for us, with a program of events that will challenge business to think about more than just the bottom line. We began the year with the launch of TEC's National Electricity Market (NEM) Report Card, with John Pierce (Australian Energy Market Commission Chair), and Michelle Groves (Australian Energy Regulator), debating the

report card with key author, Chris Dunstan, ISF (UTS) and Jeff Angel.

Our first major event for this year will look at paper. Often the first issue a company addresses on sustainability, the paper conundrum still perplexes many. We will examine how decisions about which paper to use exemplify the complexity of sustainability, and the challenges faced by business working to do the right thing. It's a totem issue for our Buying Better project.

In another event we will challenge business to think about the value of all resources, not just those that hit the balance sheet, as we explore natural capital. While the value of the natural environment is fundamental to those of us in the environment movement, it is time business recognised the value that the environment provides, and shift operations to recognise our natural assets, while working to protect them. Recently, high profile business leaders have begun drawing these ideas into corporate debate.

Later in the year, we will focus on the Green Economy with the NSW Treasurer and Environment Minister joining us to discuss the critical issues facing NSW. It will be interesting to see what take a conservative state government has on the issue.

Big Dam Addiction Resurfaces, Dammit

TEC's Water Campaigner, Leigh Martin, reveals that the abandoned Tillegra dam proposal is back, under another name...

The rejection of the proposed Tillegra Dam in November 2010 was a victory for common sense, sound urban water planning, and the ecology of the Williams River. Following a long and determined campaign, the Tillegra proposal was completely discredited, having been exposed as unnecessary and environmentally unacceptable. The then State Government was left with no alternative but to reject the dam on planning grounds. Barry O'Farrell as Opposition Leader also promised that a Coalition Government would not build Tillegra Dam.

In the wake of the rejection, the previous state government announced the development of a Lower Hunter Water Plan (LHWP). The plan was intended to address the (realistic) long-term supply and demand needs of the Hunter Region. It was designed to present an opportunity to provide the Hunter with real, long-term sustainable water management, and ensure that expensive and environmentally damaging white elephants, such as Tillegra Dam, never see the light of day.

However, the process is being hijacked by Hunter Water as it pursues an obsession with massive supply augmentations, despite the case for such projects being comprehensively

debunked in the Tillegra Dam planning assessment. Key documents show that Hunter Water is attempting to control the flow of information and pre-determine the outcome of the LHWP.

Hunter Water's latest gambit is the so-called "Native Dog Creek Dam", located on a Williams River tributary. With the proposed dam site only 700 metres away from the original Tillegra site, with a capacity up to 60% that of the Tillegra Dam-Native Dog Creek is simply Tillegra Dam by another name. By pursuing Native Dog Creek, Hunter Water is actively violating Premier O'Farrell's pre-election commitment.

It is clear that Hunter Water does not understand and is incapable of planning for sustainable water management. Premier Barry O'Farrell must intervene immediately to stop Hunter Water's attempts to dishonour his election promise, by removing it from any involvement in the LHWP.

Environment groups and the Williams River community are ready to re-start the campaign to save the Williams River, unless the Native Dog Creek Dam proposal is firmly put down.

Apart from the benefits to our environment—families, individuals and community groups will collect beverage containers to raise money. It's dead easy to calculate the amount of money that will be in circulation: 13 billion bottles = \$1.3 billion in deposits. That's more than pocket money!

There will be reverse vending machines in every shopping centre and who knows- perhaps every Coca Cola vending machine will collect empty bottles and cans for recycling. Also we will have more community recycling centres taking containers and other items like e-waste.

But it won't happen without you. We need everyone to write to and phone their local MP, and talk to them about Cash for Containers. Send them photos of local litter that won't be

there when we have container deposit legislation. Go to the Boomerang Alliance website www.boomerangalliance.org.au and send an online letter to the Environment Ministers (State and Federal) before the end of May. It is time to take action on this important issue.

And if you have Cash for Containers campaign postcards please return all signed ones by 30 April 2012. Join local actions in Cooks River, Manly and Maitland during April. Join with others to show support for Cash for Containers in Canberra in May or send a banner if you can't be there. Updates on activities will be on Cash for Containers Facebook page.

Contact lisaw@tec.org.au.

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATION

TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE INC.

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

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....

.....Postcode:

I wish to pay by:

Cheque payable to Total Environment Centre Inc

Visa Mastercard

I wish to donate:

\$1000 \$500 \$100 Other \$.....

or Please deduct \$..... monthly from my credit card until further notice

Card Number:

.....

'CVN'.....

(The CVN (Card Verification Number) is the last 3 digits of the number that appear on the back of your Visa or Mastercard.)

Card expires:

Name on card:.....

Signature:.....

Phone: (day)

(evening)

Return this form and payment to:

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

I would like to volunteer to help TEC with:

Reception/support

Phone marketing

Research/submission writing

Other

My previous work has been

My qualifications / skills are.....

.....

My environmental interests are.....

.....

I am available (per week) half day one day

occasionally other

Name:

Address:

.....Postcode:

Date:

Email:

Phone: (day).....(evening).....

Consider a Bequest

Please remember TEC in your will. The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording: "I bequeath the sum of \$..... to TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE Inc. for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being of Total Environment Centre Inc. shall be complete discharge to my executors in respect of any sum paid to Total Environment Centre Inc. "

newsletter

Return Address

TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE
Suite 2, 89 Jones Street
Ultimo. 2007

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA



**TOTAL
ENVIRONMENT**