

TOTAL ENVIRONMENT NEWS



for the future

2013 / ISSUE 4

Strange allies...



There are all sorts of unusual collaborations in environmental politics. If you work hard enough to amplify an issue and make connections 'outside the box' – surprising things can happen. Two recent issues demonstrate this – the NSW Planning Bill and the dangerous and illegal trade in used tyres.

Planning Bill

The Bill presented to the NSW Parliament was atrocious. More power to developers and miners and less to the community and environment. Some groups called for it to be thrown out of Parliament without further review. TEC took another tack believing that no party would be able to nor want to block the bill before attempts were made to amend it. Also there was potent evidence that the numbers for the government in the Upper House were going to be much more pliable after the 2015 State Election. If the Bill was not improved this time – then the O'Farrell government was likely to have the numbers after the election and would have free rein. So we put a lot of work into amendments and negotiating on the 'inside'.

The ALP adopted many of our concerns. At the same time the Shooters and Fishers Party (SFP) was being uncooperative with the government and supported a number of important ALP transparency and integrity amendments. The Greens too, had very significant concerns (although they ultimately voted against the Bill).

But taken together this block had the power to force significant changes. Even the ALP and the government agreed to some key environmental improvements.

The amendment debate stretched over two days with two changes sending the government into a tail spin. The first repealed the disgraceful SEPP provisions giving mining economics priority over the community and environment in decision making. The ALP withstood last minute lobbying by the big miners and CFMEU. Not surprisingly, the miners later described the amendment as 'diabolical'. We say they deserved it. The second was moved by the ALP and obliterated the controversial code assessment from the new law. At this point the government withdrew its support for amendments negotiated with the ALP!

Thereafter a range of significant amendments were passed but the environmental ones were lost. On the third day (the last day of the 2013 parliament), the government announced it had suspended further consideration and would deliver its verdict in March 2014 after more consultation with stakeholders.

The bill may collapse and we will be left with the current law (which is not stopping negative government decisions) and the O'Farrell government waits till it has greater control of the numbers; or negotiations will start again in the New Year.

Tyre recycling

The Boomerang Alliance (of which I am the National Convenor) is auspiced by TEC and has taken on the illegal transport and storage of tyres. Only 16% of our 50m used

continued on page 2

Contents

2013 Issue 4

Strange allies...	1	No bottle left behind	4
A Funky New Precinct with Capital	2	Power to the People of Tenterfield	5
Australians Reject Fossil Past for Renewable Future	3	On being digital	5
Inside TEC	3	Grim Reading	6
		'Dead Koala' electricity	8

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continued from page 1

tyres each year are recycled; and many are stored in illegal sites or dumped. They often catch alight (arson) and are difficult to extinguish, belching out toxic black smoke. Such storages do not have fire safety equipment and frequently overstep the regulatory thresholds. There is strong evidence of criminal connections.

Recently Boomerang launched a surveillance operation tracking illegal operators. We presented the dossier to the NSW EPA and they immediately joined with us in developing a

compliance strategy. The NSW Minister for Environment agreed to call a Tyre Summit which was attended by major brand owners and tyre recyclers.

What emerged was a sorry story. The Commonwealth government had failed over 30 years despite working on product stewardship plans. State EPAs lacked regulatory power and people on the ground. Tyre dealers were being conned by illegal operators with false papers.

A number of brand owners such as Bob Jane and K-Mart had previously

ensured they were using legit recyclers. Bridgestone and Jax tyres have now moved to resolve the problems. More brands need to come on board and Boomerang will be taking the campaign to them. The Minister for Environment announced new storage rules and the EPA is undertaking 250 inspections of dealers demanding proof they use legal operators. NGOs, government and business are on the same page. There's more to come in this campaign, but there is great momentum.

A Funky New Precinct with Capital

The new team at Green Capital is planning big changes to the corporate top soil – and green shoots are sprouting underneath the Ultimo/Pyrmont precinct

Green Capital's Sustainable Economic Frontiers project, launched back in June, is designed to explore innovations in the economics of sustainability. We want to make this as meaningful and practically engaging for people and their organisations as we can, so we're focusing on the transformation of local economies in NSW.

In 2014 this work will begin in earnest with the formation of the Ultimo/Pyrmont Precinct Alliance for a Local Living Economy. Within this quintessentially urban precinct Green Capital's first task will be to engage key stakeholders from a broad range of industry sectors. By setting up a Precinct Roundtable we'll invite diverse organisations from big business to the SME community to come together and explore how to make this a more liveable, sustainable, and community-focused area. The result should be a better balance between concrete, traffic, business activity and natural beauty.

The range of occupant businesses is pretty exciting - from LendLease (who have a presence in Darling Quarter) and Frasers (CentralPark) to the ABC and Fairfax, The Powerhouse Museum, TAFE, Sydney Fish Markets, Star Casino, Screen Australia and even Google.

We can't think of a more contemporary combination of architecture and design, digital media, property developers, providores, academic research, educational

outlets, and pop culture. This precinct has got it all and we anticipate an influential pilot project, which could roll out across Sydney and beyond.

Given the scope and potential of this project we are very pleased to have brought UTS Business School onboard as a founding partner for the precinct alliance, and we're in talks with some other interesting key players.

It's important to us that the emerging vision for the precinct springs directly from Roundtable discussion sessions. We hope to facilitate investigation into green buildings, transport, energy efficiency and production, water management, waste and re-use and a range of new

economy initiatives such as social enterprise, co-working space and the sharing economy.

Ideas for action will include promotion of the precinct as a great place to enjoy doing business sustainably, lobbying for local energy trading, piloting innovative new collaborative initiatives and technologies, and creating a deeper local business engagement with the wellbeing of the residential

community. We envision a plethora of grassroots sustainability projects.

Expressions of interest from any organisations attracted to transformative sustainability will be warmly welcomed, so don't hesitate to contact us regarding this exciting alliance.



AUSTRALIANS REJECT FOSSIL PAST FOR RENEWABLE FUTURE

TEC has just started a new campaign to inform consumers about the environmental dimensions of their electricity consumption.

The campaign is based on independent polling undertaken for us in early November by Essential Media. The poll found that 87% of Australians want their retailer to do more to help customers save energy, and to report on how much they spent and what savings were achieved each year. Nearly four out of five Australians also want their retailers to supply

information once a year about the percentage of their supply that comes from different fuel sources - that is, coal, gas and renewable energy.

Large community groups with over a million members have contacted TEC to help their members switch to retailers that don't invest their money in CSG in particular, or fossil fuels in general. This information is readily available in some other countries such as the UK, but in Australia it is almost impossible to get.

In NSW the prospect that native forest timber could be burnt to generate electricity has generated public outcry over the potentially devastating impacts on forest biodiversity of 'dead koala electricity.'

TEC will be campaigning for changes to the National Energy Retail Rules (NERR) to mandate fuel mix and energy efficiency information disclosure to consumers. We will be canvassing other energy consumer and environmental groups for their support.

Inside TEC

What exactly do the campaigners do all day at the Total Environment Centre? Alison Eslake from Sydney Girl's High reports on her wonderful week of work experience....

At the beginning of the year all of my friends seemed to know exactly what they wanted to do for work experience, while I remained bewildered. Thankfully, in May my school's environment group hosted a Marine and Green Day, inviting guest speakers of all sorts to talk about the environment. Two of these guests were Ruth Hessey and Lisa Wriley, both from TEC.

I have always loved the environment. I was a passionate member of Kingsgrove Public School's gardening club, and throughout primary school I was renowned for earning the most merits for my valiant playground cleanup efforts. My father has long been an ardent supporter of Greenpeace, and he helped to inspire the budding environmentalist in me. However, after I began high school other interests began to eclipse my previous environmental enthusiasm.

Meeting Ruth and Lisa gave me a perfect opportunity to kill two birds with one stone (something I would only do figuratively, of course). Half a year later, I found myself walking nervously down Jones St ready to start my work experience placement at TEC.

I had often wondered what working at a nonprofit environment group would like, and imagined a lot of hippies wearing tie-dye and singing Joni Mitchell very, very loudly. So when I pushed open the door of Suite 2, I was shocked to find that TEC was a normal workplace, with chairs and desks and (very complicated and mysterious) telephones.

"I imagined a lot of hippies wearing tie-dye and singing Joni Mitchell very, very loudly."

My first task was to review the TEC website, which made me realize how flawed my assumptions about environmental organisations were. Of course the movement wasn't still stuck in the 1960s (although both tie-dye and Joni Mitchell are timeless) - it had embraced the technological age and every opportunity that came with it.

Next I worked on media releases for the incredibly multi-faceted campaign for a container deposit scheme (CDS), and helped count the many signatures on a CDS petition that Lisa had launched. The next day I accompanied Lisa and Jeff Angel to the creative

reuse centre, Reverse Garbage. I was amazed by the amount of useable material in the warehouse. I will definitely be telling my friends who study art and often struggle to get their hands on materials for their more creative sculptures. Afterward, we visited Parliament House to discuss the CDS petitions with the Member for Murray-Darling. I learnt so much about the political process, and it was remarkable to see environmental lobbying in action. By Friday I had finally learnt how to use the office phone. I finished up as Jenn and Jeff packaged away the petitions to send to Parliament.

I'm a little sad that work experience is already over. I am happy to say that the flame of my childhood environmental activism has been rekindled and is now burning brighter than ever.

I want to thank all of the staff at TEC for such an amazing week, in particular Ruth, who was my supervisor, Lisa, whose passion for beverage containers inspires me, Jenn, who was very kind (she taught me to use the phone!) and Jeff Angel, who is the coolest boss ever. I look forward to seeing everyone again when I volunteer in future.

No bottle left behind

Lisa Wriley, waste campaigner

On Saturday 26 October 2013, the Central Coast Mariners had their second home game of the season and over 9,000 fans turned out to watch.

Some members of the crowd were there for a special reason and took extra notice of the beverages being consumed because they knew that, when the game was over, they had permission to collect every bottle left behind and redeem them for 10c each, as though they were in South Australia or the Northern Territory. The two groups involved were the Kariong Scouts and the students and staff from the International Football School (IFS) – all up about 25 people.

So how did it come together? Well these are my local Scouts and the International Football School is a new local private school (they don't just play football – they train for 2 hours a day and have classes for 4 hours) – and the CEO has a strong community and environmental ethic. When I first met him he told me that he has had to make a stand to resist pressure to sell bottled water at the school. I knew I had found the right person to help demonstrate how 10c refunds could work in NSW!

With the supply of clean up bags and gloves (thanks to Clean Up Australia) and money (thank you Gosford Council) and liaison with the Bluetongue Stadium staff who were happy to help community groups with some fundraising – the refund action was set to go. The Stadium Cleaning contractor was also consulted and gave the green light.

Bluetongue Stadium donated extra tickets so all the Scouts could watch the game before the clean up. The IFS students are already “Mariners Mates”

“You only have to go down to the Cooks River to see that doing nothing results in a big problem...”

and attend the games. There were Coke branded recycling bins everywhere. No one could buy a drink without walking past at least four brightly coloured bins, clearly labeled and with a bottle shaped hole in the lid. There was some anxiety from the Scouts I sat with that there wouldn't be enough bottles to collect – surely most people would put their bottles in the recycling bins.

But, we had plenty to do. At the end of the game as we headed down to

the designated meeting spot – the kids couldn't help picking up bottles on the way! They were everywhere and heaps of them were half full. There weren't many bottles in the bins at all. After a briefing everyone spread out to collect the bottles from all over the stadium.

Helpers emptied out the liquid and tossed the bottles into the recycling bins that the security guys helped find for us. Bin after bin was filled up (nine in total) with clean recyclable bottles (unlike some bins we looked in and saw coffee cups and chip trays mixed in). The final tally: 1429 bottles and some cans; Kariong Scouts earned \$59.80 and the International Football School raised \$83.10 in less than an hour – and showed

that even the most well designed public place recycling system does not ensure the bottles get into the right place. Sadly the public is not inclined to use them.

With a 10c bounty on each bottle though – we turned rubbish into community money and the Stadium is happy to have us back again. But next time we hope it will be under the auspice of a national or NSW container deposit scheme.



POWER TO THE PEOPLE OF TENTERFIELD

Mark Byrne, energy market advocate

TEC has been working on reforming the national electricity market for a decade. After years of banging our heads against the brick walls of bureaucratic and political inertia, we are now starting to see cracks appear in the edifice of the old market structure.

Last month TransGrid, the NSW Government-owned transmission company, announced it was abandoning a second major new project this year. The first was the \$160 million Stroud-Taree line, which in May fell to a combination of local opposition from the Manning Alliance and pressure from the NSW government to reduce infrastructure spending.

This time it was the turn of the even larger Dumaresq-Tenterfield-Lismore line. This line would have cost \$250 million to bring more mostly coal- and gas-fired electricity down from Queensland to supply supposedly increasing peak demand on the NSW North Coast.

The problem for TransGrid was that ever since the project was announced in 2008, peak demand has been flat or falling, for reasons including a high uptake of PV systems and low population growth. The company finally recognised that shift by deferring the project for a decade in its 2013 Annual Planning Report.

The project was still to receive NSW planning approval: they were apparently haggling with Commonwealth bureaucrats about offsets for endangered ecological communities along the route. Also it needed to go

through another investment test because the Australian Energy Regulator found the first one to be deeply flawed. TransGrid finally bowed to the inevitable and pulled the plug.

This is a win for landowners as well as the local environment. Whenever big new power stations that require new transmission or distribution lines are proposed, we potentially disrupt the lives of locals in their path with years of uncertainty (if decisions are deferred or they aren't built) or decades (if they are) to come - not to mention the lives of plant and animal communities along the route. The earlier, wider and more genuine the consultation, the better

the outcome is likely to be all round.

The outcome is also a win for TransGrid itself. In the past year it has started to replace the old corporate culture of 'build, baby, build' with a greater concern with alternatives to new infrastructure, including peak demand management, energy efficiency and local renewable energy generation. It also shows they are starting to listen to the people most intimately affected by their plans.

TEC, once a staunch opponent of TransGrid, is now on its consumer advisory panel in the leadup to the decision about how much revenue it will earn over the next five years. We are already sure that the company's revenue requests for big new power lines will be down by at least 90 per cent on the current five year period.

“TEC’s track record on successful campaigns is proof we have been out there “impacting” for the past 4 decades,”

David and Goliath Go Digital

Why do websites and social media matter on the green frontier? Ruth Hessey, TEC Comms Director reports

The big question facing Australian environment organisations currently is how they should react to the fact that our federal and state governments have virtually ceased to address most of the serious environment challenges Australia is facing.

Because most people are so busy they can barely keep their eyes on the road, let alone peer into the future, the Coalition seems to think we have given it carte blanche to largely ignore environment issues, and worse, reverse key gains. Yet the speed with

which the Climate Commission became the publicly funded Climate Council after Tony Abbott tried to close it down, shows that the general public does step up when politicians step back.

This could represent an historic opportunity to win more proactive support for TEC – if we can attract people's attention. Unfortunately, much of our work can be painstakingly slow and not exactly head-line grabbing. Jeff's editorial this issue illustrates the point. The process

of creating alliances in order to amend legislation is not cinematic, newsy, or mind-blowing, unless you employ a team of comic geniuses to transform it into a show like Yes, Minister.

TEC has always avoided costly marketing and self-promotion. In the old analogue era our reputation for rigorous and balanced analysis was more than enough to maintain a healthy connection to mainstream media and the political bureaucracy.

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

In the digital era the game has changed. People are looking less to traditional information outlets, and more to the internet. When the new minister for the environment made a point of referencing Wikipedia on the subject of climate change earlier this year, his gaffe went viral (and his own Wikipedia page will never be the same again). But the message was chilling – “Everybody is an expert” suddenly became “who needs experts anyway, when we’ve got Wikipedia!?”

On the bright side, when we have government sanctioned ignorance to this extent, the need for TEC, becomes more obvious. The Murdoch media bias we saw play out across the last election was disturbing, and the anti-climate science it trumpets

daily is frustrating, but from a digital perspective it’s not as important as it used to be. Millions of people defy censorship or bias by checking their facebook news feed several times a day, sharing articles and videos gleaned from all over the internet.

“ we need a broad mass of imaginative, engaged citizens”

TEC needs to take advantage of this. Ideally we’d like the TEC website to function as a dynamic information portal, rather than a static portal for past achievements. In future the website will carry regular video updates from our campaigners, as well as direct access to what goes on in our busy work day – who we meet

and what they talk about is often.....well, let’s be frank, Yes, Minister material. We’ve also worked with UNSW animation students again to create some campaign tools to entertain visitors to our website.

What ever we do, and however you respond to it, the situation has never been more urgent. At the very moment when we have become super-connected, and more people are globally aware of the big picture issues than ever before, the planet is changing so fast many no longer feel they can influence the outcome.

In short, we don’t have much time to change. We need a broad mass of imaginative, engaged citizens to connect with the principle ideas.

It’s got to happen now.



Grim Reading

*Mining companies can't be trusted to provide accurate environmental assessments. Here's another example..... says **Leigh Martin**, water campaigner*

The proposed expansion of Gujarat NRE's No. 1 Colliery at Russell Vale will have serious impacts on sensitive ecosystems such as streams and upland swamps and threatens the drinking water catchments for Sydney and the Illawarra.

TEC has analysed the voluminous environmental assessments produced by Gujarat NRE's consultants and NSW Government agency submissions to produce a major report on the environmental impact of the proposed expansion. The results make for grim reading. If approved, the mine will result in cracking and loss of water to crucial upland swamps, and streams. These swamps and streams provide vital habitat for

“if approved, the mine will threaten vital habitat, plant and animal species, and Sydney's drinking water”

threatened plant and animal species and play a vital role in providing high quality drinking water.

Serious doubts have been raised by key government agencies about the accuracy of mine subsidence predictions and environmental assessments provided by Gujarat NRE. The project will include some of the widest longwall panels ever seen in the southern coal fields. There will also be mining in areas affected by previous mine workings. These factors are likely to increase the effects of subsidence and make predicting the extent of subsidence difficult. Subsidence predictions in the environmental assessments should be viewed as optimistic, 'best-case' scenarios. Even under these the

continued on page 7

continued from page 6

damage to sensitive ecosystems and threatened species would be unacceptable.

In response to these concerns Gujarat NRE has proposed to monitor streams and swamps and alter mine layouts if damage is detected. It's a copout as it ignores that fact that damage may take months or years to detect so that by the time it has been reported mining will have been completed and it will be too late to prevent further damage. The only way to protect streams

“the only way to protect streams and swamps is to avoid mining beneath them”

and swamps is to avoid mining beneath them.

The impact of the proposed mine expansion should also be considered in the context of their cumulative impacts on the environment of the Woronora Plateau. Previous longwall mining has resulted in serious damage swamps and streams making the protection of remaining habitat even more crucial.

The development should not be allowed to proceed.

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Please send me regular email updates to

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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

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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

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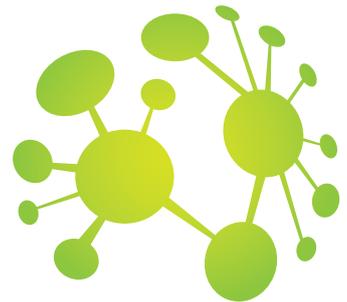
Please remember TEC in your will. The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording: "I bequeath the sum of \$..... to TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE Inc. for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being of Total Environment Centre Inc. shall be complete discharge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

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TOTAL ENVIRONMENT NEWS



for the future

'Dead Koala' electricity

Dave Burgess, natural areas campaigner

Two of the state's biggest power generators have told TEC that they will not be using native forest materials including whole logs, in their energy mix. AGL and Origin Energy say they do not have, nor is it their policy to enter into, Power Purchasing Agreements that use native forest materials as fuel. The guarantees are a welcome development as the NSW Government attempts to push through an amendment to allow the practice that has been illegal since 2002.

It will be consumer pressure that determines whether 'dead koala' electricity takes hold. TEC is now awaiting a response from other energy retailers and major energy users.

No electricity consumer will want to switch the light on knowing that koalas and other endangered species have been killed to generate their power. Burning of forest biomass also increases carbon emissions.

**Thank you to all our supporters for their help in 2013.
More TEC campaigning in 2014!
Merry Christmas and **Happy New Year.****