



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2009 / ISSUE 3

EDITORIAL

Amazing politics, desperate environment

Let's face it – the CPRS wasn't worth passing. Not because the science is wrong or a market mechanism not needed, but because by the time the major parties had finished handing out billions of dollars to polluters and consumers – the so-called price signal to deter pollution was barely alive. Yes, there were some small gains with the recognition of voluntary action including GreenPower as additional to the national cap; and moves to prevent recycling being disadvantaged – but it wasn't enough to save the environmental integrity of the CPRS with its very low target and polluter compensation.

It destroyed the political leadership and prospects of Turnbull and exposed the safe harbour that one of our major parties had given to climate change skeptics and deniers; and revealed a failure of leadership by the Rudd government.

The battle was also over the right of the environment to have a comprehensive economic voice and be given the benefit of the doubt. It also brought out all the anti or light-hand regulation adherents and the conspiracy theorists about progressive policies. It was like all the excuses to not take effective environmental action came together in a perfect storm of rhetoric, weak policy making and ideological factionalism.

This leaves Australia's global warming policy floundering.

Are we to now revert to voluntary action and tree planting while the polluting power stations double their emissions as predicted? Perhaps we will take energy efficiency seriously – that is, make it mainstream rather than rely on short term rebate programs and education. The only way to do this is to legislate targets on the energy market as has recently occurred

in New South Wales. But this will impose initial costs on industry (they have complained every time such legislation has been proposed) so will it pass the Senate?

With the collapse of the 'clean coal' facade erected to clothe pollution as acceptable and the ridiculous assertions that nuclear could make a substantial, contribution (commercially viable, timely and without a waste problem) – Australia's clean energy policy is in a shambles. It would be in a state of complete collapse if not for the 20% renewable energy target. But that does not mean GHG emissions will reduce because it may simply supply demand growth.

The finance sector can help by looking beyond the short term and vow to not bankroll new or enlarged coal fire power stations because they are risky investments. State governments which were looking forwards to not having to take 'mitigation' actions on climate change (ie passing laws to reduce pollution) and instead engaging in adaptation (sea walls and disaster planning), will have to take up the cudgels.

And the environment movement is going to have to get its act together – after splitting into the CPRS/carbon tax/war footing camps; not running a public campaign to explain and obtain public support for tough regulation and targets; and thinking that an ETS election mandate would outweigh the combined lobbying of industry sectors.

New thinking is needed all round.

Jeff Angel, Executive Director

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Our Snowy Water Scandal

TEC's water campaigner Leigh Martin, explores the dirty work behind a great river's demise

Environmental flows for the Snowy River are lagging years behind schedule, which is having many deleterious impacts on the river's biodiversity. Under the terms of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed, environmental flows for the Snowy should have reached an average of 142 gegalitres this year. Actual flows to the river are languishing at less than a third of this level and the historic river continues to decline.

To make matters much worse the water savings from works in irrigation districts funded as part of the rescue plan have been achieved - but these savings have not been delivered as Snowy environmental flows.

The reason is the Snowy Water Licence which is soaking up the environmental flows for the Snowy River in order to protect the financial interests of Snowy Hydro and its majority owner, the NSW government.

A requirement to 'pay back' Mowamba River 'borrowings' (water provided for environmental flows via the Mowamba River immediately following the corporatisation of Snowy Hydro a few years back) and the purchase of general security water from irrigators has meant

that most of the promised flow increases have not been delivered according to the timetable.

Following the corporatisation of Snowy Hydro, the Mowamba River diversion was decommissioned and natural connectivity between the Snowy and Mowamba Rivers restored. Three years later the diversion was recommissioned. Despite strong evidence that maintaining a natural connection is vital for providing natural variation in Snowy flows, the NSW Government and Snowy Hydro refuse to permanently decommission the diversion.

Also 'override' provisions in the licence allow environmental flows to be switched off at any time without justification. The licence further requires any 'spills' (eg from filling of the dam after rain events) from Jindabyne Dam to be paid back. These clauses could effectively switch off environmental flows for a decade or more, compromising years of restoration efforts and investment.

TEC is making the strongest possible objections to the Licence which is under review.

NSW's clean energy polygamy

TEC's indefatigable energy campaigners Jane Castle and Tee Lim inspect the mess

Under Nathan Rees, the NSW Government appeared to be getting some of its priorities straightened out on clean energy issues, with a number of critical announcements.

A key move was the ousting of anti-environment Ian Macdonald from the Energy portfolio and combining the Energy, and Environment and Climate Change portfolios under the energetic lead of John Robertson. As Rees pointed out to the new Minister, "Your appointment to both portfolios - the first for an Australian state - is a deliberate decision by me, to give a stronger emphasis to clean energy policy, and to ensure consistency and clarity between our environmental and energy objectives."¹ Rees' asked Robertson to "develop a comprehensive energy policy, with a strong emphasis on clean energy including wind, solar, gas..."

The NSW State Plan with its commitment to a clean energy strategy was a step in the right direction, and we've encouraged new Premier Kristina Keneally to continue and expand upon this move to a clean energy state (even though the combination of energy and

environment has now been cancelled in the latest reshuffle). However NSW's commitment to energy efficiency, smart grids and low-carbon energy such as co- and tri- generation (producing heat, electricity and even cooling from the same fuel source) will also be hindered without major reform to the National Electricity Market.

TEC has called on the NSW Government to declare a moratorium on new coal-fired power, if it is to have any hope of achieving its aim of a 60% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It is currently considering proposals for new coal or gas powered stations near Lithgow and in the Upper Hunter, either of which could see the state's emissions increase by an enormous 18.6% - or the equivalent of 7 million new cars on the road. Recent reports by the operator of the national grid show that NSW has adequate base load capacity to 2017, and a recent UTS study outlines several comprehensive scenarios through which the state's energy needs can be met through a mix of demand management, energy efficiency, and distributed and renewable energy.²

NSW should become the centre of a major new clean energy industry in Australia, creating thousands of green jobs. The government has established wind energy precincts, a gross feed-in tariff, and plans to secure at least one large solar plant for the state - key components for increased renewable energy in NSW. TEC has urged the government to be a leader in the country and adopt a 30% renewable energy generation target by 2020-25, over and above the Commonwealth Government's 20% target.

We also need to - improve the BASIX Building Sustainability Index; accelerate the greening of our homes and workplaces (on the heels of TEC's Green Globe Award for our Existing Buildings Project); lobby for amendments to the CPRS to ensure independent state government actions can gain emissions reductions beyond the federal government's cap; and ensure that other resource recovery options (such as recycling and alternative waste technologies) are exhausted before considering landfill gas generation or incineration.

¹ Sydney Morning Herald. 2009. Rees plans green power revolution. Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/rees-plans-green-power-revolution-20091018-h2yd.html>

² Rutovitz, J and Dunstan C. 2009. Meeting NSW Electricity Needs in a Carbon Constrained World: Lowering Costs and Emissions with Distributed Energy. (Prepared as part of Project 4 of the CSIRO Intelligent Grid Research Program by the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney.) p. vi.

An update on our internet innovations

By Ruth Hessey, Communications Director

Keep your eyes peeled for the beautiful new TEC website which will hit the world wide web in early 2010.

We were extremely fortunate to gain the services of talented students involved in the UTS design lab which does pro bono work for chosen NGOs every year. Under the expert guidance of UTS lecturers Vicky Karaminas and Suzanne Osmond, eight students worked on our website for 3 months taking the best ideas and synthesizing them into the final design. Although none of the students had heard of electronic waste or landfill levies or feed in tariffs when they started working with TEC, they swiftly became just as passionate about the environment as our campaigners are.

They worked hard to make our website both easy to navigate and a pleasure to behold, giving Green Capital its own variation on the home style. We are delighted with the result. A big thank you to Ashley Ryan, Annika Pol, Praveen Kumar, Suzanne Lind, Shelley Hedley, Linda Hoang, Virginia Moreno,

and Andy Berner. They have bright futures in design, and hopefully will take their environmental awareness with them into galaxies both near and far far away.

The new website is only one part of the big changes which have taken place in TEC this year as we worked to respond to a world of multimedia platforms. TEC now has three facebook cause pages (e-waste, voluntary carbon action and TEC).

We hope TEC and Green Capital will win many new supporters in the year ahead. Of course we'd never have made it this far without the people who have stayed with us for the past 37 years. But the battle is literally hotting up - scientific consensus suggests we have just five years to turn the global warming crisis around. It means our work has become all the more urgent, and we hope to employ every course at our disposal to motivate Australians to engage in the necessary change and politicians to go green.

VOLUNTARY CLIMATE ACTION CLOUT

If you're confused about whether to buy GreenPower or not, join the club. Jane Castle, our Senior Campaigner, unravels the knots

Australians have shown huge enthusiasm for lowering their greenhouse gas emissions to help tackle climate change, embracing the use of GreenPower produced from new renewable generation plants.

Currently, because Australia has ratified Kyoto and agreed to a cap on emissions which does not count voluntary action, all GreenPower purchases merely go to meeting our mandatory limit which is an 8% increase by 2012. The Federal Government's proposal to fix this some months ago was a disaster, as they would only commit to counting GreenPower purchases in excess of the total amount purchased in 2009. So if you were already buying GreenPower, it would not be counted. Only new purchases from January 2010 would reduce Australia's emissions if they were in excess of the 2009 baseline. This was problematic because many consumers may not renew their pre-2010 contracts.

This meant that despite the best intentions of the Australian people, the Rudd government was undermining our efforts. Which is why TEC has led a targeted campaign to convince the Federal Government to count voluntary action and reduce Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions beyond our mandated cap.

After a four month campaign (supported by CHOICE, WWF Australia, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Alternative Technology Association, the Moreland Energy Foundation and Environment Victoria), the Federal Government promised to count all GreenPower purchases. This was also Coalition policy, meaning that in principle both major parties

agree that voluntary action should be counted.

We won the argument and achieved a shift in policy. The details still, unfortunately, fall far short of what is needed. The proposal is only to count GreenPower in 5 year intervals and adjust the national cap accordingly. This means that GreenPower consumers have to wait five years to have their reductions counted, and even then, it is likely to be a non-transparent process that lacks credibility.

This may have been a reasonable compromise, but then the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) fiasco happened. Counting voluntary action was part of the package deal with the Coalition that went down in such spectacular fashion.

For other voluntary actions such as the installation of rooftop solar, buying carbon offsets and energy efficiency, there is even less detail, apart from a vague 'new mechanism to take voluntary action into account in target setting'.

We recommend all Australians continue to take voluntary action while pressuring the government to fix this problem. Get involved! Contact your local, state and federal representative.

Sign our petition at Make Your Climate Action Count at <http://yourclimateaction.wordpress.com/>

And check out our Facebook Cause, Make Your Climate Action Count at: <http://apps.facebook.com/causes/413732/56847791?m=1a240be5>

Productive TEC Internships

Sunny and Steven, our interns from South Korea, report on their commitment to working in the environment and what they've learned in their time at TEC.

Steven:

In Australia people call me Steven. I studied chemistry at university where I first realized that scientists can make an important contribution to environmental research. Korea is the ninth-largest emitter of greenhouse gas in the world. The country's CO₂ emissions have increased 113 percent to 488.7 million tonnes in 2007 from 1990. The percentage growth of greenhouse gases measured between 1990 and 2007 is the highest among the OECD member countries, according to the Ministry of Knowledge Economy. If no action is taken, Korea's annual emissions are estimated to reach 813 million metric tons by 2020. And the annual average temperature in South Korea is expected to climb from the present 13.6 degrees Celsius to 14.8 degrees in 2020, 16.6 degrees in 2050, and 18.6 degrees in 2080. It is possible that South Korea will turn into a subtropical country well before the end of the 21st century.

Since learning all of this, I have become interested in

government environment policy, and renewable energies such as solar power, wind power, atomic power and policies which would make sustainability mandatory throughout our society. Solar power is a growth industry in Korea, which is aiming to increase the use of renewable energy from its current 2.28 percent to 10 percent by 2020. A solar plant built in Shin An, near the southwestern tip of South Korea, features 109,000 rectangular solar modules that cover a seaside plot the size of 80 football fields. The modules tilt on a sun-tracking system, and the plant will produce 33,000 megawatt-hours of environmentally friendly electricity a year - enough to supply 6-7,000 households, and save 24,000 tons of carbon dioxide a year, or the amount of carbon dioxide 23,000 cars emit a year. Today, the total amount of commercial solar power production in Korea has grown to over 160MW.

It was only by accident that I stumbled across the TEC internship program, and it has been a very happy and educational experience. I now have a much deeper knowledge

of the environmental challenges facing both Korea and Australia. Australia is a very different society because it has western culture. Most Australians are positive and active. They almost all seem to be good citizens. The environment in Australia is so clean and well conserved. Many Australians are using green bags instead of plastic bags at the super market, and I was surprised by the number of waste bins per each house. It's a feature that Korea could copy some day. In terms of weather, it is so changeable. One day it is chilly, the next the temperature is 32 degrees. It's unpredictable, and often rains from a dry sky! But I love the spacious landscapes in Australia. It's difficult to find huge beaches, mountains, and cliffs in Korea. So I am going to enjoy traveling for the rest of my time in Australia.

Sunny:

My name is "Jeon Ji-hye (Sunny)". I am a student of Kyung-pook International University in Daegu, Korea and I am majoring in geography.

My special interest is Climatology and Environmental Geography. At university I attended the classes of Professor Hwang sang-il who has spent many years researching the effects of climate change on the environment, specifically wetlands. In his classes I learned that the major ecological functions of wetlands benefit people as well as animals. They provide nesting grounds for birds, fish, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and so forth. They filter sediments and organic matter while storing and controlling the volume of water released into rivers, streams and underground waterways, acting like a giant sponge soaking up rainfall and redistributing it. Wetlands function as an excellent natural dam during monsoon or drought season, also preventing land erosion by absorbing surface water. And they are also beautiful places which become magnets for eco-tourists.

Upo is the biggest natural wetland in Korea, located on 128°25' east and 35°33' north. It hasn't always been cared for. In 1930, the Upo wetland was made into paddy fields for rice crops after the building of artificial banks. In 1970, some of the wetland was reclaimed, but the work was interrupted by lack of funds and technical skills. In 1990, sewage landfill was built nearby, but since March 1997 when it was designated an Ecological Conservation Area by the Ministry of Environment, and registered for preservation by the Ramsar Convention in 1998, there has been less damage done and many wild birds have returned.

In 2008, I had another life changing experience when I participated as a Tae-an Volunteer. There had been a big oil spill at the Tae-an Peninsular in 2007. A crane barge owned by Samsung Heavy Industries being towed by a tug collided with the anchored Hong Kong registered Hebei Spirit, carrying 260,000 tonnes of crude oil. The collision punctured three of the five tanks aboard the Hebei Spirit and resulted in the leaking of some 10,800 tonnes of oil. The remaining oil from the damaged tanks was pumped into the undamaged tanks and the holes were sealed.

The spill occurred near Mallipo Beach (in Tae-an County), considered one of South Korea's most beautiful and popular beaches, home to one of Asia's largest wetland areas used by migratory birds. The oil slick was 33 km (21 mi) long and 10 m (33 ft) wide and 10 cm (4 in) thick in some areas. At least 30 beaches were affected and over half of the region's sea farms are believed to have lost their stocks due to the spill. Although most migratory birds had not yet arrived in the region, sea gulls, mallard ducks and other sea life were found tarred by the oil.

The South Korean government declared a state of disaster in the region. The cost of the cleanup has been estimated at 300 billion(US\$330 million). Hundreds of thousands of volunteers and celebrities helped to clean up the beaches in the campaign. By January 2008, approximately 4,153 tons of crude oil spilled had been collected by utilizing some 268,710 kilograms of oil absorbents and other cleanup devices.

While there, I removed oil from rocks and provided relief supplies for people living near Tae-an peninsula. I realised that the environment is in big trouble and decided I must try to do something about it. I tried to find other activities connected to protecting the environment and to find out how other countries address the issues. So I attended this internship program and I've learned a lot. I'd like to participate in campaigns to protect the environment and apply what I have learned at TEC when I get back to Korea.

It's been a good chance for me to stay in Australia and to work at TEC. I am really enjoying experience of Australia culture and learning about the variety of environmental issues. There are so many splendid places to travel near Sydney such as the Blue mountains and Bondi beach. I usually visit these places with my friends every weekend. As there isn't any desert in Korea, I will go to Uluru in Australia early next year. If I have a chance to come again, I would like to travel all around the Australia.

OBITUARIES

TEC lost two of its longest serving and most valued volunteers recently.

Dr Fred Bell was a member of our founding Management Committee (in 1972) and remained involved until the 1990s. As well he was a senior academic in geography and hydrology who did not shy away from being an informed critic of environmentally damaging developments. His advice was particularly helpful in our battle to save Botany Bay from complete industrialization and in our efforts to stop the draining of the Macquarie Marshes one of Australia's most important wetlands. He also worked with TEC during the

Snowy Water Inquiry and was co-author of our pioneering publication, 'Our Wildlife in Peril' the first national listing of endangered species; and managed the agenda setting project 'Conservation of NSW forest ecosystems'. In later years Fred produced 'ESD from A-Z' and became active in the central coast environmental community.

His sudden death was a great loss to us all; but we will remember and continue to value his very significant contribution to the cause of environment protection.

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MEGA-MINE ON SYDNEY'S DOORSTEP?

Dave Burgess, Natural Areas Campaigner, questions the possibility of "repairing" landscapes that have been mined

The future of 8 major waterways, 226 upland swamps, water catchment land and a State Conservation Area will be at stake when the NSW Planning Minister considers one of the largest longwall coal mines ever proposed, early in the new year. BHP Billiton's Bulli Seam Operations proposal seeks to continue coal mining between Campbelltown and Wollongong for at least 30 years while ramping up the amount of coal taken out of the ground by 40% per annum. Mining is proposed to take place under or close to the Nepean, Cataract, Georges and Woronora Rivers, O'Hares, Stokes, Wallandoola and Ousedale Creeks and many of their tributaries.

While TEC was encouraged by some of the baby steps taken to protect the neighbouring Waratah Rivulet in the recent Metropolitan mine approval, the NSW Government will face major credibility issues in terms of river protection and biodiversity were it to give wholesale approval to such an aggressive expansion of mining with longwall panels up to 300m wide.

The proposed undermining of so many upland swamps is unprecedented. The company has promised remediation of surface cracking yet many of the areas will be inaccessible and the industry has previously admitted to having no knowledge of how to 'repair' a swamp.

The Dharawal State Conservation Area in the northeast portion of the proposal was recently ranked as being in the top fifty 'high conservation status mainland islands of biodiversity' in Australia in a report commissioned by the Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. It contains very high levels of endemic species and is known habitat for 49 threatened species. Two nationally important aquatic ecosystems and the pristine nature of the area will be directly threatened by mining in this area.

These values will be vigorously defended by TEC and other environment groups at an expected inquiry into the proposed mine in coming months.

Stuff That Rots

Sarah Van Erp, TEC's Waste Minimisation Campaigner delves into landfill politics in NSW

Recycling has been all over the news recently, but many people still don't really understand why domestic garbage is such a big deal. There are many reasons why we need to reform the landfill system of waste management but the most important concerns the loss of finite resources – even the essential nutrients in food which we take for granted. As John Lawson, the NSW Manager of Global Renewables, a company that recycles municipal waste said recently at our Green Capital event, land-filling organics instead of composting this resource to build healthy soils, is effectively "taking food out of our descendents' mouths".

What exactly are organics? Basically the stuff that rots and creates methane, a potent greenhouse gas - food scraps, paper, timber, and garden waste.

Landfill levies have been created to make dumping waste like this more expensive than recycling it, but still the system is abysmally dysfunctional. NSW has the highest waste levy in Australia, but Victoria, South Australia and the ACT are all outperforming the state on diverting waste away from landfill. On its current trajectory, NSW will miss its own 2014 target for Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) by 14%, and that's assuming no growth in waste generated.

In fact waste generation has actually increased by 3.5 million tonnes per year (or 4.67% p.a.) over the last 5 years. This means that the shortfall in the recycling target by 2014 could be even worse than expected.

Progress on organics has proved particularly poor. The only organics collected in 2006/07 was a small amount of garden green waste, resulting in a pathetic 27% of organics being recovered. Organics decomposing in landfill are responsible for almost 3% of Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions. It is ludicrous that this material is not recovered as a highly valued resource for either making compost or generating energy in biodigesters.

The good news is that there is vast, untapped potential for the recovery of organics. If we recycled 100% of organics, the overall recycling rate for municipal waste in NSW would leap from 38% to 70% - now that's a figure we could be proud of!

To harness this potential, the NSW government needs to develop more effective policies to improve recovery and investment in recycling. The Australian Council of Recyclers and Boomerang Alliance's National Recycling Initiative is a plan to significantly increase recycling and reprocessing in Australia and boost jobs and economic activity.

Unfortunately the government has only thrown loose change at recycling. The National Recycling Initiative is a solution with real commitments and real outcomes. All that's needed is for government to join the table.

Irene Morphett was a volunteer in our office for several decades. As a retired teacher she had a welcome grasp of the facts and educational techniques. Her advice to the younger volunteers was always welcome and at the same time she became familiar with the new politics of the environment. Before the days of the internet TEC would answer the many inquiries for information by mail and Rene was a great help with this important task of helping people understand the emerging problems of the environment.

She was appointed Assistant Director in her later years at TEC and was a vital helper in the office as TEC swung into high gear with many environmental campaigns. She retired in the 1990s but kept in touch. She is sadly missed.

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,
PO Box A176, Sydney South NSW 1235

I would like to volunteer to help TEC with:

- Reception/support
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- Research/submission writing
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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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or Please deduct \$..... monthly from my credit card until further notice

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Phone: (day)(evening)

Return this form and payment to:

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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. "

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