



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2007 / ISSUE 1

E D I T O R I A L

STATE ELECTION

Every election is claimed to be 'the most important' and given how fast things change, perhaps there is some truth in this. However the coming State Election is the most important since 1995, for the environment.

In 1995 we had had almost 7 years of Coalition government, including an enlightened period of minority government when parliament and the executive operated in a more accountable manner. Also during this time the battle to save our native forests reached fever pitch. By the end of 1994, the core high conservation value areas of the south east were a hair's breadth away from being woodchipped. Blockades were a regular feature in the north east.

Bob Carr, then ALP Opposition Leader made protection of old growth forests a central part of his campaign. On the following day after he gained government in a close election, he again promised to protect the forests. A series of regional assessments over the following years led to the dedication of hundreds of thousands of forest to national parks. It was a massive achievement after decades of conservation group efforts.

Now in 2007 we have a state election where climate change and sustainable water supply are high on the agenda. How these critical issues are dealt with in the next four years, will lay the groundwork for a more sustainable future or for a decline into crippling environmental decay.

Environmental groups have called for a 30% cut on 1990 levels of greenhouse gases by 2020. We have pressed for

a 25% renewable energy target by 2020. The date – 2020 – is not a random choice. This is the time when our coal fired power stations start to reach their use-by-dates. Society will have to choose between refurbishing the power stations or switching to green power. Whether we can make the green choice will depend on the policies, research and investments that occurred in the previous 13 years.

Water security is also at a critical juncture. Will we invest in recycling or divert funds to desalination? It's a critical question because already political leaders have suggested that if desal is built we can just keep adding extra modules. This does nothing for the inherent flaws in our urban water cycle. If we keep using water just once then inevitably we have to keep finding new sources as population and economic activity grow; if we recycle our current water resources (in a drying climate) they last much longer.

2007 is the most important election for the environment in over a decade. More than ever, your vote should be for the environment.

To see the results of the environment groups survey of party policies and the big issues, visit www.environmentelection.org.au

JEFF ANGEL, Director

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NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editor • Jeff Angel
Mailing • Sue Kennedy
Printing • Breakout
Design • Glenn Dare

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Jeff Angel
Leigh Martin
Dave Burgess
Karine Wiss

Published by
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE INC
Level 4, 78 Liverpool St
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 02 9261 3437
Fax: 02 9261 3990

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

The heat is on global warming policies

JEFF ANGEL, Director

Australian politicians are pirouetting on the global warming stage with new policies almost a weekly occurrence. A recent Newspoll found 76% of people thought climate change was a major problem for Australia and 77% would pay more (mostly 'a little more') to help address the problem. It's a flood after the season of cynicism promulgated by the PM, his Ministers and the fossil fuel industry.

So what are some of the new policies and are they constructive?

Emissions trading

The biggest advance has been the decision by all states and territories to bring in a national emissions trading scheme by 2010, if the Prime Minister refuses to act. Led by NSW, the states have prepared a model which could rapidly come into operation. The Federal Government has also announced an inquiry to report in May. However, its constrained terms of reference do not give hope for optimism.

There is still dispute about the targets from all quarters and environment groups recently released a target call for a 30% cut on 1990 levels by 2020.* The European Union is discussing a similar goal. TEC has been a long-time advocate of emissions trading and will be producing three briefing notes to counter misinformation and promote public and business debate over the next four months. 2007 is the year Australia will decide on this crucial issue.

Solar hot water

One of the biggest users (25%) of home energy is for water heating. Solar hot water is a ready replacement. In NSW the election has seen a bid by both parties to give rebates for the installation of solar water heaters. TEC believes that all new homes should be mandated to have solar hot water.

*http://www.tec.org.au/dev/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=528&Itemid=328

Light bulbs

Federal Environment Minister, Malcolm Turnbull has announced that new energy efficiency standards will outlaw the incandescent light bulb (CFLs) in favour of compact fluorescents by 2009-10. TEC welcomed this as it is the first comprehensive step from the Commonwealth. It means that in a relatively quick time, we can retrofit existing homes. Most of the residences we will have by 2020 have already been built so we need to attack their energy footprint, as well as ensure new homes are energy efficient.

There have been some complaints about whether smaller bulbs like Christmas lights will disappear, but the new rule only applies where there are alternatives (ie most lights). Dimmable CFLs are also available. Most importantly CFLs use only 20% of the power compared to incandescents to produce the same light and last much longer.

Green fuels

State and Australian governments have announced financial support and regulations to improve the uptake of ethanol and gas by motor vehicles. They are a small, necessary move but it is only through massively increased funding for public transport that greenhouse emissions from transport will be significantly reduced. TEC has released a public transport policy for the NSW Election.

New departments

Climate change is leading to the creation of new agencies. Both Howard and Rudd have merged environment with climate change; similarly in Victoria and now under a NSW ALP policy, there will be an environment, climate change and water portfolio. This is a stark change from the 1970s when environment was lumped with a number of completely unassociated areas. Are we finally seeing environment become a genuinely senior agency so that our institutional capacity to make the right decisions for the environment is greatly improved? The next few years will tell us as environment jostles with the traditional resource extraction and treasury agencies.

Longwall Denials

DAVID BURGESS, Natural Areas Campaigner

Following the release of TEC's report on the environmental damage being caused by longwall coal mining, the NSW Government and miners have denied there is a problem.

However, the industry and the Primary Industry Department (DPI) are engaged in greenwash. Their response to our recent report is selective and even goes to the extent of denying that DPI is the approval body. The evidence is clear - longwall mining is having a disastrous impact upon rivers and creeks, including many in Sydney's water supply catchment and the DPI is the approval body for subsidence.

Despite the damage to numerous rivers since the mid 1990s and calls for protection by government agencies and community groups, the DPI still rejects the idea of a formally enforced buffer zone to protect water resources. As noted in our report the Department is operating as a law unto itself and has an inherent conflict of interest as the sole regulator of subsidence management. An example can be found last year with the approval granted to BHP Billiton's Appin 3 mine. Independent consultants employed by the Sydney Catchment Authority were employed to determine a suitable buffer to protect the Cataract River from mining, yet the 350m buffer recommendation was ignored by the DPI and mining was allowed to come within 80m of the river. Inevitably river cracks have appeared.

BHP Billiton likes to use Marhynes Hole on the Georges River as the flagship of their remediation projects. The truth is that there is no long term evidence the area has been fixed and the damage to our rivers is not remediated. Nor did the Cataract River's flow return to normal since so-called remediation was carried out. Indeed, BHP's own studies have concluded that it is not always possible to determine where damage has even occurred.

Agencies including the Sydney Catchment Authority have stated that they have little confidence in remediation methods and the recent Illawarra Regional Strategy, released by Planning Minister Frank Sartor, admitted the mining could threaten water supply and quality.

The problems of longwall mining are featuring in several marginal electorates during the state election campaign. Once the voters have made their verdict known TEC will continue to press for special legislation to protect rivers from mining.



SAFER SOLUTIONS in the garden

Our new campaign on chemicals in the home is ramping up with Jerry Coleby-Williams, of ABC Gardening Australia fame joining us.

On our website – www.safersolutions.org.au – he provides information on organic gardening and reducing the use of chemicals.

"Twenty years ago who would have thought that some mothballs could promote cancer or that DDT would contaminate breast milk? Nobody planned for pesticide contamination in our waterways or residues in our food, yet these are the issues we face today with the continuing use of harsh pesticides.

Many commonly used pesticide products in gardens today are currently under review because of concerns about their unintended impacts. Will they be the DDT of the future? The point is that this cycle is likely to continue. A pesticide we may regard as 'safe' today could be off the market tomorrow because it poses dangers to children or has long-term environmental impacts. Good gardeners today still believe that pests and diseases should be kept firmly in their place, but without the use of harmful chemicals. While there are many quick and easy remedies to most garden problems, the key focus of organic gardeners is preventing these problems from arising in the first place," Jerry says.

Our website also contains an easy reference guide to dozens of chemicals and a guide to detox your home.

Brochures and a 'purse card' are available from TEC.



Safer Solutions
Keeping your home **healthy** and **green**

Water recycling takes centre stage?

LEIGH MARTIN, Urban campaigner

Urban water management is shaping up as a key battleground in the NSW Election with both Government and Opposition making a number of impressive sounding announcements.

A major focus of debate is recycling versus desalination as water supply options for Sydney. The Government has altered its previous position of only building a 150 megalitre (ML)/day desalination plant at Kurnell if storage levels reach 30% to now building the plant if returned to office. Significantly the plant will be designed so that it can be upgraded to 500ML/day.

The Opposition has announced plans to introduce an indirect potable recycling scheme by constructing a recycling plant to produce 86 gigalitres (GL)/year of highly purified recycled water from the Western Sydney STPs. This would be directed into Prospect Reservoir when total storage levels reach 20% and used for Hawkesbury-Nepean environmental flows at other times. This is a major breakthrough for the debate on recycled water and has placed pressure on the Government to respond. However, the Opposition has not ruled out constructing a desalination plant of its own at Malabar as a 'last resort'.

The Government has responded with a recycled water plan that does not include potable recycling. It has plans for constructing a recycled water 'grid' over 25 years to produce 100 GL of water for industrial and outdoor use. The reason for the very long rollout period has not been made clear.

Adopting higher level restrictions as storage levels decline is a sensible drought response that can delay or prevent the need for expensive and environmentally damaging infrastructure. However, both sides have ruled out using higher level water restrictions if storage levels fall further. Equally neither side has supported permanent low level restrictions despite such measures being successful and well accepted in Melbourne and Adelaide.

The Central Coast also faces a major water supply challenge with even lower storage levels than Sydney. While sustainable alternatives are available, including better demand management, recycling, rainwater tanks and ensuring that development does not exceed the limits of local water resources, unsustainable approaches are still being promoted.

The Government has proposed Tillegra Dam, a 450GL capacity dam that would severely affect the ecology of the Williams River in the lower Hunter with a pipeline to supply the Central Coast.

The Opposition supports Tillegra, and a scheme to extract more water from already stressed local creeks and rivers, as an interim measure, along with rainwater tanks.

While there has been significant progress in the debate on water issues during the campaign, recycling figures quoted by both sides fall well short of what is required for genuinely sustainable water management. Any such approach to water management should also include better demand management and recognition of the important role of restrictions (temporary and permanent) in reducing wasteful consumption.

LABOR

- \$2B Desalination plant 125ML/d upgrade to 500ML/d.
- Increase rainwater tank rebate from \$800 to \$1500 (if connected to toilet and/or washing machine).
- \$300 rebate for dual flush toilets.
- \$100M Recycling and stormwater harvesting fund. Recycling target of 100GL/yr (non-potable) in 25 years.
- \$20M program for installing rainwater tanks in schools, including \$5M to improve water efficiency in schools.
- Construct Tillegra Dam (capacity 450GL) on the Williams River to supply the Central Coast despite availability of other alternatives, including recycling.

COALITION

- Desalination as a last resort.
- Indirect potable reuse with recycled water directed into Prospect Reservoir.
- \$949M Recycling plant 86GL/year. To be used when supplies reach 20%. Used for environmental flows at other times.
- \$120M Stormwater harvesting fund. No specific projects. Community board to allocate funds.
- \$1500 rainwater tank rebate for tanks over 2000L (if connected to toilet and/or washing machine).
- Tillegra Dam to supply Central Coast plus increased surface water extractions from Wyong River, despite availability of other alternatives, including recycling.



Time to ban the free plastic bag

KARINE WEISS, Waste Officer

Most Australians agree that the 40 million bags ending up as litter each year, cause unacceptable damage to wildlife, waterways, natural and urban landscapes. However, despite repeated commitments by environment ministers to the phase out the bags by the end of 2008, government had failed to take decisive action, until late last year.

This failure of retailers to meet voluntary reduction targets triggered an investigation into regulatory options and in February this year The Environment Protection and Heritage Council released a Regulatory Impact Statement which addresses the costs and benefits of a range of options including - no further action, a federal levy and a national ban.

A recent survey by TEC independently evaluated the performance of the major retailers according to their commitments in the Code of Practice and evaluated the extent of behavioral change amongst both consumers and retail staff. With the help of volunteers throughout the state we surveyed more than 50 supermarkets. The results were not surprising and clearly show voluntary measures alone do not cut to the chase!

- Consumer behavior: 83% of customers used the free plastic bag offered at the check out, and only 17% brought their own bag to the supermarket.
- Staff behavior: 73% of survey participants reported the checkout operator used a free plastic bag without asking them, only 19% of checkout operators first asked whether a bag was required.
- Promotional and structural efforts: Less than half of the participants noticed promotional material around the store aimed to reduce plastic bag use.
- But, the good news is 70% of supermarkets offer reusable ('green') bags for sale.

The costs of alternatives have been revealed as hugely exaggerated. For example, increased transaction times from the use of reusable bags was claimed by industry to result in a cost of \$60 million. But when Environment Victoria put this proposition to the test, they found that reusable bags do not, on average, add to transaction times and, in fact, save time and money. Overall savings are to the tune of \$41.6 million. This finding casts doubt on other estimated 'costs' of regulation (to view these results go to: www.envict.org.au).

TEC supports a nation wide ban on light-weight bags and a levy on the alternatives (excluding reusable bags). A ban is seen as the most effective way of reducing plastic bag use and sustaining this reduction. In countries like Ireland where a levy alone was used an immediate and dramatic reduction in plastic bag consumption was evident, but, the impact gradually wore off and the cost was simply absorbed by the consumers. As consumption rose the Irish Government had to increase the levy.

Will Australian governments finally take action to stop billions of bags being handed out each year?



Sustainable Business in NSW

TEC's Green Capital is promoting a range of new policies and regulations for sustainability in the business sector that would create certainty for business operations and investment, and create new jobs. The 'wait and see' attitudes of many businesses to sustainability needs to be short circuited by government action. The result would be a set of policies that divert investment (both external and from inside the business) from environmentally degrading activities to environment repair and improved efficiency. This will lead to reduction in the environmental footprint of the market, business and consumers.

- In the first instance the Government should further address its operations, including its corporations. Credible public sustainability reports; reduced energy and water consumption as a result of efficiency measures directed at operations and offices; a green chain of supply; and investment of funds in socially responsible and green activities – should make government the leader. The effort needs to be extended through a direction from the Premier and oversighted by a special unit in the Premier's Department.
- The problem of environmental impacts from natural resource use should be progressively resolved in cases where the Government sells resources (or access to resources) such as water, minerals and electricity. Clause 14A (2) (g) of the IPART Act (that sets prices) directing attention to ecologically sustainable development, should be bolstered so that prices properly reflect scarcity and environmental costs.
- Where there is a three year payback on water and energy savings measures, business should be mandated to implement them in a timely manner. Currently water and energy savings plans are not required to be implemented.
- TEC has previously welcomed the commitment by NSW and the other states to implement a national emissions trading scheme (NETS) by 2010, if the Commonwealth does not. NSW should also lead a debate about upgrading the greenhouse gas reduction target. Otherwise NETS will move too slowly to help abate global warming and ill-prepare Australia for effective action to lower emissions by the decade after 2020 when key decisions will need to be made about the future of coal fired power stations. (TEC and other environment groups have suggested a 30% cut on 1990 levels by 2020).
- A special program to help small to medium size firms embrace sustainability practices should be funded so that the current ad hoc, incremental approach is disbanded and sector by sector is addressed. For example, sustainability issues should become an integral part of small business training that is offered by TAFE NSW.
- The Government and industry associations should develop joint purchasing plans that favour products with less environmental impact (eg recycled paper, GreenPower, solar hot water) utilising combined purchasing power to expand the market for these products.
- Regulations to require extended producer responsibility for priority products such as e-waste and tyres will reduce the landfill load and recover resources. Contrary to the recent Productivity Commission (2006) report on waste, such measures are not a burden on business but an opportunity for more employment and reduced reliance on virgin materials. Importantly they decrease the environmental footprint of consumer goods.
- Control of freeriders in the emerging green market. Businesses are starting to see commercial benefit in tapping into the 'greenmarket'. The Government should ensure that environmental claims need to be validated so that only those companies that genuinely reduce environmental impact are rewarded.
- Greater accountability and overlap between the environment, planning and resources management portfolios when developing and implementing policy, for example sustainable city principles. Major business headquarters will be attracted by a 'green' city with clean air, good public transport and energy efficient buildings.

HELP THE ENVIRONMENT TODAY FOR OUR FUTURE

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
- 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

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PO Box A176

Sydney South

NSW 1235

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"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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