



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2007 / ISSUE 3

E D I T O R I A L

THE ELECTION AGENDA

What environmental challenges will immediately confront the next federal government? With the big rise in environmental concern there has been plenty of policy attention over 2007; for instance the early emergence of a political consensus on the need for emissions trading has been very welcome. There's lots more to do, so what does TEC see as key policy challenges?

First of course, climate change, with a trading scheme that can take significant strides as soon as possible and a genuine renewable energy target that builds on the state schemes. Environment groups and green business will have to be active to ensure the rules for these schemes maximise the green gains.

Second, big moves on energy efficiency – ignored for too long by governments and the electricity industry because it affects dividends – but crucial to reduce business and residential costs and avoid massive new and costly investments in fossil fuel power.

Third, the lethargy that infects product take-back scheme discussions needs to be overcome. Essentially this means speedy national action particularly on electronic products, tyres and packaging, rather than the go-slow that has emanated from Canberra. We can avoid landfilling millions of tonnes of useful resources.

Fourth, our eastern seaboard capital cities will lose chunks of their quality of life, if we don't massively increase investment in public transport. Economic costs will rise as traffic congestion worsens; and air quality will decline. The federal surplus can be instrumental in lifting mass transit infrastructure.

Finally, improved biodiversity protection and river management. We are still clearing too much land and not investing enough in landscape restoration, including via stewardship payments to farmers. Our inland rivers are in crisis and need to have water put back into them. Inevitably there will have to be less but more efficient irrigation, as the climate dries; and in some areas there will be an exodus of farmers from once productive lands.

One of the disappointing aspects of the policy debate to date is the lack of articulation about the merging of economics with environment. It's still conventional growth, rather than highlighting the multiple benefits from green industry. Together they are a much stronger combination. Part of this conversation has to be about green consumption – both substituting for polluting products; and consuming less.

The new government won't have long to wait before it shows its credentials to the public. In little over a week after polling day, the Bali Kyoto Protocol Negotiations will take place and our global warming stand will be on trial. We'll then know what type of government we have elected.

JEFF ANGEL, Director

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Green Electricity Watch

The latest independent review of GreenPower products - Green Electricity Watch 2007 - has revealed the country's top green energy providers. Its ranking system helps consumers to make more informed choices when buying government accredited GreenPower. Overall, products from Origin Energy, ActewAGL and Climate Friendly received the highest Green Electricity Watch rankings.

With climate change at the forefront of national debate, TEC devised GEW in 2002 and it is now undertaken with the support of Australia's leading environment groups.

Almost 600,000 Australians now have GreenPower, as more and more people realise that switching to accredited GreenPower for home electricity is the best and easiest way to cut household greenhouse emissions. There are big differences between the GreenPower products and how much they help fight climate change. Green Electricity Watch takes the confusion away by ranking products on their capacity to reduce greenhouse emissions, so that people can make an informed decision based on their needs and budget.

For the first time, this year's Green Electricity Watch shows the value for money of each GreenPower product.

For all the information you need go to: www.greenelectricitywatch.org.au

SMART METERS

coming your way - but slowly

TEC's new report on smart meters has found that the rollout of meters across Australia could reduce total electricity use - and electricity greenhouse emissions - by up to 10%. The report, *Advanced Metering for Energy Supply in Australia*, by Energy Futures Australia, shows that a 10% reduction could save 19 million tonnes of greenhouse emissions every year, equal to taking 4.5 million cars off the road.

Smart meters measure energy consumption according to time and price, a huge improvement on our current 'dumb' meters that tally up consumption over 3 month periods. State-of-the-art smart meters can be fitted with a striking in-home interface that shows consumption, price, savings and emissions in real-time. Remote communication also allows networks to cycle or switch off air conditioners or pool equipment during critical peak times. These meters can also measure the export of electricity to the grid from rooftop solar panels.

Australian governments are currently considering the roll-out of smart meters since 2002 but, clearly, progress has been slow. TEC is advocating for the rapid roll-out of the meters and the acknowledgment of their greenhouse benefits. Our new report also shows governments should take complementary actions including - time-varying pricing for customers and generous tariffs paid to householders who generate their own electricity.



Trees for airline offsets?

Cameron Eren, CLIMATE CHANGE INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS OFFICER

Tree plantation offsets are being used by companies, including Qantas recently, as a way of countering their greenhouse emissions. It's claimed that the Kyoto Protocol recognises them.

However, due to the inherent weakness of tree plantation offset projects, it has been decided by the Kyoto parties that offsets generated by tree plantations could only be temporary. That is, purchasing offset credits through tree plantation offsets would only be allowed to temporarily offset (for five years) the carbon liabilities of parties. Using tree plantations would only allow countries to defer offsetting emissions by buying credible Certified Emissions Reductions (CERs) at a later date.

In addition to these unique protection measures it was also decided that parties could not offset more than 1% of base year national emissions through tree plantation offset projects. Despite these dual layers of protection the flagship Kyoto compliant emissions trading scheme, the European Union ETS, failed to afford any recognition to tree plantation offset projects - the various issues surrounding tree plantation projects being regarded as too great to afford recognition as a credible offset mechanism.

Secondly there exists uncertainty around the magnitude of the enhanced impacts of aviation emissions released during flight. Some aviation companies are entirely ignoring them, however.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) guidance document on aviation emissions *Aviation and the Global Atmosphere* (1999) suggests that organisations use an uplift factor of 2.7. For this reason the Australian Greenhouse Office Greenhouse Friendly Scheme provides the option to use an uplift factor of 2.7 when calculating aviation emissions.

Many offset providers are already calculating aviation emissions using an uplift factor of 2.7 and TEC has encouraged Qantas to improve the integrity of its offset program by matching their leadership and rejecting tree plantations.

TEC takes on National Electricity Market

Jane Castle, RESOURCE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER

Last issue we reported on the expeditions to 'Planet NEM' – the National Electricity Market. Since then Total Environment Centre has been re-writing the Rules to ensure that energy efficiency and demand reductions are the priority for our power grid, instead of more wasteful consumption and more polluting, fossil fuel power. Our Rule Change Package is now with the Australian Energy Market Commission, the body responsible for determining the policy and Rules for electricity supply in NSW, the ACT, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. The Package challenges the AEMC to get serious about the so-called 'efficiency' of the monopoly operators.

But how efficient is this? Around \$23 billion of electricity consumers' money is ear-marked for spending by networks on new 'poles and wires' over the next 5 years. This is despite between 30% and 70% of energy use being avoidable by the implementation of energy efficiency measures. California, which has a similar economy to Australia's, has avoided building new infrastructure for almost 20 years because they have been serious about reducing waste. So why can't we?

Among the Rule changes that TEC is seeking are: the requirement for networks (the 'poles and wires' companies) to investigate demand management alternatives and implement them if cost-effective before building new infrastructure; the requirement for the Australian Energy Regulator to develop a demand management incentive for networks; and the requirement for the National Energy Market Management Company to implement a market for the sale and purchase of demand management services.

The proposals will be open for consultation by the AEMC in the near future and we encourage anyone who wants reduced electricity prices – and fewer greenhouse emissions - to put in a submission (see www.aemc.gov.au) No doubt the energy companies that want to keep selling more power will be!

ACTION ON WASTE

Waste answer for climate change

A landmark collaboration between Australia's biggest waste companies, recyclers and the Total Environment Centre has released a plan to prevent two billion tonnes of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.

Currently, the dumping of food, garden, paper and wood wastes produces high levels of landfill gas, consisting mostly of methane, which has a global warming potential 25 times that of carbon dioxide. Unless new recycling policies are implemented, there is a significant risk of increasing greenhouse gas emissions over the next 50 years, (reaching 2 billion tonnes) making up potentially 85% of Australia's future carbon budget, according to original research conducted by sustainability consultants Warnken ISE.

This is a pollution liability we must avoid. To combat it, these degradable materials should be recycled, instead of land filled. Measures such as a landfill allowance scheme, emissions trading, bans and levies imposed at the tip, are available.

Business-as-usual projections of landfill emissions show an increase from 15.4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year in 1990 to 46.9 million tonnes by 2050.

TEC and the recycling companies are undertaking further work into the solutions and discussing policy options with state and federal governments.

QLD waste at crossroads

The second report from TEC's State of Waste Series, has revealed damning evidence that Queensland's waste management is dismal, at best.

Queenslanders are the second highest landfillers of waste in Australia, and are the second worst recyclers, with only 27% of the 8.3 million tonnes of waste generated being recycled. It's also the only mainland state without a defensible waste strategy that incorporates both targets and associated action aimed at improving resource recovery.

Queensland is at a waste management and resource recovery crossroads. An important component of a sustainable society is the ability to recycle a maximum amount of material back into the economy. If Queensland wants to have a waste management system that is sustainable, this poor performance needs to be improved dramatically.

The 'State of Waste in Queensland' report, produced by Warnken Ise predicts the high levels of waste generation could very well rise to over 20 million tonnes each year by 2025 and 18 million tonnes of this will be wasted in landfill.

The recently released discussion paper, Queensland Waste Strategy (EPA) is just a small start and much more will be needed to ensure a sustainable Queensland.

BUSTED! The 'Mobile Muster' Myth Exposed

Karine Weiss, WASTE OFFICER

TEC has lifted the lid on the industry's sham mobile phone recycling scheme.

Over 30 million mobile phones have been sold in Australia, and 8 million more are being sold each year. With an average life-span of 18 months, and a measly 3% being recycled, millions of mobile phones are unaccounted for and many will make their way to landfills across Australia.

Once a mobile phone has reached landfill the toxic substances within it, such as lead, cadmium, arsenic and mercury can leach out to waterways putting the environment and community at risk.

The mobile phone industry has not taken sufficient steps to ensure that phones are appropriately disposed of, despite the establishment of the voluntary recycling program 'Mobile Muster' by the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA). AMTA claims the industry does not need to be regulated to improve recycling volumes, but a TEC survey sponsored by the City of Sydney shows that the Mobile Muster scheme is completely inadequate. The survey results reveal that;

- I. The scheme's coverage is extremely poor, fewer than 20% of mobile phone retailers are participants in theory, and even fewer are in practice.
- II. The performance of those retailers participating in the scheme is inconsistent, and lacking in many aspects, such as:
 - o The recycling bin is not placed in a visible position (62%)
 - o There is no promotional and/or educational material (71%)
- III. Only 10 mobile phone retailers in the City of Sydney have a visible recycling bin

These ten bins and four more placed in ANZ branches are meant to serve a combined residential and working population of half a million people, who replace over 300,000 mobile phones every year.

Clearly there is a need to improve on the industry's current 3% recovery rate. The poor performance is evidence that voluntary measures are insufficient and that a regulated Extended Producer Responsibility scheme is urgently needed.



Private Native Forestry

The problem of PNF in NSW has bedeviled native forest protection. For many decades it has been an unregulated industry, with timber cowboys turning up and liquidating the timber resource on a farm, before setting their sights on the next property. Some of this one-off logging was a precursor to rezoning for urban development. The environmental damage has been enormous over thousands of hectares – old growth and rainforest destroyed and stream banks wrecked. TEC is aware of attempts by government to bring in a measure of environmental control since the 1970s Wran government. Later exercises also failed - until 2007.

Environment groups were fortunate to obtain a promise from the Iemma government during the election to adopt a logging code by mid-2007. In 2006 and early 07 the Natural Resources Advisory Council had grappled with the problem, but deep differences between environmental groups and loggers made a resolution, impossible. The timber lobby kept pressing for delay, so they could still extract maximum lumber; and some groups from the Riverina extolled the rights of private property, ignoring the community losses from environmental degradation and unsustainability. Key departments were also making unwise compromises.

However, after the election a resolution was found by using the Native Vegetation Act and legally binding property vegetation plans (PVP); which while it did not deliver maximum environmental protection, did significantly improve the situation. Key results were:

- There is now a regulation framework. This includes a satellite map showing riparian, old growth, etc and major environmental features being permanently protected via the land title. The state law that had given an exemption from environmental regulation was abolished.
- Liquidation logging carried out by the cowboys is now illegal.
- There is far more likelihood of retaining vegetation cover, including regrowth in the landscape and a more diverse aged forest (including recruitment trees and older hollow trees).
- New specific environmental prescriptions - a mixed bag of results – but a big improvement on none.

The next big task is compliance and monitoring. Already hundreds of PVPs are in the pipeline and the community and department are going to have watch closely for evasions and signals for future improvements.

TEC acts on Action for Air

Leigh Martin, URBAN CAMPAIGNER

In 1998 the NSW Government released its “Action for Air” plan to improve air quality in the Greater Metropolitan Region (GMR) of Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. The plan provides a 25 year framework of measures to improve public transport, reduce vehicle use and cut emissions.

With the plan now in its ninth year and the Government’s Clean Air Forum (Clean Air, Cool Climate) on 23 November TEC is undertaking a major review to assess whether the plan is achieving its goals.

Unfortunately latest information reveals that the GMR continues to suffer from major air quality problems. National Environment Protection Measure (NEPM) and World Health Organisation (WHO) goals for ozone (the major indicator of smog) are regularly exceeded, while fine particle pollution remains a problem in winter and summer.

Health effects associated with ozone and fine particle air pollution include increased hospital admissions and mortality from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, reduced lung function in asthmatics and respiratory problems in children. Because the GMR is a single air-shed, pollution in any location can have consequences across the whole region.

Most disturbingly there seems to have been little or no improvement in ozone or fine particle pollution since the introduction of Action for Air.

Two reasons for this stand out - continuing rapid growth in vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT) and poor progress in implementing Action for Air commitments to improve public transport. While there has been good progress in tackling emissions from fixed sources such as industry continuing rapid growth in VKT is undermining the benefits of these strategies and gains from cleaner vehicles and changes to fuel composition in recent years.

A major overhaul of “Action for Air” is needed to improve progress in meeting commitments and reaching air quality goals. TEC will be identifying new initiatives including ways to curb growing vehicle use and boost public transport.

**Your drinking water is under threat!
TAKE ACTION NOW.**

cracked!

drained!

polluted!



Longwall mining under scrutiny

David Burgess, NATURAL AREAS CAMPAIGNER

As an Inquiry investigating longwall mining in the NSW Southern Coalfield prepares to hand down its findings early next year, TEC is upgrading its campaign including a cinema advert (see picture) highlighting the ongoing impacts of this destructive method of underground mining on rivers, swamps and groundwater.

At the Inquiry hearings in September, the Sydney Catchment Authority revealed that up to 91% of Sydney's southern supply catchments stand to be undermined, while the Department of Water and Energy's submission openly questioned whether river remediation works.

TEC has recommended impacts should be prevented rather than minimised, and that enforceable protection zones must be established around rivers, creeks and upland swamps, along with an urgent assessment of groundwater aquifers. Also we have urged removal of the conflict of interest, where the Mines Department approves subsidence plans and collects royalties.

Meanwhile Freedom of Information documents have revealed that while the Inquiry was sitting, Peabody were manoeuvring to gain longwall approval to have 4km of the Waratah Rivulet and the stored waters of Woronora Dam undermined over 21 years. A TEC visit to the rivulet in October with the Sydney Morning Herald revealed that, despite remediation work, the watercourse had again run dry.

Further south, BHP Billiton has applied to extend their Dendrobium Mine with longwalls that will undermine up to ten upland swamps. As well as having irreplaceable ecological values, these swamps act as water recharge points in the upper Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment, playing a vital role as natural 'regulators' of flows, particularly during dry times.

September saw Minister Frank Sartor's approval of yet another enormous coal mine at the top of the Goulburn River catchment. Moolarben is a combined open cut and longwall mine that will put at serious risk the Goulburn River and associated groundwater system as well as threatening sandstone gorges along the Goulburn River.

The NSW Government must change its priorities and act to prevent damage to rivers, swamps and groundwater from the impacts of coal mining.

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:

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- Other

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My environmental interests are

I am available (per week) half day one day
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other

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Sydney South

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Consider a Bequest

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