



TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2004 / ISSUE 2

E D I T O R I A L

Dangerous waters

A seminal point in the relationship between the environment movement and the Carr Government has arrived. Highly important policies and laws in a range of areas are due for decision. To date there has been a lot of consultation (known as 'being in the tent') and good access to Ministers, but there are worrying signs. Already, pronounced activism has emerged with a logging blockade in the Brigalow woodlands and court action and demonstrations against the filming of the Stealth war movie in a wilderness area.

Will this become the pattern for the future?

WATER

It has become quite clear that the NSW and Commonwealth Governments are intent on cementing irrigator property rights to water and letting the environment come a distant second. The only major route for environmental flows to reach an adequate level will be to buy the water! There will never be enough funds to do this. Yet the irrigators win twice – once by getting perpetual water rights, at no charge, and then by selling the water to environmental trusts for river health. The only solution is to give government the power to reallocate water to the environment, without payment of compensation. Our rivers need significant environmental flows and this will be more so in the future as climate change takes hold.

BRIGALOW

There are lots of rumours about an imminent decision. Premier Bob Carr delayed a resolution just before the 2003 State Election to avoid any political fallout. Since then there has been a creaking moratorium, with increasing pressure on high conservation value areas – and just recently a firewood contractor was stood down from a key site because of breaches of environmental conditions. It is eminently possible to have a significantly expanded reserve system and a value-added timber industry. There's no time to waste.

BE NICE TO DEVELOPERS

The Government has been pursuing changes to the planning and threatened species laws, at the behest of the development industry. Public consultation, environmental impact statements and independent listing of threatened species, has always rankled influential members of the development sector. They have lobbied hard and legislation is due to be presented to Parliament. Included is a scheme for biodiversity certification of planning schemes. It sounds good in theory but has the potential to completely undermine threatened species protection with shoddy environmental assessments and spurious political certification that a plan will protect species.

LAND CLEARING

Ending of broadscale land clearing may be near. However, there are some high hurdles to jump (see report in this issue). If the Government fails to keep faith with its mandate to stop clearing – then it will surrender massive quantities of its environmental credibility.

URGENT! PLEASE MAKE A GENEROUS DONATION TO OUR CAMPAIGNS

JEFF ANGEL Director

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Green Capital Grows



TEC's Green Capital Program just keeps growing. It aims to encourage and facilitate the development of Corporate Social Responsibility. Our event program brings together key stakeholders from business, government and non-government organisations in a constructive dialogue and debate on key sustainability issues.

It's been a busy time and to date and we have attracted over 3,000 business people out of the office and into our sustainability forums.

As the Program has grown, so has the staff. Tony Mohr started in January as TEC's Associate Director, replacing program founder, Dave West; closely followed by Danielle Domone-Karlson, Subscriber Support Services. They joined Julia Lipton (Manager Events & Special Projects) and Anthony Lazzaro (Program Support Officer). It's a great team.

In 2004 Green Capital has already organised major events on ecological footprinting and the sustainability of the electricity sector, both held in Sydney and Melbourne. These events alone attracted over 800 people. Outside of the major events we have held 'Business Leaders Forums' with renowned environmentalist Hunter Lovins; one on the development of a greenhouse emissions trading scheme and another announcing the second 'Carbon Disclosure Project' (a move by investment groups to get business to reveal carbon burdens).

Green Capital and TEC Campaigners also co-ordinate on events and special projects. For example, Green Capital organised its business forum on greenhouse emissions trading while Jane Castle, TEC's energy and resource campaigner, organised meetings with the peak environmental groups to consider a

joint position on emissions trading. The objective of having both the NGOs and business supporting an emissions trading scheme should add extra strength to the campaign for a scheme that produces real reductions in emissions.

Next on the event agenda is "The Community's Right to Know" which will investigate the pros and cons of community consultation and sustainability reporting. Quentin Dempster of ABC Stateline will chair the debate, with a small panel of leaders from the business and NGO sectors. The event aims to tease out what works and what does not, with a view to assisting business to learn from the experiences of others.

Green Capital is also developing into new areas

Work has started on a pilot "Sustainable Staff" training package for Insurance Australia Group staff. The training aims to engage staff about corporate sustainability and drive a culture shift for triple bottom line values to be integrated. This kind of staff training has the potential to be delivered to a range of other businesses which want to make sustainability part of their core business, not just a nice-to-have speciality. TEC is also commencing a three year program with Griffith University on reforming the ethics of the finance sector with a view to mainstreaming socially responsible investment.



LAND CLEARING END CLOSE

It has taken a lot of campaigning by environment groups, but NSW and Queensland are close to activating laws to end broadscale land clearing.

Work has been intense in NSW since the Carr Government gained power in March 2003 with a clear promise to end broadscale clearing of remnant vegetation and protected regrowth. TEC was closely involved in development of the Native Vegetation Act (passed late last year) and the key regulations which will implement it.

A number of areas are in contention, such as the use of offsets. These are intended to compensate for the loss of remnant vegetation through for example, permanent reservation of other higher value habitat or management actions such as weeding or removal of grazing. The judgements in the field are critical and offsets can simply disguise the continuation of clearing, with alternative benefits put off to the never-never. Another potential loophole is so-called routine agricultural management activities (ramas). While clearly farmers should not be required to apply for permission for everyday activities, such as fixing fences or keeping a road clear – past experience has shown that unless the

rules prevent excessive clearing, then many thousands of hectares are cleared under the excuse of ‘ramas’.

There is also the problem of illegal clearing. Unless the law is unambiguous, highly paid counsels can help farmers evade prosecution. The Government has announced it will crack down on such clearing and has purchased powerful satellite monitoring to assist with compliance. Whether the law is sufficient remains to be seen.

Government has also established 13 Catchment Management Authorities. They will receive some \$400m over the next 4 years to invest in their regions. Their essential task is to establish new bush coverage, while the ban on further clearing stops the rot. As a result all parties are hoping that our degraded rural landscape will recover. TEC will be closely monitoring the situation in coming months.

EPR ADVANCING

A significant step has been made with federal and state Environment Ministers agreeing to investigate a safety net for the proposed national television take-back scheme. A regulatory safety net would bring importers and other domestic manufacturers and distributors into the scheme, eliminating free-riders and increasing resource recovery rates (see *Total Environment* 1/2004).



TEC pressed for such a regulation to be endorsed at the Ministers’ meeting. The TV industry intends to set up an independent third-party organisation (known as a “producer responsibility organisation”) by the end of 2004 to recycle up to 15,000 tonnes of used televisions going to landfill each year.

The computer industry has also made progress, and a draft product stewardship plan where industry intends to set up a recycling scheme, was proposed. Australians currently send approximately 1 million computers to landfill each year.

The Ministers recognised that Australia, as a significant importer of electrical goods, needed to continue to align itself with international trends in product design including the phasing-out of hazardous substances. They agreed to investigate measures such as those adopted by the European Union for designing electrical and electronic equipment to minimise hazardous substances.

GM UPDATE

NSW will be spared GM canola crops this year, with the withdrawal of trial plantings by Bayer. Originally some 5,000ha was proposed, but this was reduced to 400 and then 40. Farmers were particularly concerned about contamination. The Minister and the NSW Parliament required adequate insurance to cover any liability and it is understood this was one of the reasons the company withdrew. Says a lot about the confidence of GM proponents that they can contain GM spill into the environment!



CLIMATE CHANGE - the energy challenge

DOES THE NATIONAL ELECTRICITY MARKET WORK?

Very few people have heard of it, but the National Electricity Market (NEM) is the main institution that organises the electricity industry. It came about during the Keating Government in 1995 and was premised on selling-off government owned assets and involved establishing new national regulatory bodies. It aims to link the states' electricity systems to make supply more reliable and efficient. The rules that govern the NEM are based on continued support for big fossil fuel power stations, as government did not want to down value its existing power stations. It was largely developed in a 'black box' by energy and treasury bureaucrats.

A decade on, the NEM faces enormous problems. Spiraling greenhouse emissions and no plans to factor in environmental concerns undermine claims that the NEM is delivering the triple bottom line. The electricity sector accounts for some 33% of greenhouse emissions and TEC has identified reform of the NEM as a central plank of climate change policy.

The Market does not provide adequate, long term price signals nor a level playing field, to foster research, development and commercialisation of renewable energy, energy efficiency or demand management. As a result, the NEM has produced far worse outcomes for the environment. Even the Electricity Supply Association has admitted that there has been a 31 per cent increase in greenhouse emissions as a result of deregulation, giving lie to the spurious claim by the Commonwealth Greenhouse Office that the NEM has been a key instrument in controlling emissions.

Without intervention, the future is not looking much better with the overriding incentive of the market to sell more greenhouse emitting electricity. Currently, inefficiency on the consumer side of the fence is a plus for electricity companies. This explains why most retailers still actively sell and market air-conditioners despite their role in driving expensive, peak demand.

2004 to 2006 has been slated as a key period of reform in which the Ministerial Council on Energy must resolve difficult supply-demand balance issues – people in government are concerned that we will run out of power – even though we waste up to 50%! TEC is working at the national level to advocate the right outcomes. To keep the pressure on, TEC has just produced a series of position papers: "The National Electricity Market: Environmental

JANE CASTLE, Resource Conservation Campaigner

and Social Issues", available on our website at www.tec.org.au and we held Green Capital forums in Sydney and Melbourne. We are also lobbying all state and federal governments.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY – INDUSTRY IMPEDES PROGRESS

Energy efficiency is the cheapest and quickest way to tackle global warming but Australia has consistently failed to make use of this potential. A huge resource of energy savings is waiting to be tapped.

Commonwealth and State Energy Ministers have begun to address the issue through the formation of the National Framework for Energy Efficiency (NREE) working group, being led by the Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria (SEAV). But progress is being stalled by a conservative approach and pressure from the powerful, energy hungry industries.

The first step for the NREE is to prove that the potential for energy efficiency actually exists, but industry lobbying is promoting lean gains. Initial modeling showed that with only 50% take-up - 30%-70% savings could be harnessed across all sectors. This would increase real GDP by \$1.8 billion, create 9200 jobs and cut greenhouse emissions by 32 million tonnes. However, under pressure from energy intensive industries, the NREE went back to the drawing board to produce new figures. To downgrade the figures, restrictive economic hurdles that excluded all energy efficiency that didn't pay for itself within 2.3 years – were imposed. The result was the slashing of initial projections by over 60 per cent.

Many energy efficiency experts argue that the new projections are overly conservative, and local and international experience backs this view up. The new projections will severely weaken the case for implementing a national plan and lower the target when and if a strategy is implemented.

TEC sought the economic and technical details behind the energy efficiency projections to undertake its own critique and to inform the community. SEAV refused to release the data, so TEC used Freedom of Information laws to obtain it. Now armed with the information, TEC is lobbying State and Federal Energy Ministers to accept the initial projections and commit to effective action on energy efficiency.

Coastal Local Elections

On the NSW regional coast the environment didn't do so well in the March local government elections. While the mainstream media focussed on the city results, some of which gave a significant boost to the Greens and progressive independents, coastal communities were seeing more of the same in their LGAs.

In all but three local government areas, the results favoured the pro-development industry candidates over the environment – an unsurprising result considering the large amount of money spent by the pro-development teams.

Some councils used the chaos and confusion during the changeover period to whisk through last minute developer benefits, while others have set about improving the land values of numerous landowners in their areas since coming to power.

This means it is even more important for the State Government to act on resident and environment group concerns and to actually achieve real and substantial coastal protection. A key target is the planning instruments. Changes too need to be made to the Local Government Act before the next council elections to ensure that developer donations are banned and the almost libellous propaganda used by the pro-development candidates is controlled.

Environment studies shredded

Millions of dollars spent by Federal, State and Local Government on environmental studies and plans are being wasted with new moves by developer councils to dump them.

If Governments at all levels are really serious about protecting the coastal environment, surely one of the simplest steps to take would be to make councils adopt these plans and use them as a mandatory base for their strategic plans and planning instruments. However, again and again councils base these instruments on the demands of developers and land speculators while ignoring or overriding recommended or planned and mapped wildlife corridors or environmental protection zones.

A recent example is Greater Taree Council's latest version of its Hallidays Point Development Strategy. Much of the new strategy comprised landowners requesting rezoning and council's justification for granting it - with the overriding and shrinking of previous significant vegetation, corridors and environmentally protected areas and the joining of villages to allow for more sprawling development. On the Central Coast, the Wyong Conservation Strategy is being scrapped. This was an expertly produced and mapped strategy placing environmentally sustainable planning ahead of accepting a stream of ad hoc and damaging developments. The WCS took years of work by Council planning staff and the NPWS to compile, but strong lobbying of the new developer council, by some landowners that wanted to make a mint out of rezoning, ensured its demise. However, a strong community campaign is pressing the State Government to impose the strategy.

TEC is helping local groups to fight for environment protection and has presented a policy package that will stop such moves, to the Government.





Georges River focus

LEIGH MARTIN, Urban Campaigner

Riverside gem breakthrough

The battle to save a precious three kilometre stretch of bushland on the banks of the Georges River has received a major boost with news that the Federal Government has backed away from plans to sell the site.

The former Defence land between Mill and Deadmans Creeks near Sandy Point has been under threat of sale to developers for several years. The site contains important ecological values and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has requested that the land be transferred to the NSW Government for inclusion in the Georges River National Park. The land on the opposite sides of the River and Mill Creek is already National Park.

TEC and local groups have been campaigning to prevent the sale and have the land included in the National Park, for more than two years. The campaign attracted the support of the NSW Government and local State Members. The Federal Opposition also expressed support.

Despite this the Federal Government appeared determined to proceed with the sale. In a major breakthrough, however, it appears that the weight of public pressure has finally forced a rethink. In a letter from Federal Member for Hughes, Dana Vale,

to a local community group it was revealed that the decision had been made not to dispose of the site by sale but to grant it to the State Government for inclusion in the National Park.

The site is not yet secure however. No timetable has been provided for transfer of ownership and in a bizarre move Ms Vale has sought to have the land transferred to Sutherland Shire Council for a reserve instead of to NPWS. TEC was unable to obtain an explanation from Ms Vale's office.

Placing the land in a council reserve would afford only a very weak level of protection as it would only take a resolution of Council for the land to be reclassified and sold for development. Unfortunately there are numerous examples of councils selling important parcels of community land.

It is vital that the Federal Government be given a clear message that the only acceptable outcome is for the land to be included in the Georges River National Park. Write to the Federal Member for Hughes, Dana Vale, as well as the Federal Minister for the Environment, David Kemp and the Minister for Finance and Administration, Senator Nick Minchin C/- Parliament House, Canberra 2600, opposing any move to grant the land to Sutherland Shire and demanding that it be immediately transferred to the NPWS.

SYDNEY CITY ENVIRONMENT AGENDA

TEC has recently presented the newly elected Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, with an environmental agenda for the City of Sydney. It details some of the key environmental issues facing the city and steps that Council can take to promote sustainability.

The main elements of the plan are:

- Revising Development Control Plans to require improved water and energy efficiency.
- Establishing an advice office to assist residents and developers to improve the sustainability of new development and major refurbishments/renovations.
- Ensure that Sydney City Council has a purchasing policy that ensures sustainability criteria are followed for paper, equipment (energy rating; uses recycled paper; end of life recycling, etc), cars and timber.
- Providing strong support for the proposed CBD light rail extension.
- Support for congestion charging for vehicles entering the CBD to encourage a switch to public transport and provide a source of public transport funding.
- Revising Development Control Plans to reduce the availability of free workplace parking in new buildings.
- Providing an assessment of the city's environmental footprint in Council's State of the Environment Reporting.
- Protection of open space and foreshore areas by opposing the sale of public lands and maintaining open space and foreshore areas in public ownership. Where possible the Council should seek to acquire lands for public recreation.
- De-channelling stormwater canals and degraded urban streams and returning them to more natural condition.

TEC looks forward to discussing our ideas with the Lord Mayor and the new Council.

HELP THE ENVIRONMENT TODAY FOR OUR FUTURE

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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