

# chain reaction

Issue #142

June 2022

RRP \$15

The National Magazine of Friends of the Earth Australia

[www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au)

## THIS IS CLIMATE CHANGE. FROM THE DISASTER FRONTLINES.



**The Lismore Floods: A Reflection**

**Protecting Our Native Forests  
For Climate And Public Health**

**Kangaroo grass as a guide  
to sustainable activism**

**Covid Was Just A Practice Run**

**The workers on the frontline of climate impacts**

**The war on Ukraine:  
Nuclear power, weapons and winter**



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- our campaign for a nuclear-free future
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Peter Negus

**Back cover**

Gemma Romiti @gemijuu

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Climate change is here and it is wreaking havoc on communities. The bushfires, the pandemic, the floods - the world as we know it is changing and each disaster further exposes the structural inequalities of the system that puts profit over people and planet. This edition focuses on the growing climate disasters on this continent; we share some voices from the flood frontlines, explore the intersecting issues causing disasters and celebrate the incredible community efforts that do some of the best work at long-term recovery and resilience.

The Chain Reaction Collective is growing, so no matter where you are, or what your background is, we'd love to have you creating this magazine with us!

For the earth and each other, the Chain Reaction Collective

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Friends of the Earth (FoE) Australia is a federation of independent local groups. Join FoEA today, sign up to our monthly newsletters, or donate!



Healthcare workers stage die-in at AGL office to protest pollution

FEB 02, 2022

[https://www.foe.org.au/climate\\_die\\_in\\_of\\_health\\_care\\_workers](https://www.foe.org.au/climate_die_in_of_health_care_workers)

In January, 2022, Gippsland health professionals staged a theatrical health protest outside AGL's head office in Melbourne, calling for the energy giant to reduce its harmful coal pollution.

The group, including doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers set up a mock medical ward to demonstrate the health impacts of air pollution and climate change. They also delivered an open letter signed by 25 Australian health organisations calling for AGL to commit to replace coal with renewable "Loy Yang A's current closure date of 2048 is unrealistic and AGL need to come clean with the community about a realistic and appropriate plan to replace it with renewable energy and ensure a transition that includes skilled local jobs."

AGL has had dozens of breaches for ash spills, exceeding air pollution limits and water contamination.



Climate change threatens Tasmanian forests

28 March 2022

[https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/climate\\_change\\_threatens\\_tas\\_forests](https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/climate_change_threatens_tas_forests)

The summer of 2021/22 has been mild in terms of a fire season in the east of the country. However, there have been a number of fires in lutruwita/ Tasmania that have threatened World Heritage Areas (including an incredibly significant Huon pine forest). The west of the state has been experiencing a prolonged and extreme drought.

As reported in The Conversation, "this drought fits an observed drying trend across the state, which will worsen due to climate change. This is very bad news for the ancient wilderness in the state's World Heritage Area, where the lineage of some tree species stretch back 150 million years to the supercontinent Gondwana".

The authors point to the fact that we will need to change some aspects of how we manage the wild landscapes of the great World Heritage landscapes of the south west, and centre of the state.

## Could the Ukraine conflict cause one of the world's worst nuclear disasters?

MAR 02, 2022

[https://www.foe.org.au/nuclear\\_ukraine\\_conflict](https://www.foe.org.au/nuclear_ukraine_conflict)

In March the Russian military took control of the Chernobyl nuclear site in Ukraine. While there have been near-misses with military attacks threatening radioactive waste sites, the greatest nuclear hazards lie ahead.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said on March 2:

“The situation in Ukraine is unprecedented and I continue to be gravely concerned. It is the first time a military conflict is happening amidst the facilities of a large, established nuclear power program”.

A worst-case scenario would involve a deliberate or accidental military strike hitting a reactor. Multiple Chernobyl - or Fukushima-scale disasters could unfold concurrently.

Even before the Russian invasion, Ukraine's reactor fleet was ageing, its nuclear industry was corrupt, regulation was inadequate, and nuclear security measures left much room for improvement.

In a report by Greenpeace, International nuclear specialists notes that as of 2017, Zaporizhzhia had 2,204 tons of spent fuel in storage at the site.

The spent fuel pools contain far more radioactivity than the dry store.



The Guardian reported in 2015 that the dry store at Zaporizhzhia is sub-standard, with more than 3,000 spent nuclear fuel rods in metal casks within concrete containers in an open-air yard close to a perimeter fence.

*First published in RenewEconomy*

## Act on Climate update: Communities call for climate action as election nears

6 April 2022

[https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/act\\_on\\_climate\\_update\\_community\\_call\\_for\\_action](https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/act_on_climate_update_community_call_for_action)

Community action and the biggest climate strike in years has put climate justice on the agenda as the 2022 Federal election nears.

The devastation caused by climate-fuelled floods in northern New South Wales reminds us of the consequences if governments and corporations refuse to deliver deep emissions cuts this decade.

Communities on the frontline of climate impacts have shown incredible courage and resilience in response to the latest disasters. We keep them front-of-mind as we fight for urgent action on climate here in Victoria.

Two of our many recent efforts:

**'RACE TO ZERO EMISSIONS' SHOWS THE COALITION IS AT THE BACK OF THE PACK ON CLIMATE:**

Click here to watch the video - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yEZ2p\\_olx8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yEZ2p_olx8)

Friends the Earth are calling on our supporters to email government MPs and Senators to remind them that tackling the climate crisis is a top priority (it takes less than two minutes).

Call for the Federal government to adopt a science-based 2030 target. [https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/email\\_your\\_mp](https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/email_your_mp)

**FRIENDS OF THE EARTH KICK OFF 2022 WITH JOINT INFO NIGHT:**

[www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au)

Friends of the Earth members kicked off another big year of grassroots campaigning with our first face-to-face gathering in years. FoE's community-driven campaigns have had a tremendous impact over the last decade.

Together, we've helped turn Victoria from a climate laggard that had essentially banned wind farms and was open to fracking and coal exports, to a climate champion with a permanent

ban on unconventional gas and strong climate and renewable energy policies. But we have work to do... This year we'll be campaigning for a comprehensive plan for Victoria to smash its target of halving the state's emissions by 2030. Let's get organised and build community power so our demands cannot be ignored.

ATTEND Act on Climate meetings to get involved in the push. <https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/climateevents>





## Statement on Treatment of Climate Protestors by Law Enforcement

NOV 30, 2021

[https://www.foe.org.au/statement\\_on\\_treatment\\_of\\_climate\\_protestors\\_by\\_law\\_enforcement](https://www.foe.org.au/statement_on_treatment_of_climate_protestors_by_law_enforcement)

On November 22, 2021, an activist was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment, 6 months no parole, for taking nonviolent direct action as part of the Blockade Australia mobilisation. A local community environment centre, unconnected to the protest, was raided by police.

FoE express concern about the harsh sentencing in this case, and the broader treatment of protestors by Australian law enforcement. Throughout history,

powerful protest has been crucial to creating change and progressing justice and equality. Protecting the right to protest is critical to building a strong democracy.

(By) taking non-violent direct action (we help to) protect communities from the harm caused by Australia's refusal to act on the climate crisis.

While protesters have been facing harsher treatment, the Government is refusing to take action to tackle the climate crisis.

The right to peaceful protest in the face of the worsening impacts of the climate crisis must be protected.

## Seismic sucks! OCEAN speaks out in Apollo Bay

5 March 2022

[https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/seismic\\_sucks](https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/seismic_sucks)

The Otway Climate Emergency Action Network (OCEAN) took to the streets of Apollo Bay to raise awareness about the impacts of seismic testing in the Otway Basin.

Over the past year we have seen state and federal governments earmark vast expanses of Gunditjmarra Sea Country for a massive expansion of gas mining as part of a national economic recovery.

OCEAN protectors walked along Apollo Bay Foreshore, joined by members of Friends of the Earth, and the First Nations-led Southern Ocean Protection Embassy Collective to call for a stop to seismic blasting in the Otway Basin which spans the coastal waters along of south

Every June, Koontapool (Southern Right Whales) return to their birthing grounds along the coastlines of South West Victoria. They use the southern coast, waters and songlines to navigate their journeys to and through Gunditjmarra Sea Country to feed and birth. These

families of Baleen cetaceans are Gunditjmarra Ancestors.

Proud Gunditjmarra Woman, Yaraan Bundle spoke after the march about bringing awareness to sea country and protection of the Southern Right Whale (Koontapool) and their song line country.



## New report debunks claims that nuclear power is cheap

DEC 09, 2021

[https://www.foe.org.au/nuclear\\_powers\\_economic\\_crisis](https://www.foe.org.au/nuclear_powers_economic_crisis)

Friends of the Earth Australia comprehensively debunks claims that nuclear power is cheap or affordable in the Australian context.

The report, 'Nuclear Power's Economic Crisis and its Implications for Australia', details catastrophic cost overruns with nuclear power construction projects over the past decade.

Dr. Jim Green, National nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth Australia, said: "Nuclear lobbyists base their claims about 'cheap' nuclear power on implausible cost estimates for reactor types that have not even been built."

"Research by CSIRO and the Australian Energy Market Operator demonstrates that nuclear power is far more expensive than renewables coupled with storage". Dr. Green said.

"The persistence of nuclear support can be attributed to three factors: ignorance, commercial interests, and the 'culture wars'. Those are the likely explanations for the Minerals Council of Australia's ongoing disinformation campaign regarding nuclear power".



## Community solidarity after the floods

MAR 03, 2022

[https://www.foe.org.au/community\\_solidarity\\_after\\_the\\_floods](https://www.foe.org.au/community_solidarity_after_the_floods)

The news from southeast Queensland and northern NSW is devastating. Among the harrowing stories of loss and destruction, there are many of mutual aid, solidarity, empathy and bravery.

It is the self initiative and self organising of affected communities that does some of the best work at emergency relief and long term recovery.

As the clean up continues, here are some local initiatives you may want to support.

### FIRST NATIONS SPECIFIC

- Bundjalung Community Flood Relief

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/bundjalung-community-flood-relief>

- Support Aboriginal Families Of Lismore

<https://chuffed.org/project/support-aboriginal-families-of-lismore>



### OTHER

- Lismore City Council, Flood Appeal Account

BSB: 062565 Account: 10864633

- Red Cross Flood Appeal

<https://www.redcross.org.au/floodsappeal/%C2%A0>

- Givit

<https://www.givit.org.au/%C2%A0>

### OTHER GENERAL SUPPORT

For large donations (from businesses, organisation & institutions) please email [donationslismore@gmail.com](mailto:donationslismore@gmail.com).

### ANIMALS AND WILDLIFE

<https://koala-rescue-qld-inc.giveeasy.org/help-us-in-the-floods>



## Victorian government breaks old growth forest promise

Friday, Feb 25 2022

[https://www.geco.org.au/latest\\_news](https://www.geco.org.au/latest_news)

Logging started this week in a patch of untouched forests in Swifts Creek on Gunnai Kurnai Country, despite the Andrews government promising to protect all old growth forests in November 2019. Greater Gliders and Yellow-bellied Gliders have also been found in the area, the forests are an island in a sea of fire-impacted forests, and a critical refuge for threatened species.

A number of old growth forest areas have been logged since the governments supposed old growth logging ban.

Logging has continued in Victoria despite bushfires destroying almost 6 million hectares of forest and an estimated 3 billion animals nationally, including threatened species.

The Victorian government's own preliminary response to the bushfires lists the threatened Greater Glider, Smoky Mouse, Sooty and Powerful Owls among the "fauna species of most immediate concern". And yet clear-fell logging continues in their habitat.

WOTCH has been granted injunctions to protect 40 forest areas while the case is heard. The trial went to the Supreme Court of Victoria in March 2022.

Stay tuned for updates.

<https://www.wotch.org.au/>

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) is a federation of autonomous organisations from all over the world. Our members, in over 70 countries, campaign on the most urgent environmental and social issues, while working towards sustainable societies. FoEI currently has five international programs: Climate Justice and Energy; Economic Justice, Resisting Neoliberalism; Food Sovereignty; Forests and Biodiversity; and Resisting Mining, Oil and Gas.

## Friends of the Earth International Online

**Web:** [www.foei.org](http://www.foei.org)

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[www.twitter.com/FoEint](https://www.twitter.com/FoEint)  
[www.youtube.com/user/friendsoftheearthint](https://www.youtube.com/user/friendsoftheearthint)  
[www.flickr.com/photos/foei](https://www.flickr.com/photos/foei)

**Action alerts:** [www.foei.org/take-action](http://www.foei.org/take-action)

**FoE International's web radio station (in five languages):** <https://rnr.fm/>

# INTERNATIONAL

## Friends of the Earth International statement on Ukraine

16 Mar, 2022

<https://www.foei.org/friends-of-the-earth-international-statement-on-ukraine/>

Friends of the Earth International strongly condemns the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces. Our member groups around the world are horrified to witness the growing impact on civilians and the environment.

Friends of the Earth International calls for demilitarisation and disarmament on both sides of this conflict, as well as globally.

Wars and conflicts are fuelled worldwide by the dependence on fossil fuels and other non-renewable resources and are often caused by competition for them. We must urgently get out of this dependence and ensure a just

Friends of the Earth International's vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies living in harmony with nature. Our solidarity goes out to all those who suffer from and oppose this unjust war. We demand an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian invasion forces.

It is important to remember that this attack did not come from the Russian people, but from Russian leaders. We call for peaceful and respectful communications and condemn hate speech that targets entire nations.

## Alarm that IPCC WGIII report on climate mitigation accepts overshoot of 1.5°C and relies on unproven technofixes that won't curb runaway climate change

04 Apr, 2022

<https://www.foei.org/ipcc-wgiii-report-on-climate-mitigation/>

The IPCC's findings have become a political battleground. Climate justice campaigners fear that climate scientists' core message - that we must make an urgent just transition away from fossil fuels to limit the risk of runaway warming - is being undermined by the legitimisation of a 1.5 degree overshoot in modelled scenarios, and pathways that include unproven and speculative technologies to supposedly cool the planet later down the line.



# ASIA PACIFIC



## Internationalist Solidarity with Wadas

March 14, 2022

<https://foeasiapacific.org/2022/03/14/internationalist-solidarity-with-wadas/>

In February 2022, 250 police officers and military personnel infiltrated the village of Wadas, in the southern part of Central Java, Indonesia, armed with shields, weapons and police dogs. They claimed they were there to oversee the operations of Purworejo Land Agency, a company conducting land measurement for a mining project.

However, their presence soon turned violent, with police attacking, intimidating and arbitrarily arresting local residents, both within their houses and at local mosques. At least 63 people, including 13 children, were arrested. This attack is the latest in a series of repressive actions against the Wadas community, who, for the last four years, have been protesting against a proposed andesite mine in their village, which would support the construction of the Bener dam nearby.

The planned mining site is located on productive agricultural land: hills which are the main source of livelihood for the Wadas community. The hills also assist in preventing the threat of landslides and serve as a water catchment area for 23 water springs in their village.

These attacks are part of a worldwide pattern of criminalisation and repression of those who seek to defend their territories, environment and peoples' rights.



## KTNC Watch condemns Korean NCP for failing indigenous peoples who lost their forests to palm oil plantations

February 4, 2022

<https://foeasiapacific.org/2022/02/04/ktnc-watch-condemns-korean-ncp-for-failing-indigenous-peoples-who-lost-their-forests-to-palm-oil-plantations/>

In January, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy announced their final statement regarding the environmental and human rights violations on POSCO International's palm oil plantation in Indonesia.

The complainants, (Korea Transnational Corporations Watch (KTNC Watch) and Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, SKP-KAMe, WALHI Papua, Indonesia NGOs,) expressed regret that the case was closed without providing effective remedies to the victims of environmental and human rights violations.



## Capacity development training for Nepalese farmers

April 1, 2022

<https://foeasiapacific.org/2022/04/01/capacity-development-training-for-nepalese-farmers/>

Agriculture is the main source of income for Dang, Kapilvastu and Bardia farmers. However, farmers have been producing less due to disease, irrigation and manure, causing a local food crisis. This is attributed to a reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides to increase production, which have resulted in adverse health impacts. This agricultural crisis has also been exacerbated by increasing climatic stressors.

The nearby Tharu community has been implementing different traditional farming techniques, which have increased their agricultural production and provided an opportunity to build capacity for the next generation of farmers, incorporating traditional methods of farming practices.

It is hoped that the skills and knowledge shared between farming communities during workshops will strengthen their collective capacity and sustain their livelihoods long into the future.

Under OECD Guidelines the non-judicial grievance mechanism helps to provide remedies through mediation to parties whose rights have been violated. However, even after going through the complaint process for more than two years, the indigenous peoples affected by the development and operation of POSCO International's palm oil plantation were unable to access the remedies.

Throughout the mediation process, the Korea National Contact Point (NCP) was not ready to listen to the Indonesian complainants or provide interpretation services during mediation. The first evaluation and the final statement were published only in Korean, making it impossible for local Indonesian complainants to fully understand the progress.

## South Cotabato local council upholds ban on open-pit mining

March 25, 2022

<https://foeasiapacific.org/2022/03/25/south-cotabato-local-council-upholds-ban-on-open-pit-mining/>

The Provincial Development Council of South Cotabato has issued a resolution upholding the ban on open-pit mining in the province. The ban stands in the way of the Tampakan Gold-Copper Project (TGCP), one of the largest open-pit projects in Asia that residents fear will destroy the environment.

The PDC said "the environmental and social impacts of the open-pit mining method outweigh economic gains."

TGCP, which covers an area the size of the city of Manila, straddles four provinces and threatens watershed systems that supply water to South Cotabato and contiguous areas.

It is an area of high ecological value including UNESCO World Heritage Sites, high groundwater vulnerability and high seismic risk.



# The Lismore Floods: A Reflection

Tessa Campisi

I sit in the bones of what used to be my home on the Lismore flood plain.

It smells of disinfectant and flood slick; strangely sweet like fermenting fruit, with overtones of decay and petroleum. We've scrubbed the walls five times over, yet still the smell creeps in through the cracks in the floorboards.

I suspend time for a moment and wander through my memories.

I see the painting of the scaly-breasted lorikeet on the wall; the jars of wild foraged mulberry jam; the fairy lights and potted ferns and cookbooks falling over one another on the shelves. So very recently I had nestled into the corner of the red corduroy couch and laughed with my housemates as we played cards and made music and brewed endless pots of tea. The anxious onslaught of worry about deforestation, nuclear armament and coal mining would slow to a trickle, and for brief moments it could feel as though everything was right in the world.

And here is the grief, heavy and dark as storm clouds, welling up from the deep. I find it in the juxtaposition of the richness of what this home had once been and the echoing emptiness of the walls which tremble as the dump trucks trundle down the street. It is a grief laced with fear, with the knowledge that the true damage caused by this flood is just beginning to emerge.

-----

We didn't realise it would be this bad. The flood of 1974 - the highest on record, had only come a metre into the house. We thought the water might lap at the back steps, perhaps the floorboards. We danced around our beautiful home singing *'It's Raining Men'* as we put our precious things up on tables and benches. We thought we were being overly precautionous.

That afternoon we kayaked across the cricket pitch over the road and laughed as the dogs tried to fetch sticks that floated by. I imagined the river as an inky creature slinking across the landscape, unstoppable and formidable as the migration of wildebeest across the Serengeti. I sank into the sounds of frog calls and rainfall that hushed the rush of water moving beneath and all around us. I felt safe, cradled by the security of what we thought we had prepared for, and marvelled at the sheer force of the Earth System.

But safety is a feeling, not a fact.

The rain grew fiercer as we anxiously waited for the newest update from the Bureau of Meteorology. Spiders and frogs climbed up

the walls as the river climbed the back steps one by one. Slowly, slowly and then all at once, awe collapsed into terror.

Most days my climate anxiety is like a dark cloud - omnipresent yet silent, as it casts shadows across my mind. The complexity of the Earth System makes it hard to look Climate Change straight in the eyes. We are offered a glimpse through the lens of science, our intricate instruments of observation mapping shifts in rainfall patterns, sea surface temperature and atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels. The picture painted by this data is alarming yet abstract, relying on understanding and trust of the scientific method which the public often does not fully comprehend. It becomes a concept based on facts that dull and blur into the background noise of life.

As we huddled in the tinny at 5am, ducking under powerlines and manoeuvring through the fast-flowing waters 2.5 meters higher than any flood in Lismore's colonial history, climate change shifted from the abstract to the immediate in a heartbeat.

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The floodwater subsides surprisingly quickly, so that the entire town is still in shock as clean-up begins. It is extraordinary to experience the myriad of social networks which criss-cross the region, pulling together like the laces in my steel cap boots - fluid and reflexive to the needs of one another. Doves of volunteers flow into the town brandishing generators and rubber gloves and disinfectant and egg sandwiches, and so we scrub and shovel and mop and haul. We call ourselves the mudlarks, rebuilding our lives out of the thick alluvial sediment that has nestled into every crevice.

I feel like I am in a dreamscape, where familiar places exist only through a morbid, mud-caked lens. Washing machines and wooden pallets are suspended from trees at the dog park, and swollen mattresses are piled up along the main street. On the floodplain where the water hung around for longer, a thick layer of festering sludge has rendered most things unsalvageable. It feels entirely too intimate to walk past the knitted teddy bears and lacey underpants and shattered photo frames from which peer somebody else's treasured memories.

In this lavish stage of late capitalism, it makes more sense to throw belongings away and claim insurance than try to repair them. It's not like anybody has the time, anyway - we're all too busy applying for relief payments or ripping up carpet or just trying to get some sleep.

*It is a grief laced with fear, with the knowledge that the true damage caused by this flood is just beginning to emerge.*

The refrigerators and the microwaves and the clothes dryers huddle together on street corners, with all the metals mined and petrochemicals refined in their manufacture now destined for landfill. I imagine Harvey Norman - the King of Whitegoods - looking down on Lismore from the Alstonville plateau, laughing to himself with the percussion of the cash register.

One sunny afternoon we discover a mish-mash of mountain bikes that have been chucked into a pile on the curb. They have disc brakes and good tread on the tyres but are just little mangled. We spend the rest of the day tinkering with chains and tightening spokes, and giggle as we ride our schmick new bikes up and down the street as if it were Christmas.

As the days turn to weeks, Lismore pulses steadily to a syncopated beat.

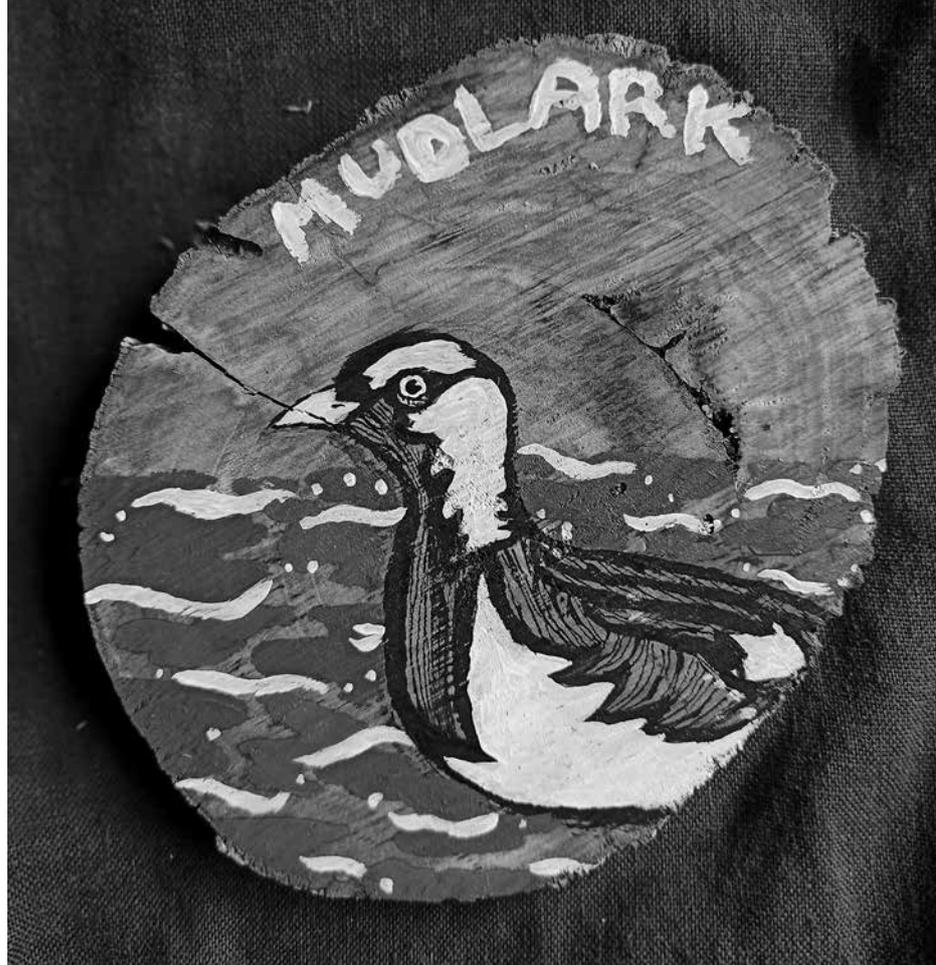
There is the whirr of ADF chinooks, the slam of bobcats, and the crash of couches being tossed from second storey windows. It is quickstep, all hands on deck, let's get this mud out before it dries into a putrid crust and the mould begins to sprout from the walls. Sleep is elusive and we rise at dawn with a crook back from the shoddy mattress of the fold-out sofa.

The crisis is now.

And then there is something more subtle, a soft hum in a minor key that shifts like the slow-moving waters of the riverbed. It is the despair of the housing crisis which has gripped the Northern Rivers as investors cash splash and stash away title deeds, pushing rental prices up and up. It is the steep rise in insurance premiums in the flood zone, the last suburbs with any affordable housing in Lismore where those with low incomes and little social mobility reside. It is the severe shortage of disability support workers, or Auslan interpreters, or psychologists. It is the crushing pressure on healthcare workers who have worked tirelessly through the pandemic and are now treating wounds that have become septic from the fetid floodwaters.

The crisis was here all along.

Quick quick, slow; a tango, Lismore dances between cascading disasters. The 24/7 news cycle fixates on the visually harrowing floodwaters, yet the Lismore community is grappling with the cracks in its very edifice. When the Prime Minister comes to town he plays hide and seek and announces a disaster relief package from behind a line of police, unabashedly funnelling



Flood Self-Portrait:  
Painted using driftwood  
and paints salvaged  
from the flood debris.

extra funding to his party's own electorates.

Meanwhile, behind the piles of debris that line the streets, a couple sits on the stumps of what was once their home, contemplating the asbestos in the walls and their \$100,000 mortgage. People were drowning here before the east-coast low was even a blip on the radar.

The reality of the disaster is terrible to behold, yet in some ways I have never seen with greater clarity in my life. I watch as emotions pass through me in waves - loss, anger, gratitude, despair, resolve. I notice the threads which tie me to the community, and the community to the river, and the river to the Earth System, and the Earth System to our actions. As a child of the Anthropocene, this time of synthetic abundance, vast inequality, and climate chaos, I stand here at the edge of the Great Unprecedented and wave goodbye to the fantasy of stability. The future is unstoppable, unknowable, but it's the only one we've got. And so every day I pull tight the laces of my steel cap boots, wave good morning to the river and the mudlarks, and go down into town to help pick up the pieces.

*Tessa Campisi is a geography nerd with an interest in the interplay of human society and the environment. In her spare time she carves wooden spoons and campaigns for forest protection*

## More information

To Support the grassroots community disaster response, please send monetary donations to:

Koori Mail: Bundjalung Flood Relief Fund  
(<https://www.gofundme.com/f/bundjalung-community-flood-relief>)

Resilient Lismore:

<https://www.floodhelpnr.com.au/donations>

# #ThisIsClimateChange

Svea Pitman

I sent a text to Jack, my friend's son in Ocean Shores at 1.08am, to see if they were flooding - it often floods there. "No", he said. They were fine, so were we, the water wasn't even over the road yet at our home. We said goodnight and I went to bed.

Around 4.30am I assimilated a mermaid into my dreams as my dog Saki jumped off the bed and made a splash. She jumped back on the bed and on me, wet! I sat bolt upright in the dark, my legs went knee deep into cold water. I rushed to the hall in disbelief, turned on the lights and ran to my son Ezra's room.

"Martina!" I called my girlfriend, "We're flooding again". We rushed from room to room half dressed as the water rushed at our legs. In ten minutes it had risen 20cm to the hall and was swamping at the artworks that were stacked there. I sobbed. Not again.

Five years ago, I had finally broken the cycle of renting. I bought this home, a humble three bedroom brick house in Mullumbimby. A few months later, in 2017 our home flooded for the first time since it was built.

This time we had a flood plan. Ezra, Martina and I worked for hours in the pouring rain heading to the local SES to pack the sandbags and repeat.

The rains were torrential and it was nearly 6am. Light was breaking and we moved the contents of the house from room to room and lifted everything we could that wasn't floating around the house. I sent Ezra, my 17 year old son, to see if our elderly neighbors were alright.

The water was chest high in the front yard, he tried to use the kayak to move through the water but the current was strong and he used the trees and fence to hall himself along. The neighbors were okay and grateful he'd come to check.

The water kept rising for a few more hours with the tide, bubbling black liquid spurted from the sinks. Not sure what else to do, I cooked us breakfast, marking the last meal we'll ever eat in our home.

Ankle deep in flood water, I made eggs and fried tomatoes on toast and for the first time since having Covid in December last year (I think because of the adrenaline) I could smell and taste the food!

Things didn't get much worse over the next couple of hours so we had a gin on the deck (lake) seat, watching people in canoes and small blow up boats paddle down the road. The water started to subside and as we opened the doors like a plug, the water ran out.

Within fifteen minutes the rains were back in full force and the water was once again rising in the house. We shut the door and watched in total shock as once again the water rose, metres within minutes, raging loudly the torrent rushed through our garden. As we wondered how high the water could go, a neighbour appeared half wading, half swimming to tell us to get out if we could.



He told us when the water got to his fridge-height he had gotten out through his front door but that the lady next door wasn't so quick and smashed her way through the roof cavity to fresh air.

Okay, my brain was trying to compute. It could still get worse.

Zara, my 20-year-old daughter, had arrived by bike with her boyfriend. They were reveling in the road-lake and made us all smile with their antics. We decide Ezra should go with them, he got a bike and they waded with the bikes on their shoulders to Tallwood where Anicca lives on higher ground.

Martina and I could not leave, there was no road and we had the dogs. We drank more gin as she lit candles in glass jars and we used the remaining dry bedding to make a damp bed for the night on the wet soggy mattresses, one for us and one for the dogs.

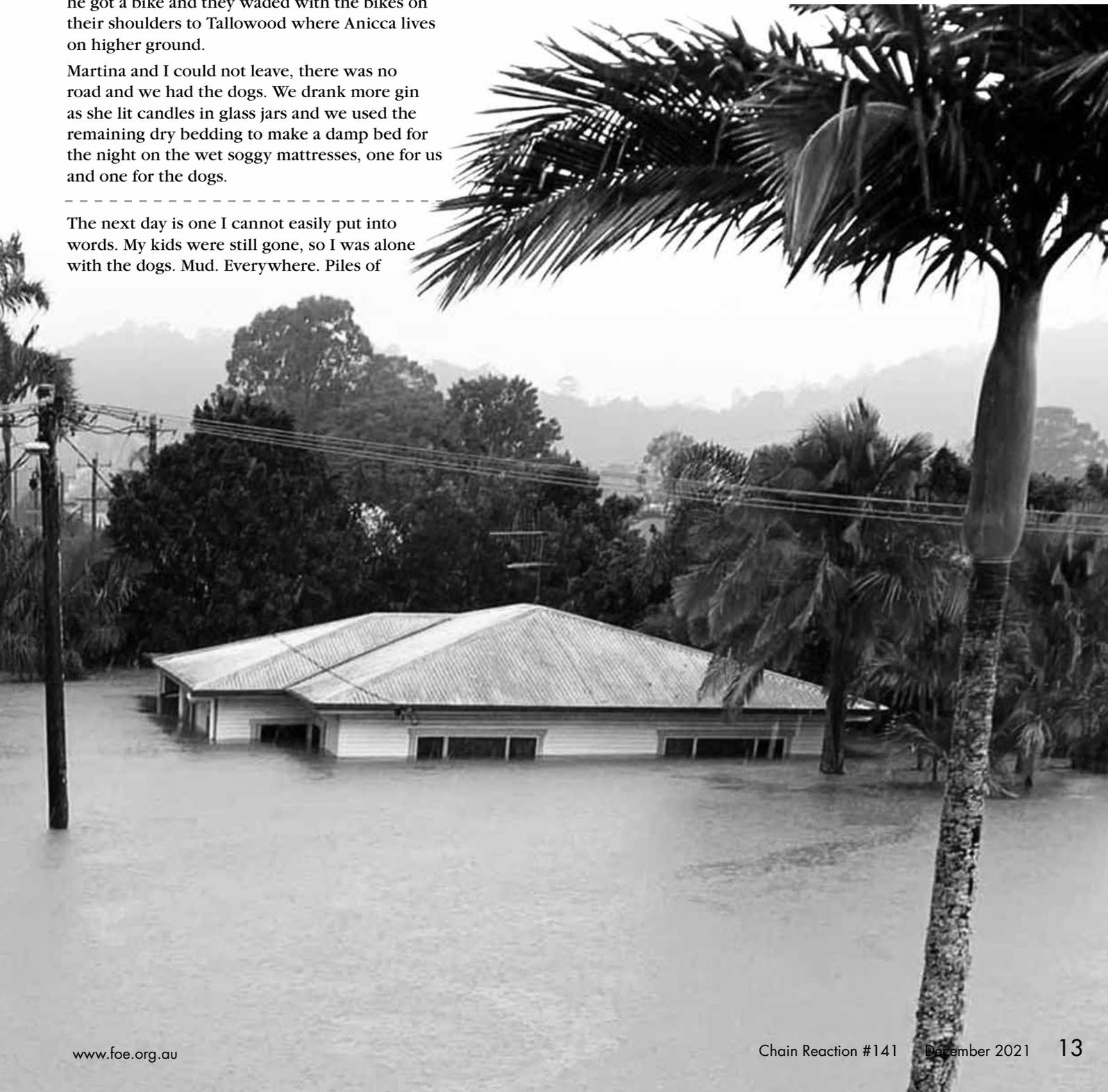
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The next day is one I cannot easily put into words. My kids were still gone, so I was alone with the dogs. Mud. Everywhere. Piles of

our life, upon wet soggy piles of our life. Everything was everywhere. Like the house had been put through a washing machine, room by room. I didn't know what to do. There was no power. There were no phones, no internet, I had no one else there and I was in shock.

After an hour or two I started to put things on the deck. One by one I slowly started to move our belongings outside; the rugs were heavy. My beautiful rugs, books, bedding... small bits of furniture that had floated around the house.

By the afternoon, I had worked alone for a number of hours when a couple arrived, "are you okay?"



“Um, no,” I said. I need to find my kids. The phones are out. My car was flooded and I have a medical condition that means I can’t walk far. They drove me to Tallowood. We found Ezra and went home.

An hour later Fran arrived. Another stranger, who was just taking it on herself to drive house to each house and see if anyone needed help. She could see that we had a huge task ahead of us to clear out all our belongings and assured me she would be back tomorrow with help.

She took me to the community center and there were people everywhere just arriving and offering to help. I asked for a shower. They didn’t have showers, but a wonderful woman Sylvia, helped me call my mum online.

Sylvia got to action and started ringing around to see if there was somewhere for us to stay.

Another stranger approached “Would you like to have a shower at my place? I live just out of town and we have a phone that is working.”

Gen took me to her home, it had been two long wet days and I washed the floods off me. I was overwhelmed that she had swept me up and taken me to her sanctuary. She offered me a glass of wine and I choked back tears.

Her husband Peter went to get my son and the dogs and we used their phone to organize emergency accommodation. I am so grateful for their support and their kindness. Gen took me out of the trauma zone and gave me some normality. I was immediately feeling better. Fantastic, she said, let’s help someone else! And we had a laugh as she prepared to go back and find the next family to bathe and clean the flood waters off.

We found emergency accommodation in Byron for three days.

I arrived back home on Wednesday morning and after an hour on my own again, walking in circles, a 4WD full pulled up and another person I’d never met, Pete, called out, “do you need a hand?”

Within hours the carpets were gone, most of the furniture and Pete managed the job, directing people he had never met, to move our coats, the artwork from the walls and strip one room to dry it then move the things we’d saved there. People came all day. The mud army arrived, a group of men with shovels, and they literally shoveled the mud from each room.

Then Tam arrived, and I realized my old friend who lived around the corner was the first friend I’d seen since the floods. The incredible, overwhelming amount of work that was being done to remove the aftermath of the floods; our life, our home, to the street, had all been done by people I had never met before.

Day four and we were at it again. A group of fifteen young women came door knocking house by house on our street where everyone had flooded to mop each room. The mud was going, bit by bit, from the hands of more strangers helping me.

All aspects of need were being addressed by the community, as the gravity of the disaster was



slowly being understood. Massive landslides, houses washed away, people who died, dozens of roads destroyed like cake, with asphalt icing, greedily grabbed by a cheeky child and torn to pieces.

Stories were shared of people using their own boats to rescue their neighbors. ‘Phil’ who saved over 100 people, 2 brothers in Coraki who did the same.

It is yet another astonishing factor of this catastrophic disaster that ‘000’ was not available. Phones and any contact was lost for dozens of families no help could be called. There are no systems in place, to respond, almost at all, to this kind of cataclysmic event.

In this time of shock, trauma and grief it was the community that came through, in all the ways a community can and will continue to in the face of Climate Change.

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Tragically and un-believably, this week we all flooded again.

Entire lives were destroyed... again. Woodburn is being evacuated and Coraki is underwater... again. Byron Bay flooded through the main streets, in what they described as an entirely unpredicted extreme weather event, “a rainbomb”.

The landscape had changed forever. This is climate change.

We need to think outside the box, challenge the paradigm, a levee will not tame Climate Change. Relocating, building back higher, flood-resistant homes, buy-back schemes; there are options and the community needs to have these discussions when we are not in recovery mode.

Above else, we know we need action on Climate Change to stem this tide of natural disasters which will inevitably affect us all. None of us will be immune to becoming a Climate Refugee and potentially losing your home.

We must seize this moment to catalyze momentum for immediate action to cease funding fossil fuels, to stop land clearing and native forest logging and invest in renewable energy and storage solutions, restore our waterways and regenerate our agricultural lands.

This is Climate Change.

Street after street for weeks, the people of Mullumbimby moved their lives and homes to the curbside, and it looked like a bomb had gone off, house by house.

Then the Army arrived. A little late, but they are now here. Dozens of giant Army machines. Hundreds of soldiers. And they have got to work with the community fixing roads and access to stranded homes and families cut off by roads and river crossings that have vanished.

Imagine tens of thousands of Australians working for the benefit of the environment and ready to respond to Climate disasters? To revegetate our waterways, stop weeds and invasive species and work to save endangered species.

I am sure many will come, but whether you agree or not, let’s take action. We can all use our voice, our vote and our wallets to make a difference. We have run out of time.

**This is Climate Change.**

# COVID was just a practice run

Zianna Fuad

All I could think about during Covid was “this is just a practice run”- that it was just a warm-up, a taste of the future, and although I have trust in spontaneous and unpredictable social transformation, the truth is, there is no such thing as ‘normal’ anymore.

Here we lived through the Black Summer Bushfires... two evacuations and half the land burnt, leaving a scar in the valley.

This time it's the worst flooding we've ever seen in the North. The river rose beyond what I could ever imagine, roads were cut off to our home in four different directions and we scrambled to find missing friends without internet or power.

My youthful years are now marked with chapters delineated by disasters.

Bushfires, Pandemics, Floods.

When they're not on our doorstep I'm plagued with thoughts of climate dystopias that are both proven and here, wreaking havoc on (already overexploited) communities.

Severe climate disruption has arrived. In 2021 we saw Cyclone Tauktae in India with 185km winds. There were extreme raging wildfires in Cyprus, Turkey, Russia, California, Canada, landslides in Japan. Sandstorms in Beijing and Algeria, and a rare tornado across the Czech Republic. Heatwaves across most of the Northern Equator have killed hundreds of people. There has been extreme flooding in Germany, Belgium, Australia, France, Indonesia and the Maas hit a record height in the Netherlands. More than one million people have been displaced by floods in China alone.

And while the overall warming of the planet is pretty much in-line with climate

model predictions from decades ago, the rise in extreme weather events is exceeding predictions. Even the experts are shocked - and that sends shivers up my spine.

A lot of people I know who are part of the counterculture take pride in not reading the news or science, but it's time to start. Privilege may bolster you from the truth but there will come a time when it will flood right in, lapping at your metaphorical doors and quite possibly your real ones.

We have reached an hour when action at an unprecedented scale is required.

Sustained disruption against violence, profit and greed is the fastest way we'll see the change we need. This impending chaos has been known about for over four decades. We are on the brink of multiple collapses. We have waited on government after government for change.

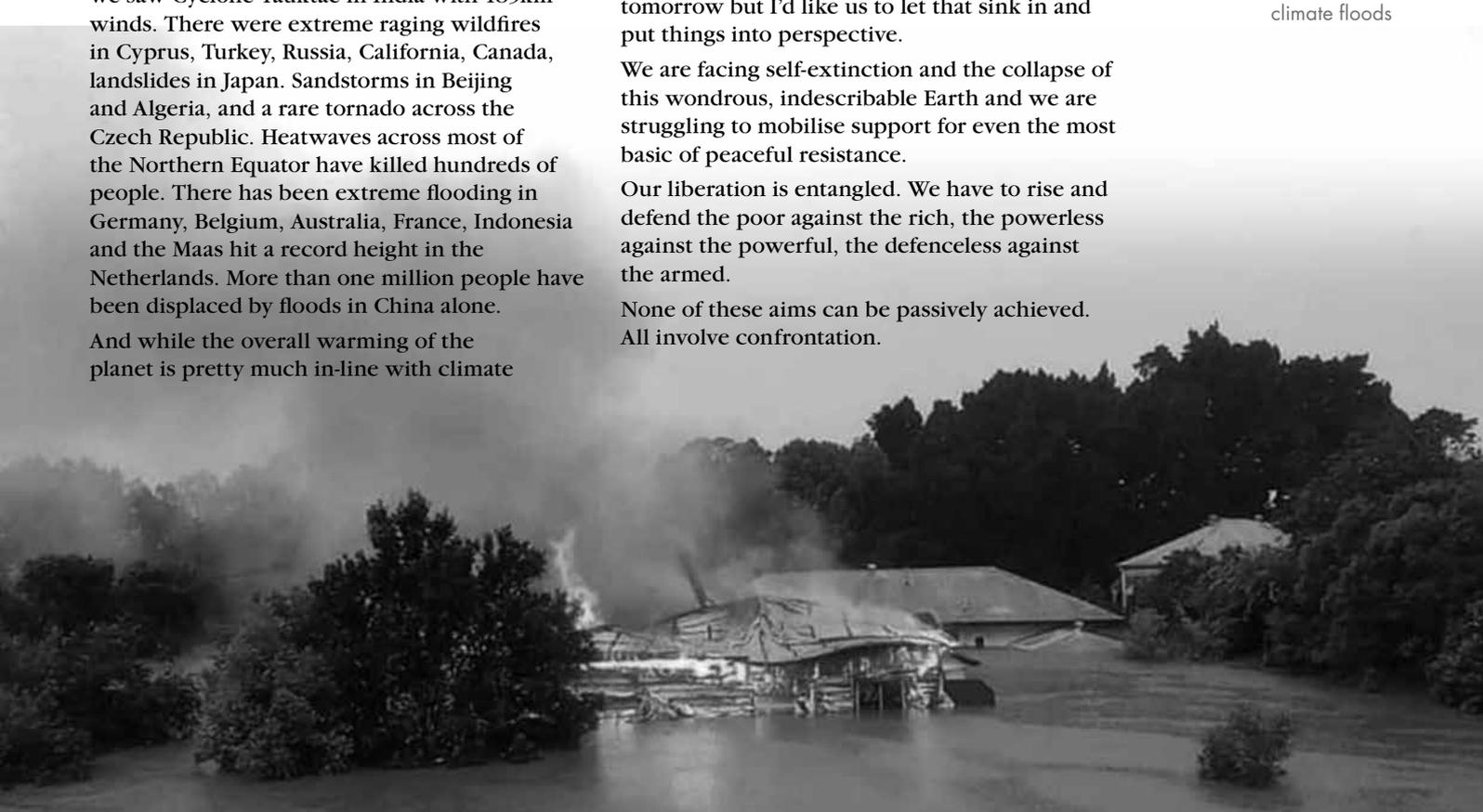
The suffragettes did more radical things for the vote. They lit mailboxes on fire and threw ground pepper on the PM - and I'm not necessarily saying that's what we should do tomorrow but I'd like us to let that sink in and put things into perspective.

We are facing self-extinction and the collapse of this wondrous, indescribable Earth and we are struggling to mobilise support for even the most basic of peaceful resistance.

Our liberation is entangled. We have to rise and defend the poor against the rich, the powerless against the powerful, the defenceless against the armed.

None of these aims can be passively achieved. All involve confrontation.

A house bursts into flames in the Lismore climate floods



# 'I simply haven't got it in me to do it again': imagining a new heart for flood-stricken Lismore

Barbara Rugendyke and Jean S. Renouf

The flood crisis in northern New South Wales has left lives shattered. Those worst affected are dazed and struggling to comprehend the loss of life, homes, livelihoods and possessions.

We are both residents of the hard-hit Lismore region, as well as researchers with skills in geography, community development and resilience. One of us, Jean Renouf, also works for Fire and Rescue NSW. We are both helping people devastated by the recent floods and its aftermath.

We've seen the heartbreak in Lismore first-hand. Shock and pain is evident in people's eyes. The reality has hit that there's no longer a coffee shop in the town centre, no pub, restaurant, hairdresser, clothing store, pharmacy or newsagent. Horror at the annihilation of the town they love is palpable.

There is also a strange feeling of *déjà vu*. The town struggled back to life after the flood of 2017. Now, people talk of leaving Lismore. As one business owner said:

*I survived ten years here. I picked myself up and started again after the last flood. I simply haven't got it in me to do it again.*

So what will it take to rebuild Lismore? And how might the new town be more resilient?

## A flood-weary town

Lismore sits on a vast flood plain beside the Wilsons River.

In the town's early days, the river provided water and a transport route. Its fertile flood plains were ideal for food production and the river provided a major trade route for Lismore's timber and farming industries.

Over the years, improvements in road transport and other services mean Lismore's riverside CBD location has become less necessary.

Lismore is a town accustomed to floods, but the most recent flood was at least two metres higher than those previously recorded. Aboriginal elders, however, report "big floods" in the past topped Lismore's cathedral hill, as this one did.

Climate change is expected to result in more frequent and intense rainfall, increasing the flood risk further.

## A techno-fix won't work

Historically, engineered solutions have been introduced to reduce Lismore's flood risk.

A one-in-ten year flood levee was built in 2005 to protect the CBD. However in 2017, water



spilled over the levee and caused one of the most damaging floods this century.

When levees are topped, flood waters can rise rapidly and become trapped rather than draining away. Levees also give a false sense of safety to Lismore businesses.

Constructing buildings using specific materials and design can make them flood-resilient. But the contents cannot be flood-proofed or affordably insured.

Other engineering solutions have been proposed, including excavating river bends to speed up the exit of floodwater. But such measures can worsen flooding downstream and are unlikely to help during major floods.

Lismore residents are unlikely to support proposals for a new dam upstream, which would create environmental and social damage.

## Lismore re-imagined

Clearly, Lismore urgently needs radical change - and that requires bold and creative land-use planning.

Key to a re-imagined Lismore would be a staged move of the CBD to higher ground.

One strategy would be to encourage land swaps, with Lismore City Council exchanging commercial land in the CBD for land on high ground (either land it currently owns or land it

This pub is among many Lismore buildings destroyed by the recent floods. Lismore residents and business are still grappling with the flood's aftermath two months later.

purchases). A well considered “structure plan” – used to manage growth and change – with careful rezoning could encourage changed land use and attract new commercial development.

Financial incentives could encourage owners of commercial premises to rebuild in safer locations. This could create new, smaller hubs for professional offices, a retail precinct or cultural activities.

Consideration should be given to locating multiple services on flood-free land owned by state or federal authorities. This might, for example, bring together emergency services, health services and government support offices.

Houses deemed unsafe should not be rebuilt in the same place. Housing blocks may need to be bought back by authorities. Where houses can be repaired, some may be relocated to higher ground.

Before this year’s floods, housing in Lismore was already in short supply. Creative planning could address this – perhaps allowing landholders to build tiny houses or granny flats on high ground.

During the recent floods, we saw police, SES and fire stations engulfed by floodwaters, rendering them inoperable. Emergency service bases located below maximum flood heights must urgently be relocated or adapted.

And what to do with the riverside land where the CBD sits now?

The riverine environment could be restored. Impervious surfaces such as asphalt and concrete could be replaced with regenerated bushland to slow water runoff.

Expansive parklands could replace commercial premises beside the river. This “green heart” could incorporate new facilities such as an amphitheatre and sports fields in areas less likely to flood, retaining some heritage buildings for public use.

If these sites did flood, they would be more easily restored afterwards than is the case for current commercial premises.

## A new town heart

This new Lismore will not be easily achieved. Significant public and private funds will be needed. It will take political will and, above all, community support.

This might all seem very hard, but towns have been fully or partially relocated for similar reasons in the past – most recently, at the Queensland town of Grantham.

Many Lismore people would love to live in a safer and more prosperous town with a new CBD and verdant riverside community precinct.

Such changes will encounter justifiable resistance, however, including from business and property owners in the CBD. Earlier this month, Lismore mayor Steve Krieg summed up the sentiment of some, telling the media:

*Forty years ago people tried to [move Lismore] but what you have to understand is that Lismore people love Lismore. They don't want it to move or be taken away from them.*

However, the economic, social and emotional cost of this flood is incomprehensible. Residents and businesses are considering leaving Lismore for good.

*This town with heart now needs a new heart.  
As published first in The Conversation, Australia.*

*Authors*

*Barbara Rugendyke Adjunct Professor in Geography, Southern Cross University*

*Jean S. Renouf - Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, Southern Cross University*

The famous Lismore heart stands strong during the flood recovery.



# Blockade Australia: Serious Crisis, Serious Response

Greg Rolles

The history of climate and environment activism on the continent called Australia is long and strong. From time immemorial, more than 500 nations and millions of people lived on Country in a way that sustained and promoted biodiversity, that we know kept our climate in balance. This history is long, deep and amazing in a global context when considered against a lot of other parts of the world who fell into patterns of domination and destruction of country. It can be argued that the major Empires you were taught to revere in high school history collapsed and were destroyed by their inability to live in vibrant harmony with the Earth that created them.

When the English invaders landed on this continent in 1788, the battle to save that long held knowledge was fought from day one. The first invaders began cutting trees down and local Eora Nation people tried to get in between the axes and their quarry. Astonished that people could be so stupid as to wreck generations of carefully cultivated trees and land that provided so many resources.

In one of the first recorded Frontier Wars, Pemulwuy speared an English convict and official gamekeeper for killing animals not meant to be taken for food, possibly risking the balance

the Bidjigal people had kept through ice ages and thousands of generations.

The growth of the Australian colonial machine was always resisted. Pemulwuy even managed to get white convicts and poorer settlers to fight the British colonial project alongside him. Through nonviolent and violent resistance, every scrap of exploitable land was fought for by First Nations People and their supporters.

We know of the larger campaigns, successful and otherwise. The Franklin River Dam, the campaign to save Lake Pedder, Adani and onwards. Each time the colonial project went to destroy Country for the profit of a few, staunch community resistance arose.

After 230 years of this mayhem and destruction, along with the rest of the world, we stand on a dangerous precipice. What the First Nations of this continent (and many other places) knew with their advanced knowledge of the interconnectedness of all things and our dependence on country and each other - was that forgetting these things would lead to death.

As we approach (or cataclysmically head over the cliff of) 1.5 degrees of global warming since pre-industrial times, the very existence of all life on earth is at risk. In violence and mockery of



the advanced, wise ways of being, colonialism has desecrated Country and created this crisis. Just so a few scared families and groups could amass vast fortunes and power.

As I write the second part of this article, I overhear a parent refer to their infant child. "I will hug them until they get too old to want to hug me anymore. Then I'll say, 'get a job, get a part time job, then I'll take you shopping.'" The reality of the child's life is likely to be one of natural disasters and scarce resources. Careers and shopping as we know it now is unsustainable. We will need to fight to keep the child's political and civil rights intact for their adulthood.

In the massive emergency that faces our global community, the resistance movement has taken its next step. History shows us that the only thing that can stop a few people with a lot of power and money is a lot of people with a lot of love and hard work. Against one of the most repressive and violent machines in Earth's history, Blockade Australia has taken the time and organisation to make nonviolent direct action as effective and strategic as possible.

Blockade Australia has also decided to go on the front foot. Instead of waiting for the Australian exploitative machine to act so we can react with defence of areas targeted by the death trip, we have decided to purposefully target points of extraction on this continent. Targets that are vulnerable to a few committed people willing to make a lot of personal sacrifice, face arrest, malignment in mainstream corporate owned media and hits to their prospects for jobs and respect in the death trip machine. Places where the extractive machine must pass through bottlenecks of infrastructure and logistics. The goal is to hit the extractive experiment in language it understands - in its profits. Blockade Australia will be targeting the machine profits that are killing our collective home wherever it is.

One of these was a traditional "bad" industry of coal in Newcastle on Awabakel and Woromoi Land last November. Attracting global media attention with Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce labeling Blockade Australia ("Greta on steroids" other quote) cost the exploitative industries on this continent millions of dollars.

Under severe pressure from their corporate masters, the police sent in all of their resources, raiding the innocent Newcastle Environmental Centre (who were no associated or worked with BA) seizing dangerous placard paint and cardboard. Amongst the repression faced by the activists themselves, one person was sentenced to one year jail (currently on bail awaiting appeal), another had their car, their home of two years, seized by police. After 4 months of waiting, police having applied to destroy the car under "proceeds of crime", courts released the car back to the activist in early February. The person who had their car seized was also restricted from



contacting or talking to their partner under anti-association laws. In fact the magistrates courts issued multiple non-association orders in a bid to punish those who would dare challenge the Australian extraction project.

This year Blockade Australia will be working at the original site of the colonial crime scene. In Sydney, where the invaders first landed, Blockade Australia will be looking for and targeting other economic bottlenecks... roads, ports and rails.

They may not be what the public sees as the traditionally tolerated "bad" industries. The targets will be successfully stalled and blockaded as the movement grows and the public's appetite for a safe future so their kids can hug, work and play safely as adults can be secured. A pivot from a conventionally understood climate target like the Newcastle coal port to roads in Sydney is key to conceptualising the climate crisis as a systemic problem.

We know, the only thing that can stop those profiting from the death cult of the Australian colonial project is enough people willing to get in the way of it.

Whenever the topic of climate catastrophe comes up, or the never ending wars we wage, I like to assuage people's despair and "what can I do?" by pointing them to the bravery of those our media often overlook. And I like to give them the hope that they can be involved in actions with similar levels of resistance and tenacity (if not bravery) by being involved in Blockade Australia.

We have to rise and fight through the media blowback and repression and secure climate justice for all those already suffering from Australia's motives and for all those children around the world who we will never get the chance to meet.

*Greg Rolles is a full time volunteer, an anti-war and climate activist with a Masters in International Relations.*

*Instead of waiting for the Australian exploitative machine to act so we can react with defence of areas targeted by the death trip, we have decided to purposefully target points of extraction on this continent.*

# Tree's Not Bombs on the Flood Frontlines

Eve Jeffery

Like so many across the country and the world, Susie Russell sat and watched the tragedy of the February 28 floods unfold on Social Media. When she saw on Facebook that some of her mates were out in a dinghy rescuing people, and the scale of what was happening was starting to become apparent, she felt that she couldn't sit at home and do nothing while there was a major disaster in her region.

'Some of my friends had lost everything in their homes. I wanted to know what I could do that would be useful, not be in the way, and not use the resources of those who needed them. A day later I saw posts from people that they had no food. So I asked my partner Greg and friend, Jane, if they would come and do a soup kitchen in Lismore.'

This is not the first time Susie has cooked for the masses. 'In 2019 when our village was surrounded by fire and most people had evacuated, I cooked a meal at the old sawmill for the local brigade - that developed into the Community Support Hub.

'For three weeks we had a 24-hour roster. We fed everyone who turned up including all the rotating fire crews from Forestry. It made me acutely aware of how important it is in a time of catastrophe, to have somewhere to sit and eat and talk (if you want to). Somewhere to get a real hot meal. Particularly vego and vegan options - sausage sizzles only go so far.

'Also during that fire experience when our house was actually surrounded by fire, two complete strangers turned up and helped for a few hours and it just made such a difference to me mentally having that happen - so I know how appreciated help from outside is. It shows you are not forgotten and turns a major effort into a shared experience that takes or lessens the stress.'

'We've served 300 to 400 hot meals a day and unlimited tea, chai and plunger coffee. We've aimed to have sweet treats too. If we have any excess of anything we put it on the free takeaway table. We have given out a couple of dozen mosquito nets, hundreds of bottles of mozzie repellent and other toiletries, and always have fresh fruit to go, and sometimes biscuits.'

While technically 'retired', Susie fills her days with a variety of voluntary jobs. She has been with North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) since the early days and she is also involved with the

North Coast Environment Council. Recently she has also joined the board of the Rainforest Information Centre among others.

When she first thought to do the café, the idea was a collaboration between the old NEFA liberation cafe and Food Not Bombs in Newcastle who run a regular soup kitchen.

'I used "Trees Not Bombs" because the flooding is the result of decades of catchment mismanagement and the clearing of the rainforest and logging of steep hills and not having legal requirements to protect streamside vegetation, so there is nothing to slow the water.

I used "Not Bombs" because, although Lismore looked like a war zone with its middens of household possessions, there weren't bombs falling. Not like in Ukraine or Yemen or anywhere else where people can't go about repairing their lives or environment because there are actually bombs falling on them. And also because the 'COALition' are investing big time in weaponry from jets to subs and tanks but also armament factories - but only token peanuts for biodiversity, koalas, catchment repair.

'Trees Not Bombs is to remind everyone that we need a reversal in priorities. Put caring for people and the earth first. If we do that we won't need submarines and tanks.'

'Working together, much more can be achieved. I know that the community self-organised in other Northern Rivers communities to support each other and reach out to those isolated.

'That said, I think having many years of thinking and practising solidarity, mutual aid and being involved in organising and collaborations helps a lot. It's more than that too, the spirit generated by volunteer service during an emergency is personally very rewarding for all involved, givers and receivers.

*An adaptation from the article first featured in the Byron Echo.*

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Email [chainreaction@foe.org.au](mailto:chainreaction@foe.org.au).

# Australian Firefighters Climate Alliance – a voice for the grassroots

Bushfires are becoming more frequent and the bushfire season is coming earlier and lasting longer because of climate change.

These longer fire seasons in Australia are not “normal”. They are being driven by human induced global heating (climate change). Unless we act now to reduce our emissions in line with what climate science suggests, we will become locked in to ever worsening fire seasons.

The people on the frontlines of climate change include firefighters. You have probably heard of the Emergency Leaders for Climate Action (ELCA), which is a ‘coalition of former senior Australian fire and emergency service leaders representing every fire service in Australia, a number of SES and land management agencies, communicating the seriousness of the climate change threat, calling for government action on emissions’. They represent leaders within the emergency services who are concerned about climate change.

There are many thousands of grassroots firefighters who also have opinions about climate change and fire. The Australian Firefighters Climate Alliance (AFCA) has been created to provide a platform for rank and file firefighters to express their opinions and build political pressure for the government to act on climate change.

The AFCA is a network of grassroots volunteer and career firefighters ‘wanting to see our governments take stronger action on climate change. We are not connected to any political party’.

This statement, from a volunteer firefighter in Gippsland sums up the thinking of AFCA: “I grew up in regional Victoria and I am now a firefighter here. I have witnessed bushfires getting more intense and more destructive whilst the Australian Government has failed to adequately act on reducing the emissions driving this trend. This failure to act is putting regional

communities and firefighters at greater and greater risk from catastrophic bushfires.

Some of the current and founding members include Jim Casey (Fire and Rescue, NSW), Darin Sullivan (Fire and Rescue NSW) and Vivien Thomson (Rural Fire Service volunteer, NSW).

AFCA says that Australia should aim to reduce emissions by 75% below 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2035, and make this announcement well before COP27.

As one small part in building demands for Australia to act, AFCA has launched an effort to encourage firefighters to raise their voice on the need to reduce emissions.

Full details on the campaign can be found here.

<https://australianfirefightersclimatealliance.org/home/2022-summer-campaign/>

AFCA facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/ausfca>



# Climate Change and Natural Disasters

Cam Walker

We know that climate change is already making natural disasters worse. After the 2019/20 'Black Summer' fires, climate scientists who work in the field of 'attribution' science found that the severe season was at least 30% more likely due to climate change. According to a report released by the United Nations Environment Program and environmental not-for-profit organisation GRID-Arendal in early 2022<sup>1</sup>, as climate change continues to destabilise global weather patterns, we can expect up to 50% more wildfires by the turn of the century.

The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*<sup>2</sup>, highlights, yet again that not only is climate change impacting on natural disasters by super charging many individual events, it warns of future scenarios which could be "an atlas of human suffering", with irreversible ecosystem damage, drought, fires, and floods increasing unless we take decisive action now to reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

The 'take home' message of the report is:

'Further climate change is inevitable, with the rate and magnitude of impact largely dependent on the emission reduction pathways that we choose. Time is running out if we want to act'.

The report says: "the scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human well-being and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future."

The Chapter on Australasia in the IPCC report has a considerable amount of detail on the likely impacts of continued global warming on future climate in Australia. The report looks at both observed impacts and predicted future impacts (applying a level of certainty to each of these).

## General impacts

Ongoing climate trends have exacerbated many extreme events (the authors cite a 'very high confidence' in making this statement). The Australian trends include further warming and sea-level rise, with more hot days and heatwaves, less snow, more rainfall in the north, less April-October rainfall in the south-west and south-east, and more extreme fire weather days in the south and east.

The report says that 'climate trends and extreme events' have combined with existing vulnerabilities to cause major impacts for many natural systems, with some experiencing or at risk of irreversible change in Australia. For example,

warmer conditions with more heatwaves, droughts and catastrophic wildfires have already negatively impacted terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. The bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef is one well known example of this.

## Rainfall

Less winter and spring rainfall is projected in southern Australia, with more winter rainfall in Tasmania, less autumn rainfall in south-western Victoria, and less summer rainfall in western Tasmania.

## Fire

Our fire seasons are already getting longer and more intense. Impacts on fire regimes that have already been observed and can be expected include:

- The extreme fire weather experienced in 2019-2020 was at least 30% more likely due to climate change
- More droughts and extreme fire weather are projected in southern and eastern Australia (high confidence)
- There was an increase in the number of extreme fire weather days from July 1950 to June 1985 compared to July 1985 to June 2020, especially in the south and east, partly attributed to climate change
- There have been more dangerous conditions for extreme pyro convection events since 1979, particularly in south-eastern Australia.
- Multiple wildfires in short succession are resulting from increased fire risk conditions including higher temperatures and declining winter rainfall.

## Floods

As noted by The Climate Council<sup>3</sup>, the recent record-breaking deluge that has flooded towns and cities in Queensland and New South Wales is one of the most extreme disasters in Australian history.

They say that climate change is 'firmly embedded' in the 2022 flooding emergency.

The intense rainfall and floods devastating communities in Queensland and New South Wales is taking place in an atmosphere made warmer and wetter by climate change, which is driven by the burning of coal, oil, and gas.

The pattern of more intense rainfall events is well established in Australia. In recent decades, the intensity of short duration (hourly) extreme rainfall events has increased by 10 percent or more in some regions. Daily rainfall totals associated with thunderstorms have increased over the past 40 years.

For each 1 C rise in global average temperature, the atmosphere can hold approximately 7 percent more moisture. A warmer atmosphere also means there is more energy to fuel storms that generate heavy rainfall. These factors increase the likelihood of extreme downpours.

The higher that global temperatures rise, the worse such events become. Globally, the frequency of intense rainfall events is likely to almost double with each degree of further warming.

## Human impacts

There will be an increase in heat-related mortality and morbidity for people and wildlife in Australia due to heatwaves. Climate change has adversely affected physical health of people globally and mental health of people.

On a global scale, the IPCC says that climate change, including increases in frequency and intensity of extremes have reduced food and water security, hindering efforts to meet Sustainable Development Goals. Economic damages from climate change have been detected in climate-exposed sectors, with regional effects to agriculture, forestry, fishery, energy, and tourism (high confidence), and through reduced outdoor labour productivity.

And, as always, it is the poor who suffer the most: 'observed impacts are concentrated amongst the economically and socially marginalised residents.' Climate change is contributing to humanitarian crises where climate hazards interact with high vulnerability. Climate and weather extremes are increasingly driving displacement in all regions, with small island states disproportionately affected. Flood and drought-related acute food insecurity and malnutrition have increased in Africa, and Central and South America.

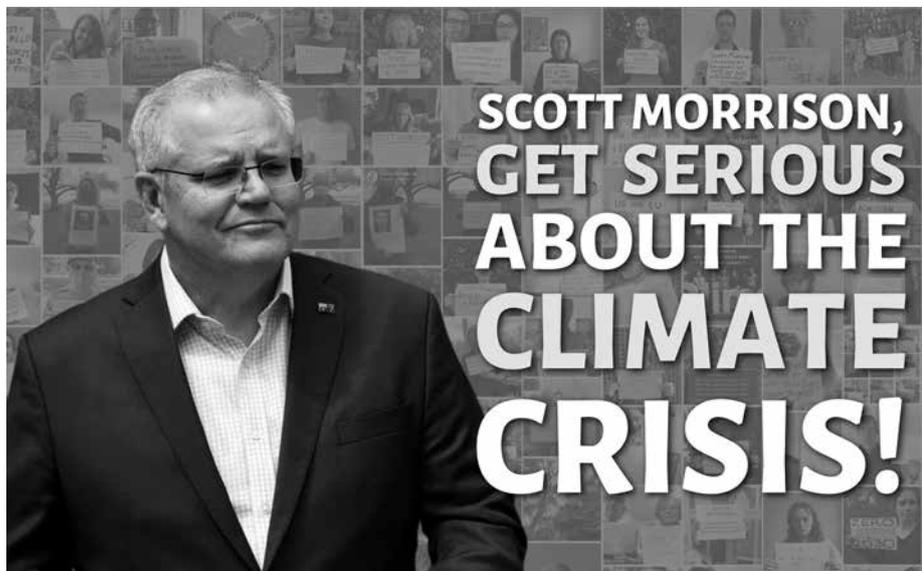
There will be 'cascading, compounding and aggregate' impacts on cities, settlements, infrastructure, supply-chains and services due to wildfires, floods, droughts, heatwaves, storms.

## What we do matters

Action now means less pain later.

The IPCC says 'human-induced climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme events, has caused widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people, beyond natural climate variability'. They make it clear that we need to act now to limit future warming. 'If global warming transiently exceeds 1.5°C in the coming decades or later (overshoot), then many human and natural systems will face additional severe risks, compared to remaining below 1.5°C.

The International Energy Agency (IEA)<sup>4</sup> says that while the number of countries announcing pledges to achieve net zero emissions over the coming decades continues to grow, the pledges by governments to date – even if fully achieved –



fall well short of what is required to bring global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions to net zero by 2050 and give the world an even chance of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 °C.

Climate science makes it abundantly clear that we must ensure that the 2020s are the decade of a massive clean energy expansion, transformation of our economic systems and rapid decline in emissions. This transition must account for the social and economic impacts on individuals and communities, and ensure no regions are left behind in the transition. We cannot leave it to 'the market' to set the rate of change in sectors like electricity production, because we know that it will lead to negative impacts on people currently employed in the fossil fuel sector. The IEA says that no additional funding should be given to new unabated coal plants, and that existing less efficient coal plants need to be phased out by 2030. The IEA also says that 'beyond projects already committed as of 2021, there are to be no new oil and gas fields, and no new coal mines or mine extensions' if we are to have a hope of meeting emission reduction targets that will avoid dangerous climate change.

## Australia must act

Prime Minister Scott Morrison refused to strengthen Australia's 2030 target at the COP26 summit in Glasgow last year. His government decided to stick with the weak target set by Tony Abbott way back in 2015—a meagre 26 percent reduction this decade.

The Morrison government signed the Glasgow Climate Pact which requires countries who haven't yet strengthened their 2030 targets to do so for the COP27 in Egypt this November.

It's time for PM Scott Morrison to be clear with global leaders and the Australian community. It's time for the Federal government to get serious about the climate crisis.

Sign here: [foe.org.au/climate\\_petition](https://foe.org.au/climate_petition)

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# Friends of the Earth fire policy

Fire has played a pivotal role in almost all landscapes across Australia for millions of years. The continent of Australia is a cultural and natural landscape: it has been shaped by First Nations peoples for many hundreds of generations. Colonisation disrupted this long management and now settler society is trying to understand how fire should be used in the landscape to manage it for biodiversity, asset protection, and human safety.

There is no doubt that climate change is driving more intense fire seasons. The world has warmed as a result of human activity and now all fire events occur in a warmer environment. This is well documented, and climate change is leading to longer fire seasons, with more frequent dry lightning storms in some areas. We have known this for years. Back in 2008 the Garnaut Climate Change Review's final report said that predictions "suggest that fire seasons will start earlier, end slightly later, and generally be more intense" and that "this effect increases over time, but should be directly observable by 2020."<sup>1</sup>

More recently, the Emergency Leaders for Climate Action noted that:

*Australia's Black Summer fires over 2019 and 2020 were unprecedented in scale and levels of destruction. Fuelled by climate change, the hottest and driest year ever recorded resulted in fires that burned through land two-and-a-half times the size of Tasmania (more than 17 million hectares), killed more than a billion animals, and affected nearly 80 percent of Australians. This included the tragic loss of over 450 lives from the fires and smoke, more than 3,000 homes were destroyed, and thousands of other buildings. While unprecedented, this tragedy was not unforeseen, nor unexpected.*

The influence of climate change has also been acknowledged in recent government investigations into the 2019/20 fires, including the Bushfire Royal Commission, the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and the Inspector-General for Emergency Management investigation into Victoria's preparedness for the fire season.

## Reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Of course, we need to act decisively to reduce Australia's contribution to climate change. Without co-ordinated global action to radically reduce emissions, we will face ever worse fire seasons.

## Fire and First Nations people

*'Fire is an element that has shaped this continent for millions of years. Since the last ice age or so, Indigenous Australians have used fire to tend and nurture Country. After colonisation, these practices were lost, suppressed or undermined. In the centuries afterward, fires of cataclysmic intensity have come along at higher frequencies.*

Den Barber, Wiradjuri

In many parts of the continent, Indigenous people have been excluded from involvement in managing their lands. This has had profound impacts on people and landscapes. Now, in many places, First Nations people have been able to reassert their right to be involved in managing their lands. We encourage and support continued government support for Cultural Burning programs as part of the Land Back movement and efforts to achieve self determination.

As one example, the Victorian Traditional Owners Cultural Fire Strategy outlines six core principles that underpin cultural burning practises in the state<sup>2</sup>. We would encourage the

state government to continue to develop cultural burning programs with traditional owner groups. Groups that are already engaged in Cultural Burning programs, such as the Dja Dja Wurrung in Central Victoria, could be resourced to share knowledge with other traditional owner groups.

## Fuel reduction

One key tool used to manage fire risk is fuel reduction (or hazard reduction or prescribed burning). While often presented as a panacea for fires, it requires a complex and nuanced application to be safe, effective and ecologically beneficial. But many vocal proponents of fuel reduction burning see it as a blunt instrument that can - and should be - applied across all forested landscapes frequently. As we know, the natural world is a complex place. When using a tool with such large implications as fire, we need an equally complex approach rather than a blanket 'we must burn the bush' mantra.

Prescribed burning is meant to remove fuels such as the litter and shrubs. This reduces risk at first, because most fires need a continuous layer on the ground surface to spread in. The problem is that the litter quickly returns, and disturbance initiates plant growth.

We know that in some instances, fuel reduction can increase fire risk. For instance, in south west Western Australia, research shows that forests were unlikely to burn for a short period (5-7 years) following fire, but very likely to burn as the regrowing understorey became taller and denser (the regrowth period), for the next 43-56 years<sup>3</sup>.

## Logging and fire

In considering future fire threat, governments must consider the contribution of native forest logging to forest flammability. Logged forests are more fire prone in their regrowth stage.

## How do we respond to longer, more intense fire seasons?

Even with meaningful climate action, we are locked into many decades of climate change. It is clear that we need additional resources to fight the fires that will come in future seasons.

Here are some of our ideas:

### *Additional fire fighting teams*

The Victorian government already funds a large firefighting force through Forest Fire Management Victoria, or FFMV. This includes crews who have special training and are tasked with working in remote areas like our national parks. The government has increased funding for firefighting efforts. However, it is essential that we commit to creating additional remote area crews. With climate change driven fire threatening the conservation estate - national

parks, World Heritage Areas and other reserves - it is essential that all states and territories have the ability to stop destructive fires in these areas.

Victoria needs a new volunteer remote area firefight team, as NSW, the ACT and Tasmania already have<sup>4</sup>.

We should be opening up volunteer opportunities for people based in large cities to get involved in firefighting efforts<sup>5</sup>.

The federal government should establish a national remote area firefighting force which can be deployed as needed across Tasmania and mainland states when World Heritage and National Parks are at risk. This was recommended by a Senate inquiry after the devastating fires in Tasmania of 2016<sup>6</sup>.

### *We need additional aerial support*

With fire seasons getting longer and more intense, we will need more planes and helicopters to fight fire. At present, most of these are leased, either within Australia or from overseas.

The Bushfire Royal Commission report<sup>7</sup> recommends the creation of a national aerial firefighting fleet, which can then be allocated to the states "according to greatest national need". As fire seasons get longer in both the northern and southern hemispheres, it is essential that we build a publicly owned air fleet of Large Air Tankers (LATs) and Type 1 helicopters. At present we only own one LAT - the remainder are leased internationally.

FoE urges the federal government to establish a national, publicly owned fleet: [foe.org.au/firefighting](http://foe.org.au/firefighting)

### *Protect threatened ecosystems*

As the Friends of the Earth report *An Icon at Risk* highlights, there are threats to a range of fire sensitive communities<sup>8</sup>, including peatlands, Snow Gums and Alpine Ash. The report calls on the state government to:

- assess whether Snow Gum woodlands require the same level of direct intervention that Alpine Ash currently receives through reseeding and other recovery programs
- rapidly develop a plan to assess and manage the scale of dieback of Snow Gum woodlands due to damage caused by beetles
- ensure fire sensitive communities such as peatlands, Snow Gums and Alpine Ash can be protected from future fires through adequate resourcing of ground and air fire fighting capacity

There are fire sensitive vegetation communities in many places around the country, especially in Lutruwita/ Tasmania, which require specific commitments by governments to provide sufficient resources to ensure these areas can be protected in extreme fire seasons.

Further information and policy proposals: [melbournefoe.org.au/living\\_with\\_fire\\_in\\_the\\_pyrocene](http://melbournefoe.org.au/living_with_fire_in_the_pyrocene)

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# Protecting Our Native Forests for Climate and Public Health

Alana Mountain

I am sitting in a dear friend's home in Warburton on Wurundjeri country, looking out to the forested ranges. And whilst in my immediate view, there is the illusion that this forest expands beyond the ridgelines as magnificently as what is before myself, I know there is a different story occurring on the other side of these grand mountains...

Less than 10kms from this town there is clearfell logging occurring at an alarming rate. Forests are consistently stripped bare, leaving nothing but turned soil and scars in the landscape. These forests - the most carbon dense in the world - are essential to our communities. They are essential for supporting the life that dwells within them, the unique and threatened wildlife and are especially significant for water security and mitigating the risks posed to us by a rapidly changing climate.

We currently live in a period of history where we are constantly witnessing the steady decline of our ecological heritage. And, as a result, Mother Nature is unbalanced and manifesting itself in drastic crises. We see that islands are drowning because of rising sea levels, the ocean is acidifying, rivers are drying up, crops aren't growing in once fertile regions and the countries spanning the equator are becoming drier and inhospitable.

I've spent the better part of the last decade of my life curiously defending forests, absorbing consensus-based science of dedicated researchers such as David Lindenmayer, and watching on with heartbreak, filled with fear as mine and the future of generations-to-come are placed at risk because of environmental vandalism.

Looking locally, I know that the logging occurring so close is dangerous and increases the risks of bushfires. Logging, AKA deforestation, is drying out the landscape and increasing the flammability of the forest. We know that bushfire regimes have changed drastically and bushfire seasons are lasting longer - spanning larger areas than we have ever witnessed before. We only have to look to the summer of 2019-2020, where we experienced the worst bushfires in living memory.

It was revealed last year via the *After The Logging Report*, co-published by 19 Victorian forest protection groups and researched by Margaret Blakers, that our precious forests are not being

regenerated as expected by VicForests - the government owned logging agency pillaging the last remaining carbon sinks of our state.

Not only are we losing precious biodiversity, but the promise of 'growing back' our forests is not being fulfilled. This is a major issue for future carbon sequestration. What is left behind typically resembles that of a moonscape or a Mad Max film, not a bio-rich, diverse forest ecosystem!

Australian Mountain Ash forests exceed all other forests in their capacity for sequestering carbon by a mile. The average carbon stock sits around 1100 tonnes per hectare. So, when forests are logged and burnt in a post regeneration burn, this carbon is released and lost to the atmosphere.

Further pollution is caused via the burning process as a result of the intensity of the burn. Each year, alike other areas across the Central Highlands and Gippsland, Warburton is blanketed in a dense smoke. Those unfortunate enough to already have, and perhaps even develop respiratory issues, are severely compromised. How can we continue to allow this industry to contribute to and accelerate the climate crisis as well as increase the risks of respiratory complications for communities? It is criminal and outright ecocide. You would think given the experience of the last two years battling COVID - a pandemic that has cost us millions in medical service expenses that we would prioritise respiratory health.

We know that undisturbed and unfragmented forests are our best chance of mitigating the impacts of a drying landscape. Our forests retain huge volumes of water, regulate climate and produce moisture contributing to large weather systems. They also obviously provide us with oxygen and a variety of other social benefits such as tourism and bare deep cultural significance to our First Nations people.

It isn't difficult to arrive at the logical conclusion that logging and protecting the myriad of ecological and social values of our native forests are incompatible.

They cannot co-exist.

We must immediately prioritise the ecosystem services they provide, as well as the safety of our communities, by ending native forest logging once and for all.

# The Workers on the Frontline of Climate Impacts

Anna Langford

In 2022, we're already seeing how the impacts of the climate crisis are wreaking havoc on communities. And while a new band of tech billionaires are quick to make pronouncements about broad-sweeping fixes, tackling the climate crisis in a socially just way means putting workers' rights at the core of solutions.

To ensure this happens, workers need to be a key part of the conversation about what solutions we will embrace to rapidly lower emissions and respond to the climate change impacts that are already locked in. But to open this conversation, we first need to ask the question: What does climate change look like for workers across Victoria?

In October 2021, Friends of the Earth launched the Climate Impacts at Work project with RMIT University and six Victorian unions. Its aim is to conduct pioneering research into the ways that climate impacts are already affecting workers in different industries.

On the campaign trail, I frequently meet community members who say that they aren't qualified to talk about climate change, because they're not scientists or economists and the problem is so wide-ranging and complex.

While we may not be able to speak about every aspect of the climate crisis with the detail of those who study it, what we are equipped with are our own stories. With climate change already hitting us here and now, we can speak to it from experiences in our daily lives - like in our workplaces.

With this understanding, the Climate Impacts at Work survey has sought to draw out workers' local knowledge of climate impacts, and gather their ideas for the climate solutions they want to see. The research will give a picture of how climate change on the ground looks different for transport workers compared with health workers, or for people in Northern Victoria compared with Gippsland or Melbourne. So, what have workers already told us? The responses so far capture detailed accounts of how workers are having their health and safety put at risk as a result of climate impacts like intensifying heatwaves, storms, floods, and bushfire smoke.

For Hannah, a disability support worker, the anxiety of working through extreme weather is doubled as she becomes responsible not just

for herself, but her vulnerable clients. Hannah notices the ways that climate change intersects with socioeconomic inequality, and how that affects her clients.

"Specialised housing [isn't built] in gentrified areas where the rent's expensive," she explains, "so a lot of disability homes and day programs are being built in suburban areas where the radiant heat effects are really high and the tree planting on the streets is really low."

We've heard from hospo workers who become sick and worn out while working in poorly ventilated kitchens during heatwaves. As they work multiple days in a row during extreme heat, they become more and more exhausted, which results in further risks to their safety. Monique, a cafe supervisor, says, "When I imagine a future working in this industry, I fear a summer full of 40 degree days. I fear a workplace that still has no OH&S procedures even as we start having to send people home with heat stress - or to hospital with heat stroke."

It's clear that workers across different industries are already struggling to battle the impacts of climate change. It is these same workers who will be crucial to our communities' resilience as climate impacts intensify. As Health and Community Services Union member Hannah puts it, "As we move away from fossil fuels, care work will remain as important as ever."

## What's next?

We have conducted a survey called "Climate Impacts at Work", to ask what does climate change look like for workers across Victoria. The report will give a comprehensive understanding of how the impacts of climate change are already hitting workers on the ground across Victoria, and arm unions with this crucial data to push for stronger climate action from governments and employers. It will be released mid-2022.

As a unionist, I see taking action on climate change as core union business. It will be a key part of fighting for workers' justice - for our own and future generations. If unions lead the charge in workplaces when it comes to climate action, we can ensure that workers' rights are protected, and social justice is baked into the solutions we fight for.

*Anna Langford is a Community campaigner for Act on Climate collective*

# IPCC Climate Report Warns of Threat to Australia's Food and Farming

Tim Read

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) WGII Sixth Assessment Report was released earlier this year. FOE recently reported on the IPCC's warning about fire threat, in this article, we focus on the warnings about climate change impacts on Australia's food and farming system.

The take home message is: Further climate change is inevitable, with the rate and magnitude of impact largely dependent on the emission reduction pathways that we choose. 'Australia is one of the most vulnerable developed countries to climate impacts.'<sup>2</sup> Time is running out if we want to act.

## The impacts of climate change on our food and farming system, summary

Extreme events, such as the recent flooding rains, are increasing and will result in 'compound and cascading' effects on agriculture, water resources, lives, livelihoods and infrastructure'.<sup>3</sup> Such events are projected to increase in magnitude and intensity.

In International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES), has provided a summary of the impacts of climate change on our food and farming systems as detailed in the IPCC report:<sup>4</sup>

- Increased heat waves, droughts and floods from climate change are exposing millions of people to acute food insecurity, and this is set to worsen.
- Smallholder farmers, pastoralists, Indigenous People and fishing communities face higher exposure to climate impacts; while marginalisation linked to gender, ethnicity and low income make people more vulnerable.
- Climate change is undermining food production and impacting agricultural productivity growth, which has slowed 21%.
- Unsustainable agricultural expansion and unbalanced diets are increasing vulnerability to climate impacts and creating resource competition.
- 1.5°C of warming risks crop failure of maize in major food producing countries.
- By 2100, 34% of current cropland could be unsuitable for food production.

The IPCC calls for transformational changes that address social inequities to make food systems more resilient and just, such as:<sup>5</sup>

- Cultivar improvements, agroforestry, community-based adaptation, farm and landscape diversification, and urban agriculture.
- Diverse agroecological farming working with nature supports food security, livelihoods and biodiversity - and helps to buffer temperature extremes and sequester carbon.'

'Hundreds of millions of people, especially in Africa, Asia, Small Islands, Central and South America, and the Arctic are being impacted by stresses on food systems. 10% of current livestock and crop areas may become unsuitable by 2050, rising to 30% by 2100.'<sup>4</sup>



Let's learn more about the Chain Reaction community!

Submit a photo with a sentence about you, and response to the questions: 'when/where did you first read Chain Reaction?', 'what does FoE/Chain Reaction mean to you?' 'what environmental/social justice/alternative world building projects are you working on at the moment?'

Send to [chainreaction@foe.org.au](mailto:chainreaction@foe.org.au).  
Include your name and location.

Here in Australia climate change impacts on food and farming are already being observed, such as declines in crop yields and quality, along with negative effects on livestock production and forestry, 'due to hotter and drier conditions, including intense heat',<sup>8</sup> along with an increase in degrading impacts on ecosystems. Food systems are also major drivers of climate change and ecological degradation.

The IPCC report says that while some 'incremental adaptation is occurring' in the food and farming sectors in Australia, that 'in the longer term, transformative adaptation, including land-use change, will be required.'<sup>8</sup>

The health and resilience of our food and farming system is dependent on the health of Australia's ecosystems, indigenous wildlife and domesticated species that are part of farms. It also depends on the wellbeing of the people who work in farming, and our farm and food industry workers are often poorly paid, marginalised, making them particularly exposed to climate impacts.

### Agroecological farming and food systems offer viable pathways to climate resilience and food justice

The IPCC report says that agroecology (known in Australia as regenerative-organic) farming can increase food system resilience and some practices can help draw down carbon.<sup>9</sup>

Thankfully many Australian farmers are leading the way with regenerative stewardship approaches to caring for their farms and the ecosystems that surround them. Regionally based alternative food systems are beginning to thrive to counter the negative impacts of supermarket dominated food systems, which can be vulnerable to disruption, as we have seen during the recent floods, the pandemic and now the Ukraine-Russian war.

### Scaling-up agroecological approaches in Australia

More support for our farmers and rural communities which enables just transitions to regenerative approaches is vital if our food and farming systems are to become resilient and capable of adapting to the impacts of climate change.

We can all help to drive the change by consciously purchasing foods that come from regenerative sources, such as those provided by the FOE Co-op in Melbourne. Yet much more needs to be done if we are to increase the speed of the regenerative transition, as numerous institutional and other barriers impeding progress remain.

Our community has a right to food that is grown in a socially just way, in harmony with nature. Collectively we have a right to shape the strategies, policies and systems of consumption and production. These rights are embodied in the concept of Food Sovereignty.

FOE is a founding member of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, the alliance is a farmer-led civil society organisation of people working together towards socially-just and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems.' AFSA works to nurture community participation in democratic processes.

### What can we do about this?

If you are interested in working on food and farming related issues, you are welcome to join the new FOE Food and Farming project group, this group is developing a citizen-led project to support the work of farming and First Nation communities as they strive to transform the current system. If you are interested in volunteering with the working group, become a volunteer with FOE.

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# The War on Ukraine: Nuclear Power, Weapons and Winter

Jim Green

Six weeks into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the death and destruction has been devastating. In addition, the targeting of nuclear power plants by Russia's military has raised the spectre of a nuclear disaster.

The Russian military's seizure of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant – at a time when at least one of the plant's six reactors was operating – was the most dangerous incident. The partial loss of power to the plant further raised the risk of a disaster.

To say that the seizure of the Zaporizhzhia plant was reckless would be an understatement. Dr. Edwin Lyman from the Union of Concerned Scientists summarised the risks:

*“There are a number of events that could trigger a worst-case scenario involving a reactor core or spent fuel pool located in a war zone: An accidental – or intentional – strike could directly damage one or more reactors. An upstream dam failure could flood a reactor downstream. A fire could disable plant electrical systems. Personnel under duress could make serious mistakes. The bottom line: Any extended loss of power that interrupted cooling system operations that personnel could not contain has the potential to cause a Fukushima-like disaster.”*

The Russian military also seized control of the Chernobyl nuclear plant, the site of the world's worst nuclear accident. Workers were held hostage for 25 days. Off-site power was lost for five days, but generators supplied the necessary power to cool nuclear waste stores. It has been difficult to extinguish forest fires in the contaminated Chernobyl Exclusion Zone due to military conflict.

Several other nuclear facilities have been hit by Russian military strikes, including a nuclear research facility at the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology, and two radioactive waste storage sites.

At the time of writing, there haven't been any major radiation releases resulting from Russia's invasion. But the risk remains, and the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi continues to express “grave concern” and notes that “an accident involving the nuclear facilities in Ukraine could have severe consequences for public health and the environment.”

## Nuclear weapons

Putin reportedly has greater ambitions than invading and controlling Ukraine, so who knows where the conflict will lead, how long it will drag on and whether it triggers a response from NATO.

The risk of nuclear warfare is low, but it is not zero. It doesn't help that NATO and Russian military doctrines allow for the use of tactical nuclear weapons to fend off defeat in a major conventional war. It doesn't help that some missiles can carry either conventional weapons or nuclear weapons, increasing the risk of worst-case thinking and a precipitous over-reaction by the adversary.

And it doesn't help that Putin's statements have included threats to use nuclear weapons, or that a referendum in Belarus revoked the constitution's nuclear-weapon-free pledge, or that Belarusian president Aleksander Lukashenko joined Putin to watch the Russian military carry out a nuclear weapons exercise, or that Lukashenko has said Belarus would be open to hosting Russian nuclear weapons.

Beatrice Fihn, executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, points to other concerns:

*“Russia and Belarus are not alone in their aggressive and irresponsible posture either. The United States continues to exploit a questionable reading of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that prevents states from ‘possessing’ nuclear weapons but allows them to host those weapons. Five European states currently host approximately 100 US nuclear weapons: Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Turkey.”*

## Nuclear winter

In a worst-case scenario, the direct impacts of nuclear warfare would be followed by catastrophic climatic impacts known as ‘nuclear winter’. Earth and paleoclimate scientist Andrew Glikson noted in a recent article:

*“When Turco et al. (1983) and Carl Sagan (1983) warned the world about the climatic effects of a nuclear war, they pointed out that the amount of carbon stored in a large city was sufficient to release enough aerosols, smoke, soot and dust to block sunlight over large regions, leading to a widespread failure of crops and extensive starvation.*

*“The current nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia could potentially inject 150 teragrams of soot from fires ignited by nuclear explosions into the upper troposphere and lower stratosphere, lasting for a period of 10 years or longer, followed by a period of intense radioactive radiation over large areas. ...*

*“Such an extreme event would arrest global warming for 10 years or longer, possibly in part analogous to the consequences of a less abrupt flow of polar ice melt into the oceans ...”*

## The myth of the peaceful atom

Russia's deliberate and accidental strikes on nuclear sites in Ukraine aren't the first attacks on nuclear facilities by hostile nation-states. Examples include the following:

- In 1979, Israeli agents in France planted a bomb that destroyed research reactor components while they were awaiting shipment to Iraq.



The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine.

- Israel's destruction of a research reactor in Iraq in 1981.
- The US destruction of a research reactor in Iraq in 1991.
- Attempted military strikes by Iraq and Iran on each other's nuclear facilities during the 1980-88 war.
- Iraq's attempted missile strikes on Israel's nuclear facilities in 1991.
- Israel's bombing of a suspected nuclear reactor site in Syria in 2007.

Most of those attacks were directed at 'research' reactors capable of producing plutonium for weapons. Most or all of the attacks were driven by weapons proliferation fears – often legitimate fears – and an understanding that the IAEA's so-called 'safeguards' system is ineffective at preventing weapons proliferation.

For decades, the nuclear industry and its supporters denied and trivialised the connections between 'peaceful' nuclear programs and weapons proliferation. But nuclear power has been in such a desperate state in recent years that the industry now acknowledges and even celebrates the connections between power and weapons. Those connections are said to justify greater taxpayer bailouts and subsidies for nuclear power programs in the US, the UK, France and elsewhere.

Nuclear advocate Michael Shellenberger provides one example of these nuclear turncoats.

Having previously argued that there is an "inverse relationship" between nuclear power and weapons, Shellenberger decided to start telling the truth in 2018. He acknowledged that "having a weapons option is often the most important factor in a state pursuing peaceful nuclear energy", and that "at least 20 nations sought nuclear power at least in part to give themselves the option of creating a nuclear weapon".

Public health specialist Assoc. Prof. Tilman Ruff noted in a 2019 paper:

*"The web of links between nuclear weapons, nuclear reactors, and the materials that power both are deep and inextricable. Nuclear power cannot solve our climate crisis, and aggravates the existential danger posed by nuclear weapons. Out of the climate crisis frying pan and into the fire of radioactive incineration, nuclear ice age and famine is a lose-lose dance with extinction. Our understanding of our climate crisis challenge needs to broaden to include the jeopardy of abrupt nuclear winter."*

## Australia's contribution to global nuclear risks

Australia has uranium export agreements with all of the 'declared' nuclear weapons states, all of them breaching their disarmament obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; countries with a history of weapons-related research based on their civil nuclear programs; countries that have not ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; countries expanding their nuclear weapons capabilities; and undemocratic, secretive states with appalling human rights records.

Australia's uranium export agreements with Russia and Ukraine were much of a muchness: federal parliament's treaties committee issued strong warnings about the inadequacy of nuclear safeguards, the government of the day ignored those warnings, and no-one has any idea about the security or whereabouts of Australian uranium and its by-products in Russia or Ukraine.

Australian governments, and uranium companies operating in Australia, also contribute to global nuclear risks by exporting uranium to countries with lax safety standards and inadequate nuclear regulation. The most dramatic illustration of that problem is the fact that Australian uranium was in the poorly-managed, poorly-regulated Fukushima reactors during the explosions, meltdowns and fires in March 2011.

Ukraine provides another example. Even before the Russian invasion, Ukraine's nuclear industry was corrupt, regulation was inadequate, and nuclear security measures left much room for improvement.

Australia also contributes to global nuclear risks because of the bipartisan support for the US alliance and 'extended nuclear deterrence'. As a result, Australia routinely undermines global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament initiatives. A case in point is Australia's efforts to undermine the UN's Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and the government's refusal to sign or ratify the treaty.

And the Australian government's pursuit of submarines powered by weapons-useable, highly enriched uranium undermines global non-proliferation efforts. If it's okay for Australia's military to have weapons-useable nuclear material, then it's okay for the world's other 190-or-so countries to have weapons-useable nuclear material. What could possibly go wrong?

*Jim Green is the national nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth Australia. Detailed information on nuclear threats resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine is posted at [www.nuclear.foe.org.au/ukraine](http://www.nuclear.foe.org.au/ukraine)*

# No planning for renewable energy projects on the Atherton Tablelands

Steven Nowakowski.

Climate change is delivering unprecedented climate patterns across Australia. The use of fossil fuels is now directly proven to be a key driver of climate change and has resulted in a 1.5°C temperature rise since the Industrial Revolution. To keep temperatures below 2°C is going to be a Herculean task.

The transition to zero emissions renewable energy is now finally occurring. However, this comes with its own challenges. Industrial scale renewable projects are sometimes in the wrong locations. There is a pipeline of industrial scale projects worth over \$6 billion - most earmarked for the southern Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland - with six projects imminent. It is calculated that 13,100 hectares of remnant, and 12,900 hectares of non-remnant vegetation will be cleared across Queensland for these projects, with the majority in North Queensland.

Proponents of these large-scale wind and solar farms are cherry-picking the easiest locations to place these developments along existing transmission lines. It is highly unfortunate that the main transmission line to Cairns hugs the western boundary of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Here, conflict arises between the conservation of high bio-diverse habitats and the proposed industrial scale wind farms.

Two projects proposed, Chalumbin and Upper Burdekin, would clear almost 3,000 hectares of remnant vegetation and vital habitat for many endangered species. Fragmentation of the forests would also lead to weed incursions, altered fire regimes and forest edge effects that would alter

forests up to 100m beyond the road edge. Chalumbin, for example, requires 146km of new internal haulage roads up to 70m wide in some places.

These projects generally go through local council as Code Assessable under local planning schemes and are fast tracked through the Integrated Planning Act. At state level, there is a planning guideline called "State Code 23 for wind farms" which is a deficient, outdated and flawed instrument. It is at federal level that these projects usually become known to the wider public. However, by this stage it is often too late, particularly if the only legislation to be used is the flawed Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act.

The solution to this madness is an overarching planning policy for the roll out of renewables.

A moratorium is needed on any industrial scale projects adjacent to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area until a proper planning policy is developed.

Can you imagine 239 turbines (Chalumbin and Upper Burdekin combined) abutting the Tasmanian World Heritage Area, or Kakadu World Heritage Area, or the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area? The Wet Tropics deserves better!

A master plan for Queensland can be developed that highlights high bio-diverse areas, state-wide wildlife corridors and places of high cultural significance, overlaid with high wind resource and solar opportunities. The land outside of these areas could be open/suitable for the roll out of renewables. If such plan is not created, conflict between land use and the protection of nature will persist and only intensify in the coming years.

Existence is resistance.

*Bodies assemble  
Under a cloud filled sky  
Bodies prepare  
To assemble  
A spider like web  
Of connected threads  
Trapping the deadly  
Machines from destroying  
Forest and pristine  
Habitat for species  
Declared endangered  
Declared to be protected  
We assemble  
For their protection  
When they won't  
When they don't  
Protect our future  
Children  
Of the earth  
Rise together  
From the chaos  
Ahead of our existence*

Poetry from Earth & Bone - Alana Mountain



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# Kangaroo Grass as a Guide to Sustainable Activism

Aia Newport

For a long time, I've noticed people doing change-work becoming overwhelmed, tired and stressed. While community organisers do amazing work, it seems we often sacrifice our own needs in order to help others.

How then do we continue to support others while also taking care of ourselves? What are some gentle guides we can use in our daily lives to make our solidarity work and change work meaningful and sustainable?

To begin exploring such questions I often look to the world around me for answers. Today, I take kangaroo grass as an example.

Kangaroo grass, like most plants I know, uses leafy strands to photosynthesise sunlight into the energy it needs to survive. If for whatever reason, the plant cannot photosynthesise enough energy, it can become sick and die.

Let's imagine people beginning their solidarity or change work are fresh, bushy clumps of native kangaroo grass.

If we are consumed by other critters in the ecosystem, then our capacity to photosynthesise and take care of ourselves is reduced. It is healthy for us to give up part of our energy to other critters in the ecosystem, as it contributes to a thriving community. As grass, we also need to be nibbled sometimes to encourage new growth, which in turn leads to increased soil fertility.

However, if we let ourselves be eaten down until we are just a little nub that hardly looks like grass anymore, we find it hard to regrow because we don't have much to photosynthesise with. It takes longer and is more stressful for the grass to grow back, just as it is more time and energy intensive for humans to bounce back after a stressful time.

As kangaroo grass or change-makers then, we can only give so much to the world before we are at risk of ill-health. No matter what soil we are first rooted in, be it anger, guilt, fear, joy, optimism or love, if we let other critters feed on us all the time, we will eventually cease to exist. Caring for ourselves then, is much like caring for a tussock of beautiful kangaroo grass.

One thing I've learnt about living in a community or ecosystem, is there is *\*always\** someone who needs help. It's up to us to practice listening to our boundaries and to

decide when it is time to help others and when it is time to look after ourselves. If we think about it and experiment, often we can do both at once.

Clearly, I don't believe we need to sacrifice our own health and well-being in order to make wonderful, long-lasting systemic change. In fact, the idea that "saving the world is now or never and I'm the only one who can do it because no one else understands how bad things really are" is quite likely perpetuating harm and preventing us from getting where we want to.

I'll speak from my own experience here so you know where I'm coming from. I used to believe the world needed me to sacrifice myself and become a little nub of grass in order to save everyone and everything. I believed I knew the answer to the climate catastrophe and if everyone just saw what I saw and did what I did then we'd be able to fix it. I believed if it wasn't happening today then it was happening too late.

This led me to a place of depression, impatience and overwhelm. I was constantly judging myself and others for not doing enough, I had no time to hear alternative perspectives and I felt the world was a complete hell-hole. I thought that I was the only one really trying to make life better and so what was the point of trying anymore, because I couldn't do it on my own.

I'm in the middle of a long process of changing the way I view myself, but the key part is now I realise my perspective is a choice. I've reached a point (and this point will inevitably keep changing) where my life and much of the world feels like a paradise when I let it. Yes, despite all the shit of which I am well aware, I feel empowered to create the world I want, slowly and with love. It feels amazing. It feels like freedom.

It seems I've slowly replaced my depression with gentle action. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the number of cars on the road, I might decide to start using my bike and set a goal of selling my car by the end of the year. When I might have felt frustrated by the number of Clive Palmer ads around and rolled my eyes at the broken system, I could feel that frustration and volunteer to support the local independent candidate in the upcoming election. The newfound patience has meant I'm in less of a rush to find an answer and can take the time to find an approach that really suits me and my community.

I'm still as committed to bringing about meaningful change, but now I do it in ways that feel deeply nourishing to me. I'm building relationships, listening to my body, connecting with my ancestry, and falling in love with the world every day. I'm doing all the things I knew were important but had lost touch with.

There is a risk here that I will start to focus "too much" on my own well-being and not make time for others, to settle into my comfy privilege. To mitigate this and maintain a healthy balance between my own needs and the needs of the community I'm living in, I regularly check-in with my body and my moral compass, to see if anyone is feeling hard done by.

Sometimes, if I haven't checked in for a while my moral compass will get a bit snarky and say "Oi, you haven't done any anti-racism work recently, what's up!?" When this happens, I pause and take moment to consider why I haven't been doing this work and if now is the time to change. Sometimes it's not the right moment, sometimes it is.

Other times, it will be my body that speaks up, "hey you haven't had a shower in five days, maybe it's time?"

Overall, I appreciate both these parts of me and their often-conflicting needs. The best thing about recognising them is that I can then start finding ways to meet both of their needs.

However, if either of them start making threats, saying I will be a bad person if I forget to shower or do any anti-racist work for a week, a month... even a year, then I turn it the fuck down. I know my existence is worthwhile and I trust that wonderful change will still happen without me, because I am not some special hero required to save the world. The world is just living, it doesn't need saving.

As you can probably tell, I do not believe activism has to feel hard to be effective. Instead, I'm living the belief that we can contribute to change AND take care of ourselves.

From my experience, we can hone our skills that allow us to do sustainable change work. If we practice listening to our bodies and our moral compass, we can balance the desire to stay healthy with the desire to make the world a better place. If we let go of the idea that the world needs to change in a certain way, and change today, we are more likely to act in



consensual and considered ways that result in long-term changes. If we remind ourselves, we will be okay even if we face scarcity, we open ourselves up to generosity.

Let's consider the kangaroo grass again and make this desire to change the world nice and small, as small as one flowering head. Our size limits us - we are not the whole world so we can't change the whole world. Yet we can choose how to live our life as a small kangaroo grass flower. Will we dwell on our limited flower power, living in a constant state of overwhelm, or will we grow into our agency and remember we get to choose when to let go of our stem and fly away with the wind? Will we converse with our neighbours and decide to fly away together, a glorious display of collective action and autonomy? Perhaps the seeds flying past you now are doing precisely this.

So how about think local, act local? Slow and steady? LOUD AND BIG SOMETIMES, but mostly a relatively content chugging away? Can these be our gentle, everyday guides to sustainable activism?

*Aia (them/them) was born on Wurrundjeri country and is of Scottish, Welsh, and English descent. Get in contact at [sunshine.punch@protonmail.com](mailto:sunshine.punch@protonmail.com), or follow on Instagram @saltcrusted\_nipples*

Each edition, we hear from a volunteer at FoE about what they do, and why they're passionate about FoE.



## Trains, trams and advocacy with Sustainable Cities

Wil Ross

I came to FoE in the depths of lockdown, looking for a way to connect with my community and fight for a better quality of life in Melbourne. I'd heard so much about Friends of the Earth Melbourne from friends and I wanted to experience it myself.

My way in was through the Sustainable Cities collective - a group of dedicated community members, urban planners, and transport advocates. As I would soon learn, this small collective is a hodgepodge of people, many young and many older, united by their passion for just and sustainable planning.

Our focus back then in 2020 was the campaign against the North East Link (NEL), a tollway project that is still set to destroy key habitats and entrench car-heavy planning in that part of Melbourne. Working on the anti-NEL campaign taught me that saying no to one project is never just an oppositional stance. There were — and still are — so many alternative proposals that would make public transport accessible, regular and normalised in Melbourne's north-east. From memory, all of them are cheaper than NEL.

Probably my funniest moment working with FoE was convincing my housemates to dress up as a cardboard train and pose for photos during lockdown. I also got to walk around in my train costume and livestream some thoughts on Melbourne Metro 2 and the Suburban Rail

Loop as I walked. As far as lockdown looks go — bleached hair, acid wash accessories, home job stick n poke — this was one trend that did not take off.

I've learnt a lot from my time at FoE. I especially learnt about resistance and persistence from the grassroots people pushing for change in our public transport. Working with the anti-NEL campaign, and the Disability Resource Centre's transport for all campaign were two key moments in my learning. I've taken home the idea that "small" changes are often as or more important than the big, flashy ones. Turns out accessible tram stops and on-time, electric buses might be more important than flashy announcements about airport rail - sorry Dan Andrews. I also learnt a lot about how to use Canva - even if I don't always rank Twitter graphics high on my list of activist skills.

I was regularly involved with the Sustainable Cities collective until early last year, when I stepped back to focus on my studies. But my connection to the people involved is still a source of passion and good advice for someone who often needs it. I've been introduced to a community of people who dedicate their lives to campaigning for smarter, fairer, less capitalist cities. Thanks to them I have an endless supply of critiques, suggestions, and urban transport memes. If that's my experience of the FoE community, I'm pretty happy.

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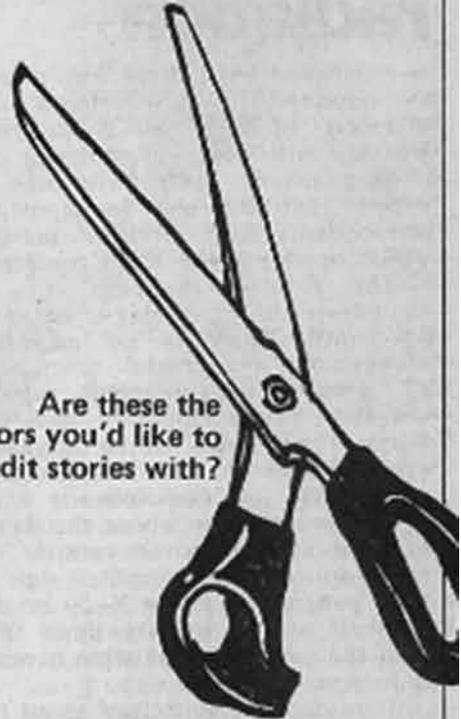
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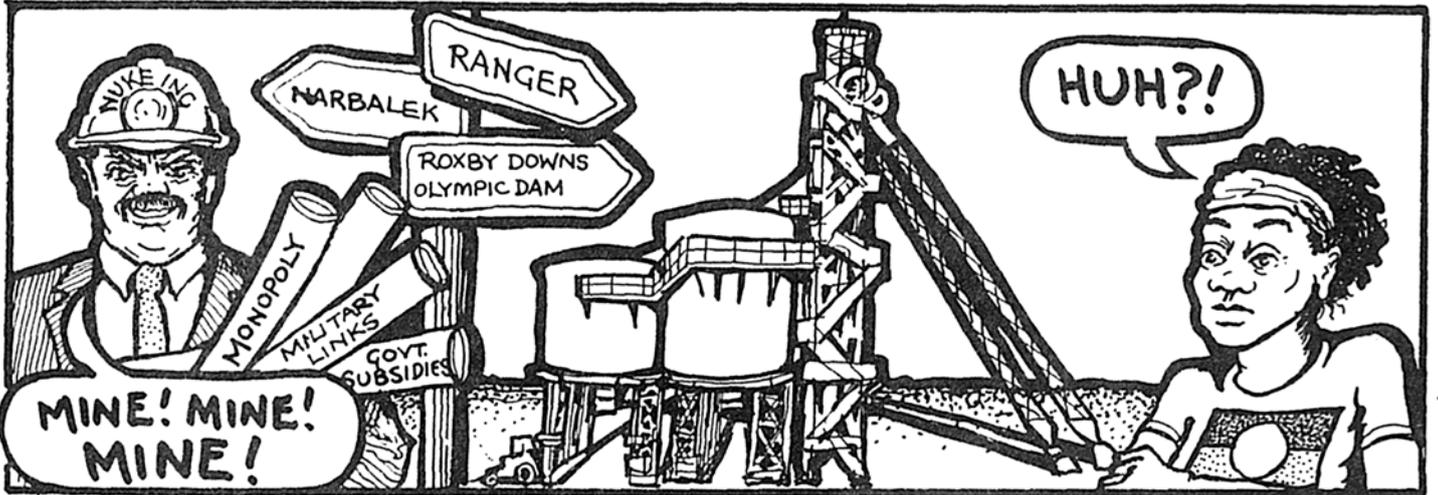
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# the STORY of URANIUM MINING in AUSTRALIA

## THE LAND



## THE MONEY



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KATE MCCANN 1990

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# CLIMATE WORKERS

