

HOPE e:news bulletin, 28 May 2008

Hi All

Of course the big thing the last few weeks was the release of the Federal Budget. Below you can read something on how the Government has intended to spend its money on the Environment, and how it might affect you and your family. Other items in this bulletin include our 'HOPE in Action' activities, and information on some of the latest resources. We have an extensive library, so if you need help on a particular subject give us a call!

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Office news

HOPE in Action!

This past weekend we attended the Eco Expo in Beaudesert. We had a marvelous day! There were lots of enquiries, we gained some members, and distributed most of the literature we took with us. Thanks to Keith and the local Rotary club for putting on a great event. (The June newsletter will have a report of the day - with photos.)

On Sunday 1st June HOPE will have a display at the Queensland Day celebrations in Queens Park, Toowoomba. When you are in the area for this event come and say hello. We would love to meet you! For those who wish to assist for a few hours, please contact the office. We always have a good time!

General

The Great Artesian Basin

HOPE has acquired a resource about the Great Artesian Basin called 'Water Down Under'. This is a very informative DVD that explains how the Basin came about and why we need to do everything we can to preserve it. If you are interested in borrowing it, please contact the office.

Sustainable Housing

Sustainable housing minimizes the burden on the environment, is comfortable and practical to live in. It is cost efficient to maintain. Queensland Government has a Sustainable Home Program. One such home has been built in Toowoomba, and it is open for visitors. See SH principles in practice and learn! Visit to see how you can reduce running costs by up to 60%, decrease water and energy consumption, and how to use natural heating and cooling.

The Sustainable Home is located at 308 Ramsay Street and is open Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays between 10am and 4pm. For more information on the Toowoomba project, contact Toowoomba Regional Council's Sustainable Housing Officer: Ph: 07 4688 6426.

The Federal Budget 2008-09

The budget for 08-09 has been released. Here are some relevant excerpts from the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and Art's part of the budget:

Green loans for Aussie Homes

The Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett, announced that up to 200,000 working families will be eligible for Green Loans over five years to improve the energy and water efficiency of their homes, as part of the 2008-09 Budget. "Green Loans will provide people with easy access to practical household improvements that combined could reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by more than 600,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent every year.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/garrett/2008/pubs/budmr20080513b.pdf>

Government makes it easier to be green in one easy stop

Doing your bit for the environment will now be even easier thanks to the Rudd Government's investment of \$3.0 million to develop the *One Stop Green Shop* online environmental resource for schools, businesses and families. "The *One Stop Green Shop* will provide the Australian community with a single window to all federal, state and local government environmental programs for sustainability at home," Mr Garrett said.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/garrett/2008/pubs/budmr20080513d.pdf>

Increased funding for solar rebates in 2008-09

The Rudd Labor Government will bring forward \$25.6 million in funding under the Solar Homes and Communities Plan in 2008-09, and introduce a means test to make the program more equitable. "There has been a substantial increase in solar power installations across the country, so the Government has increased the funding available for rebates in 2008-09."

<http://www.environment.gov.au/garrett/2008/pubs/budmr20080513f.pdf>

\$254.8 million in water security for cities and towns

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, said that the Rudd Government will invest \$254.8 million to increase the security of water supplies in cities and towns as part of its \$12.9 billion *Water for the Future* plan. "The effects of climate change mean that most of Australia's towns and cities are facing a future with less water."

<http://www.environment.gov.au/wong/2008/pubs/budmr20080513d.pdf>

\$400 million brought forward to act on Murray-Darling

The Rudd Government has brought forward \$400 million in funding to accelerate water purchase and infrastructure projects in the Murray-Darling Basin. Bringing the \$400 million forward in the Murray-Darling Basin delivered on a key election commitment.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/wong/2008/pubs/budmr20080513e.pdf>

For more information on the Budget visit:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/about/publications/budget/2008>

Updates on upcoming events

On **Saturday 14 June 2008**, EDO (Environmental Defenders Office) and TREC (Toowoomba & Region Environment Council) are organizing an Environmental Law Workshop in Toowoomba. Learn how the community has a voice in urban development, mining, water planning, pollution prevention, access to information and peaceful protest laws.

Presented by EDO Lawyers Jo Bragg and Larissa Waters; Chaired by TREC Coordinator, Lara Nunn
Time: **10am -3pm** (lunch provided). **Venue:** The Jacaranda Room, Grand Central Shopping Centre, corner Margaret and Dent Streets.

RSVP: To info@trec.org.au or 4632 1505

Late Mail - just caught this bulletin!

Ian Lowe & Irina Catalina at the 2020 Summit

The 2020 Summit was an inspiring event, with enormous energy and strong commitment to the possibility of shaping a better future. According to ACF President, Professor Ian Lowe and ACF Councillor Irinia Catalini, there were more positives than negatives and we could be very pleased with the level of support at the 2020 summit for the sort of future that we want.

In his opening address, the Governor-General noted the far-reaching ramifications of possible climate changes... Agriculture, cities and sustainability are all affected, as is Australia's place in the world.

There is no single policy which can respond to every aspect of climate change. Rather, the Summit discussion suggested almost every aspect of policy choice will be affected by the drive toward sustainability. Climate change is the overarching issue this generation and those to follow must address.

Population, climate change, sustainability etc stream

Australia faces an unprecedented challenge from climate change. We risk losing our natural heritage, our rivers, landscapes and biodiversity. We have a brief opportunity to act now to safeguard and shape our future prosperity.

Ambitions

Our aspiration is that by 2020 Australia is the world's leading green and sustainable economy, that we will set time bound targets and be on track to dramatically reduce our ecological footprint.

By 2020 Australia will be making a major contribution to a comprehensive global response to climate change, including working with our partners on clean energy. Australia will have dramatically reduced our emissions.

Environmental considerations will be fully integrated into economic decision making in Australia at the household, business and government levels.

A robust emissions trading system and a suite of complementary measures will be driving a low carbon revolution with Government taking the lead, working in partnership with business and the community. Climate and sustainability policy will also incorporate the needs of disadvantaged and low-income Australians.

A new dialogue will have been established with our Indigenous peoples on our response to climate change, water and sustainability challenges.

Australia's globally outstanding ecosystems and species are managed to reduce threats and build resilience to promote adaptation to climate change.

By 2020 the health of Australia's ecological systems will be improved.

Priority themes

An integrated, whole-of-government approach underpinned by clear targets and measurement with independent reporting is fundamental.

Strong national leadership and international engagement was identified as a priority theme.

Top ideas

We could adopt a National Sustainability, Population and Climate Change Agenda and develop robust institutions to support it. Australia would have a whole-of-government approach to climate change and sustainability policy, encompassing government expenditure, taxation, regulation and investment.

As part of this agenda we could include an audit function to report on government's performance against these climate change and sustainability objectives.

We could implement a set of national environmental accounts, including carbon and water accounts, to inform government, business and community decision-making.

Through a National Sustainable Cities Program the government could lead a nationally consistent approach to urban and regional planning which drives water efficiency and reductions in emissions. This could be supported by the implementation of tax and other policies that encourage the use of public transport.

Australia will have a population policy.

Further investment could be directed into research, development and deployment to enable a low emissions energy revolution.

We could transform the ecological footprint of the built environment by taking the lead on national planning, building and product standards to minimise waste and reduce water and energy consumption. A particular initiative could be to require carbon neutrality for all new buildings constructed beyond 2020.

Before 2020 all Australians could have the tools to enable them to measure and manage their personal carbon footprint.

The urgency of responding to climate change makes it imperative that the Emissions Trading Scheme and the ensuing long-run carbon price drive a transition to clean energy technologies”

Disappointments

Professor Lowe proposed a formal statement that no new coal-fired power stations without carbon capture and storage should be built. He prefaced this proposal with an explanation that there were different views around the room about whether carbon capture and storage was technically feasible, economically practical, ecologically viable or socially acceptable, so there would be different views about whether coal-fired power stations with carbon capture and storage might be acceptable, but we could surely all agree that coal-fired power without carbon capture and storage is now unacceptable! Remarkably, that was not the case, and the troglodytes in the coal industry and the economics profession opposed this proposition, necessitating Senator Wong reporting that “a substantial number of the group felt strongly” that there should be no more old-fashioned coal-fired power stations but “there was no consensus”.

While there was a strong consensus on the need for a rapid transition to clean energy supply technologies, there were some at the Summit who believed that this label included “clean coal” or even nuclear power!

While the sub-group that Professor Lowe was in agreed a consensus position that we must “dramatically reduce our ecological footprint while striving to maintain or improve quality of life”, the final statement after including the views of the other two sub-groups said “dramatically decrease our ecological footprint while continuing to grow our economy and improve our quality of life” – so the old approach that quality of life is improved by economic growth is perpetuated in the statement.

There remains a pervading neo-liberal ethos that sees price signals and market forces as the main driver of change, with regulation and government action as supporting strategies.

The Top Ideas are mainly couched in terms of things that we “could” do; many of us saw them as things we must do, but that view was not universal.

Finally, while there was grudging acceptance that we should have a population policy, there are clearly still very deep divisions about what that policy should be.

"I argued that we should have a goal of stabilising the population at a level that could be sustainably supported, but others opposed even that sort of general proposition that allowed room for debate about per capita consumption levels. Many of the group clearly still hope that rapid technological change could somehow compensate for the increasing demands of a growing population," says Ian Lowe.

ACF Councillor Irina Cattalini learned from the 2020 Summit is that there is no shortage of great advocates for sustainability around Australia, with a vision for change and ideas of how to get there – but we spend far too much time in our silos.

It's worth considering the message from Paul Hawken's latest book, *How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming* (Viking Penguin, 2007):

"There is no question that the environmental movement is critical to our survival. Our house is literally burning, and it is only logical that environmentalists expect the social justice movement to get on the environmental bus. But it is the other way around; the only way we are going to put out the fire is to get on the social justice bus and heal our wounds, because in the end, there is only one bus. Armed with that growing realization, we can address all that is harmful externally. What will guide us is a living intelligence that creates miracles every second, carried forth by a movement with no name."

Great ideas

Needless to say there was a buzz of anticipation and excitement arriving at Parliament House and entering the Great Hall for the Opening Address. Prepped and ready for putting our ideas to work, we entered the senate rooms where 100 of us were expected to share our ambitions on Population, Climate, Sustainable Cities and Water.

Despite the diversity of opinions in the room, there was a surprisingly strong alignment of views on the most important issue: the urgency of addressing climate change and the need to act now in this brief window of opportunity available.

Great ideas came forward in droves. Greater investment in public transport, small scale distributed power generation and rain water capture in our cities, personal carbon allocations, nationally consistent building regulations to improve water and energy efficiency, an overhaul of perverse taxes and subsidies, retrofitting of low-income housing, and a new sustainability commission as a watchdog with teeth to make sure all this happens, to name a few.

Opposing views

On the other hand, the 20th century was still yapping at our heels, anxious about being left behind in this renewed enthusiasm for moving rapidly to a sustainable future. So it was unsurprising that the future of coal became highly contentious.

We could not even agree to opposing any new ‘dirty coal’ despite whether or not carbon capture and storage was believed to have a future, and hence the battle lines over language were drawn. It was disappointing that despite the best of efforts, we could not get the word ‘renewable’ included in any of the arising text. Significantly, descriptions such as ‘clean energy’ were swapped for the more accurate ‘low emission energy’ to avoid capture by the ‘clean coal’ lobby’s language. It was pleasing to see that theirs was the voice recorded as the minority dissent.

Population and consumption

There was a lack of willingness to address the big issues of population and consumption. Many of us gave it a good try, but try as we might, we could not get recognition for the connection between our consumption levels, the pathways we choose to a sustainable future and the population we will be able to sustain.

While one of our subgroups achieved consensus that Australia needs to develop a population policy through a comprehensive national debate, even this moderate objective has not yet made it through in our reports. I proposed that until we agree on what pathway we are going to take to battle climate change and the corresponding consumption patterns that pathway will entail, we can not determine what population level we can sustain. We have two choices, as a nation: we must consume less, or we must consume differently.

Most of us may need to do both, but for a significant number of under-consuming groups, there is a need to consume more, differently yes, more efficiently, yes, but more, none the less. Just as the international community is turning its attention to sustainable economic development paths for developing nations, so we need to consider the development needs of disadvantaged Australians, especially in Indigenous communities. Sadly, on new ideas to improve equity in an ‘environment’ stream, mine was one of only a few voices.

Transport

Also inadequately dealt with was the issue of transport. Here the resistance was less from an interested minority, than from a lack of courage or faith that large scale, systemic change is possible. While we were asked to think big, many people thought “that will never happen...” With the daily stories of increasing petrol prices a constant reminder of peak oil, now more than ever we need to think differently about our transport and urban planning.

One of the ideas that did get through in the reports out of our session was that we should empower households with tools like smart meters to help them change their behaviour. Interestingly, that was never an idea put forward by anyone in the group. It goes to show the importance and power of good process, and accurate scribing!

The 2020 Summit asked us to ‘think big’ to contribute innovative solutions to our future challenges, but those challenges are with us now. We were asked to avoid getting bogged down in details like emissions targets and the design of a carbon trading scheme, so didn’t tackle those, or other complex but important issues such as pricing policy, focussing instead on the big picture.

What we want is for our ideas for the future to stem from good principles, a commitment to sustainability, and to equity. What we got was an ambition to set targets and be on our way to reducing our national and international ecological footprint. It’s not a bad start.

(Extract from Friends of South-East Queensland news bulletin, May 2008)

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