



# TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2006 / ISSUE 2

E D I T O R I A L

## TEC GROWS

**TEC has just moved to a new office. It's bigger reflecting our growth over the last 8 years and we hope, in the future. Our hard working staff have better conditions. And TEC has a lot to do.**

While sorting out the old office – what gets archived, recycled or taken with us – the tonnes of work that TEC has undertaken became readily apparent. A massive effort on toxic chemicals and coastal protection for example, spanning more than a decade. A campaign to reform the RTA, with a proposed law to integrate transport and land use planning drafted; and early efforts to bring climate change to public and political attention also emerged from the old files. These and the rest triggered memories of the many enthusiastic, intelligent and committed people who have helped the environment through TEC, either as staff or volunteers. It's been an enormous effort.

There was also a lesson for environmental campaigners – you rarely win at the first attempt. Persistence is crucial. The environment movement has such a large agenda, seeking a paradigm change that will make our society sustainable. We must keep pressing on, presenting the agenda and policy prescriptions; making new alliances and resisting the inevitable counter attacks by those who wish to hang onto to their exploitative ways or are just inert and cannot rise to the challenge.

TEC tries hard to be efficient with its resources, well aware we are not a rich group and greatly appreciative of the donations and grants we receive. In keeping with the concept of our founders we avoid large administrative overhead so we can focus on effective and strategic action and work on a wide range of issues.

As we empty our boxes into the filing cabinets and onto the shelves we are thinking of future campaigns, both national and NSW based. Some are continuations of long running projects, others are new. We are going to raise the profile of the need to

protect our threatened native grasslands. We will be helping over a dozen local groups combat the destruction of rivers caused by rapidly expanding coal mining. We are entering the final stage of the regional coastal conservation work. Recycling of computers, which contain many toxic components and valuable resources, is a top priority, as the industry fails to adopt a take-back plan. And we are always pushing to make Sydney more environmentally sustainable.

Our campaign plan also features climate change – the biggest environmental threat. We are working where other environment groups are largely absent – reform of the National Electricity Market, so that energy conservation and renewables take centre stage – and playing a key role in developing the principles for emissions trading. We are also working with other groups for a renewable energy target for NSW.

### **There's lots to do.**

Come and visit us. Ideas and support very welcome, as TEC grows over the next ten years.

TEC HAS MOVED TO:  
**Level 4, 78 Liverpool St, Sydney 2000**

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**Ph: 02 9261 3437 Fax: 02 9261 3990**

JEFF ANGEL, Director

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# Govt wrong on light rail

**With traffic congestion a major problem in the Sydney CBD and demand for public transport increasing with rising fuel prices - the need for a CBD extension to Sydney's present light rail system is increasingly apparent. However the NSW Minister for Transport has gone to war against light rail. Some of the objections put forward include traffic impacts; difficulties posed by narrow streets; and reluctance of commuters to transfer from buses to light rail. TEC disagrees.**

Extending light rail through the CBD would free up buses currently caught in congested CBD traffic to service other areas, thus improving public transport throughout Sydney. Light rail offers a number of other advantages over buses including increased capacity and quieter operation.

A report by Hyder Consulting to Sydney City Council concluded that there would be no problems with the preferred Castlereagh Street route. There is currently little north-south traffic on this street and cars would be encouraged to turn left out of Castlereagh Street wherever possible to discourage through traffic. The street would remain open but be mainly used for property access.

It was also concluded that there would be no significant impact on east-west traffic flows particularly with the Cross City Tunnel having taken some of these movements off the surface streets. The State Government had previously deferred any consideration of a CBD light rail extension until after the completion of the Cross City Tunnel.

The issue of narrow streets is also a red herring with light rail being successfully operated in many areas with narrower streets throughout the world.

Passenger transfers from buses can also be managed with the development of appropriate interchanges at Eddy Avenue and Pitt Street. Transferring to faster more efficient light rail system will also prove more comfortable and user friendly than being stuck on buses forced to crawl through congested city traffic. Transfers between bus and rail have been well managed with comfortable interchanges at Parramatta, Bondi Junction, Liverpool and Blacktown. Integrated ticketing would increase the speed and convenience of transfers. It has also been estimated that 60-70% of total demand would come from internal trips, transfers from heavy rail or ferry or people using the existing light rail system.

It is clear that there are no serious impediments to light rail in the CBD and that extension of the current system will yield major public transport benefits. TEC will continue campaigning.

**STOP PRESS!** The NSW Opposition has released a visionary light rail policy for Sydney. It will prove most popular. The Iemma government is out of step with the community and sustainable city policy in this area.



# GREEN CAPITAL

ADVANCING CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY

AN INITIATIVE OF TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

## Short-termism: A barrier to sustainability

Over the last couple of years, TEC's Green Capital has seen the short-term focus of business emerge as a major barrier to sustainability. Decisions made by a business today may result in greenhouse gas emissions that will persist in the atmosphere for over 100 years. That same company will be judged on its financial performance over a mere 3 months. This gap means that even if a business is trying to be sustainable, they may be limited by the short-term expectations of management and investors.

To raise the profile of the issue, Green Capital organised two large debates in Sydney and Melbourne. The debate panel included Steve Gibbs, CEO of the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme which manages over \$15 Billion for 298,000 members; Mike Hawker, CEO of Insurance Australia Group & Michael Ulmer, CFO for National Australia Bank. The panel raised some big challenges, including the fact that although superannuation fund members are with a fund for over 30 years, superannuation trustees evaluate the performance of their fund managers over a mere 3 years.

ABC Journalist Stephen Long challenged the panel with three hypotheticals - investment in a new coal fired power station, a dodgy coastal housing development and a new tollway. Discussion highlighted how difficult it can be to make sustainable decisions in a culture where the current financial year rules the roost

Given how systemic short-termism is, there is clearly a need for further work on the issue. Green Capital has secured funding for a research project that will identify the causes of and solutions to short-termism. Hopefully it will lay the foundations for an ongoing debate and a future that is able to take inter-generational equity seriously.

Tony Mohr, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

## THE FUEL CRISIS

TEC recently described the reaction of many businesses and governments to the current fuel crisis, as like stunned mullets. We believe Australia needs to come to grips with the threats and opportunities, rather than letting the situation run away from us and endanger environmental gains.

Already we've seen those who have been trenchant critics (such as the nuclear and oil shale industry) of environmental movement positions, jump on the bandwagon to elevate their dangerous sectors to the moral high ground. It's essential that with the onset of climate change along with oil supply problems, we don't let the oil problem overwhelm the tough task of environmental sustainability by for example choosing more greenhouse intensive alternatives.

We are seeing increased prices affect different industry sectors as well as a general impact on macro-economic indicators and policy. These will embolden the existing problem of short-termism, when we need to be looking to the longer term.

TEC has obtained briefings from the team at Sydney University and CSIRO that delivered the widely reported 'Balancing Act' and expert risk analysis by leading economists Dr Shane Oliver of AMP Capital Investors and Jeff Oughton of National Australia Bank. These were presented to the latest Green Capital event to help us all get our heads around the issue.

Environmentalists are as much concerned about economics as the condition of the environment, as we are well aware of the interactions between the two. We want to be part of the solution in a way that advances environmental sustainability, as opposed to making our current environmental problems, worse.

## Launch of Safer Solutions website



Our new website containing Australia's largest non-government source of information on hazardous chemicals in the home was launched this month. Part of a project funded by the Environmental Trust, it is also a national pilot for improving public awareness of problems and alternatives and OEILT.

TEC has had a long history in chemicals issues including:

- 1983 - TEC's Toxic Chemicals Committee organised the first national conference on the toxic chemical load on the environment and human health. Later conferences on solvents and chemicals in schools, broke new ground.
- 1986 - publication of 'A-Z of Chemicals in the Home', now in its third edition.
- 1995 - a 10-year campaign resulted in a ban on hazardous organochlorines for termite control in Australia.
- 1996 - our inventory of Sydney Harbour showed gross sewerage and toxic chemical pollution, which led to the Government announcing a \$400 million clean-up program for the harbour. TEC exposed extensive contamination outside Sydney's oldest toxic waste dump at Castlereagh.
- 1997 - TEC joined with local people in Gunnedah in 1997 to fight for better controls on aerial spraying of agricultural chemicals.
- 1999 - TEC published 'Clearing the Air, Pesticide Spray Drift Kit' to help communities combat chemical trespass.
- 2002 - release of 'Safer Solutions a guide to integrated pest management for schools'.
- 2005-6 - a successful campaign for notification laws with the NSW Pesticides Amendment (Notification and Miscellaneous Matters) Regulation 2005 for pesticide use in public places including adjacent to schools, kindergartens and childcare centres.

Along with the website we are also employing community educators who are visiting parents groups. In the next few months new information resources will include home renovation and gardening advice.

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

# WASTE CAMPAIGN

## Plastic Bags - EDGING CLOSER TO A BAN

The failure of the retail sector to meet the reduction targets it negotiated with state and federal Governments has brought regulation of the free plastic bag a step closer. The large supermarkets (which make up only half of the retail sector) failed to reduce plastic bag use in 2005 by the agreed 50%. They also failed to engage small retailers on plastic bag reductions, and a recent survey of check-out practices shows that operators are still bag-happy.

While the Federal Government is opposed to a regulatory approach (favouring the voluntary tactic), the states have shown leadership, with Victoria recently announcing a ban on free bags through a levy on light-weight plastic bags. This leaves the ball in the NSW Government's court. Will NSW be left dragging the chain as supermarkets continue to hand out billions of bags every year?



## Rebyte! SETS THE BAR FOR TOXIC COMPUTERS

TEC has produced a comprehensive best practice plan for a national computer recycling scheme - ReByte! The plan challenges the multi-billion dollar industry to divert millions of toxic computers from landfill after years of inaction.

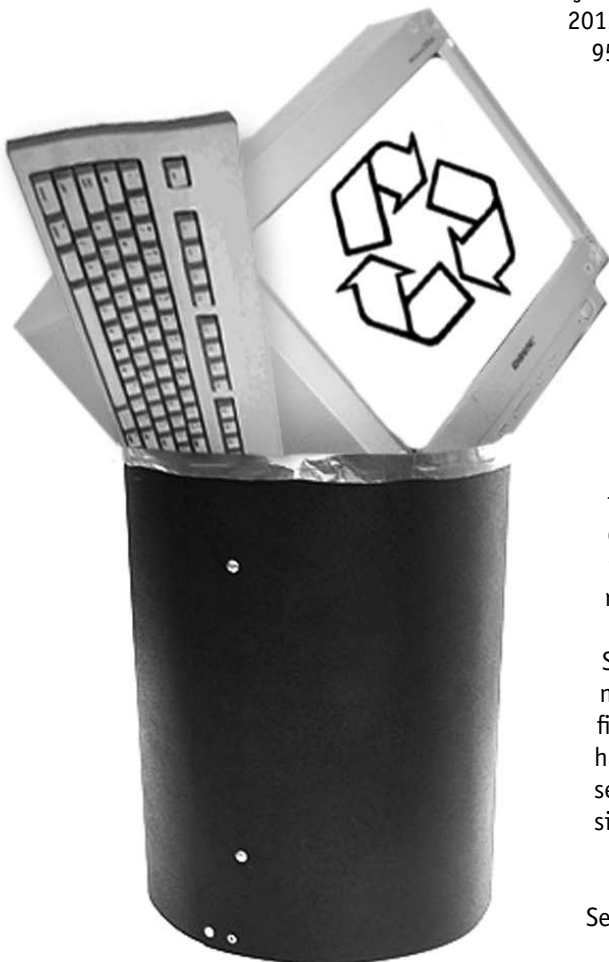
ReByte! lays out a timetable for a 95% recovery rate for old discarded computers by 2012. For new computers, which can remain in use for many years, the target is 95% by 2022. The scheme utilises innovative market based instruments such as advanced recycling fees and refundable deposits to deliver collection targets. To achieve best practice recycling, the scheme rewards producers for reducing the toxic load of their computers and for making them easier to recycle.

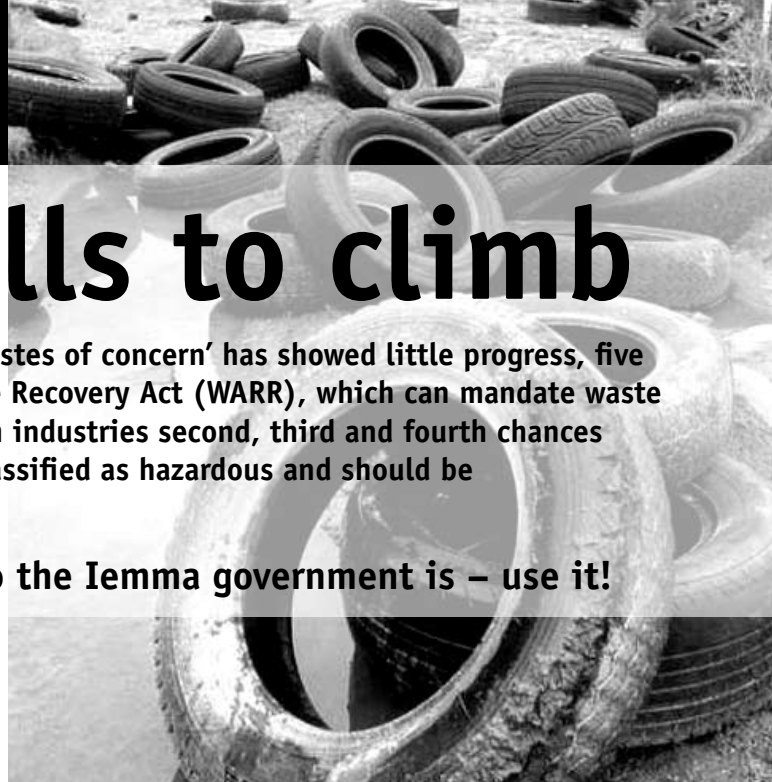
Computers contain a range of hazardous materials including: mercury, arsenic, cadmium, PVC, lead, solvents, brominated flame retardants and other hazardous materials and many rare and non-renewable materials that are wasted when dumped in landfills.

Only around one percent of computers are currently recycled, because it's artificially cheaper to dump them in landfills. As with most products, this is because the environmental cost of end-of-life computers isn't taken into account. This has meant that millions of computers have been dumped in landfills and millions more are on the way. With 2.4 million new computers sold in Australia each year and industry stalling on action, regulation is urgently needed.

So far state governments have delayed action due to the interminable national negotiations with industry, which sees every week of delay as a financial bonus. It is now time for NSW and Victoria to lead. ReByte! which has been sent to every state environment minister and computer manufacturer sets a benchmark. With a workable scheme now on the table, there are simply no more excuses.

See TEC's website [www.tec.org.au](http://www.tec.org.au) for a copy of Rebyte!





# More toxic hills to climb

The release of the 2005-06 Priority Statement for 'wastes of concern' has showed little progress, five years on from the NSW Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act (WARR), which can mandate waste recovery schemes. Government is still giving problem industries second, third and fourth chances after years of delay. Most of the wastes should be classified as hazardous and should be banned from landfills.

**NSW has the WARR Act and our message to the Iemma government is – use it!**

## Mobile phones

Mobile phones contain toxic substances such as heavy metals and brominated flame retardants, as well as non-renewable resources such as gold and copper. Despite over 30 million phones becoming waste and the industry having charged consumers a recycling levy for years, less than 4% are recycled. Yet the NSW Government merely asks industry to present a plan for another plan.

## Office Paper

Around 500,000 tonnes of high quality office paper is sent to landfill every year in Australia, which is a huge waste of a natural resources and a lost opportunity for the recycling industry.

## Paint

It is unclear how much unused paint is disposed of inappropriately across NSW, but as an indication, the NSW Chemical Cleanout program collected 217 tonnes of unused paint during 2003-04. Used paint has therefore rightly been elevated to a high priority.

## Televisions

Televisions contain a range of hazardous materials including lead, mercury, cadmium and brominated flame retardants. They also contain a large range of valuable non-renewable resources. There are around 32 million TVs currently in use in Australia and up to 15,000 tonnes go to landfill in NSW each year. Despite positive early signs from the TV industry with plans to implement their own scheme, little progress has been made.

## Tyres

Over 5 million tyres reach their end of life in NSW every year. Despite charging consumers a recycling levy on each tyre sold, about 2.5 million tyres still end up in landfills every year. This is a rip-off for consumers, a waste of resources and a potential source of toxic waste. After many years government support, the tyre industry has failed to implement an effective scheme.

## Agricultural and veterinary containers

The seven years of operation the voluntary industry scheme, DrumMUSTER, has only achieved a 24% recovery rate for containers sold and a 9% participation rate out of 40,000 users of farm chemicals. The NSW Government should therefore require industry to switch from the current levy based system and to a deposit-refund system.

## Batteries

Cadmium, contained in NiCad batteries, is a known toxic substance which is dangerous to human and environmental health. Millions of NiCad batteries are imported into Australia in rechargeable appliances and for industrial applications. They were listed as a waste of concern in 2004, but industry has done nothing to take responsibility for this toxic waste, and the Priority Statement only asks industry to provide a report on proposals for battery recovery and labelling.

Over 225,000 lead acid batteries are dumped in the environment or landfills every year. This presents a significant environmental and health risk due to the large amounts of lead and other toxic materials. As the used batteries already have value due to high international commodity prices for lead, an effective scheme should encourage DIY consumers to return their batteries to retailers.

## End of life vehicle residuals

Toxic waste from the 500,000 annual end-of-life vehicles represents a severe environmental and health problem. Currently, toxic fluids such as oil, coolant, brake fluids and air conditioning gases, as well as heavy metals such as lead, hexavalent chromium, cadmium and mercury, and plastics containing brominated flame retardants and lead are being shredded and sent to landfill. This toxic cocktail can leach into groundwater to damage the environment and human health. This is in stark contrast to EU laws where shredder floc from vehicles is classified as a hazardous waste and manufacturers must recycle 95% of vehicles they manufacture.

## Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)

PVC is a threat due to the use of lead and cadmium stabilisers, and possibly other toxic chemicals in PVC products. The failure to recycle PVC also represents the loss of valuable resources. Little actual progress has been achieved to date in either the reduction of toxic materials from PVC or the recovery of used PVC.

## Treated timber

Treated timber contains toxic substances that pose significant risk. While treated timber is being phased out for some uses, it will become a growing problem as structures built with the timber are replaced. The Minister has simply requested progress reports from industry on actions to identify and separated treated timber waste, to educate the community on disposal, to assess benign alternatives to treated timber and to develop end-markets for treated timber. This is an inadequate action considering the volume and toxicity of the problem.

## Lubricants and oils

Most used lubricants and oils are covered under the Commonwealth's Product Stewardship for Oil Act, however, a significant amount of oil used by home oil change market is not collected under this scheme. The NSW Government should therefore require the petroleum industry to financially contribute to the collection and recycling of oil from home consumers.



# Central Coast Desal

**Despite the success of the campaign against desalination in Sydney, the fight against this expensive and unsustainable water supply option continues on the Central Coast with Wyong Shire and Gosford City Councils pursuing desalination as an answer to water shortages. TEC is working closely with the Community Environment Network (CEN) on the Central Coast to oppose these proposals.**

The Councils originally advocated construction of a permanent desalination plant, however, a report to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in 2005 concluded that no provision should be made for funding desalination in the next round of water prices as the case for desalination had not been made and other options were available.

Following this rebuff, Wyong Council has pushed ahead with plans to lease and operate as many as 20 portable desalination plants, without IPART approval. There is also serious concern that portable desalination plants will not be subjected to the level of environmental assessment that would be required for approval of the previously mooted fixed desalination plant

Much of the push for desalination on the Central Coast appears to be coming from developer interests who see water resources as a constraint on urban development in the area. Desalination offers a quick fix to allow urban sprawl to continue unabated.

TEC and local environment groups are strongly advocating increased water recycling as a sustainable long term solution to water shortages on the Central Coast. Present recycling levels are appallingly low. As an example, in a 2004 submission to IPART Wyong Council revealed that less than 0.1% of its effluent was recycled and that it was only planned to increase this to 0.8% by 2005. Desalination should not be considered until all environmentally and economically viable recycling and demand management options have been exhausted. There is little evidence, however, that the Councils are prepared to embrace sustainable alternatives to desalination.

The push for mobile desalination and the failure to develop recycling also reflects the fact that the Councils are no longer able to adequately manage urban water in a sustainable and economically prudent manner.

TEC and CEN have called on the NSW Government to establish a new Central Coast water corporation along similar lines to Hunter and Sydney Water as the only viable option for management of urban water on the Central Coast. This would ensure transparency and accountability through the establishment of an operating licence and regular public audits of performance. Transferring management of water services to a Central Coast water corporation would also enhance management of urban water by placing it under an organisation with no other responsibilities whilst ensuring that revenue collected from customers remains on the Central Coast.

The future of water management on the Central Coast has reached a critical juncture. Decisions made now will have lasting ramifications for urban sustainability in a rapidly growing region.

## **STOP PRESS!**

The two councils and Minister for Utilities have agreed to establish a Central Coast Water Authority. TEC will closely monitor the legislation.

Leigh Martin, URBAN CAMPAIGNER

# HELP THE ENVIRONMENT TODAY FOR OUR FUTURE

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

TEC and the environmental battle can be greatly assisted with your volunteer time and skills.

If you can help, please return this coupon to:  
Volunteers Coordinator, Total Environment Centre,  
PO Box A176, Sydney South NSW 1235

I would like to volunteer to help TEC with:

- Reception / phones
- Stalls
- Research / submission writing
- Office work (eg mail outs)
- Library
- Other

My previous work has been .....

My qualifications / skills are .....

My environmental interests are .....

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

Name: .....

Address: .....

Postcode: ..... Date: .....

Email: .....

Phone: (day).....(evening).....

Make a tax deductible donation to

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Yes, I want to help the environment campaign work of TEC.

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

Postcode: .....

I wish to pay by:

- Cheque payable to Total Environment Centre Inc
- Visa  Mastercard  Bankcard

I wish to donate:

- \$1000  \$500  \$100  Other \$.....

or Please deduct \$..... monthly from my credit card until further notice

Card Number: \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_ / \_ \_ \_ \_

Card expires: .....

Name on card: .....

Signature: .....

Phone: (day) ..... (evening) .....

Return this form and payment to:

The Administrator

Total Environment Centre Inc

PO Box A176

Sydney South

NSW 1235

## Consider a Bequest

Please remember TEC in your will. The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording:  
"I bequeath the sum of \$..... to TOTAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE Inc. for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being of Total Environment Centre Inc. shall be complete discharge to my executors in respect of any sum paid to Total Environment Centre Inc. "

newsletter

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