

TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

2005 / ISSUE 2

E D I T O R I A L

SOME WINS

It's not all doom and gloom and sometimes the sun breaks through after years of persistent campaigning. In the last few months there have been some good wins.

Brigalow victory

The Carr Government said it would make a decision on the future of the remnant Brigalow woodlands at least three times in the last five years. At each turn there was an excuse – a new big charcoal plant might want the timber; the drought; the 2003 state election. Then earlier this year as wood supply agreements were about to expire and industry pressed for lengthy extensions at unsustainable levels, the Government grasped the nettle. Instead of locking out a conservation decision and allowing further pillaging of the forests, they granted a temporary 3 month extension, with a final land use decision by the end of March.

It was a month late but on 4 May the Premier announced (after tortuous internal government discussions), that 350,000ha of new conservation reserves would be created along with a \$40m industry restructuring package. Almost all of the icon areas sought by the environment movement were to be protected.

The campaign was a joint effort by local and state groups, including TEC. The conservation park plan was countered by the BRUS (so-called Brigalow Region United Stakeholders) proposal, developed by local exploitation interests which contained only token reserves. This position is still supported by the Coalition which has vowed to reverse the Carr Government decision. On the other hand the local timber industry is beginning to see the light and taking advantage of the generous funding package.

Energy Savings Fund

Readers of 'Total Environment' will be familiar with our campaign for a 'demand management fund'. Based on successful overseas models, the fund works outside the established electricity supply industry which is antagonistic to selling less power, and seeks to support a growing energy savings industry.

During April, Utilities Minister Frank Sartor introduced the Water and Energy Savings Act, which allocated \$40mpa to energy and \$30mpa for water along with the power to require savings plans from industry. The move is a clear recognition that current policies are failing to gain traction and if a growing and competitive energy conservation industry can be established, then there are good prospects for a diminution of demand for more coal power.

Of course it won't be that easy and traditional supporters of fossil fuels will continue to try and scare the public about 'the lights going out' if we don't have lots more coal power. TEC is continuing to campaign against more coal.

Land clearing

It has taken two and a half years but the negotiations to end land clearing and give the Native Vegetation Act 2003 effective regulations, have come to a close. TEC was prominent at all stages – design of the ALP 2003 election policy to end broadscale clearing; membership of the Sinclair Committee that devised the new legislation and catchment management agencies; and finally the regulations that provide much needed working detail to the new regime.

It has been a long process with farming representatives asserting their rights to greater freedom of action to clear native bush than the policy intended. Despite their efforts to undermine the policy, some key agreements were made, while in other important areas the Government had to step in. A wide range of matters had to be resolved including – protection of threatened species; retention of disappearing grasslands; so-called invasive scrub; environmental assessment of clearing and routine agricultural management activities.

TEC will keep a close eye on how the legislation is implemented.

Waste

The next era of waste management must have extended producer responsibility as its central tenet. TEC has been working on the National Packaging Covenant (NPC) and electronic waste, such as computers and mobile phones.

The NPC work has been a long process of dismantling industry PR such as:

- 'container deposits will harm kerbside collections – this does not happen in other countries and the two systems happily coexist;
- Australians recycle 50% of packaging – this is mostly paper and aluminium, not the horrendous plastic wastes which need to be targeted;
- 'industry has made great advances under the NPC' - you can't tell because there are no targets or independent monitoring.

Now federal and state environment ministers have imposed a 65% recycling target (up from 48%) by 2010 and an end to NPC greenwash. In the area of computer waste, NSW has ordered a recalcitrant industry to develop a take-back scheme.

To all our donors and supporters – thank you for your help.

Jeff Angel Executive Director

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Climate change campaign

Jane Castle, Resource Conservation Campaigner

The effects of climate chaos have really started to bite, and so has the focus on NSW's energy policy, with good reason: the biggest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in NSW is coal fired power, which generates over 90% of our electricity. But despite the huge potential for energy savings and commercially viable low-emission technologies, a responsible NSW energy policy has been put at risk by Treasury bureaucrats and lobbying by the fossil fuel industry.

In December 2004, the NSW Government released its Energy Green [discussion] Paper. It claimed that the State was running out of base-load power and encouraged the private sector to invest in new coal-fired power stations to meet the alleged shortage. The Paper claimed that the emissions from new coal could be off-set by NSW Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme (which has recently been shown to be far less effective than claimed). Of the many flaws, the most conspicuous was the failure to consider a comprehensive energy savings plan as the first choice for addressing NSW's energy supply and demand balance.

Total Environment Centre's response has been consistent with its ongoing campaign to reduce energy waste and increase support for low emission technologies. Most recently, TEC's campaign for a Demand Management Fund resulted in the establishment of the \$40 million per year Energy Savings Fund. The Fund has the potential to leverage competitive energy savings programs and kick-start a vibrant energy savings sector that can compete with polluting fossil fuel generation. The Fund needs to be extended beyond 5 years and protected from being stripped for other purposes, to have guaranteed impact. To support the case for using the Energy Savings Fund to address energy demand growth before considering more electricity generation, TEC has just released a new report 'New Coal or Energy Savings?

The True Costs for NSW Consumers'. The report compares the costs of coal-fired power and energy savings. It shows that the full costs of the proposal to build another 1500MW of generation capacity at Mt Piper would be \$9.4 billion once all the network, fuel and greenhouse gas emissions costs are included. This would be \$3915 for every household in NSW. In contrast, the cost of implementing 1500MW of energy savings would cost only \$1.2 billion, with consumers reaping \$2.4 billion of savings in energy bills.

The report also questions the Government's claim that base-load supply is running out, and shows that the proposed expansion of the Mt Piper power station would only meet energy demand for 4 years. Energy savings measures, however, could address base-load demand until 2027, allowing time to reduce demand even further or implement low emission generation across the State.

TEC has also produced, with other environment groups, the 'Common Myths of NSW Energy Policy' paper (in response to much misinformation about NSW's energy supply and demand), and the 'Environment Score Card' to rank the final Energy Plan. A 'no new coal' announcement by Bob Carr would send a strong national message on energy policy.

See www.tec.org.au for the recent documents

WATER

TOO PRECIOUS TO USE ONLY ONCE

Jeff Angel

Sydney has level 3 water restrictions. It is hard to imagine in our drying climate that Warragamba Dam will again fill to past high levels. How did we arrive at this parlous state and are there sustainable ways to improve our drought security?

Some will clutch at the call for a new dam. But the water catchment areas are far worse hit in our changing climate than coastal areas. A new dam would be just as empty. Similarly flawed is the plan for a desalination plant. Granted it is an obvious emergency response the government may feel compelled to embrace, but like a dam or the plan to access the deep water in existing dams, it simply gives a growing population more water to use just once, flushing it out into the ocean.

What is the point of spending billions of dollars on repeating the mistakes of the past? And the desalination plant will just add to the greenhouse gases that are contributing to climate change. While there are glimmers of light in current government policy in regard to encouragement of individual and business water conservation, much more needs to be done.

There is the scandal of business introducing water wasting household goods and industry practices. The same can be said about the explosion of energy inefficient air conditioning onto the market. What is wrong with the engineers and marketing people that they produce goods that have such a profoundly adverse environmental impact? This social irresponsibility is unacceptable.

And when government considers regulation to stop the waste of resources and associated community cost, industry objects and tries to undermine the measures. Witness the lobbying by the Housing Industry Association against the introduction of the Building Sustainability Index (BASIX) law (which requires water and energy conservation measures in new buildings) into regional areas where water and energy efficiency are also vital. Pressure has been brought to bear on the NSW Government by the Property Council to avoid water recycling being part of new apartment blocks.

Regulation sets a benchmark above which industry can confidently invest in new businesses, making, selling and installing water and energy efficient measures and products. This is not only important for expanded business and employment activity, but is an essential adjunct to better pricing signals. If we are to raise the cost of water, as we must, then people should have easy access to competitively priced devices that can save water. This is only possible if you have a healthy and expanding production base.

A crucial part of the new market for water conservation will be extensive installation of rainwater tanks to capture the rain that falls in the coastal regions, but not in the catchment. The tanks by law should be connected to toilet and clothes washing. It is

simply a waste of time and the government rebates to allow them to be used only for the garden.

A drought security policy requires daily conservation of water so that extractions from the dams are minimised, not waiting until the garden is hit by a drought and dam levels are already low.

Recycling

What about metropolitan scale recycling? We have had a few suburban success stories. Olympic Park and Rouse Hill have very low reliance on our dam supplies due to the harvesting of stormwater and grey water and treatment for non potable supply. They have a dual reticulation system where potable or drinking water is delivered through one pipe and non potable uses such as garden and toilet are supplied by another.

The Government says the new urban release areas in the north west and south west of Sydney will have such facilities, but this does little for the main driver of consumption – existing urban areas that according to the Metro Strategy will also be absorbing more population growth. Dual reticulation facilities could be constructed extending out from existing sewerage treatment plants which already produce high quality non potable water.

But is this the most economic and sustainable method to save the city's water supply? We have to ask the hard question about sending the treated water back to Warragamba where it would be diluted and then treated again at the water filtration plants just downstream.

Critics say 'people won't drink treated sewage'. But Sydney already is! Warragamba receives the not very well treated sewage from Goulburn as well animal waste coming off the farmlands in parts of the catchment. The combination of clean water from most of the catchment, (which is pristine forest) and the purification plants, ensures good quality drinking water. It would be a reasonably simple infrastructure task to divert highly treated waste water back to Warragamba.

If we had been sending our once-used water back to the dams and mixing it, over the last ten years, we would not have level 3 water restrictions. As we face a drying climate, our drought security would have been immeasurably improved.

There are, no doubt, arguments to be had about such a scheme. But Sydney is in dire straits and this changes the social, political and economic parameters. We need an informed public evaluation involving business, the community and government. It is a debate we must have now.



Building rail...

Leigh Martin, Urban Campaigner

Recent months have seen considerable media attention on Sydney's transport woes and the urgent need for new public transport infrastructure in the Greater Metropolitan Region.

It is clear that Sydney is a city in the midst of a transport crisis as a result of decades of road building at the expense of public transport. This approach has clearly failed as transport congestion worsens year by year and the quality of the air we breathe deteriorates.

The media focus on these problems and growing public discontent at the state of our public transport system has forced the NSW Government to respond. In early June the Government announced plans for the largest rail expansion in 75 years with a new south-west line from Glenfield to Leppington by 2012, an underground city line and tunnel under Sydney Harbour by 2017, north-west line by 2017 and extension to Bringelly in the south-west and Vineyard in the north-west by 2020.

While these plans to expand the rail network are to be welcomed, even if they will take 15 years to complete, they are seriously undermined by NSW Roads Minister Michael Costa's resurrection of the previously abandoned F6 motorway proposal: a scheme that would not only worsen traffic congestion and air pollution but destroy sensitive wetlands and damage the iconic Royal National Park. Having presided over the disintegration of public transport, scrapping of the Parramatta to Epping section of the Parramatta to Chatswood link and the decision to close the Newcastle Rail link while Transport Minister, it appears that Minister Costa is hell bent on continuing the failed and discredited road building policy from his new portfolio.

This approach is totally out of step with sustainable development principles and the goals of the Metro Strategy. Funds that would be devoted to building the F6 could be better spent reducing traffic congestion and clearing the air by improving public transport and providing a genuine alternative to the private car.

It is clear that this is what the community is crying out for. A 1999 study by the Warren Centre revealed that 71% of Sydney residents surveyed favoured improved public transport over building more toll roads as the solution to traffic congestion. Of those surveyed, 73% believed there was not enough investment in Sydney's public transport, compared with 52% who believed there was insufficient investment in roads. Only 14% supported more investment in roads at the expense of public transport, while 70% would support increasing spending on public transport at the expense of the road budget.

These results should not come as a surprise. It is obvious that Sydney needs a massive boost to public transport funding to bring forward key projects and increase capacity and service levels.

If the Government wishes to show that it is serious about addressing our transport problems it should immediately announce that the F6 is off the agenda and bring forward the plans to expand the CityRail network.

TEC to offer community with Safer Solutions

TEC's household hazardous chemicals education program has officially been named "Safer Solutions: Keeping your home healthy and green". The name was chosen because it encapsulates the practical, positive alternatives that are available to replace and eliminate hazardous chemicals in the home.

The education program has advertised for three local educators to conduct grassroots training programs for parents with young children. The program will be rolling out in Randwick, Penrith and Lismore. The council areas were chosen as they represent a cross section of NSW and will act as an evaluation for the remaining two years of the education program.

The local educators are an innovative concept in environmental education as they move away from the traditional method of providing workshops at set locations and times. In contrast to the traditional 'build it and they will come' approach, TEC's educators will respond to the community's needs and offer

training at local playgroups, childcare centres and libraries. It is hoped this will ensure the messages of the program reaches a wider proportion of the community.

The program has also met with local community gardening projects in Cabramatta, Botany and Redfern. TEC conducted informal training needs assessments with these groups and found strong interest in hands-on, practical advice in reducing and eliminating their use of artificial fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. TEC is intending to offer expert training to these gardening groups and is hoping to snare a 'celebrity' gardening expert to assist with the training.

Greenwash



Tony Mohr, Associate Director, Green Capital

Last year the term ‘Greenwash’ made it into the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines it as “Disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image”. This may be in the form of direct marketing, media releases or company reporting.

Green Capital has become increasingly concerned about greenwash over the last couple of years. As business has become more aware that being a responsible business is good for their reputation some have chosen to build up their reputation through improving their performance on sustainability, while others have chosen to artificially inflate their reputation without a commensurate increase in actual performance.

Greenwash has become more sophisticated over the years when business simply wanted to protect themselves from criticism or cash in on the shift in public opinion towards environmentalism. The various strains of greenwash identified so far include;

- advertising and marketing that is inconsistent with actual performance (environmentally friendly used to describe a product with reduced impact, not no impact);
- claiming the status quo as an achievement (99% fat-free lollies);
- claiming regulatory compliance as a company-led initiative (new homes have a 3 star rating, when that’s the legislated minimum standard);
- having a public position that is inconsistent with their government lobbying position (no public position on Kyoto, while government relations staff lobby against ratification);
- claiming a niche product as a mainstream success story (using a niche green product to make the company brand generally look great)
- claiming credit for a program where they are a minor participant in (packaging industry incorporating council kerbside recycling figures into their own numbers)
- companies using their industry association to deliver negative public positions, leaving their own reputation free of any negative issues. (Housing Industry Association lobbying against environmental regulations on behalf of their member organisations)
- influencing public opinion on an issue through 3rd party organisations such as think-tanks and front groups (companies discreetly funding the Institute of Public Affairs to undertake research, write opinion pieces and ‘new stories’)

The Green Capital team is currently conducting research into examples of greenwash that will be discussed at two big debates held in Sydney and Melbourne on August 16 and 23 respectively. In addition, Green Capital is also running a policy workshop on ‘responsible marketing’. This project will explore how social and environmental responsibilities should apply to the marketing industry and the businesses who use it.

While NGO’s in the states and Europe have worked on these issues in the past, there is very little recent work in Australia. The debate and the policy workshop should result in community groups, business and government all gaining a better understanding of how to prevent greenwash. In the long run, the community needs much more credible information by which to evaluate companies and their products.

Coast Plans

Fran Kelly, Natural Areas Campaigner

Over the past decade or so, the coast of NSW has been under huge pressure from the demands of developers wanting to make a profit from spiralling land prices. A combination of councils stacked with developers and their supporters, plans and strategies full of zonings based on developers' demands, and land banking or speculation, has resulted in widespread destruction and degradation of biodiversity and natural resources.

The need to plan strategically, on a regional basis, has never been stronger. If plans could be put in place that clearly state what could be developed and where, well into the future, there would be a much better chance of retaining high conservation value land, protecting wildlife and water quality, containing urban sprawl, and ensuring sustainability.

The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources is currently developing regional planning strategies for several areas of the NSW Coast. In the past year focus has been on the Far North Coast (Tweed, Byron Bay, Ballina, Richmond, Lismore and Kyogle LGAs) and Lower Hunter (Port Stephens, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock and Maitland LGAs) regions and more recently the South Coast (Bega, Eurobodalla and Shoalhaven LGAs) has begun. The Mid North Coast, Central Coast and Illawarra are earmarked for 2006.

The success of the strategies in ensuring that sustainable planning practices are implemented in all coastal councils, will depend on whether biodiversity and ecological integrity are placed at the forefront and high population figures and land rezoning requests pushed by developers are rejected.

Local environment groups assisted by TEC are in the midst of a major effort to defeat developer led planning.

Lower Hunter

In the Hunter, environment groups have had to fight proposed population projection of around 300,000 over the next 25 years. The figure has been promoted by developers and some local councils, with the support of the Minister for Hunter and Roads – Michael Costa. It is being used to justify pushing the extensive release of new environmentally fragile greenfield sites for car-dependent urban sprawl.

The community, in particular the Hunter Environment Coalition has proven via maps, information and expert research and input that the figures are a furphy, would be unsustainable anyway, and growth can easily be accommodated in a combination of infill of existing urban centres and new sites on already cleared land close to existing infrastructure and services. In other words there is no need for any new land release or development on vegetated sites. While such a stance might be unpopular with developers that have invested in such sites, it would be highly popular in the broader community who have indicated in surveys that protection of the natural environment – such as the beaches, forests, wetlands and lakes – is one of the most important issues in the Hunter and how they most relate to the region.

The need to fully protect biodiversity seems to have gained acceptance at Ministerial and Head Office level. There will be a need however for all levels to remove developers as drivers of the process. Other issues the Hunter Strategy will need to address include green corridors, expansion of the reserve system, the protection of wetlands and the Hunter estuary and catchment, sustainable use of resources, retention and expansion of public transport, affordable housing and urban design, and climate change.



Far North Coast

The Far North Coast is likely to see a first draft of its strategy by around October or November this year. Like the Hunter there have been frustrations over inadequate biodiversity constraints mapping.

Far North Coast environment groups are producing their own maps to identify and promote remedies to key data gaps. They will be pushing for an outcome that guarantees the environment is put first before development rezoning. The Far North Coast does not have quite the same pressure for growth as the Hunter, but the DIPNR expert figure of predicted population growth – 70,000 – is being challenged by figures of around 140,000 with the reason that “overflow” could be expected from Queensland once it completes a regional plan for the South East. With pressures from Queensland developers there is a danger such growth figures be embraced and used to excuse the release of extensive greenfield sites.

However, there are many areas at the limits of their carrying capacity, with water and waste systems already under severe pressure. It has been shown that reasonable growth can easily be accommodated in a mix of higher and lower density infill with new sites accommodated on cleared and suitably located land, avoiding vegetated sites.

South Coast

The South Coast Regional Strategy is still in its early days, but the Minister for Planning has already publicly stated that there will be no more new major development areas in the region. The intent is to put an end to the ongoing sprawl of new housing estates that have sprung up throughout the region over the past few years. It is hoped the strategy will deal with some of the most contentious and unsuitable areas proposed for development such as Stocklands site in Vincentia, Barlings Beach in Eurobodalla and Bournda in Bega shires. Like the north coast regions, there is very little adequate vegetation mapping so a lot of assessment and mapping work will need to be done by DEC, with adequate funding, time and resources from DIPNR, to bring the biodiversity constraints data up to speed.

TEC has appointed community planners for each of the regions to help facilitate environment and community input to the strategies. For more information they can be contacted as follows:

Far North Coast:

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Lower Hunter:

James Ryan 0414 922 591 stringybark@hunterlink.net.au

South Coast:

Mark Fleming 4478 6377 mflem@dodo.com.au

Biodiversity certification and banking

As part of the new regional strategies the Minister for Environment has been given the power to certify local environment plans, if they meet biodiversity standards. The Department is also proposing a biodiversity banking scheme. More on this in our next Total Environment.

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