

GREEN

MAGAZINE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GREENS



From Little Things, Big Things Grow

Population growth - a debate about our future



Changing the world, one drink can at a time. Victoria's container deposit legislation



Nuclear waste dumps and the impact on Indigenous communities

climate rally

13.07.09

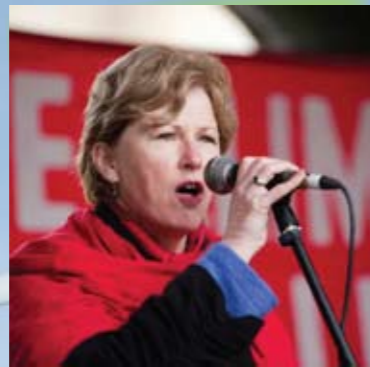
GREEN

MAGAZINE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GREENS

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SENATOR SARAH HANSON-YOUNG AND STAFF, ADELAIDE



SENATOR CHRISTINE MILNE, HOBART



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SENATOR BOB BROWN MARCHES DOWN SWANSTON STREET, MELBOURNE



COMEDIAN AND ACTIVIST ROD QUANTOCK, MELBOURNE



SENATOR RACHEL SIEWERT, PERTH



WA GREENS MPS LYNN MCLAREN, ADELE CARLES & GIZ WATSON, PERTH



CLIMATE RALLY, SYDNEY



CLIMATE RALLY, SYDNEY



CLIMATE RALLY, MELBOURNE



CLIMATE RALLY, MELBOURNE

PICS COURTESY PETER CAMPBELL, RACHEL PEMBERTON AND FLICKR USERS CHANG HUANG, 'NEWENT'

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the australian greens wish to acknowledge that we are on indigenous ground – this land is the spiritual and sacred place of the traditional owners and their ancestors and continues to be a place of significance. further, we thank them for sharing this land with us and agree to respect their laws and lores.

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PIC CREDIT: FLICKR USER TIMOTHY K. HAMILTON

small steps, big impact

In an era where the government's proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme hands all the benefits of individuals' hard work to large polluters, when subsidies and incentives for environmentally responsible power or water alternatives are weak to non-existent and when stimulus spending barely offers any credible acknowledgement of the very real need for environmentally considerate options, many of us feel frustrated with our current situation.

Fortunately, even while the government and big business turn a blind eye to the need for action, there are individuals all over Australia making real changes. From the resurgence of backyard vegie patches and chicken coops to the return of reduce, re-use, recycle techniques our parents and grandparents honed during wartime eras, the action of the individual forges on ahead even without government support.

The age old saying, from little things big things grow, has particular resonance for us in Australia. Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody used it to illustrate the strength of one man, Vincent Lingiari, in his battle to win back the land rights of the Gurindji people. Peacefully, with steady resolve, he and his fellow campaigners turned what had begun as a small pay dispute into a much bigger call for action. It seems that this, too, is the path that many Australians currently find themselves on.

Tired of discussions about 5% or 10% targets, we seek a greater acknowledgement and fight a bigger fight. We can all begin small, take action in the ways closest to home, but in doing so we also join a greater ideological battle. It is our job, each and every one of us, to protect this planet we inhabit. From our small contributions, a bigger change is growing.

This edition is an anathema to the government's apathy. It explores the ways in which people from all walks of life are starting small and having big impacts. From our Guest Green, Colleen Hartland, showing us how 10c can change the world to Samuel Alexander exploring how living simply makes a big impact on the world around us, this magazine is full of stories which show that from little things, big things grow. Certainly this is true of the current debate over population growth and natural limitations, as discussed by Christine Dunn on pg 10, or in the beautiful poem of Stephen Whiteside (pg 5).

Lastly, a reminder that *Green* magazine is always happy to receive your input. Our readership survey may be completed (see pg 5 for winners) but we continue to welcome your letters, emails and contributions. If you would like to submit any articles, local Greens news items, letters or feedback we would love to hear from you.

Lefa Singleton Norton - Editor
greenmag@greens.org.au ▲



CARTOON BY FIONA KITALUSKAS



In the face of ongoing climate change, we should be making a bigger issue of domestic renewable energy systems such as solar and wind technologies, and making our householders aware of what a great deal they are for consumers.

Being a very cynical octogenarian, I have always regarded consumers as mere pawns in the economic systems of most countries and over centuries we have been subjected to many and varied 'isms'.

Tribalism, federalism, reformationism, industrialism, capitalism, Nazism, fascism, communism, socialism, consumerism. Of all these, the one that is responsible for the greatest rate of rape of Earth without a doubt is Homo Sapiens' consumerism.

Now with solar energy and wind turbines readily available for domestic situations a Western Australian, Mr Graeme Attey had his wind turbine on the ABC *The New Inventors* program last year. It is an affordable product expected to come on the market in 2009. With this product, the consumer also becomes a supplier, as unused energy is fed back into the electricity grid and a credit is obtained. Each house becomes a miniature power station.

What a marvellous situation! More should be made of these affordable options, and information provided to householders about using the federal government grants to access them.

Surely this is imperative keeping in mind the dire situation in which we find our planet, which is getting worse every year due to our continued use of fossil fuels, coal, oil and of course clear felling of our old growth forests.

JAMES J SHAW
Ryde - Epping Greens



I enjoyed the article by Jamie Parker in the last edition of *Green* magazine.

Please would you publish more insights into the swag of Greens politicians of all ranks across the country. In particular I'd like to know what are the issues where. And especially insight into what makes a Greens constituency.

BRYAN KILGALLIN
Via email



Lawrie Hall made a number of important points in his Letter to the Editor in issue 27.

We do need a lot of discussion on sustainability and the limits of growth, for

the world is moving into a phase where developed countries, once the bastions of manufacturing, will be devoid of such industry.

Again whilst most people are now saying that climate change is our biggest problem, where is the basic action? For some time I have pushed the debate on biochar, but there seems to be little support from our Greens leaders. I would like to know why!

Surely the soil is our most important asset, and we need to be discussing what we will do after the end of cheap oil-based fertilisers. Our soils are deficient in charcoal, and biochar production on a massive scale is perhaps the only answer to carbon sequestration which will really work to fight climate change. No rocket science is involved in the production of biochar and Australia does have the manufacturing capability to get on with it.

Many quick growing weeds and native species which are fuel for wild fires should be converted into charcoal and added to agricultural soils. What about the millions of tonnes of green waste which currently ends up at tip sites? The Greens need a policy on all aspects of sustainability.

Sure alternate energy systems are urgently needed, but we need a

lot more debate about offshore wind generators particularly in the shallow Bass Strait with its Roaring Forties.

At the first Greens meeting I went to on climate change the opinion of many was that we should be careful not to scare people with any gloomy facts. Now some years later we are still skirting around the edges. If climate change is our biggest worry, then it should be our main target.

Again, what is our policy on biofuels? If we have passed peak oil, how will we power our big machinery? Our maxim is to think globally but act locally. There is a need to cut out much of the peripheral talk, and really get back to basics and show how our rural communities will function and survive in the future.

NYE EVANS
Lyons Greens

ED: Thank you to all our letter writers. We're interested to hear what all members think about this resource, and we encourage you to write a letter to the editor on any issue regarding *Green* magazine and its content. Letters are requested to be no longer than 400 words and will be edited for length. Please email them to greenmag@greens.org.au ▲



Got something to say? Drop us a line at greenmag@greens.org.au

1 million women for climate action

Calling Australia's women!

www.1millionwomen.com.au

Christine Milne was one of a number of high profile women asked to be ambassadors for the exciting new campaign to inspire 1 million women across Australia to reduce their personal emissions by 1 tonne each.

The campaign, the brainchild of Natalie Isaacs and her Climate Coolers organisation, seeks to inspire 1 million women across Australia to take simple action to reduce their personal emissions by one tonne this year.

"There is nothing more important than preventing

climate crisis and I am excited and uplifted by the thought of 1 million women coming together to work towards that end," Senator Milne said.

"With Australia's governments refusing to take leadership, it's time for the community to demand the kind of action that the science requires.

"Who better than Australia's women to stand up, demonstrate what can be done and lead the way to a happier, healthier and more prosperous Australia?" ▲



logging brown mountain

www.theprotectionplan.org.au



The wonderful old growth forest of Brown Mountain in East Gippsland, Victoria is now being logged. There are more than 50 trees over 300 years old in this area of forest, which is adjacent to Errinundra National Park. Many trees between 500 and 800 years old have now been logged.

These forests also provide habitat for threatened species such as the Powerful Owl, the Spot Tailed Quoll, mainland Australia's largest marsupial carnivore, and the Long-footed Potoroo, Victoria's rarest marsupial. The endangered Orbost Spiny Cray has been found in Brown Mountain Creek.

Environment East Gippsland (EEG) has radiocarbon-tested a felled old-growth Brown Mountain eucalypt and the result suggests the giant gum was between 500 to 600 years old. This sample was radiocarbon dated by experts at the University of Waikato in New Zealand.

The campaign continues to protect this unique environment and the creatures that live there. ▲

PHOTO CREDIT: JILL REDWOOD

one hundred years from now

Stephen Whiteside

I think of my dear mountains, and the valleys in between;
Of the rivers, of the summits, of the ridges cloaked in green,
And I wonder how it all will look one hundred years from now,
And if in time great chunks of it will fall beneath the plough.

For now it's national park, of course, this precious stretch of dirt.
The trees and plants and birds and beasts cannot be harmed or hurt.
Australia's population's small. We've lots of open space,
But to the north the numbers grow. They surge and swell apace.

Surely ours must rise in time. Will pressure come to bear
To tame the wild and lonely alps, and settle people there?
Perhaps the hills will all be tiered with fields for growing crops,
And all that will escape will be the rocky mountain tops.

Perhaps the valleys all will fill with houses, streets and cars,
With lights all night to dim the mighty firmament of stars.
The wombats and the currawongs, banished from their home,
Will search in vain the country for another place to roam.

The eucalypts will disappear, the rivers choke and die,
And smoke and fumes will stain the crystal clearness of the sky.
Our cosy little camp-site, our dainty patch of grass
Will be a concrete walkway where a thousand feet will pass.

Yet maybe I have got things wrong. It might not be this way.
Perhaps the alps as they are now is how they'll always stay.
We'll somehow still remember that some land must always shine
No matter how we multiply. Perhaps we'll hold the line.

We'll hold our values firmly as the population grows,
And prize the wild places that are not laid out in rows.
My dear and ancient mountains will be dearer still somehow,
Protected, treasured, nurtured, loved...one hundred years from now. ▲

Readership Survey

It is our pleasure to thank everyone who participated in our readership survey. Reading through all your responses has given us a great deal of food for thought moving forward with the publication, and we'll be working on incorporating your feedback into the magazine as we continue to grow. The winners from our survey are listed here. We hope you all enjoy your prizes, which will be making their way to your doors shortly.

- ACT Owen Cox, Peter Johnson, Emily Kerr
- NSW Chris Dubrow
- QLD Elissa Jenkins, Darryl Rosin, Madeleine Schultz, Roger Callen, Stuart McKenzie, Justin Stevenson
- SA Donella Peters
- TAS Chris Harries, Sharon East, Anne Layton-Bennett, Jon Southerly
- VIC Tim Long, Colin Smith, Dale Smithyman, Zibet Szacsavay, Harvey S, Karl Tschugguel, Hugh Rundle, Janet Massey
- WA Marlowe Grief, Dee O'Neill

despair and defiance



In a time when some Aboriginal communities have won their hard-earned land rights, a new battle is being fought. Communities are being asked to sacrifice country and culture for basic citizenship entitlements, like healthcare and infrastructure. Nowhere is this confrontation uglier than in the cases when nuclear waste is involved. Senator Scott Ludlam explains.

In August of last year I was privileged to camp with Aboriginal elders and environment groups at the 'Australian Nuclear Free Alliance' meeting in Mary River, about 100 km south east of Darwin.

This was a remarkable gathering of traditional landowners and campaigners who have been impacted by uranium mining, nuclear weapons testing and radioactive waste dumping. Supported by environment groups from around the country, this meeting was started in 1997 as the Alliance Against Uranium when the campaign to stop a uranium mine in Kakadu at Jabiluka combined the strengths of Green and Black organising.

The stories I heard were of the cruellest form of dispossession: the day black rain fell at Maralinga, the expanding groundwater sacrifice zone around the Beverley uranium mine and the cultural and ecological tragedy of Olympic Dam.

Trauma is not too strong a word for what people were feeling. The Australian community at large holds a distant but healthy suspicion about all things nuclear, but for the people gathered this weekend the insidious poisoning of country and culture by nuclear blasts, nuclear waste and uranium mining are matters of direct personal experience.

I heard about the brain tumours and breast cancer growing inside people far too young - of the legal entrapments of the *Native Title Act*, which has set families against each other and of the NT Intervention, which has simply compounded and aggravated the despair.

At the meeting there was a huge hand-painted map on the wall showing the rash of proposed uranium mines from Meekatharra to Mount Isa and everywhere in between. As one participant observed, "there's just nowhere left to run."

In the back of everyone's mind in the Territory is the spectre of 60 years of nuclear waste from the Lucas Heights reactor. The Howard Government passed the highly coercive *Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act* in 2005, which suspended all forms of due process and democratic oversight in order to dump Australia's radioactive waste in the Northern Territory. In opposition at the time, the ALP promised to repeal this bill and start again.

Now the Federal Government is burning its bridges up here. First there was Martin Ferguson's

thuggish repudiation of Kevin Rudd's election promise on the waste dump. Then we witnessed the awful spectacle of former *Oils* frontman and anti-nuclear activist Peter Garrett meekly signing-off on the expanded violation of groundwater at the Beverley Uranium Mine. In the pipeline are massive expansions

“We witnessed the awful spectacle of former *Oils* frontman and anti-nuclear activist Peter Garrett meekly signing off on the expanded Beverley Uranium Mine.”

at the Roxby Downs and Ranger uranium mines. Where will it end?

According to the hardened campaigners and their families here it ends with final silencing of their culture, language and the contamination of the country for all time.

In 2009 we still have elders and senior law people willing to share their knowledge with us and to 'open doors to the country' as Kevin Buzacott puts it. The language is still alive. The cultural laws are still being passed on to the kids, and people want to get on with the healing that 'sorry' went some way to enabling. Why are we still crushing Aboriginal people between chequebooks, bulldozers, police and Acts of Parliament?

Authorities have attempted to provide for the health treatment costs of the police and military personnel present at Maralinga during British nuclear testing -

those of them still living. It is unlikely that there will ever be a 'sorry' and compensation for Aboriginal people who found themselves under a mushroom cloud. An area the size of England was fenced off by the British, who permanently contaminated an area the size of metropolitan London with seven nuclear blasts and hundreds of "minor trials". Aboriginal people did not give prior or informed consent to the weapons tests, they were not warned that the black rain was laced with plutonium and radioactive fission products, or that the brilliant white flash would blind.

The Senate Inquiry into my bill to repeal Howard's *Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005* received 103 submissions from various organisations and individuals. Two public hearings held in Alice Springs and Canberra provided thoughtful and

considered input to the Environment, Communication and the Arts Committee's deliberations and final report.

The inquiry revealed an overwhelming consensus regarding the deficiencies and consequences of Howard's 2005 legislation, which enables the Federal government to impose a radioactive waste facility on unwilling Territory communities and against the wishes of the NT government. The legislation does this by overriding laws generated by the Territory government, preventing the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* from having effect during investigations of potential dump sites, excluding the *Native Title Act 1993* from operating at all, overriding the *Land Rights Act* and wiping out procedural fairness through the suspension of the *Judicial Review Act*.



PIC CREDIT: FLICKR USER MIDNIGHT DIGITAL

This inquiry exposed how contested the favoured nuclear waste site at Muckaty Station really is. Senior Ngapa traditional owners gave compelling evidence about the flawed nature of the consultation process and questioned the accuracy of a secret anthropological report that designates a small handful of individuals as speaking exclusively on behalf of that country.

It is now a year and a half since the ALP was elected on a promise of throwing out the Coalition's failed radioactive waste strategy. Eighteen months later that strategy is still in full effect, run with ruthless efficiency by Martin Ferguson.

It is essential that sooner or later Australia faces up to its radioactive waste legacy, in a deliberative and measured process. Any future legislation to this effect will be carefully scrutinised to ensure that it enables the kind of scientific, transparent, accountable and fair process the government has promised.

“The British permanently contaminated an area the size of metropolitan London with nuclear trials.”

Ten years ago the Jabiluka uranium mine was fought to a standstill by the Mirrar and thousands of their supporters. The Kungkas defeated the South Australian waste dump despite the full force of the Federal Government being brought to bear. The Territorians working against the waste dump and their supporters are going to win as well, but only through a determined mobilisation made up of thousands of individual actions: write out a surprisingly generous cheque to the Australian Nuclear Free Alliance (ANFA), send a strongly worded letter to the Prime Minister or pick up the phone and find out how you can help more directly.

The nuclear industry has no place in a sustainable Australia. There is still time to bring some sanity back to this 60 years-old conversation and to institute a properly democratic and informed process for curing the country's radioactive migraine.

The people gathered in that shed just outside of Darwin have things they would much rather do than fight these undemocratic and toxic projects, but fight they will, and they deserve our support. ▲



PROVIDED COURTESY OF ANTI NUCLEAR ALLIANCE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Pictures taken from a corporate video leaked from Pangea Resources, detailing transport and storage of nuclear waste.

limits to growth

Population growth is one of the most contentious issues for our future. What is responsible growth in an era of depleting resources? Christine Dann investigates.

Thirty-seven years ago, a book came out which predicted that around thirty-seven years from today – sometime in the middle of the twenty-first century – world population would peak, global birth and death rates would stabilise, and then birth rates would start to decline. At roughly the same time the supply of food per capita, and services per capita (healthcare, education, utilities like electricity and telecommunications) would also peak and start to decline. The same would happen with industrial output, non-renewable resources and pollution.

The book was called *Limits to Growth* and it was written by four Massachusetts Institute of Technology scientists, who had been commissioned by the Club of Rome (a group of industrialists) to provide these estimates. They did so using a sophisticated computer model which could handle a number of variables, and calculate their impacts on each other. Taking actual data from 1900 as their baseline, and using the actual data from then until 1970 to estimate the rates at which population was growing, resources being depleted, and so on, the *Limits to Growth* team was able to provide three separate scenarios of when and how soon the peaks would be reached. The 'standard run' scenario assumed business-as-usual – that growth and depletion rates would continue at the same levels as for the previous seventy years, and that nothing would be done by way of technological or political interventions to increase or decrease them. The 'comprehensive technology' scenario assumed that there would be a widespread application of existing technologies that would impact on the trends (such as artificial birth control and energy efficiency) and the development of new and even better technologies. The 'stabilised world' scenario assumed that there would be political and social changes that would lead to slower growth and depletion, so that instead of a steep decline after the middle of the century the positive trends, such as food and services per capita, would continue on a flat line,

albeit at a somewhat lower level than the peak, while the negative trends, such as resource depletion and pollution, would also drop and stabilise at a much lower level.

The same year that *Limits to Growth* came out, a unique election manifesto was published. Called *Blueprint for New Zealand, An Alternative Future*, it had two headline policies that no political party had ever advocated before – Zero Economic Growth and Zero Population Growth. The party promoting them was the world's first national-level Green party, the Values Party, and it proposed these policies because its founders could see that already the rate of population growth, resource depletion and pollution was putting severe strains on environmental resources and amenity, on social cohesiveness and conviviality, and on the quality of life generally. By 1975 the Values Party's next election manifesto, *Beyond Tomorrow*, elaborated on how a 'steady-state' economy serving a stabilised population would protect the environment and create worthwhile work while providing adequate incomes and supporting social services for all.

Warning the public that there are natural and social limits to economic growth which we cross at our peril, and promoting alternative policies, have motivated Green parties in New Zealand, Australia, and around the world, ever since. Yet although there have been Greens in the national Parliaments of Australia and New Zealand since the 1990s, and Green electoral support has increased slowly but steadily since that time (with 1.17 million Australians voting Green at the last federal election and 157,613 New Zealanders doing likewise in the 2008 general election), I think it would be fair to say that Greens have made almost no headway in shifting the thinking and practice of governing elites or the general public away from their mindless promotion and acceptance of economic growth as both the means and end of the 'good society'. Further, there are even signs that (albeit with the best of intentions) some Greens have been diverted from the only

solutions which will work – which are political – and into the blind alley of technological solutions.

At this point in time, which is not only the halfway mark in the *Limits to Growth* predictions, but also when the incredible scale of global theft and murderous exploitation by elected and non-elected elites (hitherto justified as being necessary for the Holy Grail of economic growth) has become more apparent than ever before, it seems timely to look at how well the the *Limits to Growth* scenarios have matched real world data thus far, and also at what the implications of this are for Greens who are trying to avert ecological and social collapse.

Matching of real world data and the *Limits to Growth* scenarios was done thoroughly last year by an Australian scientist, Dr Graham Turner. In his paper *A Comparison of the Limits to Growth with Thirty Years of Reality* he took observed data from 1970 to 2000 in all the categories where *Limits to Growth* had developed trend lines, and compared them with each of the three scenarios in *Limits to Growth* to see which matched best. There was a very close fit in most of the categories with the standard run or business-as-usual scenario. The increase in literacy rates (a measure of the service of education) was lower than the standard run between 1970 and 2000, and the increase in food per capita was slightly higher, but in both cases the actual data is closer to the standard run model than to the other two scenarios. If everything continues to match the standard run model, then while world population will indeed have peaked by the middle of the twenty-first century and started to decline, so will everything else – including food per capita and non-renewable resources.

The closer matching with the standard run scenario is not surprising given that very little by way of technological improvement and almost nothing by way of alternative social and political arrangements has taken place. On the contrary, it really has been (bigger and bigger) business-as-usual. Governments serving the interests of resource robbers and mega-polluters have provided taxpayer subsidies for their activities (and now for the banks and finance houses that laundered and transferred the ill-gotten gains). At the same time they have attempted to fool the public that they are doing something about the 'Great Resource Robbery' and 'Climate Killing' by going through charades of slapping the robbers and polluters on the wrist with wet bus tickets, such as the highly-compromised Emissions Trading Scheme in New Zealand and the pathetic 5% greenhouse gas reduction target in Australia.

With regards to how well the standard run scenario, now confirmed by actual data, compares with the other two scenarios, it shows that they are both far too optimistic with regard to when the various peaks will be reached, and how high (or low in the case of pollution) they will be. The comprehensive technology scenario

bears the least relation to reality, while the stabilised world one is closer as regard both the timing and the height of the peaks, but diverges as much or more with regard to the steepness of the descent from the peaks. This is useful information as regards which is the better path to pursue, comprehensive technology or stabilised world, since the former leads to much worse results than the latter. Improving technology merely delays the time at which the peaks are reached and pushes them higher, which leads to a bigger crash afterwards for resources, food and services. Technology clearly will not save us if no other changes are made.

Technology will continue to be part of the stabilised world mix, but what makes this scenario both more desirable than the other two in terms of ends, and harder to achieve in terms of means, is that it requires a significant drop in both production (profit for the few) and consumption (pleasures for the many). The owners and managers of the means of production will continue to fiercely resist the drop in their profits that protecting the natural environment and reducing the size of their market requires, while on the other side of the equation, citizens in their role as consumers (a role which has

become all-encompassing now that so few things of use and beauty, from meals to music, are wholly made at home) are equally reluctant to forgo the products they have a use for, no matter what it costs degraded nature, exploited workers and abused animals to provide them.

Yet unless those with the power to support production and consumption reduction

policies today are prepared to do so, involuntary and harsh reductions will be visited upon their descendants, who will also be living in a much hotter, less stable and more polluted world. They may also experience it themselves, since most people reading this article will be alive thirty-seven years from now. The challenge for Greens as political activists is to get the message on limits to growth and the stabilised world scenario across in ways that people can hear and act upon in their role as citizens of local and national communities, with the power to direct policy-makers and political representatives to stop putting production and consumption (economic growth) first and start paying attention to protecting and enhancing what is truly valuable.

We also have to realise that, even when done with best of intentions, technological fixes, from energy efficient light bulbs to hybrid cars, are not the answer. Producing them still takes resources, and consuming them instead of the old versions is still perpetuating the production-consumption treadmill that grows the economy at the cost of the natural and social world. So the challenge for Greens as members of their varied communities is to find ways to live more lightly on the earth that also give more joy than being trapped in the producer-consumer matrix, and to support others in their efforts to do likewise. ▲

“Technology clearly will not save us if no other changes are made.”



pare down your life to make it happier

Is consumer culture the ultimate fulfillment of human destiny? Or are we entitled to hope for something more? Samuel Alexander of simplicitycollective.com looks at the concept of voluntary simplicity.

Our current use of language, it must be said, does not bode well for those of us who live in hope, for consider what today is proudly called the 'developed world': In the face of extreme poverty we see gross overconsumption; in the face of environmental degradation we see a fetishistic obsession with economic growth; in the face of social decay and spiritual malaise we see a vast corporate wasteland eating away at the future of humanity. Our collective imagination lies dormant. What is to be done? How now shall we live?

Our planet urgently needs us to explore alternative ways to live, and one promising way to lessen our impact on nature is to reject consumer culture and voluntarily embrace 'a simpler life' of reduced consumption. The economic problem of how to provide for ourselves and our families, of how to secure the necessities of life, has been solved for the vast majority of ordinary people in western society. We are fabulously wealthy when considered in the context of all known history or when compared to the three billion human beings who today subsist on one or two dollars per day. The houses of typical families are bigger than ever and they are each filled with untold numbers of consumer products, like multiple TVs, racks of unused clothes, washing machines, dishwashers, dryers, vacuum cleaners, kitchen gadgets, garages full of 'stuff'. Houses are often centrally heated and have air-conditioning, with spare rooms, and two cars parked outside. Most of us have spare income to spend on take-out food, alcohol, going to the movies, books, taking holidays. We generally have access to sophisticated health care and free primary and secondary education. On top of all this, we live in a democracy, our water is clean, and almost nobody goes hungry.

All this is indicative of a society that has attained unprecedented wealth, which I am not about to suggest is a bad thing, necessarily. But it is a prosperity which has proven extremely easy to take for granted, leaving many in

the global middleclass still complaining about the hardness of their lot, and feeling deprived despite their plenty.

Despite the fact that western society is several times richer than it was in the 50s, at the beginning of the 21st century we are confronted by what social critic Clive Hamilton has called an 'awful fact.' Despite the unprecedented levels of material wealth, there is a growing body of social science which indicates that people today are no more satisfied with their lives than people were in the 50s and 60s. In other words, it seems that increases in personal and social wealth have stopped increasing our wellbeing. Getting richer is no longer making us any happier. It is troubling, therefore, to see that our whole society is geared towards maximizing wealth. As Henry David Thoreau would say, 'We labor under a mistake.'

Voluntary simplicity is a post-consumerist living strategy that rejects the materialistic lifestyle of consumer culture and affirms what is often just called 'the simple life,' or 'downshifting.' The rejection of consumerism arises from the recognition that ordinary western consumption habits are destroying the planet; that lives of high consumption are unethical in a world of great human need; and that the meaning of life does not and cannot consist in the consumption or accumulation of material things. Extravagance and acquisitiveness are accordingly considered an unfortunate waste of life, not so much sad as foolish, and certainly not deserving of the social status and admiration they seem to attract today. The affirmation of simplicity arises from the recognition that very little is needed to live well – that abundance is a state of mind, not a quantity of consumer products nor attainable through them.

Sometimes called 'the quiet revolution,' this approach to life involves providing for material needs as simply and directly as possible, minimising expenditure on consumer goods and services, and directing progressively more time and energy towards pursuing non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning.

This generally means accepting a lower income and a lower level of consumption, in exchange for more time and freedom to pursue other life goals, such as community or social engagements, family time, artistic or intellectual projects, more fulfilling employment, political participation, sustainable living, spiritual exploration, reading, conversation, contemplation, relaxation, pleasure-seeking, love, and so on – none of which need to rely on money. According to this view, personal and social progress is measured not by the conspicuous display of wealth or status, but by increases in the qualitative richness of daily living, the cultivation of relationships, and the development of social, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual potentials.

Voluntary simplicity does not, however, mean living in poverty, becoming an ascetic monk, or indiscriminately renouncing all the advantages of science and technology. It does not involve regressing to a primitive state or becoming a self-righteous puritan. And it is not some escapist fad reserved for saints, hippies, or eccentric outsiders. Rather, by examining afresh our relationship with money, material possessions, the planet, ourselves and each other, 'the simple life' of voluntary simplicity is about discovering the freedom and contentment that comes with knowing how much consumption is truly 'enough.'

Consumer culture can distract us from what is best in our lives, and it functions to keep many locked in a work-and-spend cycle that has no end and attains no lasting



PIC CREDIT: FLICKR USER MCWARR

“Voluntary simplicity does not mean living in poverty, or becoming an ascetic monk.”

satisfaction. But if we rethink our relationship with money and possessions, we may be able to free up more time and energy for the pursuit of what truly inspires us and makes us happy, whatever that may be. In this way voluntary simplicity can be seen to enhance the meaning of our lives.

Rather than dedicating one's life to the pursuit of riches or status, simple livers are more likely to have a balanced working life or even work part-time, and are more likely to seek fulfilling employment and accept a modest income, rather than get too hung up about a high salary. With less time devoted to acquiring expensive things,

simple livers will have more time to spend with friends and family, and more time to spend pursuing their private passions or enjoying their civic responsibilities. The point is that disciplined and enlightened moderation with respect to our material lives will not tend to give rise to any sense of deprivation, but will ultimately lead to a happiness, a satisfaction, and a freedom far greater than that which is ordinarily known in the hectic, dead-end lifestyles of consumer culture. In short, many are drawn to simplicity because they want to escape the rat race and live more with less.

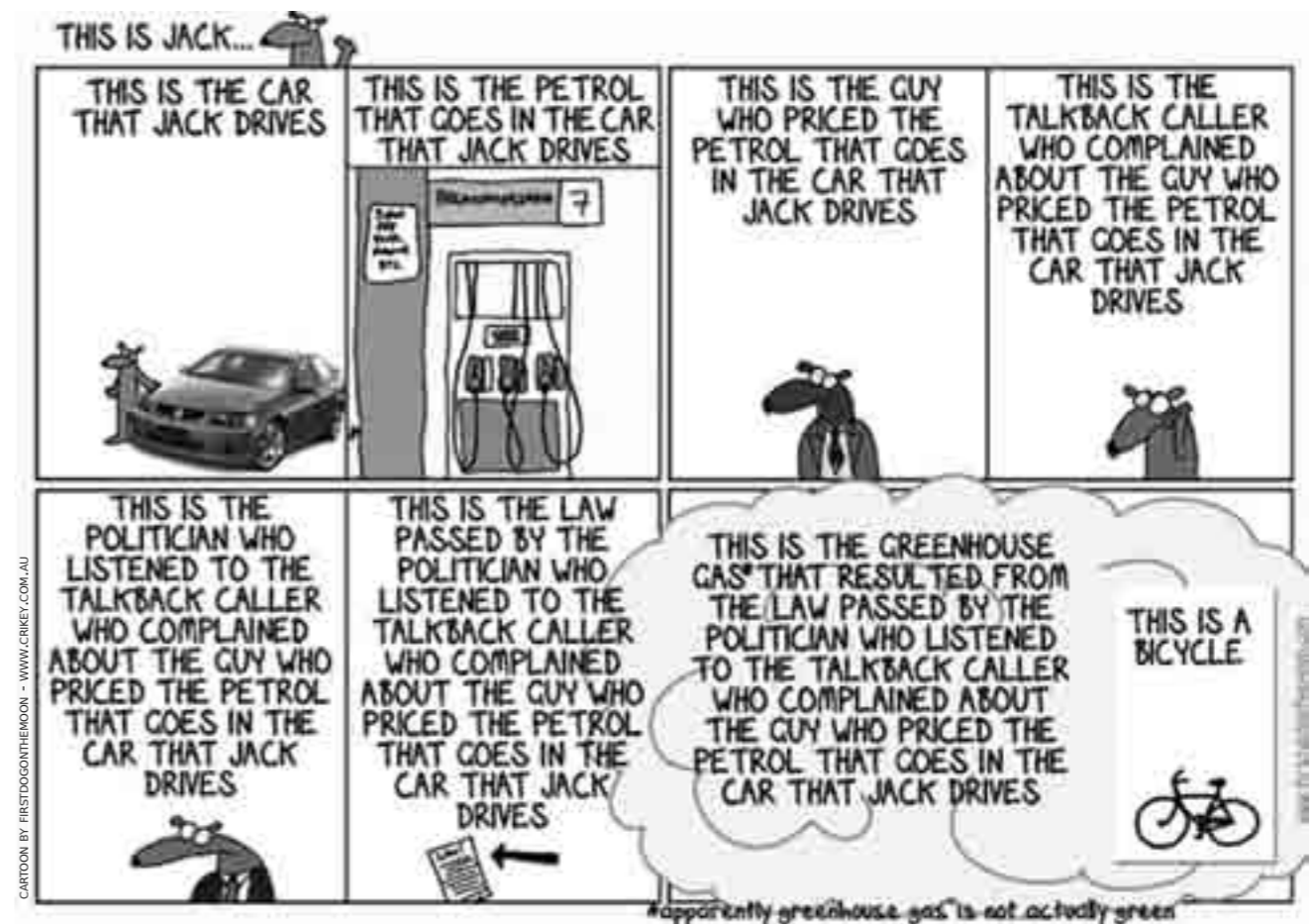
Simple living tends to involve thoughtful thrift and environmentally and socially conscientious spending habits. It can involve recognising that there is no good reason for desperately trying to 'keep up with the Joneses,' since modest accommodation and few possessions are perfectly sufficient to live a free and happy life. Simple living can involve buying secondhand clothing and furniture, creating one's own style, and rejecting high fashion. It might involve cultivating a garden, eating simply, locally, and creatively, and discovering that doing so can be both cheap and satisfying. And it might involve riding a bike instead of driving a car, choosing a washing line over a dryer, or even something as simple as choosing a book over television. Rather than work long hours to afford a life dedicated to consumption, the simple liver might step out of the rush and reduce working hours, freeing up more time to paint, play the piano, meditate, spend with family, read, walk in nature. Rather than choose competition, the simple liver is likely to choose community. And so on and so forth, until the very elements of life have been transformed.

There is not one way to live the simple life, and that anyone who wishes to embrace simplicity must be prepared to think over the idea for oneself, until it takes root in personal experience. I am convinced, however, both by faith and by experience, that if someone is genuinely committed to the idea of simplicity then that person, with a little courage and

some imaginative effort, will find a way to shape a simple life of their own. Start with a few small steps, enjoy the adventure, and soon enough your life has changed.

As the globalisation of western consumption habits pushes our planet towards the brink of environmental collapse, as evidence mounts that consumer culture has failed to fulfill its promise of a better life, and at a time when three billion of our fellow human beings still live in the darkness of poverty amidst plenty, one may be forgiven for thinking that there is a certain inescapable logic to pursuing a way of life that is 'outwardly simple, inwardly rich.' Yet, from earliest childhood onward, first upon somebody's knee, then through lessons ratified by polite society, we are educated into a materialistic form of life that squarely contradicts that of voluntary simplicity. What is more, it seems we are forbidden to admit this.

If it is true, however, as some existentialists have argued, that we can always make something new out of what we have been made into, then it might be interesting to inquire: Did you choose your mode of living because you preferred it to any other? Or did you honestly think that it was the only way? Reading and talking about voluntary simplicity with these questions in mind can be unsettling, rather like being shaken awake from the most dogmatic slumber. But it can also be exhilarating and uplifting, in the most unexpected ways. I hope that some readers will find, or have already found, that this is so. ▲



environmentalism without a mortgage

Buying green energy, installing water tanks and solar systems - we all know how to beef up the eco credentials of our homes. But what about the vast number of Australians who live in rental accomodation? Cate and Chris from greenrenters.org explain.

The number of renters in Australian cities is rapidly increasing. Currently around 20 percent, our ability to cope with these numbers and their environmental impact is woefully inadequate. There is a large number of products, schemes, infrastructure and ideas for greening our ever expanding suburbs, aimed squarely at those who own their own homes and possess the freedom to make many decisions that are unavailable to renters. We decided to start our blog www.greenrenters.org, to provide a resource for the expanding body of general public who are largely under represented. Typically young, open to ideas, lacking in resources, they are the epitome of 'big things' growing from 'little things'.

There are many obstacles faced by renters striving to lead a sustainable existence. The biggest and most widely reported being that renters are required to seek permission from their landlord or agent to make additions and alterations to the property. With pretty much all of the most effective housing overhauls such as green plumbing and solar panels requiring a fair amount of alteration, renters are instantly at a major disadvantage. As Australian cities are currently experiencing housing shortages most renters are unwilling to take the risk in bothering their landlord too much, as a 'troublesome tenant' can easily be replaced with little notice. Even with recent government rebate schemes for renters and landlords to insulate homes, it is apparent that most renters are

still reluctant to approach their landlords while most landlords lack the motivation to instigate the process themselves. This is a difficult issue which needs some overhauling, perhaps allowing tenants the freedom to carry out enhancements to their rental properties at their own cost, but that's a topic to be discussed further elsewhere.

Not all rental situations are the same and frequently you may be one passionate environmentalist living in a household of disinterested housemates. You have the option to move into a household that shares your

opinions but that's not always practical. There is no easy solution to this problem, our best recommendation being to focus on self-interest and explain to your housemates that 'being green' can also save them money. Try to avoid lecturing people who simply aren't

interested. A lot of the solutions on our blog revolve around having a reasonable amount of space, especially outdoors. This is a luxury we are lucky to have but this is frequently not the case in all rental situations. Whilst this is more challenging, there are still a wide variety of options available to you.

Money can be an issue for many renters, those living in student accommodation, sheltered or government housing are often unable to afford often more expensive 'eco' alternatives.

Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles preventing many renters from 'greening their lifestyles' is the very nature of renting itself. The transient, temporary nature that often is its biggest allure is its biggest

“Communities can collaborate to work outside the conventional modes of consumption and mass production.”



PIC CREDIT: FLICKR USER STEVE RHODES

problem, requiring inventive transferable alternatives to permanent solutions. Likewise when it comes to utilities, you might want to opt for green power, but discover your name isn't on the bill and those who's names are left the property a long time ago and no one knows who they were or where they went.

Enough of the negative, bearing in mind the multitude of restraints what can the aspiring renter do? Well as it turns out, quite a lot!

Growing your own veggies and herbs is a source of pleasure with meals planned around harvests, goods swapped, given as gifts and the cooking of jams and relishes. Many vegetables and herbs cope well in pots, even on a windowsill or apartment balcony.



Growing your own vegies, even on your balcony, can be a great source of pleasure

“Food co-ops, swap meets and shared bulk buying are all great ways of using your purchasing power.”



www.greenrenters.org

Green renters is a site for those striving to lead sustainable and ecological existences within the confines of rental property. Frustrated by constantly attending conferences and exhibitions that only provide products and advice to home owners, the website provides hints and tips for those who are unable to make major changes to a property but still intend to spend many years and call somewhere home.

After six months and over 100 articles posted providing hints for the garden, bathroom, kitchen, lounge and much more to renters around the world, www.greenrenters.org is finally officially launching.

The site is open for contributors, ideas, comments and proposals for projects, especially conversations about policy relating to renters and landlords.

Alongside the website, green renters is available for workshops, stalls, presentations and panels with a whole host of tips, advice and home made goodies.

For another handy resource you can download the free Victorian Green Renters' Guide from www.envict.org.au/rentersguide

A reduction of utility usage and therefore your bills can be achieved through thoughtful changes to your home. Exterior blinds, insulated curtains and door snakes can reduce heating and cooling needs and increase comfort in the home.

Many people may long for a water tank but we find several large buckets, recycled oil drums or a wheelie bin work just as well, are cheap and can be moved to your next rental property.

Ultimately it's far easier to join forces with others than do it alone. Food co-ops, swap meets and shared bulk buying are all great attainable ways of using your purchasing power for good not evil. Renters can look at swapping household furniture with others and the fashion of retro and vintage home décor means many things can be reclaimed rather than simply discarded.

Communities can collaborate to work outside the conventional modes of consumption and mass production. The Sharehood is a community-based project that provides a forum for neighbours to meet, interact, make friends, share skills and resources. The Sharehood was formed in Northcote in 2008 and now neighbours are trading garden produce for worm juice, babysitting for each other, sharing compost heaps, fixing each others' cars, holding backyard BBQs and have put on large neighbourhood garage sales.

Ethical and organic buying comes with great intentions but many renters are excluded by the higher costs of some products and the

preponderance of manufacturers to sell a 'green' product rather than changing all of their range. Often equivalent products from smaller companies who make less fuss about their environmental credentials are equally as good and a fraction of the price. It pays to carry out your shopping armed with reliable facts, be prepared to spend some time checking the backs of packets for what they really do and what ingredients they contain.

We strive to make our own washing and cleaning products where possible with the use of everyday household materials such as bicarbonate soda, vinegar, lemon juice and lectric soda. There are plenty of recipes available on the site. The Sharehood runs tours educating people about how to navigate the confusion of good intentions combined with the complexities of organic, fair trade, minimal packed, carbon miles and Australian made. They are also initiating a zero waste challenge where participants aim for a week devoid of non-recyclable waste.

Many consumer groups and renter advocates are now lobbying government and the rental industry with initiatives, such as Just Change's pilot scheme providing up to \$2000 worth of energy efficiency improvements to low income rental properties, showing that as a group we are finally being taken seriously. There are tips on our site that anyone can try, so drop on by, encourage your housemates and your neighbours and who knows what we can achieve, we might even make our landlords care! ▲

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why i am a climate activist

People become involved in environmental activism for a variety of reasons. Joel Dignam tells us why he is a 'climate activist'.

Being a climate activist can be a very draining business. Being aware that humanity is, on its current emissions path, going to face terrible increases in global temperatures, rising sea levels, chaotic and highly destructive weather events, the loss of land for growing food, and a diminishment of water security is concerning. But time after time the needed change that I, and others like me try to promote, is stonewalled. Either by the apathy or self-concern of ordinary people, or politically by vested interests who hold inordinate sway over Government decision making processes.

In some ways, the whole situation isn't too unlike that in Richard Adams' *Watership Down*. When Fiver, the novel's lagomorph protagonist is seized with a vision of an apocalyptic future, in this case for the rabbit warren he calls home. Although the rabbit chief and his militia scorn Fiver, a few rabbits are swayed. Fiver and his new companions, some of who are only accompanying him out of pity, leave the warren in search of a new home. Their journey is not without trial, but the suffering and loss that they endure is found to be justified when the few survivors later tell them humans exterminated the old warren. Unfortunately this analogy falls short of describing the current real world situation. The climate realists, who are very much in the role of Fiver in the modern world, do not have the luxury of being able to take like-minded companions and secede from the global climate. Instead they are compelled to try, time and time again, to sway public opinion, to sway political process, because their survival, indeed, everyone's survival, is dependent upon the threat being not just recognised, but addressed.

It all gets a bit 'Australia 1970' in that "we are ruined by the thing we kill." While climate realists are attempting to save humanity, they are too often dismissed as mere environmentalists. As if it is possible for humanity to function independently of the environment in which we live. Even people who accept the message too-often fail to modify their action accordingly. It becomes yet another good idea, like fair-trade or vegetarianism which is too inconvenient or too costly to take on board. Even when progress is being made, when a growing proportion of the population is concerned enough to take action, industry-funded scientists abuse their position in society to muddy the waters and stir up doubt. This enables selfish people to continue to excuse their actions, and governments to continue putting off the inevitable.

But that's not the point of this little spiel. The point is that the good fight is worthwhile. This was impressed upon me last night as I watched a free screening of *Telling the Truth*. A rather wittily titled documentary that follows seven Al Gore trained climate project presenters as they deliver their personalised version of his slideshow to various audiences across Australia. I saw people from all over Australia and from all across our society. Not just the dread-locked stoners that some would have you believe are the majority of climate activists but doctors, sportspeople, students, businessmen, all trying to change the world for the better. Each of these people were motivated to act on climate change for different reasons. Some were trying to protect their children's future, some dreamed of a less unjust world while others wanted to be able to keep living in their house. It was great. They weren't the sort of policy hacks



PIC CREDIT: FLICKR USER CHANG HUANG

who might attend seminars and write letters to the newspaper, like me, but they believed in what they were doing and that they were making a difference.

So I began thinking about my own growth as a climate change activist. From a largely unaware lad who was surprised to know that his vegetarianism was helping the climate, to an informed and passionate chap who mentally ticked off a box when a senior meteorologist speaking about climate change referred to an albedo flip. I thought about the friends and the beautiful people I had met and worked alongside. The inspiring figures who through their dedication and commitment, give hope to others, or who by their willingness to take direct action, promoted discussion and encourage others to do more. I thought of the members of the various groups in which I'm involved, not one of whom is remarkable, but all of whom are doing remarkable things; giving up time, energy and money to try to keep this issue at the front of people's minds.

I thought about how I sometimes feel like this issue is consuming me, like I am giving up too much, potentially losing who I am. But I realised that that's not the case. I know of all of the things I have done or that I do, it's not the academic pursuits that make me who I am. I'm just happy in myself that I have been able to contribute to what is a vital growing global movement for justice and sustainability. I think of who I am now, of what I feel and of whom I know. I am doing what I do because I know it is the right thing. I am doing it because I have a vision of a society where we are healthier, where our energy supply isn't dependent upon sending people to war, where the environment isn't polluted by oil and slurry spills, groundwater contamination and where mine waste isn't being dumped into waterways. Where people don't have to spend hours in traffic to function, where essentials are within riding distance and people have more time to spend with their families and friends. Aiding in the realisation of this vision is the single best contribution I can make to this world. ▲



Damien Lawson addresses the crowd at the Climate Rally in Melbourne

PIC CREDIT: FLICKR USER TANVER

colleen hartland

Australian Greens Victoria MLC for Western Metropolitan Region



One of the first letters I received as an MP was from a suburban couple who run a community campaign for a deposit on drink containers. We are all familiar with these sorts of campaigners – they are the absolute salt of the earth. They care about their issue and they just keep plugging away.

Peter and Marion Cook asked for a meeting, so we brought them into the office in Parliament and looked at their home-made report on litter.

It seemed ambitious to walk into Parliament and try to change the way we view rubbish in Victoria. Especially since, in those days, I was only allocated a single staff member, and we were inundated with issues.

But it was a campaign that we were keen on from the outset.

It was nearly two years before we were able to campaign in earnest, but the idea has always been there, simmering on a back burner.

A local family with creative kids created a brilliant placard “10c can change the world”, which has stayed in my office as the campaign mascot.

This year, we produced our own report on the financial, social and environmental benefits of a 10c deposit on drink cans, bottles and cartons in Victoria.

We printed an award-winning postcard, and received 5,000 signed copies back from all across the state, which are waiting in my office, ready to deliver to the Victorian Environment Minister.

As I speak, people are logged on to our website, sending emails to key MPs, urging them to support the scheme.

A few weeks ago, hundreds rallied at Parliament House, chanting “10c can change the world!”, after the placard. Peter and Marion were there. They brought a trailer load of empty drink containers tied up with string, which we dumped on the steps of parliament. Some more excitable campaigners wore strings of containers and skylarked about.

On the campaign's Facebook page (also titled ‘10c can change the world’), people are posting amazing photos of drink container rubbish. The idea of that is to make people see the rubbish they otherwise ignore,

because they're so used to it. But they shouldn't be used to it.

What really strikes me about this campaign is that having come from the community, it remains a community issue.

At public meetings, people attended from local footy and netball clubs, who wanted to use the idea as a fundraiser. We even had a pony club representative who was keen to get the other pony clubs in her area together to learn more. It's been a real treat to meet and talk with these people.

The campaign even has official support from the Scouts and the Guides in Victoria. I don't think that's ever been the case before for a Greens campaign.

Next week, the Greens private member's bill should be debated in Victorian Parliament. If it succeeds, it will be our first in Victoria to pass the upper house.

Ian Cohen MP has a bill ready for debate in the NSW Parliament at around the same time (good luck, Ian!), and Senator Scott Ludlam has introduced a bill based on mine to the Senate.

All of this sounds like a big thing grown from a little thing, but really, we've only just started growing.

I have stood up in Parliament and said that if anyone wants to criticise drink container deposits as being ‘the thin end of the wedge’, I'm happy to agree.

Once people have accepted the idea that drink containers should have a value, they're less likely to treat them as rubbish. And they'll get used to the idea of taking responsibility for waste.

What about other packaging? And why stop at packaging?

What about TVs, car batteries, phones, computers, gas bottles, mattresses, and all the other difficult rubbish of the modern era. Independent campaigns like ReBorn are showing the way.

Once we have the infrastructure and profitability of 10c drink container deposits, the recycling “Hubs” can be used for other extended producer responsibility schemes.

It creates jobs, reduces waste, and brings the community together. A Greens campaign grown from a community idea into broader movement. 10c can change the world! ▲



Bob Brown



BOB'S BACK PAGE



Adele Carles & Bob

Murky Brown

The Hobart Mercury has afforded right-wing columnists Greg Barnes and Piers Akerman (yes – his column is in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* too) pages of poison pen to attack me over the huge public response to pay the Wielangta Forest court costs.

Akerman in turn quoted the sad Senator Eric Abetz: 'Sadly, it seems that, if you bang on enough about how much you really care about forests, some misguided people will give you money—even if you may not need it, and even if your policies and legal challenges would see those same forest habitats destroyed (sic).'

Senator Abetz, as Minister for Forests in the Howard government, racked up a \$436,000 bill at taxpayers' expense by sending a federal legal team to the Wielangta court hearings to back Forestry Tasmania, and has refused to pay the money back. I have challenged him to set up a public appeal. No response there.

My sincere 'thank you' to everyone who has offered or given help or good wishes in the Wielangta Forest challenge and to everyone, including Margaret Blakers, instructing solicitor Roland Browne, barrister Debbie Mortimer, my office manager Michelle O'Toole and the good residents of Wielangta on Tasmania's east coast, who sustained this vital challenge to legislated ecocide.

Meanwhile, out in the Weld, Upper Florentine, Styx and East Gippsland forests, people are continuing peaceful blockades. They inspire us all. And in this age of climate change, there is not a leading politician in Canberra who has not heard the Greens' message that ending the unnecessary destruction of native forests and woodlands,

from Tasmania to the Tiwi Islands, could cut Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by 15 to 20 percent. Compare that with the Rudd government's target of 5 percent tied to \$16.5 billion compensation to the big polluters!

Gunns Backer

One of the thousands of the support letters so hated by Piers and Eric reads:

'I do not vote Green. I have investments with Gunns. I think it is stupid to take on litigation that can send you broke, even so, I believe your voice is important in our democracy. Where can I send a donation to support you staying in the Senate?'

Tofu Boneheads

And then, an Unley, South Australian, Labor voter asks, after we voted against the 'Ruddbank' bill that would sink up to \$28 billion of public money into a guarantee to finance commercial property developers:

'You tofu eating fruitloops ... boneheads ... (did you) lot get a real coffee yesterday in place of your usual skinny soy decaffe?'

Adele

They're a bit miffed over at ALP headquarters in WA. Especially because Adele Carles is our new Greens member for the Western Australian state seat of Fremantle. I thought I'd go over and help Adele in the campaign but, instead, found that everywhere she went she was picking up votes very nicely for herself. Generous, bright, and proudly Green, MP Carles will be a great asset on the floor of the Assembly for all West Australians. Her 46% primary vote (54% two-party preferred) trounced Labor in a seat it has held since 1924. Go Adele! And a big 'congratulations' from all of us.

Earth

I've been at Liffey, for a few days here and there, over the past year to tend to my two wild Welsh mountain ponies, the collapse of the old bridge over the river and to take general delight in the forest, wildlife (including a growing gaggle of native hens) and the soaring bluff above. And to do a little writing. I hope to self publish the sum total of 500 words — on life, existence and the Universe — in a little book entitled *Earth*, in the coming months.

Warmest wishes

Bob

PS: To track our Senate team quintet please go to: www.greensmps.org.au/stay-informed and sign up to receive our important email updates.



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**“You can keep
your gold. We just
want our land back.”**

- Vincent Lingiari

