



Benalla Sustainable Future Group

Newsletter 31

November 2021

Benalla Sustainable
Future Group Inc.
PO Box 642
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President's Message

As I write this message, my hope is that COP 26, beginning in a few days, will finally deliver the climate action the Earth so desperately needs. And yet, my heart is also full of anxiousness, because of the arrogance, selfishness, and yes, I will say it - stupidity - of those politicians who have been elected to represent us in Glasgow. I commend Ian Herbert's insightful article in this newsletter as a must read.

On a local level, most of you will be well aware that BSFG has travelled a very much interrupted and frustrating journey over nearly two years, firstly in gathering 600 signatures on our Climate Emergency petition to present to Benalla Council, then organising our Climate Science talks in February this year (attended by around 140 people), engaging in an initial presentation to Council in March (student leaders Charlie Paterson and Cheyane Vaughan, Dr Gerard Brownstein and myself), and in October, when Council finally got around to considering the petition, we again addressed Councillors (student leaders Lachie Sands and Jess Patterson, Dr Brownstein and myself). The Council rejected the request to declare a climate emergency and prepare plans and actions to help bring Benalla to net zero emissions by 2030. It instead moved a motion stating that 'they recognised that climate change is one of the most significant issues that will impact the social, cultural, economic and environmental health and wellbeing of our community, and will act accordingly with all policies and programs of the council'. On the surface, this sounds fine, but on closer analysis, there is no commitment to targets, nor indeed, any timeframe attached to this motion. In essence, it absolves the present Council from taking any major steps forward in the battle to mitigate climate change.

Our committee member, Peter Maddock, has since contacted Councillors and the CEO, with a very informative list of suggestions for 'climate and emissions' analysis tools, and Peter has prepared an article on this correspondence for the newsletter.

Where does all the above leave us, both globally and locally? Probably where we have been for the past 20 or 30 years, in which the community (individuals, climate scientists and environment groups) and responsible and entrepreneurial business leaders have initiated the positive changes that have occurred. If our political leaders continue to obfuscate over the issue of emissions reductions, then we as a community cannot give up fighting for more urgent change.

And this is where, once again, I will implore our younger generations of supporters to please come on board, and become 'hands on' involved in BSFG. I, and many others in this organisation, have been advocating on behalf of the earth (as well as volunteering in leadership in many other organisations) for a large part of our lives, and we hope that our efforts don't just dissolve into nothingness when we depart (whenever that might be!!). Our AGM will be held in May 2022, and our current committee is very willing to co-opt some more members prior to the AGM, so that people don't feel as if they are embarking on a commitment in an unsupported manner. Please contact me if you are willing to become involved - contact details are on the last page of this newsletter.

Peter Holmes

Next General Meeting

We invite you to attend our next! General Meeting:

7.30 pm Thursday 25th November 2021

Benalla Uniting Church Fellowship Room

Guest speaker: Michelle Croker

Michelle is a consultant working for Neoen Energy, the developers of the Goorambat Solar Farms. Michelle lives in Yackandandah, and will also be able to update us on some of the renewable energy projects in that community.

Supper will be served at the conclusion of the evening.

Judy Schwarzman
Secretary

"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed." - Mahatma Gandhi

A message to a friend in the UK re COP 26

My friend Ray lives in the UK and he was asking me whether our great leader would come to COP 26 or whether coal might have an unpleasant whiff about it (his words). Here is my reply:

All the states have more ambitious plans than the Federal Government. Indeed, the Federal Government has NO PLAN. Only now, on the eve of COP 26, are they trying to scratch something together. That's after eight years in power.

What we will see in a matter of days is a statement about net zero by 2050 with little real action. It will not say anything about retiring coal powered electricity. It will not say anything about moving away from gas or limiting exploration. It will talk about green hydrogen because one of our rich iron ore magnates believes in CC and is investing billions to set up green hydrogen plants, despite the Feds. Solar will continue to grow, despite the Feds. Wind will continue to grow including now offshore, despite the Feds. The only positive investment the Feds are behind is a large pumped hydro plant being added to the Snowy Hydro scheme. That was instigated by the previous PM Malcolm Turnbull before he was voted out by his LNP party. They should be putting funds into transmission lines but they sit on their hands.

The other thing you will hear about is sequestration - carbon capture and storage. This is a complete furphy. First off it could only capture a percentage of emissions from coal-fired power stations and the target is zero. Secondly it adds cost. Thirdly if you look at potential storage sites the amount available and the geographic places adds up to very little. The only place it has been used successfully is to force more oil out of oil wells - adding to CC. But your average punter doesn't know this and they are taken in by the PM's spin. Of course all the fossil fuel people, urging him on and asking for hand-outs, know it but they won't say.

Some States are doing better than others. South Australia is well ahead. Other States including Vic are going well but like a bet each way. They haven't yet turned down gas exploration requests. Fugitive emissions from gas are not properly accounted for and the methane graph is scary.

So, in summary, anything done so far is DESPITE this government's policies. They have in fact HINDERED progress. We have a Federal Minister for emissions reduction who actively campaigns on behalf of coal and gas. The PM's own department head is straight from the fossil fuel industry and they have stacked all the advisory bodies. But now they are being exposed for what they are and even the general voters are now more aware. 70% plus of Australians say we should do more to act on CC.

Going back to your email, you asked about batteries. They are now being added to the larger solar farms here to time shift the output. I don't think the price will fall too quickly because of the parallel demand for EVs. There is the possibility for different types of batteries for large scale installations e.g. flow batteries. A breakthrough is sorely needed. Some States here are pushing ahead with their own pumped hydro schemes and I think that's the solution.

Let's see if my predictions re the Feds plan are correct. I then went on to explain the local term 'furphy'

though, in retrospect, I could have used some stronger language.

So how did it all pan out?

My prediction was correct but I claim no great predictive skills. Were there any surprises? Absolutely not. It's all business as usual, including the spin.

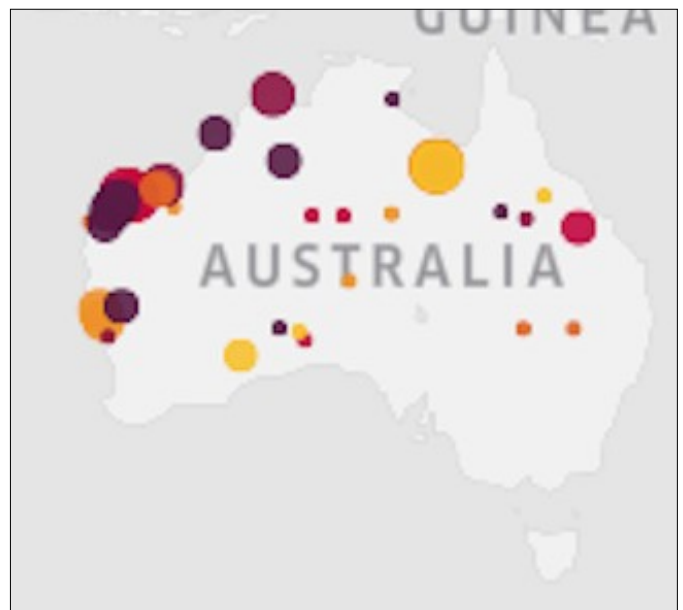
As Scott Morrison was about to fly off to Europe Barnaby Joyce took great pleasure in announcing that he was instrumental in ensuring methane reduction was not part of the plan. Scott Morrison immediately fronted the media to insist that he never had any intention of agreeing to any reduction.

What a sad state of affairs. Here, on the eve of COP 26, we have Australia's PM and Deputy PM publicly arguing over who has done the best job at rejecting one important element of climate action.

I wrote about methane and fugitive emissions in the last BSFG newsletter. The recent rise in levels is totally scary. This will only be exacerbated if 'clean hydrogen', as mentioned in this latest plan, includes hydrogen derived from fossil fuels - and it does in Angus Taylor's rhetoric. Victorian Federal MP Darren Chester also mentioned it as being available from brown coal in the Latrobe Valley - and he is one of the Nationals who is supposedly a supporter of strong climate action!

Ahh, pity help us. All we really need is a Federal government which simply asks the States, "How can we help?" and States who truly are committed.

Ian Herbert



This image shows a sample of Australian abnormal methane concentrations over 2019. The source is from ESA Copernicus/Sentinel-5P Satellite data.

The size and colour of the circles indicate the size and intensity of the plume detected. The redder the colour, the higher the concentration.

The question needs to be asked, "If such high concentrations of methane and their sources can be detected from space then why are we not doing something about them?"

Australia's published methane emission figures are simply calculated as a percentage factor of extraction.



The Age
Kathy Wilcox

Net Zero Benalla

I watched the [recording of the meeting](#) of the Council hearing of the BSFG Climate Emergency Petition at the Benalla Council Planning Meeting which was streamed on Wednesday September 29th.

It was interesting to see during the meeting there were several questions from Councillors about determining council emissions. Councillor Puna Gunaratne requested an emissions report for the review of the Climate Adaptation Plan 2013-2025.

I was also reassured by the second point of mayor Danny Claridge's motion at the end of the meeting, 'That council recognises that climate change is one of the most significant issues that will impact the social, cultural, economic and environmental health and wellbeing of our community and will act accordingly with all policies and programs of the council'.

After approaching Peter Holmes about communicating with council about emissions accounting, I sent an email to all Councillors, the CEO and the Manager Economic Development and Environment mentioning protocols and tools for councils to do a community wide emissions inventory and highlighting work being done both locally and globally by other cities and local governments. Such as [Cities Power Partnership](#) (Benalla Council is a Member), [ECLEI Local Governments for Sustainability](#), [Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy](#), and [C40 Cities](#).

Our [Renewable Energy Benalla](#) action group is based on a transition strategy developed through John Lloyds work with [Beyond Zero Emissions](#) (BZE). This strategy provided baseline stationary emissions for a 100% Renewables Benalla by 2028. These emissions are based on the [GHG Protocol Standard for Cities](#), the GPC. Since producing the Transition Strategy BZE has, with local government specialists [Ironbark Sustainability](#), developed a [Snapshot Climate Tool](#) to provide all Councils in Australia with an online emissions profile.

The GPC enables organisations to determine a city-wide emissions inventory based on Tier 3 data which is local activity data and locally sourced conversion factors, or actual activity-specific local carbon emissions data. Such data can be time consuming and expensive to obtain.

The Snapshot Climate Tool however uses Tier 1 data which is largely modelled data, with little or no local activity data available (these methods take state, national, or international data, and scale them to the municipality using a relevant metric). The Tool provides a profile not an inventory however the data is sufficiently accurate to provide councils with an insight into community emissions. The GPC also provides guidance on a Council Operations emissions inventory. My email to Councillors resulted in replies from Mayor Danny Claridge, and Councillors Gail O'Brien, Puna Gunaratne and Justin King each mentioning they were looking forward to working with BSFG.

I took the opportunity to reply to all Councillors mentioning Ironbark's website article on [Science Derived Targets for Australian Councils](#) and attached an emissions reduction target for Benalla I had requested from Ironbark.

One Councillor is looking forward to working towards achieving a net zero Benalla although the boundaries for this have not been established. Would it be for council operations emissions, or the city-wide emissions reported by the Snapshot Climate tool? I did provide Councillors with a link to the [2021 Australian Local Government Climate Review](#) which provides a comprehensive analysis of climate change actions, barriers and opportunities facing councils and communities.

Despite the unsatisfactory outcome of the Climate Emergency Petition to Council we may now have the opportunity to work with Council to support and work with the community towards achieving a Net Zero Benalla.

Peter Maddock

'Sustainability' and 'Resilience' coming out of COVID

The 'S' in BSGF stands for Sustainable and our sustainability has been sorely tested during the pandemic.

The immediate impact was on businesses whose product was no longer being purchased. Government programs were put into place to keep employees on the books and to provide additional support to those who lost their jobs. The amount spent was enormous.

It certainly was a time of reflection. Most people now are simply glad that we are getting vaccinated to a high percentage and that life can return to normal.

An immediate outcome currently in the news is the lack of foot traffic in the central business districts of major cities. From a sustainability perspective this would seem to be a good thing with less commuting and more quality time at home.

Another outcome though has been the soaring cost of housing. It adds to the growing inequality in our society and I wonder how any young person, already encumbered with a student loan and car loan, could ever aspire to purchase their own home. There is no light at the end of that tunnel as both sides of government have effectively ruled out any action. The huge deficit racked up during the pandemic rules out any massive social housing initiatives.

If we open up our borders the plan is to once again return to high immigration numbers. Where are those extra people going to live? Or do we only accept people who can show they already have the house deposit?

So we pretty much return to the old normal with planes back in the sky, crowds attending big events and hospitality venues back to full seating capacity. You can even plan a wedding now.

Which brings me to the next word - 'Resilience'. How well are we placed to weather the next storm? Will we remember the lessons of the pandemic or will our planted vege gardens just gather weeds?

Our socio-economic system today has little resilience. It relies heavily on just-in-time service delivery both within Australia and on an international scale. It is very prone to disruption. Shortages can stem from a lack of supply or even just a lack of shipping containers.

Our answer to it of course is to consume less and to save more, putting something aside for the next adverse event. The choices in many cases will be made for us. Interest rates and fuel prices are now on the rise. The impacts of climate change are already upon us and money also needs to be set aside for what is termed 'adaptation'.

Our health systems operate with little spare capacity. There was a fear they would be overwhelmed but thank goodness the lockdowns prevented this. Will they cope with the next pandemic? Or a higher population?

We need to spend just a bit more time and money on developing resilience and a bit less on growth and consumerism.

But how do we do that with a political system which has a huge inbuilt resistance to change? The ruling LNP party has effectively ruled out changes away from the present *modus operandi* and the labour party is loathe to commit to significant change. The only answer is to support independents who will respect the wishes of their electors. Voices of Indi provides an excellent template to follow.

Ian Herbert

Many Homes Are not Energy Efficient

BSFG's Action Group Renewable Energy Benalla has been running energy efficiency workshops over several years aimed at reducing emissions and improving the comfort of houses in Benalla. Most homes built in Australia before recent building standards were introduced are poorly insulated and incur high heating and cooling costs, thus contributing directly to our emissions problem.

A new report suggests that up to 8 million homes fall into this category. For renters especially, remedying these problems can be difficult. An article on the ABC describes the report's findings and outlines some easy measures that people have used to address the problem of poorly insulated rental housing, showing that improved comfort and lower energy costs are possible, even on a very limited budget:

[*Many Homes are not Energy Efficient*](#)

Katanning Community Energy

Katanning, WA sounds a bit like Benalla, but it's developing it's own community energy program. One of the factors: the Council is on board!

[ABC article on Katanning Community Energy](#)

David Blore

REB becomes CEB

At a recent meeting of the Renewable Energy Benalla action group it was decided to rename the group to Community Energy Benalla to emphasise community renewable energy efforts in Benalla. Changes will be made on the REB website to reflect this and we will also be looking at incorporating Community Energy Benalla on the BSGF website.

www.reb.org.au

Consumption Emissions

I have just watched the ABC TV episode '[COP26: Towards Zero](#)' on iView. China and India are mentioned as being large emitters, which they are - however it is not mentioned that these countries have low per capita emissions compared to Australia and the US. Nor is it mentioned for instance that we import many emissions from China in our consumption purchases.

This loads the burden of reducing emissions onto these countries when they are least responsible for both historical and current emissions. Australia's emissions would be higher if we counted these consumption emissions in our own emissions inventory. Greta Thunberg has called COP26 a '[Global North greenwash festival](#)' and that this year's climate change conference is the 'most excluding' ever. By this she means those most responsible for climate change, which are often western based high consumption economies, including Australia, are avoiding taking real action on reducing emissions.

The [Snapshot Climate Tool for Benalla](#) shows the Benalla municipality has 35% agricultural emissions compared to 34% from electricity. The total emissions are 400,000 t CO₂e or 28.5 t CO₂e per capita. These figures would be considerably higher if consumption emissions were included. These consumption emissions occur outside Benalla in countries such as China.

Peter Maddock

BSFG Web Presence Under Review

In June/July 2015 Peter Maddock, Bev Lee and Cath Marriott held meetings to plan a website for BSFG, with consideration of social media - Facebook and Twitter - following on shortly after. The first news items on the current website were posted six years ago in August 2015.

The aims set by Peter, Bev and Cath for the website included providing an information resource about BSFG and issues related to sustainability which could be drawn upon by the community, particularly students, when exploring issues related to sustainability. This informed the structure of the website, which contains content about the history and development of BSFG; its areas of interest - Biodiversity, Building, Renewable Energy, Education, Food and Agriculture, Transport, Waste/Plastic - a news blog, links and more. The Food Co-op has had a label of its own on the menu bar on the home page. The Facebook and Social Media accounts have been used as a strategy to share largely well researched articles on areas of interest. Renewable Energy Benalla (REB) requested a website of its own with associated Facebook page. This was developed and launched in early 2017, with an Instagram page added more recently.

An attempt was made from the beginning not to have a static website but to also include items which changed regularly. At the same time, we remained aware that having a continually updated website would be very demanding for the volunteers managing and updating it. We therefore aimed for a balance of information with some areas updated for currency and interest. Instagram was added to our Social Media suite more recently by Heath Whiley to appeal to younger people interested in sustainability issues.

Reflecting on the past six years, we feel that the website and social media sites achieved the initial aims set. However, we are aware that the contexts in which we are working have changed. Modern web sites appear to have become less dense in terms of information/content and more actively supported by social media sites which provide constant updates of happenings and local events as well as highlighting issues and concerns.

In terms of website updating and management, the current team of Peter Maddock and Bev Lee have been working on the website now for over six years. It has been a valued working relationship, with complementary roles undertaken and regular but not overly taxing meetings, most recently on Zoom. We have done the hard yards, been in it for the long haul. However, the long haul for Bev is coming to an end as she would like to be released to focus on other projects. Peter is prepared to assist in the transition to a new format with the assistance of Karen Nankervis, with a view to encouraging other members to assist with the website and social media.

Where to from here? We have been using the Weebly platform, but with Bev's decision to wind down her involvement, investigations have begun into transitioning to the Word Press platform and to rationalising our web presence by amalgamating the BSFG and Renewable Energy Benalla websites and social media accounts.

There is much to think about and discuss. We may need ask BSFG to apply for funding to facilitate the

development and transition to a new website on Word Press and an accompanying social media strategy.

We are looking for people keen to work on the transition over the next few months, with Bev maintaining the current site and phasing out as the transition is made. If you have the time, skills and interest in being involved, please contact Peter by email peter_maddock@iprimus.com.au or mobile 0418 135 330.

Beverley Lee & Peter Maddock

16th September 2021



*The Age
Matt Golding*

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**Deadline for
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Sunday 27th February**



**Benalla
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