

Benalla Sustainable Future Group

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Newsletter 1

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President's Message

Welcome to the first newsletter produced solely by Benalla Sustainable Future Group. Over the past two years we have provided material for a joint newsletter with Benalla and District Environment Group (BDEG) but recently the committee decided that we should produce our own newsletter. So, welcome again to our first edition.

As with any newsletter a lot of work goes into writing and collecting material and organising it into a suitable format for publication. As well as thanking the contributors to this newsletter I would particularly like to thank Ian Herbert for volunteering to act as Editor for this first newsletter and for the considerable work he has done to get it to publication.

Our Annual General Meeting is planned for Thursday 24th May - see notice below. We are particularly pleased to once again have Barney Foran as our Guest Speaker. Please come along on the night to support the group and to hear a talk of direct relevance to all Benalla & district residents.

Benalla Rural City recently requested that we provide two representatives on the Climate Change Adaptation Plan Steering Committee. We were pleased to be asked and hope that our inputs are ultimately of benefit to the whole community. It would be possible for BRC to embark on this endeavour in tokenistic fashion but we are pleased to report that there is at least a core group within Council who are keen to see real progress made throughout Council operations. One key step in the development of this adaptation plan is to ensure that all council staff and key contractors understand the implications of climate change for Benalla, and they will be attending a lecture/discussion with Barney Foran a few days before our AGM.

John Lloyd

Living Within Our Means – a Roadmap for Sustainable Energy Use for Benalla

**A Public Address by Barney Foran
Thursday 24th May 2012 at 7.30 pm
at the Benalla Uniting Church Meeting Room**

You are invited to hear Barney Foran speak on the big issues facing our society and the planet. Barney will speak on two areas:

A specific plan for the Benalla community to consider as a way of defining our energy requirements for the future, and identifying sustainable sources of energy to meet these needs, including solar, wind and biofuels.

The challenges for leaders to achieve transformational change in a very short time to address issues of energy supply, land use change, water supply, global warming and food security.

Barney Foran led research teams in CSIRO's Resource Futures group which produced long term analyses of Australia's physical economy focusing on human population (Future Dilemmas), land and water (Decision Points) and a triple bottom line analysis of the Australian economy (Balancing Act).

Our short AGM with reports and the election of Office Bearers will precede the talk. Contact John Lloyd for further information.

Victoria Still 'Wedded' to Polluting Brown Coal!

Over the last twelve months the Victorian Government has made a number of decisions that do not help the state move towards a clean, renewable energy future but rather keep providing support for our polluting coal fired energy supply. Following is a time line of these decisions (with acknowledgement to Environment Victoria).

May 2011 The Baillieu Government ends negotiations for the partial closure of Hazelwood, Australia's most polluting power station.

Aug 2011 Introduction of very restrictive planning provisions for wind farms. Most of Victoria becomes a no-go zone as a single landholder is allowed to block a wind farm if they live within 2 km of a proposed turbine.

Sep 2011 Slashing support for solar: the feed-in-tariff, the subsidy that helps households with the cost of installing solar, is cut by more than half.

Oct 2011 Government grants Alcoa in Anglesea a license to pollute from its coal fired power station for another 50 years with no conditions attached to reduce its pollution.

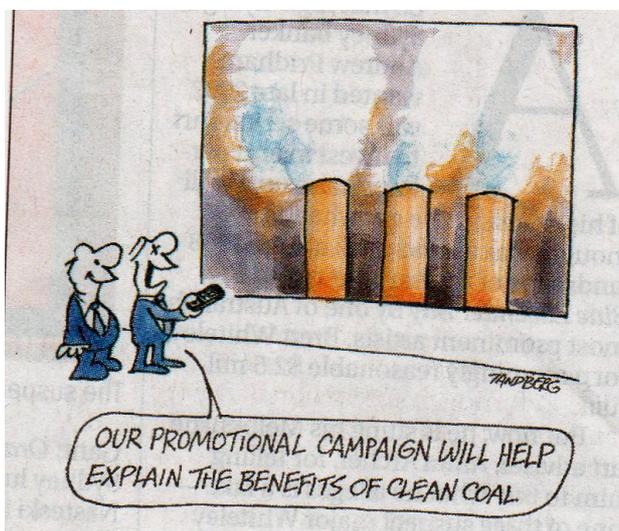
Jan 2012 Energy Minister Michael O'Brien ignores his own department's economic modelling on the impact of the federal carbon tax, instead using his own calculations to wrongly claim Victoria would be hit 'first and hardest'.

Feb 2012 State government re-commits \$50 million to a new coal fired power station, HRL, in the Latrobe Valley.

Mar 2012 The target to reduce Victoria's emissions by 20% by 2020 is abandoned, despite it being legislated in the Climate Change Act and a key election promise.

State government releases plans to boost exploration, mining and exporting of brown coal and announces plans to allocate billions of tons of brown coal.

The Age reveals that the government has a secret plan to develop 'an aggressive and proactive communications campaign to promote the benefits of brown coal' to counter opposition from environmental groups and the community.



Tanberg, *The Age*, 23/3/2012

Naturally, members of Benalla Sustainable Future Group were very concerned about these developments and it was decided that a delegation of members should seek a meeting with our local state politician, Bill Sykes, Member for Benalla. This meeting took place in late March and involved six of our members.

At this meeting, which lasted for an hour, delegation members expressed their concerns about many of the government's decisions outlined above. We requested that Dr Sykes convey our concerns to the Premier, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, and the Minister for Planning. It was agreed that I should write to him stating our concerns and he would then convey our concerns to appropriate ministers. (See below for excerpts from this letter.)

Dr Sykes has provided me with a copy of the letter he wrote on our behalf to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Ryan Smith, and we now await a response from the Minister.

John Lloyd

Arguments Presented to Bill Sykes

Climate Change

Recently released findings from a major review of climate observations by the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, show that emissions from burning fossil fuels have accelerated since the global financial crisis, increasing the concentration of carbon dioxide in the world's atmosphere, to the highest levels in 800,000 years ('Greenhouse gases on rise after lull', *The Age*, 14/3/2012). The review finds Australia's annual daily average temperatures have increased 0.9 degrees since 1910, and overall each decade has been warmer than the previous decade since the 1950's. The report states, 'Multiple lines of evidence show that global warming continues and that human activities are mainly responsible.'

Benalla Sustainable Future Group believes that there is overwhelming evidence that the 'business as usual' scenario being promoted by your government is completely unacceptable as it is focussed on short term economics and ignores the very real threat to the climate which has major implications for future generations.

Support for Coal and Expansion of Coal Mining

We believe the government's support for coal-fired power and the expansion of coal exploration and mining undermines any attempt to move Victoria towards a clean, renewable energy future. Brown coal is the 'dirtiest' fossil fuel containing almost two-thirds water, almost one-third carbon and some ash, and it is well recognised that Victoria's brown coal power stations are the 'dirtiest' in Australia.

Government figures released in February 2012 under the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act show Victoria's major power generators have emerged as some of the biggest carbon emitters in the country. For the 2010-11 financial year Loy Yang A station pumped out 19.4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide while Loy Yang B and Hazelwood power stations emitted 16.8 million tonnes ('Power Groups Face Huge Carbon Bill', *The Age*, 29/2/2012).

Despite the claims by vested interests the technologies for converting dirty brown coal into 'clean' or 'green coal' are not currently available at scale. Benalla Sustainable Future Group believes the government's plans to boost exploration, mining and exporting of brown coal to be totally unacceptable as is the government's plans to develop 'an aggressive and proactive communications campaign' to counter opposition from environment groups and the community. This can be seen as government 'spin' trying to promote the benefits of 'clean coal'.

Wind Farm Policy

Benalla Sustainable Future Group believes that the planning provisions for wind farms are far too restrictive and will drive investment in clean wind energy away from Victoria. Pacific Hydro has confirmed it is pulling out of any future wind farm investment in Victoria, saying 'there was no point in investing in the current climate' (*Weekly Times, Johanna Leggatt, February 29, 2012*).

It was also reported in this article that the City of Greater Bendigo, The Mount Alexander Shire Council and the Macedon Ranges Shire Council are seeking changes to the wind farm no go zones declared by the government. A Greater Bendigo councillor said he feared the wind farm rules deterred crucial investment in rural areas.

The provision to give individual households the power to veto wind turbines within two kilometres of their homes could make most of Victoria a 'no go zone' for wind energy if rural householders oppose the building of wind farms. The claim by wind farm critics, such as the Landscape Guardians, that wind turbines can cause health problems is not supported by any peer reviewed scientific literature.

We believe these provisions, while satisfying a small vocal minority, are out of step with the wide public acceptance of wind farms as revealed by CSIRO research (*The Age, 18th January, 2011*). A key finding of this report was that 'there is stronger community support for the development of wind farms than might be otherwise assumed from media coverage. This includes support from rural residents who do not seek media attention or political engagement to express their views.'



Tanberg, *The Age*, 21/3/2012

Benalla Food Co-op

BSFG's focus is about helping to create a more sustainable future for Benalla.

Late in 2009, BSFG organised a public forum. We were asked to nominate an area of interest with the possibility of carrying out some action towards a more sustainable Benalla. A number of potential action groups were identified.

The idea of a Bulk Food Co-op came out of that process. It sat on the shelf for a while but as time went on a few others expressed interest, and so a small dedicated committee met on a regular basis. Venue, freight, supplier, food health and safety were just a few major considerations that had to be worked through.

The aim of the group is to encourage the responsible use of our earth's resources, reduce packaging and excessive handling of food, support Australian growers and local producers where possible, reduce food miles and as a consequence, reduce food costs. It also allows people choice about the products they buy and to have knowledge from where they are sourced.

Access to the Benalla Bulk Food Cooperative is through an annual membership which is \$10.

Initially, and without any finance, we relied on 'setting up' costs coming from membership and members volunteering seed money. We were also supported by the Brunswick Uniting Church who donated \$500 to our cause (they have been running a successful food co-op for some years).

We had our first open day in May 2011 and although we only had 12 members, we felt we were off to a good start and were able to purchase 28 different products.

In 12 months membership has grown to 52 and we now have approximately 50 products. All seed money has been reimbursed.

The Products we stock, are dry, non-perishable foods such as flour, cereals, sugar, legumes, dried fruits and nuts etc. Members are encouraged to bring their own containers for food items and purchase enough product to last them the month. They are also asked to undertake volunteer duty twice per year.

The sale of food items occurs once per month and alternates between the 4th Monday and 4th Saturday (Benalla market day) in the month. Purchases can be made any time between the designated times which are Monday 4 to 6pm, and Saturday 10am to 12pm the following month.

We are grateful for a wonderful venue at the Benalla Uniting Church, Carrier St. in the old kindergarten hall.

Late last year I put in a submission to Benalla Rural City, seeking funding from the 2011/12 Community Grants Program. This was successful and so we were able to purchase lockable metal cupboards to enable safe and hygienic food storage, and secondly, a computer, as detailed records about product, purchase dates and financial data need to be kept.

The grant has made an enormous difference to the efficiency and ease of operation and we feel fortunate that BRC supported our efforts, which also makes for a stronger community.

The positive outcome of the food co-op is that members are able to make a contribution towards a more responsible and sustainable use of our earth's resources whilst having a lot of fun.

We look forward to seeing some new faces during 2012.

Christine Holmes

Phone 5768 2379 or email chrispeth@bigpond.com for further information.



**Helping out at the Benalla Food Coop
Kate Holmes, Kin-Ryu Holmes and Val Stafford**

Products for a Sustainable Life Style

Details of the following products come from *Renew* magazine, the journal of the Alternative Technology Association. Benalla Library has copies of *Renew*.

Bamboo your home and save some trees

Wood is a very popular building material due to its warm feel and great looks, but much of the wood available in Australia is from less than ethical sources – a lot of it is straight out of old-growth forests, both here and overseas.

Leto Bamboo has a great range of bamboo boards, panels, flooring, skirtings and veneers for all sorts of uses. The panels range from 4mm to 40mm thick in standard sheet sizes of 2440mm x 1220mm and various finishes such as natural or carbonised. Flooring includes boards in 96mm and 150mm widths, both finished and unfinished.

For more information contact Leto Bamboo in Mulgrave, Vic. www.letobamboo.com

Bikes made from bamboo!

Well partly at least. Organic Bikes has released its first bike made partly from bamboo. The 'Dylan' is made from natural laid-up bamboo tubes and 100% recycled alloy lugs and chainstay tubing. It is designed as a flat-bar road bike or fitness bike, ideal for the morning commute or a ride down the bike path.

The Dylan is designed to offer a more eco-friendly choice with the alloy bike frame tubing being replaced by bamboo, one of the strongest and most renewable materials available.

The bikes are available in small, medium and large sizes and use a single drive system, while not good for hilly areas would be quite suitable for riding around Benalla.

RRP \$990 including delivery. For more information contact Ecolifestyle, www.ecolifestyle.com.au

The lowest flowing showerhead?

Water saving showerheads don't just save water, they also save energy by reducing hot water use. The Perfect Flow Ultimate showerhead takes water saving to the 'ultimate' using just 5.5 litres per minute and has a 3-star WELS rating. Unlike many 'low flow' showerheads the Ultimate is not simply a restricted higher flow unit, meaning the user cannot tamper with the flow rate by removing a restrictor. The showerhead comes complete with articulated arm, or can be installed to an existing compatible shower arm.

RRP \$30. Contact Todae, www.todae.com.au

What Victorians Really Think

Recently Environment Victoria conducted a major survey of Victorians on their attitudes to the environment. This included questions about greenhouse gasses and clean energy solutions.

While for many people health, cost of living and police and public safety are the most important issues, most people (87 percent) consider the environment important. While many Victorians support the Baillieu Government's actions to boost energy and water efficiency there was overwhelming opposition to the government's moves to stand in the way of clean energy and letting big polluters such as Hazelwood Power Station, continue to pollute. 76 percent of Victorians believe that it is our state government's responsibility to act to reduce greenhouse pollution.

Victorians don't think the the Baillieu Government's policy to give residents the right of veto over wind turbines is fair. Not even Coalition voters (less than one third) think the policy is fair.

Victorians want more investments in renewables and less in coal. When asked about future energy production 82 percent wanted more energy efficiency with 78 percent wanting more renewable energy like solar and wind. Just 13 percent want more coal mining in Victoria and a mere 7 percent want more coal-fired power stations.

These findings make it clear that the government's plans, and the coal industry's plans for expansion are unsupported by Victorians. And that HRL, the new coal fired power station for Victoria, a brown coal 'supermine' in the Latrobe Valley and coal allocation across some of Victoria's most precious landscapes are totally out of touch with the vision that Victorians have for our future.

Finally, it is important to note that none of the findings from this research are based on party lines.