



Benalla Sustainable Future Group

Newsletter 16

March 2017

Benalla Sustainable
Future Group Inc.
PO Box 642
Benalla 3672

Next Meeting

Our next General Meeting will be held on

Thursday 23rd March at 7.30pm
in the Uniting Church Meeting Room
opposite the Coles Car Park,
Carrier Street Benalla

'Divestment'

Guest Speaker: Pablo Brait



Pablo is a Community Organiser with Market Forces. He has volunteered and worked on climate, fossil fuel and renewable energy campaigns since 2007. His main focus is helping people work together to build the power they need to win.

Market Forces is an affiliate project of Friends of the Earth. Market Forces believes that the banks, super-annuation funds and governments that have custody of our money should use it *to protect not damage* our environment.



President's Column

Clean coal is an oxymoron! Welcome to 'alternative facts' and the 'post-truth' world!

We frequently hear that many Australians are disillusioned with politics as it is currently practised. The speech by Prime Minister Turnbull to the National press Club on February 1st would only reinforce this decline in the credibility of politicians. As would the Coalition's antics in the parliament with the Treasurer fondling a lump of coal in parliament while accusing the opposition of an 'ideological approach to energy' and negligence in policy planning.

Prime Minister Turnbull said, "Clean coal is vital to Australia's future energy mix."

Clean coal does not exist. An appropriate analogy would be 'healthy cigarettes' which will still give you cancer - but not as much as unhealthy cigarettes!

The Prime Minister said clean coal power stations will play a part in ensuring lower electricity prices under a Coalition Government. "The battlelines have been drawn - it's clear that the Coalition stands for cheaper energy. We are approaching this issue clear-eyed, pragmatic and objective."

When Malcolm Turnbull talks 'clean' coal, it is unclear whether he means coal plants that are more efficient than Australia's ageing plants, or whether he means coal with carbon capture and storage (CCS).

Both of these 'clean' coal technologies are expensive (much more so than renewable alternatives) and **still** emit greenhouse gases. Large-scale wind and solar plants are already cheaper than new 'more efficient' coal plants, and much cheaper than coal plants with CCS.

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

As reported on Business PM (ABC Radio, 2/2/17) power prices for consumers could double, not fall, if new coal-fired power stations are built. Key manufacturing and business lobby the Australian Industry Group and energy experts strongly disagree that coal would be cheaper or more reliable, for several reasons.

"This is not a recipe for guaranteed lower prices, in fact prices would need to be sustained at very painful levels for the life of the project for that project to make its money back," Australian Industry Group's principle national advisor Tennant Reed told Business PM.

Even if they were built, power from new highly-efficient coal-fired power stations would not be cheaper. In fact, Bloomberg New Energy Finance has calculated that they would be the most expensive, and dirtiest, form of power available, costing more than solar, wind and gas-fired power.

In his advocacy for clean coal Malcolm Turnbull said, "We've invested \$590 million since 2009 in clean coal technology research and demonstration and yet we do not have one modern high-efficiency low-emissions coal-fired power station, let alone one with carbon capture and storage".

As the Climate Council says, "Surely, if anything, this is a stunning admission of wasted government spending? That we would invest almost \$600 million in clean coal technology, and have nothing to show for it?!"

And yet Turnbull continues to plug the virtues of 'clean' coal, while renewable power such as wind and solar is already cheaper than new coal, and getting cheaper by the minute." ('Fact Check: 'Clean Coal' & Turnbull's Energy Speech', Climate Council, 2/2/2017)

Lenore Taylor in her article, 'Hard facts unmask the fiction behind Coalition's 'coal comeback',' (*The Guardian*, 11/2/2017) points out a few facts that undermine the 'coal comeback' PR strategy the Coalition has been rolling out. One of these facts is that renewable energy is not 'causing blackouts'.

"They're primarily due to the (incredibly complicated) energy market that wasn't designed or isn't being run to cope with a higher proportion of renewables, and is throwing up perverse incentives that mean South Australia can have a blackout while generators are sitting idle. It would seem obvious that the answer to this problem is not to abandon all incentives for renewable energy but rather to fix the market and the rules."

Taylor concludes her article as follows, "We've been enduring this climate war nonsense for more than a decade and now we're wearing the consequences - rising prices, unreliable power supply and increasing emissions. Responding with a parliamentary pantomime to try to shift the blame to a fictitious renewable industry bad guy is true ideological idiocy and also negligent, **because it puts the shallowest, shortest-term and most opportunistic strategy for political survival ahead of households, investors and future generations.**" (My emphasis)

Politicians should ditch 'partisan antics' on energy security

An unlikely coalition of electricity suppliers, business groups and environmentalists is calling on politicians on all sides to ditch their 'partisan antics' and work together to create a reliable, affordable and clean energy system.

After a week in which the government and opposition clashed over energy security and renewables policy following more blackouts in South Australia, interest groups are calling for a new bipartisan compact to reform the system.

Groups as diverse as the Australian Industry Group, the Australian Energy Council, the Climate Institute and the St Vincent de Paul Society have united to pen a joint letter calling on the Coalition and Labor to lift their game.

"There is simply no room for partisan politics when the reliability, affordability and sustainability of Australia's energy system is at stake," the letter says.

"The status quo of policy uncertainty, lack of co-ordination and unreformed markets is increasing costs, undermining investment and worsening reliability risks. This impacts all Australians, including vulnerable low-income households, workers, regional communities and trade-exposed industries. The finger pointing will not solve our energy challenges."

A decade of such divisions has made energy investment 'impossibly risky' in Australia, pushing prices higher while hindering change and resulting in 'enduring dysfunction'.

Source: "Malcolm Turnbull, Bill Shorten told to ditch 'partisan antics' on energy security", Adam Gartrell, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13/2/2017.

The editorial in *The Age*, 'Memo Canberra clan: get on with power plan', 14/2/2017, comments on this open letter as follows:

"On the one hand, it's encouraging to see such a well-co-ordinated and community wide clarion call to law makers to put aside petty politics and broker a bipartisan approach to energy policy. On the other, though, it is dispiriting we are in this situation as long as a decade after then prime minister John Howard took a market-focussed carbon price to the 2007 election."

"It is hard to think of a core issue on which there is more agreement, yet less policy progress. And, like the reliance on fossil fuels, it's unsustainable and fraught."

John Lloyd



Government losing the argument on energy

A series of questions by Essential Report on energy policy has found the Turnbull government is so far failing to persuade people of either its performance or its arguments on energy security. (Michelle Grattan, The Conversation, 21/2/2017)

According to the Essential poll, 71% said the government was not doing enough to ensure 'affordable, reliable and clean energy' for households and businesses. Only 12% said it was doing enough. Less than one-quarter (23%) of Coalition voters thought it was doing enough. 62% of these voters said it wasn't.

The government has recently signalled it is likely to provide incentives for new 'clean coal' coal-fired power stations. But 45% opposed building new coal-fired power stations in Australia, with 31% supporting. The question did not refer to 'clean coal'.

Despite the concerted government attack on the ALP's strong commitment to renewables, nearly two-thirds (65%) approved of Labor's 'target of 50% renewable energy by 2030'. 18% disapproved. Support for the policy was 55% among Coalition voters.

Nor have people been convinced by the government's heaping blame for recent blackouts on over-reliance on renewables. The poll found 45% agreed with the proposition that recent blackouts 'are due mainly to failures of the energy market in responding to extreme weather events'. 19% agreed they 'are due mainly to the privatisation of electricity supply'. Just 16% said they 'are the result of too much reliance on renewable energy'.

Asked whether renewable energy was the solution to our future energy needs or a threat to our future energy supply, 64% saw it as the solution (including 58% of Coalition voters), and 14% as a threat.



The Age, 14/2/2017

Climate change skeptics on Victoria's endangered list!

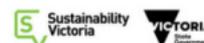
That's among the findings of Sustainability Victoria's social research on climate change. The study shows that 9 out of 10 Victorians believe climate change is real and caused by human activity.

Climate change skeptics are now a rare breed - just four per cent of Victorians saying there's no such thing as climate change!

Among the 3300 surveyed, one in three rank global warming among their top three concerns.

93%
of Victorians want State Government action on climate change

Climate Change Social Research, Sustainability Victoria / Wallis, 2016



93%
of Victorians think business and industry should contribute to action on climate change

Climate Change Social Research, Sustainability Victoria / Wallis, 2016



84%
of Victorians support state renewable energy targets of 25% by 2020 & 40% by 2025

Climate Change Social Research, Sustainability Victoria / Wallis, 2016



Four out of five Victorians are willing to take action on climate change



Climate Change Social Research, Sustainability Victoria / Wallis, 2016



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

REB - Renewable Energy for Benalla

REB Action Group

The REB Action Group was established from self-nominated interested members of the community who attended the Benalla Renewable Energy Future Forum in October 2016.

The REB Action Group will work in collaboration with the community and relevant organisations to achieve the following objectives:

- Promote energy efficiency and reduce energy use within the community
- Create awareness, promotion and support for renewable energy by the community
- Develop a Future Energy Plan for Benalla to transition to zero net energy
- Achieve a significant increase in local renewable energy generation
- Keep increased financial benefits locally

As well as these major objectives the REB Action Group has developed an Action Plan which identifies key tasks to be achieved over the next 6 months and the members who are to undertake the tasks.

The REB Action Group will make regular reports to the community.

Beyond Zero Emissions Support

Benalla has been selected as one of the three Victorian communities to be part of the BZE Zero Carbon Communities Project. BZE will support Benalla to develop a 10 year 100% renewable energy transition strategy in the energy use and building sectors. BZE will work with our community over the next 10 months (until October) to develop this strategy.

The BZE contribution will include:

- Developing a baseline of emissions across energy consumption and buildings
- Two community engagement workshops, one of which will focus on businesses
- Reports for potential for renewable technologies in the region.

New Energy Jobs Fund

BSFG (REB), with the support of Benalla Rural City Council, (which includes a co-contribution of \$20,000 if successful), has applied to the Victorian government's New Energy Jobs Fund for \$50,000 to fund the development of a Benalla Future Energy Plan which will outline how to achieve becoming a zero net energy town by:

- Following the established Z-Net Blueprint least cost approach.
(for further information see www.z-net.org.au)

- Identifying the characteristics of Benalla and the community and existing energy use.
- Defining current and likely future energy requirements
- Identifying options for reducing energy use.
- Investigating which renewable energy options are feasible, viable and desirable by the community and therefore will work best in Benalla.
- Assisting low income households, renters and businesses to invest in energy efficiencies and access renewable energy opportunities.
- Undertaking two feasibility studies for renewable energy projects which can be replicated for additional future projects (small and large scale opportunities).

John Lloyd

AND ANOTHER THING...

15/2/17

ARE YOU AFRAID OF THIS?

The climate
How hot does it have to get before those dunderheads in Canberra realise global warming is upon us right now? **Mark Hill, Middle Park**

The climate pays no heed to the skeptics; it just keeps changing.
Steven Sommer, Highton

The Coalition: the parliamentary wing of the coal industry.
Kerry Wardlaw, Tecoma

So all those European governments that are developing clean energy are "complacent" and "ideological"?
Phil Alexander, Eltham

The Age, 15/2/2017

"We are the first generation to feel the impacts of climate change, and the last generation to be able to do something about it." US President, Barack Obama

Want to be a green shopper?

Sustainable shopping bags

Information from an [article](#) written by [Uta Mihm](#) published in CHOICE magazine (www.choice.com.au) Last updated: 28 November 2016

Reusable bags have become part of our daily existence. A 2010 CHOICE online reader survey found 62% of respondents use green bags or other reusable bags as their main shopping bag.

There are plenty of sustainable options available to shoppers looking to minimise their environmental impact, although not all of them are as green as they first appear to be. CHOICE looked into the issue to find the best sustainable bag option for shoppers and for the environment.

Which bag is best for the environment?

Peter Allan, Principal Consultant at Hyder Consulting, authored numerous studies for the government on the impact of plastic bags, including reports advising which system would be kindest to the environment. This research involved a lifecycle assessment of bag options, including energy and water use, materials consumption, litter and marine impacts across the life of a bag.

The analysis found that:

Overall, a reusable bag is a better option for the environment than bags with between one and three typical uses.

"Given the popularity of the green bags, we needed to test whether reusable was better for the environment and this was comprehensively proven - but only so long as you use it repeatedly over a long period," (Allan).

A green bag has to be used more than 23 times before it becomes a better option than single-use bags.

Of the range of reusable bag types tested, the most environmentally-friendly option was the 100% recycled content PET reusable bag, closely followed by the reusable green bag.

Calico bags aren't recommended, because of the amount of water used to make them.

Which is the best single-use bag – if you HAVE to use one!

Recycled high-density polyethylene (HDPE) bags come out best for their low environmental impact. Paper and biodegradable starch bags are at the bottom of the list.

"Both biodegradable and paper bags use more energy and materials than thin plastic bags to make," says Allan. "And there is little advantage in biodegradable and degradable bags, because most bags end up in landfill where there is no benefit to breaking down - they just create more methane and a less stable landfill site."

Biodegradable: These bags are made from plastic that meets the Australian Standard for biodegradability, and break down or compost into carbon dioxide, methane, biomass and water. They're generally made of corn starch or other plant material.

Degradable: Petroleum-based plastic is used to make these bags. They break down into small pieces when exposed to oxygen or sunlight.

HDPE (high-density polyethylene): This is a lightweight plastic that the vast majority of single-use plastic bags are made from.

LDPE (low-density polyethylene): Thicker plastic like this is often used to make customised boutique bags for higher-end shops.

Ban the bag

Although there's no nationwide ban on plastic bags in Australia, many other countries have introduced measures to reduce use of lightweight plastic bags.

Bangladesh was the first country to ban polyethylene bags in early 2002.

Ireland was the first country to use a nation-wide levy to discourage plastic bag use in 2002. Within a week plastic bag use decreased from an estimated 328 to 21 bags per capita.

China is the largest country that's banned plastic bags. It saved the country an estimated 1.6 million tonnes of oil in the year following its introduction in 2008.

In November 2013, the European Commission adopted a proposal that requires its 28 Member States to reduce their use of lightweight plastic carrier bags, using whatever measures they like, including charges, national reduction targets or a total ban.

In Australia, some states have taken it upon themselves to reduce the use of plastic bags. In May 2009 the South Australian government banned the use of single-use plastic bags. Since then, the Northern Territory, ACT and Tasmanian governments have followed suit and in November 2016, at a National Meeting of Environment Ministers, Queensland committed to ensuring there is a ban on single-use plastic bags in place by 2018. Meanwhile in Victoria the Environment Protection Amendment (Banning Plastic Bags, Packaging and Microbeads) Bill awaits!

Community responses

Some communities have taken the initiative and banned lightweight plastic bags in their towns. Across Australia, many festivals, events, farmers' markets and entertainment precincts have gone plastic bag-free with community support.

Jennifer Geer



WE ALL WIN
WHEN WE GET RID OF PLASTIC BAGS

Are Vegans Cool?

In my article "Limits to Growth" in the previous [BSFG Newsletter #15 December 2016](#) I mentioned the community consultation on the Benalla and District 2036 Community Plan. We were asked to pick between two vision statements. I chose the second because it had the words 'people making individual choices'.

I thought yes if we are in an environmental predicament at the moment it is largely driven by 'people making individual choices'. Can we choose to change?

I recently came across the blog [The Inkling](#). The blog is by a lady I saw in an online article with Haydn Washington the author of [Demystifying Sustainability](#). You can listen to Haydn talking about Sustainability on the ABC's Ockham's Razor [here](#).

The Inkling blog has an extensive listing of articles under Sustainability. I found one article with the title [If you take too long to decide you end up with no choice](#). The first sentence is, "What would you give up to save the world?" while within the article ".....we can't expect to be able to save the world AND still have everything we've ever wanted. Just like you can't expect to be able to balance your household budget and buy everything you like. Living within your means and living within your ecological means are similar."

At the 2015 Swanpool Environmental Film Festival we screened the short TEDxWWF film [Climate change -- the greatest story never told](#) by George Marshall which was independently run with the World Wildlife Fund as part of a One Planet Living series. George's talk focused on the disconnection between what we know, what we believe in and what we do. See my article in [BSFG Newsletter #10 May 2015](#), "George Marshall and Getting Consensus on Climate Change".

This year I have chosen not to travel to Europe, in part for financial reasons but more importantly because of the high emissions from flying; trying to match up what I know, what I believe in and what I do. Living both within my means and my ecological means.

In Paris last year 195 nations agreed to holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change. [Wikipedia](#) gives a table showing the Paris signatories and their share of global carbon emissions. The US has 17.9%, Australia 1.5% and China 20.9% shares of global carbon emissions. In Australia there is a tendency to accept we are only responsible for a small proportion of global carbon emissions so there is not much we can do to influence global emissions.

The website [ShrinkThatFootprint](#) presents an analysis of "Carbon Targets for your Footprint" and shows that in 2001 the personal carbon footprints for the US were 21.7 tonne (tCO₂e), Australia 14.0 tonne, the World 4.0 tonne and China 1.7 tonne. Emissions on a per

capita basis therefore show that Australia is a high emitter. A strong reason for Australia to be committing to strong actions to reduce emissions.

In the same article Shrink That Footprint shows a personal 2050 carbon target of 1.5 tonne for 2°C of warming by 2100 above pre-industrial levels. In a previous [BSFG Newsletter #8 November 2014](#) my article 'Carbon Footprint' presented an analysis showing my personal carbon footprint to be 16.8 tonne. It's a long way down to 1.5 tonne!

So what other choices can I make to reduce my carbon footprint? There is a big global effort now to generate renewable energy. It's going to take a lot of money and time to get this infrastructure operational. And there are signs that in the US and Australia coal burning is going to increase.

However, I recently came across a film that has given me something to think about; [Cowspiracy; The Sustainability Secret](#). A major factor behind the film were a number of articles pointing out that the emissions from animal agriculture are quite high. In particular, the article [Livestock and Climate Change: What if the key actors in climate change are...cows, pigs, and chickens?](#) from the Worldwatch Institute, which estimates that raising livestock and their by-products actually account for at least 32.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide per year, or 51 percent of annual worldwide GHG emissions.

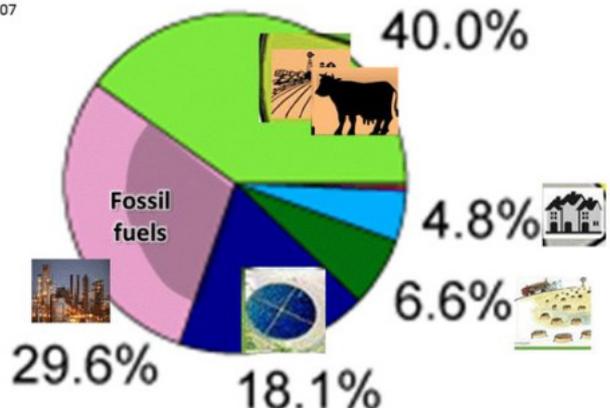
Kip Andersen the young presenter and filmmaker was strongly influenced by Al Gore and the film 'An Inconvenient Truth'. His film becomes a personal journey to investigate why environmentalists are ignoring emissions from animal agriculture; another inconvenient truth?

He makes the case that the greenhouse gas emissions from animal agriculture are mainly short lived methane emissions which could be quickly reduced by simply changing to a plant based diet. The film concludes that choosing a vegan diet would be better for the planet. Could it be our best chance for our planet living with a cooler atmosphere? Now here's an emissions reduction choice I can get my teeth into!

Peter Maddock

Global methane emissions 18% of total

IPCC 2007



Students Inspired by Young Environmental Activist

On Saturday the 11th of February, 16 students from Benalla P-12 College, FCJ College, Euroa SC and the home-school community had the opportunity, kindly offered through sponsorship by Benalla Sustainable Future Group, to attend a talk by Xiuhtezcatl Martinez at the Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne's Federation Square.

Xiuhtezcatl has been speaking on behalf of the planet since the tender age of six. Now at the age of 16, his extraordinary eloquence has moved audiences, which include world leaders, Hollywood celebrities and other young people across continents who have joined his Earth Guardians activism movement. Through public speaking and hip-hop, Xiuhtezcatl is spreading his message about the climate emergency that the world is in.

He is also one of 21 youths attempting to sue the US government for failing to act on climate change and protect future generations. Xiuhtezcatl spoke of each of these things and gave examples on how each and every one of us can get involved and help the fight for action on global warming.

Benalla P-12 Vice-Captain, Maisy Lister says, "It was so inspiring to listen to him speak so passionately about what he loved and to help us to see how we as young people can make a real difference to the things that matter. Xiuhtezcatl helped us to see the potential we all have if we alter our mindset from our 'wants' to our 'needs' and the impact that this can have on all of our lives. A profound thing that Xiuhtezcatl said that has been stuck in my mind since the event is, "we are at a tipping point right now where we will either be remembered as the generation that destroyed the planet and the generation that put profits before our future, or as the generation that united to address the greatest issue of our time"."

Riley Atkinson, 15 year old home schooled student, stated that, "The talk opened my eyes and made me realise that we each play a part in global warming. We can really make a difference at an individual and community level. The change doesn't need to come just from the big corporations, but from the people. We need to be aware of our CO2 footprint size, and reduce it as much as possible." The talk has motivated Riley to be careful with recycling and being wise with his use of all resources, and he also enjoyed Xiuhtezcatl's use of rap music.

Year 11 FCJ student, Jazzy Burke, commented that, "Xiuhtezcatl is a very inspiring young person, with incredible achievements, especially for his age. Listening to how he had created change and how he had motivated others invoked in me a sense of power, a feeling that I could change the world, just like him. Whilst positively sharing his thoughts, Xiuhtezcatl also highlighted the major issues facing the planet, and how these will affect young people most of all, in the future. The biggest problem society seems to have, is a separation of actions from consequences. Those in charge of major energy companies, and many of our political leaders who make the decisions, seem to be disconnected from those people living in poverty on low-lying islands, who will be forced to leave their countries due to rising sea levels, resulting from global warming. Xiuhtezcatl spoke with passion, and has a life story to spark change in all".

Overall, the group found the talk inspiring, and at the same time confronting, from the issues that it raised about climate change. However, in responding to a question from the audience about the enormity of the challenges facing the world, Xiuhtezcatl re-assured young people that, "they should strive to do whatever they felt comfortable with".

Peter Holmes



**Divestment:
Isn't Consumption Investment?**

At our General Meeting on Thursday February 23rd we heard from the young Benalla people some responses to their BSGF sponsored visit to "[Xiuhtezcatl Martinez: Why I sued the U.S. Government](#)". I recall several of them saying they would be looking at cutting back on electricity and water use. I wondered if the young girl who said she had become a vegetarian had done so for environmental reasons. See my previous article in this newsletter; Are Vegans Cool?

At the end of the meeting we watched the short film [Eartrise-Take Back the Power](#) which included a look at the 350.org Divestment initiative called [Fossil Free, Divest from Fossil Fuels](#). "Divestment is the opposite of an investment – it simply means getting rid of stocks, bonds, or investment funds that are unethical or morally ambiguous.....Fossil fuel divestment takes the fossil fuel industry to task for its culpability in the climate crisis". Note the name of the website is GoFossilFree.

I thought during the film that our personal consumption expenditure is a form of investment; our own 'culpability in the climate crisis'. So, by limiting or eliminating our consumption of certain goods we are divesting from the companies supplying these goods. Every time we drive a car or fly in a plane we are investing in fossil fuels.

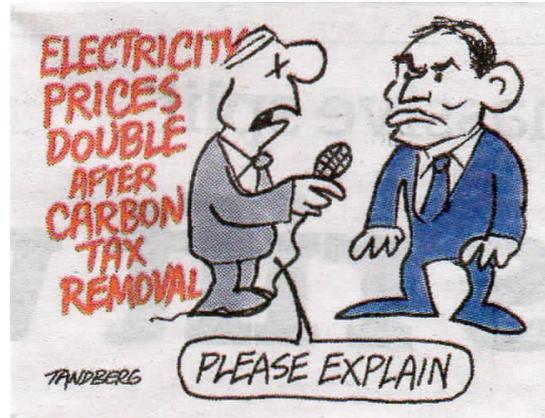
Most of us drove home from the meeting that night; further investment in the fossil fuel industry. I did see one person putting on their bike helmet as they left the meeting. I must admit that I have often thought I should ride my bike to a meeting but there is always a reason for putting off doing so. Perhaps I should invest in a bike trailer to enable me to carry multimedia gear!

Peter Maddock

(Editor's Comment: A bike trailer's a good idea Peter!)



The Age, 9/3/2017

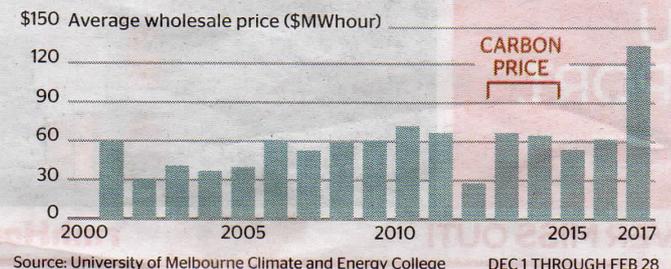


The Age, 9/3/2017

Energy Costs eclipse carbon-price levels

A growing crisis in the electricity market has led to wholesale power prices more than doubling in a year and rising to at least twice the level they were under the controversial Labour-Greens carbon price. An analysis by Melbourne University's Climate and Energy College found the average wholesale electricity price soared to \$134 a megawatt hour in the summer just finished; compared with \$65-\$67 in the two summers the carbon price was in place.

National average summer wholesale electricity prices



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