



Benalla Sustainable Future Group

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Benalla Sustainable
Future Group Inc.
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President's Message

COVID-19 v Climate Change

Understandably, the world's attention has had to be focussed on dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic over the past few months, and dealing with the health, economic and societal issues that have arisen from this crisis.

However, as one commentator recently wrote in 'The Age, the climate change crisis will not have ended when a vaccine is finally developed to counter COVID-19. Certainly, carbon emissions have temporarily decreased while people are forced to stay home, so there is less traffic on our roads. As we head into winter, this may be countered by an increase in energy consumption as households turn on their heaters for longer periods each day.

All this is of fleeting concern, compared to some worrying developments in governmental decision making in recent times. In 2019, the NT government removed its ban on fracking in the Territory, with the potential to destroy precious ecosystems and the health of many indigenous communities. Thankfully, the companies which were intending to engage in fracking, have now suspended plans, ostensibly because of the concerns over the health of its workers due to COVID-19! Energy analysts think that the real reason is because of falling demand for gas worldwide, and the consequent drop in the gas price, making it uneconomic compared to renewable energy.

More recently, just as the COVID-19 crisis broke in Victoria, the Andrews government announced it was lifting its moratorium on conventional gas exploration. Again, a misguided decision, given the level of emissions created by burning gas for power production or heating. It seems that our governments only count emissions created locally in the extraction of the gas, and conveniently omit those emissions created by the burning of the gas overseas in the countries which import our gas. Gas is certainly not a transition energy source on the road to a renewable future, as the Prime

Minister has claimed, when he dangled \$2 billion in front of the NSW government, to develop the Pilliga gas fields in central NSW. Santos, the company which is angling to commence fracking in these gas reserves, is currently pushing very hard to get the NSW government to approve the project. Thankfully organizations such as 'Lock the Gate' are fighting hard to prevent this potential environmental disaster.

Another environmental concern that has just emerged, is the decision by the Victorian government to allow ten more years of logging, much of which will be carried out in forests recently devastated by bushfires. What a disaster this promises for the restoration of these fragile ecosystems, where there have already been species driven to the point of extinction.

All of these examples illustrate how vigilant we must be to hold governments to account, when decisions are made with the public's collective mind focussed on another major issue. We cannot take to the streets to protest, but we can vent our disapproval by letter writing to newspapers and politicians, or by signing on-line petitions, so I urge you all not to pass up an opportunity to take action.

Unfortunately, our campaign to present a Climate Emergency petition to Benalla Rural City Council, has been delayed, but not derailed, by COVID-19. As soon as the current lock-down on public gatherings is removed, we will be rescheduling the Climate Science talks at BPACC, and taking the petition, with approximately 600 signatures, to Council. Encouraging news is that Shepparton City has just declared a Climate Emergency, and the number of councils having taken this step, continues to grow - as of 2nd April, 95 Councils in Australia representing 35% of our population, have now declared an emergency.

In the meantime, the BSFG committee wishes you all good health, and trusts that you have managed to survive this period of 'social distancing' by staying in touch with family, friends and neighbours.

Peter Holmes

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

New Report on Extreme Heat

Up to 3.5 billion people could be struggling to survive in conditions of extreme heat in 50 years' time if the world fails to curb greenhouse gas emissions, a major new Dutch study has found.

Around a third of the world's population will by then live in areas where the average annual temperature is predicted to rise above 29 degrees Celsius - unless they emigrate, according to scientists from the Netherlands' Wageningen University.

Living in such conditions would place them outside the climatic niche humans have inhabited for the past 6,000 years, said Marten Scheffer, who lead the study published Monday in the Proceedings of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) journal.

"The coronavirus changed the world in a way that was difficult to imagine just a few months ago and our results show how climate change could do something similar," Scheffer is quoted as saying in a statement from his university and the other research institutions involved.

The climatic changes are not predicted to occur as quickly as those prompted by the coronavirus pandemic, but unlike the world's current predicament, there would be no hope of relief in the near future, he added.

Scheffer and his colleagues partially based their conclusions on an analysis of past data, by comparing climatic conditions in regions humans most prefer to settle in.

They found that human population density peaked in locations where annual average temperatures hovered around 11 to 15 degrees Celsius, with a second smaller peak at 20 to 25 degrees Celsius.

This distribution has hardly changed in the past 6,000 years, which is why researchers call this temperature range the 'human ecological niche.'

Looking into the future, the scientists used a climate forecast from the 2014 Fifth Assessment Report of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The report assumes atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations will develop largely unchecked as they have over the past decades, leading to corresponding temperature rises across the globe.

Using the international projections of the third so-called Shared Socioeconomic Pathway (SSP3), which foresees a future marked by regional rivalries, researchers were able to model the predicted world population against the rising temperatures.

They found that the percentage land area with an annual average temperature of more than 29 degrees Celsius will expand from 0.8% (most of which currently lies in the Sahara desert) to 19% by 2070.

Affected areas were in South America, Africa, India, South-East Asia and North Australia. The heating climate would hit more than a billion people in India alone, and more than 100 million people in Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia and Sudan.

"This would not only have a devastating direct impact, it would also make it more difficult for societies to deal with future crises such as new pandemics," emphasized Scheffer.

As a result of this report, industry leaders in Australia are calling for the Morrison government to include climate change in the recovery plans for the COVID-19 pandemic. They are not convinced that fossil fuels have any part to play in Australia's economic future.

#WednesdayWisdom

My twitter feed had a post on Wednesday May 6 from [Project Drawdown](#) which I now notice has the hash tag #WednesdayWisdom.

"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."
-- Jane Goodall.

The following link is a short Jane Goodall video which looks at the impact of our activities on the earth and poses the question what kind of difference are we going to make? [Jane Goodall Mother Earth](#).

Project Drawdown Founded in 2014, is a non-profit organization that seeks to help the world reach 'Drawdown' - the future point in time when levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere stop climbing and start to steadily decline, <https://drawdown.org/about>.

Our carbon and ecological footprints show that we are exceeding the capacity of earth to sustain life support systems. Each day provides us with an opportunity to make a difference.

Peter Maddock

Localisation

I have been interested to see the emphasis on shopping locally during Covid 19. Not only does this support our local businesses during the coronavirus shutdown it also has the potential to reduce our carbon emissions, and other environmental impacts.

Using local traders means we are not driving longer distances to purchase goods. Or service providers also are not travelling long distances.

Local Futures is an international group working to strengthen local economies that put the well-being of people and the planet first,

<https://www.localfutures.org/>.

Local Futures is encouraging the development of local food to reduce the carbon emissions associated with modern agriculture and the global transport of food. Watch the short video, [Going Local: the solution multiplier](#).

Our action group the [Benalla Food Co-op](#) aims to encourage the responsible use of our earth's resources, reduce packaging and excessive handling of food, support Australian growers, reduce food miles and food costs.

Another action group, [Benalla Local Food Network](#) is encouraging local food growers, retailers, organisations and community members come together to supply the town with healthy food. This group arranged to have Serenity Hill speak at one of our meetings about the [Open Food Network](#), a now global network aiming to support local food systems.

As the Open Food Network says:

"Sometimes the best way to fix the system is to start a new one".

Peter Maddock



Where to from here?

The arrival of COVID-19 into Australia in March changed our whole way of life, virtually overnight. Tourism, arts and hospitality were the first businesses to be closed down and sports followed. We got back to the basics.

With nothing on the calendar (no meetings, no cinema or hall events for us) it has certainly provided plenty of time for reflection. When I'm not outside doing farm work I am inside researching and adding to my family history book.

I've been thinking about how we have developed as a country in the last couple of centuries. To look at a truly sustainable society though we should take a lesson from the indigenous peoples before European settlement who can look back not two centuries but 600 plus.

Back in 1845 my grandmother's grandfather travelled with Charles Sturt to explore Central Australia. After being turned back by lack of water from the central desert regions Sturt tried once again and that's when he came across Cooper's Creek which he named after his friend Judge Cooper, back in Adelaide. He explored up and down the series of waterways, recognising that they were ephemeral and fed by flood waters hence he called it a creek not a river.

Sturt documented the native populations as recorded in his book 'Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia'. There was a considerable population along the waterways with permanent dwellings and food caches. When the rains came the people spread out to forage, using their knowledge of the country. Even as the explorers struggled to survive and find water, they came across healthy native groups including women and children. It was truly a resilient society.

'Resilience' was talked about a lot a decade ago in biodiversity fields and is now getting more airplay following the bushfires and now the virus. In my mind the definition of resilience is the ability to survive, even thrive, through the bad times and to prepare for such in the good times. Those native peoples did so for millennia.

Our own grandparents era was much more resilient than we are today. Unlike the natives, they had to deal with the concept of 'money' but they did value a high degree of self-sufficiency and 'prudence' and avoided getting into debt.

Now we come to today's society - and what a house of cards we have built for ourselves. The just-in-time economy has had to quickly scramble to cope. The Reserve Bank is printing money. The commercial banks are deferring loans and scrambling to improve their much depleted 'impairment loan provisions' rather than paying out big dividends.

Meanwhile our own Federal Government seeks a way to revive the 'economy'. By that I believe they mean getting back onto the old merry-go-round as quickly as possible. The structure that has been built up over decades, and accelerated this century, cannot be allowed to collapse!

But is it resilient? Is it sustainable? Will we the people forget the lessons of these past months and revert back to the way we were a year ago? It was election time then and we did have choices.

What we have discovered over the past two months is what is essential and what is not. We've also had a light shone on the nature of work and money as a means of distributing wealth. The concept of a 'living wage' has gained some credence following the need to double Newstart.

One pleasing side effect of the pandemic has been the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions as people stay at home, cars are off the road and air travel comes to a standstill. We know as a society that we have to cut emissions but this is not the way that we would have chosen to go about it.

Personally I'm happy with the restrictions. I don't want to see a return to cheap air travel or a continuance of cheap fuel. We do need a price on carbon.

Future growth is also being debated with immigration currently prevented by border restrictions and lack of transport. It's got the economists and sections of the government quaking in their boots. The whole Ponzi scheme, the house of cards, has been dependent on population growth. Hopefully at this time of forced zero immigration more people can reflect on the impacts and the stupidity of this 'endless growth' philosophy.

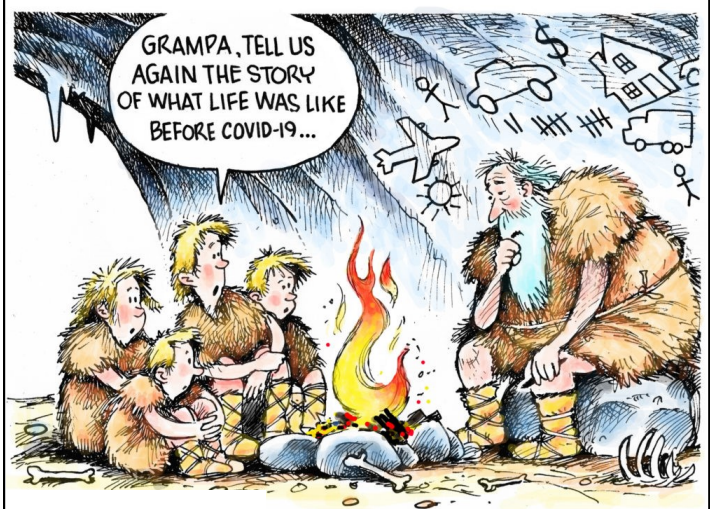
Coming 'out the other side' whenever is now the point of discussion. The economy, as measured by GDP, is just the result, the bottom line, of what we choose to do as a society. We make the choices.

I'd like to think that we have all discovered that there can be life, and a good life too, without all the travel and without all the toys. We might also have discovered that the prudence of our grandparents and paying off a mortgage, rather than negative gearing, is a good thing. We'll see.

Ian Herbert

P.S. I think we should tighten our belts for the long haul. We are indeed the 'lucky country', together with New Zealand, at this time. The rest of the world is suffering greatly.

The USA is a basket case. All their chickens are coming home to roost - privatised public health, poor short-term social security, highly geared companies and factory food production. We have no idea how and when they will come out of it. The old saying is that when Uncle Sam sneezes the rest of the world catches a cold. It still might be the case.



Hot Mess During COVID-19

I awoke this Sunday 3rd May morning ready to start writing something for our May newsletter.

Rather appropriately when I turned on the radio I caught Richard Aedy on ABC RN presenting the show 01 | Hot Mess - Human Frailties. [Listen on this link.](#)

There was a short introduction to the series the previous Sunday 26 Apr 2020, 8:00am Introducing Hot Mess - Why haven't we fixed Climate Change? [Listen on this link.](#)

Being someone very concerned about the environment in the broadest sense, including human induced climate change it was interesting to hear people's responses to the topic and also get an insight into people's earth view and how different that can be.

The series looks like an interesting one to follow particularly as it is a difficult subject to tackle as we deal with COVID-19. The episode this morning presented a range of viewpoints on people's attitudes to climate change, setting the scene to exploring in future episodes why we have not fixed human induced climate change.

Two other broadcasts I have listened to recently leave me with a sense of urgency in dealing with climate change:

1. ABC RN Big Ideas, Thu 23 Apr 2020, 8:05pm, Dr Aila Keto AO - conservationist, founder, and President of the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society; 'Is saving our planet still possible?' [Link to listen.](#)
2. ATA ReNew put online a recording of the webinar; 'Will Steffen - Climate Change 2020 - Why we are facing an emergency - April 2020.' [Link to watch.](#)

As I was finishing this article this short video called The Great Realisation came to my inbox and is a good way to sign off this article. [Link to watch.](#)

Is the Environment Important?

I have been interested in environmental issues for many years going back to the mid 60's and having a Biology Textbook by Garrett Harden, who described the [Tragedy of the Commons](#). The textbook had a good description of exponential growth where a nominal loan in 1 AD repaid in gold at a nominal rate of interest over 2000 years, the weight of gold would be greater than the weight of the earth! So much for our monetary system?

At the time I also read Rachel Carson's Silent Spring and witnessed the first images from Apollo 11 of Earth. This image is often in my mind when I listen to politicians talking about prioritising the economy over the environment. I still have the September 1970 edition of Scientific American which was called and devoted to The Biosphere, that thin layer of soil water and air around Earth which supports all life.

It is in my later years that I have started to read more about the environment leading me to question the sustainability of life on earth given our apparent trajectory of over exploiting earth's life support systems.

Is the environment important to us? Some time ago I came across the rule of threes which survival experts use:

1. You can survive three *minutes* without breathable air (unconsciousness generally occurs), or in icy water.
2. You can survive three *hours* in a harsh environment (extreme heat or cold).
3. You can survive three *days* without drinkable water.
4. You can survive three *weeks* without food.

So, environmental parameters which are often taken for granted are critically important to our survival.

A critical concern for me is that our economic system sees the environment as a subsystem of the economy and does not see any limits to economic growth.

Peter Maddock

Member Submitted Links

Over a period, we have received some links from members to articles they have found interesting. Some of these are before COVID-19 and relate to the 2019/20 bushfire disaster and calls for action to reduce emissions and human induced climate change.

There's nothing safe about a country in flames, and the Coalition will exploit that. As bushfires flare, expect the government to dampen hopes of climate action and ramp up national security rhetoric. Jeff Sparrow, [The Guardian Thu 23 Jan 2020.](#)

Scott Morrison's stance on climate change makes it harder for future governments to undo his damage. The need for emissions cuts is urgent - the longer we wait, the more of our carbon budget we use. Greg Jericho, [The Guardian Thu 23 Jan 2020.](#)

Top academics write to Morrison Government asking for 'deep cuts' to Australia's greenhouse gas emissions, National science, technology and environment reporter Michael Slezak, [ABC News 29 January 2020.](#)

Coronavirus is a human crisis beyond most of our scariest dreams - we will need to restart our society. It would be a huge mistake for Australia to go back to how it was. Sam Mostyn and Travers McLeod, [The Guardian Sat 4 April 2020.](#)

Norway and the A-ha moment that made electric cars the answer. Jon Henley and Elisabeth Ulven, [The Guardian Sunday April 9 2020.](#)

Using lots of plastic packaging during the coronavirus crisis? You're not alone. [The Conversation April 28, 2020.](#)

We have a right to expect government to do what markets cannot: social and economic protection for all of us, John Falzon, [The Guardian Sat 2 May 2020.](#)

Aren't we in a drought? The Australian black coal industry uses enough water for over 5 million people. Ian Overton, [The Conversation May 4 2020](#)

Editors Note:

Thank you to the members who submitted these links. It would be nice though if just a few more people could try their hand at writing an article or two or submitting a report.

My thanks to Peter H, Peter M and Christine for their contributions in this issue.

Ian Herbert

Benalla Food Co-op COVID-19 update

It's hard to fathom the complexity of the globally challenging time COVID-19 has delivered to us all. As to the running of the Benalla Food Co-op, we were questioning ourselves - How will we manage the running of the co-op? Customers by appointment? Reduce open hours? Should we close?

Keeping people safe was of prime importance. Emails were flying around between committee members who were diligent and supportive of keeping it going if we could. After consultation with Callum Morrison, BRC Public Health Officer, we fine-tuned the procedures for the Food Co-op to continue serving our members. Many of our customers have been shopping for nearly nine years, so it would be a grave shame if we had to shut altogether. I was reassured by Callum's comment that, "We are providing an essential service". Callum was very impressed with our efforts and at no time indicated a necessity to close the co-op.

Numerous procedures have been implemented, along with the basic hygiene principals such as: no one entering until hands have been washed in hands free basin, no touching of body, not coming in to the food co-op if you are unwell and limiting the customers to three at a time, which was well under four square metres per person.

Any points of possible direct contamination between customers, customers' containers, duty members, and food co-op products has been eliminated by wearing gloves and thoughtful procedures that might look bizarre, if not dealing with a pandemic crisis. We have also had to tell our customers that children must remain home.

Another idea that came up was to make a short video. If you wish to view the video outlining our procedure, Ctrl and Click on the following link:

[Benalla Food Co Op COVID-19 procedures.mp4](#)

The committee had also been looking into an electronic payment system at the food co-op. With the advent of COVID-19 it became a priority as this is now the preferred method of payment. This required purchasing a new iPad and Square card reader, downloading the Square app on to the iPad, and transferring a lot of data to the new system as well as sorting through some teething issues. Cash or cheque payments are also still available, as we are using an in-and-out cash tin system to avoid cross handling of cash.

Members have been patient, supportive and as committed as always to continue shopping at the food co-op.

Christine Holmes
Benalla Food Co-op Coordinator



Logging forests after bushfires fires

One of our members Alan sent me some information about post fire logging. This included articles from several journals which are difficult to include in the newsletter.

However, I have found information about logging forests after fires which may be of interest to you. You should be able to view these videos if you are not on Facebook. You may need to unmute the video speaker icon to enable audio.

From Goongerah Environment Centre GECO, Martin's Creek rainforest turned to ashes, <https://www.facebook.com/GECOEastGippsland/videos/534150067309587/>.

And from GECO again, The Project - Should Logging Resume on Land Recovering from Bushfires? <https://www.facebook.com/GECOEastGippsland/videos/243981640151409/>.

The second video includes an interview with David Lindenmayer. Vic Forests does not accept the published opinions by David Lindenmayer on logging after bushfires.

Please contact me if you would like to receive the journal articles:

2017 Please do not disturb ecosystems further - NatureEcolEvol

2018 From unburnt to salvage logged - Quantifying bird responses to different levels of disturbance severity - JapplEcol

2018 Impacts of salvage logging on biodiversity – a meta-analysis - JapplEcol

2019 Long-term impacts of wildfire and logging on forest soils - NatureGeosci

Peter Maddock

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