



Benalla Sustainable Future Group

Newsletter 34

March 2023

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

What an incredibly confronting last several months we have experienced! Events that have served to attest to the urgency with which we need to tackle climate change have occurred in various regions of Australia and around the world. These included floods and a tornado in Benalla, just to remind us that locally, we cannot rest in our endeavours.

Catastrophic floods in NSW, Queensland and the Kimberley have been a result of unprecedented rainfall due to the warming oceans. The recent cyclone which struck New Zealand is a taste of the increased intensity we can expect from such events in the future.

On a positive note, at a local level, interest is certainly stirring in the community in relation to tackling some very important issues. There are some articles in this newsletter relating to the outstanding talk given by Dr Greg Moore at the Benalla Uniting Church about the benefits of trees in a changing climate. If you missed Greg's talk, don't worry - we have recorded it and details of how to access the recording are contained in the article on page 2. My sincere thanks to Sue Campbell for suggesting Greg come to Benalla and for providing us with his contact details. My hope is that when our Councillors and Officers view the talk, it will lead to a mindset change that is so desperately needed in policies related to new housing subdivisions and public open spaces. I am sure that our 'Greening and Cooling Benalla' Action Group will be champing at the bit to make sure it stays front of mind for Council.

The BSFG 'Wastewise' Group has been busy investigating ways to prevent hard to recycle goods from being deposited in our landfill. A number of articles have already appeared in the Ensign, with information and helpful hints to follow. Containers have been provided in several locations around town, to collect plastic bottle tops, bread ties, and blister packs, all small items in themselves but having a fantastic end use when reprocessed (such as wheelchairs for children).

We appear to finally be having a more serious discussion about electric vehicle charging stations in Benalla. There are currently a number of bureaucratic hurdles to jump before we reach a uniform approach to this essential part of the transition to EVs in Australia and, most importantly, the issue of universal access to the chargers for all vehicle makes. BSFG will be inviting a speaker to our next general meeting to talk about EVs - see details below of next meeting.

One of my greatest concerns, which I raised in my presentation to Council over the Climate Emergency petition, is whether the large number of businesses and their employees who work in the current motor vehicle industries in Benalla, are being properly prepared and assisted in the transition away from internal combustion engine transportation.

REB is also planning an evening session in April to disseminate information about household batteries and PV systems - yet another area where bureaucracy has stalled progress!

As you read the articles within this newsletter, my appeal to our readers is that you come along to our meetings, and become informed and involved in one or more of our action/focus groups. We can make a difference locally by keeping the conversations happening and by urging our community and our Council to take Climate Change and resource management seriously.

Peter Holmes

Next General Meeting

5.30 pm Thursday 30th March 2023

Benalla Uniting Church Fellowship Room

**Guest speaker: Russell Klose
from Kilowatt Cars, Yackandandah
on Electric Vehicles**

See full meeting notice on back page.

***Judy Schwarzman
Secretary***

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

Outstanding Talk given by Dr Greg Moore

On 22nd February over 130 people from Benalla and many other north-east municipalities gathered at the Benalla Uniting Church. They were inspired, entertained and challenged by Dr Moore's presentation which centred on the health benefits, financial savings in energy consumption, and climate mitigation effects which result from increasing tree cover in urban areas. Dr Moore is one of Australia's leading arboriculturists, was Principal of Burnley Horticultural College for 20 years, and has served on the Boards of and chaired several environmental organisations such as Trust For Nature, Greening Australia, Treenet and the Significant Tree register of the National Trust.

Attendees included Councillors from Strathbogie and Wangaratta, and Council officers from Benalla, Indigo, Wangaratta and Strathbogie Shires.

Benalla Sustainable Future Group president, Peter Holmes said, "The issues and benefits raised by Dr Moore in his talk, need to be immediately taken seriously by Benalla Rural City and other Councils who have not already established appropriate planning policies, in the areas of new housing subdivision approvals and associated streetscape policies. An excellent first step would be for Benalla Rural City to join with seven other North-East Councils in utilising the services of the shared Sustainable Subdivisions Advisor." Dr Moore said that, "Planning policies need to include protective overlays for existing mature trees, which should be incorporated into public open spaces within a new subdivision, unlike the current practice of removing most of these trees to create more lots for the developer."

Dr Moore quoted studies that have shown the very significant health benefits that shady public spaces provide. Not only do they encourage an increase in people taking more exercise, resulting in lower rates of cardiovascular and diabetes illnesses, but the socialisation and emotional wellbeing of communities was found to be improved. The studies found that financial savings in health costs were as high as \$5 billion per year in Australia. Another very significant finding was that women who live and exercise in treed areas have healthier weight babies compared to those women without access to cooler areas.

Dr Moore also was very critical of the trend towards creating subdivisions with smaller lot sizes and building approvals for larger houses with inappropriate cladding on those allotments. He showed graphical evidence of the heat sink effects being created in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne, where much of this unfortunate development is occurring. Temperatures of up to 7 degrees C higher occur in these heat island areas. However, the astonishing fact is that the heat island created by day in these suburbs, then moves at night towards the eastern and southern suburbs where more elderly people live, causing an increase in the number of 'excess deaths' (due to dehydration, strokes, heart failures) during heatwave conditions, because overnight temperatures are more elevated. Benalla, and other rural cities, are not immune from this situation which needs to be urgently addressed.

The other obvious benefits raised by Dr Moore centred on the financial benefits of appropriately selected and located trees, because of the cooling effect in summer, leading to reduced need for air-conditioning. Savings of up to \$200 per year can be achieved on household

electricity bills.

Another important fact that was mentioned regarding financial benefits of trees, should interest Councils. Streets paved with bitumen last many years longer when they are shaded by trees, resulting in much lower maintenance costs for local government (and ratepayers).

Dr Moore stated that much of the inappropriate development that is occurring in urban areas, has been a consequence of inadequate State Planning regulations, and the inability of communities to successfully challenge proposals in VCAT. Councils have been unwilling to request changes to proposed subdivisions, because they are conscious of the costs of being challenged at VCAT.

However, this should not let Councils 'off the hook' Mr Holmes said, "An all of community approach to demanding better outcomes is required. Councils should insist on a minimum of 10% of a subdivision area being set aside for open space (and not fudging this by saying the street areas constitute the 10%). Lot sizes must be sufficient to allow for enough medium size trees on each lot. Street trees should be included to provide shady avenues for people to walk and ride."

The other question that BSFG would like answered is whether Benalla has a minimum percentage target for tree canopy cover within the urban area, and if so, does this apply to each individual subdivision approved, or is it just averaged over the whole city area? Dr Moore mentioned that many municipalities have set targets of 30% tree canopy cover.

In response to a question about appropriate street trees, Dr Moore gave examples of a number of Australian species which have been found to be suitable. These included a particular genus of Spotted Gum, Yellow Gum, Cypress Pine, and some Acacias. He also mentioned there were some species of Oaks that were suitable. The audience were referred to an excellent website for information on climate-ready trees: cat.bgci.org

Dr Moore's talk was recorded, and will be available for interested people who were unable to attend his presentation. Please email BSFG at bsfginc@gmail.com for information about the recording.

Peter Holmes



Dr Greg Moore talk - photo by Doug Spowart

Greg Moore's Talk

[The Benalla Planning Scheme](#) comprises state provisions, which are uniform in every planning scheme, and sections known as local provisions. It is made up of words (ordinance) and maps. The words set out state policy (mandatory inclusions) and local policies, followed by specific provisions such as zone and overlay controls. The extent to which a planning scheme includes local provisions and directions (other than those parts which are required under the Planning Act) depends on the strategic planning work done by a Council to justify such inclusions.

It is a large publication (936 pages at present, although Wangaratta's is 1080 and Wodonga's is similar), full of nice words and good intentions (for example in CI11, 'Planning is to recognize the need for contribute towards ... A high standard of environmental sustainability, urban design and amenity.'). but there is one standout flaw in my view. It provides a loophole which allows local councils to:

'Provide an offset to compensate for the biodiversity impact from the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation.'

CI 52.17-5:

'Offset requirements If a permit is required to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation, the biodiversity impacts from the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation must be offset, in accordance with the Guidelines. The conditions on the permit for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation must specify the offset requirement and the timing to secure the offset.'

This is a state provision and thus is mandatory for all Councils. The 'Guidelines' mentioned above is a document prepared by DELWP: 'Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation' (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2017), used statewide.

There are set amounts of open space to be provided in new estates, but that provision can also be offset. A number of Councils have clear strategies for obtaining and developing land for public open spaces in recognition of its importance to the wellbeing of the local community: sadly Benalla does not have such a strategy in our Planning Scheme.

So, rather than comply with the good intentions of the Planning Act it is far easier and more profitable to just jump straight to the offsets provisions. It's more profitable for the developers and easier for the council. New parkland only means more grass to mow or trees to look after. It does raise the question: what happens to the open space contributions from developers, and to the offsets provided when native vegetation is cleared? Why can't we see some sort of regular reporting back to the community on this?

Unfortunately everything Greg Moore spoke about is to do with well-being. Developers and council staff only see it as an expense. Well-being doesn't help the council budget today.

The system is set up in such a way that even though we the voting public would like to see more tree coverage and open space, we don't really get a say, if Council decides to accept an offset by way of a cash provision.

The only way I can see around this dilemma is that the planning scheme provisions need to change at the State level. The loopholes have to be plugged. My suggestion then is to write to the State Minister concerned and lobby local members.

Who might the Minister be? You now need to write to two of them. What was DELWP is now DEECA and planning has moved to the Department of Transport & Planning! Ahhh, the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Another opportunity for a department to handball the problem. Better then write to the Premier because the buck stops there.

I'm no expert, nor do I wish to be, but I am told that offsets weren't always the case. It doesn't have to be this way.

Significant Trees

Greg Moore suggested that one way to provide some level of protection for existing trees was to place them on the Council's Significant Tree Register. That prompted me to take a look at the BRC register. It appears on page 37 of the 'BRCC Tree Asset and Maintenance Management Plan 2018-2021' (just a bit out of date).

Eleven individual trees are listed. I'm pleased to see that the large Lima Stringy Bark opposite Swanpool Hall is there - an endangered species. Likewise the nearby Bunya Bunya Pines which are National Trust registered. The large Algerian Oak at the Lima School Community Centre doesn't appear, but should. It is also National Trust registered.

There are many very large River Red Gums on sites slated for development. You can go onto Google Maps satellite view and see them. Currently they are lone sentinels in open paddocks, some already cleared around them. Will some of them form a corridor in new open spaces i.e. parkland? Is such information open to the public?

Just asking. Maybe some of our readers might know the answer.

Ian Herbert

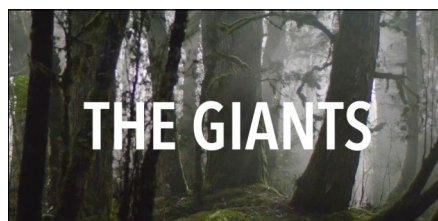
Swanpool Environmental Film Festival 2023

Saturday 17th June 1 pm to 9.30 pm

Guest speakers and films are still being finalised. Films 'Greenhouse' and 'The Giants' are listed.



Greenhouse by Joost Bakker investigates what it would be like to grow all the food you ever needed



The Giants explores the intertwined fates of trees and humans in this poetic portrait of environmentalist Bob Brown drawing on his 50 years of inspiring social and political activism.

System Error

While musing about how we got to where we are today, I started to think about the systems behind our society. In previous articles I have talked about how hard it is to 'jump off the merry-go-round'. Many of our systems are not responsive to the needs of the people - or the planet.

Take the Environment Protection Act for example. It does not yet take into account effects on Climate Change. Or the example on the previous page where the Victorian Planning Act allows offsets - so that's the loophole the developers will go for first.

Recently our RBA governor Philip Lowe 'belled the cat'. He stated that his board can meet in the morning and change the interest rate in the afternoon. He also stated that it wasn't the case for all the other measures that could be taken. When it comes to politicians making changes, it can take many years.

Take the latest case of increasing the tax on funds above \$3 million in superannuation accounts. It drew a good deal of political opposition but to me it was just correcting a 'system error'. It won't be applied until 2025! Such is the pace of change for something most of us would consider 'bleeding obvious'.

Many systems are 'locked in'. An example now is franking credits, negative gearing and capital gains tax. They are now considered political dynamite. Instead our politicians fluff around with patches to the housing and rental crisis such as proposing that superannuation funds be used to help with a deposit. The rate of building new public housing is less than the growing rate of desperate applicants.

The endless growth myth still prevails. To quote Bob Brown, "We've got corporate capture of our parliaments".

We are a reactive society. We come along after a calamity and try and fix it. It's an ethos that stems from pride in our emergency services - SES, CFA or even bring in the army. How much better off we would be though if we continuously and expeditiously improved our systems and took action ahead of crises.

Ian Herbert

P.S. Since writing about the Significant Trees Register, I am now told it can take two years to get a new entry up. That's within an existing system, not even asking for a change.

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

Thinking about an electric vehicle?

Russell Klose from Kilowatt Cars (Yackandandah based supplier of used Nissan Leaf Electric Vehicles (EV's) from Japan) will be presenting a question, answer and drive session at the Benalla Uniting Church, on Thursday 30th March.

We will start at 5.30 pm with a talk from Russell on who they are, what they are doing and why, why you should consider buying an EV, how to charge it (at home/on the road), bulk buy opportunities and the advantages of EV ownership-lower running costs, low emission driving etc.

After this part of the talk is finished, Russell will have vehicles available to look at/sit in and test drive.

Then there will be a shared pizza dinner. A gold coin donation would be appreciated.

At 7.30 pm we'll have a question-and-answer session with Russell - a great opportunity to talk with someone who sells EVs, and has travelled over 25,000 km in an EV around Australia.

To book go to: <https://www.trybooking.com/CGQLS>

Or email: bsfginc@gmail.com

We hope you can join us.

*Judy Schwarzman
Secretary, BSFG*



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**Deadline for
June 2023
Newsletter
Sunday 4th June**



**Benalla
Sustainable
Future
Group**

www.bsfg.org.au



**Saturday 17th June 2023
at Swanpool Cinema
1 pm to 9.30 pm**

This year's keynote speaker:

Prof David Karoly

plus presentations by

Winton Wetlands

and

**Save Our Strathbogie
Forest Group**

Films:

**'Greenhouse by Joost'
'The Giants'**