

La Trobe University

Environmental sustainability media spotlight:

This weekly report is brought to you by the La Trobe University Sustainability Taskforce to introduce and encourage awareness and opinion about our sustainable future. We would welcome opinion pieces, which we will try to place in the media, and any comments that you have about sustainability, so please feel free to contact me at J.Ayers@latrobe.edu.au or on 9479 1187. Or you can contact Sustainability Taskforce at sustainability@latrobe.edu.au.

Major Australian media - 28 August - 3 September 2009

'Environmental sustainability' – major media report

Great Barrier Reef faces catastrophic harm

Tom Arup, 3 September 2009, [The Age](#)

City Profile; Leading the green lifestyle push

Canberra Times September 2009, [Canberra Times](#)

Global recycler sets up shop in city with user-pay program

Sarah Martin, 1 September 2009, [The Advertiser](#)

Landfill ban for e-waste

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It's not drought, it's climate change, says scientists

Melissa Fyfe, 30 August 2009, [Sunday Age](#)

'Environmental Sustainability and La Trobe' – Major Media Report

Radio Adelaide, The Wire:

Compere: Various, 1 September 2009

WIN Mildura, WIN News:

Compere: Newsreader, 1 September 2009

'Environmental Sustainability' – Major Media Report

Great Barrier Reef faces catastrophic harm

Tom Arup, 3 September 2009, The Age

Climate change damaging sea life

THE Great Barrier Reef's chances of survival from even moderate climate change are poor and "catastrophic damage" may not be avoided, a report has found.

The Reef Outlook Report concludes that the rate of climate change backed by the Federal Government would result in "severe mass coral bleaching" and threaten the habitats of key species on the reef.

In a series of dire predictions for the World Heritage-listed natural wonder, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's report finds that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will have to be kept under 400 parts per million (ppm) if important animal species and coral are to have a low to medium vulnerability to climate change. The current level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is 387 ppm.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has on several occasions publicly supported a 450 ppm target — a figure also backed recently by the Major Economies Forum that includes the US and China.

The report finds that if carbon dioxide reaches 450 ppm in the atmosphere, which is currently predicted for 2035, it would result in "severe mass bleaching" and destroy the reef's ability to grow new coral.

Eminent marine researcher and former chief scientist of the Australian Institute of Marine Science Charlie Veron, who helped prepare the report, told The Age the Rudd Government-backed 450 ppm target would result in the complete death of the reef by 2050.

"Mr Rudd would not be supporting the 450 target if he knew the facts," Mr Veron said yesterday.

"This isn't a theory — all the science is incredibly concrete now and it is backed by everybody in the coral research field."

World Wildlife Fund spokesman Nick Heath said the report showed climate change had already affected levels of calcification, a process that helps grow and strengthen coral, which have collapsed dramatically since 1980 as the ocean around the reef warms and become more acidic.

Environment Minister Peter Garrett said the report found that the Barrier Reef continued to be one of the world's healthiest coral systems, but that the emerging threat from climate change required effective action on global warming.

"The world's only got one Great Barrier Reef, Australia has only got one Great Barrier Reef. It is our most important natural environmental asset," Mr Garrett said.

On the back of yesterday's release Mr Garrett and Queensland Premier Anna Bligh yesterday committed to a binding target to cut the amount of pesticides and other agricultural run off on to the reef by half. The report finds that one third of the reef is exposed to agricultural run-off that hurts coral and marine life.

The Rudd Government has spent \$325 million to improve the health of the reef, including \$76 million to work with nearby farmers to limit agricultural run-off.

The release of the report yesterday is the first of what will be a five-yearly review of the health of the reef.

City Profile: Leading the green lifestyle push

1 September 2009, [Canberra Times](#)

WHEN Charlie Beauchamp Woods took interest in the environment, she was in her early teens. In a few short years, the now 20-year-old is preparing to travel to Copenhagen in December, where she will attend COP15, the United Nations' climate change conference. Ms Beauchamp Woods is a youth ambassador for the Office of the Commissioner for **Sustainability** and the Environment, and her day-to-day lifestyle and home environment are living proof of her message. Her parents have enthusiastically followed their daughter's lead, making changes around their Ainslie home to save energy, ultimately saving money in the long term. Ms Beauchamp Woods refused to drive the family's four-wheel drive, instead encouraging her mum and dad to trade in for a low-emissions car.

Simple changes, such as better seals around doors, turning off electronic equipment at night and installing energy efficient light bulbs were among the first steps, which then led to installing a solar hot water system and solar photovoltaic panels. The solar energy generated by the panels earned the family \$700 on their first bill after installation, thanks to the amount of energy they were able to feed back into the grid. The family's veggie patch has made their enviro-friendly home a popular spot for their friends to dine, as the homegrown vegetables are top-notch quality and leaves the produce found in restaurant's lagging behind. Miss Beauchamp Woods has recently moved into a share house up the road with friends, and has already started to make changes around her new home. She still goes home to her mum and dad often riding her bike, of course.

Global recycler sets up shop in city with user-pay program

Sarah Martin, 1 September 2009, [The Advertiser](#)

GLOBAL recycling company Remondis is setting up operations in SA for the first time, offering a user-pays recycling program for businesses in metropolitan Adelaide.

The Australian branch of the recycling company, which is famous for introducing the wheellie bin to our shores, was one of 10 companies to receive grants as part of the State Government's \$3 million Recycling at Work program.

As a result of the grant, the company has opened a South Australian office at Wingfield and expects to invest as much as \$1 million in the new container collection service.

The new user-pays recycling service will be offered to small-and-medium-sized businesses in an attempt to divert 70 per cent of business waste from landfill - up to 50,000 tonnes over two years.

Newly appointed program manager Trent Kotz said he believed the company's offering would appeal to companies looking to be more environmentally responsible.

"We believe we have got a package that is cost effective and won't affect the space of residents in the CBD," he said. Mr Kotz said the company was expecting "huge" demand for the service but said it would take some time to get people to change their habits.

"Adelaide is a funny market as it is a very loyal market and trying to get people to change from one supplier to another - whether they are cheaper or more environmentally friendly or not - is very difficult to do," he said.

Mr Kotz said Remondis differed from waste companies who had an "alliance" to landfill and were reluctant to offer recycling programs.

"They own the land fill sites and they have got to fill them up, so to divert waste from their landfill isn't in their interests."

Delfin Lend Lease is one of the first companies to sign up to the Remondis service.

"(We) have a strong commitment to **sustainability**," Delfin's Blakes Crossing project director Troy Jamieson said.

[Landfill ban for e-waste](#)

Lia Thomson, 1 September 2009, [The Sydney Morning Herald](#)

Local councils hope to force a national recycling strategy, writes Lia Timson.

Four Sydney councils have banned the dumping of electronic waste from next January in a bid to force the federal and state governments to implement a national recycling scheme.

Mosman, Manly, Warringah and Pittwater Councils, responsible for all of Sydney's northern beaches, resolved to enact the ban ahead of a national e-waste policy expected to be announced in November.

Computers, printers, scanners, DVD players, gaming consoles, cameras and televisions will not be picked up in general clean-up kerbside collections and will be rejected at the councils' joint Kimbriki tip at Terrey Hills. Residents are being told to find responsible alternatives instead.

The four councils grouped as SHOROC – Shore Regional Organisation of Councils – are hoping to redirect the devices from landfill to a nationally regulated recycling system that is yet to be agreed upon.

Televisions and computer equipment contain lead, mercury, cadmium, beryllium, PVC, arsenic and other chemicals that cause cancer, brain damage and other disorders. They also contain valuable metals such as gold, silver and copper.

Various industry bodies and government agencies have been tinkering with national collection and recycling options since the 1990s.

In May, state and territory environment ministers, through the Environment, Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC), agreed to investigate various schemes, including a purchase levy, to fund a national program.

The manager of environmental services at Mosman Council, Mehreen Faruqi, says responsibility for toxic e-waste rests with hardware manufacturers, not local councils. "Banning also achieves environmental **sustainability** as it stops toxic waste from reaching the [local] environment. We're encouraging consumers to do more recycling and coerce governments to take it seriously," she says.

Warringah Mayor and SHOROC president Michael Regan has urged other local governments to join the ban.

The councils support the extended producer responsibility scheme whereby manufacturers are responsible for the collection and disposal of electronic devices under a federally regulated approach. Manufacturers fear that without a legal framework, some white-box importers and "free-riders" would escape a voluntary scheme.

Some companies have their own recycling programs, with Dell being the only free worldwide recycling service for its own products without purchase. It also collects any brand with the purchase of a new Dell.

Apple runs a limited recycling program with purchase from some stores. Toshiba collects its own branded notebooks for free and other brands for a fee. Byteback, a program run by **Sustainability** Victoria in conjunction with the Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA), Apple, Canon, Dell, Epson, Fujitsu, Fuji-Xerox, HP, IBM, Lenovo and Lexmark since 2005 is due to finish at the end of the year. There are no recycling schemes for television sets.

The director of sustainable business at Dell, Tod Arbogast, says any scheme works only if it is free, convenient and responsible, which includes auditing of recyclers. "We believe producers should be responsible for the products they put into the market and all [unbranded] producers must declare who they are," he says.

According to the EPHC, Australians discarded 16.8 million electronic devices in 2007/8. Only 9 per cent was recycled while 88 per cent, or 14.7 million, was sent to landfill. The remainder was exported.

The problem will worsen as consumers take up digital television and digital radio in coming years. There are an estimated 40 million analogue radio receivers in Australia – all will be replaced when analogue transmission is eventually switched off.

EPHC estimates the value of the recouped metals, glass and plastic in e-waste is not sufficient to fund an expansion of recycling beyond its current levels without government or

consumer support. Its modelling shows a buyer (or manufacturer) contribution of \$21 per item could fund recycling rates of 50 per cent, whereas \$33 to \$50 could ensure 90 per cent of all discarded equipment is recycled responsibly.

Product Stewardship Australia represents electronics manufacturers and its executive officer, John Gertsakis, wants to see a federally funded system. But he rejects the option of a set levy at purchase or drop-off as retrograde. "We want a federally regulated, permanent, national scheme for all products and all brands. Our members will fund what is needed for a collection and recycling scheme. If we can fund it from our members, we don't need to have additional burdens on consumer or retailers," he says.

The AIIA also rejects the option of a flat levy. It supports options that give manufacturers funding flexibility and wants to see environmental design principles incorporated into standard product lines.

A spokesman for Minister for the Environment and EPHC chairman Peter Garrett says a decision on the national scheme is expected at the next meeting in November. He would not speculate on how long it might take to enact it after that.

Warringah's Michael Regan is confident a national scheme will be in place in the first quarter of 2010. "I'm putting my faith in all sides of politics that there is enough goodwill there and from industry and consumers for it to happen," he says.

Gertsakis says the industry will not tolerate any more delays. "There needs to be a real decision in November. Not to do so is environmentally irresponsible," he says.

It's not drought, it's climate change, says scientists

Melissa Fyfe, 30 August 2009, [Sunday Age](#)

SCIENTISTS studying Victoria's crippling drought have, for the first time, proved the link between rising levels of greenhouse gases and the state's dramatic decline in rainfall.

A three-year collaboration between the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO has confirmed what many scientists long suspected: that the 13-year drought is not just a natural dry stretch but a shift related to climate change.

Scientists working on the \$7 million South Eastern Australian Climate Initiative say the rain has dropped away because the subtropical ridge — a band of high pressure systems that sits over the country's south — has strengthened over the past 13 years.

These dry, high pressure systems have become stronger, bigger and more frequent and this intensification over the past century is closely linked to rising global temperatures, they found.

Climate data from across the past century shows the subtropical ridge has peaked and waned, often in line with rising global temperatures.

But to see what role greenhouse gases played in the recent intensification, the scientists used sophisticated American computer climate models.

When they ran simulations with only the "natural" influences on temperature, such as changing levels of solar activity, they found there was no intensification of the subtropical ridge and no decline in rainfall.

But when they added human influences, such as greenhouse gases, aerosols and ozone depletion, the models mimicked what has occurred in south-east Australia — the high pressure systems strengthened, causing a significant drop in rainfall.

"It's reasonable to say that a lot of the current drought of the last 12 to 13 years is due to ongoing global warming," said the bureau's Bertrand Timbal.

"In the minds of a lot of people, the rainfall we had in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was a benchmark. A lot of our [water and agriculture] planning was done during that time. But we are just not going to have that sort of good rain again as long as the system is warming up."

But not all experts agree. Murray-Darling Basin Authority chief Rob Freeman told a water summit in Melbourne last week he believed the extreme climate patterns that have dried out south-east Australia would not prove to be permanent.

"Some commentators say this is the new future. I think that is an extreme position and probably a position that's not helpful to take," he said, expressing confidence that wetter times would return.

Dr Timbal believes 80 per cent of the rain loss in south-east Australia can be attributed to the intensification of the subtropical ridge. If the next phase of the study is approved, the scientists hope to work out exactly how rising temperatures result in a stronger subtropical ridge.

The research program, supported by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, the federal Department of Climate Change and the Victorian Department of **Sustainability** and Environment, was set up in 2006 to solve the puzzle of why south-east Australia had experienced such a dramatic loss of rain.

The program covers the Murray-Darling Basin, Victoria and parts of South Australia.

Monash University's Neville Nicholls, a lead author on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change who has also published on the subtropical ridge, said he believed the program's results were right.

"We did think that the loss of rain was simply due to the [rain-bearing] storms shifting south, off the continent," Professor Nicholls said.

"Now we know the reason they have slipped south is that the subtropical ridge has become more intense. It is getting bigger and stronger and that is pushing the rainstorms further south."

The scientific results have implications for many state government water programs and drought funding, some of which factor in climate change. Projections for the water coming to Melbourne in the north-south pipeline are based on the assumption that Victoria will return to rainfall levels of last century.

Melbourne's dams get roughly a third less water than they did before the drought began in 1996.

'Environmental Sustainability and La Trobe' – Major Media Report

Radio Adelaide, The Wire:

Compere: Various, 1 September 2009

The Tupi oilfield off Brazil's southeast coast is said to yield 150 billion barrels of oil, and is the most significant find in the last 30 years. Lula plans to introduce sweeping reforms that will ensure that any profit from the fields will be shared with the Federal Government. But is his announcement as good as it sounds? Greg Downey discusses the poverty problem in Brazil, and the tremendous inequality.

Interviewee: Dr Rowan Ireland, Research Fellow, La Trobe University

Interviewee: Greg Downey, Senior Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Macquarie University

Duration: 3 mins 59 secs

WIN Mildura, WIN News:

Compere: Newsreader, 1 September 2009

A Murray Darling Basin lagoon has been compared to battery acid as dry conditions continue to suck life from the basin. Scientists say other sites run the risk of suffering the same fate. Dr Mark Fraser, Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre, and a team of La Trobe University water quality students, are experimenting with ways to treat the acidity.

Interviewee: Dr Mark Fraser, Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre

Mention: Bottlebend Lagoon

Duration: 1 mins 36 secs

