

Annual Report of Doctors for the Environment, Australia. 2004-2005

This has been an active and successful year for “Doctors for the Environment, Australia”. Our membership continues to grow, mostly by word-of-mouth, so we rely on our membership to communicate about DEA to like-minded colleagues.

We have consolidated our main goals, the health aspects of climate change and children’s health in relation to the environment and have achieved in the areas outlined in this Report.

Education

DEA was awarded its first competitive grant---- from the Federal Environmental Education Research Grant Scheme. Our successful proposal entitled "Community environmental education using human health messages", explained that the medical profession regularly uses health messages to promote good health and a healthy lifestyle. To improve the community’s understanding of major environmental issues, we aim to develop two posters on biodiversity and climate change that link human and environmental health. These posters will be displayed in the waiting rooms of at least 150 doctors (GP’s and Specialists) who are DEA members, and in the rooms of any other interested doctors. The posters will be eye catching and informative and will provide suggestions for individual and collective action. Poster design will incorporate the expertise of DEA Members and Committees aided by environmental communication and design specialists. In submitting our application we recognised that adult personal responsibility is important in improving both environmental and health outcomes despite the fact that school aged children are the only representatives of the general community who are routinely exposed to environmental messages. For this reason the posters will be crafted to target the general adult community. Approximately 80% of the community visits a general practitioner at least once a year. This large captive audience is representative of the adult population and usually has ‘waiting time’ to absorb the health messages on display. A secondary goal is to increase all medical practitioners’ awareness of the educational initiative and its message.

The award of this Environmental Education Grant is very important for two reasons. Firstly, it establishes a track record that will be helpful when we apply for other grants. Secondly, it provides an important means for participation by DEA members many of whom have asked what they can do to help. We will be in contact with members to enlist their help in displaying the posters and ensuring this project a success!

Children's Health

To increase our expertise in environmental hazards in childhood, Mariann Lloyd-Smith the Coordinator of the National Toxics Network Inc (NTN), a public interest non-government organisation which is the Australian focal point for the International Persistent Organic Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN) joined the management Committee of DEA. **The National Toxics Network** is a community-based network working for the reduction of pollution, protection of environmental health and environmental justice for all. NTN was first formed in 1993 and since then has grown as a national network to support community and environmental organisations across Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. The NTN website <http://www.oztoxics.org> has a Community Information Section. It has information on a variety of toxic chemicals, a briefing paper on Children's Environmental Health and topical issues such as the hazards of CCA treated timber.

Meeting with Senator Ian Campbell, Federal Minister for the Environment.

In April two DEA representatives met with the Minister and had a very positive meeting. We were pleased with his acceptance of the health argument in relation to environmental problems such as climate change and indeed his acceptance of the very real threat of climate change. We believe that a good rapport was established and several issues that fall within our Climate Change Policy were discussed. Our report on the meeting with the Minister is brief because it is our policy not to "quote" from such meetings as explained in the recent article by David Shearman and Bill Castleden in an April 2005 News item from DEA on our web page www.dea.org.au .

Meetings with other Ministers and politicians

One of our most important roles has continued to be the briefing of Members of Parliament on current environmental issues that have significant implications for health. Over the year we have met a number of federal and state Ministers, Members and Senators.

Policy Development

This important work of the Management Committee continued with the preparation of the Health and Forest Policy. Whilst policies on the environmental aspect of preserving forests are provided by other environment groups, our policy highlights the importance of preserving forests to human health. As with other policies it is available to be used in briefing politicians and other public figures concerned with national issues.

State Committees

As stated in last annual report, while much of our work has been at the national level we are conscious of the need to act at State level on many issues. Many of the issues brought to our attention by members relate to state environmental health issues that would be best dealt with by state committees. Western Australia has a committee and produces a 3-monthly state newsletter. We have resolved to establish committees in other states with Victoria next.

One example of a state issue that received attention from us was our concern about climate issues and the expansion of the Hazelwood power station in Victoria: this led to a meeting in Minister Thwaites' office with his Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor.

Tax deductibility for donations

In October we received a "Certificate of Entry" into the Register of Environmental Organizations signed by the federal Minister for the Environment. Now donations made to the "The DEA Fund" will be tax deductible. We have gone through the long and arduous process of applying for tax deductibility, partly to increase our income-generating ability and, most importantly to be able to apply to Foundations for grants. It is a condition of application for such grants that the applicant must have tax deductibility. Why do we need more money? We are an incorporated body and have to fulfill the rules, meetings, procedures, membership lists, payments, and accounting requirements. This involves an increasing amount of administration which takes Committee members away from doing what you want them to do—seeing Ministers and politicians and educating the public. Therefore our first priority may be to raise enough money to obtain part time secretarial help for a few hours each week.

Student membership

At the AGM in Brisbane in September 2004, the Constitution was amended to enable medical students to be full members of DEA. Our student membership is now growing satisfactorily.

Web page

The web page www.dea.org.au continues to diversify with the aim of providing articles for members which are relevant to our goals.

Papers and Presentations

"Waiting rooms perfect forum for green awareness; docs" news item in Medical Observer, 15 July 2005, organised by Sarah Morton.

David King "Environmentalism: Sackcloth and Ashes?" "The Australian Friend", March 2005, p10.

Bill Castleden "Time for Doctors to be Heard", Medicus (AMA magazine in WA) May 2005, pages 18-19.

Bill Castleden "Health and the Environment" Seminar on Environmental Stewardship at St John of God Hospital in Perth on 8 September 2005. This was then

reported in the October 2005 issue of "Medical Forum" (page 20), a medical news magazine sent to all doctors in WA.

Sian Hughes and Sarah Morton were guest speakers at ACF climate change meeting in Melbourne On November 3, 2005 "How the medical profession can help to protect, restore and sustain the environment"

David Shearman "An organizational structure for exerting environmental influence" presented at the ISDE meeting in Vienna, September 2005.

David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith "Legal Aspects of Climate Change" presented at the ISDE meeting in Vienna, September 2005.

David Shearman and Colin Butler. "Millennium Ecosystem assessment 2001-2005: A world saver for human health and well being". MedicSA (AMA magazine in SA) June 2005

David Shearman "One Tiny Step for Humanity, with a Big Limp" Article about the Kyoto Agreement in" Comment and Analysis", The Independent Weekly, February 13-19, 2005

Bill Castleden, Chair

David Shearman, Secretary

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