

Annual Report 2007

Doctors For The Environment Australia

The human health aspects of climate change have continued to be our priority during 2007. Over the past year, there has been a significant change in public attitudes to climate change with acceptance of the science and demands for action. The environmental movement rightly takes much of the credit for this sea change, together with the numerous scientists who have entered the public debate.

Our role, perhaps one could describe it as a niche role, has been to explain the extra dimension that climate change is not just an environmental issue but one that will increasingly affect the wellbeing and health of all humanity and that includes all Australians. This annual report explains how we have operated to do this during 2007.

Amongst the scientists and writers who comment on climate change issues, there is an emerging consensus over the climate change performance of the three contributors, public, industry and commerce, and governments. It is our experience backed by much comment in the literature that the public is far ahead of government in understanding climate change.

Governments have failed in two ways; during the past decade when climate science was much more certain than the soft economic data they act on every day, they have been in denial: today when they accept the science there is much rhetoric and little action of consequence.

The corporate sector fits somewhere in the middle. Many large companies have good greenhouse emission programs, others have green-wash and yet others continue the sabotage of humanity's needs.

Doctors for the Environment, Australia has tried to act within this paradigm and bring its limited human resources to bear on those points where it can be most effective. We would ask our membership to recognise that the scenery has changed; we must now examine the inappropriate functioning of government and society if we are to have any hope of controlling greenhouse emissions. With these thoughts in mind, our activities for the past year will be summarised.

Educational Activity with the Public and Medical Profession

The educational posters produced by DEA are now well recognised and sought. Our Climate Change and Health poster distributed to over 20,000 doctors in late 2006 was a once off enterprise with the AMA.

During 2007 we have established a relationship with RACGP to distribute future posters and the first of these will go out this year to all RACGP members. It is on human health and biodiversity. This form of education through doctors' surgeries fills an important niche and we believe that it is a vital contribution to an understanding of the relationship between health and the environment.

Not least we feel that it also educates our profession. Many doctors have not had the time to get to grips with this critical issue and the posters and accompanying information have a role in correcting this. The articles on our web site are also orientated to the profession though they are read increasingly by the public. We acknowledge the work of Sarah Morton in initiating this educational initiative and David King in carrying the project along in 2007.

Web site www.dea.org.au

Early in 2007 the web site had a significant face lift. A new 'front page' was developed to display the latest articles and news. This resulted in a sixfold increase in the number of 'hits' and this increased usage has been maintained. We are now in the process of ongoing change to the site dictated by the demands that arise. For example, in a recent initiative on health, climate change and public transport in conjunction with the Public Transport Users Association (PTUA), we displayed simultaneously our manifesto, related articles and links to the PTUA site and launch of their policy. At the same time letters were sent to all federal parliamentarians drawing their attention to the issue of climate change and public transport.

It is also intended to use www.dea.org.au to promote interaction and exchange of views between members. To this end a 'blog' has commenced. As yet it has not reached a critical mass of contributors, and clearly we will have to work harder on this issue. We thank Glen Moss, webmaster for his hard work and skills in developing this part of our educational program.

Briefing of Politicians

This remains the most difficult of our tasks in terms of organising and delivering meetings.

With the election pending, over the past year we have attempted to see key Ministers and shadow Ministers in the health and environment portfolios. We have been much more successful with Labor than with Coalition at this stage as might be expected. We remind members that we are strictly non-party political and success in getting meetings with Labor in no way reflects a party political position.

We have added to our earlier meetings with Antony Albanese and Peter Garrett, meetings with Nicola Roxon in Melbourne and Jan McLucas in Cairns. The latter carries the shadow portfolio in Ageing and has a committed interest in climate change because of the expected inundation of some of the Torres Strait Islands.

We remind you that the briefing of a Minister is only the beginning of the process, for we then maintain contact with correspondence. We have also met Senator Christopher Evans, leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for National Development, Resources and Energy emphasising that the interest in health includes most other portfolios and especially energy.

We met Kevin Rudd last year and there is now follow up with one of his staff on environmental health issues. In contrast to the last election, we have had less success in meeting and briefing Coalition Ministers. However and perhaps most importantly we have met with senior Ministers who express climate change scepticism.

This report would be incomplete if we did not mention that we have met with many Members and Senators and also some State parliamentarians. Our program of interaction with Federal parliamentarians has involved two mail-outs this year, one on health and climate change that introduced our Energy Policy and the other on health climate change and transport mentioned above. In many cases the response of the members opens the door to meetings.

Finally, we report that we asked a member of federal parliament, well known to all, to 'peer review' this process of briefing and to present criticisms for our consideration. The only criticism was that we are not seeing enough members. The process we use was regarded as unique and our standing and presentation took us to the forefront of what other groups can do.

State Committees

We have a policy to form State committees as quickly as possible, and one of the reasons is to have available more committed members to do the work of briefing and communicating with politicians.

During 2007, the WA State committee has gone from strength to strength but despite our efforts we have not succeeded in forming committees in other States. The eminent social scientist Hugh Mackay has written about the general withdrawal of society from activism into the refuge of home improvements. I hope we have not reached this depressing scenario in the medical profession, but make the point that it has been very difficult to get members to help us with this. Our efforts will continue.

Report of the WA State Committee of DEA.

The WA State Committee of DEA continued to meet productively on an approximately 2-monthly basis under the secretarial guidance of Clinical Professor Alasdair Millar who also chaired the Scientific Meeting sub-committee. Dr Arthur Harris opted to retire during the year having sat on the committee since its inception. His counsel is missed and we wish him well. The preparations for DEA's first scientific meeting to be held in November 3-4th 2007 in Fremantle in association with Rural Health West have been harmonious and hopefully successful. DEA has an excellent line-up of speakers. Regular 3-monthly WA newsletters have appeared and received reasonably wide local circulation within WA. Despite this, membership in WA has remained somewhat static with a balance between new members joining and others electing not to continue with their memberships. We have attempted to find out why members are 'dropping off' and the reason seems mostly to relate to a stronger allegiance to other environmental groups or the feeling that the climate change argument has been won! It is possible that DEA is seen to be politically partisan, although this has not been stated. As Chair, I would like to thank the State Committee for their enthusiasm and support.

Bill Castleden

Financial Administration

The establishment of financial structures and member database by Sarah Morton has been taken forward rapidly by John Stokes and a new system is partly implemented.

Submissions to Parliamentary Committees etc

The federal government has been able to restrict the creation of Senate Committees since it had a majority and this has given us only one opportunity in 2007.

We made a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry and Resources "Inquiry into the development of Australia's non-fossil fuel industry: case study into selected renewable energy sectors" June 2007.

Student Teaching at ANU

Doctors for the Environment Australia has overseen a population health project, successfully undertaken by six final year medical students at the ANU. This 'Prevention, Evaluation and Public Health Policy' report was entitled "The Effect of Prolonged Breast Feeding by Dieldrin-Contaminated Mothers on Maternal and Offspring Breast Cancer Risk". Their report will shortly be posted on the DEA website. This project was co-supervised by Gillian Hall (DEA member from ACT and ANU staff member) and Colin Butler.

Policy

Members of the Management Committee have the duty to prepare policy by which we can move forward in making recommendations to the public and government. During 2007 a DEA member, Dr Don Reid prepared a policy on nanotechnology and Professor Peter Newman and Dr Gary Glazebrook prepared a Public Transport and Green City Manifesto for the Federal Election. In fact this will remain a policy document long after the election for it defines how transport should proceed over the next decade.

Joint scientific meeting of DEA and Rural Health West

This meeting, organised by the WA Committee took place in Fremantle on November 3 2007 and was an outstanding success with 200 registrants of whom 28 were DEA members. The two keynote lectures were given by Dr Bill Castleden, Chair, DEA, "Global healing -a WA Perspective" and by Dr Colin Butler, Epidemiologist Australian National University and member of the Management Committee DEA, "Global health, global tensions and climate change ". Other speakers included Dr Judy Edwards MLA and Prof Lyn Beazley, WA Chief Scientist

Other Contributions

The brief report above fails to do justice to the many contributions made by the Management Committee, the educational events at a local level, the extensive letter writing on many greenhouse topics such as the proposed Tasmanian pulp mill, invitations to speak and advise.

The list of references in effect provides a summary of much of this work. Bill Castleden and Grant Blashki have been appointed Al Gore Climate-Educators and their extensive list of talks is below. Linda Selvey and Nick Towle have become Al Gore Climate-Educators on the second intake. Congratulations to all four members of our Management Committee.



DEA MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS 2006/07

Publications

Blashki, G., Butler, C. D., and Brown, S. (2006). Climate change and human health- what can GPs do? *Australian Family Physician* 35(11) 909-911.

Blashki G Guest editorial Primary Care Researchers and Climate Change PHCRIS Infonet June 2007.

Blashki G Guest Editorial, Primary Care and Climate Change, AAAGP newsletter 2007

Blashki G, profile and feature articles

Quoted in Miles C Warming signs Calls for action on climate change are growing louder. *GP Review* March 2007.

Profile in McNamara S GP becomes climate change warrior *Australian Doctor* 16 Feb 2007; 12.

Quoted in Stephens A Prevention is the only Cure *The Sunday Age* 17 June 2007..

Quoted in Fleming K Gore's Army *The Bulletin* May 1 2007.

Profiled in Levin N 10 Questions about Climate Change to Dr Grant Blashki *Australian Jewish News* September 4 2007.

Butler, C.D., Castleden W., Westberg G., Benatar S., Holdstock D. 2007 Reed Elsevier and the conflicts of interest of publishers *eBMJ* <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/334/7593/547>

Butler, C.D., Castleden W., Ruff T.A., Westberg G., Corra L. 2007 A call for publishers to declare their conflicts of interest *Journal Royal Society of Medicine* 100, 355.

Castleden, Bill, How to be carbon neutral. *The Western Suburbs Weekly*, (circulation approx 48,000, on 9 January.

http://www.amawa.com.au/media/medelink/2007_07_27/carbon.asp

Shearman, David, with Joseph Wayne Smith "Climate Change Litigation. Analysing the law, scientific evidence and impacts on the environment, health and property" Presidian Legal Publications, October 2006

Shearman David with Joseph Wayne Smith, "The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy, Praeger, Davenport, Connecticut 2007 a series from the *Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy*

Shearman, David "Climate Change and the indictment of Democracy". Perspective, Radio National 16 October 2007

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/perspect.ive/stories/2007/2059992.htm>

Talks, Lectures and Presentations

Grant Blashki, Climate Project Presentations

WIZO, 5 September 2007.

Doctors for the Environment, 2007.

Brighton Rotary, 12 July 2007

Surfers Appreciating the Natural Environment, Torquay Surf Theatre, 27 February 2007.

Department of General Practice, 2007.

Central Highlands Division of General Practice, 2007.

University of Melbourne Green Week presentation, 2007.

Engineers without Borders, 24 April 2007

Melbourne Philanthropists, 2007

Bialik College, 2007.

Bill Castleden Climate Project Presentations (numbers in brackets =attendees)

- 5.2.07 Margaret River Rotary Club (35)
- 9.2.07 Public Forum, Margaret River (250)
- 18.3.07 Busselton Shire Staff (40)
- 26.3.07 Bunbury East Rotary Club (30)
- 1.4.07 Perth Sunfair x2 talks (50)
- 2.4.07 Manjimup Rotary Club (25)
- 4.4.07 Zonta Club Busselton (150).
- 23.4.07 Esperance Rotary Club (32)
- 24.4.07 Esperance Council Presentation (20)
- 30.4.07 Narrogin Rotary Club (13)
- 1.5.07 East Narrogin Primary School (7 adults about 35 children)
- 1.5.07 Central South Naturalist Club Narrogin (40)
- 3.5.07 Community Forum Denmark (150)
- 8.5.07 Community Forum Bridgetown (60)
- 19.6.07 Albany East Rotary Club (30)
- 20.6.07 Community Forum Albany (80)
- 22.6.07 Fremantle Community Forum (65)
- 26.6.07 Community Forum Boyup Brook (35)
- 30.6.07 Community Forum Nannup (28)
- 12.7.07 Voyager Estate (35)
- 14.7.07 Busselton Environmental Group Forum (40)
- 15.7.07 Sustainable Population Australia (60)
- 5.8.07 Ferguson Valley Sustainability Group (28)
- 7.8.07 Busselton Rotary Club (28)
- 9.8.07 Geraldton Sustainability Group (70)
- 10.8.07 Nagle College Geraldton x2 (8 adults 150 children)
- 10.8.07 John Willcocks College Geraldton x2 (4 adults 70 children)
- 13.8.07 Geraldton Grammar School (10 adults, 200 children)
- 17.8.07 Nyandimurra Primary School (20 adults 30 children)
- 3.9.07 Independent Retirees Margaret River (28)
- 10.9.07 Churchlands SHS x2 (8 adults 350 children)

Other talks, lectures etc**Grant Blashki**

Climate Change and Primary Health Care. The challenge of climate change for health in rural and regional Victoria. Climate Adaptation Science and Policy Initiative (CASPI) Graduate House The University of Melbourne. August 22 2007.
Climate Change and Health General Practice and Primary Care Research Conference 23- 25 May 2007.

Bill Castleden

On October 11 2006 I presented a paper "A Health Perspective on Climate Change and what we can do about it." at an all day conference on Climate Change in Perth presented by Catholic Earthcare Australia.

On November 18-20th 2006 Grant Blashki and I attended a training course in Sydney run by the Hon Al Gore in association with the Australian Conservation Foundation with 80 or so other Australians to become Climate Change Educators.

Colin Butler

Climate change and health. Climate change in the 21st century. Future prospects for the "health" of our planet and mankind. International Academy of Environmental Sciences, Venice, Italy May 19 web-conference (invited keynote)

<http://www.environmentalscienceacademy.com/inglese/start.htm>

Sea level rise, food insecurity and refugees. Doctors for the Environment Victorian state meeting. The Green Building, Carlton Melbourne Victoria, March 13, 2007

Graeme Horton

"Doctors who do things differently" Presentation to an evening meeting of University

of Newcastle Medical Students Society about my activities with DEA and with rural medicine. DEA. 14th March, 2007

Climate Change and Human Health. Presentation to NSW Central Coast Environment Forum followed by panel discussion, held at Wyong Council Chambers 21 April 2007. I delivered a 30 minute talk on "Climate Change and Human Health" which was followed by a panel discussion.

Press Interviews

Colin Butler

Richard Ewart, SBS Radio (October 17, 2006) Climate change, population and sustainability

Richard Ewart, SBS Radio (November 22, 2006) Nuclear energy and sustainability

Heart FM, Northern Midlands Community Radio, Tasmania (November 24, 2006) Nuclear energy and Doctors for the Environment

Murray Bridge Radio, SA, Nuclear Energy and Doctors for the Environment Australia (November 24, 2006)

Peter Weekes, Sunday Age environment reporter, Melbourne, (March 28, 2007) Climate change and its health and social effects

Melissa Sweet, Australian Rural Doctor, Climate change, rural medicine and health (April 24, 2007)

Participated in hour long national talk back radio: ABC Sunday Nights with Noel Debien (population policy for Australia, links with climate change and religion, especially Catholicism) September 16, 2007 <http://www.abc.net.au/sundaynights/>

Bill Castleden

Several interviews on regional radio as a result of Al Gore messenger-ship.

Representation of DEA at Meetings

Focus group day in Brisbane on 30th April to represent DEA input into the National Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development. (invited by the Dept of Environment & Heritage) David King.

Attendance at CANA conference as a DEA representative Gilles Rohan

Meetings with Politicians and Ministers

The most important of these are mentioned in the body of the report. In addition meetings with State ministers and politicians have taken place:-

In WA, meeting with Hon Francis Logan, (then State Minister for the Environment and now Minister for Energy; Resources; Industry and Enterprise) and with Hon Paul Omodei (leader of the opposition). John Stokes and Dr Don Reid. Dr Steve Thomas WA State Opposition Environment, Chief of Staff for Alannah McTiernan, WA Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, David Templeman WA State Environment Minister. (Irene Kirzenow)

In SA, meetings with Members and Senators from all State parties. David Shearman.

In ACT, meetings with Federal Parliamentarians organized and attended by Gilles Rohan.

Contributions by Members

There are many but these tend not to be communicated to us.

We draw attention to:-

Air, Food, Water - A Tasmanian Catastrophe Public Forum,

Dr Alison Bleaney, General Practitioner, St Helens, Tasmania

Investigations in north-east Tasmania could suggest a link between increased levels of health concerns in the region and the increased use of atrazine, simazine and other pesticides.

Dr Geoff Couser

Climate Change and Health - Medical Grand Rounds, Royal Hobart Hospital.

Dr Irene Kirzenow, "Climate Change", Rockingham Naturalists Group

"Climate Change"- A little less conversation, a bit more action Rotary Club of South Perth"

"Living on Borrowed Health", Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy seminar at Murdoch University

"Climate Change and Health" Keynote at "The Changing Climate of Rural Health Conference of SPINRPHEX and WAALHIBE rural health clubs

