

Origin and History of Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA)

The First Decade



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Healthy planet, healthy people

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Introduction

This history was written by DEA Co-Founder David Shearman by reviewing all minutes, correspondence and Annual Reports since inception of the organisation. It is intended to be a practical, referenced document in which members can find when policies first eventuated and important events occurred; these are frequently needed to establish DEA's track record on particular issues.

The document is open to revision from the recollections, documents and correspondence of longstanding members. It provides a detailed record of DEA's activities in its first decade with documentation to 2011

Initiation 1999-2001

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) arose as a branch of the International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE), based in Switzerland, founded in 1990 and with member organisations in 38 countries, mainly Europe and the Americas.

The aims of ISDE were to publicise the relationship between the condition of the environment and human health, promote environmentally friendly behaviour amongst physicians, patients, and the public, and to cooperate at all political levels in the reduction of harmful environmental influences on health.

Following previous contact with Dr Gaudenz Silberschmidt, Executive Officer of ISDE, Tony McMichael met with Professor David Shearman at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 1999 and they agreed that the most promising base for an Australian initiative was to explore becoming a branch of ISDE. David Shearman then visited Geneva to discuss this option with Dr Silberschmidt. A decision was subsequently made to establish an Australian branch of ISDE.

The call to action in Australia commenced with an Editorial in the Medical Journal of Australia by Tony McMichael and Charles Guest in November 1999 "Doctors and the "environment" a call to arms for medical practitioners in Australia" <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/1999/171/11/doctors-and-environment>.

The article concluded

Medical organisations such as the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (with its Australian affiliate, the Medical Association for the Prevention of War), and Mediciens Sans Frontieres, have made contributions to world peace that have been recognised by the awarding of the Nobel Prize. These efforts have continued over many years. Peace and the sustainability of the global environment are intertwined. On environmental matters, no less an effort is required by our profession.

An advertisement for the formation of DEA was placed in the same issue of MJA and recruitment commenced in 2000 by the placement of articles and personal contact.

David Shearman writes

The year 2000 was spent planning and included a stay in Switzerland working with Gaudenz Silberschmidt. Making contacts in Australia utilised many in the conservation movement, contacts made whilst I was President of the Conservation Council of SA in the early 1990s. These were early days for medical practitioners' understanding of climate change, and the year 2000 was spent on the phone, cajoling, educating and even twisting arms. The key would be the identification of a Chair-elect, who was knowledgeable, committed, persistent, personable and with a stable marriage.

In 2001 this person, Bill Castleden, was identified. He had been a leading figure in successful WA campaigns to save the WA forests.

Bill Castleden writes

Within weeks of giving up day-to-day forest involvement in 2001, I started to receive emails from a Professor David Shearman in Adelaide asking if I would be interested in joining a group of doctors he wanted to assemble to alert the public and the government about the close connection between a healthy environment and healthy human beings.

He wanted to start an Australian branch of the International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE). I ignored his emails. I had had enough of campaigning for Doctors for the Forests in WA.

And still David Shearman persisted. He wrote of his almost lifelong commitment to environmental causes, of his past-Chairmanship of the South Australian Conservation Council and his book writing and his publications. After months of email bombardment and discussions with Wendy, we agreed that we would go for a weekend to the Mornington Peninsular south of Melbourne to meet the potential steering group of doctors he had collected from each State to form what he hoped would be called "Doctors for the Environment, Australia" (DEA). I was not really sure what it was all about or if they were all too deeply green to be reasonable human beings!

Initiation and Development 2001-2005

In April 2001 DEA was Incorporated in the State of South Australia and became a registered organisation.

By the end of the 2001 several key doctors had been identified with a first planning teleconference held in October. Colin Butler, Grant Blashki, Kevin Chamberlin and Roscoe Taylor joined David Shearman and Bill Castleden. A further teleconference planning meeting

was held in May 2002 when organisational matters, structures, finance etc were discussed. Plans were made for a face to face meeting.

The Mornington Meeting October 2002

At this inaugural meeting in 2002, the health aspects of climate change were determined as our priority for action. It was noted at this stage that there were concerns that the name Doctors for the Environment Australia did not include the word **health** and it was decided to have a subsidiary title “promoting health through care of the environment”.

The immediate goals were the establishment of a website, attainment of membership numbers and communication through newsletters and publications.

This was a key meeting in establishing relationships and launching DEA.

The meeting took place in a magnificent modern architectural beauty of a house on the Mornington peninsula with striking artwork and wonderful cliff top ocean views. Grant Blashki hosted the meeting for he had become a key player in establishing DEA.

Bill Castleden writes

David Shearman had carefully constructed a full weekend of meetings and presentations during which we had ample time to assess each other's possible strengths and weaknesses. Over the final lunch and afternoon he had asked Don Henry, Executive Director of the Australian Conservation Foundation and David Yencken of the Australian Collaboration to come to meet with us and to talk with us. They made us feel we could, as a medical organisation, play a very important role in the overall effort to ensure a healthy environment for the next generations of Australians to grow into.

Our egos suitably massaged, we all agreed to set up DEA. I was to be the co-opted Western Australian representative until such time as the organisation was formally constituted and elections could be called and held.

David Shearman with his amazing persistence undertook to complete the necessary paperwork and on the 19th October 2002 “Doctors for the Environment, Australia” was well on its way to becoming a fully constituted environmental entity at the Mornington meeting.

Policy development commenced early 2002 when Tony McMichael, David Shearman and Colin Butler wrote a **Position paper on climate change and human health** for our parent organisation International Society of Doctors for the Environment. DEA then used this Policy for its work in Australia.

Also in 2002 a number of key articles were published in medical journals and magazines to interest the profession in climate change and to provide text for circulation. Foremost of these

was Shearman D. Time and tide wait for no man. *BMJ* 2002; 325: 1466-1468 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC139043/>

The initiative continued in 2003 when DEA announced its birth to RACP members with a five page leading article in RACP News by Tony McMichael, Linda Selvey and David Shearman. The article was entitled “The Impact of Global Climate Change on Human Health” and concluded with an invitation to join DEA. We stated

Doctors have the opportunity and an often unacknowledged duty to engage with these issues as part of our obligations to alleviate human suffering. For the majority of us it is important to contemplate that the world is descending into conflict, and environmental chaos will seriously imperil our ability to utilise the benefits of our medical research and our advances in patient care.

This burst of enthusiastic promotion by some members of the College culminated in the formation of committees to take the matter further. Unfortunately as history tells us these fell on hard times with lack of support from the College. Only recently in 2014 did the College recognise its duties to address climate change as an international health issue.

Canberra 2003: The First Annual General Meeting

At its first formal Annual General Meeting in Canberra in November 2003, which linked with a symposium entitled “In Search of Sustainability” at the Shine Dome, the Management Committee elected Bill Castleden as Chair of the organisation and David Shearman as Secretary. DEA was still in an embryonic state.

However policy and modus operandi evolved quickly. The human health aspects of climate change became our priority. Our role, perhaps best described as a niche role, was 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. Governments had failed in two ways; during the past decade when climate science was much more certain than the soft economic data they acted on every day, they had been in denial; then in 2003 when they accepted the science there was much rhetoric and little action of consequence.

Doctors for the Environment, Australia tried to act within this paradigm and bring its limited human resources to bear on those points where it could be most effective. We asked our membership to recognise that the scenery had changed; we now had to examine the inappropriate functioning of government and society if we were to have any hope of controlling greenhouse emissions.

The events and progress over 2004 are factually detailed in the first [Annual Report](#) but this fails to convey the burst of activity on most of the initiatives we encompass today. The output of letters and attendance at relevant meetings including the ISDE General Assembly in Europe was prodigious.

A general election was held in 2004 and all members of parliament received correspondence from us. Many Ministers and Shadows were visited during 2003-4 and the major parties received a questionnaire the results of which were posted on the new DEA web site created by the hard work of Gerald Bonello in 2002 followed by Glen Morris and then Peter Mansfield (DEA member and creator of Healthy Scepticism).

Commencement of Submissions to Parliament

In 2004 our first submission to parliament was made to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, on the [USFTA](#) and at the subsequent one hour hearing we presented inadequacies of the Treaty in terms of climate change accounting and the absence of externalities.

Other submissions made in 2004 were to:

- the Mandatory Renewable Energy Panel, on the health benefits of increasing the percentage of renewable energy. Of 245 submissions ours was the only that dealt with health. After discussion with the secretariat Tony McMichael was asked to address the committee in Canberra on our behalf.
- Premier Bracks on the greenhouse aspects of the Australian Grand Prix and suggestions for mitigation.
- the AMA Annual General Meeting in May 2004, Proposal for Environment and Health to be a special topic.
- the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator in relation to genetically modified canola.
- the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, in relation to health implications of not properly protecting the Great Barrier Reef.
- Mr Mike Rann, Premier of South Australia. Critique of the Economic Development Plan in relation of its failure to consider health related issues.

State Committees and Further Development of DEA

State Committees were also established in 2004 and it was not surprising that some of our first actions were to add our voice to many others for the preservation of old growth forests in Tasmania and in the Daintree where we quickly made our mark with media interviews.

Early policy preparation was productive not only in the sphere of climate change but a [Population Policy for Australia](#) was developed.

Throughout this year of frenzied activity, a constitution was prepared with the assistance of environmental lawyers, and negotiations took place on the establishment of appropriate insurance and on tax deductibility status with the establishment of “The DEA Fund” for tax deductible donations. No one said “but I don’t have time” but there were no distractions from mobile phones, Twitter or Facebook.

An Accountant Graeme Marshall was found who kindly worked for us pro bono. Treasurers Peter Mansfield and then Sarah Morton struggled to pull together a small membership base

and pay the bills and by the end of 2013 we had recruited 140 paying members. The annual fee was set at \$42. In September 2004 the Constitution was altered to bring students into full membership. The committee was joined by Gilles Rohan (ACT) and Sian Hughes (Victoria).

The Scientific Advisory Committee was formed to provide medical and scientific expertise and enhance our standing and credibility as an environmental organisation.

There was no paid assistance. Throughout this period Clare Shearman put aside her interests and worked full time or more to do the letters, submissions and preparation for everything including meals for the Hon Secretary! The car was permanently full of dozens of letters en route to the post. It is not just DEA that owes a tremendous debt to Clare for helping found the organisation but to society itself and the climate change movement in particular for volunteers we see in Conservation Councils and other NGOs are3 fundamental to the functioning of society.

In 2010 DEA employed a full time Administration Officer. Until that time DEA had managed with part-time casual secretaries.

Action and Achievements 2005-11

In 2005 DEA received a grant from the Federal Environmental Education Research Grant Scheme. Our proposal “Community environmental education using human health messages”, aimed to improve the community’s understanding of major environmental issues, by developing two posters on biodiversity http://dea.org.au/resources/file/biodiversity_poster1 and climate change http://dea.org.au/resources/file/climate_change_and_health_poster that linked human and environmental health. These posters were displayed in the waiting rooms of DEA members, and other interested doctors. The poster on climate change was co-badged and further promoted by the AMA.

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. The posters were crafted to target the general adult community of which approximately 80% visit 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 of the initiative was to increase the awareness of environmental health issues by all medical practitioners. An initial run of 300 posters was taken up by DEA members followed by other practitioners after significant media publicity. During 2007 we established a relationship with RACGP to distribute future posters and thereafter further mail outs were made by the Medical Observer.

In conclusion we found that many medical practitioners did not have enough awareness to consider displaying the posters. This began an important learning curve by DEA on the ways in which to involve the medical profession. However there were some positive outcomes from the enthusiastic display of posters by DEA members and the request for posters from a large number of schools. We acknowledge the work of Sarah Morton in initiating this educational

initiative and to David King for the development and delivery of this program which extended to several other climate related posters.

The Federal Government grant may have reflected our good relationship with Senator Ian Campbell, Minister for the Environment whom we met with in April 2005 and who accepted the health argument to climate change and indeed his acceptance of the very real threat of climate change. Thereafter climate change issues became increasingly politicised.

Policy Development

Subsequent to the Climate and Health Policy of 2002 the important work on policy by the Management Committee continued with the preparation of **A Policy on Health and Forests** released in 2005. This was deemed essential to both climate change and the battle to save old growth forest in Australia from logging.

A draft document for Children's Environmental Health, 2005. DEA first recognised the importance of children's health in relation to increasing concerns about persistent organic pollutants and about climate change. 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), was appointed adviser <http://dea.org.au/about/committees>

"An Energy Policy for Australia" was also prepared in response to discussion and suggestions at the 2005 AGM though it does not appear on the DEA web site till 2008. This is a large document which reviews all modalities of energy production and their relevance to a sustainable future. All modalities of energy including nuclear were analysed for their health aspects.

Submissions to Parliamentary Committees

Early submissions by DEA indicated the range of climate related topics being researched and developed.

Submission to the Uranium Mining, Processing and Nuclear Energy Review July 2006. This submission detailed the health concerns in relation to any expansion of the nuclear industry. <https://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/UMPNER-submission.pdf>

Response to the Uranium Mining, Processing and Nuclear Energy Review Report, December 2006. https://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/UMPNER_Report_response_from_DEA.pdf

Submission to Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter, House of Representative Standing Committee on Environment & Heritage, written by Dr Colin Butler, May 2006. Submitted by

David Shearman on Sat, 24/02/2007 –

15:21. https://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/DEA_Submission_02.pdf

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry and Resources. 27/09/2007 – Inquiry into the development of Australia's non-fossil fuel industry: Case study into selected renewable energy sectors https://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/House_of_Reps_Standing_Committee_on_Industry_and_Resources.pdf

The year of 2007 was an election year and was highly productive year for DEA delivered by a keen Management Committee and emerging state committees.

The level of activity is evidenced by the large number of publications on Pp 6-8 of the [Annual report](#) which were augmented by Bill Castleden and Grant Blashki being appointed AI Gore Climate-Educators followed by Linda Selvey and Nick Towle. Consequently there were many more talks to communities.

For the Federal election in 2007 Professor Peter Newman and Dr Gary Glazebrook prepared a **Public Transport and Green City Manifesto**. In fact this has remained as a policy document long after the election for it defined how transport should proceed over the next decade. The manifesto was issued in conjunction with the Public Transport Users Association (PTUA), and simultaneously with letters to all federal parliamentarians.

Briefing of Politicians

This initiative was developed by DEA from 2004 onwards when many Ministers and Shadows were visited before the 2004 election. It was one of the most difficult of our tasks in terms of organising and delivering meetings. The intent was to brief and educate but also to maintain the contact so as to provide further information as necessary.

With the 2007 election pending, DEA attempted to see key Ministers and Shadow Ministers in the health and environment portfolios as well as numerous non-ministerial members and senators. We had meetings with Anthony Albanese, Peter Garrett, Nicola Roxon, Jan McLucas and Kevin Rudd. We 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 requested a well known member of federal parliament to “peer review” our process of briefing and to present criticisms for our consideration. The only criticism was that we were 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 were doing.

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 heralded the commencement of state committees organising a DEA scientific meeting at the same time as face to face management committee meetings and the AGM. The meeting 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.

DEA Chairs

Dr Bill Castleden 2002-2008

Bill Castleden, a vascular surgeon from WA, accepted an invitation to attend the foundation meeting of DEA on the Mornington Peninsula in October 2002 and then assisted in the work of a slowly evolving team and was elected Chair of DEA at the first AGM in 2003 and served for 5 years. He says

I perceived my main roles to be the chief support for DS as Secretary, to recruit as many new members of DEA as possible, to communicate as much as possible with other medical and environmental organisations, and to communicate with the public-at-large. I established the WA Subcommittee of DEA and commenced a series of eighteen 3-monthly newsletters that finished in November 2008

Indeed, Bill assisted with much else including Annual Reports, national newsletters and publications. He might be described as a working Chair and fulfilled the philosophy agreed for members of the management committee to share the load. He had a prodigious capacity to educate and after becoming an Al Gore educator he quickly completed 28 community talks in 2007, mainly to large audiences

However it was to Bill's skills of Chairpersonship that DEA owes so much. He was affable, diplomatic, positive and collegiate. He vacated the Chair in 2008 and has continued to assist DEA in many ways including service on the DEA Fund Committee.

Professor Michael Kidd 2008-2010

Michael was the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Flinders Medical School and a prominent medical figure in Australian medicine. Previous to his move to Adelaide he was Professor and head of the Discipline of General Practice at The University of Sydney. He was President of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners from 2002-2006 and during this time developed a partnership between the RACGP and Doctors for the Environment Australia. He is an elected member of the executive committee of The World Organisation of Family Doctors and is their liaison person with the World Health Organisation.

Michael brought a different dimension to the workings and image of DEA for he had many national contacts and was very experienced in dealing with the echelons of the profession. He was a great speaker and Chair, likable and efficient, he took a particular interest in

fostering younger members of DEA committees to leadership. He worked to build confidence- perhaps best epitomised by his words in an Annual Report

The Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr Margaret Chan, recently wrote that, "Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Climate change will affect, in profoundly adverse ways, some of the most fundamental determinants of health: food, air, water. In the face of this challenge, we need champions throughout the world who will work to put protecting human health at the centre of the climate change agenda."

Doctors for the Environment (Australia) is one of these champions and over the past year the members of our organisation have continued to alert doctors and the public in this country on the health effects of environmental degradation and the huge health risks of climate change.

Our members have provided advice and support on ways that we can all make a difference in the way we live our own lives, operate our clinics and hospitals, and in the way we provide care and advice to our patients.

Professor Kingsley Faulkner 2011-current

Kingsley took over the Chair in 2011 and was the DEA representative at the Transforming Australia National Summit, Geelong, Victoria in September 2011.

The DEA Web Site

DEA attached particular importance to the need for a well functioning informative web site and a simple site was created in 2002 by Gerald Bonello even before DEA was formally announced. Thereafter there were numerous changes and revisions initially by Glen Morris and then by Peter Mansfield (DEA member and creator of Healthy Skepticism) who undertook significant revisions which resulted in a sixfold increase in the number of "hits".

Our Educational Role in 2008

In 2008 our mission was to focus even more on the need to educate on the health aspects of climate change. This aligned with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) "protecting health from climate change" theme for World Health Day in recognition that climate change is posing ever growing threats to global public health security. Indeed for DEA 2008 was a year of successful educational activities and we emerged as a significant contributor to health issues at a national level.

Climate Change Health Check 2020

https://dea.org.au/images/general/Climate_Change_Health_Check_2020.pdf

To recognise World Health Day and the topic "Protecting Health from Climate Change", together with the Climate Institute, we released this national report written by Dr Graeme Horton and Professor Tony McMichael. The aims were to emphasise that climate change is a health issue and to indicate that there would be changes to medical practice as a result of climate change. The report was endorsed by the RACGP and the AMA joined in the press

release. The Presidents of both organisations helped with media. The media ‘take’ was very successful. DEA and the Climate Institute did over 40 interviews on radio and articles appeared in the Age, West Australian, Sunday Tasmanian, ABC on-line and ABC Rural. In addition there was a large take in rural newspapers. Interviews were also given by the AMA and RACGP. Overseas the interviews included Radio France and Al Jazeera and WHO offered congratulations to DEA on the report. Climate Change Health Check 2020 resulted in invitations to DEA to give a number of lectures in Australia and overseas.

As an important educational activity DEA has continued and expanded its educational role on the health aspects of climate change with posters, pamphlets and meetings.

The poster on **Biodiversity and Health** was distributed to 35,000 RACGP members in December 2007. The philosophy driving this initiative was the need to recognise that the single most important factor in the health of each person is not the availability of good health services, or effective cancer drugs, or short waiting lists or state of the art accident services, it is the integrity of the Earth’s ecological services. Perhaps this is an understatement for it is the only factor of consequence. Without ecological services, the Earth would be ‘dead’ like many other planets including our neighbouring planets in the solar system. It follows that the protection of ecological services is integral to maintaining all advances we have made in medical science and in providing a future for further advances. The title of the poster “**Less Drive Time, More Alive Time**” summarises the avoidance of many diseases and greenhouse emissions by walking, cycling or taking public transport, in preference to private car usage. This poster was available from October and was distributed to all RACGP members in December 2008. DEA posters continue to have a wide exposure with use in other countries and requests for copies from schools and youth groups in Australia and other countries, particularly North America.

GreenClinic Brochure, an initiative between the Australian Conservation Council and DEA, was very successful and was evaluated in an article in Australian Family Physician. Vol. 37, No. 8, August 2008, 683 “The GreenClinic Pilot. Educational intervention for environmentally sustainable general practice” written by Grant Blashki and Graeme Horton. Podcasts on the topic were produced by Grant Blashki and Don Henry at <http://www.racgp.org.au/media/289507/200808fogartyblashki.mp3> There were two new educational pamphlets for use in doctors’ waiting rooms “Prescription for a Healthier Planet” prepared by members Richard Yin and George Crisp, and “Help Yourself and Help the Planet” prepared by Richard Yin, George Crisp and Medical Observer magazine. This pamphlet has also been made available by Medical Observer in poster format.

DEA made an important impact at a Workshop at the RACGP/WONCA Conference, Melbourne, October 2008 with speakers presenting four topics each focusing on different emerging areas, followed by a discussion panel:

- Climate Change as a Global Public Health Problem by Grant Blashki;
- Environmentally Sustainable Health Care by Graham Horton;
- Medical Responses to Climate Changes:
- Planning Adaptations at Multiple Levels by David King;
- The important role of doctors in community campaigns to influence climate change policy – lessons from successful anti-tobacco and forest protection campaigns Dr Bill Castleden.

The trade exhibition at the meeting was also an important venue for DEA to display its educational material.

DEA used a half-page advertisement in the Weekend Australian on November 10th 2007 on the health aspects of climate change entitled “Enough to make you Sick”.

Collaboration Between DEA and Medical Observer (MO) Magazine

This important collaboration was seen by DEA as a means of disseminating environmental health messages to a large proportion of the medical profession and the collaboration is still very active in 2015 when this section of DEA history was written.

In the first instance MO facilitated distribution of DEA’s Posters commencing in 2007 to about 24,000 Australian General Practitioners. In June 2008 MO, as part of its Green Campaign, launched a Green Issue which included articles by and about DEA members. There were articles on DEA’s Climate Change Health Check 2020 report, GreenClinic and BikeDoctor. It was then agreed that DEA contributors write a commentary on matters relating to the environment and health several times each year. Thereafter, in the subsequent year over 50 articles were published in Medical Observer on climate change or other environmental health topics, most of which were badged with a “Green Issue” logo. DEA was cited or featured in over 20% of these articles which included a report on the DEA presentation at the WONCA conference in Melbourne, and a full page interview with Michael Kidd entitled “Follow the Leader”.

The first four opinion pieces set the scene

“Hospitals set off on environmental path.” Dr Graeme Horton 3 October 2008

“Fight the good fight against climate change.” Prof Michael Kidd 6 February 2009

“Our experiment with climate is dangerous.” Prof Peter Doherty 5 June 2009

“We need to act on climate change now.” Prof David Karoly 12 June 2009

MO also assisted with the “Prescription for a Healthier Planet” patient information brochure, initiated by DEA members George Crisp and Richard Yin, to produce a version which was able to be printed from the DEA and Medical Observer websites.

In 2009 MO produced another Green Issue with articles on

- A profile of green practice advocates Dr George Crisp and Dr Richard Yin
- A two-page feature article on climate change health impacts entitled “Climate Change – Prepare for the Worst”, with commentary from DEA national committee member Dr Graeme Horton and DEA member Associate Professor Colin Butler
- GPs including Dr Richard Stiles and Dr Alison Bleaney discussing how to deal with suspicions of local environmental hazards

DEA members have also been featured in profile stories. For example in 2010 Dr Dimity Williams wrote an opinion piece on “The health dangers of coal-fired power” which expressed the view that we no longer had a social licence to continue the mining of coal in light of its true cost to society.

This was followed by a two page feature article, "Taking on the Mother of All Causes" highlighting her DEA involvement and calls for climate change to be an increasing focus of health care and health education.

DEA expresses its thanks to Dr Graeme Horton for being the member on the Management Committee who organised and managed our continued liaison with MO till 2014.

The Garnaut Climate Change Review

Led by Professor Ross Garnaut this was first commissioned by Australia's Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments in 2007, to conduct an independent study of the impacts of climate change on the Australian economy. The Review's Final Report was released on 30 September 2008. The Report recommended medium to long-term policies and policy frameworks to improve the prospects for sustainable prosperity.

In the [DEA submission made in March 2008](#) we were critical of the review. In the summary of our submission we wrote

.... it is apparent that any comprehensive economic assessment of the costs and benefits of mitigation of climate change by the reduction of greenhouse gases must incorporate the substantial predicted public health impacts of climate change (14, 15) and include the substantial public health planning and resources needed to deal with the anticipated health impacts of warming. (16, 17) Indeed the 4th IPCC Report (5) indicated that the health impact would incur substantial costs. These impacts provide a powerful argument for proceeding with early and vigorous greenhouse gas mitigation.

And in the Annual Report we wrote

Professor Garnaut walked his road to Damascus and came to understand the dire consequences of the uncontrolled rise in greenhouse emissions. It therefore came as a surprise to all that his recommendations on targets for reduction were totally inadequate to offer salvation for the Great Barrier Reef and other segments of Australia's ecology.

As post-script to this debate Professor Garnaut accepted our invitation to attend a Management Committee meeting in Adelaide in 2009 and a very active debate ensued.

Interaction with Elected Representatives in 2008

There were two important briefing papers to all members and senators in the federal parliament.

The first letter on community measures to reduce greenhouse emissions asked members to respond by telling us "what you personally are doing to address the problem of climate change. Let us know how you are showing leadership within your electorate and please send to us any messages you are using in your newsletters to constituents." This letter received a

number of positive responses including one from the Treasurer published on <http://www.dea.org.au> However we concluded that much work remained to be done to convince our representatives that they needed to act personally on this issue.

The second letter addressed the issues of renewable energy and an emissions trading scheme. Within this context we asked for a bipartisan approach to the urgent problems of climate change. This has been a recurrent suggestion in our interaction with elected representatives.

2009

The year of 2009 was highlighted by the major initiative on the health harms of coal.

Initiative on Coal and Health

With the public debate in Australia often miring the science, DEA found it increasing difficult to make progress in informing the public of the health implications of climate change. In this context DEA made a policy decision to educate both governments and the public on the wide ranging adverse health impacts (from local pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions) of the fossil fuel industry. We decided to work towards the mitigation of greenhouse emissions, by focusing on opposing the expansion of the coal industry.

This initiative commenced in early 2009 with the development of policy and a paper “Briefing from Doctors for the Environment Australia on Health, Coal Pollution and Renewable Energy” for meeting with elected representatives. The salient points in the policy were

To request an immediate levy on carbon without any concession to the coal industry. Such considerations rendered the CPRS ineffective according to a [report from the Grattan Institute](#). It is our view that the government must harden its resolve on this issue.

To oppose the development of any new coal mines on health grounds. http://archive.dea.org.au/UserFiles/File/pdf_documents/Energy_Policy_Final_2009.pdf

To support planned redeployment of jobs from coal mining areas to renewable energy industries, thereby reducing the impacts of mine closure and health hazards of unemployment.

In the absence of a carbon price, to finance the increased development of renewable energy by fiscal means. There is now extensive literature demonstrating that these industries support more jobs than coal mining. For example in Australia wind power employs two to three times the number of job years per kw hour of power produced by coal mining and generation. These jobs are sustainable, healthy and clean and offer a technological future for Australia which we are failing to grasp (in contrast to our competitors). The gain in jobs has been substantiated in the ACF-ACTU report “Creating jobs- Cutting pollution.

To support the view that climate change is the great moral challenge of our generation, that it is an economic challenge, a social challenge and actually represents a deep challenge on the overall question of national security, and that to delay any longer would be reckless and irresponsible for our economy and for our environment. (Prime Minister Rudd) Therefore as a wealthy advanced nation we should offer leadership in our green house emission curtailment and recognise that we must do this as a step in the attainment of future international agreements.

This initiative, [Election manifesto on the health impacts of coal pollution](#) commenced in early 2009 had DEA members including students visiting and briefing federal Members and Senators on the health aspects of coal mining and pollution from coal fired power stations.

Simultaneously the issue was developed in media articles in the Australian, http://davidshearman.org/pdf/Climate_Change_Worry_for_Doctors.pdf, Courier mail, ABC on-line and [Crikey](#).

Poola Challenge Grant

DEA received a Challenge Grant from the Poola Foundation (Tom Kantor Fund) to establish a small secretariat in 2009 to support the growing work of our organisation and to expand our educational and advocacy activities. We thanked the Poola Foundation for their crucial and generous contribution. Guy Webber was appointed for a year and we thank him for his support in the initial establishment phase of our secretariat. Ms Joy Oddy was appointed as Administrative Officer in February 2010 and her presence greatly increased the activity and efficiency of the organisation.

Interaction with Elected Members

In the **Visit your member initiative**, DEA members including students, visited and briefed their federal Member or Senator on the health aspects of climate change. Nearly 100 visits including several to Ministers and parliamentary secretaries were completed.

This exercise formalised our procedures for the preparation of briefing papers, for researching the interests of each member or senator, for reporting outcomes in a standard fashion and for seeking topics with which to maintain contact.

Submissions Made to Parliamentary Committees in 2008-2009

There were many but the following are highlighted because they signaled a new sphere of DEA action on

Sustainable hospitals

Submission to the Premier of Victoria "[Sustainable Hospitals-response to Victorian Climate change green paper](#)" by Forbes McGain and Eugenie Kayak

Energy and fossil fuels

Submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Impact of Peak Oil on SA which was our first presentation on fossil fuels. This was followed a one hour presentation including questions.

We also highlight the **Submission on the proposed Olympic Dam Expansion EIS**. The Environmental Impact Statement was of several volumes and required a prodigious amount of work. DEA addressed the question, “Is the expansion of this mine in the future long-term health interests of SA and indeed in the interests of Australia?” Our answer was “No”.

The **Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries Inquiry into food production in Australia** was a remarkably forward looking review which addressed many important aspects of agricultural food production and the health of rural communities and it demonstrated the DEA policy of relating climate change to many other issues.

A further new sphere of action was epitomised in the 2009 educational poster **Economic Growth and Health**. This challenged the logic of ‘never-ending’ and unregulated economic growth, and called for a renewed examination of true sustainability. In September 33,000 copies were distributed and most to Australian GPs within the Australian Family Physician mail-out.

Student Members Set the Pace in 2009-2010

In 2004 medical students became full voting members of DEA; student memberships grew steadily and in 2009 a National Student Committee was formed. This comprised 13 student members (with 1-2 representatives from each state) with Liz O’Brien as the national representative sitting on the DEA Management Committee. This signified the integration of student contributions into the mainstream of DEA activity and offered an opportunity for the development and expression of student skills and enthusiasm.

A multitude of projects were defined and implemented, university representatives for DEA were elected and a diverse range of DEA and environmental health presentations and sessions were held around the country. Student members engaged formally in political, professional, public and media events in tandem with graduate DEA members, and independently.

At the national level, DEA students were strongly represented at AMSA’s Global Health Conference (Hobart, July 2010), presented at IFMSA’s Think Global Workshop (Hobart, July 2010) and hosted the first iDEA student conference (Melbourne, December 2009). DEA provided financial support for Monash University medical students involved in the AMSA “think tank” “Climate: Code Green” initiative. An excellent educational [video](#) and brochure were produced for distribution to medical students across Australia.

The Inaugural Student Conference

In 2009 the National Student Committee held several tele-conferences to organise the inaugural student conference, December 5-7 at Newman College, within the University of Melbourne. It was attended by 40 medical students, from six Australian states and 11 medical schools.

Noting that the health effects of climate change were not covered sufficiently by any Australian medical school, topics included heat stress, vulnerable populations, depression, financial loss and food insecurity. Solutions from the health sector, included sustainable hospitals & clinics, population stabilisation, promotion of active transport, cityscape design, and low-impact agriculture.

Speakers included Richard Di Natale, a former GP and upcoming Greens senate candidate, Dr Colin Butler on sustainability, Taegan Edwards on climate change and social justice, Dr Forbes McGain on 'green hospitals', Leadership and advocacy were discussed by Dr Bill Williams of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War and Dr David Shearman of DEA.

Dr Merryn Redenbach, a paediatric registrar from the Royal Children's Hospital (Melbourne), gave an outstanding talk on her experiences as ship's doctor with the marine wildlife conservation organisation Sea Shepherd.

Population Policy

A Population policy was first developed in 2004. Subsequently DEA promoted this opportunistically, but in 2010 a population debate exploded when the Prime Minister expressed satisfaction with an Australian population projected to be 36 million by 2035. In response to the Federal government's Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia, DEA developed a revised policy paper "[A Sustainable Population for Australia](#)" which was sent to all members of Parliament and recommending:

- That a national task force be formed to prepare a scientific report on an environmentally sustainable population for Australia.
- This report must be based upon scientific, demographic and health science and not on the opinions of community sectors with conflicts of interest. The intent will be to provide the data upon which government policy can be reliably based.

The policy was announced with a press release featuring Dick Smith and articles followed in The Age, The Canberra Times, The West Australian, The Punch (on line) and Medial Observer. There were several radio interviews around Australia. Additional exposure was obtained with press releases from Senator Nick Minchin (Lib) and Kelvin Thomson (ALP).

A roundtable discussion with Minister Burke was attended by DEA Management Committee member, George Crisp. Although the discussion and the subsequent government report indicated very little advance from previous thinking, we felt our initiatives were important to sow the seeds for future policy decisions.

A [Population and Health poster](#) was developed and sent to 23,000 General Practitioners by Medical Observer which simultaneously published a news article on our population campaign featuring an interview with Dick Smith entitled “Dick Smith joins doctors’ sustainability campaign” and an opinion piece by George Crisp entitled “Population growth is hurting our planet, now”.

Submissions made to Parliamentary Committees 2010

Submissions important to note because they indicated the widening of DEA related topics being addressed by DEA

[Review of the national environment protection \(Ambient Air Quality\) measure.](#) Air quality discussion paper

Submission to the Standing Committee on Procedure [“Inquiry into the effectiveness of House Committees”](#)

This submission explored the role of House Committees in informing elected representative on complex issues and suggested avenues for more effective government and further education. Examples of complex issues were climate change and the demise of the River Murray system. The submission arose from frustration at the level of knowledge shown by some Parliamentary Committee members

Sustainability and Health think-tank, [“Prescriptions for a healthy planet”](#), Sydney, April 16th

This one day think-tank style meeting was organised jointly by Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) and the Institute of Sustainable Solutions (ISS), University of Sydney.

The main aim of this meeting was to explore and promote the consideration of health within key aspects of sustainability and climate change. Four major themes provided the basis of discussion, one theme for each session. These themes were supportable populations; reducing poverty and social disadvantage; healthy urbanisation and responsible business.

Brief introductions to each theme were delivered by invited experts in each area, but the majority of time was devoted to small group work and reporting back of major discussion points. The expert panel then provided commentary and summary of the issues raised during each session.

Attendance was by invitation only, and participants came from a wide range of organisations, including business, academia, politicians, public service, media, medical practitioners and charitable NGOs.

One of the highlights of the meeting was the passion of presenters and attendees, and the healthy debate that occurred mostly in a respectful manner between these different groups. Over 50 people attended the day, with many staying on for the informal social event that followed.

It is difficult to quantify the benefit of such an event, but I believe that it provided a number of benefits and was worth the investment of \$5,000 that DEA contributed to organise the event, as well as the time of one of the DEA executive members.

The World Congress of Internal Medicine

DEA extended its educational role by providing educational material on climate change at significant meetings. One of the first booths was held in the exhibition hall at the World Congress of Internal Medicine, March 22-25, 2010 in Melbourne.

There were 1580 registrants from 58 countries, including around 930 from Australia and 160 from New Zealand. Other countries with high attendance included Italy, Thailand, South Korea and Bangladesh.

Visitors to the booth included Professor Geoff Metz, President, Royal Australasian College of Physicians; Professor Ian Gilmore, President Royal College of Physicians London; Professor William Fitzgerald, President, Royal College Physicians and Surgeons Canada; Professor Anthony Capon ANU; Dr Simon Slota-Kan, Victorian Dept of Health and Dr Lynne Madden NSW Dept of Health.

Notable in the program was the speech of Bob Brown on world population growth as well as climate factors during which he showed the DEA/AMSA video.

Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA)

In 2010 DEA was a lead organisation in the establishment of the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) which brings together health professionals and consumer groups concerned about the impact of climate change on health.

We would like to thank the Medical Journal of Australia for allowing us to reproduce the [attached article](#) from their archives.