Bright future for community renewables

by Joachim Muller, Central Coast Greens

A community-owned wind farm is Australia’s new international champion after winning the prestigious World Wind Energy Reward 2012.

Hepburn Wind is the community co-operative responsible for the first community-initiated and owned wind farm in Australia. As well as generating electrical energy, the 3.1 MW wind farm in Leonards Hill, near Daylesford (about 100 km north-west of Melbourne) has also helped to educate the community about wind power.

The World Wind Energy Association (WWEA) awarded Hepburn the “Community Power – Citizens’ Power” accolade at the 11th World Wind Energy Conference 2012 for its ground-breaking initiative establishing this community-owned wind farm. The WWEA said: “The Hepburn Community Wind Farm stands for a social movement outside the strong fossil fuels lobby in Australia, aiming at a fundamental energy transformation that is driven by Australia’s citizens. As the first initiative for a community wind farm on the Australian continent… the wind farm has become an example and important reference project in Australia and has inspired many similar initiatives around Australia and beyond.”

There are many community groups around the world that already jointly own renewable energy production facilities. In Germany there are already close to 600 initiatives with many set up as democratic co-ops with each member owning one or more shares and entitled to a single vote. Another advantage of the co-op model is it educates and empowers members and also gives back to the community.

In just eight years, the members of Hepburn Wind have driven their project to the point where it is now feeding electricity into the grid. More and more community groups are setting up across Australia and all expect to get a financial return as the cost of renewable energy nears parity on both solar and wind with grid. More and more community groups are setting up across Australia and all expect to get a financial return as the cost of renewable energy nears parity on both solar and wind with grid. More and more community groups are setting up across Australia and all expect to get a financial return as the cost of renewable energy nears parity on both solar and wind with grid.

Solar projects can develop much faster than wind projects because they can be completed in stages and grown to meet demand and the changing financial situation of the co-op. Many are completed in less than two years. Solar panels do not require any extra land as they can be easily installed on the roofs of private homes and public buildings. Solar electricity has decision making made according to the financial viability of an individual project. For information on forming a renewable energy co-op, visit www.embark.com.au. Embark is a support organisation which has used the experiences of Hepburn Wind to compile a very detailed set of instructions on how to join the renewables revolution.

Joachim Muller was involved in setting up Central Coast Community Energy (CCCE). For more information email: communityenergy@gmail.com. Other Community Renewables Initiatives in Australia include: Hepburn Wind; New England Wind; Port Phillip Community Solar; Mount Alexander Community Wind.

Don’t shoot, I’m a bushwalker!

by Sue Stock

More than 150 people joined a colourful protest outside National Party MP Thomas George’s office in Lismore at the end of June. Some were dressed as wounded bushwalkers, others as koalas and different bush animals. All were there to protest the O’Farrell government’s deal with the Shooters Party to allow recreational hunting in National Parks.

The changes to legislation mean the O’Farrell government has sold off public safety, the environment, animal welfare and native wildlife to the extreme demands of the Shooters Party.” It’s known that feral animals need to be controlled but amateur recreational hunting is not the answer as it will scare feral animals into new areas, making them increasingly wary professional shooters. Animal welfare will also be put at risk. There can be no assurances that hunting will be humane.

There are many public safety questions also. Will the public be excluded from National Parks when hunting takes place? Shooting would jeopardise the safety of rangers as well as conservation areas in the Northern Rivers area of NSW which will now be open for amateur hunting. North East Forest Alliance spokesperson Dailan Pugh told the rally how these parks are used by more than 4 million visitors a year. “These are important for local recreation and essential mainstays of the tourism industry,” he said.

NSW Greens MP Cate Faehrmann also spoke at the rally and said, “Communities close to the parks that will now be entertainment for recreational hunters are extremely concerned. What makes this deal even worse is that recreational ground shooting is recognised by feral species experts as completely ineffective at eradicating species. It’s disgraceful that Barry O’Farrell has sold off public safety, the environment, animal welfare and native wildlife to the extreme demands of the Shooters Party.”

Lead NSW Greens senate candidate and NSW MLC Cate Faehrmann (far right) launched the “Don’t Shoot! I’m a bushwalker” campaign in northern NSW’s Nightcap National Park recently in protest over the Premier’s dodgy deal with the Shooters Party to allow amateur hunters into National Parks. Cate has been working with communities across NSW to overturn this outrageous decision with the campaign rapidly gaining momentum. Visit www.catefaehrmann.org/dontshoot to add your voice.
Seven Sydney Councils lead on renewable energy master plan

Daniel Kogoy, Greens councillor on Leichhardt Council

In inner west and southern Sydney, seven local councils are working together to develop their own renewable energy master plan. This master plan includes Leichhardt, Marrickville, Ashfield, Canterbury, Rockdale, Bankstown and Canada Bay councils and will identify the best ways to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy sources in these LGAs.

It will also cover financing, ownership and operational details, including community/council ownership and joint ventures.

Community-owned renewable energy is already common in parts of Europe and North America. In Australia we’re in the early stages of the move away from large, centralised coal, gas and nuclear power stations towards clean, decentralised, community-scale renewable energy autonomy. (see The Future is Bright for Australia’s Community-Owned Renewables, Page 1)

Decentralised renewable energy reduces network costs as power stations can be built quickly and closer to where they are needed. It enables local ownership, which empowers communities and delivers economic benefits locally. It also represents a great opportunity – after the recent shameful electricity sell-offs – to increase the percentage of public and community-owned renewable energy. All commercially viable renewable energy infrastructure is being investigated for the master plan including solar PV, solar thermal, waste-to-energy, micro hydro, wind power and co-generative sourcing renewable fuels. There is also the potential for alignment with the City of Sydney’s renewable energy plan.

The renewable energy plan is a Greens initiative, but Greens councillors have worked hard to gain the support of various Labor, Independent and some Liberal councillors.

The seven councils plan received a boost on July 1, 2012 when The Clean Energy Finance Future Fund became law and $13.2 billion was made available through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency for renewable energy in Australia. The NSW state government needs to come to the party. Both NSW Labor and the Liberals played key roles in dismantling the successful NSW Solar Bonus Scheme and in selling off our electricity sector against widespread community outrage. NSW Labor gave planning approval for two new coal fired power stations that will increase NSW’s greenhouse gas emissions by a massive 16%. Last year the O’Farrell government embarked on an anti-wind power crusade, enacting one of the world’s most regressive wind power polices, while supporting the expansion of coal mines and coal seam gas.

Given O’Farrell’s approach and Tony Abbott’s gallop towards federal government it is imperative that local communities show their support for renewable energy by actively investing.

To solve the climate crisis, local communities and councils must take the lead towards our 100% renewable energy future and this is what our renewable energy master plan is doing.

Daniel Kogoy will be running for a second term as Greens councillor on Leichhardt Council on 8th September.

Renewable energy types

Don’t shoot, I’m a bushwalker!

During National Reconciliation Week NSW Greens MP Jan Barham (front left) signed a Statement of Commitment between the Byron Shire Council and the Bundjalung of Byron Bay – Arakwal People. Jan has a motion before the House calling on the Government on Homelessness. She is also currently reviewing government positions on Boarding Houses, Residential Parks and Community Housing providers and consulting on a motion for an apology regarding Forced Adoptions.

The Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2012, has now passed through parliament.

This Bill now:

- Allows the minister to make National Parks available “for the hunting of game animals by persons who hold a game hunting licence.” The legislation allows recreational hunters access into 79 national Parks including Nightcap National Park.
- Expands the list of “game animals” that can be hunted on public land (like national parks) to include several non-native bird species.
- Prevents anti-hunting protests by making it an offence “to interfere with a person who is lawfully hunting game animals on public hunting land” (including national parks).

The sun is our largest renewable energy source, with an infinite supply to support the use of solar panels. In one day Australia gets enough solar power to meet all its energy needs for a year.

WIND power is a natural, renewable and continuous force.

Hydro power has enormous potential as a renewable energy with waves and tides also able to act as generators of energy.

Biomass, decaying plants or trees and using landfill waste can provide a substantial amount of renewable energy.

And when the sun doesn’t shine, the wind doesn’t blow?

The sun can be used as a renewable energy source even when the sun doesn’t shine (or the wind doesn’t blow) as there are off the shelf renewable electricity technologies available that can supply base load power. Mark Diesendorf, from the University of NSW debunks the myths of renewables and base load power: www.theconversation.edu.au/renewable-energy-can-provide-base-load-power-heres-how-2221

More than 25 councils across NSW have now passed motions against coal seam gas (CSG) mining in their local government area.

Some motions declare a moratorium on CSG, others focus on issues of water security and some councils specifically request that the NSW government inform them of mining requests before approvals are made. In May, Richmond Valley Council joined a growing list of Northern Rivers councils to declare a moratorium on new coal seam gas projects on council land. Until then they’d been the only north coast council to have spoken in support of the coal seam gas industry.

In the majority of councils calling for a halt to coal seam gas mining against CSG it’s Greens councillors who have taken the initiative in preparing and advocating for a motion to be passed. “I wanted to achieve bi-partisan support in council on this key issue because ultimately it will affect us all if our water supply is polluted and our agricultural land destroyed,” says Pauline Tyrell, Greens Councillor at Canada Bay. “Even though my council is in the city we still eat the food from the Liverpool plains and enjoy the wine from the Hunter Valley, two areas under serious threat if coal seam gas mining goes ahead.”

Momentum from urban Sydney councils increased after last year’s NSW Local Government Association (LGA) annual general meeting passed a motion against CSG mining. The LGA rejected industry suggestions that CSG development is appropriate in residential areas, and called on the government to rescind exploration licences covering residential areas.

Lock the Gate, the national alliance of more than 120 community, industry and environmental groups concerned about the impact of coal and CSG mining, says that a show of unity by councils across NSW will empower more communities to say no to CSG and a united local government opposition can pack a political punch within NSW state government. There are many things Councils can do to legally delay mining in their LGAs and show the mining companies they do not have a social license.

The movement against CSG regularly uses the term ‘people’s moratorium’ and many communities in northern NSW have taken this idea a step further and declared their local CSG-Free. Thousands of people in more than 20 communities in the Tweed Shire and Lismore local government areas are now part of the “CSG-Free Community” movement.

Visit www.lockthegate.org.au/local-councils-for-the-list of NSW councils that have passed motions against coal seam gas.
Greens councillors – It’s more than rates, roads and rubbish

There are more than 100 Greens making a difference on local government councils across Australia. Meet six of the Greens who’ve been on NSW Councils for the past four years, and all will be running again for election on 8th September.

Chris Parker
Cessnock City Council
Elected – 2008
Chair of Tidy Towns Committee – 2009
Children from Greiga Public School in the Hunter were in danger from buses and cars performing complex manoeuvres as they crossed the road every day. Chris Parker consulted with parents and the principal and lobbied successfully for a new parallel road. He encouraged Pacific National to contribute $180,000 to its cost as well as paying for improvements to the school’s grounds with the result that both parents and children feel more secure.

In 2009 Chris re-established the previously defunct Cessnock Tidy Towns Committee which has made significant improvements to Cessnock’s urban environment by landscaping the parks. He has also been behind restoring the memorial to the North Rothbury Riot when miners sustained severe injuries after taking on the mine owners.

Linda Eislter
Canterbury City Council
Elected – 2008
Chair – Environmental Sustainability Community Committee
Neil has successfully ensured that the Ploughmans Wetland will now be completely excluded from residential development, a long term threat until 2011. He has also ensured the security of Orange’s water supply through stormwater harvesting at Blackmans Swamp Creek and Ploughmans Creek which means there will be enough water for healthy creeks and full catchment dams.

There are solar panels on the Orange Council buildings because Neil championed this effort to reduce Orange’s carbon footprint and free up Council funds for other initiatives. The panels have been so successful at saving energy that they will pay themselves off ahead of projections.

Vanessa Ekins
Lismore City Council
Elected – 2004
Deputy Mayor – 2008; Chair – Environment Committee
Poor infrastructure meant some Lismore children could not walk safely to school. Vanessa forced the Lismore City Council to respond to community demands for better footpaths and they are now included in the Council’s Cycleway Strategy which is set to be delivered over the next ten years.

Before Vanessa took the Chair of the Council’s Environment Committee, Lismore Council had no formal environment policy. She has now led the development of biodiversity, water, farmland and heritage policies as well as the digitisation of local heritage information. In Lismore every DA must now also consider heritage matters.

Sue Wynn
Wyyong Shire Council
Elected – 2008
Deputy Mayor – 2011
Sue overcame Council antipathy and introduced an e-waste collection and recycling scheme. The initial twice-yearly collection received so much community support and removed so much e-waste from the general household refuse stream that Council expanded the initiative and Wyyong Shire residents can now take their e-waste to the tip at any time where it is sent on to be recycled.

Groups across the council are also benefitting from the Community Matching Fund that Sue set up. Under the scheme, volunteer groups in seven categories can apply for a share of the $300,000 fund. Sue says “the Fund will leave a lasting legacy and will potentially assist volunteer programs that permanently assist the community and environment across the Shire.”

Murray Matson
Randwick City Council
Elected – 1995
The ALP right dominated Randwick for many years leading to a political atmosphere of betrayal and loathing. After Murray became Mayor in 2004 it was agreed to share the mayoralty in Randwick inclusively between the Greens, Labor and Liberals. This stabilized local politics allowing for sustained policy implementation that has benefited the whole community.

Prior to Murray’s election in 1995, Randwick had no environmental agenda so Murray used his mayoralty to set up a special environmental levy. The resulting fund pays for the “Sustaining Our City” program which employs an environmental officer with a budget for alternative energy systems, water conservation and environmental education.

Keep your eye on council re-zoning

Sue Wynn, Deputy Mayor, Wyyong Shire Council

In Wyong Shire, our Local Environment Plan (LEP) is in its final stages before being placed on exhibition.

The document is enormous and dry and will be on exhibition for two months. Yet most residents will only concentrate on the zoning for their property if they bother at all. Sadly, this is the fate of most complex policy documents and residents do not realise how it affects them until it’s too late.

The State government is proposing to rezone all public schools, hospitals, TAFE’s, universities and police stations into their surrounding zones, unless there are compelling reasons to do otherwise. This would wipe out all community involvement and consultation if and when the government decided to sell these valuable community lands and open space. It would certainly make it much easier to fulfil the $450 million dollars of public schools sales identified by consultants, Boston Group.

Greens on council must fight these changes. In Wyong Shire, in my capacity as a Councillor, I am attending as many meetings as possible to explain to the members what the change of zone may mean for their school in the future. I am hoping this will empower the community to make a submission to have their school land zoned SP2 Infrastructure (Education Establishment) with justification. The Entrance Infants School is a wonderful example of what was achieved after it was deemed surplus to needs. The community campaigned to retain the land and on the site is now an Art Gallery, a café for young disabled people to learn hospitality skills, a Men’s Shed, a Dance Studio, play equipment and community rooms.

At the other end of the spectrum, the lovely little rural school of Dooralong has simply disappeared without a murmur.

Jamie Parker (right), NSW MP for Balmain, has been working with anti-uranium campaignes to mobilise a broad-based movement against the Liberal government’s plans to explore for uranium in NSW. He will speak at a public meeting on the 16 August and is facilitating an activist training session on 25 August. Here he is pictured with campaigners from Muckaty near Tennant Creek who are fighting a proposed radioactive waste dump on their land.
NSW Heritage Laws fail 6000-year-old Aboriginal Site

Few people would be surprised to hear that the planning system is currently skewed in favour of big developers at the expense of environmental, social and cultural concerns, but the destruction that is its legacy continues to come to light.

The development was that of Australia’s largest KFC restaurant, built approximately one year ago. The site is located on Hunter Street in Newcastle west and was formerly occupied by the Palais Royale building, which was demolished in 2008. Disturbingly, this fast-food restaurant has been constructed on one of Australia’s most significant Aboriginal heritage sites.

The excavation report on Aboriginal heritage on the site was not released until almost a year after the restaurant was built, thus making its assessment of the heritage impact of the development largely redundant. The report states that the site had “high to exceptional cultural and scientific significance” and has revealed that the site contained more than 5,700 ancient Aboriginal stone tools with unique workmanship and campsite remains. The artefacts date back a remarkable 6,700 to 6,500,000 years. This makes the artefacts the oldest evidence of human settlement in the Newcastle region.

Excavation reports are commissioned by developers as a condition of receiving an Aboriginal heritage impact permit. Remarkably, it is unclear whether there is any obligation for a developer to make these reports public. In this instance the report was released only because local groups brought enormous pressure on the developer to make it public. In addition to the ancient Aboriginal artefacts discovered, the report has also revealed the presence of a large array of colonial-era artefacts. This amalgamation of historical pieces has been primarily destroyed through the construction of the KFC building.

Surely, this had report be made public earlier, evidence of such a significant store of artefacts would have been sufficient to allow the developer to permit the destruction of the heritage. Because of lax regulation, this can mean that the development is allowed to progress without the information from the excavation report even being known to those giving the permitting.

Australia’s largest KFC outlet in Newcastle was built on a site the potential to reveal knowledge of Aboriginal occupation for the past 6,700 years. However without protection the laws a proper interpretation of the site was not realised and artefacts were buried under the outlet.

With new laws regarding Aboriginal heritage currently proposed, it is essential that we have a say in the development and protection of the sites as owners of the land. We must ensure that the protection of these valuable pieces is protected and not lost through lack of regulation.

Adapted from an adjournment speech delivered in the NSW Upper House by Greens NSW Heritage spokesperson David Shoebridge.

Book Reviews


Review by Adrienne Shilling

“The people have got to get control back of the government, away from the big boys’ pockets! We say we’re a democratic people, but we’ve lost our government, it has become more of a dictatorship.”

This quote from a Caronoo farmer in NSW exemplifies what Rich Land Waste Land reveals: the undue influence on energy public policy – in this case coal and coal seam gas – by big business. It is eroding the faith of communities in just outcomes from government regulation and also in the future itself.

Author Sharyn Munro uses the metaphor of war – while herself acting like a foot soldier – to sound the alarm about the impact of coal and coal seam gas mining on local communities, public livelihoods and environment in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. She apologizes to the First People for displacement from their land describing how it’s now farmers, rural villagers, “new settlers and retirees who are being displaced by a mining industry in an area of our country, a taking over of land and a clearing out of people.”

Does the government know about Triple Bottom Line full cost accounting: people, planet, profit? she asks.

Munro’s narrative is clear and engaging but I found this a confronting book because it documents so many personal experiences of the deleterious impact of mining. Munro has provided meticulous, lengthy endnotes to each chapter supporting these, each showing time and time again the willful lack of government intervention to prevent the callous ruinism of important agricultural or environmentally sensitive land. One frustration however was the lack of a comprehensive index to help with cross-referencing.

Rich Land Wasteland is a call to arms. I urge people to read this book and understand the devastation being wrought on our beautiful country and to get active join local groups, contact beleaguered spokespeople, contact beleaguered groups, contact beleaguered spokesperson David Shoebridge.

Left Turn: Political Essays For The New Left edited by Antony Loewenstein and Jeff Sparrow (Melbourne University Press, 2012)

Review by Mark Rubbo

I ran into Antony at the Sydney Writers’ Festival and mentioned I was reviewing this collection of essays. “You have to remember Mark, that it’s not a manifesto and it doesn’t present a program; it’s a collection of interesting ideas that don’t necessarily get aired or discussed.”

Loewenstein and his co-editor hope it generates debate and anti-war and anti-Government’s views, “Violence, Non-Violence and Aboriginal Australia is sure to be attacked.”

Jeff Sparrow looks at the decline of Left politics in the context of the Occupy movements in societies where the market has become the default setting for most organisational relationships. In the Occupy movement, Sparrow sees some hope for the politics of the left in that its utopian anarcho-realist representation raises the question of what kind of world lies on the other side of neoliberalism.

Some of this is echoed by Christos Tsiolkas who argues for the shift to a new kind of aridity, “In any great adventure, there are always obstacles in the way.”

The book uses three stories, or what the authors call “versions of reality”, to act as a lens on what’s going on. There’s Business as Usual, the defining assumption is that there is little need to change the way we live. The second story called the Great Unravelling, draws attention to the disasters that Business as Usual is taking us towards, as well as those it has already brought about.

The third story involves the emergence of new and creative human responses and the epochal transition of an industrial society committed to economic growth to a life-sustaining society and what Macy and Patstone call the Great Turning. The central plot to all three stories is finding and offering Active Hope.”

Active Hope: How to face the mess we’re in without going crazy by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (Finch Publishing, 2012)

Review by Lauren Moore

Active Hope asks readers to look at the world through different eyes. It describes in detail humanity’s turning point in how we treat each other and how we look after our environment, and the changes needed to sustain mankind as a species.

Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone draw upon the wealth of knowledge and experience in teaching resilience, psychology, deep ecology, social change and Buddhism. Active Hope is peppered with practical ideas and techniques to overcome despair and set about making a contribution to a world fuelled by compassion, creativity and interconnectedness. As they write, “in any great adventure, there are always obstacles in the way.”

The book uses three stories, or what the authors call ‘versions of reality’, to act as a lens on what’s going on. There’s Business as Usual, the defining assumption is that there is little need to change the way we live. The second story called the Great Unravelling, draws attention to the disasters that Business as Usual is taking us towards, as well as those it has already brought about.

The third story involves the emergence of new and creative human responses and the epochal transition of an industrial society committed to economic growth to a life-sustaining society and what Macy and Patstone call the Great Turning. The central plot to all three stories is finding and offering Active Hope.”

GreenVoice readers can purchase Active Hope for the special price of $15 inc. postage (RRP $24.99). Email laura@finch.com.au before 31 August 2012 to order at this special price.
A New Planning System – for developers not communities

by Colin Hesse,
Greens NSW Local Government Support Worker

Three years ago a retired police officer and his wife moved from their apartment in Parramatta to their new home at Berala in the Auburn local government area, but something had changed. To their great surprise the neighbouring single story house had been demolished while they were on holiday, and in its place a two-story house was being built. Not only would this rob their solar panels of light, but also their flower and vegetable gardens.

Their dreams of a comfortable retirement doing the gardening and contributing their bit to reducing greenhouse emissions for the sake of their grandchildren had been destroyed, and yet it was all perfectly legal.

The NSW Labor Government had allowed a new system of development approval called Exempt and Complying Development, which means that so long as the size of the block and the zoning was right, a private certifier could approve a new house next door to you without any input or discussion with neighbours or even the local council.

This was one of many changes to the planning system pushed through by the now disgraced NSW Labor Government, and begs a most vital question, should you and your elected councillors have any input into what is built in your area?

The NSW Liberal/National Coalition Government has just released a Green Paper for A New Planning System for NSW. However, the central premise of the paper is buried on page 09, though it is a recurring theme throughout that “individuals and markets are best placed to deliver diverse choices in all our emphasised development outcomes including housing and local centres. This statement typifies the economist rationalist or neoliberal approach of the paper. By this statement the authors of the paper demonstrate their commitment to economic rationalist or neoliberal philosophy.

Regulation is out and broad, non-prescriptive planning laws that allow developers to very much do as they please are in.

The Green Paper rightly contains criticism of the plan and at times contradictory amendments by previous governments to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 – of which there have been over one hundred and fifty.

Community involvement in their area local planning

The paper highlights what the Government states to be the importance of having the community involved in discussing the conceptual aspects of planning for their area. However this has already happened through local councils when they consulted over new Local Environment Plans as mandated by the previous Labor Government. In many senses the Liberal/National Coalition Government have completed the circle of change started by Labor that has handed power to developers in NSW over community interest.

Key points of A New Planning System for NSW include:

• Elected local councils will most likely be removed from any decision-making role regarding developments.
• Development applications to be assessed by bodies appointed by the government of the day with no accountability to the community affected by those decisions.
• So called merit appeals by developers will be allowed to exceed plans decided upon in “consultation” with the community.
• Creation of Enterprise Zones “which will be characterised by very little, if any, development controls.
• Nothing in the paper beyond broad statements about the protection of the environment or heritage.
• Extension of definition of ‘exempt’ and ‘complying’ development to almost all forms of development.
• Developers allowed unsolicited proposals, presumably in areas where the proposed development would not otherwise be allowed.
• Allowance for more private provision of key infrastructure – this raises concerns about integration with Government services and access to privatised services including cost of the services and transparency in decision making by State Government in the granting of rights to private business to operate public services.
• Lowering Section 94 contributions that are paid by developers for new community facilities. The shortfall will have to come from increased rates or a decline in community services.

Decision making on planning, broad zonings aside, must not be changed so it’s solely in the hands of bodies appointed by the State Government of the day. Every one of us should be allowed to have a say about what is built next to us, in our street or on our main streets. This will be removed by the O’Farrell government’s proposal, and the situation that affected the retired couple in Berala three years ago will not have changed. Indeed, it will be worse.

You can make comments on the New Planning System at www.haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/nexplanningsystem

Green paper is green light for developers in the Western Suburbs

The Greens believe that communities must be involved in all stages of the planning and development process, and should have an ongoing voice in the character of the local areas where they live. The proposals in the NSW government’s new Green Paper for A New Planning System for NSW threaten this.

“Western Sydney is growing fast,” says Shaun Gilchrist, Greens candidate for Ryde Council.

“Communities are already under pressure from inappropriate development and need adequate local consultation. What they need is more consultation, not less.”

It’s a mistake though, says Simon Margin, Greens candidate for Parramatta Council, to say the Greens are anti-development.

However all development must respect community needs and fit with the overall vision for an area. When high-rise development creeps into areas where there needs to be adequate public transport and other infrastructure already in place. This does not happen with development that is uncoupled with the council’s plan for the area.

In Ryde, residents have been facing inappropriate development for some time, says Mitch Ophir, another Greens candidate for Ryde. The most talked about development is the Ryde Civic Centre, where public land is being sacrificed for 24 storey towers. The local public transport is inadequate and this development will mean an already heavily congested area could become unliveable.

In North Ryde the Cox’s Road development will change what is mostly a single storey quiet shopping village into a four – or possibly eight – storey development. More traffic means more safety and health issues and a lower quality of life for everyone.

The Greens know planning issues are never simple and can’t be covered in a document of the future like the O’Farrell government is proposing.

Malikeh Michels, Auburn Greens Councillor says, “Some suggest towers are the answer but I believe towers isolate people. It’s always a balancing act and nothing is ever black and white. We need development to prevent housing shortages and price rises but it’s got to be in appropriate areas. I am all for city houses and units in town centres and on corridors like Parramatta Road.”

Phil Bradley, Greens candidate for Parramatta Council says in the Parramatta LGA development interests are outweighing community needs. “Parramatta has the sixth largest commercial centre in Australia. It already has many multi-storey buildings, including apartments, but the proposed 55-storey tower next to Parramatta railway station, although well located close to services, is excessive in height and size and taller than the other tall buildings in the area.

Annie Nielsen, another Greens candidate for Parramatta Council says, “Greens are developing multi-storey buildings in context with their surroundings, with well supplemented community services and local transport. Maintaining public transport hubs must be the benchmark. This is a sensible way of reducing damaging urban sprawl into precious bushland remnants and open space, including vital agricultural land.”

Contrary to O’Farrell’s Green Paper, communities across NSW need a greater say, not less on development and planning. More Greens voices on local councils will mean more community consultation and input.
Big Society and its implications for Australia

by James Whelan, Research Director, Centre for Policy Development

It is just over two years since David Cameron was elected as British Prime Minister. Since his election, Cameron has implemented a range of policy changes that are considered to have ‘redefined the role of the state’ and, correspondingly, the roles of the private and community sectors.

These ‘Big Society’ changes were first articulated by Phillip Blond, director of UK think tank ResPublica in his 2010 book ‘Red Tory’. Here, Blond drew on ideas, assumptions, values and policies that have previously been associated with the ‘Third Way’, including a commitment to a smaller state and an expanded role for the community sector.

Some ‘Big Society’ champions espouse ‘private sector primacy’ – the belief that businesses are intrinsically more effective and efficient than public sector organisations. Cameron and other Ministers associated with the ‘Big Society’ changes have promoted the idea of funding a more diverse range of service providers, including new or hybrid forms of service delivery organisations such as mutuals, spin-offs and cooperatives. In reality, existing corporations have dominated the outsourcing process.

Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ changes have been criticised by many community leaders for their negative impacts on the voluntary sector. In the UK, as in Australia, volunteers already play a major role in the lives of their communities. Cameron’s changes assume that community members are willing to commit much more time and energy to providing services previously delivered by public servants: an assumption that is not supported by surveys and potentially compounds existing inequalities.

The UK’s ‘Big Society’ appeal to widely-held values about citizen empowerment, co-production, diversity and community autonomy while implementing changes that have transferred public wealth to corporations, disempowered non-government organisations and weakened the public sector. ‘Big Society’ has generated widespread criticism and sparked a social movement that upholds some of its values – such as the support for a strong and diverse community sector, and the need for public services to be responsive and accountable to their users – while rejecting Cameron’s policies and programs.

In Australia, ‘Big Society’ ideas are generating interest and support amongst conservative think tanks and politicians. During Phillip Blond’s Australian visit in mid-2011, he was introduced to a ‘friend of Australia’ by Tony Abbott to address a forum convened by Liberal Party think tank, the Menzies Research Institute. During his visit, Blond briefed senior Liberals and local government officials. Elements of Cameron’s agenda have been endorsed by the Centre for Civil Society, the Centre for Social Impact, the Sydney Institute and by the Institute of Public Affairs whose director, John Roskam, urged Tony Abbott to adopt the ‘Big Society’ program.

It’s important in Australia that the merits of ‘small government’ ideologies and policies are properly debated and given critical media and political commentary before a dismantling occurs in Australian communities that will have far reaching implications.

James Whelan is the author of Big Society: How the UK Government is Dismantling the State and What it Means for Australia. Visit http://tiny.cc/32w0gw to download the full report. He is also a director of www.changeagency.org

Is impact of carbon price on local government a load of rubbish?

by Colin Hesse

Like the temperature of the world, the heat generated by the discussion around pricing carbon emissions has increased the political temperature, while doing little to shed any light on how a carbon price will impact our community.

Each level of government will be affected by carbon pricing, and in the case of local government those effects will be in three main areas: the cost of electricity (in particular the cost of electricity for street lighting), CO2 emissions from waste, and other pass-on costs, primarily through building materials.

Accorded a range published by the Sydney Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC) in Perth, the cost of the carbon price for local government will be “around one third of the economic impact of the introduction of the Goods and Services tax”.

The NSW Government’s conservative Independent Pricing and Regulatory Authority approved a rate rise this year for all councils in NSW of 3.6%, of which the carbon price component was 0.4% of the increase.

A carbon price is widely agreed to be both the most effective and cheapest way of moving Australia to a lower carbon future. The pricing of carbon has already driven significant savings by local government to the way waste is managed, in particular by the extraction of methane and by increasing recycling.

Senator Lea Rhiannon joined protesters against Income Management outside Bankstown’s Centerlink on 2 July. Bankstown local government area is one of five trial sites in the national income management program that quarantines up to 70 per cent of welfare payments. It first started in the Northern Territory intervention.

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If you see false carbon tax price hikes, you can call 1300 303 689 or visit www.scamwatch.gov.au
Ballina: A Coastal Planning Nightmare

by Isabel McIntosh

Two years ago when Ballina hosted the NSW Coastal Conference a king tide flooded the streets, washing salt water up through drains and increasing erosion on the beach. Delegates saw for themselves the severe challenges this coastal town in northern NSW faces from the realities of sea level rise. King tides regularly inundate Ballina streets and heavy rain events also make this large catchment area susceptible to flooding. Yet Ballina Council recently rezoned old cane farming land – the lowest lying land in the Shire – to support a new industrial and residential zone. The NSW State Government is also pushing for low lying areas to be approved for new housing and industrial estates. Greens Councillor Jeff Johnson says new nursing homes and high care facilities should not be there. “Recently a draft evacuation plan showed just a five hour window to evacuate the town during a major flood,” he says. “There are councillors reluctant to accept the realities of sea level rise and abandon plans that have been in the pipeline for a decade or more.”

During king tide events more than a foot of salt water comes up through pipes onto the main street and it is rusting away the infrastructure as well as cars that drive through thinking its fresh water. There are also ongoing issues with sewage when the low lying land floods. “When sewage and infrastructure actually pack it in the situation will be critical,” says Johnson. “We have to be planning for the future now.”

Jeff Johnson was elected to Ballina Council in 2008 and will be standing for re-election in September.

Saving lives and respecting refugee rights

Why the Greens voted against the Migration Legislation Amendment (Ball Process) Bill

The Greens want a long-term and compassionate regional approach that will help refugees. The UNHCR, Amnesty International, legal experts and advocates like the Refugee Council of Australia have said that sending desperate refugees who make it to Australian territory back to Indonesia or Malaysia or to Nauru will not deter them from seeking safety, and it will not save lives. This is because there is currently no other way for most of them to get to Australia. In the first three months of 2012 Australia took only 17 UNHCR refugees from Indonesia. The Greens did not support the amended bill as it would not provide a humane solution for refugees and it:

- Removed protections under the Migration Act to enable the Minister to deport asylum seekers arriving in Australian territory by boat to any country that has signed the Bali Process (www.baliprocess.net/).
- Did not meet Australia’s legal obligations as a signatory to the Refugee Convention
- Ignored the detrimental impact that Nauru had on health of asylum seekers and why it was closed by Kevin Rudd in 2008.
- Was not a compromise that would save lives but removed all human rights protections from Australia’s migration laws
- Would not stop refugees from drowning and could push desperate people onto boats making even more arduous journeys to New Zealand or Canada (even after John Howard introduced temporary protection visas and the so-called “Pacific Solution” 353 women and children drowned en route to Australia)

The Greens policy aims to provide resources at the source and quickly resettle refugees and proposed the following immediate and practical actions:

- Increase Australia’s humanitarian intake of refugees, especially from Malaysia and Indonesia
- Fund more urgent UNHCR refugee assessments in those countries, so people can be resettled to safety as quickly and fairly as possible
- Ensure search and rescue practices and arrangements with Indonesia are effective and clear

The Greens did not support the amended bill as it would not stop refugees from

The O’Farrell government is falsely blaming the carbon price for soaring electricity bills. The real culprit though is the $17.9 billion that NSW households have been forced to pay for new wires, poles and substations, many of which are unnecessary. NSW Greens MP John Kaye (centre) has been challenging the Premier to drop the deceptive blame game and start addressing the real causes of rising electricity bills.

Marine Parks Crossword

After a ten-year campaign it was announced last month that Australia’s most precious ocean environments will be protected by the world’s largest network of marine reserves. See if you can sustain the same focus to complete this special Greenvoice crossword.

Across
1. Round ocean reptile
5. An inlet
6. Type of seal
8. The other hippocampus
9. “Little” migratory bird
10. Made by polyps
11. Hand gesture
12. World heritage reef in WA
13. A spill means disaster
14. Oil and gas co.

Down
1. Form of renewable energy
2. To save for future generations
4. Sea north of Darwin
7. Type of dolphin
8. Enables wind propulsion
12. We need to act…

If you would like to design the next crossword, please email office@nsw.greens.org.au

The O’Farrell government is falsely blaming the carbon price for soaring electricity bills. The real culprit though is the $17.9 billion that NSW households have been forced to pay for new wires, poles and substations, many of which are unnecessary. NSW Greens MP John Kaye (centre) has been challenging the Premier to drop the deceptive blame game and start addressing the real causes of rising electricity bills.

Narrandera Town Hall is at the junction of the Sturt and Newell highways in Western NSW. Across the 152 local government areas in New South Wales, town halls are an important part of community life.
Donations reform breathes fresh air into council elections

by Justin Field, Greens Candidate for Shoalhaven Council

Even small donations to council candidates and parties in local government elections can have a substantial influence on the result.

However, under new NSW legislation only individual citizens listed on the electoral roll can now donate to political parties and candidates – and only to a maximum of $5000 to a political party or $2000 to any one candidate. No longer can corporations or any organisations, including developers, make political donations. The Greens have long championed such changes which were passed by the O’Farrell government earlier this year with the support of the NSW Greens.

This reform, while largely a response to the perception that political donations were buying influence at the state level, will have a significant impact within local government and the upcoming council elections in September will be the first to be conducted under these new laws.

In the past, even a few thousand dollars donated by an organisation could significantly boost a local campaign by funding election materials such as flyers, posters and advertising in local papers and on local radio. When the donor was an organisation with a specific interest in council decisions such as rezoning or local development, the potential for a conflict of interest was substantial. Add to this the fact that there is often less media scrutiny of local council decisions and the circumstances become ripe for a ‘cash for decisions’ culture to grow – or at the very least the perception that political donations could buy influence.

This new ban on corporate and organisational political donations will dramatically reduce money spent on September’s local government election campaign and this will benefit voters. The Greens believe policies, not advertising dollars, should determine election results and that new candidates running in local government elections will have a much clearer field to represent community interests.

There is still the need for future reform to donations laws as they relate to local councils such as capping total expenditure allowed by political parties and candidates and improving the auditing and compliance regime. However the reforms to date are a great step towards ensuring local government remains truly local.

Corporate fundraising and the ability to buy advertising and saturate local streets with election flyers should never be the measure of a local candidate.

Justin Field is running as a Greens candidate in the Shoalhaven Local Council Elections. Read more at www.justinfield.wordpress.com

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