

Initiatives of Change Conference:

"AUSTRALIA AS A NEIGHBOUR"

International House, Melbourne, Australia, 12-16 January 2007

Workshop: "Environmental Initiatives of Change."

Presenters: Deane Belfield (Eco2Sys Consulting, <http://www.eco2sys.com>), **Nithi Nesadurai** (Environment Protection Society, Malaysia) and **Tom Duncan** (Ecoplan Consulting, <http://www.ecoplan.net.au> and AlgaFuels Pty Ltd, <http://www.algafuels.com>).

The Workshop over two days was attended to full capacity and brought issues such as Climate Change, Drought, Environmental Disasters, Cost-efficient Renewable Energy, the Food vs. Fuel debate, Nuclear Power & Nuclear Waste, and Carbon Taxes back to the question: "How can I as an individual make an Environmental Initiative of Change in my life that will be part of the solution?" Information was given on what we can do in our household such as switching to Government Accredited Green Power (such as Jack Green, a Wind Farm Power Generation Company), and organizations to support who are active in the Climate Change arena (<http://www.greenpeace.org> & <http://www.foe.org>).

Presenters gave an overview of their awakening to environmental issues. Deane Belfield and Tom Duncan both come from rural backgrounds, and both had been in situations, where they felt it necessary to apply Gandhi's approach of direct action, facing arrest and imprisonment, for an act of civil disobedience, against laws which fly in the face of common sense and moral conscience. Both related to the conservation of rivers and forests, the key drivers in halting desertification and drought and overall climate change. They are also active in consulting to Government, Corporate and Community Organisations in Australia and internationally. They are seeking investors into their efforts for climate change solutions in wastewater treatment technology, renewable energy and biofuels development.

Nithi Nesadurai of Environment Protection Society, Malaysia, is working through a Community Organisation to influence Government and Industry by applying the United Nations Blueprint for Ecologically Sustainable Development: Agenda 21. Nithi is an active participant in the COPP meetings for nations to thrash out differences and attempt to move forward on the Kyoto Protocol.

As Neo-Liberal Economics and the all too common "What's in it for me?" attitude has appeared, ethics are seen as something one can leave at home for the family, while at work anything goes as long as it toes the line for profit and productivity. But drought saps livelihoods or impacts business Bottom Lines. Convenor of Beyond the Bottom Line session Day of the Conference, Mohan Bhagwandas, put it nicely, "We cannot afford to ignore the environment any more".

Australia has again ignored international efforts and agreements for the sake of interests in coal, oil, gas and uranium. Australia is the highest carbon dioxide emitter and has the largest Ecological Footprint per capita globally. Australians have an average of 7.7 Hectare Ecological Footprint for all the natural resources consumed and our excessive usage of fossil fuels. If all people in the world lived the way Australians live, we would need 3 additional planet Earth's. Can we afford that?

Facing Climate Change may incur costs to some parts of the economy but it will be a boon for other parts of the economy including renewable energy and carbon neutral biofuels. We need to make the vote of moral conscience in this time of dire need.

The Nicholas Stern Report on the Economics of Climate Change released by the British Treasury (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/sternreview_index.cfm) was a turning point in the recent history of Climate Change politics. It highlighted that 10-20% of Global GDP would be wiped off the balance sheets of our world's Nations, if we failed to put a miniscule 1% of Global GDP investment per year into Renewable Energy and Price Carbon into the Market. The seas could rise flooding of the homes of over 2 billion people within the next 50-100 years. Our Pacific neighbours, Tuvalu and Kiribati citizens, are already facing the new unenviable title of "Environmental Refugee".

A letter was drafted at the end of the conference, signed by many of those present and sent to our political leaders in Australia asking them to act for the Common Good.

*Report by **Tom Duncan** [edited P. Thwaites]*