



Annual Report – July 2017

Introduction

At the time of BCCAG's last AGM, our hopes were still high that the new Turnbull government would begin to take real action to deal with the challenges of climate change looming large. But it soon became clear that any hopes the Government would act were misplaced. The need for BCCAG and groups like BCCAG to act and grab the attention of the public was paramount.

So we decided to start 2017 with a big event that would attract a large crowd, particularly from amongst sections of the community we don't normally attract. We wanted to use that event to talk of a climate emergency.

The well-publicised 'Facing the Climate Crisis' event in February took place at Brighton Grammar School and attracted a record attendance of some 350 participants. They came to hear Tim Flannery on a panel with 2 other guest speakers, Alison Rowe from the Future Business Council and Laura Sykes from the Australian Youth Climate Coalition. It should be noted that roughly 60% of attendees were new to BCCAG. They were not listed on our mailing list.

Flannery set the tone, not only for that event but for much of our activity to come when he said that, in the absence of leadership from Government, leadership must come from the community.

At the last AGM, we saw the election of an excellent group of keen members to the BCCAG board but also the retirement of 2 long serving, dedicated and experienced outgoing board members. Then, during the first few months that the new board had been working together, 2 of its key members had to resign, each for pressing personal reasons, our Secretary Anne Tourney and President, Lynette Luther.

That cumulative loss of experience and expertise made for a difficult few months of reorganisation and redistribution of responsibilities.

In addition to running our monthly public forums on topical issues we decided to pursue a range of additional activities. These included maintaining contact with and lobbying of our local federal and state MPs, interaction with Bayside City Council on sustainability and their '*carbon neutrality by 2020 plan*' and running campaigns in co-ordination with other climate action and environment groups.

Monthly Public Forums

Since last August, monthly public forums have included:

- Aug. 16: David Spratt, Climate Reality Challenges and Solutions
- Sept. 16: Chris Cole, RBG: Adapting the Melbourne Gardens to climate change scenarios
- Oct. 16: Sam Castro: TPP & Climate Change: Corporate Interest vs The National Interest
- Nov. 16: BCCAG 10th Anniversary Gig: Simon Kerr's Music for a Warming World
- Feb. 17: Tim Flannery, Alison Rowe, Laura Sykes: Facing the Climate Crisis
- Mar 17: Mark Wakeham, After Hazelwood: What's next for Australia's Power
- Apr 17: Film screening, After the Flood with Leonardo DiCaprio

May 17: Danielle King, VicRes Scorecard for measuring home energy performance
June 17: Film screening, Guarding the Galilee – Impacts of the Adani Coal Mine
June 17: W. Van dePol & A. Carey, Finance, Super & Divesting from climate ch. drivers

Campaigning

We joined with the Victorian Climate Action Network (VCAN) to gain support for the Climate Emergency declaration and petition. It calls for federal and state politicians to act in the national interest, declare a climate emergency and mobilise a co-ordinated effort to restore a safe climate. The February Climate Crisis Forum served as the launch of our local campaign. To date our members have collected 655 signatures to the petition.

Following the February Forum, we established an Active Volunteer Group, now numbering some 56 volunteers. Since April, the group has held 11 weekly street actions as part of the Stop Adani campaign, first, targeting Westpac and then the Commbank, calling on the bank to rule out funding the Adani Mine. Five Commbank branches in Bayside/Goldstein have been targeted.

The Active Group also conducted an opinion survey of shoppers to gauge support for public funds going to the mine project. Twice the office of Tim Wilson MP was targeted, on the first occasion to hand over letters from the public opposing the mine and on the second occasion to hand over the results of our opinion survey. Attendance at our street rallies has varied from 15 to over 30.

With the agreement of Southland's Centre management, we ran a BCCAG information stall on 3rd June as a trial to attract attention to our activities. The stall attracted some attention and we plan to repeat this every few months.

Lobbying our local MPs

The newly elected Member for Goldstein, Tim Wilson MP has displayed a readiness to conduct an ongoing dialogue with us and we have kept up the pressure on him throughout the year, on climate and energy related issues. Last October, he conveyed a message to the PM on our behalf, to refrain from offering public funds to Adani and obtained a written reply for us from the PM. We have held four meetings with him in his office and between meetings have had several email exchanges. The issues covered include, policies to promote emissions reduction, responses to the SA energy crisis, removing regulatory barriers to the greater penetration of renewable energy, national security implications of climate change, the perversity of public funding being offered to Adani and the Finkel Review.

Tim has demonstrated that he reads the material we send him and he generally responds promptly and to the point. He believes in small government and the power of the free market. He has nevertheless, conceded to us that pragmatic policies to improve energy security and affordability as well reduce GHG emissions are needed and that he favours a policy along the lines that Finkel has proposed. He said that he is not yet ready to specify what initial emissions target he would support. On the question of public funding for the Carmichael Mine project, whilst he has noted our concerns, he says that he is against all government subsidies, whether to fossil fuel interests or renewable energy.

Whilst we have plans to meet our local state MP's, we have not as yet started this process. This task will hopefully be taken up by the new board.

Liaison with Bayside Council

Last July, we initiated a meeting with Councillor Laurie Evans to talk about poor responses we have had from Council over 2 submissions made by BCCAG in early 2016. In response to an email to the CEO by Laurie after our meeting, two meetings with staff were arranged. The first was with the Community Engagement Coordinator to discuss Council processes. The second was with the Manager of Sustainability and 2 of his staff. At that meeting we tabled a list of concerns about lack of evidence of real action to achieve Council's objective of carbon neutrality by 2020. Officers agreed that they had much work to do and they agreed to schedule quarterly meetings with BCCAG to report on and discuss progress.

Whilst 3 such quarterly meetings have now taken place and we have received reports as agreed, it would be difficult to show evidence of a substantial change, other than some movement towards a pilot program to assist pensioners obtain solar panels. The Council has appointed a new Sustainability Co-ordinator, filling a position that had been vacant. One matter that we are pursuing with Council is to support our proposal for a Community Solar Project, amongst other policies and actions we are pushing for.

We are pleased to note that Council voted to support a state government ban on single use plastic bags.

Community Solar Proposal

The Community Solar model that BCCAG would like to develop in Bayside in collaboration with Bayside City Council is based upon the Lismore business model, described at <http://farmingthesun.net/lismore/business-model/> In essence this comprises:

- A host body (e.g. Bayside Council) agrees to host a community solar farm.
- A community company established by BCCAG raises funds via a Private Investment Offer from community investors (maximum of 20 shareholders).
- The funds raised are then lent to the host body to build the solar farm
- The host body repays the loan with interest.
- The community shareholders receive franked dividends over the term of the loan (usually 7 years), and return of their initial funds at the end of the term.
- The host body receives renewable energy, electricity and emission savings, community / stakeholder partnerships and a high public profile!

Rather than Lismore's 99kW systems BCC could choose a smaller installation of say 20kW as an initial venture. We think there would be ample enthusiasm in the community to mobilise the investment funds needed for such a venture which would be a win-win for Council and the community.

Social Media and Webpage

Social media plays an important role in modern society. With this in mind we have started to overhaul our webpage to make it more attractive and up to date. We appointed a new webmaster to manage this process but there is still much to be done. We have also tried to keep our Facebook presence alive and initiated a Facebook discussion page, though with limited success.

We acknowledge assistance from Environment Victoria in this work. They have also helped us promote events of mutual interest.

Victorian Climate Action Network (VCAN)

BCCAG maintains contact and co-ordinates with other climate action groups through VCAN about such initiatives as the climate emergency petition. Through VCAN, we were able to promote our major February public forum much more widely, including promotion through the Sustainable Living Festival (SLF). We helped staff the VCAN stall at the SLF big weekend.

BCCAG has signed on to support a number of submissions to Government made by other VCAN affiliates. BCCAG itself initiated a last-minute submission on the proposed Narrabri CSG development in NSW, though through lack of time, other VCAN affiliates were not able to sign on.

Other Activities

During the year, BCCAG engaged with 3 other initiatives, Transition Streets the Elsternwick Park redevelopment and Take 2.

Transition Streets is a global program to engage street based communities to work together on community sustainability programs. We arranged with BCC for the printing of 20 manuals for the program and are working with 2 Bayside Community Houses to initiate this scheme amongst local residents.

We are supporting an ongoing campaign by the Elsternwick Park Coalition to have the northern area of the park redeveloped as a wetland and urban forest for flood mitigation and passive recreation after closure of the Golf Course. The campaign has gained wide public support but so far, has not been backed by Bayside Council.

Take 2 is a State Government Initiative to involve the community at different levels in emissions reduction initiatives. We signed on as a founding member but have not as yet taken any initiatives of our own to promote the program.

In Conclusion

We have had a particularly busy year and taken on a number of new initiatives and actions. Our higher profile has brought in 119 new members and friends, including 42 new registered members. We now have close to 700 members and friends on our data base.

As a result of our increased level of activity, our operating expenses in equipment, materials, stationary and venue hire have also increased. Income has not increased commensurately, resulting in a drop in our bank balance over the year of \$1,055, the second consecutive year that our bank balance has dropped. This clearly is not sustainable, a matter which the membership must address.

Some years ago, it was decided to abolish membership fees. Consequently, we now rely entirely on donations to keep going. We all need to take this situation on board and be willing to boost our small contributions at BCCAG activities. Alternatively we could decide to reinstate a small annual membership fee of say \$10. We do not know what impact that might have on our membership.

Finally, as Acting President, I wish to express my appreciation to all my colleagues on the board for their tireless work to achieve our aim of 'A safe climate for all'. We do what we do because we must.

David Rothfield