AJDS
AUSTRALIAN JEWISH DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

JUST VOICES

Issue #11, October 2016 – Climate Change

IN THIS ISSUE

Bonnie Monteleone, "What Goes Around, Comes Around", 2016 (see more in the Plastic Ocean Project)

As we experience climate change – some more than others, it is often with numbers that we get a sense of its scale: over half of the earth's surface poses critical danger to biodiversity; last June was the hottest on record, being the 14th month in a marathon of record breaking temperatures. We were disgusted when the Australian Government – concerned over tourism– censored UNESCO's report on coral bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef (as well as damage to the Tasmanian wilderness and Kakadu). Whether governments, industries and agribusiness take responsibility or not, we'll continue to see surface water levels dropping worldwide, heatwaves becoming more frequent and intense, and flooding and bush fires worsen.

When prompted to discuss climate change, some within our ranks ask why this is relevant to the AJDS. Well, not only is the environment a primary necessity for any type of activism a basic physical level, climate change will continue to manifest in human societies along socio-economic and political lines. Developing countries will suffer the consequences of rising water levels and pollution first, while Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders will be disproportionately affected by climate change here. Traditional owners of this land and their intrinsic knowledge of natural systems must be involved in the solution, but we suspect they won't be without further action.

Societal collapse borne of increasingly uninhabitable conditions will create more refugees, and their reception (or rejection) will rely on the rank politics of nationalism and racism. It is also no secret that many companies, including the Jewish National Fund, operate under the guise of environmentalist organisations, the JNF is in fact an agent of environmental, as well as cultural, devastation (read more at whatsbehindjnf.org.au). Water shortages in the Middle East have played an important role in the ongoing conflict there, and this problem will not be going away. Global climate change requires both global and local action.

We embrace Jewish teachings borne of Biblical and Talmudic teachings that encourage cultivating and safeguarding our environment for future generations. But another uniting premise for the action taken by AJDS members has always been to advocate for social justice, and there can be no such justice without clean water and air, and sustainable practices.

Our organisation considers climate change and the environment as one of our core issues for all of these reasons. This issue of *Just Voices* captures the links between social justice activism and progressive environmentalism.

Keep in touch and send in your thoughts and comments to editor@ajds.org.au.

Keren Rubinstein, AJDS Content Editor

What you can do:

- Write to your local representative to ask what is being done in your area to reduce waste and support green businesses, ask as well what poisons are currently being used by the local council, and why.

- If you are a home owner, install solar panels.

- Divest from funds that profit from fossil fuels.

- Eat less meat, eggs and dairy.

- Consider boycotting companies with poor environmental records, like BP and Nestlé.

AJDS Environment Policy

We are living at a time of unprecedented biophysical crisis. Human civilisation is facing a perfect storm of problems driven by climate change, environmental destruction and pollution, biodiversity loss and resource depletion, all of which are intensifying global socio-economic and regional problems.

Two centuries of exploitation of readily accessible energy resources have facilitated a population explosion and driven ongoing land clearing and exploitation to satisfy ever-growing human consumption. Land and water resources, including waterways and marine environments have been degraded and polluted. Biodiversity loss, both terrestrial and marine, has accelerated due to over-harvesting and loss of natural habitat compounded by climate change. This loss is threatening to collapse the very ecosystem services on which all life depends.

Entrenched inequalities worldwide are rising, feeding social alienation, political upheavals, the growth of fundamentalism and an escalating refugee crisis. Climate change is hitting the have-nots hardest and will amplify social and political unrest.

Climate change and population movements are also producing new threats of global epidemics. Threats of war over increasingly scarce, sought-after resources, are likely to intensify.

The ruling political philosophy is built on the erroneous belief in infinite growth on a finite planet. This blind belief, which underpins neo-liberal globalisation, is at the core of the biophysical crisis that confronts us. The challenge besetting all progressive movements today is to find a common path to confront this global crisis.*

Guiding Principles

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society places itself amongst progressive voices globally, striving for peace and social justice for all of humanity. Today, the progressive vision has inevitably become entwined with environmentalism. A holistic progressive vision recognises that social goals cannot be achieved in a world threatened by climate catastrophe and environmental destruction.

The need to restore the health of the biosphere and the stability of the climate system has become an integral part of the progressive struggle. Furthermore, the struggle to attain vital environmental goals can only be realised through the adoption of new economic and social paradigms based on ecological sustainability.

The proposition that nuclear energy is a clean and safe alternative to coal must be rejected outright as a false claim leading to a myriad of problems along the nuclear fuel cycle.

Climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately impact already disadvantaged peoples and those whose lives are directly tied to the land.

A viable future for humanity is predicated on building sustainable systems that respect the natural world and exist within its bounds but crosses borders.

What we do

- We are committed to reducing our environmental impact. We are guided by the principle of ecological sustainability throughout our operational activities.
- Staff and members are called upon to reduce their consumption of energy and materials and to recycle where possible. We minimise printing and use recycled paper with 100% recycled content with post consumer fibre.
- We evaluate the environmental impact of any new products and office supplies we intend to purchase.
- We use Serversaurus, a carbon neutral web host.
- We encourage our members and supporters to consider the environment in their day-to-day lives.
- We engage with other organisations in order to address the issue of ecological sustainability.
- We support moves by environmental movements globally to recognise the social justice aspects of environmental conservation.
- We support the work of various environmental organisations and join them in organising events and campaigns.
- We support Indigenous led campaigns to protect areas of significance and to be able to manage their lands sustainably, recognising that Aboriginal people have developed intricate and complex land management practices over millennia, suited to their countries.
- We draw attention to the ecological degradation and disregard for indigenous rights caused by the JNF's afforestation programs and promote alternatives. whatsbehindjnf.com

* This Background is drawn from the paper, *Environment and development challenges: The imperative to act.* Bruntland and Ehrlich et al (2012). International Institute of Environment and Development, and International Union for the Conservation of Nature,Conservation International

Read more on our Environment Campaign page at ajds.org.au/feature/environment

Climate emergency

By David Rothfield.

It hardly got media coverage but, yes, they said it. Those gathered for the U.S. Democratic Party Convention last July declared that they could not to wait for others "…to lead the world in combating the climate emergency" (my emphasis). The closing declaration of the Convention went on to say that "... our generation (must) now lead a World War II-type national mobilization to save civilization from catastrophic consequences."

If Hillary Clinton wins the Presidency, then, in the words of the Declaration, "within the first 100 days of the next administration, the President will convene a summit of the world's best engineers, climate scientists, climate experts, policy experts, activists and indigenous communities to chart a course toward the healthy future we all want for our families and communities."

This must be the first time that the term 'emergency' has been embraced by any major political party in relation to the climate crisis. It has taken some ground-shaking climate events, as well as a measure of success on the part of the global climate movement to bring about this new dynamic.

The year 2014 had the distinction of being declared the hottest year, globally, on record. The record didn't last long because, in short succession, 2015 beat that record and now, based on weather records of the first 8 months of 2016, this year is set to be declared hotter than the previous 2 'hottest' years. For the first time, NASA has published a 'mid-year' climate analysis, in which they reported that each month so far, this year, "has been the warmest respective month globally, in the modern temperature record" which dates back to 1880.

The added energy in the global climate system has been causing record-breaking storms and cyclone damage around the globe, most notably in our back yard, in the western pacific. There have been record-breaking heat waves and drought events across the Indian sub-continent, with temperatures in the 50s for days on end. Similarly, record-breaking droughts, accompanied by widespread crop loss and starvation have swept across Southern and Eastern Africa as well as Central America and South-East Asia where Vietnam and Papua New Guinea have been particularly affected.

Warm pacific temperatures have been killing the Great Barrier Reef with a record-breaking bleaching event, affecting 93% of the reef.

These warm temperatures have been leaving their mark in the Arctic too, which has experienced increased melting of ice cover for over a decade. The ice cover, this northern summer, was 40% less than the prevailing average cover of the 70s and early 80s.

Reduced ice cover has flow-on warming effects due to the albedo phenomenon, the changing reflectivity of the earth's surface. Heat reflective white surfaces, are being replaced by heat absorbing blue, brown and even green surfaces across the Arctic. This amplifies and accelerates the global warming trend.

To cap off the reasons why politicians should be worried, there is new evidence that global warming is having a greater toll on Antarctic ice cover than previously thought. New studies have revised estimates of sea level rise this century with the Antarctic alone potentially adding 1 m. to previous estimates. The latest estimates of sea-level rise are up to 2 m. within the lifetime of many of our grandchildren.

The Paris Climate Conference has been hailed as a success, though that depends on what your measure of success is. If all signatories to the Agreement fulfill the commitments they brought to Paris, we may succeed to reduce a predicted catastrophic temperature rise of 4° C to a disastrous 3° C, still well short of the aim of 1.5° C to 2.0° C.

But is even 1.5° C, average increase safe? Such an increase will kill the entire Barrier Reef. By the end of this century, it will cause what today is still regarded as a 1:100-year storm event to become a frequent event every year along Australia's eastern seaboard. Such events leave hundreds of thousands without power and have many thousands evacuated from their homes. In Victoria, events such as the 2009 bushfires will become frequent. In Melbourne we will experience sea-level rise of possibly 2 m, sufficient, with added storm surge to flood Docklands, large parts of South Melbourne, Albert Park and Elwood, as well as beach fronts all along the Mornington Peninsula. As Prof. David Karoly, climate scientist from the University of Melbourne says, "Our climate is not safe now, so what does dangerous climate change mean?"

The U.S. will not be alone if it adopts an emergency climate change mobilisation program. China is already making rapid strides to bring its carbon emissions under control and achieve its ambitious emissions reduction targets, an expanding economy notwithstanding. India is not far behind.

Australia is still committed to a policy based on keeping our coal industry in business and expanding coal exports. That both China and India are rapidly phasing out coal imports has not yet registered.

The environment movement meanwhile is mobilizing to declare 2017, the year for declaring a global climate emergency. It will centre around a declaration for which mass support is to be sort. That declaration can be found here:

http://climateemergencydeclaration.org/#sthash.vTQ75aMg.dpbs

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South Australia's push to be the world's nuclear waste dump

By Jim Green.

The South Australian Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission released its report in May. Its main recommendation was to consider turning SA into the world's nuclear waste dump by importing 138,000 tonnes of high level nuclear waste and 390,000 cubic metres of intermediate level nuclear waste.

How much money might be made by taking nuclear waste from other countries? There is no precedent to base an estimate on. There is a great deal of uncertainty about potential revenue, and it is far from certain that revenue would exceed the Royal Commission's $145 billion estimate of the costs associated with the project. The economic case presented by the Royal Commission was strongly challenged by economist Prof. Richard Blandy, by The Australia Institute and others. Yet those critiques were ignored by the Royal Commission and by the state government.

The Royal Commission glossed over major contradictions in its proposal. For example the assumption is that high level nuclear waste will first be imported for storage to accrue funds to build a deep underground repository. But what if efforts to establish a repository come to nothing – as they have in many other countries? South Australia will be stuck with thousands of tonnes of nuclear waste, most likely on the Eyre Peninsula or the west coast, with no capacity to dispose of it and no return-to-sender clause.

The Royal Commission glosses over the fact that Australia has not yet been able to find a disposal site for our own relatively small stockpiles of low and intermediate level waste. Attempts to impose a national nuclear waste dump in SA by the Howard government failed. Later attempts to impose a dump in the NT failed. And the current attempt to impose a national dump in the Flinders Ranges is being fiercely opposed and will almost certainly fail.

So the proposition is that we should attempt storage and disposal of high level nuclear waste even though attempts to manage low and intermediate level waste have as yet been unsuccessful. And the proposition is that we should attempt storage and disposal of vast amounts of foreign waste even though we have not yet found a solution for Australia's much smaller stockpile of radioactive waste. Those propositions are reckless and irresponsible.

The public health and environmental risks are profound. Professor John Veevers from Macquarie University wrote in Australian Geologist about the risks associated with a high level nuclear waste repository: "Tonnes of enormously dangerous radioactive waste in the northern hemisphere, 20,000 kms from its destined dump in Australia where it must remain intact for at least 10,000 years. These magnitudes − of tonnage, lethality, distance of transport, and time − entail great inherent risk."

It should be noted that no country has completed construction of a deep underground repository for high level nuclear waste. There is one deep underground repository for intermediate level nuclear waste – the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in the USA – but it has been closed since February 2014 due to a chemical explosion in one of the underground nuclear waste barrels. A U.S. government report details the many failings of the operator and the regulator that caused the WIPP accident.

The Royal Commission had little or nothing to say about other problems overseas, e.g. fires at radioactive waste repositories, the current project to exhume 126,000 waste barrels from a dump in Germany following extensive water infiltration and corrosion, the liquid nuclear waste explosion at Mayak in the USSR, and many others.

Separately, the federal government is also trying to establish a nuclear waste dump in SA – this one for national nuclear waste, much of it from the nuclear research reactor site at Lucas Heights, south of Sydney.

The federal government has identified a site near Hawker in South Australia's Flinders Ranges. The site was nominated by former Liberal Senator Grant Chapman but he has precious little connection to the land. Conversely, the land has been precious to Adnyamathanha Traditional Owners for millennia. The fact that the government is once again targeting a 'remote' Aboriginal site – following previous, failed attempts to impose a dump on the land of Aboriginal people in SA and the NT – is beyond comprehension and creates a lot of frustration and hurt. Regina McKenzie, an Adnyamathanha elder living at Yappala station, just kilometres away from the proposed site, says that the proposal is "an attack on our cultural beliefs, history and heritage."

McKenzie explains: "Adnyamathanha Traditional Owners weren't consulted about the nomination. Even Traditional Owners who live next to the proposed dump site at Yappala Station weren't consulted. The proposed dump site is adjacent to the Yappala Indigenous Protected Area. On the land with the proposed dump site, we have been working for many years to register heritage sites with the SA government. The area is Adnyamathanha land. It is Arngurla Yarta (spiritual land). The proposed dump site has countless thousands of Aboriginal artefacts. Our ancestors are buried there. The nominated site is a significant women's site. Throughout the area are registered cultural heritage sites and places of huge importance to our people."

The site is subject to earthquakes and tremors, at least half a dozen times each year. And although it seems like desert to the unknowing eye, it is flood land. The water comes from the hills and floods the plains, including the proposed dump site. The last flood in 2006 uprooted massive trees in the area, while an earlier flood destroyed an entire township.

Regina McKenzie, in the name of the Adnyamathanya people, calls on "all South Australians − all Australians − to support us in our struggle" and she states that "Adnyamathanha Traditional Owners will fight the proposal for a nuclear waste dump on our land for as long as it takes to stop it."

So what should be done with Australia's radioactive waste? Around 95 percent is securely stored at two Commonwealth sites – Defence Department land in SA, and the Lucas Heights site south of Sydney. It is by no means clear that any waste needs to be moved, and there certainly isn't any urgency. A number of organisations calls for an independent investigation into all possible options since years; being rigorously ignored by the government which keeps pursuing its central remote dump preferred option.

Dr Jim Green is the national nuclear campaigner with Friends of the Earth, Australia.

Live Exports and Climate Change

Animals Australia, along with three Israeli animal protection groups – Anonymous for Animal Rights, Let the Animals Live, and Israel Against Live Shipments – have launched a campaign to end live exports.

The trade is objectionable to most Australians, due to the horrific conditions sheep and cattle are subjected to on the long voyages, and also upon arrival, where they are kept in feedlots until an often cruel and unregulated slaughter. All in all, these animals are kept in extremely unclean, overcrowded and unattended conditions for months. A great deal has already been written elsewhere about this ongoing horror.

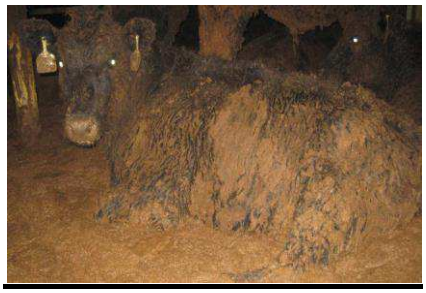
But animal welfare is not necessarily a motive for those concerned over climate change. Here are some reasons I learned for condemning live exports also for environmental reasons:

The shipping of live animals for slaughter overseas is carried out by extremely polluting ships running on diesel fuel.

Upon arrival, excessive pollution is produced by cows in feedlots, by the concentrated animal sewage.

Then, countries often import grain for the feedlots, which in turn perpetuates the unsustainable grain industry in those poorer countries (this results in Dutch Disease – the decline of other sectors to give rise to grain production for export). Export-based economies put local producers at a disadvantage in different ways. But back to the environment.

Yet, Animals Australia has focused on animal welfare in its campaign to stop live exports. It also decided to support the Israeli animal rights NGOs in the hope that if Israel no longer imports Australian meat-producing animals, then its neighbour, Jordan, to which Australia exports a far higher number of livestock, might cease to do so as well.



A cow wallowing in faeces on board a ship.

Since New Zealand ceased the live export trade over a decade ago, its economy has benefitted, and of course so have the sheep.

What's crucial to remember is the link between the beef industry and commercial vested interests. And agribusiness is extremely powerful. Meat production practices, combined with the forest clearing needed to produce grain for feed, together account for an untold percentage of carbon emissions. It seems outrageous that the myriad unsavoury effects of all this should go largely concealed while the status quo is maintained.

Tabbita feedlot, NSW

Visit Animals Australia to find out how you can help this campaign.

The Water Conundrum of the Middle East

By Timetraveller (pseud.)

As populations of the Middle East become more urbanised and adopt Western-style living standards, the demands on the area's water resources will become more immediate and desperate. Of 33 countries worldwide predicted to suffer severe water shortages by 2040 due to changing populations and life-styles, as well as the effects of climate change, the Water Resources Institute lists 14 in the Middle East - among them Israel. These countries are already heavily dependent on water extraction from ground sources, aquifers and desalination, and deteriorating factors will most likely result in unprecedented demands on the water infrastructures of those countries. An immediate example can be seen in Syria, where the civil war has been partly blamed on a prolonged drought, resulting in people who previously lived on the land losing their livelihoods and moving into urban centres, thus destabilising that country.

Israel is a special case in this area, since, due to its large urbanised Western immigration, it is amongst the most economically developed countries in the region; add to that the immeasurable benefits it enjoys through the benevolence of the United States. With the foundation of the modern state of Israel, the earliest Zionists immediately realised the importance of the water economy and efforts were made at the outset to conserve water and educate the population about this priceless resource.

That has led, over the years, to Israel becoming an international leader in water conservation and recyling. Seth M. Siegel, author of 'Let There Be Water' (2015), in his highly commended investigation of the subject, proposes that not only is Israel a world leader in exporting water saving and rescuing technologies, but that the export of this expertise and promotion of the technology will also serve as a force for international peace. In so doing, he states that Israel could help rescue the populations of the world from an increasingly water-starved future.

How has Israel achieved this unique situation? Without getting too technical, it has been done by recycling all water - sewage, industrial and agricultural - as well as the construction of massive water desalination plants. Stormwater is also pumped back into aquifers for storage. Israeli agronomists and engineers have developed such innovative practices as drip-irrigation and drought-tolerant plants. (It may come as a surprise, but Tel Aviv receives a similar annual amount of rain as London - 524 mm compared to 594 mm; however, the annual rainfall patterns are vastly different, resulting in vastly different landscapes). So the image of a desert - at least on the coastal plain of Israel - is somewhat erroneous - if one only considers total annual rainfall. Certainly the Negev and the Beka'a Valley are arid zones with very little intermittent rainfall.

Having said all this, it seems somewhat inconsistent that such a large part of its economy (3.6%) is based on the export of high quality agricultural produce where the relatively warm winter climate enables the growth of lush out-of-season produce for export to wintry Europe. However, this export comes at cost because there is a large water investment in the produce, as well as the water in the product itself. Thus Israel is, in fact, exporting water. This resulted, recently, in the somewhat mythic Jaffa orange orchards of Israeli being uprooted due to the excessive amounts of water required to grow the trees and produce the crops.

So how does all this tally up. On the one hand climatologists have predicted severe water shortages in the region versus a country which not only exports water in the form of agricultural produce, but will benevolently export its knowhow to escape those countries' predicament. For a foretaste of the future, perhaps we should look at the current situation as it applies to Israel's closest neighbour - the Palestinians. A recent Al Jazeera publication raised the question of peace and water by accusing Israel of using water to dominate the Palestinian population. Chuck Spinney, writing in Consortium News corroborated this saying:

> Access to water is one of the most fundamental and least discussed issues underpinning the Israeli – Palestinian conflict (as well as the recurring pattern of Israel's conflicts with Syria and Lebanon). Control of the West Bank's water resources is intimately tied into the growing pattern of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and, if left unchecked, Israel's inevitable annexation of Area C (60 percent) of the West Bank (thereby formalizing the Gazification of Areas A & B). Water resources are also intimately woven into pattern of destruction in Israel's siege of the Gaza ghetto.

Historically, the Oslo Interim Agreement in 1995 set the stage enabling Israeli authorities to secure 71 percent of the water resources of the Jordan River and the Alpine Aquifer (an aquifer located beneath both Israel and the West Bank) compared to the total Palestinians allocation of 17 percent. (This was accounted for by the Palestinian population being much smaller than the Israeli population at the time of the Accord's signature). Today the figures for sharing these water resources are 87 and 13 percent respectively, in spite of changes in population figures. In addition, Mekorot, the Israeli water authority, restricts water flows to

Palestinians on the West Bank, creating a hegemonic imbalance. Over the years of occupation, Israeli authorities have disrupted the up-keep and development of water resources in the West Bank, thus wells which have been over-used and run dry are not able to be deepened for access to water. Furthermore, Palestinians are prohibited from drawing water from the Jordan River.

A joint body - the Joint Water Committee (where Israel has "de-facto veto power") has successfully handicapped Palestinian efforts to rejuvenate and expand their water infrastructure. Al Jazeera reports, "As reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the ICA has refused between 2010 and 2014 98.5 percent of the Palestinian building permit applications for Area C projects."

It also reports that since 2016 alone, over 50 water and sanitation projects have been demolished on the grounds that they lacked the relevant Israeli permits. To put this in clear focus, Al Jazeera notes that the average Israeli has access to around 240 litres of water per day, with settlers having 300 litres; "…while Palestinians in the West Bank are left with 73 litres - well below the World Health Organisation's minimum standard of 100".

The coercive nature of the Israeli authorities in the field of water resources has resulted in Palestinians initially becoming dependent on Israel, but eventually has resulted in their giving up and leaving - thus enabling the growing Israeli footprint into previously Palestinian-held West Bank land.

The imbalance between the water usage of Israelis on the West Bank and their Palestinian neighbours is even more extreme when one considers the plight of the Bedouin who have lived in the Negev Desert from time immemorial. Take the case of a Bedouin family living in Umm al-Hieran, 9km from the nearest source of clean water. The Israeli authorities have prohibited the upgrading of this pipeline which is leaking and dilapidated because they do not recognise the village itself. These Bedouin were evicted from their pre-1956 home in Wadi Zuballa, then in 2004 as the authorities planned a Jewish development in the area, their homes in Umm Al-Hieran were declared illegal. Today some 80-90,000 Bedouin are living in unrecognised villages where they have no rights to hold the land they stand on. Given this, they are forced to truck in water at prohibitive rates for a people who are subsisting in an environment where they can be moved on and their houses destroyed at the whim of the authorities.

Moving on to Gaza, Hagai Amit, of Ha'Aretz points out that the situation in Gaza is of immediate major concern. While the burgeoning population requires the basic necessity of life, namely water, excessive pumping of the coastal aquifer has resulted in its infiltration with salt and sewage contamination. The Gazan's inability to develop adequate sewage and water infrastructure systems have compounded the problem. Furthermore, since electricity is available only part of the day, water cannot be secured through constant (extremely expensive) desalination. In the meantime, Israel currently supplies between 5-10 million metres of water per annum to Gaza. This, however, is no long-term solution to the dire situation emerging, and today hydrologists agree that by 2020 the water catastrophe in Gaza due to over pumping and contamination will be irreversible and Gazans will be left waterless.

Where to now? The inequalities I have described above need to be considered in light of projected climate changes due to global warming. Aytzim (Environmental Judaism) describes projected changes such as reductions in precipitation by as much as 4-8 percent, increased transpiration by up to 10 percent, increased severity of rainfall and changed rainfall patterns. These changes will most likely result in loss of arable land, mass migration in search of resources, etc. What does this mean for Israel and its closest neighbours? How will the imbalances already being witnessed in water allocations play out when there is even less of that life-sustaining substance to share around?

Again, quoting from the World Resources Institute,

> Water is a significant dimension of the decades-old conflict between Palestine and Israel. Saudi Arabia's government said its people will depend entirely on grain imports by 2016, a change from decades of growing all they need, due to fear of water-resource depletion. The U.S. National Intelligence Council wrote that water problems will put key North African and Middle Eastern countries at greater risk of instability and state failure and distract them from foreign policy engagements with the U.S.

No-one knows what the future holds, but given the glaring imbalances between Israel and her neighbours, we can probably say that there will be "interesting times" to come.

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Is your money funding climate change?

By Pablo Brait.

(Originally published in The Well, July 27, 2016)

If your neighbour asks to borrow something from you that you know he will use to commit a crime, would you lend him what he needs? Or say your neighbour asks to borrow paints and paintbrushes from you in order to make racist placards for a far-right political rally. Would you hand them over? Would you be complicit if you did?

What about if your neighbour asked to borrow money?

As Australians, we hand our money over to banks and superannuation funds on a regular basis, yet very few of us know what they do with it.

And unfortunately, quite a bit of what they do with it is invest in activities that worsen global warming, destroy farmland and forests and pollute our air and water supplies.

In 2007 I realised that climate change was the most important long-term issue humanity faced and I dived head-first into activism. But even before that, inspired by my grandfather's experiences as a holocaust survivor and the life he led afterwards, I had been involved in many social justice and environmental campaigns, and sought to live morally as an individual.

When I found out, relatively recently, that my bank and super fund were using my money to fund activities that worsen climate change, this was a blow at two levels. First of all, there was the issue of my personal finances contributing to a problem I was working to solve. Secondly it became very clear just how unaccountable our financial institutions were. We hand over our money to these corporations and they do what they like with it, without input from us. And when I started asking questions about where my money was invested I got the typical spin and obfuscation rather than straight answers.

This was despite it being MY money.

Luckily, through the dogged work of groups like Market Forces (where I now work) and 350.org, much of this information is coming to light.

Since 2008 Australia's four major banks have loaned almost $50 billion to coal, oil and gas projects in Australia.

Commonwealth, Westpac and NAB have been major funders of the Abbot Point coal port on the dying Great Barrier Reef. ANZ has lent Australia's dirtiest power station, Hazelwood, $430 million, including one deal done a few months after the devastating mine fire in 2014 found to be probably responsible for 11 deaths.

All four major banks have lent to the companies looking to expand coal seam gas fracking in Queensland and NSW and all four have lent money to Whitehaven Coal, the company bulldozing the already endangered Leard Forest to build a new coal mine.

Superannuation funds use our retirement savings to invest in these same fossil fuel companies and infrastructure.

The irony of a company entrusted with our retirement savings using it to destroy the future livability of our planet is lost on most super funds, which remain irresponsibly complacent when it comes to dealing with climate change.

To top it off, investing in companies looking to expand coal, oil and gas use at a time when we urgently need to reduce it is not only immoral, it is also a very risky move financially.

The latest science shows that in order to give ourselves a 75 per cent chance of avoiding two degrees of warming, we need to keep around 80 per cent of existing fossil fuel reserves in the ground.

At the moment, fossil fuel companies are valued based on the assumption that nothing will be kept in the ground. With the rapid rise of renewable energy and countries that aren't Australia introducing emissions reduction policies, this is unlikely to occur. What happens when the penny finally drops for investors? It's impossible to predict but many analysts are saying it's probably not going to be pretty.

Already, 50 US coal companies have filed for bankruptcy since 2012 and many mainstream analysts are saying the crash in the international coal market is structural, not cyclical. In the last two years many super funds have lost money on their fossil fuel investments. Super funds should not be exposing us to this risk.

So what to do? Divest! Since 2013 a growing movement is pressuring the banks and super funds (and other institutions like local councils, universities, religious congregations, etc.) to divest (the opposite of invest) from fossil fuels.

The beauty of the fossil fuel divestment movement is it marries the personal and the political. Many are motivated by wanting their personal savings to be aligned with their values. It is about personal choice. But the divestment movement also has global political repercussions. As more and more institutions announce that they are divesting (by the end of 2015 divestment pledges had been made by institutions controlling US$3.4 trillion), the fossil fuel industry becomes increasingly isolated politically.

It is primarily the political power of the fossil fuel lobby that has

blocked action on climate change over the last 30 years, and as more and more respectable companies and institutions distance themselves from this dirty industry, governments start finding it easier to put good policies in place.

In Australia since 2013, thousands of customers have switched from the big four banks to a fossil free bank, and thousands more have put their bank on notice.

At the end of last year, this pressure forced all four banks to announce policies in support of keeping global warming below two degrees. NAB took it one step further and committed to never funding the Galilee Basin mega-coal mines, which aim to ship their coal via the Great Barrier Reef.

The next step is keeping them to their promises, and for that we need to pile on some more pressure.

So if you're keen to align your money with your values, fight climate change and democratise our financial sector all at the same time, get involved with fossil fuel divestment.

You can start by seeing if your bank funds fossil fuels, and if they do put them on notice.

You can also look up your superannuation fund here, and send them an email asking them to divest from fossil fuels.

And if you're part of a Jewish community group or synagogue, you can make a communal divestment commitment. Find out more by contacting the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change.

Your money, your future, your choice.

This article was reprinted with permission and originally published here:

http://www.atthewell.com.au/article/is-your-money-funding-climate-change

The Forest Industry Taskforce: an opportunity for a better future

In November of 2015, the Victorian government implemented its Forest Industry Taskforce, following Daniel's election promise. The taskforce, funded by the Victorian government, brings together various interest groups representing unions and environment groups to develop policy recommendations for the future of Victoria's forests.

The Taskforce will seek broad community support to address key challenges facing workers, forest, wood and fibre industries, and Victoria's environment. Victorian Campaigns Manager with the Wilderness Society, Amelia Young, said in a media release: "This is a unique opportunity for stakeholders to work together to recommend solutions that benefit all Victorians, conserve high-value ecological assets, and deliver new investment and employment opportunities, especially in regional communities,"

The taskforce is led by stakeholders and is the first time in Victoria that policy recommendations have been delegated to stakeholder groups. It brings together groups that have historically been at odds with each other's interests, from environmental NGO's to industry representatives, with the challenging task of finding common ground for the consumption and conservation of forest resources. The top priorities for the taskforce are to prepare policies which ensure:

- secure fibre and wood supplies
- jobs maintenance and growth
- protection of unique native flora and fauna and threatened species
- new conservation reserves and national parks
- forest management which maintains forest health and supports the full range of economic, social and environmental values and benefits at state, regional and local levels

For more information, visit: http://forestindustrytaskforce.com.au/

The Leadbeater's possum is a critically endangered possum largely restricted to small pockets of alpine ash, mountain ash and snow gum forests in the Central Highlands of Victoria, Australia, north-east of Melbourne.

On Fracking

By Bonnie Gelman.

'Fracking' is an abbreviation of a process of coal seam gas extraction called 'hydraulic fracturing'. Gas extracted in this

way is known as 'unconventional gas'. Fracking involves pumping a mixture of water, sand and chemicals into rock at high pressure. The rock fractures and gas (or oil) is forced out. There are many issues relating to fracking; there are multinational companies putting pressure on governments to allow for the process. It is said that increasing reliance on natural gas, rather than coal, is creating widespread public health benefits, as the burning of natural gas produces fewer harmful particles in the air. Also claimed is that nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide emissions have been reduced dramatically at the power plant level, with natural gas producing only somewhere between 44 and 50 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions compared with burning of coal.

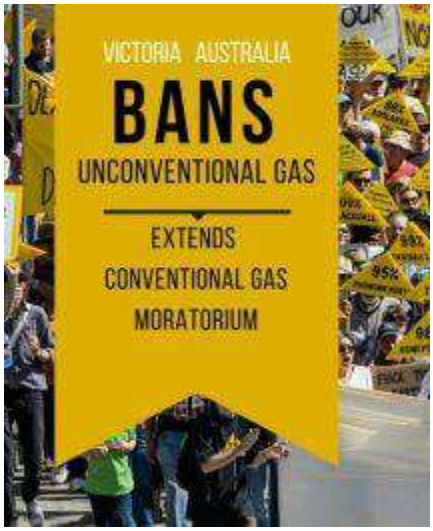
Image found here.

But air quality dynamics around fracking operations are not fully understood, and cumulative health impacts of fracking for nearby residents and workers remain largely unknown.

There may be also be under-appreciated problems with air quality, particularly relating to ozone. Natural gas is not a purely clean and renewable source of energy, and so its benefits are only relative.

The embrace of cheap natural gas will undercut incentives to invest in solar, wind, and other renewables

Another major study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, confirmed that high-volume hydraulic fracturing techniques can contaminate drinking water



A win in Victoria.

Another issue with respect to water is that fracking is hugely water-intensive; wells can require anywhere from 8 to 75million litres of water, with another 25 percent used for operations such as drilling and extraction. So fracking can impact local water sources, both with respect to aquifers being contaminated, and / or not being as available for use as potable water. If you are interested in reading more, there is 2014 literature review published in *Annual Reviews of Environment and Resources* titled "The Environmental Costs and Benefits of Fracking," authored by researchers affiliated with leading universities and research organizations who reviewed more than 160 studies.

Friends of The Earth (http://www.foe.org.au/) and Friends Of The Earth Melbourne (http://www.foe.org.au/) is an excellent social and environmental organisation which is working hard to ensure that renewable energy is the focus of energy production. Friends of The Earth and Lock The Gate farmers and activists have worked hard to stop fracking in Victoria. That the Andrews Government extended the ban on fracking in Victoria is good news after a state parliamentary inquiry into the issue received more submissions than any in recent memory, almost all against.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

The AJDS publicises these events but does not necessarily organise them:

National Day of Action against nuclear waste dumping in South Australia
October 15, 2016

Jews for Refugees Succoth fundraiser dinners for RISE refugees
October 22-23, 2016

Friends of the Earth's Vegan Masterclass Series, Vol. 3: Lebanese Kitchen
October 30, 2016

"The Two State Solution": A Workshop with Liam Getreu
November 6, 2016

Annual Run for Palestine
November 6, 2016

Australian Urban Agriculture Forum November 20-21, 2016

Visit **ajds.org.au/events/** for more details

To receive SMS notification of AJDS events send a text to **0423 234 069**

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and a Jewish Voices among Progressives

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