

Notes and thoughts from the National Climate Action Summit, Canberra 2010

By MASG member Dean Bridgfoot, and please accept the lack of prosemany of these notes were written with a thumbnail dipped in tar....or at least in a crowded and dim lecture theatre.

What is the National Climate Summit?

This was the second national gathering of grass roots organisations from across Australia working with community on the issue of sustainability and climate change. This meeting saw the formal setting up of a network that will enable over 120 groups from across Australia to share information and resources and most importantly coordinate their actions.

Why is it needed ?

Governments and big business are paralyzed or captured by vested interests and unable to take meaningful action on climate change, meanwhile local communities like Mt Alexander are leading the way with energy, creativity and innovative projects. But local groups can't make the structural changes needed by themselves. A national network enables those community groups to work cooperatively on larger projects and campaigns and to build a shared understanding of how we can do that. We hope that this will enable us to build the community understanding and strength to get the political and structural changes needed for a more sustainable, climate safe, Australia.

What went on ?

A three day summit with keynote speakers and workshops to increase people's understandings of the issues, a series of campaign streams to coordinate national projects and a network stream to work out how the national network would be governed and operate.

What does that mean ?

There is now a national calendar of actions and projects that MASG can contribute towards and our members can take part in if we wish to, and a national understanding and agreement on how we can work together, on what sorts of projects and how.

Speakers: My summary of the main messages from the presenters

Noting that I couldn't attend all of the talks, I missed the Waldon Bello from the Phillipines on the perspectives from the Global South, Clive Splash ex CSIRO scientist on carbon trading schemes and taxation systems, Auntie Donna Jackson from the Australian Nuclear Free Alliance and Mark Ogge from Beyond Zero Emissions on a 100% renewably powered Australia.

Damien Lawson: Convener of climate action centre, Melbourne

In 2009 the Australian Government policy (the CPRS) tied Australian policies to international talks (Copenhagen) which it had little control over, and the climate movement linked our efforts to strengthen the Australian Government's position, without uncoupling Australian action from international agreements. This is a mistake because when Copenhagen failed, we had no policies in Australia and no community understanding of what we need to do. We need to explain and engage Australians in the need to have Australian policies that will build a renewable powered Australia which will be beneficial for Australians irrespective of what agreements go on elsewhere. This is

what China and other countries who are investing in renewable infrastructure on a massive scale are doing. There is no shortcut for this to happen, the climate movement needs to get active and do the hard slog of organizing and building our skills and numbers of people involved and supporting action.

A carbon price, levy or fee and dividend should be something that the climate movement undertakes to support so that there is a price on carbon that will ensure business has investment certainty and so that investment can be directed where it is needed.

No new coal is a major message for us to convey, and Hazelwood power station, as the most financially shaky and most polluting of Australian stations should be highlighted and campaigned against for closure as soon as possible.

Christine Milne: Australian Senator, deputy leader of Greens

Vested interests in the fossil fuel lobby are fighting like partisans, and a sign of your success is how much energy and desperation they are showing. BUT they will get meaner and harder and you must expect this.

They have fought using three messages that tap into the mainstream value system (work hard, earn \$\$ and spend them on stuff you don't need to make you feel better about yourself)

1. Doubt the science and scientists
2. You will be worse off taking action on climate change. It will cost you \$\$
3. Greenies want you to live like peasants, you want be able to buy stuff or do stuff

To counter the fossil fuel messaging you need to have three clear messages that demonstrate that tackling climate change will lead to a BETTER future, not just a slightly less catastrophic one.

1. Climate science is clear and rational. Denial is irrational, not factual and funded by vested interests trying to hoodwink you.
2. Action now on climate change will mean you will be better off. Cleaner, safer air in our cities, better public transport, more jobs that are safer for workers, healthier more nutritious locally grown food etc etc
3. Acting together is fun ,important and beats buying stuff and burying your head in the sand.

The climate movement is not visible enough to your elected representatives at all levels of government. You need to be visiting, ringing and writing to them letting them know you care and that you will hold them accountable for their actions.

Do this by

1. Ringing up and asking for an appointment
2. Have a clear message and a specific ASK that your elected representative can follow up on
3. Write your ask down in a clear, concise way and ask for a response and convey to them that you will be following them up on the ask
4. Let them know that you will PERSONALLY tell others, doorknock, write letters etc to tell others what happened and how they dealt with your request.

David Karoly: lead author of IPCC 3rd and 4th assessments and Melbourne University climate scientist

Climate change is already happening and will continue to happen for AT LEAST the next millennium.

The last 6 months has been hotter than any other period in the satellite record.

Sea level is rising faster than the upper levels of the IPCC estimates. Arctic sea ice for Jan/feb 2010 is nearly as low as 2007 and the second lowest level recorded.

IPCC report is in 3 volumes over 1000 pages each. The so called Himalayan glacier mistake is on page 493 in Volume 2 and is contradicted in the following paragraph. That estimate does not make it into the main findings or briefing notes for policy making, HOWEVER the evidence from over 300 glaciers across the world INCLUDING the Himalayan ones is that 98% are receding and the rate of recession is accelerating.

There is a concerted attack on climate science and a personal attack on climate scientists which often is abusive and threatening in nature.

Australia's emissions from stationary energy and transport have increased by 25% on 1990 levels, and we only just make our Kyoto targets (Of a 108% increase) because of the one off slowing of land clearing in the Australia Clause to Kyoto.

To stay under the 2 degree rise in temperature limit the world must decrease its emissions by 50% by 2050, and the earlier that is done the more chance we have of staying in that limit. Many scientists including David Karoly believe that this 2 degree limit is too dangerous and may lead to unexpected, non linear changes or tipping points. If asked what is the best mechanism of dividing up the emissions amongst people David noted that most people know how to fairly distribute a limited resource....ask 10 kids at a Birthday party how many pieces of cake are needed and they will tell you....it shouldn't be any different on a global level. David said that if you do divide up the global emission budget equitably then Australia and the other high emitting nations actually need to make MUCH MORE DRAMATIC emission cuts than we are signing up to. The Potsdam Institute calculates that Australian would need to make a 90% reduction by 2050 to try and stay within 2 degrees, and to pick a safer temperature rise limit we would need decarbonised economy even sooner.

Ian Fry: chief negotiator for Tuvulu in the Copenhagen Climate Conference of the Parties

Ian has been Tuvulu's negotiator for the last 11 years. Before Copenhagen the newly industrializing countries of Brazil, South Africa, India and China publically stated that they would consider emissions targets only if the USA made a clear and strong commitment to significant emissions reductions as well. Because that did not happen it was clear going into Copenhagen that not much could happen.

Because of the USA situation the Danish Government then circulated a draft agreement made by the high emitting countries without wider consultation to try and save face for the USA. Financial incentives were offered as part of that face saving accord and poorer countries that didn't sign on wouldn't be eligible for the funding. The pacific island nations then were put under enormous pressure by Australia and others to agree to the accord.

There was also a huge lack of involvement of civil society in the process.

So Copenhagen failed because the USA had nothing to bring to the table and so no one else had a reason to move. The Danes and USA then tried to get an "Accord" up to paper over this fact and some governments, notably the UK, then spent time trying to blame the Chinese for lack of any agreement.

What does a 2 degree Copenhagen accord process mean for Tuvalu ?

1. It is the end of our nation, and we couldn't sign a treaty that signs away our sovereignty and future. The highest point in Tuvulu is 4m above sea level and most people live within 1 m of sea level.
2. The Accord takes us back to pre-Bali meeting targets; many larger emitting nations like Australia went BACKWARDS on our commitments.
3. It abandoned the agreed to Kyoto process
4. It reopened the concept of COMPENSATION to oil exporting countries who might lose revenue from the loss of fossil fuel sales, which had been excluded in previous negotiations in which adaptation money was to go to poorer nations to prepare for climate change impacts and rebuild from climate instability.

Out of Copenhagen comes confusion. Tuvulu doesn't expect much in Mexico. The USA and other countries need to have community pressure on them to take real action and negotiate in good faith and that will take time to build, so no real movement is expected until the South Africa meeting in 2 years. Tuvulu will be writing to the UN secretary general to have the process opened up so that civil society can participate.

Georgina Woods: International liaison person for CANA, the Australian Climate Action Network

We need a unified series of campaigns and messages. 100% renewables is a central rallying cry. We also need each other and the diversity of groups and ways we are working is understandable and useful. Consider each group ,its work, methods and aims to be like an organism in a rich ecosystem that is working cooperatively but independently for the good of all those in the ecosystem. As a movement we need to understand that and think about building alliances and joint campaigns in which we ask what do we need from other groups and what can we provide for them.

Bernard Keane: Political editor for CRIKEY

Sceptics and denialists of climate change are fundamentally different people operating from a different premise. It is essential that skeptics exist and debate and scrutinize the science, but on the basis of the science.

What is occurring now is an economic war on future generations who will have to pay for the damage done by climate change and the higher costs of late action, hence younger people and parents of kids need to get PERSONAL on this.

There is NO GROUNDSWELL of denialism-but there is a campaign of spreading confusion by denialist who are a very small majority of people- mostly men over 65 years old in the middle to high income bracket (hence powerful). This is unfair as they won't see the real impacts of climate change and they won't pay the economic costs from their slowing down of action.

This small group of men has a group of media cheerleaders who amplify their message, the usual shock jocks, The Australian newspaper and the chairman of the ABC.

Kate Lee: Australian National Union organiser

Kate analysed the movement's tactics and laid down some powerful advice and criticism. She noted tha:

1. Media junkies, many of us are addicted to media and stunts and spend more time on that than on organizing and building a national supporter base.
2. Larger national organisations ask for \$\$ from supporters but don't ask for them visible things on a mass or collected basis
3. We need to build long term organisations that have experience and skill in organizing its membership and has a stable financial and governance base.

She concluded that the movement needs to build its power and influence to have any real meaningful impact-to become ORGANISED POWER, and organised power only comes from

1. Organised people
2. Organised money

To make that happen we need to be TALKING to people, face to face or on the phone. Email and newsletters etc etc are good at keeping people informed, but they don't get people engaged or organised. Organisers in community groups should be spending ½ or more of their time on the phone or directly talking to people and building up the trust, understanding and organisation.

Dean's summary

An enormously important event in which MASG attendees get to meet with inspiring people from across Australia and hear analysis from some of the leading thinkers around climate change, climate politics and social change. It enables us to contribute to a truly national movement and understand our role in an emerging national and international movement that is forming to support the structural changes needed for a safer, better world.

It also made me reevaluate how I do what I do, and get on the phone and out meeting people a lot more....watch out !!