

COAL ACTION MURIHIKU

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Jenny Cambell reflects on her experiences at the recent “Our Land, Our water, Our Future: Beyond Coal and Gas” conference at Kurri Kurri, NSW

BEYOND COAL

Highlights – people

Kristin Gillies from CANA and I travelled to this conference, with him providing support and companionship as we listened to the heartache and pain of the Australian people in their huge struggle to combat the actions of the multitude of multinationals, which are supported by the Australian Government.

Re-meeting Drew Hutton and hearing about recent successes with some Lock the Gate campaigns was a highlight along with a workshop on how to energise and raise awareness around a campaign here in Aotearoa/ NZ.

Rob McCreath told me about Felton Food Festival held recently, once again a great success.

We heard from Sid and Marilyn Plant’s neighbours that they are being well supported and OK at present, in spite of the terrible situation they are in. The ANZAC wreath we sent to Acland was appreciated.

I met many new, energised, motivated, committed and knowledgeable people who inspired and encouraged me to keep up the actions, strategizing and support for each other here.

I felt proud of our cultural awareness, especially as we four from Aotearoa sang (not in tune you understand!) Te Aroha at the farewell as a symbol of solidarity across the Tasman.

“Knitting Nanas” inspired me to buy yellow wool and crochet two hats while there, which I gave to Drew and to the Chair of the organising group, John Hepburn, as there is a connection with the “Lock the Gate” campaign. Gordon, a fellow activist, made the pompoms. We agreed

that “The Aged are Revolting” is a huge pool of untapped energy, skills, knowledge and available time. So our idea of “Grands” could do with some more energy and stirring up here again.

Insights

The ‘open space’ method for workshops worked very well, with people volunteering to run a group about a topic and others who were interested joined them.

People are very distressed, tense, disempowered and in pain from their continuing experiences but telling their stories, while painful, was in a way healing. Over the conference time they connected, supported and networked with each other and gained confidence. The strength of their movement is growing as they learn strategies from each other. Some recent successes are helping sustain them.

They think Aotearoa/NZ has no coal problems – by comparison of size and number that could be true! Guest speakers were focused, varied and topical; coming from Australia as well as from overseas.

Even though not a lot was new as far as general concepts go, eg impacts on health, water, soils, community, other species, climate change, air . . . all the issues we are very aware of; it was the

hugeness of their issues which challenged me. I bought a copy of “Rich Land, Wasteland”, as author Sharyn Munro was a keynote speaker. I can only read a few pages at a time as it is very depressing and heart wrenching.

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Miners’ memorial at Kurri Kurri



Glenn Beutel has been awarded the 2013 Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) Peter Rawlinson Award. Glenn lives in Acland near Sid and Marilyn Plant, who will be remembered by all who attended the CANA 2012 SummerFest at Maitland. The ACF explains the reasons for the award:

“Glenn Beutel made a decision to remain in his family home at Acland, on Queensland’s Darling Downs, while a coal mining company bought out 56 of his neighbours and more than 60 local farms. Glenn’s stance stalled the mine expansion and alerted many other groups to this issue.

“As the company moved in, knocking down houses and public buildings and altering the countryside, Glenn photographed the changing landscape. His stunning photographs document a social history, as well as the beauty and diversity of the Darling Downs’ flora, mammals, frogs, lizards, birds, insects and butterflies.

“Acland has consequently been used as a striking example of wrongful resource activity, gaining attention on the international stage. Glenn is the quintessential example of *ordinary people doing extraordinary things.*”



Heroes of Acland – Marilyn Plant & Glenn Beutel

Photos: Robina Johnston

Beyond Coal cont from p1

Open Space groups I went to included dealing with trauma, divestment, Lock the Gate – initiating a campaign, facilitating, connecting with indigenous communities (very emotional for me), and engaging with spirituality groups. People were very generous, warm, hospitable, thoughtful and respectful of others; while listening and helping in a multitude of ways. It was great to see different age groups, lots of young people and of course oldies, all with heart breaking and telling stories told.

Summing up

I felt uplifted in a funny kind of way – by the resilience of people under pressure and stress, and by their indomitable spirit in the face of such opposition. This was a

group of “movers and shakers” as we have in Aotearoa / NZ – you people! I feel encouraged that there are people around the world who are giving their all for the greater good.

It was a privilege to be there and I hope some of what I learned can be passed on to others in my conversations and actions in the future. This is brief and does not do justice to the four days – but there was so much to take in... I am still processing it all.

Rangimarie, kia kaha, Jenny

You can read Kristin Gillies’ inspiring account of the conference at: <http://coalactionnetworkaotearoa.wordpress.com/2013/05/24/beyond-coal-australia/#more-16706>

Denniston Update

Jane Young

To the profound dismay, but probably not the surprise, of New Zealand environmentalists, on the 23rd of May Conservation Minister Nick Smith granted Bathurst Resources the Access Arrangement for the Escarpment Project. The announcement appeared to be cynically timed to avoid having to open up the issue to public consultation under law changes to be brought in the following day. The government may have acted within the letter of the law but their moral stance is a little harder to justify, especially in light of John Key's promise made at the opening of Bathurst's Wellington Office in March 2012:

"Should DOC intend to grant the concession application, then it will be put out for public consultation before a final decision is made."

Bathurst Managing Director Hamish Bohannon has stated, "Everyone accepts there are parts of the Plateau with high conservation values and our plans include modern mining techniques that will minimise impact and rehabilitate agreed areas . . . When added to the other licence areas on the Denniston, this block can be the mainstay of a sustainable and profitable industry for 20-30 years . . . it acknowledges New Zealand's unique cultural values and love of the environment."

In his statement, Mr Bohannon failed to explain how strip mining a unique New Zealand ecosystem demonstrated "love of the environment" or would "add value to the conservation estate". A Q&A page on the DOC website answers the question, "How will you ensure the company does the rehabilitation work that it is supposed to?" with "As part of the agreement Buller Coal has to lodge significant bonds and take out insurance policies to ensure it meets its part of the agreement. DOC will also be monitoring the rehabilitation work to ensure it takes place."

Anyone who is aware of the ongoing reductions in DOC funding might speculate as to how effective that monitoring is likely to be. And anyone who has ever set foot on the Plateau will be aware of the absurdity of claiming that it would be possible to restore the ecosystem after opencast mining.

But then there would appear to be little evidence that the government or successive ministers of conservation have any real appreciation of the ecological values of the Denniston Plateau. In response to questions at the 2011 Forest & Bird Conference, Kate Wilkinson made it clear that she considered it to be little more than a rocky wasteland. In his announcement, Nick Smith was at pains to point out that the Plateau was general

stewardship land with the lowest legal status of protection. He failed to explain that this had resulted from the lack of funds being put into surveys and assessment of the area, rather than from the Plateau's lack of intrinsic ecological value. Perhaps his reference to the existence of a reservoir, bulldozer tracks and weed infestations was intended to reinforce the notion that protection of the Plateau was already a dead duck and so should not be seen as a major conservation issue.

The news only got worse.

On the 6th of June in the Christchurch High Court, Justice John Fogarty turned down an appeal by Forest & Bird against the Environment Court's decision not to look at the cumulative impact of Bathurst's proposed mine and a Solid Energy permit for a separate site on the Plateau. The judge said that the Resource Management Act did not provide for applications that may rival each other to be heard together. He commented, "This feature of the Act is the source of the hard answer to the otherwise very powerful proposition of Forest and Bird, that if cumulative effects are not considered now, they never will be."

Although the High Court dismissed three of the five points of appeal, it did at least ask the Environment Court to keep separate its consideration of the mitigation of mining activities, and of the offsets related to Bathurst's proposed biodiversity enhancement package. "We argued that mitigation must directly reduce the impact of the mining activity," said Debs Martin, Forest and Bird's Top of the South field officer. "The offset proposals [such as pest control in the Heaphy Area] could not be mitigation as they weren't related to the mining activities and would occur in areas away from the proposed mine."

The High Court also asked that regard be given to the possibility of future mining within Bathurst's other mining permits on the Denniston Plateau when imposing consent conditions. This is important because Bathurst has never made any secret of its intentions to mine the other seven permits that make up the Buller Coal Project.

As the legal battle continues, Bathurst Resources is in the process of redomiciling from Australia to New Zealand. Many Kiwis – spotted or otherwise – won't be putting out the welcome mat.

To read more about the background story of the fight for Denniston go to: http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Bathurst_Resources.

The Methane Problem

When it comes to human-induced (anthropogenic) global warming, carbon dioxide has received the lion's share of the publicity. This isn't surprising. We all know that burning organic (carbon-containing) fuels produces CO₂. And burning fuels is something we do a lot of. In recent years, however, the spotlight is expanding to illuminate the wildcard in the pack – methane.

Methane is 20–30 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO₂ and is produced when organic matter such as dairy waste or animal manure is broken down out of contact with oxygen. Methane concentrations have risen by more than 100% since the industrial revolution, and human sources produce 150% as much as all natural sources put together. (Corresponding figures for CO₂ are 31% and 3%.) This could change dramatically in the future if, as many scientists fear, rising temperatures bring about a catastrophic release of naturally occurring methane, which at the moment is safely stored in frozen deposits.

Coal mining and landfills contribute to anthropogenic methane production but it's ruminant animals – cows, sheep, goats, deer – that are the worst offenders. World-wide they are responsible for 5–6% of total carbon emissions caused by humans, but in New Zealand, however, they produce almost 32% of the total. Between 1990–2006 emissions from our cattle, sheep and deer have increased by 12% with dairy cattle emissions soaring by 72%. This puts us in a unique position in the developed world, and gives us some very difficult problems to solve. The demand for animal products is increasing all

the time but currently

Animals that burp

So why do ruminants cause this problem? If you've ever studied human physiology, you'll know that mammals can't digest cellulose, the carbohydrate found in plant cell walls. Fortunately, some bacteria and other microbes can make the enzymes needed to carry out this handy trick. The microbes that live inside the rumen of animals such as cows or sheep get a laid-on food supply, and in return digest the cellulose and make chemical compounds, mainly fatty acids, that their host can use for energy. The downside of all this cosy togetherness is that some microbes called methanogens also make copious amounts of methane. This is why it's so dangerous when a sheep gets stuck on its back or side – the gas builds up in the gut and the pressure may be lethal. Normally, the animal continually burps up a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide, which is fine for the sheep but not so great for the climate.

Mitigation Measures

Researchers have found some ways of getting ruminants to reduce methane production but these aren't always very practical and don't always produce net benefits in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. New Zealand ruminants tend to lead an outdoors life most of the time so feeding dietary supplements such as coconut oil or garlic can be problematic. In addition, additives may taint the meat or milk produced – coconut might be ok, but most people aren't likely to be too keen about garlic flavoured milk on their cornflakes.

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Clued Up On Carbon – Part 4 Beat the Burp

Jane Young

there is no price on agricultural emissions so there's little incentive for farmers to cut back unless the measures they take are profitable in their own right. In addition, it's still early days as far as the research is concerned that will, hopefully, provide farmers with tools for the job.



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A chemical compound called monensin may reduce methane production although the effects are variable and may not be long lasting. Monensin appears to have productivity and health benefits, but because it's officially classified as an antibiotic, that opens a whole can of worms as far as its use as a feed additive is concerned.

Another approach is to breed forage plants that reduce methane emissions from gut bacteria. Germinal Seeds NZ Ltd says that the high sugar ryegrasses that reduced sheep methane emissions in UK trials are the same as varieties grown on New Zealand farms to boost animal productivity. The accompanying methane reductions seem to result from the growth of microbes becoming more efficient so that more energy can be used to make protein rather than methane.

Geneticists have also joined the fray. They have sequenced the genome of one of the main microbial offenders, which has the potential to provide the key to chemical molecules that can be used as specific targets in order to selectively attack the bad guys. Vaccination is a technology that has real promise.

Animal breeders may well have an important role to play. Just as sheep, for example, can be selected for rapid weight gain, fine wool or high lambing percentages, it may be possible to select for low methane emissions. The downside is that none of this is going to happen quickly – it's much easier to measure an animal's weight gain than the amount of methane it burps up every day.

Of course, there is a very simple way to reduce agricultural emissions, no technology required – reduce stocking numbers. Although this idea would seem to deal a direct blow against the sacred cow (so to speak) that demands increased productivity at all costs, in fact some farmers have already come to the conclusion that bigger isn't necessarily better. A dairy farmer who produces more milk, for example, doesn't necessarily make more profit. Unfortunately, soaring land values for dairy farms are often based on productivity rather than profitability. It's all part of the same economic mindset that demands growth at all costs.

Black Humour



'STEADY AS SHE GOES'

<http://www.polyp.org.uk/>



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WANT TO GET SERIOUSLY INVOLVED?

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Newsletter items to Jane Young by July 10:
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HELP PUT IN A KIWI BID!

The Government is currently calling for bids from oil companies who want to do risky exploratory deep sea drilling off the NZ coast. The Green Party plans to put in a competing "Kiwi Bid", which will aim to protect our waters for all of us, not exploit them. To find out more go to: <http://www.greens.org.nz/stopdeepseadrilling/thekiwibid>.

And for a graphic illustration of why NZ should absolutely not allow deep-sea drilling see John Wathen's eyewitness account of the aftermath of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yduv3APYawA>