

Climate Change, Peak Oil, the Environment and the Community

A recent conference hosted by SCEC (Sunshine Coast Environment Council) and Maroochy Shire Council brought together speakers from all sections of the community including business, consultants, academics and political leaders. The conference, entitled *Towards 2020 Climate Change Conference and Expo*, unanimously agreed that climate change is already a reality. It also concluded that its occurrence simultaneously with peak oil (the point at which it is predicted that the world has used half its available oil reserves) presents us all with a clear ultimatum if our planet is to be fit for our children and grand-children.

Speaker after speaker highlighted the problems already occurring, such as the melting of polar ice caps, average daily temperatures increasing by up to 0.74C in the last 10 years, the extending of summer by up to 30 days and its impact on food production, and so on. The list goes on and does not make good bed-time reading!

The insurance industry is already way ahead of the government (which incidentally has only just started to give some credence to global warming and its impacts) in assessing the repercussions of climate change. If sea levels rise as predicted, large areas of our coastal strip will be under water and the subsequent impact on the community can only be guessed at. Business is already taking strategic advice on how to avoid these problems and is putting in place plans and actions to mitigate or even benefit from them.

At the national level we have been seriously let down by our leadership, whose actions or inactions are at best flawed and at worst downright catastrophic for our future. The science has been known for at least 20 years but apathy and the vested interests of politicians in maintaining unsustainable technologies have prevented positive action until now.

Finally, bowing to a groundswell of public concern, renewable energy sources are being investigated, although many times more funding is being placed at the disposal of the nuclear lobby to convince us that it is safe and the answer to all our greenhouse gas and energy problems. Even if nuclear had no other problems, it will be at least 15 years before a single amp would be provided into the national grid and the cost would be astronomical, especially if not subsidised with more of our tax dollars.

Renewable sources of energy such as solar, wind, biomass etc can have a significant impact on energy availability (as has already been seen in many countries such as Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Spain where up to 30% of energy is from renewable resources) and these could all be better developed if some of the billions of our dollars were not being used to subsidize the coal and oil industries. Don't let the politicians get away with telling us that it will only make a small difference. We have sunshine 300 days a year and the technology to harness this source is already in existence.

Now here is the dilemma: we can each affect what happens in the next twenty to thirty years, but what we do now remains in the atmosphere for eighty years. The problem is that it means a complete reversal of the "me,

me, me” society. We need to put pressure on our politicians to make sure that sustainability and the environment are high on their agenda.

We must all consider our lifestyle choices. If petrol jumps to \$5 or \$10 dollars a litre we will all have to decide what journeys are necessary. It won't be a matter of “I can afford it so I will”. The fuel may just not be available.

We can no longer accept the cultures of mass production and associated transport costs. Local communities, such as that proposed for the new Sippy Downs Town Centre, will become essential for food availability and the modest bicycle will come back into its own as an affordable and effective means of transport. The four wheel drive will not necessarily become a thing of the past but will become more expensive and hopefully used only in the appropriate environment.

We have a major opportunity to change our lifestyle and community, but it is up to each of us to make a contribution and not assume that our political leaders know best. Please support local leaders who emphasise the importance of a sustainable and equitable lifestyle for all.

Craig Rattle, Chairman, SDDCA Environment Sub-committee

Please email your comments to the SDDCA:
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