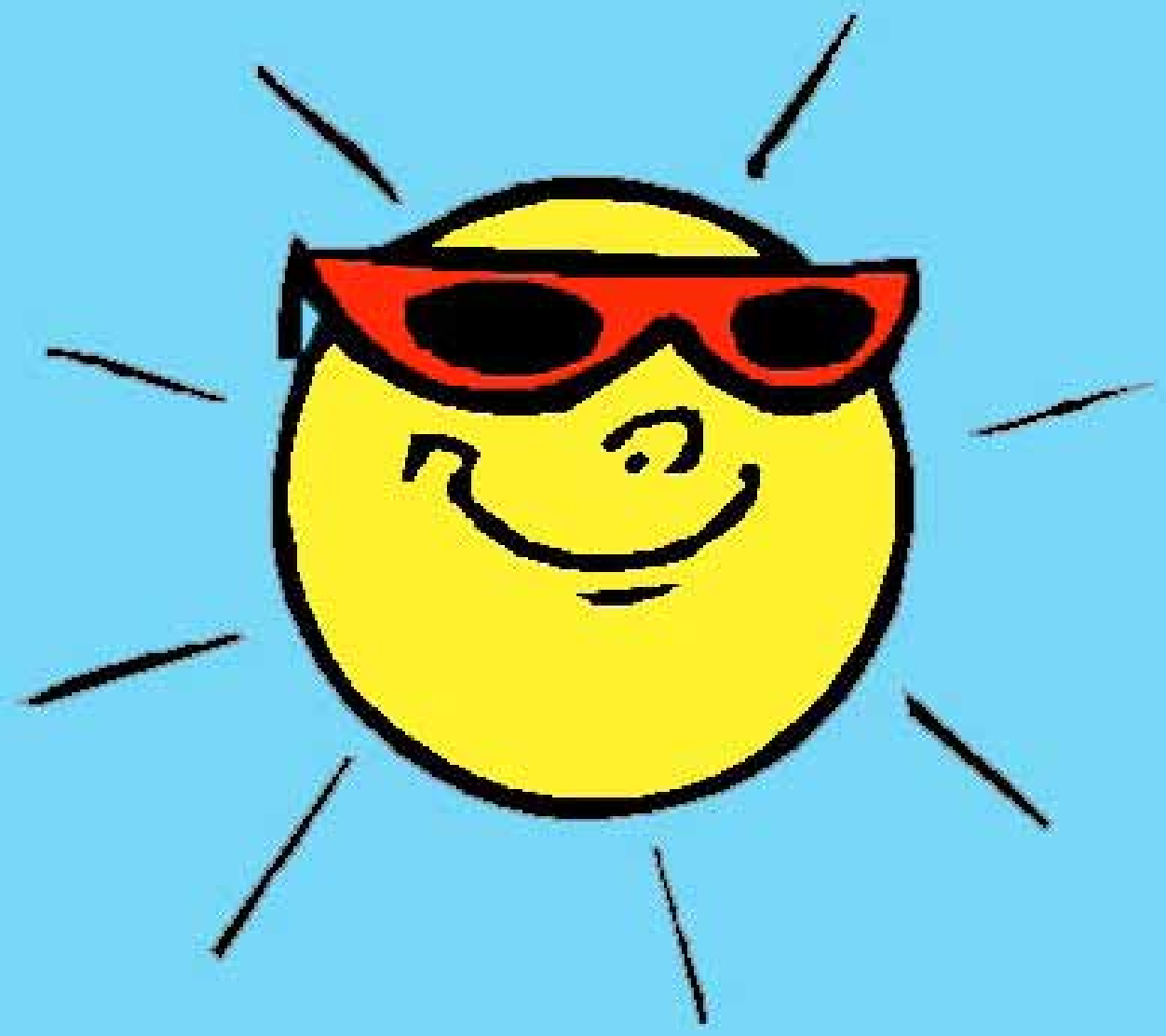
Always look on the bright side of life



Bright-siding climate advocacy and its consequences

David Spratt / climatecodered.org

April 2012

Connecting the dots...
between extreme weather and climate change

"Perth is sweltering through the eighth heatwave of the summer and autumn seasons, the first time such an event has happened since records started being kept in 1897." – ABC News, 11 March 2012

"It's official - Australia has had its wettest two-year period on record." – *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February 2012

"The heatwave that accompanied the bushfires on Saturday smashed records, as much of Victoria, including Melbourne and 20 other centres, registered unprecedented highs, the Bureau of Meteorology says." – *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 2009

"The proportion of Australia experiencing hot and wet extremes has increased in line with predictions of the impact of rising greenhouse gas emissions." – *The Age*, 15 January 2011

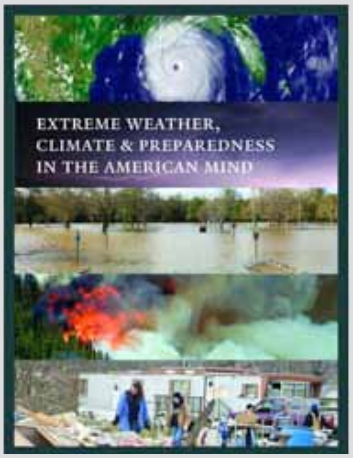
"Basic physics and climate models both suggest that a warmer Earth will likely see both more intense droughts and floods over Australia, with some regional differences. The succession of events in the last decade or so is consistent with this prognosis." – Br Barrie Pittock, The Conversation, 24 February 2012

"One effect of increasing greenhouse-gas levels in the atmosphere is to amplify existing climate signals. Regions that are dry get drier, and regions that are wet get wetter. If you have a place like Australia that is already extreme, those extremes just get more pronounced." – Prof. David Karoly, *Rolling Stone*, 3 October 2011

"An extreme heat event in 2050 could kill more than 1000 Brisbane people in a few days unless emergency response strategies are significantly improved, according to a new report on heatwaves." – *The Age*, 20 February 2012

"Climate is what you expect; weather is what you get. I like to think of the weather as a game of dice. Mother Nature rolls the dice each day to determine the weather, and the rolls fall within the boundaries of what the climate will allow. The extreme events that happen at the boundaries of what are possible are what people tend to notice the most. When the climate changes, those boundaries change." – Dr Jeff Masters, Weather Underground

"It's not the right question to ask if this storm or that storm is due to global warming, or is it natural variability. Nowadays, there's always an element of both… there is a systematic influence on all of these weather events now-a-days because of the fact that there is this extra water vapor lurking around in the atmosphere than there used to be say 30 years ago."
– Dr Kevin Trenberth, US National Center Atmospheric Research



REPORTS

Connecting the Dots: A communications guide to climate change and extreme weather from Climate Nexus
http://www.climateaccess.org/resource/connecting-dots-communications-guide-climate-change-and-extreme-weather-0

Extreme Weather, Climate & Preparedness in the American Mind
http://www.environment.yale.edu/climate/news/extreme-weather-climate-preparedness/
Polling of public observations and experiences of weather and opinions about the links between global warming and particular extreme weather events.

Always look on the bright side of life

Bright-siding climate advocacy and its consequences

by David Spratt

At a forum in Melbourne this February on "Saving lives... reframing climate change around health and livelihoods", Daniel Voronoff summed up our dilemma:

> People of vision, working together patiently and persistently, have inspired their community and changed the course of history. These leaders, recognising the threat to civilisation posed by climate change, have successfully alerted many of the public to the danger it faces. After many years and great resistance from powerful and ruthless people, an empowered community has achieved an epic win. The country has taken its first steps towards a 'clean energy future'. But time is running out and much more needs to be done to prevent the catastrophe. Also, their enemies are using lies and fear to win the hearts and minds of the people, and destroy their hard won gains. Everything may be lost – unless the leaders reach out to a resistant public in new ways and tell them the truth about the threat to health, lives and livelihoods that we face.

Voronoff's analysis, published last year on this site as "The real climate message is in the shadows. It's time to shine the light", highlighted an aspect of climate advocacy in Australia and elsewhere that had long concerned me: can you successfully bring about change without communicating the problem you are trying to solve? Is selling "good news" and avoiding "bad news" the way to engage communities in understanding how climate change will affect them and what they can do about it? My concern grew as the gap between the science (where researchers tell us the climate is heading) and the politics (the inadequate scale of the solutions being proposed) got wider and wider.

In the commercial world the answer is yes, you can sell a "solution" without a real problem, because half the game is about fabricating demand (status, for example) for things people don't need (a new car). In politics too, you can succeed by fabricating or playing on a sentiment (insecurity) to sell an answer (border protection). The answer solves a problem constructed for the purpose. The means of selling does not matter, so long as you succeed.

But with climate change, the problem is not a commercial or political construct, and not fully solving the problem will be catastrophic beyond most peoples' imaginations and current understandings. The price of failure is not a product left on the shelves or an election lost. Failure is a planet on which most people and species will not survive.

These ideas were first published at climatecodered.org in a five-part series between 17 and 25 April 2012. My thanks to those who made valuable comments and suggestions to drafts of this text.

www.climatecodered.org/p/brightsiding.html

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Yet much climate advocacy and campaigning appears to assume that as long as you tell a positive story and move “in the right direction”, it doesn’t matter if people understand or agree about the problem. It’s all about selling “good news” and not mentioning “bad news”. This is how the Obama administration, Australia’s Labor government, the Say Yes campaign and many national climate advocacy organisations worked in 2011.

Known as “bright-siding”, this social phenomenon both masks and reflects our growing insecurity. Bright-siding is the belief that although you can’t control the outer events of your life, you can control your outlook with relentless positive thinking and a sunny disposition, and by refusing even to consider negative outcomes. Being unrelentingly positive is the key to success and prosperity. There is no space for Hugh Mackay’s observation that “Nature equipped us with the capacity to feel negative emotions – pain, sorrow, fear, even anger – for good reason.”

“Have a nice day.” Bright-siding comes in many forms, old and new. It is the method of religious, political and personality cults and gurus who demand uncritical adoration and positivity, and of many personal development courses. It’s at the core of political spin: George W. Bush was a cheerleader at prep school, as president he declared “Mission accomplished” in Iraq in 2003, and later remained “optimistic that all (foreign affairs) problems will be solved”. It’s behind RMIT University’s recent "behavioural capability framework” edict to staff to present a happy face, even if they’re not. There is a particular version in North Korea, and in all nationalist triumphalism.

And it’s the subject of a book by Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How the relentless promotion of positive thinking has undermined America*, prompted by the barrage of unrelenting positivity Ehrenreich encountered while receiving treatment for cancer. Ehrenreich’s Introduction gives an overview.

She happily acknowledges that good, positive feelings “like gratitude, contentment, and self-confidence can actually lengthen our lives and improve our health”. While Americans see themselves as “positive” people, happiness is a “slippery thing to measure or define”, so when psychologists undertake to measure the relative happiness of nations “they routinely find that Americans are not, even in prosperous times and despite our vaunted positivity, very happy at all”. Ehrenreich concludes that “positivity is not so much our condition or our mood as it is part of our ideology”, as displayed in American patriotism for “the greatest nation on earth”. It is a “quintessentially American activity, associated in our minds with both individual and national success, but it is driven by a terrible insecurity”, which “requires deliberate self-deception, including a constant effort to repress or block out unpleasant possibilities and ‘negative’ thoughts” about the country’s chronic weaknesses and inequality.

Believing the country impervious to a 9/11-style attack, or New Orleans to inundation, and incapable of failure in Iraq or a Wall Street crash, could exist because “imagining an invulnerable nation and an ever-booming economy (meant) there was simply no ability or inclination to imagine the worst.” And that is the core problem: bright-siding undermines critical thinking in government, business, and everyday life: the understanding that the worst may happen, and to be prepared. “We need”, says Ehrenreich, “to brace ourselves for a struggle against terrifying obstacles, both of our own making and imposed by the natural world. And the first step is to recover from the mass delusion that is positive thinking.”

Ehrenreich says enforced optimism obstructs the liberal (progressive) agenda, producing an enforced stupidity. In other words, optimism is conservative, while realism is progressive.

What bright-siding climate advocacy looks like

What do the Obama administration, Australia's Labor government, the 2011 "Say Yes" campaign and many national climate advocacy organisations, share? They share a common view on how to market action on climate:

- Only positive "good news" messages work. Don't mention "bad news" such as climate impacts and don't communicate the magnitude of the problem, because people can't deal with it; and
- The good-news story is first and foremost about "clean" or renewable energy, so construct public messages dominated by renewables and economic benefit, not about about replacing fossil fuels.

The Obama administration tried, unsuccessfully, to frame legislation to reduce greenhouse emissions as being about "energy independence". It did not pass, although that was not principally Obama's fault. But taking climate off the agenda was, says Jonathan Lash of the World Resources Institute:

> I don't blame the president for the failure of climate legislation, but I do hold him accountable for allowing opponents to fill the void with misinformation and outright lies about climate change… By excising 'climate change' from his vocabulary, the president has surrendered the power that only he has to explain challenging issues and advance complex solutions for our country.

Taking the "climate" out of climate-change policy public messaging became the rage. Lash's criticism could be made equally of Australia's Labor government, whose "Clean energy future" campaign was classic bright-siding. All clean energy and barely a mention of climate change or impacts. Check this, or this, 45-second government TV ad for any mention of the word "climate". It's all win–win clean energy. The 100% Renewables "Big solar" campaign in 2012, largely focussed around the Clean Energy Finance Corporation legislation, is similar in emphasis.

And so was the "Say Yes" campaign run by a number of Australian environment/climate non-government organisations (eNGOs), together with the ACTU and GetUp, in 2011. The word "climate" only just got a mention in the Say Yes Reasons poster, the Morning tea kit and this Fact sheet. Of 13 posters, just two mention climate. You would have thought that how climate change might affect family's lives might be relevant in talking to your neighbours, but it wasn't.

The bright-side mantra ran deep. Good news! It's all about "Yes!" Just "Say Yes!". The campaign asked people to "Say yes… " to … almost anything. If there was one message, there was a dozen messages, a bad public relations strategy.

Bright-siding is attractive for differing reasons. For some eNGOs close to Labor, there is a desire not to talk too much about coal and gas; because that would make it hard to explain the virtues of government policies that won't reduce domestic emissions in the next decade. Clean energy is safe territory. Who could disagree? In the community climate movement, there is concern that talking about climate science and impacts is "too depressing" or "we already know all that science stuff" (which is not self-evidently the case), in favour of "getting on with doing something positive". The case for bright-siding includes the following:

- "Sell the sizzle", a manual on climate messaging produced by Futerra Communications agency, which emphasises that one's narrative should start by selling the "sizzle" (a

SAY YES

The "Say Yes" campaign aspirations and materials were difficult to distinguish from those of the Labor government's "Clean Energy Future" campaign. Reasons include:

- A lack of political acumen, leading to a misreading of the situation, which resulted in a defensive strategy to "keep the multi-party climate committee talks going", based on a fear of failure, when there was no reasonable prospect of that happening.
- No agreement or aspiration to significantly improve the outcomes above Labor's position (for example on the level of the carbon price), despite the Greens advocating for this. Campaign research was based on marginal Labor south-east Queensland seats, with messaging that many eNGOs found unsuitable for the rest of the country, and which most punters did not understand ("A price on pollution", for example).
- A confusion between the public affairs and community mobilisation aspects of the campaign, which was exemplified by the character of the 5 June rallies.

The coincidence in approach between the government and Say Yes may be reflected in the government funding made available to some NGOs at the time: ACF received $398,421.75 for community education, AYCC $271,560 to "raise awareness" and the Climate Institute $250,000 for "Independent assessment of the effect of carbon pricing on the cost of living".

positive vision of the future) rather than the "sausage" (identified as climate change impacts) because "climate change is no longer a scientist's problem – it's now a **salesman's problem**" (my emphasis). "Sell the Sizzle" says:

> [T]here is one message that almost every audience responds to. A narrative that changes hearts, minds and even behaviours. An approach needed now more than ever before. And it's the opposite of climate hell. We must build a visual and compelling vision of low carbon heaven. This guide outlines how to communicate that new positive vision.

And if that is as far as you read, you could be quickly be bright-siding with just the good news about clean/renewable energy. But that is not all that Futerra says:

> The second step in our narrative is 'choice', because now we've got heaven we've got to show hell. Today we have a choice between that positive picture and the alternative of unmitigated climate change. It's extremely important to hammer home that this moment is the moment of choice between the two paths. **You don't pull your punches here** – lay out the climate chaos we're trying to avoid. People can actually listen to this now because they are sitting in the life raft of a positive vision watching the Titanic of climate chaos. (emphasis added)

- Often quoted in defence of the "positive only" approach is: "Apocalypse Soon? Dire messages reduce belief in global warming by contradicting Just-World beliefs". But this study is actually consistent with the literature on communication that the strongest possible science-based messaging is effective. It is deceptive to claim the study supports "only positive" messages, because it samples messages with zero efficacy (messages that don't suggest a path of action that would solve the issue), which is why they induce the "scepticism" they do.
- A view that most campaigning is simply negative and apocalyptic, and doesn't work. "Sell the Sizzle" says that: "The most common message on climate change is that we're all going to hell". But Joe Romm, prolific author of the Climate Progress blog, and a former acting US assistant secretary of energy for energy efficiency and renewable energy, says that the two greatest myths about global warming communications are that constant repetition of doomsday messages has been a major, ongoing strategy,

and that strategy doesn't work and indeed is actually counterproductive:

> These myths are so deeply ingrained in the environmental and progressive political community that when we finally had a serious shot at a climate bill [in the US], the powers that be decided not to focus on the threat posed by climate change in any serious fashion in their $200 million communications effort… The only time anything approximating this kind of messaging — not "doomsday" but what I'd call blunt, science-based messaging that also makes clear the problem is solvable — was in 2006 and 2007 with the release of An Inconvenient Truth (and the 2007 assessment reports of the IPCC)…. . The data suggests that strategy measurably moved the public to become more concerned about the threat posed by global warming... You'd think it would be pretty obvious that the public is not going to be concerned about an issue unless one explains why they should be concerned about an issue. And the social science literature, including the vast literature on advertising and marketing, could not be clearer that only repeated messages have any chance of sinking in and moving the needle.

Is all "good news" and no "bad news" a good strategy?

If ever there is evidence that "bad news" can work, it is Australian federal opposition leader Tony Abbott's unrelentingly assault on the Gillard government.

An example of trying to avoid "bad news" was the decision by the Australian government not to call the carbon tax a carbon tax. Instead it used the confusing term, a "price on pollution". This left the discourse about taxes entirely to opposition leader Tony Abbott, with devastating consequences. And then the government, having avoided the "tax" word, made its core pitch about… how you will get a personal tax break: "How much support will my family get? Estimate your assistance here…"

Of course, the good news about renewable energy is a key component in engaging people, and in reducing emissions. As renewables move towards becoming cost competitive with fossil fuel energy sources at a speed unimaginable just a few years ago, it is an even more compelling story. But the point here is that it is not the ONLY story, nor a sufficient one.

And there is an interesting question about why energy efficiency, the "lowest-hanging fruit" of all the available emissions-reduction strategies, rarely rates in the "good news" strategies. Perhaps it is not an "easy" issue on which to campaign? And a one-sided emphasis on renewables has some other dangers. It can construct the debate as just being about supply-side options (a world for energy boffins), an emphasis that pushes demand issues – and Australia's responsibility as a very higher per capita emitter and user of energy – to one side. Global equity is central to global action, and it could go two ways: everyone in the world increases electricity consumption (whatever the source) to our level, or our level goes down rapidly towards the global average. In fact, the quickest demand-side option would be to stop the outrageous deals to flog large amounts of energy to the aluminium smelters at implied subsidies comparable to their wages' bills.

And the idea that "bad news" about the world – wars, poverty, inequality – cannot work, when linked to positives outcomes or visions and choices, is absurd. Stopping bad

things happening can be a great motivator. If you believe only “good news” works, it’s hard to explain the success of the anti-coal-seam-gas “Lock the gate” campaign, or the enthusiasm for blockading a coal port, or of the popular appeal of campaigns past and present to stop wars, end Apartheid, and so many more “oppositional” struggles.

Peter Lewis of Essential Media says if you wish to mobilise public opinion, then “focus on the science first, second and third – and then start talking about the impact on our carbon-exposed economy if we wait for the rest of the world to act first”. Making the science/impacts part of the narrative seems essential, in light of consistent polling (for example here) that finds only half of Australians say that “Climate change is happening AND is caused by human activity”.

Research studies find that media coverage of climate change directly affects public concern levels, and that the actions of political elites turn out to be the most powerful driver of public concern. Concern in the USA was at is height around 2007, at the time of media focus on the IPCC’s fourth assessment reports and Al Gore’s “The Inconvenient Truth”. As partisan and ideological divides kicked in, concern fell. The research concludes that “public communications (by political elites) must continue to support climate change against opposing messaging campaigns… with amplified political mobilization”.

In this context the failure of the Rudd government after December 2009, and of the Gillard government, to drive the story of climate impacts in the public arena is a crime. Despite the deniers’ assault in the US, public understanding of climate is on the rebound, with Americans attributing their increased belief in global warming to their (correct) perception that the planet is warming and the weather is getting more extreme. It is astounding that neither the prime minister or any leader of either major party anywhere in Australia can say in public what most US citizens already know: that global warming is making high-profile extreme weather events worse.

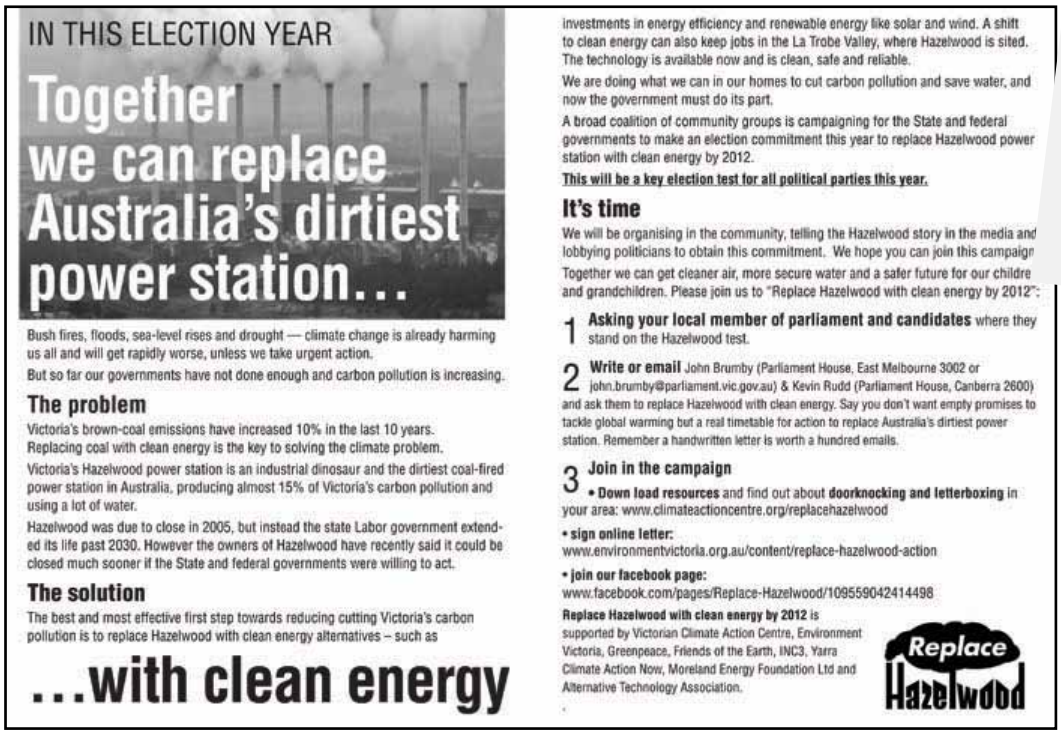
US pollster Mark Mellman says suggestions that one shouldn’t talk about global warming are “politically naive, methodologically flawed and factually inaccurate”. He finds that even dire science-based warnings are an essential part of good climate messaging -- along with a clear explanation of the myriad clean energy solutions available today and the multiple benefits of those solutions.

If “bad news” is bad news, it’s also hard to explain the success of the Replace Hazelwood campaign in Victoria in 2010-2011 (closing down coal) which:

- Told a story about climate impacts, Australia’s dirtiest coal power station and the opportunity to replace it;
- Forced a state Labor government to about-face on climate policy; then
- Made it through the federal multi-party climate talks to be included in the 2011 carbon legislation as money to close down 2 gigawatts of dirty power (likely to be Hazelwood and Playford); which
- Resulted in Playford becoming the focus of a big solar campaign, but only because a close-down-coal campaign was successful!

A one-sided emphasis on telling the good news means that one half of the narrative, as used in the Hazelwood campaign – of replacing fossil fuel with clean energy – gets lost. Coal and gas drop out of sight, and that’s not surprising coming from the federal government which is overseeing a massive expansion of both industries. But as Greenpeace has again shown recently with the launch of its new Queensland-focussed campaign, coal is where the political heat really rises. There is an element of truth in

The replace Hazelwood campaign told a story about climate impacts, dirty coal and clean energy, door-knocking thousands of homes combined with large street billboards, newspaper advertisements, lobbying and direct action protests and street rallies



IN THIS ELECTION YEAR

Together we can replace Australia's dirtiest power station…

Bush fires, floods, sea-level rises and drought — climate change is already harming us all and will get rapidly worse, unless we take urgent action.

But so far our governments have not done enough and carbon pollution is increasing.

The problem

Victoria's brown-coal emissions have increased 10% in the last 10 years. Replacing coal with clean energy is the key to solving the climate problem.

Victoria's Hazelwood power station is an industrial dinosaur and the dirtiest coal-fired power station in Australia, producing almost 15% of Victoria's carbon pollution and using a lot of water.

Hazelwood was due to close in 2005, but instead the state Labor government extended its life past 2030. However the owners of Hazelwood have recently said it could be closed much sooner if the State and federal governments were willing to act.

The solution

The best and most effective first step towards reducing cutting Victoria's carbon pollution is to replace Hazelwood with clean energy alternatives – such as

…with clean energy

investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy like solar and wind. A shift to clean energy can also keep jobs in the La Trobe Valley, where Hazelwood is sited. The technology is available now and is clean, safe and reliable.

We are doing what we can in our homes to cut carbon pollution and save water, and now the government must do its part.

A broad coalition of community groups is campaigning for the State and federal governments to make an election commitment this year to replace Hazelwood power station with clean energy by 2012.

This will be a key election test for all political parties this year.

It's time

We will be organising in the community, telling the Hazelwood story in the media and lobbying politicians to obtain this commitment. We hope you can join this campaign

Together we can get cleaner air, more secure water and a safer future for our childre and grandchildren. Please join us to "Replace Hazelwood with clean energy by 2012":

1 **Asking your local member of parliament and candidates** where they stand on the Hazelwood test.

2 **Write or email** John Brumby (Parliament House, East Melbourne 3002 or john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au) & Kevin Rudd (Parliament House, Canberra 2600) and ask them to replace Hazelwood with clean energy. Say you don't want empty promises to tackle global warming but a real timetable for action to replace Australia's dirtiest power station. Remember a handwritten letter is worth a hundred emails.

3 **Join in the campaign**

- **Down load resources** and find out about **doorknocking and letterboxing** in your area: www.climateactioncentre.org/replacehazelwood
- **sign online letter:** www.environmentvictoria.org.au/content/replace-hazelwood-action
- **join our facebook page:** www.facebook.com/pages/Replace-Hazelwood/109559042414498

Replace Hazelwood with clean energy by 2012 is supported by Victorian Climate Action Centre, Environment Victoria, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, INC3, Yarra Climate Action Now, Moreland Energy Foundation Ltd and Alternative Technology Association.

Replace Hazelwood

what Paul Keating recently told Philip Adams on "Late Night Live": if you're not creating enemies, you're probably not achieving anything in politics.

The strategic question between renewables-only messaging and other choices has become more urgent with the growing evidence that the Gillard government has trashed itself beyond all help, and that a victory by the delay-and-deny Abbott-led opposition looks very likely. In a recent exchange, one NGO climate campaigner asked: "Does it really make sense for most of the movement to be working on the Clean Energy Finance Corp when its chances of surviving may be slim?", and another responded that their "only concern with a singular focus on renewables is the Coalition can say we are supporting renewables through retaining the Renewable Energy Target and then get rid of everything else (including supporting the 5-25% range)… it is a danger for us".

But there is a bigger choice, well told in a must-read recent article in "Mother Jones" about "How a Grassroots Rebellion Won the Nation's Biggest Climate Victory", and plans to move beyond blocking new coal-fired plants to seeking to close a third of the roughly 580 existing ones in the US by 2020. Mark Hertsgaard writes of how a network of activists "confronted a harsh truth", in the words of Fresh Energy Executive Director, Michael Noble:

> They had been working the wrong problem, focusing on renewable energy instead of the broader climate picture. "What does it mean that we celebrate the construction of a $100 million wind farm in Minnesota when at the same time a 900-megawatt coal plant was being built?" asks Noble. "That's called losing. If you looked at the problem through the lens of carbon, all the work we had done was undone by a single plant—a plant that wasn't challenged by a single environmentalist."

There is no argument that Australia must move to renewable energy at a pace quicker than is generally understood, but it also true that the emissions created by the expansion of Australian coal exports will dwarf all the emissions saved by closing down the domestic

fossil-fuel-energy industry.

The carbon price, on which the "Clean Energy Future" marketing and the Say Yes campaign have dwelt, is no obstacle to the deadly expansion of Australian coal and gas industries. As *The Sydney Morning Herald* politely noted: "the extraordinary continuing growth in demand for coal for electricity and steel production in Asia challenges Prime Minister Julia Gillard's assertion the world is moving to cut greenhouse gas emissions".

And Guy Pearce pointed out at Woodford last Christmas that the expansion of Australian coal mining will add about 1.75Gt (gigatonnes) of carbon dioxide annually to the atmosphere – about 11 times what the Australian government estimates will be saved by the carbon tax legislation that recently passed Parliament. He says that even the emissions from smaller players have a staggering impact, for example:

- The annual emissions from Aston/Whitehaven's new mines, or of QCoal's mines will each be greater than all the CO2 saved by all the hybrid cars ever sold world-wide; and
- The new mines of the relatively small Jellinbah Coal add nearly 100 times as much CO2 as is saved by all the household solar panel installations in Australia.

So the question of strategic focus is no small matter.

The consequences of failure

> "Political reality must be grounded in physical reality or it's completely useless,"
> – Prof. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, director of the Potsdam Institute

If you avoid including an honest assessment of climate science and impacts in your narrative, its pretty difficult to give people a grasp about where the climate system is heading and what needs to be done to create the conditions for living in climate safety, rather than increasing and eventually catastrophic harm. But that's how the big climate advocacy organisations have generally chosen to operate, and it represents a strategic failure to communicate.

Climate policy in Australia is trapped in a culture of failure and low expectation. The reason given for advocating solutions that would still result in dangerous climate change is that what really needs to be done is "too big" to message effectively. The Australian Conservation Foundation, for example, adopted a 350 (parts per million atmospheric carbon dioxide) policy several years ago, but never made in part of their advocacy because (unofficially) "the comms people couldn't find a way to message it".

Ken Ward, a former deputy-director of Greenpeace (USA), identifies "a consensual public policy hallucination that abrupt climate change can be addressed without great conflict". Everybody from the UN Secretary-General to business commentator Alan Kohler now calls climate an emergency, but it is still a non-no for most climate campaigning organisations.

I would hazard at a guess that most eNGOs and professional advocacy groups, with notable exceptions including Beyond Zero Emissions and a few others, don't **as organisations** have a clear front-of-the-mind grasp of our current predicament, or the rate of emissions reduction required. My guess is that most would not be able to articulate the fact that the last time carbon dioxide levels were apparently as high as they are today — and were sustained at those levels — global temperatures were 3 to 6 degrees

"Scientific case for avoiding dangerous climate change to protect young people and nature" shows that temperatures today are only 1C cooler than during the Pliocene 3–5 million years ago, a period during which sea level reached heights as much as 15-25 meters greater than today.

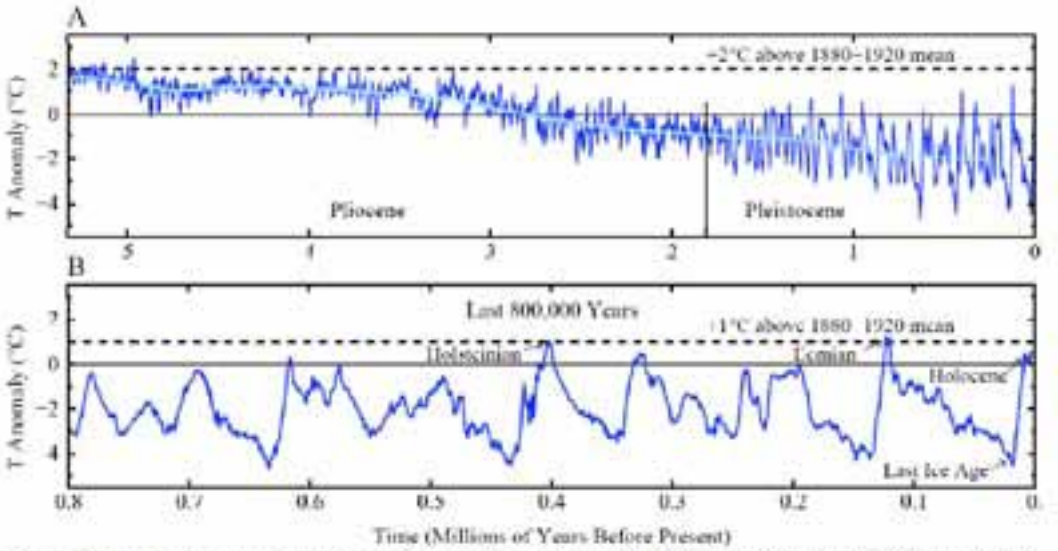


Fig. 2. Global temperature relative to 1880-1920 in (A) past 5,300,000 and (B) past 800,000 years (32).

Celsius (C) higher than they are today, the sea level was approximately 25 to 40 metres higher than today, there was no permanent sea ice cap in the Arctic and very little ice on Antarctica and Greenland. Or that oceans are now more acidic than they have been for at least 20 million years, and they are acidifying 10 times faster today than 55 million years ago, when a mass extinction of marine species occurred. It is predicted 10 per cent of the Arctic Ocean will be corrosively acidic by 2018, and 50 per cent by 2050.

Even taking into account the emissions reduction target in the Australian federal carbon package and other nations' commitments, the world is on track for 4 degrees or more of warming this century. At 4 degrees, the world would be warmer than during any part of the period in which modern humans evolved, and the rate of climate change would be faster than any previously experienced by humans. The world's sixth mass extinction would be in full swing. In the oceans, acidification would have rendered many calcium-shelled organisms such as coral, and many at the base of the ocean food chain, artefacts of history. Ocean ecosystems and food chains would collapse. Half of the world would be uninhabitable. Likely population capacity: under one billion people. Whilst the loss will be exponential and bunch towards the end of the century, on average that is a million human global-warming deaths every week, every year, for the next 90 years.

Is this communicated inside the Canberra beltway, or is it just for academic conferences? Is it important that people should know this? Is it important in setting goals? And what is the action required to keep our climate in the safe zone?

As a reference point, let's use the most recent assessment of these challenges, "Scientific case for avoiding dangerous climate change to protect young people and nature", currently in publication with 17 authors who are leaders in their fields, including James Hansen, Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, Stefan Rahmstorf, Johan Rockstrom, Eelco Rohling, Jeffrey Sachs, and Konrad Steffen. They find that:

- When slow feedbacks – important because of their impact on threshold or "tipping point" events – are taken into account, the "scenarios that reach 2 C **or even 1.5C global warming via only fast feedbacks appear to be exceedingly dangerous** (my emphasis). These scenarios run a high risk of the slow feedbacks coming into play in major ways." Hansen has explained why, at current temperatures, there is no "cushion" left to avoid dangerous climate change and "…even small global warming above the level of the Holocene begins to generate a disproportionate warming on the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets";

- to avoid 1.5C global warming, a reduction in atmosphere carbon dioxide to less than 350 ppm must be achieved before the end of this century, which would require **a 6 per cent per year decrease of fossil fuel emissions beginning in 2013, plus 100 GtC reforestation** (carbon drawdown). By way of comparison, Australia's emissions under the 2011 carbon legislation will be higher in 2020 than they are today.

[The paper also notes that "delaying fossil fuel emission cuts until 2020… causes CO2 to remain in the dangerous zone (above 350 ppm) until 2300. If reductions are delayed until 2030, CO2 remains above 400 ppm until almost 2500. These results emphasize the urgency of initiating emissions reduction. If emissions reduction had begun in 2005, reduction at 3.5 per cent per year would have achieved 350 ppm at 2100. Now the requirement is at least 6 per cent per year. If we assume only 50 GtC reforestation, the requirement becomes at least 9 per cent per year. **Further delay of emissions reductions until 2020 requires a reduction rate of 15 per cent per year** (emphasis added) to achieve 350 ppm in 2100".]

None of the big eNGOs want to say in public that global emissions need to drop six per cent annually to restrict warming to less than 1.5C, nor that achieving this will require fossil fuel infrastructure to be abandoned and drastic changes in the ways we use energy, live and work. It's not exactly out of the bright-siding handbook. It may well be beyond the scope of what is politically acceptable, but it is the new inconvenient truth. The failure to acknowledge, let alone construct, a strategy to achieve a six per cent annual reduction, makes that task impossible, so that in another eight years, six per cent a year will have become 15 per cent a year. Which is even more "impossible".

"We've reached a point where we have a crisis, an emergency, but people don't know that", Hansen said in November 2008. "There's a big gap between what's understood about global warming by the scientific community and what is known by the public and policymakers." When climate action advocates refuse to articulate or campaign on what the scientific community is telling us, the gap can only get larger.

The problem is now so big, and the scale and urgency of the solutions required so great, that it is impossible to talk about them within the current public policy frame. The business and political spheres have horizons too narrow and too limited in time to be able to deal with the challenges and complexities of global warming.

We have achieved a collective cognitive dissonance where the real challenge we face is excluded from discourse.

Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci's diagnosis of Depression-era Europe applies to the space we now inhabit: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born…"

There is no solution within the politics-as-usual frame; and there is no developed frame outside of it.

Many would say there is logic to the "two-step strategy": to first get the policy wheels going in Canberra and engage people around trivial outcomes (when compared to the scale of the problem), and ramp up the outcomes later. The problem, as Hansen et al have illustrated with clarity, is that time has run out for such an approach. It's got to be the brutal truth now, or never, and a method of connecting that reality to solutions, with an efficacious path that will build a community-wide mobilisation for action that can actually solve the problem.

Last year Roy Neel, a Vanderbilt University political scientist and formerly chief-of-staff to

Al Gore, was a visiting fellow at the University of Melbourne. At public lectures, in the print media and at university seminars, Neel gave a consistent critique of climate campaigning in the USA, and the role of the leading NGOs. He said climate politics had been reduced to the "doable", producing only "nominal victories". In contrast, he said, what was required was "courageous leadership", being steadfast in a plan with the **publicly-stated objective of solving the crisis**. The only goal is reducing greenhouse emissions and levels in the atmosphere, he said, without getting too bogged down in the bits and the detail.

And here's Al Gore's take:

> The scale and magnitude of the changes that are necessary to solve the climate crisis mean that all of the collateral reasons for taking these steps will not get us to where we need to go without a clear understanding of what we're facing if we don't act ... it's a mistake to move that to the periphery of the conversation as so many have done ... it has to be the heart of the conversation.

Rethinking climate communication and engagement

> "Happy talk" was not the approach taken by Lincoln confronting slavery, or by Franklin Roosevelt facing the grim realities after Pearl Harbour. Nor was it Winston Churchill's message to the British people at the height of the London blitz. Instead, in these and similar cases transformative leaders told the truth honestly, with conviction and eloquence." – David Orr, preface to *Down to the Wire*

In "The real climate message is in the shadows. It's time to shine the light", Daniel Voronoff drew on lessons from health promotion to argue persuasively what effective climate messaging requires. He identified the problem as bright-siding:

> The risk we face with the present suite of messages is that without stating the problem – namely the severity of the threat and our susceptibility to it – there is no argument for change. Without stating the threat, the public mind is lead to question, why a tax for innovation and jobs when the mining industry makes jobs anyway? Imagine the anti-smoking advertisement that fails to mention mouth and lung cancer, telling the smoker they should give up a pleasurable habit of ten years because, well, they're certain to feel better. The evidence shows this appeal just doesn't work.

He went on to articulate what the "Sell the Sizzle" approach (see page 6) actually does by making campaigning messages the choice between "hell" and "heaven". "Sell the Sizzle" is broadly consistent with a meta-analysis of research on health promotion campaigns and their outcomes, which found that the most successful approach is to combine a striking honesty about the problem with a message of personal efficacy: it is about you, and you are part of the solution. The study found no negative effects of messages honest about the severity and likelihood of the health impact, provided there was a clear articulation about what can be done to stop the problem. In fact, the more detail about the severity of the impact, the more effective was the message. People's well-founded fear has a key role in political messaging, when connected to efficacious solutions. The WorkChoices campaign by Australian unions in 2006–2007 showed that. And modern environmentalism was born from the dire warnings in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.

As an aside, there is a question as to whether renewable energy is the sizzle, or climate safety (a 'positive vision of the future', as Futerra says) is the real "sizzle". First, "As any good marketer knows, when you're selling something, you're selling the personal benefits, not the product itself. In the same sense with climate change, we need to sell the benefits

of stopping man-made climate change." So Coke and Toyota don't sell a brown liquid or a car motor, they sell fun and a feeling. Climate change action aims, in one narrow technological sense, to achieve product replacement by closing down the fossil fuels energy system and building a renewable energy system. That's the product. But perhaps the benefit, the "sizzle", is building a safe and secure future for people and planet, as opposed to a world of increasing climate extremes, harm and insecurity. This is the personal climate narrative for people and their immediate concerns – self, family, where and how they live and work; home, food and water in/security – which is a choice between climate harm and climate safety.

It is worth noting that the May 2011 CSIRO report on "Communication and climate change: What the Australian public thinks" found that in response to a question about the "Most important environmental issues facing Australia today", 772 rated "Climate change and related topics" in their top three concerns, as opposed to 101 for "Renewable energy" (total respondents 1602). Tristan Edis has made some interesting comments about the politics of renewable energy across electoral demographics, arguing that "support amongst the community for government policy to support clean energy is soft", particularly in the mortgage belt.

So how can the story of climate change be related to peoples' lives? One obvious opportunity is to "connect the dots" between the extreme weather people are experiencing right now, and future climate change. It is stunning that the (then) Labor state governments and the federal Labor government, and most of the large eNGOs, have been conspicuously absent in saying clearly and often in public that the remarkable run of extreme weather (record floods, temperatures, fires, storm, cyclones) people have experienced in recent years is linked to climate change. In fact, both Anna Bligh and Julia Gillard went out of their way NOT to make the connection, and a federal Labor MP who did was told to desist.

As Voronoff wrote recently on this blog:

> Although this message is clearly true, it's painful to watch as opportunities to communicate the problem we face are lost, mainly because each moment is a rare and valuable opening to let people know, honestly, and in a way that connects with something that is precious and tangible and that everyone has, whether poor, fair or excellent – that is, their health.

It's a free kick to connect future climate impacts to the present, and the words aren't difficult. Here's climate scientist David Karoly:

> Australia has been known for more than 100 years as a land of droughts and flooding rains, but what climate change means is Australia becomes a land of more droughts and worse flooding rains.

The real benefit in joining the dots is that people are more concerned about climate change when they experience extreme weather and natural disasters:

> It is clear that the evidence and projected consequences which respondents refer to in the context of their belief and concern about climate change are often related to extreme weather events and natural disasters.
>
> 37 per cent of Australian respondents reported having had direct personal experience with differing natural disaster events. Overall, public risk perceptions and understandings of the threat of climate change in Australia appear to be strongly influenced and informed by knowledge of direct or indirect experience with both acute and chronic natural disasters in the Australian environment.

And research finds that:

> … media coverage of climate change and elite cues from politicians and advocacy groups are among the most prominent drivers of the public perception of the threat associated with climate change [and] the greater the quantity of media coverage of climate change, the greater the level of public concern.

In other words, people who want climate action should talk about the extreme weather and climate change, and push in onto the public agenda. But Labor, in government federally and in opposition in the eastern States, has consciously done the opposite, which suits Tony Abbott and the Minerals Council perfectly.

Ninety per cent of Australians think climate change is happening, but only 50 per cent believe it is human caused. The other 40 per cent believe that climate change is happening, but that it is natural. The voting intention of this 40 per cent is overwhelmingly conservative. If we are going to save our climate, if we are going to come close to 'winning', then we must engage with these people – and we will not engage them by talking about loss of species, the dying coral of the Great Barrier Reef, or the demise of Kakadu National Park. All the lines of evidence show that framing climate change as an environmental threat is obsolete when talking to conservatives. We need a frame that can reach across the divide of world-views and speak to common values. That frame is climate change as a threat to health, wellbeing and livelihood. It is a frame that projects our movement as the preservers and protectors of life: yours, your family's, your community's, your country's. It is a frame that says – in this ever-changing world, a world of threats that seem insurmountable – that you, everyone, have a role to play in making it safe again, bringing security, bequeathing certainty.

Communication and messaging is only a small part of the task we face as climate activists. Behaviour change is crucial. As we have already seen, engagement grows by giving people an active, meaningful choice between good and bad. With extreme weather affecting local communities in all sorts of immediate ways, there is an expanding space at the local level to engage communities in action, whether it be about local flooding and severe rain, the effect of heat waves on the old and the very young in their local government area, the future of gardens, or of the local coastline. Such action allows an understanding of the science and impacts of climate change to be understood through local involvement. As Grist's David Roberts says:

> Belief doesn't come first; action comes first. Changing people's behaviour – in small, incremental, but additive ways – is the best way to open their minds to the science. It all comes down to change on the ground. Climate hawks need to get smart about driving behaviour change wherever they can. Those behaviour changes will pull changes in consciousness in their wake.

We need to give more people the opportunity to learn the behaviour change needed with acts of civic participation, whether it be petitions, letter-writing, talking and surveying neighbours and friends, participating and organising local meetings or groups, sitting down and refusing to move, and so on, and thereby developing community leadership. The climate action movement's role is in facilitating, supporting and reinforcing civic participation, helping to build an enabling infrastructure for a political transformation that always has the strategic goal in focus of 100 per cent renewable energy, the closure of fossil-fuel infrastructure and large-scale carbon drawdown. And that contrasts sharply which just "saying yes" to legislation which was always going to pass on the numbers.

What is lacking, in Roy Neel's term, is courageous leadership. That includes confronting several uncomfortable truths:

- We face an organised denial-and-delay lobby prepared to spend tens of millions of

dollars a year in Australia in lobbying, public relations and advertising, buying mass media, and funding the professional denial industry;

- What needs to be done cannot be achieved in today's neo-conservative capitalist economy, because a rapid transition will required a great deal of planning, coordination and allocation of labour and skills, investment and resources that can't just be left to markets and pricing;
- There is a choice between two dystopias: some very significant social and economic disruptions now while we make the transition quickly, or a state of permanent and escalating disruption as the planet's climate heads into territory where most people and most species will not survive: our task now is to chart the "least-worst" outcome;
- So this will not be painless, and the mass of the population will need to actively understand and participate in some personally-disruptive measures, but they will do so because they have learned that the transition plans are both fair and necessary, and the other choice is unspeakable.

Amongst those prominent in public life, there are people who do understand these problems and the challenges discussed here. With some nimble-footed cooperation, they could establish a new public platform.

Amongst the not-for-profit, advocacy, union and welfare sectors there are a few organisations and senior staff who would in general terms already agree with the ideas presented here. But there are too many focussed on the fight for sectoral advantage, or are paralysed by fear or conservative organisational norms, or lack the imagination to break from strategies which are not working. As the federal Labor government falls apart, and the realisation grows that the conservatives may win not just the next election, but Senate control as well, there is a sense of crisis in the eNGO sector.

Amongst grassroots groups and activists there is energy and commitment, but often a strategic failure, an unwillingness to engage in sustained, united front campaigning, a lack of effective coordination and review, and far too few resources and tools.

Let's be blunt. The change we need is not going to happen without mass civic participation and a people-power movement for transformation. We must all help to build these. It is here that the big advocacy groups are already facing a stark choice: to stay inside the Canberra beltway, do make-a-video-tick-a-box-send-an-email-give-us-money but fail to empower their membership and supporters or, on the other hand, put serious resources into supporting community organising, spend less time competing as brands in the climate advocacy supermarket, and share resources to help build mass civic participation.

> If you think there's an existential danger facing the country, you say so. That's part of what it means to be a leader. – David Roberts, Grist

April 2012

The real climate message is in the shadows. It's time to shine the light.

by **Daniel Voronoff** / First published 30 August 2011

There was more than one kernel of truth in the speech made by the Shadow Minister for Communications Malcolm Turnbull at the Virginia Chadwick Foundation back in July. But the one I'd like to look at is the analogy about how not listening to the science on climate change:

> …is like ignoring the advice of your doctor to give up smoking and lose 10 kilos on the basis that somebody down the pub told you their uncle Ernie ate three pies a day and smoked a packet of cigarettes and lived to 95.

Malcolm Turnbull was commenting on the perils of denialism and its toxic effect on public discourse, however, the comparison also holds a very literal and crueller truth – global warming is a threat to human health.

Just as galling as the deadly effect of denialism is the long-standing tendency of the environment movement to avoid spelling out the brutal impacts of global warming, especially its adverse health and wellbeing effects, a habit epitomised by the Australian Government's "Clean Energy Future" campaign. For a while now we've been hearing that it is somehow poor, dumb and ineffective communication to discuss and elaborate the problem of global warming, its dangers and how threatening to our lives and livelihoods it is. We're told that it's disempowering, a turn-off, and that such 'apocalyptic rhetoric' is, in part, responsible for the public's lowered inclination to consider global warming important. Sometimes we're even told that to mention 'carbon dioxide' and 'pollution' in the same breath is a fatal cause of distraction from the one and true communication goal.

That goal, the message we ought to be on-about, is that renewable energy and energy-efficiency are new industries with immense investment and profit opportunities, which create jobs and, by default, makes our nation strong and competitive. When asked why we should put ourselves through all the trouble of rebuilding our energy system, and for that matter, the transport system, agricultural system, the built environment, etc, etc… this is the received answer. And remember: keep smiling and don't mention the 'nasty bits'. Although this message is clearly true, it's painful to watch as opportunities to communicate the problem we face are lost, mainly because each moment is a rare and valuable opening to let people know, honestly, and in a way that connects with something that is precious and tangible and that everyone has, whether poor, fair or excellent: that is, their health.

A study cited in recent times in support of omitting the nasty bits is Apocalypse Soon? Dire messages reduce belief in global warming by contradicting Just-World beliefs. Its main finding, unsurprisingly, is that when you present a frightening message about global warming to people, without telling them how to address the threat, they tend to become sceptical about the threat. But it's worth noting one of the study's conclusions is that the "findings extend past research showing that fear-based appeals, especially those not coupled with a clear solution, can backfire and undermine the intended effects of the messages [emphasis added]."

A lot of research has gone into understanding the role of fear in motivating human behaviour, especially in the field of public health promotion (for example quit smoking

campaigns), which can shed some light on this question of whether or not to address or omit the frightening truth. And, given that the Apocalypse Soon study tells us its findings are in broad agreement with the literature, I thought it might be useful to look over the finding of a meta-analysis of studies into the use of, what are known in the field as, 'fear appeals'. In these analyses, the authors compile, compare and examine the findings of many similar studies and report on the results: the benefit being access to large sample sizes, lending strength to the evidence. But, before we go on, it's useful to define a few terms used in the study that are common to the psychology literature.

Firstly is the understanding of 'perceived threat,' which is said to be made up of two facets: perceived susceptibility to the threat (how at risk you feel) and perceived severity of the threat (how harmful it's thought to be). Secondly, fear, being an emotion, is distinct from perceived threat, a cognition, but the two are, naturally, related: the higher the threat, the greater the fear. Lastly there's 'perceived efficacy,' which has two facets: self-efficacy, the belief about one's ability to respond to a threat (yes I can do it); and response efficacy, one's belief that the recommended response can avert the threat (it will work).

And the meta-study findings? "In sum, fear appeals appear to be effective when they depict a significant and relevant threat (to increase perceptions of severity and susceptibility) and when they outline effective responses that appear easy to accomplish (to increase perceptions of response efficacy and self-efficacy). Low-threat fear appeals appear to produce little, if any, persuasive effects… the advice to message designers is the same: A persuader should promote high levels of threat and high levels of efficacy to promote attitude, intention, and behaviour changes."

Some other findings:

- Increasing the focus on severity in fear appeals appears to produce the strongest effects on perceptions. Changes in the message variables of susceptibility, response efficacy, and self-efficacy all produce moderate effects.
- Importantly, there was no support for any hypothesized negative effects from fear appeals.
- Strong efficacy messages are needed to match the severity and susceptibility messages otherwise 'fear controls' and defensive responses kick in.

On this last point the researchers note the risk associated with messages that induce fear is that they may backfire if the audience don't believe they're able to effectively avert a threat. In applying these findings to climate change communications, to my mind, this risk should be evaluated in the context of other risks inherent in the current, pivotal, carbon tax pitch, and beyond. The risk we face with the present suite of messages is that without stating the problem – namely the severity of the threat and our susceptibility to it – there is no argument for change. Without stating the threat, the public mind is lead to question, why a tax for innovation and jobs when the mining industry makes jobs anyway? Imagine the anti-smoking advertisement that fails to mention mouth and lung cancer, telling the smoker they should give up a pleasurable habit of ten years because, well, they're certain to feel better. The evidence shows this appeal just doesn't work.

There should be no doubt about the applicability of health promotion to climate change, just go read the science. There isn't much about global warming that doesn't end in a fatal or morbid human consequence somewhere down the line, sooner or later. Indeed, sooner and later. And it's precisely this point –the human health and wellbeing impacts – that should form the centre of our message. Let's put aside the loss of the Great Barrier Reef and Kakadu National Park for a while and talk instead about heat stress, asthma, dengue

fever, salmonella, drowning and third degree burns. We should tell about the economic disruption and food insecurity, and the implications of all of these for the livelihoods of our children. This is the sage advice of U.S. communications experts who've taken the trouble to consult with health professionals and develop a timely primer on climate change communications centred on health.

To those who argue that recourse to 'fear appeals' is 'manipulative', my answer is: manipulation is when you lie, like saying climate change is crap, or omit the truth, like not mentioning that climate change is the problem and not spelling out its effects. By contrast, openly discussing the science – which is frightening – and broadcasting our common plight to our fellow Australians, is taking responsibility for the truth. So, there are three elements that should compose the shape the direction of communications about global warming – we must be honest and upfront about:

- The severity of climate change impacts and our susceptibility to those impacts.
- The real adverse human impacts: the loss of life and livelihood, compounding over the generations.
- The action that we can take, that millions of Australians are taking, to stop this threat, and that we can win.

CSIRO recently published a study on public attitudes and feelings about climate change. The study surveyed about 5000 people and asked, among other things, what their feelings about climate change were. Significantly, fear was the most highly rated emotion felt by the 50.4% of respondents who believed that climate change was real and human-induced. This group was most likely to be "somewhat worried" and "very worried" about climate change and tended to perceive higher levels of personal harm from climate change than respondents who thought climate change was natural or wasn't happening. To my mind this shows, from another angle, how perceptions of threat (susceptibility to and severity of climate change) and fear may shape an opinion about the issue.

Another large survey shows that fifty-nine percent of Australian respondents thought that the region where they lived was vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, with two thirds of these respondents indicating that their location was "very" or "reasonably" vulnerable[9]. This result contrasts with that of Britons, who ranked the vulnerability of their location much lower. The researchers note that this may be due to how Australians are switched on to our continent's natural climatic variability, and that in the words of Professor David Karoly (via Dorthea Mackellar), climate change will mean a country of more droughts and worse flooding rains. Again, these survey results show that in the public mind there is a well-founded perception of climate susceptibility and severity, indicating that an honest message on this theme would reinforce common understanding.

I look forward, then, to seeing a communications campaign that kicks off with an advertisement that goes something like this:

> **"Good Health, Safe Climate"**
>
> A General Practitioner's office. The Doctor sits on her desk and addresses the camera.
>
> "As a Doctor, and a mother, I'm concerned about the health and well-being of my community. In my work I get to see the hardship that poor health can cause for people – and I get the opportunity to help my patients achieve good health. That's why I'd like to tell you about the dangers that global warming and climate change pose to your health, and what you can do to protect yourself and your family."
>
> Images of people caught up in drought, catastrophic flood, bushfire and heatwave. The image of a child struggling with asthma. Doctor's voice over:

"Scientists agree that greenhouse pollution causes global warming, making our climate change. It means more droughts, more floods, and more intense bushfires. Heatwaves will last longer, and it increases the likelihood of asthma and the spread of diseases like salmonella and dengue fever."

Back in the Doctor's office:

"And we now know that climate change is very likely to cause significant economic disruption, which means that our lives, and the lives of our children are at risk. But it doesn't have to be like this."

The Doctor is in a park. She joins a group of people. As she speaks, the camera slowly pans back revealing more and more people.

"I'd like you to join with me and millions of Australians who are standing up for good health and a safe climate. We're taking action to stop the big polluters, by coming together and making our voices heard: by voting, letter writing, signing petitions, and talking to our neighbours and friends about this threat."

The camera pans upwards revealing, from overhead, a large crowd spelling out: Good Health Safe Climate.

"Join us: what you do now can make all the difference."

This isn't the last word; it's just the beginning, an outline of elements that should compose a broader narrative that puts the health of families, children and the populace, at the centre of the message. Here I've emphasised civic participation activities in the call to action, rather than a tax or jobs and renewables. This is because without empowered participation, neither the tax, nor renewables and the jobs, would even be on the agenda – nor would there be any hope of avoiding dangerous climate change.

Powerpoint and video of this article

The presentation "'Saving Lives: reframing climate change around health and livelihood" explores the issues presented in this post. It makes the case for reaching out to conservative audiences so as to widen the political space for the necessary social-economic transition. It takes a critical look at climate change messaging to date, identifies its shortcomings, and, drawing on the cognitive sciences, outlines a human-centred communication that acknowledges the threats, demonstrates agency and inspires empathy.

View presentation as powerpoint with audio:

http://dl.dropbox.com/u/75392680/Strategic%20Framing%205.pptx

View presentation as video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtP1rLC27F8