**ANNUAL REPORT 2008**

**DOCTORS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AUSTRALIA**

Our mission in 2008 continued to be to educate on the health aspects of climate change. It was a year in which the World Health Organisation (WHO) chose “protecting health from climate change” as the theme for World Health Day in recognition that climate change is posing ever growing threats to global public health security and that “wherever you live, climate change threatens your health”. We operated to the best of our ability in recognition that the actions of governments are woefully inadequate in addressing the fast-emerging consequences of climate change. There were many other pressing health problems arising from environmental neglect which demanded our attention, but we have decided to remain focussed on the one issue that overwhelmingly threatens the health and well-being of humanity.

**Contributions to World Health Day April 7th**

To recognise World Health Day and the topic "Protecting Health from Climate Change", together with the Climate Institute, we released a national report “Climate Change Health Check 2020” written by Dr Graeme Horton and Professor Tony McMichael. Notification was sent to all members at the time. The aim of the document was firstly to emphasise that climate change is a health issue and secondly to indicate that there would be changes to medical practice as a result of climate change.

The report was endorsed by the RACGP and the AMA joined in the press release. The Presidents of both organisations helped with media. The media ‘take’ was very successful. DEA and the Climate Institute did over 40 interviews on radio and articles appeared in the Age, West Australian, Sunday Tasmanian, ABC on-line and ABC Rural. In addition there was a large take in rural newspapers. Interviews were also given by the AMA and RACGP. Overseas the interviews included Radio France and Al Jazeera. WHO offered congratulations to DEA on the report.

A World Health Day lecture 'Protecting Health from Climate Change' at the McCaughey Centre by Grant Blashki was very successful. Publication of Climate Change Health Check 2020 resulted in invitations to DEA to give a number of lectures in Australia and overseas. These are listed in the references.

**Garnaut Final Report**

In our submission, we summarised the predicted health impacts of climate change in Australia. We indicated that the Garnaut Climate Change Review needed to cost the expected health outcomes of the expected climate changes in Australia. In themselves the health outcomes provide a powerful argument for proceeding with early and vigorous greenhouse gas mitigation. It was important that the Garnaut Review understood the nature and expected scale of the health impacts. These include the numerous forms, degrees and effects of heat stress and injuries from storm, flood and fire, direct consequences that are occurring already in Australia. Changes in the incidence and spread of infectious diseases depend upon subtle effects of climate change on ecology: they are more difficult to predict but are measurable. However the most significant effects on health are likely to be due to the loss of ecological services which are in effect, human life support systems for nutrition and fresh water required for health.
Professor Garnaut walked his road to Damascus and came to understand the dire consequences of the uncontrolled rise in greenhouse emissions. It therefore came as a surprise to all that his recommendations on targets for reduction were totally inadequate to offer salvation for the Great Barrier Reef and other segments of Australia’s ecology. DEA therefore made a further submission this time to the Supplementary Draft Report and wrote to the Prime Minister stating our concerns about the inadequacy of the recommendations.

**Educational Activities**

DEA has continued and expanded its educational role on the health aspects of climate change. Posters, pamphlets and meetings are used to deliver our messages.

**Posters**

A poster on Biodiversity and Health was distributed to 35,000 RACGP members in December 2007. The philosophy driving this initiative was the need to recognise that the single most important factor in the health of each person is not the availability of good health services, or effective cancer drugs, or short waiting lists or state of the art accident services, it is the integrity of the Earth’s ecological services. Perhaps this is an understatement for it is the only factor of consequence. Without ecological services, the Earth would be ‘dead’ like many other planets including our neighbouring planets in the solar system. It follows that the protection of ecological services is integral to maintaining all advances we have made in medical science and in providing a future for further advances.

The title of the poster “Less Drive Time, More Alive Time” summarises the avoidance of many diseases and greenhouse emissions by walking, cycling or taking public transport, in preference to private car usage. This poster is available from October and will be distributed to all RACGP members in December 2008.

DEA posters continue to have a wide exposure with use in other countries and requests for copies from schools and youth groups in Australia and other countries particularly North America

**Leaflets and brochures**

GreenClinic Brochure, an initiative between the Australian Conservation Council and DEA, continues to attract attention. The project was evaluated in an article in Australian Family Physician. Vol. 37, No. 8, August 2008, 683

“The GreenClinic Pilot. Educational intervention for environmentally sustainable general practice” with Grant Blashki and Graeme Horton as co-authors. Podcasts on the topic were produced by Grant Blashki and Don Henry at [www.racgp.org.au/afp/audio](http://www.racgp.org.au/afp/audio)

There are two new educational pamphlets for use in doctor’s waiting rooms “Prescription for a Healthier Planet” prepared by members Richard Yin and George Crisp, and “Help Yourself and Help the Planet” prepared by Richard Yin, George Crisp and Medical Observer magazine. This pamphlet has also been made available by Medical Observer in poster format.

**Joint Scientific Meeting of DEA and Rural Health WA Fremantle, October 2007**

This was an outstanding success. There were 200 registrants of whom 28 were DEA members. The opening two lectures by Bill Castleden (Global healing –a WA Perspective) and Colin Butler (Global health, global tensions and climate change.) were given to all delegates; DEA speakers then gave additional talks in the streamed sessions.
DEA Workshop at RACGP/WONCA Conference, Melbourne, October 2008

In this workshop DEA speakers presented four topics each focusing on different emerging areas, followed by a discussion panel.

1. Climate Change as a Global Public Health Problem. Dr Grant Blashki
2. Environmentally Sustainable Health Care. Dr Graham Horton
3. Medical Responses to Climate Changes: Planning Adaptations at Multiple Levels. Dr David King
4. The important role of doctors in community campaigns to influence climate change policy - lessons from successful anti-tobacco and forest protection campaigns. Dr Bill Castleden

The trade exhibition at the meeting was also an important venue for DEA to display its educational material.

Other Meetings

DEA is aware that many issues other than climate change are of concern to our members and we intend to try and contribute to these issues as opportunities arise. For example a Symposium on Genetically-Modified Crops and Foods. Facts, Fallacies and Policies was organised by the WA Committee of DEA and held at the Staff Club, University of Western Australia, 15th May 2008. The Speakers were Professor Michael Jones, Professor of Agricultural Biotechnology at Murdoch University, Dr Judy Carman, Epidemiologist and Biochemist, Director, Institute of Health and Environmental Research, and Sharon Fox, scientist in Environmental Science and Molecular Biology, Murdoch University.

Interaction with Governments and Elected Representatives.

This interaction has been fostered by letters to all members and senators in the federal parliament, and by submissions to parliamentary committees.

There have been two mail outs to federal members in 2008.

The first letter on community measures to reduce greenhouse emissions asked members to respond by telling us “what you personally are doing to address the problem of climate change. Let us know how you are showing leadership within your electorate and please send to us any messages you are using in your newsletters to constituents.” This letter received a number of positive responses including one from the Treasurer published on www.dea.org.au. However we concluded that much work remained to be done to convince our representatives that they needed to act on this issue.

The second letter addressed the issues of renewable energy and an emissions trading scheme. Within this context we asked for a bipartisan approach to the urgent problems of climate change.

Submissions have been made to
(1) The Senate Standing Committee on Economics Enquiry into the Renewable Energy Legislation Amendment (renewable power percentage) Bill 2008,
(2) The Garnaut Review Committee,
(3) The COAG Working Group on Climate Change and Water on Design Options for the Expanded Renewable Energy Target, and to
(4) The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry and Resources.
(5) Submission to the 2020 Summit, number 4317.

Media Initiative on Health and Climate Change

DEA used a half-page advertisement in the Weekend Australian on November 10th 2007 on the health aspects of climate change entitled “Enough to make you Sick”. Concomitantly the web site was headed with an article expanding the topic
Collaboration between DEA and Medical Observer Magazine

This is a very important development which will facilitate distribution of DEA’s educational messages for Medical Observer Magazine is a weekly newspaper sent to about 24,000 Australian General Practitioners.

On June 13 2008 Medical Observer launched a Green Issue which included articles where DEA members were featured and interviewed. There were articles on DEA’s Climate Change Health Check 2020 report and subsequent issues have also featured other DEA initiatives such as GreenClinic and BikeDoctor. It is intended that DEA contributors write a commentary on matters relating to the environment and health, as well as ideas for articles and personal interest stories looking at ways in which doctors are attempting to minimise their environmental impact.

Poola Challenge Grant

DEA has received a Challenge Grant from the Poola Foundation (Tom Kantor Fund) towards the employment of administrative staff. This is an important development for DEA and will allow us to increase our activities. We thank the Poola Foundation for their generous contribution.

Chair of Doctors for the Environment Australia

Dr Bill Castleden retired from the Chair after 5 years of dedicated service. His commitment and effort have contributed significantly to the development and success of the organisation over this time. All members of the organisation have extended their thanks to Bill for his contributions. Professor Michael Kidd has joined the Management Committee and will chair the organisation for 2008-2009. He is Professor and head of the Discipline of General Practice at The University of Sydney. He was President of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners from 2002-2006 and during this time developed a partnership between the RACGP and Doctors for the Environment Australia. He is an elected member of the executive committee of The World Organisation of Family Doctors and is their liaison person with the World Health Organisation. He works as a general practitioner in Darlinghurst in Sydney.

Publications


Blashki G, Contributing Author to National Adaptation Research Plan (Human Health) Australian National University.


Blashki G, McMichael T, Karoly DJ. Climate change and primary health care. Australian Family Physician Vol. 36, No. 12, December 2007 989
Blashki G. GPs and the Environment. **Australian Family Physician** Vol. 36, No. 12, December 2007 981


Blashki G. Climate change a global health risk. The University of Melbourne Voice Vol. 3, No. 1 14 April - 12 May 2008


The article was rated as the top story in the Primary Health Care Research and Information Service e-bulletin for the week commencing 24/1/08


Horton G. “Promote eco-health.” Medical Observer opinion piece 18th July 2008


Kirczenow I. “Greening in Practice” Medical Observer 15th August 2008

Kirczenow I. Article in Australian Practice Manager’s Newsletter 2008


Shearman D with Positano S and Wayne Smith J. Climate Change as a Crisis in World Civilisation: Why We Must Totally Transform How We Live. Edwin Mellen Press 2007. This book has been awarded The Adele Mellen Prize for its distinguished contribution to scholarship.

Shearman D. The Role of Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA). RACGP SA and NT Matters June 2008 p6


**Presentations at Conferences, Talks and Lectures.**


Blashki G. World Health Day lecture - Climate change is global public health risk. University of Melbourne 7 April 2008.


Castleden W. "Climate Change and Health" at Perth Sunfair 6 April 2008

Castleden W. "The Environment and Health" as a half-day workshop for a management organisation called TEC 111 on 24 April 2008
Castleden W. “Climate Change and Health” Busselton Rotary Club 6 August 2008.

Furnass B. presented a paper to the ANU Emeritus Faculty (EF) on 'Entropy, climate and health: how shall we adapt” November 2007  http://www.anu.edu.au/emeritus/events/furnass-entropy.html”

Horton G. Conference presentation at General Practice and Primary Health Care Research Conference: “GreenClinic: an educational intervention for environmentally sustainable general practice”  5th June 2008, Hobart

Horton G. Invited speaker at Informa’s National Public Health Reform Summit: “Climate Change and Human Health”  8th August 2008, Sydney


King D. Presentation on climate change and health at Millennium Development Goals symposium on September 6th to 130 medical students from University of Qld.

Kirczenow I. “Climate Change and Health”- talk at Conservation Council of WA 23rd Jan 2008

Kirczenow I. “Sustainably Speaking” guest lecturer at 28th May 2008 Curtin University to Masters students in Sustainability on topic of “Environment and Health

Shearman D. Liberal democracy’s failure to cope with climate change. Lectures in Environmental politics. Flinders University August 2008

Towl N. "Our deadly legacy, the health consequences of unmitigated climate change", Mutagenics and Experimental Pathology Association of Australia, Annual conference 30th November 2007

Towl N. "Climate change and health", Hospital grand rounds, North West Regional Hospital, Tasmania 16th April 2008

Towl N. Presentation on climate change and health for the UTas, University Department of Rural Health Green Week. 18th June 2008


Towl N. Climate Change, challenges and opportunities, presentation to The Royal Society, Tasmanian Branch 1st September 2008

**Media, Press, Interviews**

**Graeme Horton:**

**Grant Blashki**

**Verelle Roocke**
RTR FM (community run and funded station) program called 'UNderstorey' with exploration of community issues. 23/10/07. What DEA does and hopes to achieve were discussed.

**DEA and its committee members were featured in the following:-**
Graeme Horton;
GP ecowarrior’s call to arms. Medical Observer 13 June 2008
Changing the world. Medical Observer 13 June 2008
Green crusaders step up. Medical Observer 15 August 2008
Aussie doc goes global with greening. Medical Observer 29 August 2008

Grant Blashki;
Medical Observer "The Case for Going Green" 13 June 2008.
Medical Observer "5 minutes with... Dr Grant Blashki" profile Friday, 9 May 2008.
Medical Observer GPs to bear brunt of climate change Friday, 18 April 2008.
Medical Observer Climate change: we want you, 6 March 2008
Courier Mail "Climate change a risk to health" 7 April 2008
Sydney Morning Herald "Climate change a risk to health" 7 April 2008
West Australian "Climate change a risk to health" 7 April 2008
The Age "Feeling Under the Weather" 8 April 2008
Channel 10's Good News Week re Climate Change a Mental Health risk 7 April 2008.
Profiled Australian Jewish News re 2020 summit Sustainability Group April 2008
Quoted in Herald Sun "Climate change anxiety" 7 April 2008
Letter to editor in The Age- World Health Day and Climate Change
The Australian re Malthouse Green Theatre 2008

Bill Castleden
Together with DEA he is featured in an article by Shane Cummings to which he contributed "Environmental health: living in a carbon neutral world" in Medical Forum (WA) September 2008 page 14.

DEA gets prominent mention on two occasions in the article in the British Medical Journal by Tony McMichael and colleagues “Global environmental change and health: impacts, inequalities, and the health sector”.
http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/336/7637/191

DEA was featured in the following international newspaper articles:-
Tehran Times: "Aussie medics warn on health impact of climate change" 8 April 2008

Gulf Times "Doctors Down Under warn about health impacts of climate change" 7 April 2008

Macau Daily Times "Australian doctors warn of health impacts of climate change" 7 April 2008
http://www.macaudailytimesnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=9576&Itemid=32

China Post "High levels of ultraviolet rays increase cataract blindness risk" 8 April 2008

France24 "Climate change increases cataract blindness risk: experts" 7 April 2008

The Times of India "Climate change increases cataract risk" 7 April 2008
http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Climate_change_blindness_related/articleshow/2932030.cms

Khaleej Times "Climate change increases cataract risk" 7 April 2008
http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?fdate=data/todaysfeatures/2008/April/todaysfeatures_April7.xml
&section=todaysfeatures&col=

Independent Bangladesh "Climate change increases cataract blindness risk: experts" 7 April 2008