

## **Annual Report of Doctors for the Environment Australia, 2004**

**The year October 2003-2004 has been one of considerable progress for Doctors for the Environment Australia.**

### **Briefing and Education**

**One of our most important roles the briefing of Members of Parliament on current environmental issues that have significant implications for health. Therefore in this Federal Election year we concentrated a significant portion of our resources on political communication, both at a personal level and as a group.**

**In March, prompted by media reports that Mark Latham was planning a visit to Tasmania, we wrote to all Federal Labor members of parliament asking that they work to protect the remaining old growth forests in Tasmania. In pursuing such issues we do not act simply as another conservation group. Rather we link protection of these forests to mitigation of climate change, itself a health issue, to sustainability and to biodiversity. As we now know, Labor did move to protect these forests very late in the election campaign; political comment has suggested that the matter was introduced into the debate too late and with inadequate finesse. Hopefully the bad comment will not lead to Labor changing their policy**

**Doctors for the Environment sent a letter with an enclosed questionnaire to all Federal politicians in the lead up to the election; this being the most likely way in which our concerns would be discussed in the Party Rooms of the main political parties. The letter and questionnaire were sent out on 26 June 2004 and published on the DEA website, together with the responses from all the parties.**

**These initiatives were supplemented by visits to Parliamentarians by Management Committee members. Some thirty Members were seen, many of whom were Ministers or Shadow Ministers. These meetings covered not only the health aspects of climate change but also other environmental health issues that might be of interest to a particular member. We also supplemented these visits with letters to the Prime Minister Leader of the Opposition, selected Ministers and members.**

**There is no way that we can analyse the results of our briefings. One might look at the environmental outcomes of the election and feel that we had little impact. Alternatively it might be that these outcomes would have been less satisfactory without our efforts. We are**

not discouraged for we have established contact with many politicians and will maintain these contacts

### **Submissions to Parliamentary Committees**

These submissions can be an important means of communicating with the government and opposition. DEA made submissions on the Kyoto Protocol Ratification Bill 2003 to the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee, on USFTA to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Treaties, and also on the USFTA to The Senate Select Committee on USFTA. Submissions are published in parliamentary reports.. In the case of the Treaties Committee we had an interview of approximately one hour. These discussions are recorded in Hansard.

### **Policy Development**

It is an important part of the work of the Management Committee to prepare policy that can be used in briefing politicians and other public figures concerned with national issues. During the year, a population policy was completed and a policy on genetically modified foods was prepared using material from the Public Health Association of Australia and the British Medical Association. Policy is published on the webpage

### **Constitution**

A revised Constitution was prepared during the year and was approved at the Annual general meeting in Brisbane in October. The purpose of the new constitution was to clarify matters of process and to define categories of membership. In the Constitution medical student are now full members and a decision has been made that they do not pay an annual due. This emphasises the organisations intent to attract student members as a priority

### **State Committees**

While much of our work has been at the national level we are concious of the need to act at State level on many issues. Many of the issues brought to our attention by members relate to state environmental health issues. To illustrate some of the issues, we have become involved in the health aspects of aerial spraying of herbicides by forestry interests in Tasmania, which has contaminated water supplies, the prevention of development in the Daintree region that falls under the aegis of the Douglasshire council, the problems of industrial pollution in SA, and the environmental issues arising from increasing urban development in South East Queensland.

**We believe that such issues are best dealt with by state committees of DEA with members who know the local issues and can liaise with their state parliamentary representatives. We are attempting to form committees in the model of the already established committee in WA**

### **Publications**

**When ever possible the management Committee has published material regarding our activities**

**David Shearman “Doctors for the Environment, Australia. Promoting health through care of the Environment.” Medic SA volume 16 number 11 p 27 2003**

**David Shearman and Linda Selvey “The Hidden Mercury Threat” GP Review, vol 8, number 4, page 11 2004**

**Nick J Towle “In search of Sustainability” Medical Journal of Australia vol 180 pp 11-12, 2004**

**Interview with Bill Castleden “Outside Surgery” Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. Surgical News, vol 5, p12 May, 2004**

**Linda Selvey. “ Do you know about Doctors for the Environment Australia? In Touch, newsletter of the Public Health Association of Australia vol 21 p11-12, June 2004**

**Kevin Chamberlin, item about DEA in Medical Link Number 037 October/November, 2004**

**Kevin Chamberlin, item about DEA in Journal of the Australian Integrative Medical Association, issue 23, November 2004**

### **Web page and finances**

**We thank Peter Mansfield of Healthy Skepticism for managing our finances and web page for the past 2 years The web site is under new management and is being progressive updated by Glen Morris webmaster. The facilities for payment of membership dues and donations will now be under the direct control of DEA through Treasurer Sarah Morton. Application has been made for tax deductibility for donations. The management Committee continues to seek sources of funding and applications for grants have been made to several national granting bodies**

**Bill Castleden, Chair**

**David Shearman, Secretary**

**October 2004**