

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"

There are two new educational pamphlets for use in doctor' 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 with Fogarty A, Horton G, Morrel E. GreenClinic - A Pilot Educational Intervention for Environmentally Sustainable General Practice 2008; 8; 881-683.

Blashki G. Climate Change and Rural Health Workforce. editorial Australian Journal of Rural Health 2008; 16: 1.

Blashki G, Berry H, Kidd M. "Primary Care Responses to Climate Change" in 'Climate Change and Social Justice' ed Moss J, Melbourne University Press, 2009; in press

Blashki G, Burke S, Fritze J, Wiseman J, Hope. Despair and Transformation: climate change and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. International Journal of Mental Health Systems 2008; in press.

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

Blashki G, Capon T. Climate Change and Health- risks, research and responses. Australian Healthcare & Hospitals Association (AHHA) 2008 Congress. September 25 2008; in press

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. Opinion Piece in Medical Observer re "World Health Day themed on Climate Change" February 2008.

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

Horton G, Magin P. "Healthy patients, healthy planet - green recommendations for GP health promotion" Australian Family Physician, 37. no 8 p 683, December 2007.

<http://www.racgp.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/Publications/AustralianFamilyPhys/2007issues/afp200712/200712Horton.pdf>

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, McMichael T. Climate Change Health Check 2020. The Climate Institute, April 2008

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

Horton G. "Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) Raises Awareness of Climate Change Health Impacts". Royal Australian College of General Practitioners NSW Faculty newsletter NSW & ACT Colleague June/July 2008 page 16

http://www.racgp.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/About/Faculties/NSWACTFaculty/NSWACTFacultynewsletter/200806nswact_newsletter.pdf

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

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

Shearman D with Wayne Smith J. "The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy, Praeger, Davenport, Connecticut 2007 a series from the *Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy*.

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

Shearman D. The interim report of the Garnaut Climate Change Review is a landmark. "Desperate Times Call for Tough Leadership" ABC News Opinion <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/>>

Presentations at Conferences, Talks and Lectures.

Blashki G with Horton G, Fogarty A, Morrell E. Green Clinic - a pilot evaluation of sustainable health care program. GP and PHC conference Hobart 4-6 June 2008.

Blashki G. Climate Change and Primary Health Care. Social Justice Initiative. Climate Change and Social Justice Conference. University of Melbourne. April 3 2008.

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

Blashki G. Climate Project Presentation. Sisters of Charity CEO retreat 14 March 2008.

Butler C. "The Lancet and the arms trade" on "Perspective", Radio National 4 March 2008
See <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/perspective/stories/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

Horton G. Midday workshop presentation at 61st United Nations Department of Public Information Conference "Reaffirming Human Rights for All": workshop entitled "Health, environmental damage and human rights" 5th September 2008 <http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/conference/workshfri8.shtml>

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

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

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

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

Towle N. The implications of climate change for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Conference presentation to the United Nations Youth Association National Conference 13th July 2008

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

Media, Press, Interviews

Graeme Horton:

2UE Sydney radio 3rd April 2008; Sunday Mail, Brisbane 4th April 2008; ABC radio 6th April 2008; The Wire news service 6th April 2008; ABC North Queensland 7th April 2008; 2CA Canberra radio 7th April 2008; ABC north coast radio 8th April 2008; 2NUR radio 23rd May 2008 – half hour segment on "Well-Being" program available as podcast <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/2nur/programs/wellbeing.html>; Medical Observer 21st May 2008

Grant Blashki

JJJ youth program called Hack, "Climate Change worry and youth" 7 April 2008; Interviews ABC by three regional stations. Re World Health Day; 3AW Re World Health Day 8 May 2008; SBS radio re World Health Day on 7 April 2008

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
http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=165772

Gulf Times "Doctors Down Under warn about health impacts of climate change" 7 April 2008
http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=211503&version=1&template_id=39&parent_id=21

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
<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/health/eye%20health/2008/04/08/150984/High-levels.htm>

France24 "Climate change increases cataract blindness risk: experts" 7 April 2008
<http://www.france24.com/en/20080407-climate-change-increases-cataract-blindness-risk-experts>

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?xfile=data/todaysfeatures/2008/April/todaysfeatures_April7.xml§ion=todaysfeatures&col=

Independent Bangladesh "Climate change increases cataract blindness risk: experts" 7 April 2008
<http://www.independent-bangladesh.com/200804074104/health/climate-change-increases-cataract-blindness-risk-experts.html>