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Its time to act on both health emergencies

April started with the very real threat of our health system being overwhelmed and ended with Australia surely being the envy of many countries across the globe. As a nation we acted on the science and health advice in a swift and collective manner with subsequently outstanding results. Our hope is now that the same sense and action can be mobilized for the '[other health emergency](#).' As Dr Trudi Beck writes in the [Canberra Times](#), "Let us also rise to the climate challenge"

Rising to the challenge is exactly what DEA members across the nation did during April, demonstrating once again their unwavering commitment to protecting human health and humanity. The activities of our members has been inspiring and far reaching at a difficult time - our work and personal practices were impacted in such unpredictable ways, with many of us also being at the front line of health care and the risks that entails.

There have been submissions, videos, presentations to public inquiries, published papers, media releases and articles, webinars, innovative solutions and much more. Please take the time to be impressed by some of these activities and initiatives highlighted below.

Last week DEA launched its **2020 Annual Appeal**. Thank you to those who have already donated! If you haven't, please consider [donating generously](#). Many traditional fundraising avenues will not be possible this year and with no external funding at present DEA relies on its members to help facilitate the work we do.

To ensure we continue to protect the environment for the health of future generations, DEA is also proud to announce its bequest program. Details of the program are available on our [website](#) or by contacting our Executive Director Denise Cauchi at denise.cauchi@dea.org.au

Following on from DEA's Organisational Review, we are formalising our structure and committees. Below you will find details about how to submit expressions of interest for 2 vital DEA committees; the national Campaigns Committee and the Air Pollution Special Interest Group.

As we continue to adjust to our new way of living under the constraints imposed due to COVID-19, we are so very appreciative of the messages of support and engagement from our members across Australia. Kind regards and take care of yourselves and communities.

Eugenie, Kingsley (Co-chairs) and Denise (Executive Director)

DEA doctors speaking up, innovating and protecting health during the COVID 19 pandemic

Amongst such fast changing and uncertain times it is wonderful to be able to focus on some of the positive innovations and activities our members have been involved in. There are so many, but to highlight a few:

Frontline doctors speak out on Covid19 and climate change

Drs Kim Loo, Kate Ahmad, Trudi Beck, Michelle Hamrosi, Arnagretta Hunter, and Ingo Weber have produced a compelling video on the need to address Covid-19 and climate change as dual emergencies. To watch the video please click [here](#). The video has had 25,000 views on DEA's Facebook page alone, as well as wide circulation on the social media platforms of a number of groups, including the Australian Conservation Foundation and Greenpeace. Organiser Dr Loo explains what inspired the video:

I have worked as a doctor for 31 years. In the past 12 months my patients have suffered impacts on their health and mental wellbeing from climate change events and the now the Covid-19 pandemic.

The drought in NSW left towns short of water. The Black Saturday fires were at the doorstep of some of my patients and they were evacuated. The ensuing smoke was toxic and lasted 81 days. The heat of summer was yet another challenge. My vulnerable patients are still feeling the impacts from these extreme events.

Now we are living the Covid -19 crisis. Our health, mental health and the economy have been impacted. The government though has listened to the science and health sector, and our incidence and death rate is comparatively low.

We have the potential for transformational change if the Government takes a similar whole- of-government approach to the existential threat of the climate crisis as we emerge from the pandemic. We need to stop the ongoing loss of biodiversity from continued logging. Introduce policy for decarbonisation. Establish a framework for dealing with climate change-the greatest threat to our health.



Principal Medical Advisor

Past DEA Chair and present DEA Scientific Advisor Committee member Prof Michael Kidd is working in Canberra as the recently appointed [Principal Medical Advisor](#) to the Federal Department of Health and Professor of Primary Care Reform at The Australian National University and writes in a recently published article of [GPs central response to COVID-19](#)

Mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19.

DEA founding member A/Prof Grant Blashki in his role as Lead Clinical Advisor for Beyond Blue has been advising on the [mental health implications of living and working during a pandemic](#). Grant also presented at the exclusive DEA webinar on April 15 to over 60 DEA members on *Managing mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic - tips for our patients and ourselves*.

Tasmanian GP Anna Seth's presentation to the Tasmanian Youth Climate Leaders' conference Supporting Psychological Wellbeing in a Changing Climate can be found [here](#)

Commission for the Future of Humanity

Several of DEA's members and Scientific Advisory Committee have contributed to the timely release of the report Surviving and Thriving in the 21st Century. Dr Arnagretta Hunter writes with John Hewson in The Conversation [here](#) and in Croakey [here](#).

Submissions and public hearings

DEA submission to the Royal Commission into the Natural Disaster Arrangements (Bushfires Royal Commission) can be found [here](#)

The health impacts of last summer's devastating bushfire season are serious, complex and wide-ranging. DEA believes that health is integral to making decisions about emergency and disaster responses. While many of the health impacts are known, more research is needed to fill the gaps in our knowledge, especially about the long term impacts of prolonged exposure to bushfire smoke. The driver of our prolonged and more intense bushfire seasons is climate change. Australia and other countries are failing to address climate change.

In February 2020, Tasmanian MP Andrew Wilkie proposed amendments to the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Bill 2007. The amendments propose to include Scope 3 emissions in the NGER reporting requirements, and to ensure timely release of quarterly emissions data.

DEA was asked to appear before the House Environment and Energy Committee hearing on May 1st and our submission can be found [here](#). Drs Kathleen Wild and Liz Bashford presented via a teleconference link. They were able to make good points about the imperative to reduce emissions and the impacts that climate change is already having on Australians' health. However, the committee's questions were mainly focussed on using the framework of emissions reporting required for the Paris Agreement to inform the Australian public and government - that is, excluding Scope 3 emissions. DEA's main argument was that without data that includes Scope 3 emissions, the Australian public and government cannot make informed decisions about the health impacts of projects. The transcript will be available on the Parliament of Australia's [website](#).

Healthcare sustainability

Western Health intensive care specialist and convenor of DEA's Sustainable Healthcare group A/Prof Forbes McGain has been working with Melbourne University engineers to develop a protective hood to assist in the caring of COVID-19 patients. He is confident the product will lead to safer and better patient care (and of course it is reusable under the appropriate washing conditions!) The product can be viewed [here](#) Forbes and the 'hood' were featured on the front page of the Melbourne Herald Sun.

On Tuesday 5 May at 4pm, Forbes will also be joining founding director of the NHS's Sustainability Development Unit and others to virtually launch the MJA's Sustainable Healthcare issue. [Register here](#)

Victorian chair, Dr Katherine Barraclough has published recently in Nature Reviews Nephrology on Green Nephrology. Abstract available [here](#).

Biodiversity Update: Dimity Williams

Nature Laws- have your say! It's not too late!

As mentioned in our February newsletter, Australia's nature protection laws (EPBC Act) are being reviewed. Every 10 years the government has to review this legislation and has appointed an 'independent' committee chaired by Graeme Samuel. Sadly, there is no health voice on the committee and no doubt the purpose is to 'cut green tape' and make it easier for mining and other destructive processes to proceed. DEA has been collaborating with other groups to help develop an alternative set of laws that will protect nature. Katherine Barraclough has been working hard on a submission on DEA's behalf. Once the link is made public we will share it with you all. We have also asked to meet with Mr Samuel and the Federal Environment Minister to raise our concerns about the shocking state of environmental protections in this country.

It would be wonderful if DEA members can add their individual voice too.

You can do this by:

1. Leaving a comment- if you are short of time you can make a short comment, less than 300 words and still very much worthwhile: [brief comment](#)
2. Make a submission- these hold more weight- by doing this as a doctor, and linking the importance of nature to human health, you can help shift their narrow perspective from regarding nature as a something to chop down or dig up to its fundamental importance to our wellbeing: [Submissions](#)

The closing date to have your say has been extended to mid-May and we have a resource to help you on our website here:

[Speak up and protect our environment for the sake of human health](#)

Let's flood their review with comments and submissions!

COVID distraction - whilst we're busy helping the community fight COVID, the government is busy destroying what's left of our forests

I'm sure most DEA members are juggling work commitments with worries about the health of themselves and their loved ones. Many of us will also be grieving the summer bushfires and destruction of the natural places we love. It can seem like sometimes it would be good to take a break from thinking about the environmental disasters unfolding around us, and sometimes we need to, for the sake of our sanity.

Sadly it seems those in ecocidal industries never need a break, they just keep on going, like some sort of zombie.

A case in point is the napalm firebombing of native forests post logging in the southern states. All this despite the impact on air quality in a time of pandemic. We are working hard to

highlight these harmful practices. For more information and to sign an online campaign click [here](#)

In our submission to the EPBC Act we highlighted the Murray Darling River as evidence of critical ecosystem loss and the complete silencing of Aboriginal voices. For a thorough explanation of the problem here's an extract from the [Quarterly Essay -Cry me a river extract](#)

Nature and wellbeing

Here are some antidotes to the misery shared above!

Last month I presented on how nature supports human health for the lunchtime Climate Action Network Australia talk. You can watch this [here](#)

If you're unable to get out into the bush, Listening Earth are going on a daily bushwalk in Victoria and you can join in via your device. I was excited to see my first native Greenhood Orchids! (see what they look like below). Check it out [here](#).

For those who love nature in their podcasts, check out Remember the Wild's podcast series [Look at Me](#) on cool Australian creatures - Giant Australian Cuttlefish, the Marsupial Mole etc.

For some relaxing viewing please enjoy [The Tree Project's](#) extraordinary short film of Tasmania's mountain ash trees.



Air Pollution

New research has linked pollutant PM2.5 and air pollutant nitrogen dioxide with increased mortality rates. A/ Professor Vicki Kotsirilos told the RANZCP's [newsGP publication](#) that the Government 'can't ignore these figures' and that local research is required to validate the results.

Coal and Air Pollution

Sign on to coal fired Power stations complaint

Coal fired power stations (CFPS) have been caught out again. Each year the National Pollutant Inventory lists the amounts of pollution released by all industrial sources in Australia. This year the results show some surprising increases in air pollution emissions from power stations.

Vales Point on Lake Macquarie in NSW has increased its PM 2.5 emissions from 19,000Kg in 2014-15 to 130,810 Kg in 2018-19 while generating just 13% more electricity. A spokesperson for Delta electricity that runs the plant admitted that the bag filters that catch the fine particles were not working properly at the time.

In Victoria complaints have been made to the EPA over a 45% hike in PM 10 and an 80% increase in PM 2.5 from Yallourn power station in the last year. The legal group Environment Justice Australia has lodged a complaint with the EPA that the power station was in breach of its license conditions by not operating the pollution controls properly.

DEA joined as a signatory to the letter of complaint to the NSW EPA and a similar letter to the Victorian EPA about pollution increases at Yallourn in the Latrobe Valley. EJA is inviting members of the public to also sign the letter as a petition. You can **sign, tweet and support** these actions;

- Victoria: [Environmental Justice Projects - Yallourn](#)
- NSW: [Environmental Justice Projects Valespoint](#)

In NSW the EPA has confirmed it will conduct an investigation into breaches of limits at Vales Point power station. Australia has some of the worst regulations in the world regarding pollution from CFPS and it is time for [change](#).

Gas

Gas and Indoor Air Quality Fact Sheet

DEA has also recently launched a Gas & Indoor Air Quality fact sheet. This outlines the health impacts of gas use in homes and provides yet another reason why we must transition away from gas. Please [disseminate](#)

The continuing government support for, and expansion of, the gas industry remains a focus for DEA. Global methane levels have continued to rise although the impacts of the pandemic have not yet shown up in the data. However, the gas price is linked to the oil price and oil prices are at historic lows, having even gone negative recently, resulting in some projects being cancelled or downgraded. Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction Angus Taylor has been keenly supporting the gas industry, reportedly tying GST payments to Victoria in exchange for that State lifting its moratorium on onshore gas exploration. The [Federal Government's Gas Acceleration Program](#) has provided \$26 million dollars in direct subsidies to the industry. And the Morrison government's \$2 billion energy deal with [NSW](#)

includes 70 petajoules of gas in a package which also includes more interconnection and a renewable energy zone pilot program. As investment in renewable energy looks to decline the government looks to prop up its fossil fuel competitor.

The AGM of Santos Ltd was held in Adelaide on April 3rd. Market Forces provided two proxy attendance (online) positions for DEA which gave us the opportunity to ask the company some questions. Global methane levels are rising sharply this decade and recent evidence published in Nature has shown that anthropogenic fossil methane, that is methane released from the extraction, transport and delivery of fossil fuels, is largely responsible.

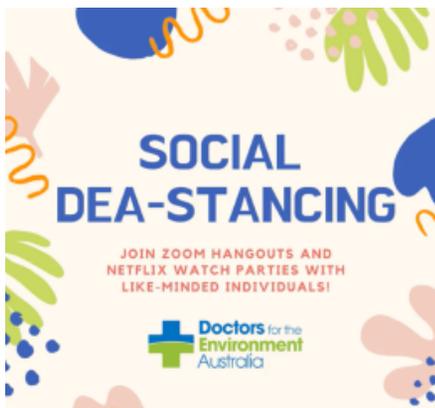
[Professor Melissa Haswell's question](#) related to the growing body of evidence for health harms in communities exposed to gas extraction activities, including, small for gestational age babies, and neural tube and other congenital abnormalities. Tellingly, Santos did not respond to this question.

The NSW Independent Planning Commission is yet to decide on the future of the Narrabri gas fields proposal which would see 850 new wells approved. Both the PM and his Energy Minister are reluctant to talk about AEMO's Integrated System Plan which forecasts in its 'Step scenario' (strong climate policy) and even its 'Central scenario' (slow action on climate) that gas will play a diminishing role in the National Electricity Market.

National Student Committee

While all of us are off campus for the foreseeable future, DEA Students is running 'Social DEA-Stancing' – an online buddy system connecting DEA med students across Australia in this crazy time. We're getting students together for some wholesome downtime with fun zoom chats and Netflix watch parties 🍷 Some of our fondest memories and happiest moments are created from connecting with like-minded individuals.

If you'd like to join in, email deastudents@gmail.com – we'd love to have you!



Other DEA news from the states

While we've been impressed with the Victorian government handling of public health and prevention in the face of COVID, we've been less impressed with recent environmental decisions and delays. A moratorium on onshore conventional gas extraction has been overturned (although the moratorium on fracking is maintained). Also disappointing was a 10-year extension of the East Gippsland Regional Forestry Agreement announced quietly by Vic government recently. Victoria's East Gippsland forests and species in them have not been protected by the agreement to date and were severely impacted by the summer's fires.

The expected Victorian Government announcement of interim Emission Reduction Targets has been delayed. Victoria is one of the few jurisdictions in the world to have a strong Climate Change Act. One of the obligations of this Act is to have legally binding targets. It is unclear when the announcement will occur. In a similar vein, amendments to regulations in the Environment Protection Act were due to be finalised shortly (hopefully strengthened) after a consultation period last year. Unfortunately this work has been put on hold for 12 months. We have written to the Victorian Environment Minister to express our concern about this.

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services pilot Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2019-21 is available. We hope that, in conjunction with the Emissions Reduction Target, an accompanying Mitigation Action Plan will also be released.

In lieu of a planned April nature walk, Victorian committee members buddied up for a phone conversation and to share photos of the green spaces we a spending time in during lock down. John Iser must surely have been the winner:



Across in Western Australia Dr George Crisp presented to third year medical students and also a cohort at a new undergraduate course at UWA in Health Humanities for students interested in going into the health professions. George was also a proxy for the Conservation Council of WA at the Woodside annual investors meeting where he asked a question about climate change impacts of their business. The outcome of the meeting which saw just over 50% of investors call for stronger targets including those for scope 3 emissions has been called a "[breakthrough moment](#)" and follows a similar outcome at the recent Santos investors' meeting.

Richard Yin presented as part of a panel at a multi-faith forum held by the Australian Religious Response (ARRCC) to Climate Change chapter in WA. We have been informed that the WA Climate and Health Inquiry has concluded and that the recommendations are now with the WA government.

Join a DEA committee

Campaigns Committee

Campaigning has become an important part of DEA's work, alongside education and advocacy, based on available scientific and medical evidence. A new Campaigns Committee is being established to develop national-level campaigns and support state/territory campaigning. Nominations for membership of the inaugural Campaigns Committee are now being sought from people with the following skills and experience:

- Experience in campaigning
- Understanding of DEA functioning
- Familiarity with campaigning tools, including digital campaigning
- Theoretical understandings of campaigning strategy and planning would be highly desirable

If you are interested in joining the committee, please send in a brief expression of interest addressing these criteria to the Sujata Allan sujata.allan@gmail.com by **COB Monday 11th May**. See [here](#) for more information

Air Pollution Special Interest Group

DEA is forming an air pollution special interest group, convened by Ben Ewald, as a contact point for those interested in how air pollution affects health and how we might focus on air pollution issues to campaign for a better environment. The initial campaign areas will be the current revision of the national air pollution standards, and the air pollution from coal mining, transport and burning. If members are interested we may also hold some evening meetings to examine recent developments in air pollution epidemiology.

The group welcomes students and doctors who have some degree of knowledge of air issues, and those who are just starting out in this interesting area of environmental medicine. The air pollution SIG will communicate via a dedicated channel on the DEA Slack account. To join the SIG please email Ben at bene2@spin.net.au

DEA in the news March/April

For a detailed listing of DEA featuring in news items for the months of March and April please click [here](#)

Thank you to those who have already donated! If you haven't, please consider donating generously



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