



CROW Newsletter

(Keeping our eye on the climate news)

March, 2021

BITS AND PIECES

Fossil Fools Day – Thursday, April 1 at the Civic Centre

Climate Action Wagga is organising a "Fossil Fools Day" rally at the Wagga Wagga Civic Centre on April 1 starting at 12 Noon.

All welcome of course. If you would like to help out contact Pat Murray at Phone: 0438 211 803

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Who listens to Scientists?

In New Zealand 80% of scientists think that their government listens to their advice. In Australia it is 60%, in USA (during Trump) it was 20%. That may explain a lot. More [here](#).

An Echidna led recovery?

New research has shown that one echidna shifts about eight trailer loads of dirt a year. The importance of this process cannot be underestimated. By improving echidna habitat, we can significantly improve soil health and boost climate action efforts.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

World's first domestic hydrogen battery developed by Australian firm

From Nick O'Malley, Sydney Morning Herald

The world's first commercially available line of hydrogen-powered domestic products, including a barbecue, a bicycle and most crucially a unit that creates and stores hydrogen power, has been developed by an Australian company, LAVO, working with the University of NSW.

The LAVO battery, which is about the size of a large fridge, can be hooked up to an existing array of solar panels. Inside it, electrolyzers use that power to convert water into hydrogen and oxygen.

Burping cows, climate change and seaweed

Mike Foley, Sydney Morning Herald

Australian scientists and entrepreneurs have begun rolling out a commercial solution to a major source of greenhouse gases with a seaweed feed to block gassy livestock burps, and promising results offering more than a whiff of global potential.

Two Australian companies, CH4 Global and Sea Forest, are kicking off world-first commercial trials with major dairy and beef companies of a feed supplement they say can enable the livestock to become carbon neutral.

Increasing rate of ice loss – these figures are staggering

Chris Mooney and Andrew Freedman in The Washington Post

Global ice loss has increased rapidly over the past two decades, and scientists are still underestimating just how much sea levels could rise, according to alarming [new research](#) published this month.

From the thin ice shield covering most of the Arctic Ocean to the mile-thick mantle of the polar ice sheets, ice losses have soared from about 760 billion tons per year in the 1990s to more than 1.2 trillion tons per year in the 2010s, a [new study](#) released Monday shows. That is an increase of more than 60 percent, equating to 28 trillion tons of melted ice in total — and it

means that roughly 3 percent of all the extra energy trapped within Earth's system by climate change has gone toward turning ice into water.

There is good reason to think the rate of ice melt will continue to accelerate. A second, [NASA-backed study](#) on the Greenland ice sheet, for instance, finds that no less than 74 major glaciers that terminate in deep, warming ocean waters are being severely undercut and weakened.

So far, the world's mountain glaciers have actually been keeping pace with the ice sheets, losing 6.1 trillion tons of ice over the same time period and thus adding roughly the same amount to sea level. Over time — probably starting right around now — the polar ice sheets will begin to massively outdistance the losses from mountain glaciers and become the dominant drivers of global sea-level rise.

[Will humans be able to survive in the tropics?](#)

From Oliver Milman in The Guardian

Rising heat and humidity are threatening to plunge much of the world's population into potentially lethal conditions, a new study finds.

The climate crisis is pushing the planet's tropical regions towards the limits of human livability, with rising heat and humidity threatening to plunge much of the world's population into potentially lethal conditions, new research has found.

Should governments fail to curb global heating to 1.5C above the pre-industrial era, areas in the tropical band that stretches either side of the equator risk changing into a new environment that will hit "the limit of human adaptation", the study warns.

[How an Australian biochar start-up inspired Microsoft's negative carbon plan](#)

James Fernyhough, Renew Economy

In the South Australian town of Tantanoola, just down the road from the Lake Bonney wind farm, a small herb-growing company called Holla Fresh is conducting a cutting edge experiment in carbon sequestration and off-grid energy generation.

Every so often a truckload of woodchips arrives at the property, where they are taken into a shed, fed into an air-tight pipe, heated, and turned into charcoal. The syngas created in the process is used to power the business, while the charcoal – or high-carbon "biochar" – is turned into compost.

Believe it or not, this obscure, small-scale technology, designed and built by Melbourne-based startup Rainbow Bee Eater and called "ECHO2", has caught the attention of tech colossus Microsoft, which bought a large number of the project's carbon credits over Finnish carbon removal marketplace Puro.earth.

Rainbow Bee Eater founder Peter Burgess believes growing corporate demand for high-quality carbon credits could send demand for his ECHO2 technology soaring.

Follow the link in the heading to find more about the technology and their ambitions future plans.

MONEY

[The World May Need A Bad Bank For Coal](#)

From Clara Ferreira Marques in Bloomberg Opinion

In this opinion piece from the major investment firm Bloomberg's, they point out that the inevitable demise of coal carries dangerous environmental and economic side effects. Better than the dangers of climate change, but still needing to be dealt with.

"Future capacity to generate electricity from coal is shrinking even in key emerging economies. ... Bangladesh, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia have cut 62 gigawatts of planned coal power in 2020. India ... now has around 30 GW of coal power planned for construction,

compared to 238.2 GW back in 2015. China wants emissions to peak by 2030 and has signalled coal imports will shrink, as consumption is capped but its own output rises.”

The article argues that coal miners will need to implement measures to give them an environmental, social and governance (ESG) ‘halo’ to remediate mines and save these major firms from the reputational damage resulting from abandoned and polluting mine sites. One suggestion is for a “bad bank”.

“Another option is to build mining’s very own bad bank, to buy up unloved assets, benefit from economies of scale and work towards an orderly end. Private equity may not be willing to step up funds, while government support, provided for lenders cleaning up, will be harder to come by for resource companies doing the same. There’s an argument, though, for multilaterals and others to step in with what could be seen as transition finance. Family offices and individual investors may even like the yield enough.”

Australia's largest community-owned solar farm powers up in Canberra

Harry Frost – ABC News

Australia's largest community solar farm has been switched on in Canberra's east. The farm will power around 260 homes in the nation's capital. The company behind the project said the farm could deliver a five per cent return to investors.

Around 550 people from the local community poured \$2.4 million into the project, with investments in the solar power plant ranging from \$500 to \$100,000.

Comment from Helen Haynes: *“Every single regional community in the country should be backed to roll out projects like this. It’s saving money, generating power locally and it’s cutting emissions”.*

The tremendous added cost of cleaning up the oil and gas mess in our oceans

Peter Milne in the IEEFA Newsletter

Australia’s clean-up bill for offshore oil and gas wells and facilities will cost US\$40.5 billion, with half of the work starting this decade, according to a report produced with the support of major Australian operators.

It has been common practice in the industry to continually delay decommissioning. Equipment to be removed includes 57 platforms with a total weight of 755,000 tonnes, equivalent to the steel in 14 Sydney Harbour bridges.

There are also 11 floating facilities, 6700km of pipelines, 1500km of umbilicals and more than 500 subsea structures. The industry has about 1000 wells to plug and abandon to seal them forever.

Deductibility for company income tax could lead to 30% of the cost falling to the Australian taxpayer.

Projects that have paid substantial amounts of Petroleum Resources Rent Tax (PRRT) for the oil and gas extracted are eligible for a PRRT refund when decommissioning occurs that could take the total government share of decommissioning costs to 58%

POLITICS AND POLICY

\$300 million support to gas industry leads to 3000 LESS jobs

From Michael West Media

To support this “gas-fired recovery”, taxpayers have shelled out about \$300 million to the gas industry since October last year. This includes \$52.8 million in the 2020 Federal Budget, a \$50 million exploration subsidy to the gas industry in the Northern Territory, and \$174 million to upgrade roads in the Northern Territory for use by fracking vehicles.

And how has the gas industry repaid Australian taxpayers for this largesse? By cutting the jobs of some 3000 workers – or about 10.5% of its workforce, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) quarterly Labour Force statistics.

The ABS paper shows that on average the oil and gas industry employed about 3000 fewer workers in 2020 than it did in 2019.

The widespread job losses also occurred during a record year for gas production in Australia, with production in 2019-20 up by 10% from the previous year, and the value of production exceeding \$82 billion.

The Australia Institute has just released a report “[When the going get tough ... the gas industry sacks workers](#)”, which details the full extent of the job losses in the gas industry.

The revolt of the Liberal moderates

An interesting article, written by Mike Steketee for Inside Story. He attempts to disinter some of the more rational members of the Liberal and National Party, such as Matt Kean in NSW, Simon Birmingham and Marise Payne at Federal level, from the death grasp of the Canavans, Kellys, Joyces and the rest have on the LNP. It offers some hope of progress and helps to identify the more moderate players from the right.

He mentions the [Blueprint Institute](#) and the [Coalition for Conservation](#) as two organisations that have emerged on the conservative side of Australian politics with a commitment to dealing with issues surrounding global warming and environmental conservation in a rational way.

The Blueprint Institute approach to future energy is summarised on a short video [here](#). Their director and senior researcher have an article in SMH, 12 March [We Must Control Detonation of Coal Fired Plants](#), which is worth a read. Both the video and article are a refreshing reminder that the political right can, and should, articulate progressive energy policies.

The Coalition for Conservation characterises itself as “a movement for conservatives who support decarbonisation and protection of the environment. We engage with our politicians in order to build bi-partisan support for the action required to address damage to our environment, reducing emissions whilst supporting the economy.”

Both organisations can be seen as important in breaking down the crazy left/right gridlock on Australia sensibly dealing with the climate crisis.

As Yallourn plans to close early, energy policy is in disarray

From Richard Holden in The Conversation

The crucial question in all of this is whether Australia’s coal-fired power stations are being retired too slowly – or potentially even too quickly.

It’s hard to know without a price on carbon to create a level playing field for renewable energy and fossil fuels. We need a carbon price that reflects the “social cost of carbon”. The [best evidence](#) is this is about US\$51 per metric ton.

Putting a price on carbon has become the ultimate political issue. Labor is scared to death of losing another election by supporting such a price – even though (with the possible exception of Joel Fitzgibbon) it knows it’s the right policy.

Scott Morrison’s Liberal Party is so wedded to using “technology versus taxes” as a political wedge it can’t even see the right policy any more.

The parliamentary National Party, meanwhile, can’t appreciate what many of their constituents do know – that a carbon price would provide enormous economic opportunities in rural and regional Australia.

Our energy transition is in disarray. It will only get worse without a price on carbon and an end to subsidies for all forms of energy. Failure to do so will merely sow the seeds for more transition problems in the years to come.

A Carbon Border Tax – will they bite us if we stick with coal? (behnd pay wall)

From Hans van Leeuwen in the Financial Times

The European Parliament has given initial backing to the EU's [carbon border levy](#), as Brussels advocates harnessing US President Joe Biden's emissions-busting enthusiasm to create a global "climate club".

European politicians and analysts expect the US, Britain and potentially even China to get behind the plan to jointly adopt carbon border taxes, putting pressure on Prime Minister Scott Morrison ahead of a G7 meeting he will attend in Britain this June.

The (EU) parliament's Environment Committee on Friday endorsed the proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which would require exporters to the EU – including from Australia – to pay a levy based on the amount of carbon used in making and shipping their products.

And from Kate Abnett at Reuters

EU sees carbon border levy as 'matter of survival' for industry

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The European Union's proposed carbon border charge is essential to the survival of its own industries and the bloc will impose the levy on non-EU competitors unless they commit to lowering their emissions, the bloc's climate policy chief said on Monday.