

Climate 'state of emergency' declared

Byron Shire leads the way on positive climate change action. By Christobel Munson

The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the global body for assessing the science related to climate change – stressed emphatically that the international effort to tackle climate change must be ramped up significantly if we are to limit the rise in global temperatures.

Since mass industrialisation, along with increasing greenhouse gas pollution from the burning of oil, coal and gas, the world has already warmed by one degree. The IPCC recommends we keep any further rise to 1.5°C. Why? To avert the collapse of modern civilisation. In layman's terms, if we don't all start to take serious action to reduce our carbon emissions – pronto – Earth will become a pretty horrendous place to live in coming decades.

There's no missing the blur of news on devastating bushfires in California, massive melting of ice in Antarctica, rapidly melting permafrost in the Arctic releasing methane and carbon dioxide, rising sea levels swallowing Pacific Islands. It's almost nonstop disaster-porn.

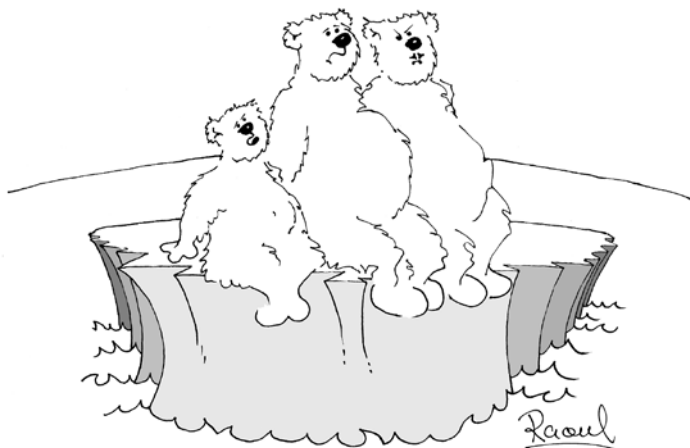
In Australia, we're already seeing repeated bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef, harsher droughts and longer-lasting, more intense heatwaves and coastal flooding and longer, more dangerous bushfire seasons. Heat stress is seriously affecting older people, animals and babies. Energy costs are rising. Rainfall patterns are changing, negatively impacting agriculture, and our beaches are slowly but surely disappearing.

With absolutely no useful climate-related policies currently emerging from the Federal Government, and so many political leaders so obviously closely in league with the fossil fuel industry, grassroots actions are erupting around the country in response.

At Zero Emissions Byron's Big U-Turn Ahead event, the Climate Council's Professor Will Steffen was asked how much time is left before Australian businesses, industry, government and households reach the peak emissions point of no return, and what to do in the meantime. His view: phase out the use of all fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas by 2040 and start to reduce our emissions within two years.

Byron Shire Council has now voted to declare a state of climate emergency, proposed by Councillor Cate Coorey, urging other Northern Rivers councils to follow suit and call for swift action on climate change. As Cr Coorey said: "All the latest science is telling us we have a very small window to act before irreversible and catastrophic impacts from global warming start to take effect. In a shire like Byron, that will mean a sea-level rise and a likely increase in floods, droughts, fires and extreme weather events such as damaging storms.

"We may not be able to have a direct impact on political decisions at the state and federal levels, but we can show some leadership locally and start taking action. Reversing climate change may seem like an insurmountable problem, but if every council, every community, every individual does their bit, then at least we have done something."



" ARE WE NEARLY THERE YET...? "

Environmental resolutions for 2019 and beyond

Kickstart the New Year with climate actions aimed at reducing the use of fossil fuels.

Reduce energy use and save money. Be aware of your household energy consumption. Turn off lights and appliances, minimise air-conditioning, dry clothes in the sun and replace old appliances (e.g. fridges) and light bulbs with energy-saving ones. Decreasing your energy use lowers the demand for coal-fired power.

Install solar panels and batteries when affordable. Use appliances such as dishwashers and washing machines during the day to minimise night-time use of coal-fired power.

Switch to a local ethical energy supplier. Compare the 'greenest' energy companies at repowerbyron.org/switch.html.

Check out solar for renters, such as Enova Energy's Solar Gardens.

Divest from fossil fuels. Move your money so it doesn't support the fossil fuel industry. Opt for ethical, fossil-fuel-free investments (see marketforces.org.au/info/compare-bank-table).

Invest in an electric vehicle when affordable. Trade in your petrol-powered car for an EV and charge it from your solar panels. Meanwhile, buy a hybrid car. Where possible, catch public transport, cycle or walk.

Vote for the climate. Ask local politicians what action in government they will take to address the impact of climate change, and support renewable energy. Vote for the political party that pledges to take practical action. Write letters to politicians – snail mail if possible – and demand a 'national action plan on climate change'.

Get active. Join a campaign (e.g. Gasfield Free Northern Rivers, Stop Adani) or a local community group taking action to reduce emissions. (There are more than 70 local groups around Australia, including Repower Byron Shire and Zero Emissions Byron.)

Be informed. Read and listen to everything you can on the topic – ensuring the information is from reputable sources such as the Climate Council. Subscribe to Renew Economy (reneweconomy.com.au), a free daily online news service

Talk it up. Speak to family, friends and work colleagues about climate change and the practical steps you can take in your everyday lives to help the environment. Share articles on social media.

Stay positive and join in. Great things are happening in local and regional Australia, with initiatives such as solar farms, tree planting, waste reduction, local food and farmers' markets, alternative transport and energy efficiency. The more people who get involved, the greater the pace of change.

Visit *Zero Emissions Byron* (zero Byron.org) and the *Climate Council* (climatecouncil.org.au) for more information.