



President's Report - 2020 AGM

This has been a year like no other and many will understandably be glad to see the back of 2020, the year that brought us the COVID-19 global pandemic, with over one million lives lost to date and the health of many left permanently damaged, along with a national recession that has driven many into poverty.

Before all of that started, for those concerned about climate change, 2020 signalled the dawn of the crucial last decade – in which to rapidly decarbonise the world economy to keep global warming to within 1.5C. While all of our state governments have set targets of zero emissions by 2050, the more significant targets are those for 2025 and 2030, which are needed to set the right trajectory and which remain outstanding. In Paris in 2015 the Climate Change Authority had recommended a 2030 emissions reduction target of 45-65% below 2005 levels for Australia – our current 2030 emissions reduction target is 26-28% reduction below 2005 levels. By February 2020, Australia's Climate Council was advising that the science indicates keeping global warming to below 1.5 degrees needs a 75% or greater emissions reduction target by 2030.

Ready to join this battle, many watched in despair as the climate emergency vanished from the media's agenda and the pandemic consumed our lives. Thus the challenge of communicating the importance of ambitious GHG reduction targets became that much harder. Even so many took it up and over the course of 2020 the Covid pandemic evoked various reflections on climate:

- Pandemics themselves are on the rise because of the rate of human incursion into the wild which is also driving loss of biodiversity – the forecast being that our continuing destruction of the natural environment will bring more pandemics.
- Climate change too is a public health emergency – almost 5000 Australians die each year from air pollution.
- Given the Government has listened to medical science in managing the pandemic why can't they listen to climate science and address climate change
- The Federal Government's radical interventions – in closing borders, providing income support and jobs stimulus funding – raised questions about why we couldn't respond with similar radical action to address the climate emergency?
- Due to the lockdown measures and border closures many countries introduced to contain infection, GHG emissions dropped as people stayed home and airports fell silent. Have we learned to consume less?
- The Covid recession and need for economic repair was widely discussed as an opportunity to build back better via a clean recovery –creating jobs and acting on climate. By drawing on our natural assets in solar and wind and developing green hydrogen, many climate think-tanks and energy researchers agreed with Ross Garnaut's hypothesis, that Australia could become a renewable energy Superpower, exporting renewable energy across the Asian/Pacific region and producing green steel and green aluminium.
- The Federal Government's National Covid Commission headed by Neville Power – former deputy chairman of Strike Energy, a WA company with gas interests – has instead backed a gas-fired recovery, against financial investment trends. However, State governments and much of the business sector are backing renewables, as are many overseas governments

including those in the EU which has endorsed a green recovery. With 60% of our trading partners now committed to a target of zero by 2050 there is a lot of pressure on the Federal Government to fall in line.

That the pandemic has not erased Australians' collective memory of the climate emergency and the environmental peril we are in, is evidenced in the findings of The Australia Institute's Climate of the Nation 2020 Report released in late October: 80% of Australians think we are already experiencing the impact of climate change; 82% are concerned that climate change will result in more bushfires and 83% support a phase-out of coal-fired power stations.

BREAZE COMMUNITY

Monthly Talks

On the home front in Ballarat, Covid restrictions meant social interaction amongst BREAZE members has been greatly reduced, obviously something we all regret. However, thanks to Smart Living Ballarat Coordinators Paul Duggan and Tim Drylie and Green Drinks Coordinator Tony Goodfellow, BREAZE, like many other groups and businesses has adapted pretty rapidly, with members logging onto Zoom meetings, talks and webinars, struggling with the challenges of the NBN, muting and unmuting, using chat and Q&A boxes, tweaking lighting and screens for better effect, and screen sharing – hopefully all new skills that will stand us in good stead during the COVID normal of 2021.

Advocacy

Of course Zoom has actually made some things easier, if somewhat less congenial, and 2020 saw the launch of the BREAZE Advocacy Action group by BREAZE Board member, Therese Footner. The Group is currently focusing on ecologically sustainable design and making homes more energy efficient and hopes to have input into the Council Plan which will be developed early in the coming year. Also in 2021, pending COVID normal restrictions, BREAZE is planning a symposium on the topic of sustainable building and making your home more energy efficient. Residential energy use – electricity and gas – accounts for 17% Of Ballarat's GHG emissions (BZE/Ironbark Snapshot tool for 2018/19).

Affiliated Groups

While most of the community groups affiliated with BREAZE - [Buninyong Boomerang Bags](#), the [Buninyong Community Collective](#) and [Repair Cafe Ballarat](#) have had to cut back on activities during the Covid pandemic, the team behind our latest sustainability-focused group, [Ballarat Tool Library](#) has been busy behind the scenes preparing for their launch. BREAZE will keep you posted on when that happens and when other groups are fully back in action. Updates will also be available on the Facebook sites of these groups.

COMMUNITY POWER AND SOCIAL SOLAR

This has also been an unexpectedly good year for our social justice arm, BREAZE Social Solar, which in collaboration with various not-for-profits from across the region received funding from the Victorian State Government's renewables led recovery. Announced in May, the Grampians Renewable Energy (GRE) Program saw 9 projects fully funded – 8 of which had previously been identified under the very successful Ballarat Community Power Hub pilot. Established on 1 July 2017 by Sustainability Victoria, the Ballarat Community Power Hub (CPH) pilot ended on 30 June 2020, having run for three years. The BREAZE volunteers who comprised the CPH Project Control Group – Peter Reid, Ian Rossiter and Jane Lean – contributed several thousand volunteer hours, overseeing the administration of feasibility studies into 40+ proposals for community owned, operated or funded renewable energy projects that had been identified via community meetings. It is thanks to their work

that BREAZE was able this year to undertake this latest project management role with the Grampians Renewable Energy Project.

In October BREAZE Social Solar received another government stimulus grant – from the Victorian State Government’s New Energy Jobs Fund (NEJ) – on behalf of the Ballarat disabilities support services provider, Pinarc. Along with donations from the BREAZE Public Fund and Pinarc, the grant will add another 68kW of social solar to Ballarat’s roofs, cutting emissions and also of course cutting energy costs for Pinarc, enabling it to deliver more/better services to its client base, and creating more jobs for locals.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Bi-partisanship on climate policy

At the beginning of 2020 we were looking forward to Zali Steggall’s bill for a Climate Act, hoping as an Independent MP on the cross bench that she could make a difference and build bipartisanship on this singularly important issue. The bill will be reintroduced this month.

That need for bi-partisanship on addressing the climate emergency was also the focus of an Open Letter on climate policy that BREAZE initiated this year. Signed by a number of leaders from across the Ballarat community it was published in *The Courier* alongside an explanatory article by Rochelle Kirkham and also sent to all members of federal parliament to whom it was addressed.

Submissions

During the year BREAZE also filed various reports and submissions:

- In February, BREAZE released a report on the *New Bushfire Reality Climate Adaptation Forum* held at the Ballarat Mechanics Institute on November 2019, drawing on feedback submitted by citizen participants. The report was distributed to Forum panelists and is available on the BREAZE website.
- In March, BREAZE made a submission to the Member for Wendouree, Juliana Addison, expressing support for the Coalition for Community Energy’s Victorian Budget submission, which called for more funding for community power initiatives in the regions.
- In April, BREAZE made a submission to the Victorian Government’s *Zero Emissions Vehicle Roadmap*, endorsing the need for more EV fast charging infrastructure across the regions.
- In June, BREAZE made a submission to the *Technology Investment Roadmap for Emissions Reduction -Discussion Paper* prepared for the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reductions, Angus Taylor. The Discussion Paper was subsequently followed by the *Technology Investment Roadmap: First Low Emissions Technology Statement 2020* in which most alarmingly, backing was given for the still unproven technology, carbon capture and Sequestration, and also for small nuclear reactors, while renewable energy sources, solar and wind, were set outside the purview of the roadmap as ‘proven technologies’ alongside coal and gas. The BREAZE submission is on our website.
- And in July, BREAZE made a submission to the City of Ballarat 2020-21 Budget calling for more funding to be allocated to the implementation of the Carbon Neutrality and 100% Renewables Action Plan. The Action Plan includes a noteworthy clause 5.4 – *Empowered Communities*, which members may find interesting if they

are not already across it. This clause offers many ways in which BREAZE members can play a role in helping the Ballarat City Council to implement the Action Plan.

2020 Local Government Elections

During September BREAZE emailed a short survey with four questions to all candidates standing for the City of Ballarat Council. On 30 September BREAZE Green Drinks took the form of a Candidates Forum with 15 candidates logging on to explain their priorities for the environment and climate change and to respond to questions from the public. Together the Forum and the Survey—to which virtually all candidates responded in full—helped to put the environment firmly on the Council agenda.

BREAZE Board Guests

During 2020 a number of guest speakers have addressed the BREAZE Board, helping to keep us abreast of local environmental issues – many thanks to: Andrea Mason, Buninyong Sustainability; Michael Poulton, the Committee for Ballarat; John van Rooden, Sustainability Victoria; Susan Moodie, Lake Burrumbeet Connected Sanctuary; Michelle Pollard, Bendigo Sustainability Group; Lisa Kendal, City of Ballarat; and Judith Bailey, Ballarat Dark Sky Community.

Thank you

I know that BREAZE has drawn very dedicated volunteers over the years – sterling individuals. One of these is Peter Reid (OAM) who after four years as BREAZE treasurer has decided to step down. An engineer by profession and by nature extremely focused and rigorous, Peter’s contribution is not something that is readily quantifiable. Suffice to say he has made an enormous difference to the work we do. A big thank you Peter, on behalf of BREAZE, for all your work as treasurer. We are delighted that you will be staying on the Board for a while yet in your project manager role.

It has been an honour to serve as BREAZE president this year and regardless of Covid constraints, very satisfying to work with the 2020 BREAZE Board in delivering on our mission: protecting the natural environment, promoting sustainability and renewable energy, and facilitating and educating the wider Ballarat community towards a goal of zero emissions by 2030. I can think of no goal more worthwhile. I thank our current Board members and all BREAZE volunteers for their collaboration in serving that mission.

All the best

Mary

Mary Debrett
President, November 2020

