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IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 FROM THE DIRECTOR
- 2 SINGLE USE PLASTIC CURSE
- 3 MISSING BIONET DATA
- 4 SYNTHETIC GRASS PROBLEMS
- 5 AUSMAP UPDATE
- 6 KOALA LAND AND THE BLUE-GREEN GRID
- 7 FIRST GREEN ELECTRIC CAR GUIDE
- 8 VIDEO SERIES UPDATE

Tracking Change

Change can be behind the scenes or highly visible tipping points. We've seen two examples in recent months.

TEC supporters will know of our long standing efforts to reform the National Electricity Market (NEM) - a complex set of energy supply rules, filtered through obscure bureaucracies and industry relationships. It governed and sought to maintain our fossil fuel power supplies. A major obstacle to climate change policies, but it largely hid in the shadows.

However, the growing alarm about global warming, public outrage and (finally) overwhelming the conservative forces fostering the climate wars that infected Australian politics, is seeing breakthroughs. At least we are now climbing the mountain rather than being stranded on a hillock.

[continued on the next page](#)

One hardly noticed recent change has been the integration of an "emissions reduction objective" in the NEM (a TEC campaign). Long dominated by an economic psyche that marginalised climate combatting policies, such as energy conservation and alternative power sources, this institution is now a casualty of change. Further, state and federal governments are adopting climate friendly legislation that bypasses the NEM. In another example, NSW is also about to enact a Net Zero Commission with a broad ranging ambit.

A more visible step has been the movement on saving Sydney's Koalas.

NSW Environment Minister Penny Sharpe has announced she is reviewing the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (covering 200,000ha) which was setting the stage for massive development west of Sydney and extinction of the state's only chlamydia-free Koala colony, and threatened many other endangered species. We are leading the campaign with 25 local, state and national environment groups to reform the Plan so that habitat and migratory corridors are preserved. The Minister has also obtained extra funding to accelerate creation of the Georges River Koala National Park.

We'll be keeping the pressure up on climate and Koalas - as well as our other key campaigns. It's a long road but there are positive steps and your support keeps us moving forwards.

Jeff Angel, Director

SINGLE USE PLASTIC CURSE

When do you think this was written?

"Every day more and more producers change from a paperboard or glass container to a plastic one. And plans are afoot to try to push the use of plastics in packaging even further (e.g., plastic pouches for liquid packaging, plastic coated glass bottles, plastic refuse bags, plastic milk bottles, plastic aerosol containers, and plastic bottles for carbonated beverages and beer)."

1978! By Ian Pausacker, in his book "Recycling: Is it the Solution for Australia?".

Only now are we coming to grips with the single use plague, as more and more items like single use plastic cups, polystyrene loose fill and helium balloon releases - all of which are commonly littered and harm the marine environment - are banned by state governments. WA, QLD and SA are all on track and NSW is also proposing action (at last).

The collapse of REDcycle showed there was an even deeper problem, with the failure of voluntary schemes to collect, sort and recycle packaging; and lack of reprocessing facilities to provide material as recycled content. Environment ministers are seriously discussing regulation of the packaging sector to meet recycling and reuse targets, and support widespread collection facilities.

Recently the big supermarkets under the auspices of the Food and Grocery Council released their ideas for product stewardship and the results of trials to use special kerbside collections for soft plastics. We cautiously welcomed their announcements.

The next 12 months are the crucial time for whether Australia will enter a new era of packaging recycling, reuse and reduction; and inclusion of recycled content and alternative, safer materials.



Four years of crucial missing data!

The NSW Government manages BioNet, regarded as the "single source of truth" about wildlife and biodiversity for environmental assessments. BioNet features data collections including native animal sightings and rescues by scientists, consultants and citizen scientists. It is used by consultants undertaking impact assessments for developers and environmental groups seeking to protect threatened areas.

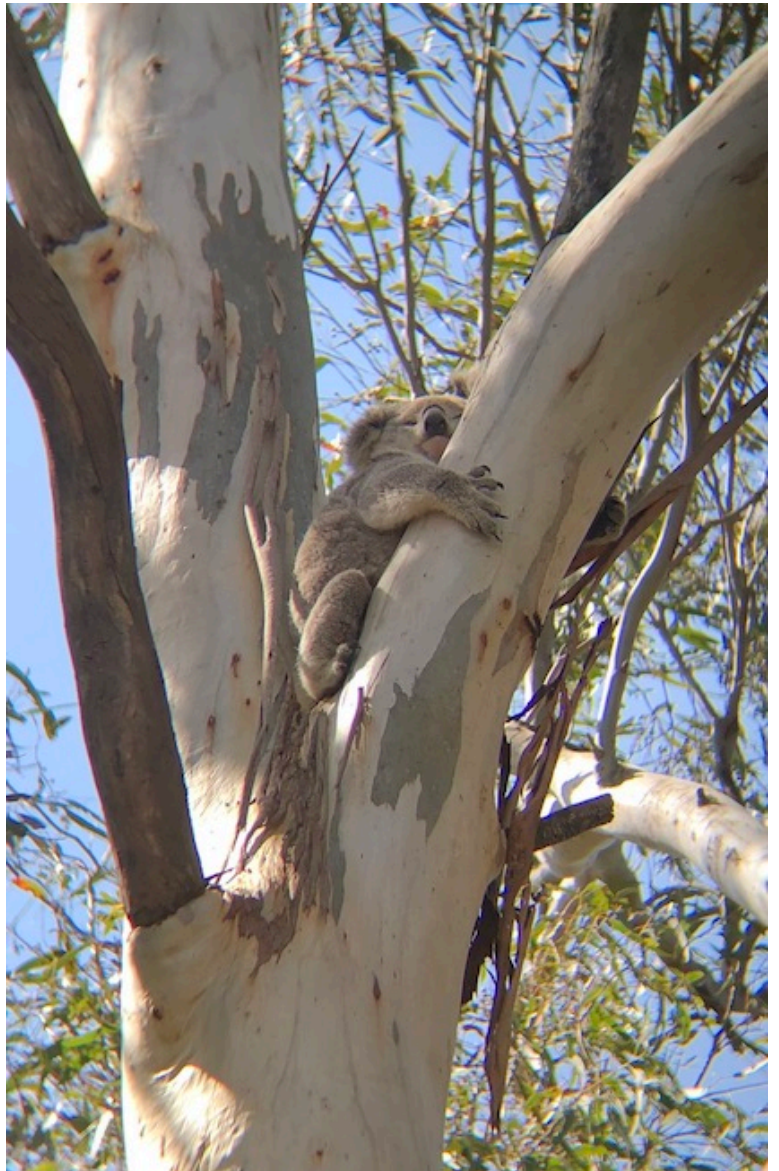
This includes TEC's Sydney Basin Koala Network (SBKN), to show the impact of development on Koalas. After meeting with our network of members across the Sydney Basin, SBKN realised the situation for Koalas seemed much worse on the ground than what the data from the NSW Government's BioNet was telling us.

So we put our investigative skills to work to unravel the raw data in BioNet and discovered that wildlife rescues had not been entered for four years. We estimated 400,000 records were missing from across the state, including 28,000 threatened species records. Wildlife records are crucial for environmental assessments as they show where wildlife is already under stress, and can tell a story about the cumulative impact of existing developments, especially on Koalas who are pushed onto roads and hit by cars, or end up in backyards and are attacked by dogs.

Journalists from the ABC extensively covered this discovery across TV, radio and online, with WIRES reiterating the seriousness of this failure. We were encouraged that Environment Minister Penny Sharpe went on record to say that she would urgently address this issue.

STOP PRESS!

We have just been informed that three of the four years of missing data has now been entered. This is a great result after years of mismanagement.



Koala found at new development site in Appin



SYNTHETIC GRASS PROBLEMS REVEALED

TEC's AUSMAP research into rubber crumb, a recycled granulate (<5mm) made from end-of-life tyres which is used as infill for synthetic turf fields and for playground surfaces, is attracting attention. It's a collaborative effort with a northern Sydney council aiming to address current knowledge gaps in relation to the loss of rubber crumb and synthetic grass blades, and the effectiveness of existing stormwater mitigation traps, at a synthetic sports field in Sydney's north-west.

With over 180 synthetic sports fields in NSW alone, the loss of microplastics from these surfaces represents a significant waste stream into the environment. Moreover, a lack of current regulations for stormwater infrastructure, and limited community awareness, has contributed to ill-informed management of this worsening pollution problem. Despite growing concerns regarding the safety of rubber crumb, which has known toxic and carcinogenic properties, Australian studies and regulations on these materials remain in their infancy.

The study assessed the loss and capture of microplastics from the sports field, and preliminary results have highlighted that up to 70,000 particles of rubber crumb and over 50,000 particles of synthetic grass have been captured in a single trap sample.



Rubber crumb found at a stormwater outlet below a synthetic turf sports field with rubber crumb infill

Ministers need to act

AUSMAP submitted these early findings to Penny Sharpe, NSW Minister for Environment, and Paul Scully, Minister for Planning. We called for:

- a five-year moratorium on synthetic turf fields,
- minimum pollution mitigation measures,
- improved resilience techniques for natural turf fields, and
- substantial investment on research to address key knowledge gaps highlighted in the NSW Chief Scientist's Report (CSE) on Synthetic Turf in Public Spaces (2023).

This came hot on the heels of AUSMAP's recent presentation of evidence to the Federal Inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways, by Project Director Dr Michelle Blewitt and Science Research Officer Juniper Riordan.

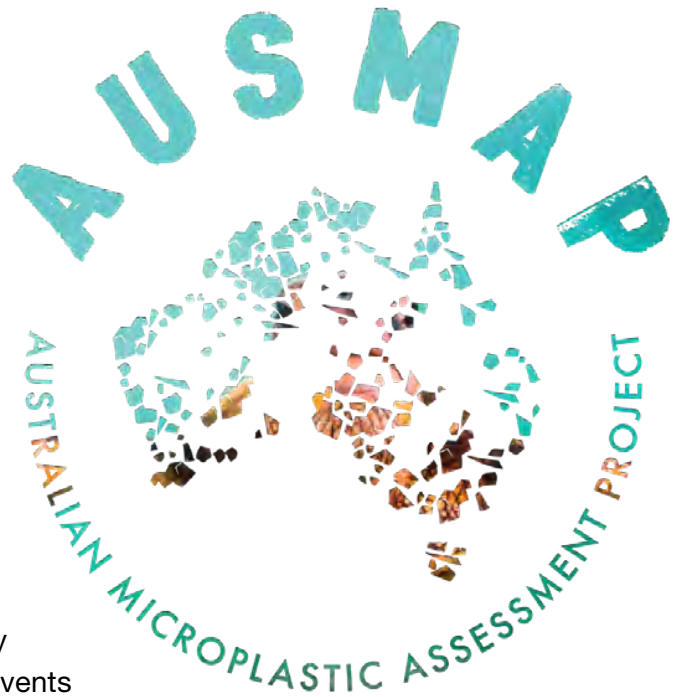
If you are concerned about a local synthetic field or playground, please get in touch with us at info@ausmap.org

Information is Power

In the meantime, AUSMAP has been busy delivering national education and engagement via community and training initiatives!

The greatest obstacle to tackling the microplastic crisis is making this seemingly invisible problem more salient in the public eye. These efforts culminated in a hectic and incredibly rewarding National Science Week which saw 11 events occur in NSW, SA and NT, with audiences ranging from primary school aged kids to elderly community members.

AUSMAP Director Michelle Blewitt also received the incredible opportunity to visit Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands, in partnership with the Tangaroa Blue Foundation, where she trained local community members to conduct quarterly AUSMAP sampling. With recent grant wins AUSMAP will soon be carrying out citizen scientist training and sampling efforts in West Lakes (SA), Kangaroo Island (SA), and Broome, Exmouth and Port Hedland (WA).



National Science Week event with a local school group on Henley Beach, SA



Trained community volunteers sampling at Belmore Basin, Wollongong - during National Science Week

Koala Land and the Blue-Green Grid

NSW Environment Minister Penny Sharpe has taken the first step to fulfil the promised Georges River Koala National Park (GRKNP) - a proposal we and local groups first put to her as the then Shadow Minister five years ago. This secures the north-south links for the Koalas of Campbelltown, and removes the threat of the massive Georges River Parkway Road.

However it's only half the equation; the next part, GRKNP stage 2, needs to ensure Koalas can move east-west between the Georges and Nepean Rivers. The vegetative links exist on private land but are under dire risk with the Department of Planning's rush to rezone land for the major developers, Walker and Lendlease, along with their attempts to fragment and limit effective east-west corridors.

We are seeking major reform of the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan that sets out urban sprawl and the future of 200,000ha in Sydney's west. So far Minister Sharpe and the new Planning Minister, Paul Scully, are yet to be on the same page, as seen with Scully's approval of Walker's fast tracking of the massive Appin Precinct development. It's such bad planning - urban sprawl - without essential infrastructure and adequate environmental safeguards. Soon after this Michael Cassel, the Planning Dept Secretary, resigned and started working for Walker. Questions need to be asked about this process and the Department's integrity.

The Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan should be amended to put conservation of the many threatened plant and animal species and new parks securely in place before new development.

If you haven't already, please send a message to NSW's Minister for Environment and Minister for Planning urging them to take action:

www.tec.org.au/

cumberland_plain_conservation_plan

In a further push for green planning, we have been able to meet the new Planning Secretary, Kiersten Fishburn, and have put forward that all new developments that go ahead need to have green spaces in and around them. Our goal is to ensure concepts such as the Blue-Green grid will network and link our greenspaces, and have mechanisms for implementation and ongoing protection, so they can move from policy to the ground. Our Plan will be released soon.

There are other indications that the State Environment Minister is also aware of this integrity collapse, as she is separating out the Environment Department from Planning. Under the previous government environmental considerations answered to planning. This change will begin in the new year.



FIRST GREEN ELECTRIC CAR GUIDE

We launched Australia's first Green Electric Car Guide (www.greenelectriccar.guide) in August to help you, the community and businesses to decide which electric vehicle (EV) to buy. It dives deep into the environmental impacts of the base models of EVs available in Australia under \$100,000 (as of June 2023). We've meticulously scored each car based on their life cycle carbon emissions, use of sustainable technologies, and the carmaker's commitment to decarbonising Australian transport.

The results? Some are predictable, while others might surprise you. No car has achieved a perfect score yet, indicating the evolving nature of the EV market. But don't be disheartened if your current EV isn't at the top. Remember, even the lowest-scoring EVs have a significantly reduced carbon footprint compared to their fossil fuel counterparts.

Our mission in publishing this guide without industry or government support, is to empower Australians with comprehensive and credible information. Pending ongoing funding, we aim to update the guide as the EV landscape evolves.



Please consider a bequest - remembering us in your will can ensure TEC keeps campaigning

Recommended bequest wording: "I give, free of all duties and taxes, the whole of my estate or _____% of my estate or the residue of my estate or _____% of the residue of my estate or the sum of \$_____ or my units/shares in _____ Trust/Ltd or my real property situated at _____ having the title reference _____ to Total Environment Centre, ABN 54 152 721 302, P.O. Box K61 Haymarket NSW 1240, for purposes that it shall determine. The receipt of the treasurer, secretary or public officer for the time being is an absolute discharge to my executor."

TO DONATE PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM OR VISIT www.tec.org.au/donate

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If you prefer to make a direct debit / transfer to our Commonwealth Bank account:

Name: Total Environment Centre BSB: 062004 Account No.: 10343440

Mail form or email jenn.brewer@tec.org.au for a receipt



Please return form to: Total Environment Centre, PO Box K61, Haymarket NSW 1240



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Our campaigns succeed due to the generosity and encouragement of our supporters.

FIGHTING FOR A GREEN FUTURE

Total Environment Centre is close to completing an inspiring video series to celebrate more than 50 years of environmental action and protection. It's called "Fighting For A Green Future". The seven-part series showcases the extraordinary power of persistence in the environmental movement.

The birth of the modern environment movement and campaigns such as a ban on leaded petrol, protecting our rainforests, the fight for container refunds to stop waste, green politics and more, are covered. We have interviewed key players and decision makers.

As we look to the past, we hope the lessons from previous campaigns will serve as valuable guidance for younger generations to continue this important work.

Soon you will be invited to a private showcase of this series, before we release it to the public in the new year. We hope you will join us!
