

Convenor's Report 2020

My last Convenor's report was in August 2019, when we lived in a different world. There was no hint that a coronavirus would sweep across the globe and devastate lives and demolish economies with consequences yet to be felt entirely. The other drama that was yet to happen was the summer bush-fire ferocity across our whole country, terrifying in its impacts both direct and indirect. So this has been no ordinary year and a bit - and this report includes a reflection of the pre and post Covid period. In many ways our message has not changed in the 15 years we have been spruiking it. *Stop destroying our planet with greenhouse gas emissions that are changing our climate, with dire consequences. We can change. It's completely do-able and will not destroy the economy, rather it is will save it.*

That's it – That's been our message, our raison d'etre, and we are beginning to see how right we were on both counts: in the prediction of its consequences, and in witnessing what renewable technology and other innovations, are capable of achieving. *The purpose of Lighter Footprints is to work for a safe climate and a healthy, sustainable environment, recognising that we face a planetary emergency and that the world must halt and reverse global warming as a matter of urgency.*

We have tried many ways to connect with our community, one hungry for science-based information, and for most years, we have managed at least one major public event, that has filled a town hall and left a political impact. We'd had our next big one planned - with a Victorian Minister and top experts. that ensured our hall would be filled. It was not to be. And as it became clear that this lockdown was no short-term blip, we had to re-invent the link to our community. And that is what we have done. We've taken ourselves online, and not by half measures. our website has blossomed. We have zoomed both big and small, and emailed and facebooked as we never thought possible. In September 2020, we had enough confidence that we could run the equivalent of our town hall meeting – in an experimental virtual experience.

Let me remind you of what these events of ours looked like. What you don't see is the teamwork that results in the high quality of these, and our other achievements. The committee of 9 has met for two hours every fortnight, as well as driving working groups in energy, the climate emergency, local government, the website and comms, writers and our speakers group. That's called commitment.

The range of issues we have delved into is wide. Climate change is complex and people come to it from different levels of interest. To remind you of what we covered since the last report we go back more than a year .

Take yourselves to September last year. A farmer, Thomas Nicholas, experienced in how to draw down carbon and keep it in the ground spoke about *Regenerative Agriculture* and the need for rethinking. We were packed into our guide hall with great food and drink to share at that stage.

October was the Hawthorn town hall event with our starry line up of Tom Kompas, Anthea Harris and Peter Newman on what a *Clean Energy Transition* could and will look like, why we should go there and what were the costs of not doing so. We could run this same event today and find each speaker doubly convincing with added data on the increased risk and cost of inaction, and the huge gains in technology to address production of clean energy.

In November we looked at *Powering up for Summer* with Dylan McConnell and Ric Brazzale as they told us how to keep the lights on under the pressure of heat – and they got right as it turned out – as governments and companies employed smart demand /response and load shifting.

Into 2020 in February we began our year with the only face to face meeting we have been able to run this year - with Simon Holmes a Court on *2020 Vision and Innovative Solutions*, surprising us with a taste of how Australia might become a leader in low emissions technology.

And then we began our Covid year of change. We cancelled our March meeting and instead ran an online practice session with zoom. Most of our supporters are in the older age bracket and very many of them were quite unfamiliar with joining meetings on line. I count myself among them, but I have had lots of help. It is therefore to their great credit that so many of them have mastered the digital technology necessary to join our Lighter Footprints meetings this year. We decided to begin with an informal session with people we admire. The CEO of Environment Victoria, Jono La Nauze, spoke with us on Victorian climate issues, and we practiced our capacity to ask questions in Chat as well.

In April, Market Forces was our first big virtual meeting attempt - a first for our speakers too. Pablo Brait and Rachel Dean talked about the power of money. I still like the twist they made to a common phrase “put your mouth where your money is” and they showed what that can do.

Simon Holmes à Court came back to us mid-month in May with a review of how things looked when focusing on stimulating the economy. How exciting that list looked then and one can only hope that some of those ideas will grab some of the stimulus money that is about to be handed out. The blog we made from his session is so relevant right now.

At the end of May Anna Skarbek from Climateworks blew us away with her report on *Decarbonising the Future*, a sector by sector breakdown of how Australia can transition to a net zero emissions future.

In June we started to hone our skills in talking with politicians – be it by zoom at the moment. Sue Dwyer, Katherine Barraclough and Mike McEvoy took us on that journey with many insights into what to do and not to do.

July was a special night with Lidia Thorpe our first Indigenous Victorian Senator. She taught us so much about the links between indigenous thought and practice and what climate activists need to understand.

In August, with council elections creeping up on us, we asked some neighbouring councils (Whitehorse and Yarra) what they were doing to address climate change, as well as the consultancy Ironbark, a group that works across many councils on this issue. Many interesting approaches were thrown up.

By September we were ready for the big one! Well, we'd been working on this idea for some time. Given there was no real way for voters to know anything about the views of their potential candidates, we'd thought perhaps we could run ward meetings for the community to get the chance to hear from them? This would involve contacting community groups who cared enough to join us, and that was right across Boroondara community's 11 wards. Who did we think we were? With the help of the Kooyong Climate Change Alliance we took it on. And they came. Not knowing how many candidates would turn up they logged in to our zoom with Craig Reucassell as the attractor! We felt sure we would lose many when it came time to break into their separate wards but they stayed, in numbers resonant of our town hall numbers, (close to 400) with more than half of the 60-odd candidates in attendance. It was a technical masterpiece for us to run 8 separate and parallel zoom meetings, with trained facilitators and supporters who kept those meetings running like clockwork. This is what is called punching above your weight, when you are a small community group of volunteers who have the whole community and the Council asking what is going on here and wanting to be part of it.

So we are now close to the year's end with just two sessions to go –*Forests* in October and *State MP's* in November. We have kept up our high standard and our numbers have grown every month. But if you think that is all we do, then let me remind you about the rest. I've mentioned the working groups with members who also visit politicians with their research. These are the engines that drive us, so do check out the website blog for more on all of them. Each does great work, and I'll highlight just one here. The writers' group is extraordinary, and over 50 members contribute to it, writing across all the major daily papers as well as many regional papers across the nation. Hundreds and hundreds of crafted pieces have been published which help to frame a way of thinking about climate change action that is increasingly reflected in the community and in articles in these papers, even the Herald Sun and dare I say it The Australian. We have also written several submissions of high quality to various enquiries, and these can be found on our website. Every day something is happening with members of Lighter Footprints. It is a dynamic group.

During the dramas of Covid we have focused on the opportunities for doing things differently to reach zero carbon emissions at speed, through the way we approach the economic recovery. We have seen powerful ideas from trusted sources, but to date little acceptance politically of this direction, so our work goes on.

And it is on that note that I make this last Convenor's report. In it's 15th year of steady growth and with a strong sense of purpose, it is time for me to let go and for new leadership to take it on. Two of us are stepping down today, myself and Robert Brown who has been part of the group for what must at least a decade. He has been such a contributor it would take too long to list what he has done over the years. Quite simply he will be sorely missed. I hope that, like me, he is not leaving the group entirely, just the committee. Thanks for all you have done at this level Rob.

One last word from me before I get off the bus. Since 2006 we have worked assiduously to have climate change recognised as sufficiently important by both sides of politics, so that progress will not be unstitched at every political turn. In this we have failed spectacularly. The issue is now so aligned with party politics of the left that the right seems required to avoid it as a matter of principle, regardless of sound argument. Any sensible discussion on climate between left and right has long ceased. Perhaps the need to bridge that gap will be removed as the politics of the day becomes overrun by world practice and by the market and communities taking issues into their own hands. Something has to give.

As for me, I am very grateful for the years that you have given me as your convenor. It has been your gift for far longer than I could ever have imagined. I will be glad to hand over the reigns in this the trickiest time imaginable, with the hope that we will see a shift in community support and political will, which will indeed mean nothing less than to save the world.