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Letters from the editors

LUNGOL

Managing Editor

Nasuvwen is a love letter to the islands I that brought me to life.

My childhood and adolescence were split evenly between Papua New Guinea and Fiji. Growing up in the islands, my early years were much like many expect them to have been - warm, laid-back, and absolutely gorgeous. To this day, I have never seen greenery and waters as stunning as the ones that defined my childhood.

The kindness and compassion of the people that surrounded me have also gone unmatched. Our friendliness is almost as world-famous as our beaches. But the quality of my people that I have the most pride in is our resilience. We make up such a small percentage of the world's population, yet we experience some of the most destructive effects of global warming and climate change. Our fragile ecosystems are dying before our very eyes. Our freshwater supplies are getting contaminated with brine from rising sea levels. Our homes and communities are devastated year after year by cyclones with unprecedented severity. We are among the planet's first ever climate refugees. But still we fight advocating, adapting, and rebuilding.

So you can imagine my disorientation when I moved to Australia, and I was suddenly sharing spaces with people who didn't believe that climate change existed, or that it was truly as bad as people made it seem if it did. It was so jarring to move from a place where everyone was collectively living a nightmare to a place where people kept telling me it was just a bad dream. I felt like I was in a dystopian world where I was alone in knowing the truth about this huge conspiracy.

But, unlike many people in this country, I don't have the luxury of pretending that climate change doesn't exist. My islands are the reason I'm here in the first place, getting a Bachelor of Environmental Management. And they are the reason you're holding the magazine in your hands right now.

Nasuvwen means ocean where I come from. And to me, the ocean represents life. It represents the humbling truth that my people have always known - humanity is not above nature, and to believe so is arrogant and dangerous.

I named this issue *Nasuvwen* because my people and my community are often ignored and left out the conversation when it comes to climate change and the future of our planet. So while I have this platform, as Managing Editor of one of the oldest student publications in the country, I will use it to write a love letter to the islands I that brought me to life.

JACK Features Sub-Editor

That humans are responsible for enormous (and, often, irreversible) damage to our natural surroundings is without question. What is more concerning is our complacency. To dismiss or ignore the plastic polluting the oceans, or rising global temperatures, or the planet's waning biodiversity (to name only a few of the problems facing us) is not only to demonstrate an enormous lack of foresight, but to display a lack of respect for the other sentient creatures that inhabit our planet. In this way, the environmentalist movement not only seeks to protect other animals, equally deserving of our attention, but it also seeks to protect us from our own destructive behaviour.

This edition of Tharunka nicely demonstrates how it is our attitudes and complacency, rather than strictly our behaviour, that most require correction. Scarlett Li-Williams (who has contributed multiple excellent pieces this year) identifies how it is our laziness that continues to put plastic bags into the ocean, in light of other countries successfully legislating against plastic bags. Similarly, the equivocacy of UNSW's commitment to divestment is highlighted by Joshua Han and Elizabeth Morley. Agatha Mossakowska writes that our wilful ignorance of Indigenous input on land use is a reflection of our lack of care for sustainability and preservation, and that Indigenous land rights and environmentalism go hand-inhand. Finally, multiple authors argue that it is structural change, rather than change in individual behaviour, that will make the greatest difference, making a clear case for a greater social commitment to environmental protection as expressed in legislation.

Overall, this is a strong edition of *Tharunka*, with plenty of insightful writing to consider. Let's hope this growing environmentalist movement hasn't come too late.

SAHANA Digital Sub-Editor

While the online platforms explore the modern, most sought after virtual aspects of this 21st Century, *Tharunka* doesn't forget the hard reality in the world we live in.

Rarely do we remember that the soil we stride on has the power to eat us up, the water we drink could wash us away, the lighter flame could burn us to ashes, storming winds could drift you distances and one fine day the skies could possibly come down on us. Being selfish is excused as being human nature, but many a times have we been taught that testing the latitudes was merely our own loss. This edition aims to take a step forward... not *on* Earth, but *for* it.





MAGGIE Creatives Sub-Editor

There's a beautiful sense of peace found under the waves of the ocean crashing on the shore. An overpowering sense of nostalgia accompanying a mouth full of salt water, as the sun and the sand seep into your lungs. The feeling of power everytime you stand on the shore; triumphant and dripping.

The ocean is a cruel and bountiful beast that will swallow you whole; but I've always found an intimate pleasure in tempting fate.

But as sea levels rise; it has become us who is drowning out the ocean's pleas. Trapped under the waves of our ignorance and inaction, our oceans are fighting for their last breath. Like a lone swimmer dumped on the shore, the ocean's pain is ubiquitous.

This issue is home to some beautiful, ethereal pieces. Ranging from the artistic talent of Ashleigh Ford, to the poignant writings of Lungol Wekina, and every other artist in the pages between.

Nasuvwen translates to ocean, and this issue is a breath of fresh air. Let the pieces encapture you, soak them up and feel their waves crash over you.

AMY Designer

I'll admit, this issue was really difficult for me to put together.

The idea of 'ocean', particularly in relation to our environmental crisis, is so multifaceted. Rising sea levels, acidification, tsunamis, pollution, loss of biodiversity, eutrophication – such issues were hard for me to grasp visually, all together.

Lucky for me, however, I realised that I had been missing a vital consideration the moment I got to read the works that had been submitted.

Where was the human located, when it comes to human-caused climate change? In particular, where is a UNSW community member?

Located where we are, it's hard to shake the sense of leisure and nearness away from our conceptions of Bondi-Coogee-Maroubra.

But we're reading a steady drowning as a 'mostly floating'. How can we reconcile this dissonance, the illusion of calm and the need for urgency?

So as you read the issue, keep and eye on the water level. Are we going to wait until water is on our doorstep before we get our feet wet?



Tharunka acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land, the Gadigal and Bedigal people of the Eora nation, on which our university now stands. When I lived, life was good.

The seas were gentle and the fish were plenty. The air was fresh and the soil was soft. The sun used to kiss me on my face, and the moon would sing me to sleep.

I watched my mother make magic in our garden. Her hands would enter the soil bare, disappearing beneath the surface only to reemerge with food. As I aged, I learned how to grow food, but I saw magic in her nevertheless.

My father would leave our home in the mornings and find his in the waves. He made his canoe as he made his children - strong, lean, and ready for the ocean. And like his canoe, he made me with patience and love.

N

My daughter was a strong woman.

When she lived, life was different.

Her gardens gave her the food I could no longer provide from the grave, and soon enough, she had little hands to show her magic to. But soon strangers came, and called her magic witchcraft.

She was made to cover her body with another woman's clothing, as if it were something to be ashamed of. She was punished for loving our gods, and was forced to love theirs. They made her pray on her knees as if she was a slave. I suppose she was.

R

Her daughter was a different woman.

When she lived, life had changed.

Her hands were too soft to create magic, and she ate food someone else had harvested. The air was different and the fish were rarer. She was unlike her father's canoe frail, soft, and afraid of the ocean.

Her mother never loved her God, but she did. She called our ways witchcraft, and called her brothers savages. She prayed to a man she had never seen before until all but her skin had turned into the foreign women she dressed like.

R

Her son was a white man with a black face.

When he lived, life had changed still.

He was arrogant, greedy, and violent. He grew to hate his colour as his mother had done before him, and took pride in the way his tongue shaped the foreign words spoken by the invaders. He thought it made him wiser.

He beat his wife as he had seen his pastor do. Women were no longer his equal. He thought he was better than his sisters because the white man wouldn't let them into his school. The white man built his school on the graves of my brothers.



8

S.

LIFE WAS GOOD

His daughter had never seen magic.

When she lived, life was new.

She traveled on roads instead of waves, and slept on foam instead of mats. She could only sometimes remember the way the sand felt beneath her toes. Her father refused to educate her, so when she tired of her husband's violence, she was alone in a city her people didn't build.

So she created her own magic. She sold lollies under the sun to feed her baby, and sold love under the moon to feed herself. When she returned to the sand she once knew, it was submerged in water. Fishes now lived in the home she had left behind.

S.

Her daughter was a chief without a throne.

When she lived, life was newer still.

She was the first woman in her family to go to school, and soon she was the first in her family to get a degree. Soon, she was the first of her village to cross the ocean to learn about healing. When she returned, she was history with feet.

She loved the white man's god and spoke the white man's language. But she also taught the white man medicine. She went back to the village to heal her people often, refusing to be paid in the white man's money. Some of their children couldn't breathe.

S

Her son is the man before you.

As he lives, life is what he makes it.

He knows not of his first language nor of his first gods, but he knows of me. And he whispers me back to life sometimes. He rejects the white man's god and refuses to be defined by their language. He loves the colour we both share on the surface of our skin. He is as he is, and he will never apologise.

He has never sailed a canoe, but he is very much like my father's - strong, lean, and ready for the ocean. He will heal the seas the white man has infected, and he will bring life back into the oceans they have killed. He is just as much of me as I am of him.

And one day, he will say that as he lived, life was good.





I've always had an appreciation for the environment. I find the natural world to be intrinsically inspiring: sunsets and sunrises, beaches and oceans, the outback. They all make me stop and stare, and appreciate the earth's natural beauty, sometimes so much so that my friends and family literally have to drag me away.

Aside from the aesthetic pleasure that the wonder of the natural world provides, over the years I have found many more ways that I value the environment, and have become increasingly involved in activism. Therefore, there's a lot more to my activism than surface-level appreciation.

I've got no choice...

why I got involved with the climate movement

I recently attended a lecture that opened my eyes to the importance of collective action in the environmental movement. I used to think that personal change was enough - that Keep Cups, reusable shopping bags, and riding your bike were the best ways for us to make a powerful impact and live more sustainable lives. And while these things are undoubtedly important, this lecture shifted my perspective on their relative significance when facing the challenges that our consumer- and profit-driven society present within the global context.

The lecturer made a single, bold claim: marketing which promotes personal action as the best way to be environmentally conscious allows large corporations to place blame on the individual and shift focus away from corporate behaviour. Thus, businesses are held as less culpable for the majority of the world's environmental destruction, for which they are, in reality, responsible. It was suggested that putting the onus of responsibility onto the individual commodifies environmentalism by reducing it to something that you can buy, like a reusable straw, and perpetuates existing consumerist institutions which create environmental problems in the first place. This was a lightbulb moment for me. In a similar way to many other social and political challenges, I realised that individual responsibility can only take us so far, and can often be detrimental in some instances when not paired with organised action. This is a common barrier faced by many at the beginning of their journey, myself included. Putting the focus on individual responsibility obscures the importance of advocating for fundamental structural change, which is more likely to bring about lasting results.

So, upon reflection, the original reason I became involved in the environmental movement was anchored by an arbitrary acceptance of the world and its systems as fundamentally unchangeable. Perhaps at the start of my involvement, my environmentalism came from an ethic of care, recognising that the earth, the land, country, animals, and plants can't defend themselves; that we should be compassionate and live in and with our environment instead of being so separate from it. Or, perhaps it came from a sense of justice: how is it fair that humans can trample all over their surroundings without any consequences whatsoever? How is it fair that we, simply one species among many, have claimed monopoly over every single thing that's on this earth, and don't feel a responsibility to look after the land we live on, or coexist with its other inhabitants? Most likely, it was a mixture of all three: awe, pity and frustration.

However, as I continued to become more active, and learned more about some of the main factors that contribute to climate change, it became clear to me that the existing structures that we have in place need fundamental change, not just reform. I began to realise that many of our environmental problems are the symptoms of corrupt institutional structures, such as capitalism, colonialism, racism, and marginalisation. For example, putting economic growth and never-ending development at the peak of governmental concern has fuelled our climate crisis through the worldwide stasis on effective climate policy. In our current paradigm, markets and big businesses are prioritised, and people and the environment are sacrificed to the greed of the powerful elite.

This has been enabled by our colonial past, which privileged groups consistently hold the most economic power. Our system pushes people into existing structures designed to benefit the rich, and which, in the process, damage the environment, the livelihoods of minorities, and anything that goes against the status quo. What therefore became a recurring theme in my journey is a deeper understanding that when the environment suffers, people suffer too. A system that thrives upon environmental degradation is linked with social inequality, because we are inextricably linked with our environment. We aren't separate or above nature, we're part of it, and so when profit is generated from environmental destruction, someone, somewhere, must necessarily suffer as a

This is a critical decade, and we are reaching a tipping point. The realisation that most of the big issues that society is grappling with today stem from and feed into the climate crisis reinstated my sense of urgency. Instead of trying to fix things once they are broken, or playing catch-up as we continue the very behaviours that are doing us harm, we need to break existing cycles and take pre-emptive steps to make sure things don't fall apart in the first place.

Now that I know more and have thought more deeply about why I care, there seems to be no choice but to be involved. There's too much at stake to simply accept the status quo. So instead of asking why I'm active in the climate movement, I think the right question is, how could I not be?

FIGHTING FOR CHANGE, why environmental movements need to ¬

Established environmental movements and groups have existed across the continent since the early 20th century,1 and have only grown since. Whether the organisations are international, like Greenpeace, or nationally-based, such as the Australian Conservation Foundation, these groups dedicate their time and energy into making sure we don't wreak havoc on our environment and destroy ourselves in the process.

Australia has a long history of grassroots movements that have contributed to the quest for environmental conservation. The campaign to protect old growth Tasmanian forests and stop the construction of the Franklin hydroelectric dam in the 1970s, for example, saw thousands of people travelling to Tasmania to blockade the construction site in an immense display of commitment and "people power". Since the 1980s, thousands of farmers and volunteers have banded together to form local groups with the aim to regenerate the natural environment by combating soil salinity and erosion levels. Wilderness conservation and environmental management movements have been a constant because of the growing awareness of the consequences of complacency, which bode increasingly poorly.

The most pressing environmental issue of the current student generation is, unquestionably, climate change. Young people of today are not only affected by the catastrophic effects of a warming planet (which have been known about since the 1980s) but have also been foisted with the responsibility of devising new solutions for how to mitigate these effects.² With hollow commitments such as the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement representing limited receptivity from government bodies and elected representatives, it's becoming increasingly apparent that the responses from those in power do not match the urgency of the issue.

While it's tempting to feel that we're contributing to a cleaner planet through our individual, everyday lifestyle changes, these actions aren't enough to stop rapid shifts in our global climate. Tackling this most global environmental issue requires a mass movement to communicate the failure of governments and companies of the population as a whole. By building this movement from the ground up, we can better pressure our government into understanding that public demands for significant change are, as of yet, absent from the political agenda.

But what does this have to do with First Nations peoples? How do grassroots efforts aiming to combat the effects of climate change tie into the necessity of working to fight for Indigenous justice?

Indigenous ju



Australians have capitalised upon the dispossession of Indigenous societies for almost 250 years, directly reaping the benefits of a brutal colonial system that has removed Indigenous people from their culture, their communities, and their land. Importantly, the stark effects of colonisation are not simply a feature of our past, but are more than apparent today. Indigenous children are today taken from their families at rates higher than during the Stolen Generations.³ While they make up only 3% of the national population, Indigenous Australians make up 27% of our incarcerated population.⁴ Indigenous children have the highest worldwide rates of otitis media, a middle ear infection that can, if left untreated, lead to hearing loss.⁵ They also have national rates of suicide that are up to 4 times higher than non-Aboriginal children.6 These few, among many, markers of the inequalities faced by Indigenous Australians demonstrate how damaging the dispossession of land and the impact of colonisation were upon their peoples. And, in a crucial way, fighting for environmental protection and propelling the voices of the dispossessed often go hand-in-hand.

In 2014, the Queensland government gave preliminary approval for the construction of the

Carmichael coal mine, set to be the largest coal mine in Australia and one of the largest in the world.⁷ Proposed by the Adani mining group, it is estimated that it will produce 60 billion tonnes of coal per year.⁸ Beyond its staggering expected contribution of 4.7 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, it threatens the livelihood of the Great Barrier Reef and the quality of the groundwater in the Great Artesian Basin, Australia's largest freshwater reservoir.⁹ Groups such as Stop Adani and the AYCC have staunchly opposed the mine.

Underpinning the entire campaign is the native title claim of the Wangan and Jagalingou Traditional Owners Council for the very land Adani hopes to construct the mine upon. The ability to make a native title claim follows the landmark Mabo v Queensland (1992) case, which overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius* (the legal term used to describe uninhabited territory that can be occupied by a state, being "nobody's land"), establishing Indigenous ownership of Australia prior to colonisation and recognising British settlement as unlawful. The High Court also ruled that Indigenous people who had prior existing title to the land should therefore have a legal avenue by which to reclaim it. This resulted in the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth), which acknowledged this ruling and granted Aboriginal people the right to apply for Native Title.

Not only is the Traditional Owners Council fighting for a say in how their land is preserved or used, and coming up against the might of conglomerates focused only on financial viability, but they're also fighting for legal recognition that they are the owners of the land. In 2017, once Adani had committed to the Carmichael coal mine, the Federal government drafted legislation (supported by the opposition) in order to bypass native title rights,¹⁰ which served to invalidate the Wangan and Jagalingou's claim. In fact, the Council most recently acquired representation that has taken to a UN committee and accused Australia of human rights violations¹¹ drawing on the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to claim that the government's actions are deliberately quashing the rights of groups to claim native title. While the work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups have delayed the construction of the mine, there's still much to be said about the rights Indigenous people are afforded when it comes to their own land, particularly once granted native title. It is important to realise that the fight for environmental protection and Indigenous recognition are, in the case of the Carmichael mine and many others, unified. It is often clear that the motives of Indigenous groups are in favour of land conservation, and that challenges to Indigenous authority are in the interest of profit.

First Nations peoples across the globe are also disproportionately affected by climate change, which gives greater credence to their conservationist efforts. Recently, UNSW students heard first-hand from the inhabitants of Kiribati that severe weather changes and rising seas are not only causing damage to their homes and schools, but are beginning to affect their ability to go about their day-to-day lives without imminent disruption.¹² Intentional razing of the land in pursuit of an oil pipeline in North America drew mass support for the Standing Rock tribe, whose main water source was at risk of being polluted.¹³ Flooding from melted ice in Ontario, Canada has forced the Kashechewan community to evacuate their reserve every spring for almost a decade.¹⁴ The necessity of protecting our planet isn't just for the safeguarding of future generations; the failure of state powers to take the issue of climate change seriously has already had disastrous consequences for those who rely on natural resources the most.

In committing to creating a more equitable future for ourselves and future generations, it is vital to maintain the fight for First Nations rights. It is not enough to strive toward mitigating the effects of climate change if our efforts do not challenge the consequences already being wrought upon First Nations peoples around the world, and the enduring effects of colonialism which are precipitating them. Let us, therefore, not fight alone, but listen to First Nations peoples, lift their voices, and come together to create a sustainable and just future. 1. https://www.aegn.org.au/wp-content/ uploads/2013/10/1432_AEGN_HIST_ HistoryTemplate_v03_FA_WEB.pdf

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DAY AND NIGHT





Ashleigh Ford



It's a classic story - you're out and about in the city on a fine morning, and get a sudden hankering for your daily coffee run... but you've left the house without your Keep Cup! Wandering past cosy, enticing establishments, the rich aromas of Sydney's finest brews all but drag you into their open arms. But you, a conscientious citizen of the sustainable modern world, exert the totality of your will power and walk on, perhaps only stopping to grab a takeaway vegetarian big brekkie, the container soon dutifully thrown into the nearest recycling bin. Big ticks all round - under your watchful eye, there shall be no plastic endlessly circulating in the oceans, nor shall innocent animals be slaughtered to indulge excessive, consumerist cravings.

But how much are we really doing for our precious planet through such heroic acts? Unfortunately, not as much as we'd like to think. In fact, since 1988, 71% of global carbon emissions have been produced by only 100 companies,1 leaving us regular citizens the power to influence less than even a third of the urgently destructive mechanisms that are destroying our climate and environment. Surely this cannot apply across the board - surely recycling is, at the very least, a means to reduce the production of single-use packaging that is swamping the Earth? Wrong again. As recently as February this year, a Fairfax report revealed² that multiple NSW waste companies were dumping thousands of tonnes of our carefully recycled goods into Queensland landfills with no regard to processing, in order to save \$3000 per truckload. Faced with examples like these, the question becomes whether individual efforts and sacrifices are even worthwhile. The answer is yes, but only so long as individual sacrifices are in the context of a wider collective political agitation that aims to achieve systematic change to complement them. Otherwise, you're giving up that morning coffee for nothing.

It is very easy to slip into the illusion that, through our excessive and self-interested habits, we as citizens are individually responsible, if not to blame, for the disaster currently being wrought upon the natural world. However, while public consciousness and accountability is vital to saving our planet, it must be focused on the real culprits of this phenomenon – big business. History is our best guide. The entire issue of waste production began with the proliferation of single-use packaging,³ in all its cheap convenience, among manufacturers during the economic boom after World War II. Public outrage at this destructive, wasteful new innovation encouraged legislation banning disposable bottles in America, but manufacturers had an ingenious response. A number of businesses, including Coca-Cola, launched a non-profit initiative called "Keep America Beautiful",⁴ which blamed consumers, and not producers, for the pollution problem the world now faced. As an executive from one of the companies said, "Packages don't litter, people do".5 Shifting the blame in this way has proven to be a hugely successful marketing tactic of large waste-producing companies. In Australia, McDonald's, for example, is very vocal about their ongoing sponsorship of Clean Up Australia since 1989,6 despite being responsible for one in five items of rubbish dumped in Victoria in 2013, along with Coca Cola.⁷ Hence, it is clear that it is not the reform of consumers which will save our planet, but that of the companies which are engaging in these destructive practices.

"There is no such thing as society". These famous words of Margaret Thatcher encapsulate neoliberal ideology, the proponents of which have weakened collective public power, and encouraged governments to dismantle structures regulating the behaviour of big businesses, since the late 1970s. These neoliberal mechanisms, entirely approved by the democracies of the developed world, ensure KNOWING WHEN TO PUT DOWN YOUR KEEP CUP AND FOLLOW THE CROWD



that cashed-up entities, such as mining and logging companies, will always have a bigger political say than individuals by exercising their pecuniary might through political donations and lobbying, which facilitates political access.8 Simultaneously, representations of public power, such as unions, have been shattered by neoliberal economic policy. The result of these processes is that we buy into social responsibility in the convenient tangibility of Keep Cups and bamboo cutlery, while significant structural change becomes impossible, and big businesses potentiate mining subsidies and logging grants by exploiting the political lenience on corporate behaviour. This lobbying has extended even further to subdue public dissent, manifesting in Tasmania's 2014 anti-protest laws which were (luckily for us) successfully defeated in a High Court Case in 2017.

The inevitable next question is whether peaceful, collective political agitation actually works when it comes to protecting the environment. The answer, once again, is yes. Take, for example, the 1982 campaign to save the Franklin River in Tasmania, in which over one thousand arrests were made (with most being acquitted of all charges) amongst the six thousand who flocked to blockade the construction of a proposed dam. The following year, the parliament passed laws to protect the now nationally famous south-west of Tasmania in the most renowned environmental campaign in Australia's history.9 More recently, initiatives such as the fossil fuel divestment campaign, which began in universities in 2011, have produced successful results in universities and in mainstream finance. According to gofossilfree.org,¹⁰ the global value of the 905 institutions currently reporting divestment is \$6.24 trillion. These commitments include the entire country of Ireland, to our very own City of Sydney Council, as well as universities like ANU and the University of Sydney. The campaign has even had significant success close to home. Fossil Free UNSW has been campaigning for the past five years for divestment, and this pressure contributed to the university's commitment to 100% solar energy by 2020^{11} – a huge win.

Of course, the moral of the story isn't to start eating a meat-only diet supplemented by coffee, taken solely in disposable cups, which fill the back of the car that you now drive everywhere instead of taking public transport. These personal steps undoubtedly contribute to the inspiring wider movement of environmentalism, which is not only making a physical difference, but sends a clear message to governments and businesses. However, if the structures which perpetuate environmental damage are to be challenged and undone, what is needed is urgent, vocal, and collective political activism and civil disobedience.

Where can one start? UNSW is home to a thriving and politically active Environment Collective, which has been fighting for environmental and social justice for years. The Collective is affiliated with the Australian Student Environment Network (ASEN), the national body connecting student environmentalists across Australia. These groups prioritise the importance of acting collectively, and supporting each other in a shared stance for effective environmental protection and justice. It is through connecting the struggles of the world, and the power of the people, that we can achieve true change.

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COOGEE VIBES



Finally, the workday's done. We sat where aircon trapped us, While outside, that bright colour of light told us the sun, Was burning up a beautiful day. Now freed, The weight of heat expresses sweat from skin, Booms the call of the sea into a primal need, To go where the waves can cool and clean. To Coogee, town of summer, with buildings autumn-coloured, Crowding round the writhing Tasman to mirror its soft sunrise, In ocean shades of blue-green daily changing. No rain or clouds could slow our hurry, flooding eastern streets, The slap of feet a drumroll beat for eager busloads, Pouring down the sloping roads to our beach. The sand, seared gold, scattered with those who arrived before, Soles that dare to touch it bare spiked with absorbed warmth until, Reaching the translucent shallows, we dive. We hear the waves suck in; surf murmuring a welcome. We see the pale horizon stretching to match its darkest depths. Forever home here, free floating.

SET (LANGKAWI)





SET (MAROUBRA)



That climate change is happening seems no longer to be an open question extreme weather events, droughts, wildfires, and coral bleaching dominate the headlines every other day, and seem only to be getting worse. It is widely agreed that this climate devastation is largely driven by the burning of fossil fuels, which has accelerated the greenhouse warming effect, leading to disastrous environmental consequences.

Yet, at the same time, the fossil fuel industry is able to prolong its harmful activities by bolstering the doubt-casting rhetoric of certain politicians and energy companies. For example, it was revealed that Gina Reinhart, mining magnate, funded nearly half of the Institute of Public Affairs' income last year – the IPA is described as a "feeder organisation for candidates for the Liberal and National parties".¹ Another example is the Minerals Council of Australia recently admitting that they make significant political donations in order to "gain access to members of parliament".² This becomes even more apparent as Australia falls further behind in climate policy compared to the rest of the world.

It seems that UNSW is, at the very least, complicit in ongoing fossil fuel harvesting, if not actively supporting it. While UNSW has refused to disclose the details of their investments since 2014 (when the Fossil Free UNSW campaign first gained traction), and while it is unclear exactly which companies they are invested in, their refusal to publicly denounce the industry - like they have for tobacco and cluster munitions - is very telling. This is troubling when we consider the behaviour of fossil fuel companies. Many, including Santos, BP, and Shell, are operating on forecasts that allow for 4-5 degrees of warming,^{3,4} far beyond the already weak commitment from the Paris Climate Agreement of 2 degrees. These companies do so while permanently poisoning and tearing up Aboriginal land without consent from traditional owners (as has been identified in other articles in this edition of *Tharunka*).

CLIMATE LEADER OR LEADER IN GREENWASHING?

How UNSW's inaction is fuelling the fires that are destroying our planet This is where the calls for divestment originate. When large, well-respected institutions like UNSW make it clear that the way fossil fuel companies use their power is unacceptable (particularly in operating on vastly less acceptable forecasts than those of the Paris Agreement), it not only hurts these companies financially, but it sends the message that public faith should be shifted elsewhere. Further, divestment is by no means a new or fringe movement. Well over 100 universities globally, including Harvard University, have already divested,⁵ as well as the entire country of Ireland,⁶ and organisations like Australia's largest health insurer, Medibank.⁷ In fact, at the 2017 Conference of Parties in Bonn, the Secretary-General of the United Nations acknowledged that investments in fossil fuels guarantee an "unsustainable future".⁸ Divestment is an effective way to tackle climate change as it addresses the disproportionate power of the fossil fuel industry, wielded in the form of financial and political sway.

UNSW has a choice: by remaining silent, it is clear whose side they are on.

Since 2013, the Fossil Free UNSW campaign has been demanding that UNSW divest from fossil fuels. In November 2016, UNSW released a new investment policy,⁹ for the first time acknowledging the impact of climate change. Sadly, it is simply full of empty words. Clause 1.6 exemplifies the vague and non-committal language used to avoid any specific goals in acting on climate change. Clause 1.6 states that UNSW:

1.6 Will establish and maintain a climate change strategy for investments that:

- a) Reflects the commitments made under the Paris Agreement
- b) Reflects the University's endeavours to find solutions to climate change
- c) Reflects a leading position among university peers

d) Does not exclude specific sectors or products but gives direction and discretion for managing climate risk and opportunity to its third party fund managers.



Many questions remain unanswered by this clause. How will the investment strategy reflect the commitments of the Paris Agreement, especially considering UNSW is not a nation state? How will UNSW investments in solutions to climate change (likely referencing UNSW research in renewable energy) align with investments in fossil fuel companies that are contributing directly to the problem? How exactly is UNSW leading its peers, when it is yet to divest? Most importantly, the policy does not provide any concrete targets or mechanisms of accountability, the salient feature of a big bark from a small dog.

Even despite these shortfalls in its stated aims, it is clear that UNSW is failing in all of these areas. UNSW's investments in fossil fuels do not reflect the commitments of the Paris Agreement. According to recent research, in order to meet the Paris Agreement targets, no new fossil fuel infrastructure can be built, and some existing facilities will need to be closed before the end of their lifespan, if we are to stay below 1.5 degrees warming.¹⁰ To continue to invest in fossil fuel companies is to directly contradict this requirement. Compared to university peers globally, UNSW is by no means leading, and is in fact falling behind.



Importantly, it is clear that UNSW understands the importance of divestment, which is damning evidence of their refusal to commit to a concrete program. Clause 1.5 of the investment policy makes no mention of climate change, but is revealing nonetheless:

1.5 [UNSW] Will not invest, directly or indirectly, in certain industries:

- a) Manufacturers of cluster munitions
- b) Manufacturers of tobacco products (but not retailers)

This clause would not exist were UNSW not to understand the power of divestment in delegitimising immoral industries such as cluster munitions and tobacco. In the case of tobacco divestment, Dr Bronwyn King is attributed to influencing dozens of super funds and insurance companies (including AXA, the world's second largest insurance company) to divest.¹² This amounts to billions of dollars divested from the tobacco industry. In these areas, while UNSW may not be a leader, they, at least, are following the accepted ethical standard.

In part, UNSW's failing has been justified by an equivocal commitment to environmentally sustainable investment, despite claiming otherwise, which we can label as "greenwashing" the image of the university. Vice-Chancellor Ian Jacobs has characterised the investment plan as taking an approach of "gradual transition", that will see "greater investment in renewable energy production and less in fossil fuels over time", as follows:¹¹

"We see this as a planned and responsible transition in our investments, distinct from the usual use of the term 'Fossil Fuel Divestment', which implies an immediate end to direct investment in fossil fuel-producing entities."

Aside from the lack of actual targets and the concerning fact that Jacobs does not even suggest that UNSW will *ever* fully phase out investments in fossil fuels, the media release greenwashes UNSW's inaction as a "fair", "orderly" and "just" transition.¹¹ The conflation of UNSW's investment strategy with a "just transition" is not only grossly inaccurate, but also insulting. The term "just transition" comes from the efforts of the international trade union movement to ensure livelihoods and material conditions of workers are maintained as our economy undergoes a period of rapid transformation toward sustainability. As such, Professor Jacobs commandeers the rhetoric of the international labour movement and of workers, without providing any real evidence of an effort to ensure a just transition. Similarly, in January of this year, Ian Jacobs announced that UNSW will source 100% of its campus energy from solar power. This move should be applauded, but, as argued above, the making contradictory investments in fossil fuels and in sustainable energy collapses any serious approval of UNSW's strategy. The Fossil Free UNSW campaign has been consistently presenting the demand for accountability, transparency, and a commitment to responsible investment. We ask that UNSW commit to:

1) A freeze on any new investment in companies that extract fossil fuels.

2) Divestment within five years from direct ownership and from any commingled funds that include public equities and corporate bonds in the 200 companies with the largest proven reserves in petroleum, coal and natural gas as defined by the "Unburnable Carbon" report by the Carbon Tracker Initiative.¹³

3) Report on options for investing the endowment in environmentally responsible investments that will further limit the impact of burning of fossil fuels and help to mitigate its effects. Environmentally responsible investments may include, but are not limited to, renewable energy, and projects for sustainable communities. 1. Seccombe, Mike. "Rinehart's secret millions to the IPA", *The Saturday Paper*, 28 July 2018. https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2018/07/28/rineharts-secret-millions-the-ipa/15327000006616

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It's up to us, the students and staff of UNSW, to hold our university to account. If we don't hold UNSW management to an acceptable representative standard,we become complicit in the ongoing support of a damaging industry. Indeed it seems that UNSW has already missed the boat on being climate leaders, as countless respected institutions globally have already divested trillions from fossil fuels.¹⁴ The power is in your hands to put the pressure on UNSW to step up and publically announce bold action on climate change in the way of divestment. Our futures are at stake, and with enough engaged student pressure, UNSW has the power to become a true climate leader.

Sign the petition at bit.ly/divestunsw.

Keep up to date and get involved with Fossil Free UNSW by following and sending a message at Facebook.com/FossilFreeUnsw

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VIE NOI

It has been difficult to ignore the constantly recycled story in the media about the banning (and unbanning) of plastic bags in supermarkets in Australia. The controversy is nationwide, with public outcries both for and against being heard even on an international level, and newspapers and media coverage all over the world wondering why Australia can't just "get the ban in the bag". Whilst other countries seem to be just fine getting underway with cutting down millions of tonnes of plastic waste just through a plastic bag ban in supermarkets, Australia seems to be having more than a little trouble.

Maybe it is best to turn to other countries for inspiration. Here are some of the current top fighters of the plastic bag, who seem to be surviving just fine without them:



Figure 1. Map of countries doing their part in regards to plastic bag bans. Source: Scarlett Li-Williams

In 2017, Kenya implemented a country-wide ban of plastic bags, which also applied to distributors and producers of single-use bags. This stance was harshened further this year, as the sale or use of plastic bags now carries either a four-year jail sentence or a fine of up to \$50,000.¹ Since the policy was passed, unsurprisingly, it has been one of the most effective bag-bans in the world, with significant positive effects on the Nairobian environment. Waterways are notably cleaner, and food is less contaminated with plastics. Plastic dumped in the ocean travels up the food chain, eventually reaching our own stomachs; the fish consume it and thus we consume it, ingesting our own toxic pollution. As a smaller amount



of plastic is dumped, a smaller amount travels up the food chain to consumers. Before the ban, David Ong'are, the enforcement director of the Kenyan National Environment Management Authority, said that plastic was found in the guts of roughly 3/10 animals being farmed for consumption, and as of 2017, this has reduced to an estimated $1/10.^2$ However, it is not all good news, as currently the most popular alternative to using plastic bags in Kenya is biodegradable fibre bags, which are six times more expensive than plastic bags. The refusal or resilience of customers to buying these fibre bags has badly impacted local businesses. Requests to the government to provide a cheaper alternative to complement the introduction of the ban have so far gone unsatisfied.²

Chile passed a national law against plastic bags with the aim to save the Chilean beaches, and although the ban only applies to coastal areas, it covers an impressive total of 230 cities, and has proven to have skyrocketed Chile's tourism industry and economy. Less plastic and litter on the beaches means Chile has become a very popular vacation spot. As the ban has had such a positive impact on the Chilean tourist economy, fines of \$300 USD are now issued to businesses that continue to distribute plastic bags during peak vacation times.³ As of 2018, Chile will ban retail businesses from using plastic bags in order to continue to protect the country's 4,000-mile coastline.⁴

English supermarkets have been at war with plastic for a few years now, and the extent of its impact has been highly surprising. In 2015, England introduced a 5p tax charge (roughly 9 cents) for plastic bags at all supermarkets,⁵ enforced by the Government to reduce litter and protect wildlife.⁶ The law was sparked by findings that the number of carrier bags given out by the seven major supermarkets in England had exceeded 7.6 billion in 2014, meaning a total of 61,000 tonnes of plastic.⁷ To put that number in context, that is the weight of roughly 12,200 male African elephants or 30,500 Land Rovers. When this new law was put in place, it sparked a similar outcry amongst the general public as the plastic bag ban did in Australia, but it was soon accepted as the norm. By June 2016, there was an 85% decrease in use of plastic bags in England, exceeding the government's expectation that plastic bag numbers would fall around 70%.⁸ By 2018, there has been an overall 90% decrease in the use of single-use plastic bags, meaning that not only are people becoming more environmentally conscious (or just too stingy to spend 5p), but also that there are billions fewer plastic bags going to landfill or into the oceans every year.⁹

However, the U.K. is not yet finished in its efforts to remove plastic waste; it seems plastic bags are simply not enough. The Marine Conservation Society's 2015 annual beach clean-up indicated that the amount of rubbish dumped on UK beaches rose by a third compared with the previous year. The main offender was plastic drink bottles, up to 43% more found compared with the previous year. In January of this year, the use of microbeads has been banned in the U.K., and next to be banned are all plastic straws, cotton swabs, and single-use plastics. These bans are part of a 25-year environmental plan to reduce plastic waste in many forms across the UK.¹⁰

A few states in the U.S. are hopping on the antiplastic bag train, and whilst not all the U.S. is on board, the train is starting to travel the nation. At least 73 bills have been introduced in state legislatures regarding the use of plastic bags in retail, with these bills proposing a ban or fee on bags, and also improving recycling programs.

Washington, D.C. was one of the first cities to tackle plastic pollution by implementing a tax on plastic bags of 5 cents, and since 2009 there's been an 85% reduction in plastic bag consumption, a result very similar to the UK.¹¹ Seattle attempted to enforce a complete ban of plastic bags, instigating a \$1.4 million lobby against the plan while it was



States with Enacted Plastic Bag Legislation

Figure 2. Map of the different U.S. States with Plastic Bag Legislation. Source: National Conference of State Legislatures

being introduced.¹² In the end, 100% plastic bags were completely banned; supermarkets were prohibited from providing plastic bags, but they were allowed to provide plastic bags, taxed at 5 cents per bag, so long as they contained a minimum of 40% recycled material. San Francisco doubled the charge for plastic bags to a 10 cent tax, and Boston plans at the end of this year to follow the trend of the other three innovative cities.¹³ In addition, recycling programmes have been initiated in states such as Arizona, California, Illinois, New York and Rhode Island.¹⁴

So, what about Australia?

Australia is still struggling with how to handle plastic bag bans and commit to the reduction in plastic pollution, and the whole world appears to be watching while we get it in the bag. Unfortunately, there is no national or federal legislation enforced in regard to plastics like other countries in the world; it is up to each state to enforce its own laws, or choose to enforce nothing at all. A plastic bag ban has existed for some time in South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and the ACT.¹⁵ Only recently has WA banned single-use plastic bags, and similarly Queensland has enacted a ban this year too;¹⁶ it is solely the government of NSW who have not turned commitment into law.

The first state to start the trend was South Australia, which passed a bill in Parliament in 2008, enforced in 2009, banning the free provision of bags at the checkout, with retailers facing fines of up to \$5,000 for distributing banned bags, and retailer suppliers facing a heftier \$20,000.¹⁷ However, they cannot take full credit for initiating the environmentally conscious sweep in Australia, as Coles Bay, a town in Tasmania, was the first across the line to completely ban non-biodegradable plastic bags in 2003,¹⁸ and Tasmania subsequently enforced a state-wide ban in 2013. The Northern Territory and the ACT both went plastic bag-free at checkouts in 2011, and in November 2016, the Queensland Government announced it would ban plastic bags from 2018,¹⁹ as well as instituting a

container refund recycling scheme. This recycling scheme, known as the Container Deposit Legislation (CDL), or Container Deposit Scheme (CDS), was first implemented in South Australia in the 1970s before spreading all over Australia, whereby glass bottles and cans can be returned by the public and deposited in local receptacles for money, thereby encouraging the re-use and recycling of glass and aluminium cans.²⁰ Whilst NSW has battled for a similar scheme to CDL to be implemented, they are the only state in Australia to currently not have a plastic bag ban in place.

Some companies, in response to the lack of a nation-wide ban, are trying to take the matter into their own hands in order to change consumer behaviour. The first attempts at removing plastic bags came on the 20th June by Woolworths, and then 1st July by Coles, by removing the availability of single-use bags at the checkout, and providing reusable bags in their place. However, the public outcry and upset surrounding the ban truly made it seem like the general public had to pay admission to enter the supermarket.²¹ Articles were published with advice on 'how to live without plastic', 'how to remember your reusable bags', and 'how to phase out the plastic in your life', which made the whole concept seem revolutionary. After a rollercoaster ride of this supermarket banning them, then re-introducing them, then banning them again, on 1st August, Coles announced that they would continue to offer free plastic bags indefinitely.²² Yet, as of 17th August, the author of this article has personally still not seen any plastic bags whilst doing her shopping, so it's possible that the enforced ban continues in secrecy and is being disguised by the media...

In light of all this effort, and the success of the bans overseas, why are Australians still desperately clutching onto their plastic bags? Some arguments attempt to explain it as a matter of practicality the argument, for example, that plastic bags are necessary as bin liners; however, the counter-argument to this - that few shoppers seem to be aware of - is that there are biodegradable bags available at supermarkets such as Woolworths and Coles. When the practical arguments don't stack up, it becomes clear that, fundamentally, the issue boils down to the time, effort, and money required to be more conscious about one's use of plastic. For many, the environmental impact simply doesn't outweigh the lesser convenience of a reusable shopping bag. However, as shown in so many other international examples, our adaptability, to what is in reality a very small lifestyle change, means we are capable of getting used to bringing our bags with us. Over time, it will be drilled into our minds to always have a reusable bag in the back of our cars or bikes, or to have a compact one in our bags and pockets. The challenge is to overcome our attachment to the easiest personal option. Our consistent preference for ease means a move like a plastic bag ban can seem futile without any direct benefit to the consumer; this is the fundamental problem that has to be consciously overcome.

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the ocean's call

your blue eyes echo those of the ocean waves crashing on my shore

and when you whisper to me everything you think i want to hear

it's like the ocean, calling me home.





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issue #6

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