



Annual General Meeting 2006 Chair's Report

It may be that thanks to a combination of globe-trotting Al Gore and a sequence of serious climate events 'our' issues are now on everyone's agenda. The Lowey Institute recently confirmed this when it listed environment ahead of combating terrorism as the issue firming in top place in people's political priorities. The study also concluded that this would impact on the way many people vote at national elections.

A few weeks back Rob Gell addressed a Moreland sustainability forum and called 'An Inconvenient Truth' the film that will change national governments. One way or another our national government has to change. We cannot afford to be an international pariah by standing outside of the only UN endorsed climate change mechanism, the Kyoto Protocol. There is little point in enthusiastically saving whales (or even the elusive orange-bellied parrot) while their habitats and all habitats are being destroyed by greenhouse gas pollution and global warming.

In the Moreland area our politicians, local, state and federal have known for years that people vote environment and no candidate serious about election to any level of office would fail to emphasise environment policy as a key priority.

At the State level the November 2006 elections are likely to feature water very prominently and the Bracks Government has staked its credentials on its impressive 'Environmental Sustainability Action Statement' containing a long list of local and statewide projects for funding and a commitment to a 10% renewable energy target to be achieved through the VRET scheme.

Moreland City Council is known throughout Victoria and Australia as one of the lead local governments on environmental issues. It has an impressive Greenhouse Action Strategy which it is committed to regularly updating and its Sustainable Tools for Environmental Performance Strategy (STEPS), which requires better energy performance from Moreland buildings, is attracting international interest.

We are fortunate to live in a community that is aware of the environmental challenges of the time. We are fortunate to be part of a community that is seriously grappling with the challenge of living more sustainably. We are fortunate to have an active community that includes acknowledged agencies like the Moreland Energy Foundation and CERES. This is all good fortune that we cannot keep to ourselves! It is good fortune that bestows a responsibility upon us to work hard at projecting the knowledge, awareness and capacity to act sustainably into other communities. MEFL has inherited a responsibility to provide leadership to other communities, to show them the pathways to local sustainability.

In Moreland we have had an upturn in people buying green power, seeking energy audits, taking part in public meetings and forums, joining lobby groups and generally showing a readiness to change and adapt their behaviours in the belief that one person can make a difference.

MEFL has been in the middle of this community belief and has been a strong part of the change in behaviours. It is so much easier to believe you can make a difference when you see others around you changing. MEFL continues to be such a credible source of advice on community climate change and a facilitator for campaigning for a new political and community will to act before it is too late.

MEFL is strengthened in its work by Moreland City Council's determination to provide community leadership on climate change. MEFL's partnership with Council has many dimensions. At a political level we have enjoyed strong support and encouragement from Mayors Higginbotham and Helou. Councillors maintain a strong interest in the activities and programs of MEFL and turn to it for lobbying and campaign action. MEFL CEO Jim Downey and his team have close working relationships with senior staff at Moreland and Board member and Director of City Development, Roger Collins, has been able to dovetail so many Council projects and initiatives into the MEFL menu. The strong partnership that positions Coburg as a Solar Village candidate which will attract Federal and State Government funding is the most productive outcome of this close relationship and is likely to change Coburg forever if we are successful in obtaining the grant monies.

Another key partnership for MEFL has been with Sustainability Victoria. Working together the statewide and local agencies have been able to maintain a very close and productive relationship which has been able to bring out to Australia some European visitors with highly contemporary knowledge and experience about the European Union's Climate Change Programme (ECCP) and carbon responses. These guests have included Woking Borough CEO, Ray Morgan, an authority on distributed generation systems, the UK Business Council for Sustainable Energy

CEO, David Green, who has extensive links into the Blair Government policy development and Dr Gill Owen, who was a Commissioner of the UK's Competition Commission (formerly the Monopolies and Mergers Commission) for ten years until 2002. Gill now specialises in sustainable energy issues. These visits have enabled the Moreland community through MEFL to have significant input into Victoria's energy policy future.

At a political level, MEFL has enjoyed the close support of local members, Carlo Carli and Glenyys Romanes in particular. We will miss Glenyys whose dedication extends back beyond her period as a Moreland Councillor to her term as the last Mayor of Brunswick. MEFL has made submissions to several State Government Inquiries and appreciates the opportunities being opened up by the State Government for community debate on policy matters. The Minister for Environment, John Thwaites, and the Minister for Energy, Theo Theophanous, have both shown strong interest in the work of MEFL. These positive relationships notwithstanding, MEFL was seriously disappointed during the year when the State Government agreed to the Hazelwood Power Station extension without achieving significant greenhouse trade-offs.

The last twelve months has seen MEFL take on the auspicing arrangements for the Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action (NAGA) that in turn has spawned highly innovative programs like the Green Electricians and the colourful Sustainability Street. NAGA works through ten neighbouring municipalities and enables MEFL to export with ease some of its more successful programs.

The new-look Moreland Board has been wonderful to work with and itself has worked hard to provide vision and direction to MEFL and to maintain its overview and assessment and appraisal functions. The Board has kept itself well-versed in energy policy developments and has continued to monitor how these may impact at a community level. Many submissions and presentations have been made to hearings and panels. The Board's strategic planning activity culminated in a strategic plan for 2005-2010 which was built around four new strategic directions and priority areas:

1. We lead community based solutions on sustainable energy;
2. We build partnerships and alliances for sustainable local communities;
3. We grow and share energy knowledge with the community; and
4. We implement excellence in business practice.

I would like to thank all members of the Board for their dedication and commitment to the cause. In particular I would thank outgoing members Lucis Thrasis and Cr Andrea Sharam for their dedication and loyalty. This Board has

provided stability and quality advice through a period when a new CEO commenced work and when the nature and scope of the organisation's activities underwent significant change.

The Board was dismayed at the thought of life without inaugural CEO, the dynamic and visionary Esther Abram, and yet the sky has not fallen in! Far from it as Jim Downey has been able to move the organisation into new territory while maintaining its authority, credibility and expertise. There has been significant staff turnover and this has been managed with skill. Former staff like Euan Williamson and Bess Mucke have moved on to positions of influence in other lands and the new appointments stepping up add new character to the organisation. On behalf of the Board I extend gratitude and admiration to the whole team that has worked so capably over the past twelve months for such an important cause.

Mike Hill
Chair of MEFL
October 2006