

What  
**FUTURE**  
will we choose?

by Janine Wood



The truth of our planet's predicament is beyond alarming.

**Two dates should now be seared in everyone's mind: 2030 and 2050...We are still, just barely inside a zone where we can stave off the worst and manage the remaining long term effects.**

***The Future we Choose* p9**

I subscribed as a member of Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) in 1982, aged 22, at the time I commenced my first fulltime employment as a speech pathologist at the Whyalla & District Hospital on the Eyre Peninsula in regional SA.

As I opened those early issues of Habitat magazine with its beautiful photos of pristine wilderness, somewhere at the back of my mind was the strong belief that my generation would be the one to turn the tide on environmental issues of that era – saving the Franklin River, stopping mining in the Antarctic, banning nuclear energy. We would be part of a movement which would restore the ecological balance and repair the damage the human race had been inflicting on the planet at an increasing pace for more than 200 years, at least in Australia. Global impacts on the environment seemed much more of a challenge then and far away. An uncomfortable few days spent at Roxy Downs along with a Campaign Against Nuclear Energy group along with what appeared to be Australia's entire fly population pointedly demonstrated the hard yards needed to make any impact, even locally!

Many of us celebrated the High Court decision preventing the Franklin Dam being dammed in 1983, now feted as one of the most significant environmental campaigns in Australian history. The region has since become part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage area.

Turning back the clock a further 10 years, to a junior high class at Ryde congregation led by John Imrie in 1972, I was first introduced to **Doctrine & Covenants section 150**:

*These are portentous times. The lives of many are being sacrificed unnecessarily to the gods of war, greed and avarice. The land is being desecrated by the thoughtless waste of vital resources.*

These words instantly struck a chord within me. What 12 year old would not want to be "... in the forefront of those who would mediate this needless destruction while there is yet day"? And how prescient this short passage turned out to be...

Sadly, nearly 50 years later, my generation has largely not heeded this wisdom. And in fairness while a good

percentage of the greed and avarice could be squarely placed at the feet of the fossil fuel industry to name but one reason for our current predicament, the lack of leadership by governments for another, and our own consumer driven habits in developed countries can't be omitted from this list.

Environmental stewardship is a term heard far more often in recent times. We all feel a responsibility to minimize our impact on the planet, reduce waste, recycle, reuse. Specific campaigns may focus our attention for a while, resulting in emails being sent, donations made or rallies attended. We've seen devastating destruction of habitat by both human intent such as deforestation, and by natural disaster – in just the past 18 months we've struggled with heat and bushfires in Australia, and now in North America as well as southern Europe, heard depressing stories of further species extinction seen the melting of what were permanent icecaps, and watched with disbelief as unprecedented flooding events occurred in Europe and Japan. Our Great Barrier Reef has had a reprieve on its deserved danger listing only through the intervention of politicians.

Last year David Attenborough's witness statement played out in homes around the world in **A life on our planet** where he vividly illustrated his words "our blind assault on the planet is changing the very fundamentals of the living world".

But with all of this evidence, we still too easily fall back into old habits and patterns, always rationalizing, it takes too much time/effort/cost to do otherwise. There is always next time or next year to improve on our efforts. In the meantime our attention is drawn back to other aspects of our lives, our friends, families, relationships and jobs.

**We can no longer afford the indulgence of feeling powerless.** ***The future we choose* p99**

Earlier this year I bought a book before a flight to Adelaide, **The future we choose – Surviving the climate crisis**, in which two pathways are contemplated: The world we are creating and The world we must create. Both are possible, one is unimaginable. The latter chapters of **A life on our planet** does much the same, relating an entirely likely next 90 years if we continue on the same trajectory where "... we will bring about nothing less than the collapse of the living world, the very thing that our civilisation relies upon".

Even since starting this article, the climate change stakes have ramped up considerably. The next update of the 2014 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report was about to be released and there were clear indications that it wasn't going to be good news. Nor was it. The warnings of scientists from

# " Sustainability in all things should be our species philosophy. " ¥

all disciplines over decades is extremely confronting for our nation and the global community. To be clear, this report has laid out possible scenarios for the future of our world based on how we react right now to keep the climate within the 1.5 degree range by halving global emissions by 2030 to enable us to reach net zero emissions by 2050. As Attenborough lucidly explains through both his film and book, with reference to current scientific understanding, if we continue living as we are currently " the living world is on course to tip and collapse" p105.

The idea that we can get around to fixing things later, after our COVID-19 challenges, when our economy is stronger, when we have time to put our minds to it, is all too rapidly becoming delusional.

The IPCC update reiterates and reinforces many of the themes of David Attenborough's witness statement, and of countless others. In the shadow of all too familiar issues of inequality, ideological conflict and a now endemic COVID-19, the window of opportunity for holding global warming to less than 1.5 degrees by 2050 to avoid irreversible change to our planet looms large.

Being nearly too late is much better than the alternative, as it offers a way forward. None of the commentators suggest that it is an easy way, but they do offer solutions and optimism if we do take that path, or more correctly many pathways, without further hesitation. Our individual and collective efforts to reduce our impact and reverse the damage has never been as important. Even more so the challenge of the scientific community to engage with and influence politicians to make decisions that are in the best interests of our global community.

Australia's position at Glasgow's global action conference in November this year on an emissions target and a date for achieving this will be another decisive moment in this diminishing window of opportunity.

I'll admit that ***The future we choose*** did leave me feeling despondent about the urgency and immediacy

of the challenges we face and the enormity of transformation needed to turn things around. However both David Attenborough's vision for the future and Figueres & Rivett-Carnac's 10 actions provide practical examples of how humanity can take the path to sustainability resulting in a better future for all life on earth, and equally explain why we should take that path. The IPCC updated report also gives us no option but to adopt a vision for the future which has sustainable principles at its heart.

**Climate change should be of concern to all who care about social justice**

**Climate change should be of concern to all who care about health**

**Climate change should be of concern to all who care about economic stability and investment value**

**Climate change should be of concern to all who care about intergenerational justice...**

***The future we choose*** p10-11

Attenborough writes with passion and optimism of humanity's ability to transition from fossil fuel reliance to renewable energy, providing example after example of how this is possible and happening now in all parts of the globe. We also hear encouraging stories of banks, superannuation funds and governments divesting themselves of fossil fuel investments, and investing in renewables.

For those of us who have had the opportunity to marvel at pristine wilderness, to stand at a lake or river side with crystal clear water or view a sunset on alpine high plains here or anywhere in the world, do we not owe future generations the same privileges?

The 10 actions proposed by Figueres and Rivett-Carnac have much in common with David Attenborough's vision for the future. They require a re-thinking of how we do things now, letting go of the old world and opening up to new opportunities of living sustainably. If any of us can ever say we are called, to my mind now is the moment, now is the day.

***A Life on our planet: my witness statement and a vision for the future*** – David Attenborough, 2020

***The future we choose: Surviving the climate crisis*** – Christiana Figueres & Tom Rivett-Carnac, 2020

***The Coal Curse*** – Resources, climate and Australia's future – Judith Brett: Quarterly Essay Issue 78 2020

¥ *A Life on our planet* p 128