From the Magazine Editor

Over the past year, research at the Sydney Environment Institute has lead us from the atolls of the Great Barrier Reef to the coastline of the Great Australian Bight; from the depths of uranium mines in Kakadu to copper mines in Sweden; from the mangrove forests of Fiji to the dought stripped riverines of the Murray Darling; from the ice shelves of Antarctica to the skyscrapers of the Sydney CBD.

Through our events, research and conversations, we are exploring these environments as more than just places — instead, as inextricably interlinked spaces inhabited by and with community. We have been practicing the art of listening; hearing the voices that have gone unheard, highlighting injustices too often overlooked, integrating knowledge and experience to instigate truly inclusive justice.

As I write this, the air in Sydney is thick with the smoke of historically unprecedented bushfires tearing down the east coast of New South Wales. Throughout 2019, world records have been shattered month after month for the hottest, wettest, windiest, coldest and driest conditions; with catastrophic heatwaves, polar vortexes, floods, fires and droughts. There is no question the climate has already changed.

But, so have we. A few years ago, the idea that Wall Street needed a green revolution, or that school children would be leading the charge at the UN COP25 would be laughed off. Communities are rising to the challenge, and there is hope in these voices. Just this week, regulatory body NOPSEMA refused oil giant Equinor’s environmental plan, for the second time, preventing the commencement of drilling in the Great Australian Bight. The Rocky Hill Mine in northern NSW was banned from being built in a landmark case based on future fossil fuel emissions. Local councils across the country are announcing a state of emergency, and despite the continued negligence of the federal government, public support for climate science, policy and action has never been greater.

SEI was founded on the notion of crossing disciplines, and addressing the complexities of climate change requires the same radical dissolution of boundaries. Our researchers are working alongside local residents impacted by mining, sea level rise and food insecurity. We are integrating indigenous knowledge into our research and sustainability practices, and we are collaborating with business and industry for a truly just transition away from fossil fuels. Here on campus we have seen immense change, from the student-lead climate strikes all the way up to the ambitious transition away from fossil fuels. Here, there is hope.

The University of Sydney is located on the Gadigal lands of the Eora Nation. The Sydney Environment Institute acknowledges that these lands were never ceded, and we pay our deepest respects to elders, caretakers and custodians past, present and emerging, here in Eora and beyond.

The University of Sydney
Sydney Environment Institute

Liberty Lawson, Editor, Sydney Environment Institute

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Working Under Pressure: Frances Flanagan on Social Justice, Employment and Equality in a Time of Environmental Crisis

By Liberty Lawson, Content Editor, Sydney Environment Institute
Published January 30 2019
Voicing Community

SEI editor Liberty Lawson speaks with research affiliate Dr Frances Flanagan ahead of her keynote presentation at the inaugural Iain McCalman Lecture in February 2019.

What would it mean to genuinely try to tackle inequality, social fragmentation and environmental collapse as inherently entwined and inseverable issues? SEI research affiliate Frances Flanagan explores this question and more in her forthcoming lecture, ‘Climate change and the new work order’. She argues that by reconfiguring our values around work, we can instigate a new democratic agenda to re-establish not only social cohesion, but also environmental stability.

Flanagan’s academic and professional career has long been guided by the imperative to give voice to those who are obscured by dominant systems of power. Beginning her career as a lawyer for an Aboriginal Land Council, representing traditional owners in the Murchison, Gascoyne and Pilbara regions of WA, she went on to complete her PhD at Oxford, culminating in the book Remembering the Revolution, a transnational exploration of political thought and memory in the wake of the Irish Revolution. Just as formative as writing the book was Flanagan’s experience of researching it against the backdrop of the 2008 global financial crisis and the increasing attention to the degradation of our global environmental systems. Her most recent role, as Director of Research for United Voice, one of Australia’s largest unions, comprising of cleaners, aged carers, educators and a number of duties towards mankind. London: Routledge.

Flanagan describes her family as “huge beneficiaries of our social regeneration, it is integrally related to the quality of our democracy.” As the French philosopher Simone Weil argued, it is politically essential that every human feels “useful and even indispensable within the social body”, and work is a crucial means by which such a sense of belonging can be realised. In our current era of surveillance capitalism, many of our basic frameworks for understanding and supporting freedom, citizenship, work and democracy are being rapidly and unilaterally reconfigured. Advancing a modern, digitally-supported conception of work that is orientated toward human and environmental flourishing is more essential than ever.

Changes to the employment relationship have been amplified in recent years, with a rise in casual employment, digitalisation, privatisation and outsourcing that have altered the familiar norms of communication and control in the workplace, as well fragmenting social bonds of trust and reciprocity. Flanagan’s postdoctoral research focusses on the experiences of workers, employers, their families and communities working in occupations, such as cleaning, maintenance and security, particularly in the context of sites that have a public character, such as public schools, hospitals and justice institutions. She explores the long-term impacts of the outsourcing and non-outsourcing of these occupations in terms of belonging, trust and social cohesion, across multiple urban and regional contexts in Australia.

“Casualisation and digital scheduling are, in combination, reducing the visibility of structural unemployment and the wounds of shame and despair it can inflict”, says Flanagan in a recent essay. “We don’t have a name yet for the experience of sitting alone in a bedroom, in a car or on the toilet in a state of distraction and latent expectation, awaiting a text message that will signal the prospect of work or its absence. Hundreds of thousands of people do this daily. Yet they now do it privately, without ritual or witnesses.”

Flanagan says her proposition for a “new work order” is a democratic, as well as an environmental one. Far from being a set of top-down policy prescriptions, instead she advances principles for ways in which citizens, unions, community groups and environmental organisations might come together around a shared agenda to properly value and support the work of environmental and social stewardship, renewal and regeneration.


Photo by Audrey Odom
The Inaugural Iain McCalman Lecture

The inaugural lecture was held on February 6, 2019, with keynote speaker Dr Frances Flanagan presenting ‘Climate change and the new work order’.

February 6 2019

Speakers

Frances Flanagan is a 2019 University of Sydney Fellow in the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies and an affiliate of the Sydney Environment Institute. Between 2015 and 2018 Frances was the national research director at United Voice, one of Australia’s largest unions. Frances trained as a historian at the University of Western Australia and Oxford, and has been a senior scholar at Hertford College Oxford, a Royal Historical Society Marshall Fellow at the London Institute of Historical Research, and a researcher at Birkbeck. She is the author of the book Remembering the Revolution: dissent, culture and nationalism in the Irish Free State (Oxford University Press, 2015), and numerous articles on the subject of work, technology, gender and social change.

Iain McCalman is Professor Emeritus at the University of Sydney, co-founder and former co-director of the Sydney Environment Institute and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, and the Australian Academy of the Humanities. He was awarded the Inaugural Vice Chancellor’s Prize for Teaching Excellence at the Australian National University in 1994, and an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2007 for services to history and the humanities. Iain has written numerous articles in British, American and European History and Literature journals on Modern British, European and Imperial cultural history and written and edited number of books, including the acclaimed The Romantic Age: An Oxford Companion to British Culture, (1991, 1992), Darwin’s Armada: how four voyagers to Australasia won the battle for evolution and changed the world (2009) and The Reef: a Passionate History (2014).

The Sydney Environment Institute is thrilled to celebrate the truly remarkable career of our co-founder, Professor Iain McCalman AO, as he steps into a well-deserved retirement, with the launch of the annual Iain McCalman Lecture.

From Charles Darwin to the Great Barrier Reef; from the sciences to the humanities, Iain McCalman is well and truly established as an internationally renowned cultural historian, an award-winning author and a highly accomplished professor of history and the humanities. Throughout his career, Iain’s work has been yoked together by the threads of environmentalism, inquiry, equality and justice, which lead to the co-founding of the Sydney Environment Institute, alongside Professor David Schlosberg, in 2013. Iain has tirelessly continued to foster a multidisciplinary network focused on addressing and communicating the key environmental issues of our time with great passion and dedication, whilst still consistently making time for mentoring early career researchers and young scholars.

Announcing his well-deserved retirement in late 2018, Iain has stepped down from his role as co-director but remains an integral part of the Institute. In honour of Iain’s compassionate and generous spirit, the SEI will continue celebrating the next generation of scholars and leaders with an annual lecture aimed at highlighting early-career researchers who, like Iain, are working across disciplinary boundaries to impact both scholarship and public discourse.

The inaugural Iain McCalman Lecture was held on February 6, given by Dr Frances Flanagan, 2019 University of Sydney Fellow and research affiliate of the Sydney Environment Institute. Flanagan’s research investigates the past and future of work, environmentalism, gender and social change and her talk titled, ‘Climate change and the new work order’, explored how the workforce can become a site of social and ecological renewal.
From Business Risk to National Risk: Decarbonising Finance and Mainstreaming Climate Change

Tanya Fiedler, chair of the Business Making of Climate Change series, reflects on the seemingly simple affirmation that ‘the fastest path to decarbonisation is in the framing of climate change as a financial and economic risk’. 

By Tanya Fiedler, Lecturer in the Discipline of Accounting, The University of Sydney Business School
Published 17 July 2019
Throughout May and July, I had the privilege of chairing the Business Making of Climate Change series of public talks. The panellists I worked with over this series are a deeply knowledgeable group of investment and corporate professionals as well as scientists, who all understand one very simple equation: The fastest path to decarbonisation is in the framing of climate change as a financial and economic risk.

This is not to deny the effects climate change will have on our natural and social systems, or the existential threats to our own survival these effects represent. Rather, this reframing appeals instead to the threats that environmental and social breakdown pose to individuals, corporate and sovereign wealth.

The motivation behind this shift in perspective is that financial markets and systems can move quickly. And they are moving quickly – as already observed in movements towards divestment by investors such as Blackrock, Vanguard, HSBC and more recently the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund.

Alongside this shift in market sentiment is an equally important shift towards the financial regulation of climate risk that one of our panellists, Dr Sarah Barker (Mercer) describes as “vol-antady”. This shift commenced with a speech in 2015 by Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England and Chair of the G20 Financial Stability Board (FSB), that led to the publication of recommendations for the disclosure of climate risk in “mainstream financial filings” by the FSB’s Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). 2 The concerns voiced by Carney, and the guidance provided by the TCFD, were quickly taken up in Australia, starting with an influential legal opinion on “Climate Change and Directors’ Duties.”

This was followed by the Australian Prudential and Regulation Authority, the Australian Securities and Investment Commission and the Reserve Bank of Australia all calling for the measurement and disclosure of climate-related risks, while the Australian Accounting Standards Board and the Auditing and Assurance Board issued joint guidance relating to such disclosures. 3

It is the convergence of these points that three of our panellists, Emma Herd (Investor Group on Climate Change), Jillian Reid (Mercer) and Kate Bromley (GIC), spoke to as driving the momentum behind businesses responding to climate change. And this momentum is clear, as noted by former Treasury secretary and outgoing National Australia Bank chairman Ken Henry recently, in a discussion around energy: “Leaders of businesses in the energy sector are having to take investment decisions, on behalf of their shareholders, right now. And the shareholders obviously don’t want to see stranded assets.”

It is also clear in the changes in strategy and subsequent investment decisions our panellists have witnessed. Dr Brendan Cullen, (University of Melbourne) and Dr Nick Wood (Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub), for example, spoke of their work with the dairy and wheat sectors, while Sharajit Paddam (OBIE) and Kate Simmonds (WillisRe) spoke of their work in the insurance industry and Cecile Walton (Commonwealth Bank) and Dr Wood spoke of their work for the banking sectors. In addition, Kate Bromley and Zoe Whitten (CITiBank) spoke of the ways in which investors are also beginning to factor climate change into their decision making.

However, and as discussed within our panels, this work is beset by several key challenges. First, as noted by Jillian Reid, “there is a lot of money at stake.” And these stakes bring with them considerable complexity. Amber Johnston-Billings (KPMG), for example, posed a question that oil companies might ask of themselves: should they “go into managed decline for the betterment of society, and erode their shareholder value?” In responding to this point, Kate MacKenzie (European Climate Foundation), argued however, that this “shareholder value is (…) not the only mechanism through which companies act; companies have massive power and influence, simply in their words.”

Second, and as noted by all of the panellists, the work required by the boards of publicly listed companies, by the chief financial risk officers, by financial modellers and analysts and by the preparers and auditors of financial reports, requires a sensitivity to, and an understanding of, climate science and its models. This is because, and as explained by Professor Andy Pitman AO (ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes), climate models and climate science were not left with business risk in mind. Accordingly, while it can’t help to take the form of climate data, there is a deficit in understanding how the science and its models can be applied to business decision-making. Difficulties then also arise, according to Theo Comino (AGL), at the individual corporate level, when layering “various governmental policies attempting to achieve the outcomes of reliable and affordable electricity”.


What we heard then in these three panels is that the financial and corporate sectors are grappling with the transition to a low-carbon economy, but that this transition is very much met with with. Contrasts with, and as Theo Comino indicated, is often in the face of conflicting government policy, begging the question, if the Australian government’s primary role is to ensure the security and safety of its citizens, what is it currently doing to protect its citizens from the physical, social and financial consequences of climate change? What is it currently doing to de-risk Australia?

Given market transitioning is very much under way, but given also the Federal government’s undermining of that transition in its support of projects such as Adani or the continued generation of electricity from aged coal infrastructure, carbon majors could be forgiven for thinking they are protected in Australia. As APRA Executive Board Member Geoff Summerhayes recently reminded us, however, “Companies that delay or avoid adjusting to new economic realities, no matter how famous or successful, can quickly find themselves on the verge of a Kodak moment.”

In other words, while those industries may perceive themselves to be protected, the market is already beginning to make adjustments that places those industries and the economy more resilient to and better able to withstand the physical and transitional effects of climate change at risk.

A question that arose in the third panel discussion on June 19, Adapting Climate Science For Business, spoke to the potential scale and cost of the risk facing the Australian economy by ignoring the risk to stranded assets and industries. What would a global investment fund think, when faced with an offer to buy 10 billion dollars of Queensland government debt? Are they going to get that paid back? No, it’s a Kodak moment.

As reported in the journal Nature Climate Change, what has been lost is the earlier transition. Credit ratings agencies are now accounting for climate change risks in their ratings of credit worthiness. The de-risking of Australia’s economy is a project than actually needs to be reposed if we don’t de-risk Australia, what impact would that have on the triple-A credit rating Canberra is so fond of reminding us off?

And if we lose our triple-A credit rating, what else might we lose?
Voicing Community

The Business Making of Climate Change Series

The Business Making of Climate Change series, held between May and June 2019, brought together panels of investors, lawyers, insurers, corporates, consultants and scientists to collectively consider why climate change is increasingly relevant to business, and how the industry can, and should, respond.

Dr Tanya Fiedler (Chair), University of Sydney Business School

Why investors are worrying about climate change

Wednesday 22 May 2019

“One of the most significant, and perhaps most misunderstood, risks that organizations face today relates to climate change...The large scale and long term nature of the problem makes it uniquely challenging, especially in the context of economic decision making. Accordingly, many organizations incorrectly perceive the implications of climate change to be long term and, therefore, not necessarily relevant to decisions made today.”

Climate change poses legal, regulatory, reputational, technological, market as well as physical threats to business. This seminar examines these many risks, with particular emphasis on the perspective of investors. Why are financial regulators, investors and other entities demanding greater insight into the financial risks and opportunities posed by climate change? Are businesses responding to these demands? If so, how? And does that response hold up under scrutiny? This event brought together investors, lawyers and academics to consider these questions, and in doing so, outline the case for publicly listed companies to develop strategies, metrics and targets for climate-related risks and opportunities that, where material, are disclosed in annual financial reports.

Speakers
Sarah Barker, MinterEllison
Emma Herd, Investor Group on Climate Change
Kate Bromley, QIC
Emma Herd, Investor Group on Climate Change
Sarah Barker, MinterEllison
Jillian Reid, Mercer
Zoe Whitton, Citi Bank

How are businesses responding to investor pressure on climate change?

Wednesday 5 June 2019

Many businesses are already feeling the effects of climate change, from the chronic effects of longer-term shifts in temperature, the effects on weather systems that can cause extreme events such as floods and cyclones and the effects arising from transitioning to a low-carbon economy, which can generate shifts in technology, policy and consumer sentiment.

As a consequence, investors are expecting far greater insight and transparency around the ways in which organisations are preparing for the shorter and longer-term risks and opportunities that might arise.

The complexities of climate science, the plethora of data available, and the difficulty in applying that science and data at the local scale and in financial terms, means many organisations are left scrambling.

Just how are businesses responding to this challenge? And where do the complexities lie? This event brings together consultants, academics, NGOs and corporate managers to discuss the work they have been involved in, in responding to such challenges and complexities.

Speakers
Theo Comino, AGL
Amber Johnston-Billings, KPMG
Kate MacKenzie, European Climate Foundation
Sharanjit Padman, QBE Insurance Group
Cécile Walton, Commonwealth Bank of Australia

Adapting climate science for business

Wednesday 19 June 2019

Climate science and the models it uses to project climatic changes over the 21st century were designed to answer big picture policy questions at the global scale. As a consequence, climate models don’t typically factor in the interactions between longer-term climatic trends and local scale events, such as weather systems, human populations or local government planning.

So just how can science be adapted to answer the questions businesses want to know? For example, how can scientists advise a company whether a particular piece of infrastructure at a specific address is likely to be rendered useless because of a cyclone in 2030? The scientists in this final panel take us through the ways in which they are assisting a variety of business sectors in answering such questions. They will explain where the science is at – what it is capable of and what it is not yet capable of – and discuss the opportunities and challenges they face in working with the business community.

Speakers
Brendan Cullen, University of Melbourne
Andy Pitman, ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes
Kate Simmonds, Willis Towers Watson
Nick Wood, Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub

“One of the most significant, and perhaps most misunderstood, risks that organizations face today relates to climate change...The large scale and long term nature of the problem makes it uniquely challenging, especially in the context of economic decision making. Accordingly, many organizations incorrectly perceive the implications of climate change to be long term and, therefore, not necessarily relevant to decisions made today.”

Taskforce on Climate-related Financial Disclosures

Sydney Environment InstituteThe University of Sydney

Photo by Max Bender

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The Business Making of Climate Change Series

Sydney Environment Institute

The University of Sydney
Prime Minister Scott Morrison and The Pacific Island Forum

Rosemary Lyster on the Australian Government’s “pathological, ideological opposition” to stepping up to the realities of climate change.

By Rosemary Lyster, Professor of Climate and Environmental Law, Co-Director, Australian Centre for Climate and Environmental Law, The University of Sydney Law School
Published 19 August 2019
There can’t be a genuine ‘step up’ in the Pacific until the government says out loud: ‘Coal does hurt us – Australians, everyone in the Pacific and everyone around the world.’ To say otherwise is to showcase a ‘pathological, ideological opposition’ to the reality that the burning of coal is a major driver of global climate change.

– Rosemary Lyster

Rob Harris asks this week in the Sydney Morning Herald whether Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s visit to the Pacific Island Forum last week amounts to a Pacific ‘step up’ or ‘stuff up’?

Working out which it is depends on what Scott Morrison and his government really think about coal and its contribution to climate change, and what they’re prepared to do about it. We have to remember that Scott Morrison, as Treasurer, brought a lump of coal into Parliament in 2017 and declared ‘This is coal! Don’t be afraid! Don’t be scared! It won’t hurt you!’

This is a major driver of global climate change. Carbon dioxide is one of the 11 major drivers of global climate change. So why is it that despite our small population, Australia is not only a big emitter (14th biggest in the world), but we are also a major exporter of the dangerous products causing the climate crisis? The Prime Minister is a champion of the resources sector and it is true that coal exports are very important to the Australian economy and to government revenue. However, Australia cannot buy its way out of the climate emergency. Even the strongest economy will be a weak defence as Australia is among the world’s most vulnerable countries to climate risk. In the same way, Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack’s injudicious comments seemed to assume that somehow Australia was insulated from climate change and that Australia could somehow lose its homeland to rising seas simply by offering them fruit picking jobs in Australia.2

The reality is that good agricultural jobs will be few and far between unless Australia and the world tackles the climate crisis.

If this is really what the leadership of the Coalition government thinks then I fear that the ‘step up’ is destined to become yet another ‘stuff up’ in the quest for an effective climate policy. Unbelievably Australia still doesn’t have one, Australia’s emissions continue to increase and there seems little likelihood that we will meet our Paris Agreement targets, let alone the more stringent ones that are sure to come.

The clear and consistent advice from the world’s scientific community, as summarised by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is that climate change is happening and happening fast. It is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2050 if emissions are not reduced. But what is really important to understand is that ‘[e]very extra bit of warming matters, especially since warming of 1.5°C or higher increases the risk associated with long-lasting or irreversible changes.’ Global net human-induced emissions of carbon dioxide need to fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching ‘net zero’ around 2050. The Morrison Government has refused to adopt these science-based targets.

The key words here for Scott Morrison are ‘very extra bit around 2050’. This refusal to take action will result in the government ‘refusing to acknowledge the harm which coal is inflicting on populations, economies and ecosystems everywhere. As the NSW Land and Environment Court Chief Judge Brian Preston said earlier this year, in refusing consent to an open cut coal mine in the Gloucester valley, the proposal for Scott Morrison to refuse to deal with the impacts of Australia’s coal mining and then say ‘We want a viable, sustainable, successful, sovereign, independent set of Pacific island states. And for them to maintain and realise their way of life’. The Pacific islands are extremely vulnerable and exposed to climate-induced extreme and slow onset events. For example, in 2015 Cyclone Pam caused damage of US$450 million, more than half of Vanuatu’s yearly GDP, 100,000 people homeless and up to 70% of the nation’s 69,000 households damaged. That means half of Tuvaula’s population was displaced. Cyclone Winston in 2016, meanwhile, caused damage of US$540 million in Fiji, or 14% of GDP. The Australian government’s repurposing of $900 million in aid funding to assist the Pacific engage in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction is a good thing. It is vital in fact. But it’s a ‘stuff up’ to continuously refuse to acknowledge the harm which coal is inflicting on populations, economies and ecosystems everywhere.

The Australian government, and all political parties, need to accept the science and have honest conversations about a just transition away from coal towards industries and electricity systems that support Australia’s economy, workers, communities and ecosystems from the harms caused by coal. That would be a ‘step up’ for everyone, everywhere.

1. Rob Harris, August 17 2019. PACIFIC STEP UP ‘stuff up’ The complexities behind Scott Morrison’s visit to Tuvalu. Sydney Morning Herald. Access Here
2. Nick Kilkenny, August 20 2019. Australia is the world’s third largest exporter of CO2 in fossil fuels, report finds. ABC News. Access Here

The University of Sydney Sydney Environment Institute
The Struggle of Climate-Induced Statelessness

By Giacomo Ranalli, Bachelor of International Relations, King's College London; Intern, Sydney Environment Institute
Published 10 April 2019
Addressing rising sea levels doesn’t just mean redrawning the lines of nations. SEI intern Giacomo Ranalli investigates the concerning gap in international law regarding changes in sovereignty and whether it has the capacity to protect millions of environmentally-displaced citizens.

Giacomo Ranalli is an undergraduate student of International Relations at the University of Sydney, Australia. Originally Giacomo is from Rome, Italy, but moved to London in order to pursue his studies with a broader perspective. During the last years, Giacomo has actively participated in student projects which promoted initiatives to raise awareness on urgent environmental issues within the European Union and worked with Amnesty International UK, collaborating in human rights protection campaigns. Giacomo is passionate about International Politics, Climate Change and Human Rights. Particularly, he is deeply interested in the multiple implications of Climate Change has on international security, justice and human rights.

The extent to which climate change is a threatening security issue is continuously discussed across the international community, however, it is with mounting urgency that we need to acknowledge the affects of climate change on statehood, and the fact that some countries will disappear altogether from the world’s map.

Climate change is already catastrophically impacting humanity, with sea level rise, ocean acidification and extreme weather irreversibly affecting coastal and island states’ communities around the world. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report shows that with persisting business as usual emission trends, by the end of the century the global average sea level will increase by one meter, relative to pre-industrial levels.1 From 1993 to 2012, oceanic coastal areas witnessed a sea level increase two or three times higher than the global mean, due to changing climate patterns that altered oceanic currents.1 In coming decades, this vulnerability will continue to be magnified, with low-lying and island states of Pacific and Indian Oceans at a much greater risk than other areas. In the case of states which lie just few meters above sea level, such as the Maldives, Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu, this threat challenges their very existence. Worryingly, a recent study notes that salinisation of fresh water supplies and damages to infrastructure due to constant flooding might renderitol states uninhabitable before they physically disappear, and as soon as mid-century.2

Perhaps the primary point of reference to define statehood is the Montevideo Convention of 1933, which lays out four necessary criteria for a state to become legal authority: permanent population, defined territory, government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.3 In the case of disappearing low-lying and island states due to climate change, the variable “defined territory” would be out of the equation sooner than later. Will their state continue to exist? It is difficult to address this puzzle, as there are no adequate and well-established criteria for statehood. Nonetheless, the identity of a disappearing state, defined by language, traditions and history, will long be carried by its population. Adding to this, the state’s governmental structure and societal organisation will maintain a certain integrity despite the eroding national borders, perhaps still be able to enter into relations with other states.4 Thus, certain elements of statehood will persist. Secondly, the existing paradigms for addressing states’ successions, defined by Cranen as “the change in sovereignty over territory”, are characterised by strong rigidity, which makes them inadequate to comprehensively support climate-endangered states.5 More specifically, in the case of disappearing states, the ‘change of territory’ constitutes a permanent loss of one, an extinction of land that will never be taken over by anyone. On the contrary, the current legal context envisages dissolution of states formally only due to absorption and merger with and by other States, or dissolution with the emergence of successor states.6 Thirdly and lastly, it is important to mention that the extent to which the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons might protect the group of climate-induced stateless people, is very narrow. The convention, signed in 1954, defines a stateless person “a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.”7 Assuming inhabitants of disappearing islands nations were considered legally stateless, signatory state parties would be required to “facilitate the assimilation and naturalisation of stateless persons and to afford necessary measures of protection to the individual, but ultimately undermines any capacity of the threatened state.

Wars, self-determination and multiple political events have changed states’ borders and shaped their authority over territories and people. However, never before in the history of the International System have states lost sovereign territory permanently due to the environment. As state institutions, civil infrastructure, landmarks, religious sites and millions of homes are submerged, what will the legal implications be for the nations and people affected? From a broader perspective of climate-induced cross-border displacement, the most impending legal issue to address is the lack of an internationally accepted framework that grants protection to affected people. Under current international refugee and human rights law, there is no effective and single consideration of climate as a driving factor of cross-border displacement, demonstrated by the lack of a commonly accepted definition of climate refugees and by the absence of legally binding treaties that ensure the human rights protection of climate change affected people. Therefore, the current transnational legal context fails to give a legal categorisation to climate-change affected people.

Narrowing down the debate to climate-induced statelessness, multiple shortcomings of international law become clear. First of all, defining and codifying statehood in a normative way has been problematic, as proven by multiple historical examples and the continued lack of a widely accepted definition of a state.6

5. Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, 1933, Article I

“Climate change is already catastrophically impacting humanity, with sea level rise, ocean acidification and extreme weather irreversibly affecting coastal and island state communities around the world.”

Giacomo Ranalli
When North Meets South: Cross-Cultural Connection and the Importance of Integrating Indigenous Knowledge

By Rebecca Lawrence, Key Researcher, Sydney Environment Institute
Published 03 July 2019
Rebecca Lawrence reflects on a two week trip in May 2019 which brought a delegation of Sami Swedish Indigenous representatives to Australia. After presenting at the International Association of Impact Assessment conference, the group travelled from Minjerribah in Queensland down to Darug Country to meet with local Indigenous leaders.

Boarding schools for children, prohibition of language, dispossession of lands, accumulation of natural resources — these are the typical hallmarks of colonisation of Indigenous peoples’ territories. At a conference in Brisbane, Australia in April-May of this year, followed by Indigenous workshops on a Quandamooka owned and run campsite on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) and on Darug Country at Yarramundi at the base of the Blue Mountains on the urban fringe of Sydney, a group of Indigenous people from around the world recently met to share their stories.

These were stories of colonisation, but also of resistance and their hopes for the future — the revitalization of language, the activism of Indigenous youth and artists mobilising to protect culture and livelihoods, and the hard work of trying to stop resource developments on traditional lands, or at the very least, getting a fair deal out of the multinational corporations profiting from them.

A small group of non-Indigenous academics facilitated this Indigenous intercultural exchange and brought together several different Indigenous communities with whom we’ve worked for many years. Together with Swedish colleagues Kaisa Ratio, Christina Allard, Rasmus Klecker Larsen, Ninis Rosqvist and myself (Rebecca Lawrence), and research funds from FORMAS and REXSAC, we funded a Sami delegation to travel to Brisbane Australia for the 2019 annual International Association of Impact Assessment. This delegation included Sami reindeer herders, Sami scholars, Sami youth, Sami activists and representatives from national Sami organisations. We were also joined by Ciaran O’Faircheallaigh, and Indigenous Australian representative from Cape York, where Rio Tinto’s bauxite mine impacts upon Indigenous livelihoods, land-uses and cultural heritage.

Together, we ran a special paper session on “Integrating Indigenous Knowledge and Rights into impact assessment”. Twenty one presentations were made over two days, and the overwhelming majority of speakers were Indigenous people themselves. The commonalities between their experiences were striking; resource developments around the world are pushed through the planning process in the face of fierce community opposition; impact assessments are paid for by proponents and undertaken by consultants producing outputs in line with proponents’ interests, with little regard for Indigenous knowledge, rights and worldviews. All this takes place against the background of the cumulative impacts of colonisation, resource developments and climate change on Indigenous communities. This creates profound — and at times unbearable — pressures on Indigenous livelihoods, health and well-being. In short, if developments are to be assessed in a just fashion, impact assessments must be led and directed by Indigenous communities themselves, and with a deep engagement with Indigenous worldviews, such as the Indigenous led impact assessment undertaken by the Semijuar Ngaj Sami community in relation to the proposed Boldøy copper mine in Northern Sweden.

But even the best impact assessment cannot stand in the place of a real recognition of Indigenous peoples’ right to say no to developments. In the absence of this recognition, Indigenous communities who oppose resource developments are faced with a tough dilemma: do they abscind the assessment process and place their resources, time and energies into protest, but risk not having any influence over the project’s formation and mitigation strategies if it goes ahead? Or, do they participate in the planning process, hoping to get the best out of a bad situation, but risk being co-opted along the way into a resource project that they never wanted?

And what of those Indigenous communities who support appropriate resource developments on their lands — how can they best maximise the economic benefits and minimise the negative social and environmental impacts when they are often forced to negotiate an impact benefit agreement before the impact assessment has even taken place? This reverse order of things makes it difficult, if not impossible, for fair negotiations to take place — how can communities negotiate leveraging benefits and mitigating impacts if the negotiations precede the impact assessment process itself? These were the complex questions that underpinned our two days of discussions around different planning and impact assessment regimes, and natural resource developments on traditional Indigenous territories around the world.

Post-conference, we travelled with a core group of Sami, Cape York and White Bear Nation Indigenous representatives to Minjerribah, a.k.a North Stradbroke Island, where we learnt about the Quandamooka peoples’ successful native title claim; the closure of sand mining on the island, and their transition to a post-mining economy by way of Quandamooka owned and managed tourism. We stayed at the beautiful Adder Rock camping ground owned and run by Quandamooka people and were privileged guests as we engaged in cultural activities with Quandamooka people.

After three days on Minjerribah we travelled further south to Darug Country, where we met with Darug people at the beautiful Yarramundi and learnt of the revitalisation of language, dance and culture through culture camps, and collaborations with researchers at Macquarie University including Marnie Graham and Sandy Suckt–Pearson. After another three days of bush camping, cultural teachings, and sharing stories around the camp-fire it was time to end our Australian tour with a bang at the iconic Opera Bar in Sydney.
Voicing Community

Special Reports

Fighting to be Herd: Impacts of the Proposed Boliden Copper Mine in Laver, Alvsbyn, Sweden for the Semisjaur Njarg Sami Reindeer Herding Community

Published 30 April 2019
Authors
Rebecca Lawrence, Research Affiliate, Sydney Environment Institute and Rasmus Kløcker Larsen, Stockholm Environment Institute; in collaboration with the Semisjaur Njarg Sami community.

This report concerns the impacts of Boliden’s proposed open-cut copper mine on the Swedish side of Sápmi in Laver, Alvsbyn, in Northern Sweden, for the Semisjaur Njarg Sami reindeer herding community.

Unfinished Business: Rehabilitating the Ranger Uranium Mine

Published 07 May 2019
Authors
Rebecca Lawrence, Research Affiliate, Sydney Environment Institute and Dave Sweeney, Australian Conservation Foundation.

This report investigates and assesses the closure and rehabilitation plan for the Rio Tinto Ranger uranium mine in the dual World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park on the traditional lands of the Mirarr people.

Insights into Community Urban Resilience Experiences

Published 18 July 2019
Authors
Professor David Schlosberg, Dr Luke Craven, Hannah Della Bosca, Beck Dawson, Kristin Gabriel
A collaboration between Resilient Sydney and the Sydney Environment Institute.

This research explores experiences of residents and emergency and non-emergency service providers in Sydney following the 2013 Blue Mountains bushfires, the 2016 East Coast Low in the Northern Beaches, the 2016/17 heatwave in Penrith, and the 2014 Martin Place Siege.
2019 NAIDOC Week Celebrations

Running annually in early July, NAIDOC Week is a celebration of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This year, between July 7-14, the Sydney Environment Institute ran series of events to celebrate the 2019 theme, Voice. Treaty. Truth.

From film screenings to yarning circles, these events brought together a diverse range of community leaders, Indigenous scholars and academics, as well as welcoming the general public to explore and celebrate the rich contributions of Indigenous knowledge and ultimately, to continue learning how we can best advocate for true justice and inclusivity.

**Monday July 8**
**Culture in Conversation: Creating Inclusive Food Communities**
Sydney Environment Institute and FoodLab Sydney have partnered with YARN Australia to bring together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander with non-Indigenous communities for an evening of ceremony, performance, meaningful conversation and the sharing of food and stories. The evening will include a light dinner (soup and damper), a smoking ceremony, performance, and a circle yarn, where the audience will be invited to participate in a cross-cultural conversation about respect, community resilience, environmental justice and enabling inclusivity in food cultures.

**Tuesday July 9**
**Film Screening: We Don't Need A Map**
The cultural significance of the Southern Cross has been co-opted and defined by European colonisers, but for Aboriginal people the constellation is a deeply significant spiritual totem. We Don't Need a Map, by Warwick Thornton, one of Australia’s leading film-makers, explores the political and cultural history of these stars. The film was followed by a discussion with the film’s writer and producer Brenden Fletcher, Wiradjuri astronomer Kirsten Banks and Dr Christine Winter.

**Thursday July 11 and Friday 12**
**The Re-Elmergence of Nature in Culture II**
This two-day workshop brought together a diverse group of experts, from Indigenous community leaders and scholars to political activists from Australia and beyond to explore the consequences of loss of agency, culture and identity for Indigenous peoples, both as a result of historical and ongoing dispossession of territories and, more recently, climate change. Ultimately, these discussions are going on to motivate government action, influence planning and design, and begin to acknowledge and repair the discrepancies in our valuing of the lived experiences of past, present and future losses in a changed climate system.
Tiwi + Jazz: Singing, Performing, Healing, Dreaming

On March 15, the Ngarukuruwala group presented Tiwi + Jazz at the Sound Lounge, Seymour Centre – an event rescheduled from last year following the passing of one of the choir member’s husbands. SEI fellow Genevieve Campbell reflects here on the strength of the group and the power of their songs to transform, transport and heal.

By Dr Genevieve Campbell, 2019
University Fellow at the Sydney Environment Institute and Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of Sydney
Published 08 July 2019
I have been involved with Ngarukuruwala and the Tiwi Strong Women’s group since 2007. Although my involvement began as a musician, it broadened to include archivist, producer, researcher, composer, arranger, manager, cook and bus driver.

Notwithstanding all of that, my fascination and thrill for Tiwi songs always comes into most clear focus when I work with the ladies as a musical colleague. I should say at the outset that I use the word ‘ladies’ without concern and on purpose — it is perhaps an old-fashioned word and potentially thought of as patronising, I am aware, but I have discussed the issue with the group a number of times over the years and they feel that it is the most polite way of referring to them. Indeed, “old lady” is a term of respect that is used widely in the Tiwi community.

Singing on stage with the women is always a fascinating experience. They are not performers; this is not a choir in the sense of the community choirle that rehearses on Thursday nights. They will sing through a new batch of Tiwi community chorale that rehearses on the Tiwi community.

They hold dozens of songs. Some are very personal and would only be sung in the country places they belong to and in their own company. Sydney audiences won’t hear those. Others are happily shared as important items of heritage and are performed in Sydney with the quite deliberate purpose of showing a wide audience what Tiwi song culture is about. Some are typical ‘crowd pleasers’, like the Yilgajoor Football song, a favourite around the Tiwi AFL Grand Final weekend.

Some songs are, in terms of derivation, what the women call ‘traditional’ — long passed down stories of ancestors, country places, ‘dreamings’ — so on our playlist is always a collection of ‘standards’ such as Yirrikapayi (Crocodile), Kupuyi (Canoe), Ningawi (Bush Spirit people) and Tiklani, Punaikapali andWunjakja — songs in the voice of the Ancestors and the Country.

At home they sing Healing songs (sadly too rarely) at smoking and funeral ceremonies and for people who are ill. Each song, while having a well-known melody, holds words that only belong to the person and their family, place and ancestors for whom they sing. While they are beautiful musically, lovely for the band to play with and very moving to experience in the room I always feel torn knowing the very real double whammy of emotion the ladies experience as they sing.

Wanting to bring healing and peace for the audience and knowing how uplifting it is, while also feeling the pain of every word, as each rendition of a healing song is heavily burdened with the grief they are feeling as human beings, quite beyond their experience as musicians or performers.

At the Sound Lounge in March, we were on stage, mid concert. I looked at a particularly fun and upbeat song next on our set list and looked at the women’s faces and I knew something was wrong.

We had been in a gentle state of worry and sadness all day. It was the funeral today for a sister (the actual sister of some and the culture sister for all of them) an elderly lady who had been dying for a week or so. Until they left for Sydney, they were sitting with her, singing healing. We had numerous phone calls back and forth about whether they could come to Sydney at all. In the end, she died a few days before they left. On Thursday evening, we sat in the hotel room singing healing (as they would be singing the night before a funeral) and on Friday they felt very keenly that they were not there as they should be.

Across the stage, I whispered to them that they should sing healing instead, if they wanted to. Perhaps they would have pushed through and sung the next song with serious faces and the audience would have been none the wiser.

Some in the audience might have found it confronting to watch the women as they sang under stage lights, being applauded as the song came to a close. Yes, it did stir up questions about why we make music, art, song and why we make a distinction between a performing a song and singing a song. The reality is that the women live in a remote town a long way from our theatres, so their complex, rich and beautiful songs are seldom heard outside their own community. If we feel uncomfortable about the context in which we get to experience in the room I always feel torn knowing the very real double whammy of emotion the ladies experience as they sing.

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Nature In Culture II: 
The Power of Meeting

By Jessica Lili Pasisi, Teaching Fellow and PhD Candidate, 
Pacific and Indigenous Studies, University of Waikato 
Published 05 August 2019
Voicing Community

Jessica Lili Pasisi
Is of Niu-Mataku, Paigai descent. She was born in Aotea and raised in the Waikato. She is currently a Teaching Fellow and PhD candidate at the University of Waikato working in field of Pacific and Indigenous Studies. Jessica’s current research relates to the cultural practices, knowledge and lived experiences of Niuean people in relation to climate change.

Jessica Lili Pasisi

Emotional. Intimate. Confronting. Inspiring. A few of many ways I could describe the recent SEI workshop: The Re-(E)mergence of Nature in Culture II. It was a privilege to attend. It was my first time to the land of Gagilael people in Eora nation. It was my first time to Australia. As an indigenous person, I’m not sure I could have prepared for this meeting not just of meeting Aboriginal people but of their ancestry and lineage, their thinking and stories that engulfs and embrace me. Perhaps it wasn’t the intention of the workshop, but I couldn’t help feeling overwhelmed, for me there was more happening than presentations and Q&A sessions. The University of Sydney is imposing, but in a room where there were more than a few Indigenous people I joined in and beyond and I felt the edges of the expansiveness of knowledge, history, culture and beauty from the people of this land with the edges of my own flegling knowledge of Niuean culture.

I am Niuean with a mix of Palagi, Māori, and Tahitian. I was born and raised in Kiriririna, Waikato, Aoteaora. Until this trip I had avoided coming to Australia, I just assumed I wouldn’t like it and perhaps more that it wouldn’t like me. But my supervisor Alice convinced me out of the safety of my Niuean crab-shell and the Sydney Environment Institute were generous in their invitation for me to be a part of their workshop. So, my body felt an obligation even if my head was telling me that I didn’t belong. And that was it, that was the thing that made me experience here emotional but also powerful (for me, not sure about anyone else) and something I’ll always treasure. Because for me as a Niuean woman it mattered what the Indigenous people of this land thought of me and what they thought of me taking in this space, on their land.

All of the speakers at the event were amazing. An enduring memory for me, were the contributions made by Mary Graham, Kombumerri, Waka Waimihia and Anene Posilai and these Mardoowarra! I still can’t believe how lucky I’ve been in meeting and being able to learn and talk with these women. As Mary presented in the first session there was a moment where the image on slides behind her had this ethereal tree that stretched up into the night sky. From where I was I saw Mary’s hair blurred into the trunk of this tree which stretched up into the heavens of a night sky. I can’t imagine a more apt visual representation of the marginality of an Indigenous culture that spans tens of thousands of years and is embedded in the bodies, stories and culture of Aborigine people today. As Mary spoke of different and connected meanings of lore and law, place and place, time and in response to the ecological crisis in Australia, it was impossible for me not to feel the power and gravity of her words and her connections to her land.

In a similar way, Anne Posilai’s powerful film, set to be released later this year, was incredibly profound for me. I’m not sure I had my eyes wider at any other point of the conference. The film is a work in progress and has this incredible imagery captured from particular parts of Aboriginal Heritage Listed Fitzroy River with narratives woven in from different tribes that know the stories of the area and this particular body of water. There were parts of the film where Anne is talking and there

Fakaalofa lahi atu kia mutolo oti.

“As a young Indigenous scholar, moving in other peoples’ Indigenous spaces isn’t always acknowledged in many conferences... This experience of bringing my ancestors to this space to meet the ancestors of this land was immense, and in hindsight I can see why my responses were so emotional. Because these kinds of meetings matter. Because these kinds of meetings matter, they have power.”

Jessica Lili Pasisi

The political and legal rights of Indigenous peoples in Australia were prominent throughout the two days and many of the conversations turned to the legal and political situations Indigenous peoples are facing in Australia. There’s an importance in being able to connect and have these conversations as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples because it furthers our personal knowledge in ways that can be productive in the work we do so and for our diverse, vibrant and dynamic communities.

The conversations made possible by having so many Indigenous people (and their ancestors) and other academics in one room created a different atmosphere to many of the academic gatherings I’ve attended. I was incredibly fortunate in my first trip to Australia to be here with two Indigenous women from Aotearoa, Alice Te Pungei Somerville (Te Atiawa, Taranaki) and Huhana Smith (Ngāti Tukorehe/Ngāti Raukawa) who presented some of their ongoing research that speaks to the importance of connections between Indigenous peoples and places, finding ways to see beyond the colonial gaze and instead using new and ways of creating and sustaining our own stories.

I found it really interesting having my first experiences of Australia largely within academic walls. In my experience as a young Indigenous scholar moving in other peoples’ Indigenous spaces isn’t always acknowledged or required to come to terms with in many conferences or similar gatherings. There can be cultural nods, introductions or maybe even performances, but actually engaging everyday in every session with Indigenous voices and really listening is an important experience and one that can’t be taken lightly.

This experience of bringing my ancestors to this space to meet the ancestors of this land was immense and in hindsight I can see why my responses were so emotional. Because these kinds of meetings matter and they have power. For sure there is privilege attached to what I’ve been able to take away from this experience of being at this SEI workshop, because it’s more than making new friends, it’s a commitment to share knowledge, it’s the sharing of strength that inspires me. I’ve learned to be more respectful and aware of other peoples and the importance of being able to connect and have these conversations as Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) peoples and other academics. I’ve learned the importance of connections between Indigenous peoples and other academics.

I’m incredibly grateful for this opportunity and look forward to all the ways we move forward in our own spaces as well as together. For now, I leave knowing that I’ll return one day with a better ability to reciprocate the generosity that was shown to me at this meeting of people, at this meeting of our ancestors, in Eora nation. Much love and till we meet again. Ofania atu, to fiteleia.
Warren Roberts on Talking, Yarning and Deadly Collaborations

By Kate Johnston, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Sydney Environment Institute
Published 25 June 2019
Kate Johnston from FoodLab Sydney sits down with Warren Roberts, founder and director of Yarn Australia, to talk about the complexities of post-colonial food culture and the importance of willingness in collaboration.

Kate Johnston: As the founder and director, could you tell me a bit about how and why you started Yarn Australia?
Warren Roberts: Yarn Australia started with a group of people from the University of New South Wales. At that time, I was in an Aboriginal class, and while it’s great to be talking about Aboriginal history and complexity, it is more than just the talking. So I said, why don’t we catch up and have a yarn about it, do something. Basically, we formed a group of students and started opening up a space where people could ask questions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culture, history, things we didn’t know about. I believe (Yarn Australia) is about having a deep intentional conversation about some more home truths and connection to the story that motivates someone to do something or that they connect with, that is more meaningful.

That’s great. I love that you make this distinction between talking and yarn. And why do you think these conversations matter, why does yarn matter now?
The Australian way of doing things is that when there’s a problem, let’s run to the solution and get the job done. But with this way of thinking, there is no room for being able to sit in the moment. So, it’s about sitting in tension, asking why is it that we’re in this space, what are some of the things that have taken place to get us here. Sitting in that moment, not necessarily wanting to find the answer or discuss what the solutions may be. I think we rush too much to the solution.

KJ: The theme for the Yarn event on the 8th of July at the University is about creating inclusive food communities. I’m wondering what the significance of food is for you and the communities that you are a part of?
I think it’s about consciousness of relationships. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a relationship with our country, with the plants and the animals and the environment, and so it’s very hard to shift or not engage our particular connections with our country and the things that we’ve been brought up on. When you’re introducing this whole different culture, you know, around colonisation and tea and sugar and flour and all these things, that’s now a big symbolic thing in our community — like damper and Johnny cakes. The simplicity of that flour and water, if you’ve got some jam and maple syrup, and just knowing that, oh if we don’t have a certain thing, we can still use these ingredients to make something.

KJ: So do you think Sydney, or this neighbourhood is an inclusive food community?
I think the complexity of an increasing interest in Aboriginal/native foods is that there’s a whole bunch of folks who want to know, but there’s also a whole bunch of our mob who are like, should I share that knowledge? I think it speaks to the intention of Yarn Australia; how do we build relationships so that knowledge can be shared, how can we have a fundamental conversation about what trust looks like when it comes to sharing culture and identity and our knowledge around the landscape and around the food.

I think we have to be conscious about those complexities, but we need to create a space where those conversations can be had, and then explore and celebrate these deadly collaborations around food together.

Speaking of those deadly collaborations, we’ve had to work hard to overcome some barriers at the university to collaborate, right?
For this event, Aunty Jennifer Quinlin, Aunty Agnus Ware and Kate Jackson are collaborating with the chefs from USU. What’s the significance of that collaboration to you and your community?
It’s like any new relationship with any groups of people, to have an opportunity for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to go hey, we can go into this big commercial space, this kitchen and work with the chefs there, together, on preparing the food for the event, and just thinking outside the box, you know. There are some complexities around the University policy when it comes to catering, but we have to be optimistic, looking at different ways we can do things. I think the more collaboration the better, because people are just wanting to be part of something.

So, on that note, I’m interested in why you wanted to work with the University in particular on this event, and what kind of relationship you would like to see built with the University?
I think my interest in working with the University is in making sure that the relationship we are trying to build is a long-term relationship. It’s actually about slowing it down and having an intentional conversation, allowing our elders to meet and come in and have a yarn and just feel comfortable to come into the space.

I think a commitment to host an event that talks about our history and culture and food is a big thing in our community. The impact of how colonisation has affected our connections with food and with the land means it’s not so simple; yes we want to celebrate more of our native foods but it’s not as simple as going oh yeah here are some native plants or ingredients. How can we have a conscious conversation about the impact of colonisation? What does this look like for Australia, what does this look like for the world? It’s like any vision or anything you set out to do, you know. I sit down with my elders and I say, I got an idea, and they say, oh yeah. Some of them can see it and some of them can’t see it, and then they go ‘oh this is nice, I enjoyed tonight or today or the event and I met some lovely people’. It just opens them up to the idea we can do other deadly things in our society with a wider audience, not just within our own community.

What Yarn Australia is conscious about is building an intentional relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. And the only way that can happen is if we do create spaces, and if there’s a willingness of participants to be involved, a willingness of partnerships. And (by making) it creative, using the arts, using food, music and culture. This is the way we can really enjoy the experience of sharing stories and song and connection in a different way, but also in an intentional way.

Warren Roberts is a proud Thunghutti and Bundjalung man who founded YARN Australia in 2007. He has extensive experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities having worked for F&HUS and universities, as well as local, state and federal government. Warren has been fortunate enough to work alongside esteemed elders from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which has encouraged him to reflect on the importance of respecting cultural protocols.

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Kate Johnston
Kate Johnston is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow on the Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project FoodLab Sydney (2018-2020) with partners including City of Sydney and FoodLab Detroit. Her research interests include environmental/food justice, sustainable food systems, sustainability discourses, environmental/food governance, blue humanities, experimental and interdisciplinary methodologies. Her professional experience includes roles in communications and events within the food industry in Sydney and Italy. She is co-founder and co-editor of Counter Magazine (forthcoming).
Voicing Community  

Ann Elias’s Coral Empire is as much a history of modern humans as it is the rampant imaginations, driven spectacle that feeds the public’s fascination with reefs. In the 1920s John Ernest Williamson in the Bahamas and Frank Hurley in Australia produced mass-circulated and often highly staged photographs and films that cast corals as industrious, colonizing creatures, and the undersea as a virgin, unexplored, and fantastical territory. In Coral Empire Ann Elias traces the visual and social history of Williamson and Hurley and how their modern media spectacles joned the tropics and coral reefs to colonialism, racism, and the human domination of nature. Using the labor and knowledge of indigenous peoples while exoticizing and racializing them as inferior Others, Williamson and Hurley sustained colonial fantasies about people of color and the environment as endless resources to be plundered. As Elias demonstrates, their reckless treatment of the sea and the environment as endless resources to be plundered.

Featured Books

Coral Empire: Underwater Oceans, Colonial Tropics, Visual Modernity
By Ann Elias
Duke University Press
From vividly colored underwater photographs of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef to life-size dioramas recreating coral reefs and the bounty of life they sustained, the work of early twentieth-century explorers and photographers fed the public’s fascination with reefs. In the 1920s John Ernest Williamson in the Bahamas and Frank Hurley in Australia produced mass-circulated and often highly staged photographs and films that cast corals as industrious, colonizing creatures, and the undersea as a virgin, unexplored, and fantastical territory. In Coral Empire Ann Elias traces the visual and social history of Williamson and Hurley and how their modern media spectacles joned the tropics and coral reefs to colonialism, racism, and the human domination of nature. Using the labor and knowledge of indigenous peoples while exoticizing and racializing them as inferior Others, Williamson and Hurley sustained colonial fantasies about people of color and the environment as endless resources to be plundered. As Elias demonstrates, their reckless treatment of the sea and the environment as endless resources to be plundered.

Sustainable Materialism
By David Schlosberg and Luke Craven
Oxford University Press
A growing number of environmental groups focus on more sustainable practices in everyday life, from the development of new food systems, to community solar, to more sustainable fashion. No longer willing to take part in unsustainable practices and institutions, and not satisfied with either purely individualistic and consumer responses or standard political processes and movement tactics, many activists and groups are increasingly focusing on restructing everyday practices of the circulation of the basic needs of everyday life. This work labels such action sustainable materialism, and examines the political and social motivations of activists and movement groups involved in this growing and expanding practice. The central argument is that these movements are motivated by four key factors: frustration with the lack of accomplishments on broader environmental policies, a desire for environmental and social justice, an active and material resistance to the power of traditional industries, and a form of sustainability that is attentive to the flow of materials through bodies, communities, economies, and environments. In addition to these motivations, these movements demonstrate such material action as political action, in contrast to existing critiques of new materialism as apolitical or post-political. Overall, sustainable materialism is explored as a set of movements with unique qualities, based in collective rather than individual action, a dedication to local and prefigurative politics, and a demand that sustainability be practiced in everyday life – starting with the materials and flows that provide food, power, clothing, and other basic needs.

The Wake of Crows – Living and Dying in Shared Worlds
By Thom van Dooren
Columbia Press
Crows can be found almost everywhere that people are, from tropical islands to deserts and arctic forests, from densely populated cities to suburbs and farms. Across these diverse landscapes, many species of crow are doing well: their intelligent and adaptive ways of life have allowed them to thrive amid human-driven transformations. Indeed, crows are frequently disliked for their success, seen as pests, threats, and scavengers on the detritus of human life. But among the vast variety of crows, there are also critically endangered species that are barely hanging on to existence, some of them the subjects of passionate conservation efforts. The Wake of Crows is an exploration of the entangled lives of humans and crows. Focusing on five key sites, Thom van Dooren asks how we might live well with crows in a changing world. He explores contemporary possibilities for shared life emerging in the context of ongoing processes of globalization, colonization, urbanization, and climate change. Moving among these diverse contexts, this book tells stories of extermination and extinction alongside fragile efforts to better understand and make room for other species. Grounded in the careful work of paying attention to particular crows and their people, The Wake of Crows is an effort to imagine and put into practice a multispecies ethics. In so doing, van Dooren explores some of the possibilities that still exist for living and dying well on this damaged planet.

“Ann Elias’s Coral Empire is as intoxicating as a plunge into a reef lagoon: a refreshingly original and compelling analysis of how the underwater coral realm has evolved from a planetary space of fathomless mysteries and alien terrains to become a complex technology-driven spectacle that feeds the rampant imaginations, pleasures, vices, and curiosities of modern humans.”

Iain McCalman, author of The Reef: A Passionate History: The Great Barrier Reef from Captain Cook to Climate Change.

David Schlosberg is Professor of Environmental Politics in the Department of Government and International Relations, Payne-Smith Professor, and Director of the Sydney Environment Institute at the University of Sydney. His main theoretical interests are in environmental and climate justice, climate adaptation and resilience, and environmental movements and the practices of everyday life – what he terms sustainable materialism.

Luke Craven is a Research Fellow in the Public Service Research Group at the University of New South Wales, Canberra. Dr Craven’s research focuses on developing new tools to understand and address complex policy challenges. He works with a range of public sector organisations to adapt and apply systems frameworks to support policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

Thom van Dooren is Associate Professor and Australian Research Council Future Fellow in the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry and the Sydney Environment Institute at the University of Sydney, and founding co-editor of the journal Environmental Humanities (Duke University Press). His research and writing focus on some of the many philosophical, ethical, cultural, and political issues that arise in the context of species extinctions and human entanglements with threatened species and places.
The People vs. Oil: The Extraordinary Risks of Deep-Sea Drilling in the Great Australian Bight

Brett Morgan on why we should be deeply and urgently invested in protecting the future of Australia's Great Southern Reef.

By Brett Morgan, Research Assistant, Sydney Environment Institute
Published 13 March 2019

I believe it to be a fair assumption that most Australians would be able to point out the Great Barrier Reef on a map. I would even go so far as to suggest that a lot of visitors to Australia would be able to do the same thing. This is primarily because the Reef is revered for its immeasurable beauty; its pristine waters are home to around 1,500 species of fish, and a coral reef so magnificent that it is visible from orbit. How many of us, though, are aware of the Great Southern Reef, which stretches from Kalbarri in Western Australia all the way around past the far north coast of New South Wales? How many of us are aware of the fact that, just beyond the approximate midpoint of the magnificent Great Southern Reef, in the waters of the Great Australian Bight, one will find a marine environment more biodiverse than the Great Barrier Reef?

The Great Australian Bight is home to one of the most unique marine ecosystems in the world. Over 85% of the species living there are endemic to that region, meaning that they are found nowhere else on Earth. The Bight is a breeding ground for the endangered southern right whale, home to the Australian sea lion, a migratory pathway for several apex predators, and every time exploratory work is undertaken in its waters, previously undiscovered species are found. For many years, however, this region has been a site of contestation between big oil companies and environmental advocates and campaigning organisations.

Several oil companies currently hold exploration permits within the Bight region—including Norwegian state-owned oil giant Equinor (formerly Statoil)—and the long-term plan is to undertake deep sea drilling in the Bight, in the hopes of extracting vast amounts of crude oil. BP previously held four shared exploration leases in the Bight, though in 2016 it abandoned its plans to drill exploratory wells, and in 2017 handed over full control of its leases to Equinor. Chevron also abandoned its drilling plans in 2017. At present, Equinor is planning on drilling its first exploration well, Stromlo-1, in late 2019.

“The extraordinary marine biodiversity found in the waters of the Bight may be reason enough for conservationists and environmental advocates alike to campaign against the proposed deep-sea drilling in this region. For those who are not swayed by marine conservation-centric arguments, however, perhaps the knowledge of the potentially catastrophic consequences of such drilling will invoke a terrifying reality.”
Aside from the substantial ecological damage that an oil spill in the Bight would cause, there are several other potential consequences to take into consideration. Many commercial and recreational fisheries operate within the waters of the Bight, and these fisheries are responsible for 25% of Australia’s total annual seafood production, providing $1.4 billion in annual revenue, and approximately $355 million in household income. Many of the communities along the southern coastline of Australia are therefore heavily reliant upon the Bight for their continued subsistence, and an oil spill in this region could be disastrous. Fisheries would need to close down for an extensive period of time in the event of a spill—potentially a year or more—over a sizeable area of potential oil exposure, and the tourism industry would suffer heavy losses, due to the many tourist sites dotted along the southern coastline. Many Traditional Owners also have strong cultural ties to this region, including the Mening and Wirringa-first-nations peoples. Furthermore, the Yalata Indigenous Protected Area spans a large part of the southern coastline of Australia, accounting for more than 456,000 hectares of limestone cliffs, coastal dunes, sand plains, and shrublands. The potential consequences of a devastating oil spill in the Great Australian Bight ought to be reason enough to deter any oil company from even considering a deep-sea drilling project in this region. The substantially-high rate of endemism in the Bight, as well as the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who rely heavily upon its waters and coastline for subsistence, means that the potential threat to life in the region is very large and very tangible. Opening up the Bight to deep-sea oil drilling projects in itself is yet another step toward the pressing reality the long-term effects of catastrophic climate change, let alone the imminent threat to such a unique marine ecosystem and a coastline that boasts thousands of years of cultural heritage. As such, it is up to us—as individuals, local communities, campaigning organisations, research networks, and conservationists—to work together if we are to win the fight for the Bight.

The extraordinary marine biodiversity found in the waters of the Bight may be reason enough for conservationists and environmental advocates alike to campaign against the proposed deep-sea drilling in this region. For those who are not swayed by marine conservation-centric arguments, however, perhaps the knowledge of the potentially catastrophic consequences of such drilling will invoke a terrifying reality. The worst credible case discharge WCCD oil spill modelling commissioned by both BP and Equinor has provided an insight into what an oil spill in the Bight might look like. For those who remember the BP ‘Deepwater Horizon’ disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, you may recall that it was one of the worst oil spills in US history. For those who don’t, this tragedy began when the Deepwater Horizon offshore oil rig exploded when drilling an exploration well. The leak that eventually took eighty-seven days to cap and released approximately four million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. This event occurred in relatively calm waters, the oceanic swell in the Bight, however, is above three metres for most of the year, with a maximum average swell of 11.3 metres. In a WCCD analysis in 2016, BP estimated the flow rate from an uncontrolled blowout in the Bight to be approximately 54,000 barrels per day, if Stromlo-1 were to leak for 149 days—the estimated time it would take to drill a relief well—this would result in “a total discharge of 7.9 million bbls (barrels of oil). Importantly, this would be approx. twice the size of the Deepwater Horizon spill in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico.” Equinor’s WCCD modelling predicts a slightly less-disastrous outcome, estimating a flow rate of more than 42,000 barrels per day for 102 days, totalling 4.32 million barrels. Perhaps one of the more compelling findings in this WCCD modelling, however, is the potential scope of the spill; Equinor estimates that the oil from a worst-case discharge—taking into account several different spill models—could span the coastline from Albany in WA all the way around to Port Macquarie in NSW. Maximum environment that may be affected by an unmitigated Worst Case Discharge of oil; based on Equinor’s stochastic modelling analysis of 102 possible oil spill trajectories. Courtesy of Greenpeace Australia Pacific.
SEI Experts Ask Authority to Hold Oil Giant to Account on Bight Plan

A group of energy and natural resource experts, led by the Sydney Environment Institute, is calling on Australia’s regulator to hold Norwegian oil company Equinor to account over its proposal to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight.

“In late April, the Sydney Environment Institute convened a group of experts from academia and industry to consider key issues around drilling in the Bight. Based on the event, these experts have made a pro-bono submission to the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA).”

NOPSEMA is currently in the process of assessing Equinor’s Environmental Plan submission to ensure it meets all legislative requirements to proceed. However, in the submission, the experts call on NOPSEMA to go one step further and hold Equinor to international best-practice standards.

The submission was co-authored by University of Sydney energy and natural resources law expert Dr Madeline Taylor, with Emeritus Professor Andrew Hopkins (Australian National University), Greg Bourne (Australian Climate Council Council and former President of BP Australia), and Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter (Aberdeen University Centre for Energy Law). In the submission, the experts say that Equinor’s “overconfidence” in its ability to prevent a major spill could lead to catastrophic environmental impacts.

Recommendations from the submission include that NOPSEMA:

• Require Equinor to carry out consultations with selected coastal communities and with other interested parties falling under the definition of ‘relevant persons’ within the applicable regulations;
• Request Equinor consult with all ‘relevant parties’ in accordance with the ‘leading’ regulatory practice of allowing no less than three months for public comment;
• Secure the public release of Equinor’s Well Operations Management Plan (WOMP);
• Require that Equinor’s wells are inspected during construction, operations and workover stages and compared to the approved WOMP to ensure that the well meets the approved WOMP;
• Ensure Equinor has demonstrated that it has learnt and implemented important lessons from BP’s Gulf of Mexico blowout in 2010, particularly in identifying the human and organisational causes of that blowout;
• Require that Equinor comply with Norway’s world-leading best-practice regulatory standards of drilling in the Bight;
• Require that Equinor adequately address protection of the 41 threatened species within the drilling area, by considering how both direct and indirect impacts will be reduced to ‘as low as reasonably practicable’; and
• Displace the American Petroleum Industry standards with the leading Norwegian NORSOK D-010 standard and adopt a ‘long-term perspective’ in assessing Equinor’s Environmental Plan for the benefit of all Australian citizens.

"Throughout the environmental plan, Equinor has consistently made optimistic choices in order to convince the public and NOPSEMA that ‘it is safe’ to drill. However, we saw a similar style of overconfidence demonstrated in BP’s proposal to drill in the Gulf of Mexico, which led to one of the world’s biggest oil spills in 2010. History has shown us that overconfidence precedes catastrophic failure in many spheres of engineering endeavour. No matter how many layers of defence there are between a hazard and an accident, accidents can and still do happen.”

Co-authors Dr Madeline Taylor, Emeritus Professor Andrew Hopkins, Greg Bourne and Professor Tina Soliman-Hunter.

The full submission is available on the Sydney Environment Institute website. Access Here
See You In The Streets: The Climate Strike and Extinction Rebellion

By Professor Rosemary Lyster and Associate Professor Nicole Graham, The University of Sydney Law School; Dr Piero Moraro, Centre for Law and Justice, Charles Sturt University; Dr Astrida Neimanis, Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, The University of Sydney.

Published 18 September 2019
On September 25, The Australian Centre for Climate and Environmental Law and the Sydney Environment Institute hosted a panel, “Extinction Rebellion: why and what does law have to do with it?” chaired by Professor Rosemary Lyster, with speakers Associate Professor Nicole Graham, Dr Piero Moraro and Dr Astrida Neimanis.

Accepting an award from Amnesty International on Monday, Greta Thunberg rightly said, “Activism works — so act”. And as we turn to the streets, the Government’s desperate attempt to criminalise social protest and label activists as ‘terrorists’ shows that our protest is indeed working — as long as we all keep showing up.

On 20 September, people in over 139 countries, led by children, will be participating in the Global Climate Strike, while Extinction Rebellion protests continue to take place all around the world.

The Australian Government attempts to discredit these movements by portraying environmental activists as ‘extremists’ and telling children they should be in school lest they turn into ‘bile bludgers’. But from our perspectives, the real question is, why every single person is not out on the streets? What haven’t they been told? Or what have they been told by those who hide or deny the scientific consensus about what’s going on? Why uphold the values of education while disregarding and disputing the evidence produced by the world’s most educated and qualified scientists?

“The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters.”

For us, the only radical ‘extremists’ are governments everywhere which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters — which are going to get a lot worse. If anyone believes that the Paris Agreement will save us — they’re wrong. It means very little when Prime Minister Scott Morrison says that Australia will meet its commitments ‘at a canter’. It means very little when Prime Minister Scott Morrison believes that the Paris Agreement will save us — they’re wrong.

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Surface temperatures will remain at elevated levels for many centuries even if we completely stop emitting CO2 emissions right now, and about 15% to 40% of already emitted CO2 will remain in the atmosphere longer than 1,000 years. In 2018, the IPCC warned us that climate change is already happening fast. Global temperatures are likely to rise by 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 if emissions are not reduced and if “more than just a bit of warming matters, especially since warming of 1.5°C or higher increases the risk associated with long-lasting or irreversible changes”. Global human emissions of carbon dioxide need to fall by about 40 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching ‘net zero’ around 2050.

The impacts of climate change on Australia are frightening. Crippling drought, blazing bush fires in winter where towns are running out of water period – including to fight the flames, a 50% bleaching of the coral reef, temperatures so extreme that the national average temperatures in January were 5.86°C above the average. Just pause for a moment — 5.86 degrees. Fires burn in Australia’s Gondwana rainforests which, according to climate scientist Dr Joelle Gergis, are normally “moso-drenched forests packed with primitive plant families dating back to the Jurassic era, some 200 million to 145 million years ago”. Massive fish kills in the Murray Darling Basin. Around the world the catastrophic losses from hurricanes interacting with climate-changed systems are tremendous. In the US alone the economic losses are: Hurricane Sandy — $75 billion, Hurricane Irma — $100 billion, Hurricane Harvey — $180 billion, and in the developing world we witness the destruction of entire cities, millions of homes and infrastructure, loss of livelihoods and the pushing of millions of people into poverty. Meanwhile, the 2019 IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services states that the rate of biodiversity decline is tens to hundreds of times higher than the average over the past 10 million years. Around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss. And the IPCC’s 2019 Climate Change and Land Report states that climate change has adversely impacted already vulnerable terrestrial ecosystems, and the increase of CO2 has contributed to desertification and land degradation in many regions.

Many people are calling this a ‘climate emergency’. But this ‘emergency’ is connected to longstanding racialised, gendered and colonial structures of power meaning that some people will ‘weather’ the emergency far worse than others. While addressing this emergency, we must address the social structures that got us here in the first place. And it’s not the kind of emergency that governments declare to justify the use of force. It is we who are declaring the emergency on governments. We’re taking charge and demanding action for ourselves, our children, grandchildren and generations not yet born.

The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters. The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters. The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters. The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters. The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters. The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters. The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters. The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters. The only radical ‘extremists’ are governments which fail to act in the face of climate-induced disasters.
SEI Magazine

The SEI Magazine is produced by the Sydney Environment Institute, at the University of Sydney, on the Gadigal lands of the Eora Nation. We pay our deepest respects to elders, caretakers and custodians past, present and emerging, here in Eora and beyond.

The magazine collates cross disciplinary responses to the critical environmental issues facing us today.

Contributions come from students, artists, scholars and activists, working locally and across the globe, to investigate the physical, social and cultural dimensions of climate change impacts.

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