

Report: Meeting with MP to Discuss Climate Code Red

Kyogle Climate Action Network

Introduction

Last Thursday (21st August 08) Tori and Shakti (of KyogleCAN) met with our MP Janelle Saffin for the purpose of discussing Climate Code Red. I'd posted the book to her a month earlier, just after it was published.

This was my first meeting with our MP. (Annie from KCAN had attended a joint meeting with Janelle along with other regional climate group representatives to present the Climate Protection Bill just before the election last year.)

In this report I'll endeavour to record the experience and offer suggestions based on it.

Meeting Style

I intentionally kept the meeting 'small and intimate', approaching it more as a 'get to know you' than as an action to set demands. My personal feeling was that building up some sort of relationship, some sort of trust, or at least ease, could be critical before bringing in the big demands at a later date. I'm glad we started off that way. In fact as the meeting progressed, it became clear it was the only way.

Biography

I'd met Janelle briefly before and knew she was an unpretentious, compassionate and approachable person.

Interesting background: had recently spent 3 years in East Timor working as PM Ramos-Horta's chief political and legal advisor. Early in life ran a womens' refuge. Campaigned against Jabiru uranium mine and had worked as an anti-nuclear campaigner.

Misleading

Sound promising? Well, she had also been a member of NSW state parliament (legislative council) 1995-2003. Perhaps that's where her pro-coal stance comes from ... (NB- google your MP to checkout where they're coming from)

Expectations

I'd assumed we'd take the arctic melt as a starting point and then talk about the government's approach to the problem. After all, every member of the Federal government would know about the dire climate situation, right? Wrong.

Reality Check

Not only had Janelle not read the book (sort of understandable) but SHE DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE about the crisis (not understandable). Nor was she going to be easily convinced. (That's OK- why should she take my word for it?) I just hope she's going to read & consider the material we left with her. And then make up her own mind.

Promises

Janelle apologised for not having read the book, said she's keen to read it, been too busy, will read it when back in Canberra – "parliamentary question time is a good opportunity for reading!" I also had a copy of *Scorcher* with me and when she saw Clive Hamilton's name she was interested ("I know Clive")- she took down the details to get herself a copy. Fingers crossed.

Information Folder

She wanted everything substantiated. The Information folder I'd brought along (and left with her at the end of the meeting) came in really handy (detailed at the end of this report). It was good to see she was keen for us to leave it with her.

Time Frame

This meeting was 20-25 minutes.

Meeting Structure

Once we were in there (facing this fact-hungry dynamo) I was immensely relieved to have prepared an outline of topics to cover and to structure the meeting by. I'd made 3 copies of the 'agenda', one for each of us.

Outline of Topics to Cover:

21st August 2008

Thank you Janelle for meeting with us today.

We'd like to discuss the contents of *Climate Code Red* via the media release we have prepared:

- 1) Arctic melt implications = Emergency
 - Disintegration Greenland ice sheet & sea level rise; permafrost loss means more C & methane
 - Deadlines brought forward
 - Aust target needs to be 325 ppm (Garnaut has modelled 550 ppm; IPCC's is 450ppm)

- 2) Solutions
 - Go beyond "business and politics as usual" via a speedy large-scale programme comparable in scope to the "war economy"
 - Zero emissions & carbon sequestration (discuss below)
 - Technology is available: renewables- solar thermal, geothermal, feed in tariffs, wind, tidal, etc.
 - economy benefits (overseas examples)
 - Phase-out coal (see Hansen's letter to PM Rudd)
 - Al Gore's call for 100% clean energy by 2020

3) Regional

- Soil carbon credits & biochar
- Construction industry (co2-absorbing cement for all new buildings, houses)
- Hemp as carbon sink and product
- Co-generation, solar rebate & feed-in-tariffs

4) Global Direction

- USA elections (stimulus 2009)
- Copenhagen Dec 2009

Another Approach?

In retrospect, had I known Janelle hadn't read the book, or was so ill-informed, it may have been better to take her through the book step-by-step via the three sections organised by the authors (1. Arctic 2. Targets 3. Solutions).

Slide Show & Scientist

Note that there's a one hour slide show available on the net through ClimateEmergencyNetwork.org (although one hour is too long for a meeting). If you've got access to a reputable scientist, take one along!

Her Responses

CCR: Janelle's first response was to query the authenticity of CCR; she was satisfied when shown the extensive notes at the end from reputable sources.

325ppm: Janelle was adamant that the 450ppm IPCC was the correct one.

Hansen: She wasn't familiar with the name James Hansen, let alone his 325ppm cap. Whisked Hansen's letter to Rudd out of the Information Folder. ("Oh, I heard something about that" she said in a chatty way.) It interested her. She had a browse and was satisfied to read that Hansen was from Columbia University Earth Institute, the same place as a hero of hers, economist Jeffery Sachs. ('do you know who he is?' she asked. Thankfully I did.)

IPCC: Discussion followed of IPCC process. She knew quite a bit about it and seemed to have studied the report in some detail. She wasn't readily going to accept the 325 ppm. Wanted to know what IPCC thought of Hansen's 325ppm? I couldn't answer that.

It would have been handy to have summary of CCR details about deficiency of IPCC process & quotes from IPCC members about the shortcomings of the IPCC process.

Coal: Took out Hansen's 'Fossil Fuel Facts' from Info folder. Pointed out to Janelle that Hansen attributes 80% of climate problem to coal. She wouldn't have a bar of phasing out coal ("It's not going to happen"). She said there aren't transitional energy options. I said yes there is, gas. There was a brilliant moment when Janelle was describing how she'd advised

Morris lemma to talk about water *usage*, not *restrictions* and to tell people to use a bucket and cloth to wash the car, “no more hoses anymore, that’s it. You’ve just can’t do it anymore”. Tori piped up at this point (I’d been doing most of the talking) with “Yep, do the same with coal. That’s it. You just can’t do it anymore”. Touche Tori !

Al Gore’s call for 100% clean energy by 2020: briefly showed her his speech in the Info folder. She was very interested, but we had to keep moving along...

Renewables: examples of Iceland and Sweden from info folder; discussed California (JS: ‘oh, California’s always been a leading economy’); briefly discussed USA geothermal resources, solar thermal technology, benefit of feed in tariff, ie, in Germany.

Soil Carbon Sequestration: This topic deeply interests her. Says she’s keen to support the farmers with this. She’d recently opened a climate change conference at Lismore’s Southern Cross Uni. Main topic seemed to have been soil carbon storage via locally-developed strains of sugar cane.(?) (I was a bit doubtful of some of her knowledge in this area, as I’ve researched it a bit for the briefs I compile for regional newspaper.)

Tony Windsor: In connection with soil carbon she mentioned ‘her friend Tony Windsor’ (the independent MP). It will be interesting for her when he puts up the Climate Protection Bill!

Construction Industry: (co2-absorbing cement for all new buildings, houses) She was very interested in this, I’ll send her some more info. Briefly discussed hemp, sugar-mill-co-generation plants in our region and CHP in London, how efficient it is and how they plan to switch to food scraps from coal.

Solar Rebate: had run out of time so didn’t get to discuss the solar rebate income threshold, although for the record, *a good friend told me a while back he’d talked to Janelle in a café and she told him she’d spoken up in Parliament against the lowering of the threshold and Peter Garrett had given her a dirty look!*

She's optimistic about the future: Sometime about now she looked at us and said, sort of incredulously “Are you really worried about this, cause I’m not, I’m feeling optimistic “ (words to the effect of the world being on top of the climate problem.) We gave a resounding affirmative. It was at that point that I realised that she really didn’t get it. Woah.

Global Direction: Pointed out the USA have been holding up the process to date. Janelle: ‘Oh, the USA never sign anything. Poverty bills, (this, that)....’

End of Meeting: took photo. Said we’ll contact her again.

Although we didn’t actually get anywhere concrete, I felt the trip had been worthwhile. It will be interesting to see what she takes on board.

INFORMATION FOLDER CONTENTS:

- 1) Basic Fossil Fuel Facts by Dr James Hansen
- 2) Highlights, Basic Fossil Fuel Facts, by Dr James Hansen (selected bits)
- 3) Al Gore, Speech: 'A Generational Challenge to Repower America', July 17, 2008
- 4) Kyogle Climate Action Network briefs for the Northern Star

News Articles

- 5) 'Coal-fired plants will undo any savings', Wendy Frew, SMH, 26 July 07
- 6) 'Emissions will drop when we end reliance on coal', Kenneth Davidson, The Age, 17 April, 2008
- 7) Dr Mills Solar Thermal technology, by Matt Peacock, 2 Oct 07

TV transcripts

- 8) Stateline on Soil Carbon Credits, (2007?)

Websites

- 9) Extracts from NSW Michael Kiely's carbon farming websites
- 10) Beyond Zero Emissions: 'Imagining a Positive Future'
- 11) Zero Emissions PDF ('Why Zero Emissions?')
- 12) Anna Rose, youth delegate, 'Youth slams Industry Hijacking of 2020 Climate Agenda', 20 April 08

Arctic Melt

- 13) Tim Flannery, 'Ice Rage: The big melt', 26 Sept 06
- 14) Climate Code Red Blog: 'What politicians won't talk about: the fate of the Arctic'
- 15) Reactions to Climate Code Red, Senator Christine Milne's Blog
- 16) 'Middle of the road... toward a cliff' by David Spratt, The Age, 8 Aug 08

Follow-up

I have since sent her the following letter:

10th September 2008

Dear Janelle

Thank you for taking the time to meet with Tori and I on 21st August to discuss the rapid onset of dangerous climate change and the need for a 350 ppm warming cap.

I've enclosed some additional information supporting the 350ppm figure.

1. Evidence of Accelerated Climate Change

Prepared by the Climate Adaptation Science and Policy Initiative,
The University of Melbourne for the Climate Institute, Nov 2007.
(peer-reviewed by Graeme Pearman)

www.climateinstitute.org.au/images/stories/CI056_EACC_Report_v1.pdf

2. Scientist turns up the heat with new alert on warming

Ed Pilkington, The Guardian, New York, 8 April 2008.

www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/04/07/1207420309396.html

3. Target Atmospheric CO₂: Where Should Humanity Aim?

Hansen, J. Sato, M. et al., 2008.

www.columbia.edu/jeh1/2008/TargetCO2_20080407.pdf

4. General Submission to the Garnaut Climate Change Review

Friends of the Earth, Australia, 11 April 200

5. Sustainable Technologies: Eco-Cement

(TecEco) - from their website: www.tececo.com

I am interested in hearing your feedback on 'Climate Code Red' and am wondering if you got hold of a copy of Clive Hamilton's fascinating 'Scorcher: the Dirty Politics of Climate Change', 2007.

Best wishes

Shakti Burke

(Kyogle Climate Action Network)

If you would like a CD of any of the referenced documents, please contact Shakti Burke:
anshakti@hotmail.com