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Let progress flow

Despite the OECD giving Australia just a B– for sustainability performance in its latest ten-year assessment (page 4), March was a good month for the environment.

The combination of an eventual power-sharing water control deal for the Murray–Darling Basin and the Australian-led Earth Hour campaign added up to the sense of a deepening shift in national commitment to making a difference.

As Earth Hour showed, making even small efforts gets very infectious. The ultimate challenge now must be to truly follow through and prove that sense of progress manifestly correct. There's been much agreed on before where the Murray–Darling is concerned, but today, some years down the track, the release of the billion-dollar critical environmental flows, central to the discussions, are apparently largely still to eventuate. There is, however, a complicated and knotted system of interests to untangle.

The April–May issue is in part dedicated to the late Professor Peter Cullen, who helped raise the urgency of national water management problems. He emphasised the need to act immediately beyond wider discussion. It would be fitting if the new COAG agreements actually saw fast action flowing to where it is needed most. Peter's work in the last few years points the way.

This issue's Focus on 21st century irrigation (pages 10–13) is related. Graeme O'Neill provides perspectives on how Australian irrigation practices and hardware must be modernised to deliver better water efficiency under drier conditions, increased demand and the new licensing arrangements ahead.

This was a final commitment of



Professor Cullen's, and he was right in highlighting that few other countries have the past experience and research capacity to deliver smarter irrigation technology, required

around the world. He was also right that Australian farmers need support, through partnership, to get on with the job.

Our second Focus (pages 22–25) on population's place in the sustainability debate provides the views of three national authorities that this fundamental issue is overlooked and must receive more attention in planning. The logic is compelling, and the solutions confronting.

On pages 18–21, Julian Cribb reports that Australian marine scientists are pointing to another rising threat from excessive atmospheric CO₂: ocean acidification and its potentially broad threats to ecology and oxygen supply. Research indicates the Great Barrier Reef is already showing symptoms, providing more impetus for the argument to reduce atmospheric CO₂ as soon as possible.

'Developing partnerships can help meet Garnaut's 2050 target' (pages 14–15) discusses ways Australia can make inroads to CO₂ reduction, while gaining credits for assisting regional developing nations to reduce theirs.

Enjoy your reading.

James Porteous
Managing Editor



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Next, in issue 143

The June–July edition of *Ecos* will preview the development of independent and more efficient distributed energy networks which may eventually move us away from the current grid supply infrastructure altogether. We also examine the critical decline of environmental monitoring capability in Australia.