

# From the Editor

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*Caveat emptor* should be the rule in politics as it is in other spheres of life. Yet people seem to treat politics as if it had no risks or consequences.

Witness the recent Victorian State election where, across the State, 9.2 per cent of voters cast their primary vote for the Greens. Richmond, which is filling with aspirational, young professional types moving into trendy apartments, recorded a vote of 27 per cent for the Green candidate.

Of course, the concerns people have about environmental degradation are both understandable and justified. Many of our most difficult problems emanate from our misuse of the natural environment and, as we become wealthier, we value the environment and its attributes highly. The problem lies not with concerns about the environment, but with the downright silly policies that the Greens put forward to deal with it.

For example, according to their Website ([www.green.org.au](http://www.green.org.au)), the leading economic policy of the Greens in the last election was 'the abandonment of economic growth (as conventionally measured)'. Given that the apartment boom on which the lifestyle of the young things in Richmond depend is the single largest contributor to our recent high level of economic growth, it is extremely strange that they would vote in droves for a party that is serious about stifling their lifestyle.

Of course, most people who voted for the Greens did not read the policy documents. Moreover, they voted Green with the knowledge that the Greens would not win government. They probably assumed, too, that successful Greens would, as Bob Brown recently admitted, be more 'realistic' than promised.

The confidence in the impotence of the Greens is, however, misplaced. The Greens mean what they say. Their



policies are being implemented, if not by them, then by erstwhile more sensible governments seeking the green vote. And the damage they are doing is large and highly visible.

Young people are fleeing Tasmania—the home base of the Greens—for a reason. After 15 years of Green NIMBYism, the competitive base of the State is in tatters. Not satisfied, the Greens are now working to stop Basslink—the \$200 million investment that will connect Tassie to the national electricity grid. Why? Because they do not want 'dirty electrons' polluting their 'clean electrons'. Their solution is to export the electricity with batteries—I kid you not (see page 34). They are also campaigning to shut down Gunns—the timber and plantation firm—which is the State's largest private employer.

The forest fires currently encircling Sydney are also, in part, the handiwork of the Greens. The Greens have induced successive governments to limit controlled burning, curtail logging and prevent the management of private forests (see Jim Hoggett, pages 9–11). This has turned woodlands into woodpiles ready to be ignited by arsonists, lightning strikes and other unavoidable causes.

The kangaroo plague that is currently destroying vast tracts of farm land is also the product of our green

crusaders. As outlined by Ian Mott (pages 12–14), thanks to the Greens, the States make ownership claims to kangaroo populations, but exercise little responsibility over them. This has led to unchecked growth, mass starvation and the destruction of the environment and the livelihood of farmers.

The problem does not emanate from our formal political institutions—parliamentary democracy, a bicameral legislature, federalism. Indeed, these are potentially vital counterweights to the green thoughtlessness that is sweeping society.

It is within the informal political processes of civil society that the problem is most severe. People seem too readily to accept the simplest pronouncements of activists claiming to represent consumers, the poor or the environment. They do not question their bona fides, values or actions. They seem willing to allow these self-appointed guardians of virtue a greater role in collective action than they merit.

Faced with competition and pressure from unelected activists, our elected political agents and their public servants are increasingly embracing them and their approach. Witness the recent proposal to appoint Louise Sylvan of the Australia Consumers Association to the ACCC (see Gary Johns, pages 15–16) and the Government's funding of anti-development NGOs to spread their narrow activist views and values abroad on our behalf (see Don D'Cruz, pages 26–29).

The solution lies with holding political activism in so-called civil society to the same standards of transparency, scrutiny and robust debate that takes place within our formal institutions.

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