

## Seniors' Conference 2010 and Green Sages

One hundred senior Victorians came together at the 2010 Seniors' Conference in November 2010. The theme of ***Climate Change & Older People*** was both topical and a call to action for all attendees.

COTA's President **Ms Janet Wood** welcomed the participants. Her opening set the scene for a stimulating day of discussion and interaction. She provided a background on why COTA used the title ***Climate for Change*** for the International Federation on Aging conference in Melbourne in 2010, and reminded all of the 350+ people who died as a result of the extreme heat conditions in summer of 2009 and the other health effects of changing climate conditions.

*'You also can hardly avoid hearing or watching the news of deadly floods and landslides, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis which are terrible for people of all ages, and especially terrible for the old. So, here at home or abroad, there are increasing reasons for us as an organisation and us as individuals to think, understand and plan for living as well as we can in the world that we have and for being active agents for change for the world that we want.'* Ms Wood said.

*'With a grant from the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, COTA has established a movement, more than an organisation, called Green Sages - sub-titled: harnessing the wisdom of older people to enhance change initiatives'* Ms Wood went on to say, asking the participants to harness their wisdom for the day to be released for the future.

Participants swiftly moved into a climate change quiz at their table, which facilitated a lively discussion and debate on the questions. **Keith Burrows**, former science teacher, author of physics texts, campaigner for the Beyond Zero Emissions project and active member of the Science Teachers Association of Victoria, expertly led the conference through the answers.

One participant reflected *'Didn't know how much I didn't know'* and another commented *'an awakening'*.

**Rev Alan Colyer** from St Thomas's Anglican Church Moonee Ponds next talked about the retrofitting of his church and church buildings as a result of his 'conversion' to sustainability and energy efficiency. He talked about the large energy, water and landfill savings that were made, reflected on the personal behaviour change that was necessary, and the future projects that will be commencing in 2011. He encouraged the audience to think about their role in leading similar things in their own church or club

Environment Victoria is the state's peak environment organisation and one of the leading environment groups in the country. It calls on people to safeguard our environment and has as its big vision to mobilise all 5 million Victorians to take Green Action. Josie Lee from Environment Victoria and a Climate Change Community Campaigner believes *'...we can change the system we live in to make living sustainably inherent and easy'* She explained how energy and water savings could be made around the home and spoke of the 1 Million Homes Strategy. This is Environment Victoria's request to Government to retrofit one million low-income homes over the next five years to make them more water and energy efficient. That's half of Victoria's existing housing and it would have a big impact on greenhouse pollution.

<http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au/onemillionhomes>  
<http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au/>

Following this, **Keith Burrows** presented again sharing his knowledge about how Australia could be powered by 100% renewable energy within 10 years. This inspiring talk provided a new view of how things could be done. Keith talked about the potential of Australia to repower the economy using safe, clean and secure renewable energy.

*'Australia has one of the greatest renewable energy resources in the world,'* he said. Beyond Zero Emissions has a detailed blueprint of how this can be achieved – a ten year transition to a zero-emissions economy using solar thermal power and wind generation.

One participant summed up the views of many participants: *'I'm glad to know total zero total emissions is possible. I felt encouraged & hopeful'*.

<http://www.beyondzeroemissions.org/>

After hearing from the panel of speakers participants then had the opportunity to discuss three key questions relating to the climate change.

***What environmental legacy they wanted to leave future generations?***

***What was the biggest impact of climate change on their way of life?***

***And what is the most useful action to take to cope with the effects of climate change?***

This was a very active session and produced a vast amount of feedback. These questions will be the focus of the engagement of older people across Victoria as part of the Green Sages project. Rural, regional and metropolitan groups of older people will be invited to share their views and discuss how they can become part of the solution to climate change by their mitigation and adaptation actions.

In the afternoon COTA's **Patricia Reeve** spoke in more detail about the Green Sages project. She emphasised that Green Sages is about older people being informed, making a decision to do something positive about the issue of climate change and then taking action. Patricia called for participants to show their support for the project by becoming a Green Sage leader and assisting COTA to spread the word, to be proactive in their own groups and to mobilise other seniors to be agents of change. The conference concluded with a summation by Ms Wood.

For further information on the Green Sages project please contact Di Ford at:  
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