

Seniors' Conference 2011: Agents of Change

Session Title:	Communicating climate change
Convenor:	Keith
Participants:	Derek, Barry, Joanne, Trish, Rod, Jennifer, Dennis, Elizabeth, Peter, Andy, Roger, Marjory, Janet, Gordon, Betty.

Summary of Discussions:

The initial discussion revolved around how each person saw the climate change issue. There was a considerable range of views on this from somewhat 'sceptical' to convinced of the need for urgent action - with the latter being the most prevalent view (not surprising given the topic).

Some of the comments made included:

- * concern over the misinformation coming from the media, particularly the Murdoch press
- * concern for the future of our children and grand-children (and other peoples!)
- * the unrepresentative power of anti C tax groups to dominate the media
- * the psychological difficulty of communicating an issue which does generate a 'fear' response in many people
- * how can we inform without generating that fear response?
- * the need to explain what we can actually do about the threat and to explain that this does NOT mean going back to cave dwelling as the deniers often suggest
- * the population issue - unless we control population increase we have no hope of limiting climate change
- * we need to start at our local level with sustainable initiatives
- * need to educate the older generation through forums such as U3A
- * express the message in simple, clear, understandable terms
- * but when expressed in simple terms it is easy for deniers to make equally simplistic statements which counter the message (such as 'warming has stopped' or 'it's not human emissions' or 'a bit of warming won't hurt us' etc)
- * deniers have the advantage of not having to worry about the truth of their statements - just repeat them enough and they 'become true'
- * we need to take into account the true cost of the things we buy including the embedded energy, the cost of the resultant pollution, etc.
- * need a cost in 'carbon units' as well as dollars

What will we do now? What needs to happen next?

How to communicate the need for climate action

- * There is a huge problem in countering the well funded misinformation campaign being waged by the vested interests and the Murdoch papers and their 'shock jocks' - not to mention Tony 'Negative' Abbott.
- * There are large numbers of unconvinced or confused voters out there who have got 'climate fatigue' and just don't want to know about it. It is these people we must somehow get to - the hardline deniers are a lost cause.
- * Many older people are very worried about the legacy our generation is leaving for our children and grandchildren, but at the same time are unsure about the seriousness of the problem. They want access to sound information.

Possible action

* COTA, through its Green Sages program, could take a lead in helping to inform both its own membership as well as the wider older community - perhaps through connections with U3A and other groups. This could also occur through articles in ONECOTA and other publications or through special events.

* COTA could also advocate politically on behalf of its concerned members. It is an unfortunate fact of modern political life that those with the loudest voices (and deepest pockets) are those who are heard most easily in Canberra. The fossil fuel industry is very effective at using apparently 'ordinary Australians' in its anti carbon price campaign. With its large membership base COTA could become an effective voice in putting the case that we older Australians, who have benefited from the exploitation of fossil fuels, are now deeply concerned at the (largely unforeseen) consequences and want to take action to reduce the potentially catastrophic impact of climate change.