

Dr. Geoffrey Chia
MBBS, MRCP, FRACP
Cardiologist

Consulting Rooms:

Sunnybank Hospital
Suite 10, 245 McCullough Street
Appts: 3344 5588
Wynnum Specialist Centre
91 Clara Street
Appts: 3396 1177

Wesley Medical Centre
Cardiology
49/40 Chasely St
Auchenflower 4066
Appts: 3876 1400

To: The Hon Kate Jones, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Change
Ashgrove Central
221 Waterworks Road
ASHGROVE Q 4060
1 May 2009

PLASTIC BAG REFORM!

Dear Kate,

Ah yes, it's another pesky letter from me. I mentioned before that two simple initiatives could spearhead your achievements for this term: the establishment of a **gross feed-in tariff** for renewable energy into the grid and the establishment of a "*Gaia Village Project**" type, zero emissions, zero waste, self sufficient community - which could be a model for sustainable living around the world.

Actually there is another initiative even simpler to implement – *plastic bag reform!*

In the runup to the previous Federal election, the Rudd team talked about phasing out plastic bags in supermarkets but unfortunately this whole issue seems to have fizzled. You are well aware of the environmental problems caused by non-biodegradable bags, which if they make their way to the sea, pose tremendous health hazards to marine animals. I quote from *Scientific American*, vol 18, number 5, Nov 2008, page 17: "*Trashed: for decades, circulating ocean currents have picked up refuse from shorelines and boats and corralled it in two vast lobes of decaying, soupy material dubbed the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.*" Indeed, an Atlantic Garbage Patch has also been discovered. This deplorable state of affairs is all the more tragic because it is completely avoidable. Only action by governments can alleviate this dreadful situation. Which government and which individual in government should take the lead? Why not this government and why not you? The solution is ridiculously simple and I believe will have community support.

Why has the plastic bag phase-out not gone ahead? I believe it is because the government failed to follow the simple 3 step programme I previously described:

1. Change public mindset
2. Provide an alternative (better) way
3. Withdraw the old (harmful) way

Step 1 is, I believe almost there, but step 2 has not been adequately handled. I suspect commercial interests oppose disposable bags being banned and community views are ambivalent. After all, even the most well meaning folks often forget to bring their reusable green bag to the supermarket and must resort to using the supplied plastic bags to carry the goods home. Not only that, the supermarket bags are very useful to dispose our garbage in (bags which will later persist indefinitely in landfills). Banning supermarkets from providing disposable plastic bags will therefore inconvenience the customers/voters (and we simply can't have that, can we?). Hence, step 2, providing a suitable alternative, has been stymied.

The solution is incredibly simple – ensure all disposable bags provided by supermarkets are biodegradable bags (either bioplastic made from cornstarch or waxed paper bags or even bags fashioned from old newspapers). You will face some resistance – the supermarkets will say that biodegradable bags are more expensive and will eat into their profits. Again the answer is simple – encourage the supermarkets to charge for biodegradable bags. Customers may then complain about having to pay for something which was previously free. Your answer to them will be simple – if you don't want to pay for the supermarket bags, just remember to bring your reusable green bags.

Once you completely replace petroleum based bags with biodegradable bags, you will have achieved steps 2 and 3 all at one go!

This also represents an opportunity for you to make a public announcement, claim an initiative and raise your profile in a positive way.

The last thing you need is to be saddled with a negative profile this early in your career. You cannot allow any further negative press, you cannot allow yourself to be seen as inexperienced or lacking in knowledge and you cannot allow Anna Bligh to fight your battles for you. You must take the initiative and make your mark as a force to be reckoned with in your own right. You must project a public image of competence, credibility and determination.

Image alone will fall flat if subjected to the scrutiny of a canny interviewer. Thus it is imperative that you build up a wide and deep store of knowledge and understanding of sustainability issues so you cannot be caught out as ignorant**.

Your university environmental studies do not cover everything. You need to know of matters far beyond a structured curriculum. You need to know the philosophies and strategies of all those who would lobby you for influence (including me). Indeed it is even more important you have an understanding of the thinking of those who you do *not* agree with, to effectively deal with them.

Our group, D3SJ, explicitly state our philosophies and aims on our website: we believe that policies should be determined by evidence, reason and fairness - the primary goal being the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people on a long term basis. I hope that is also your philosophy and aim.

Kind regards,

Geoffrey

*www.d3sj.org (downloads section)

I think the ideal location for the “*Gaia Village Project*” would be at Pinjarra Hills next to the river (from which water may be sourced) – on land previously bequeathed to UQ which has been designated for University purposes. What better way to use University land than for a pioneer project to explore all aspects of residential sustainability? What better inhabitants for such a village than University staff who are (in the main) already well disposed to sustainable philosophies? Vice Chancellor Paul Greenfield is the main person who will determine the use of that land and I have sent my paper to him. It should be a joint government, university and private sector initiative. Phil Little, a builder/designer with more than 50 years experience, who has constructed a fully solar powered house on display at Acacia Ridge, is ready willing and able to start construction on an ecovillage right now!

**Once again, D3SJ offer our services to you. Our next meeting on 13 May is by Prof. Tony Hall, an expert in urban design who will talk about sustainable towns and cities – which is of particular interest to you given the Kelvin Grove Urban Village.

I remain at your service to offer a detailed background of the history, politics, economics and science of petroleum issues, particularly Peak Oil which I have studied, spoken about and have had articles published about for more than 10 years.

Dr. Geoffrey Chia
MBBS, MRCP, FRACP
Cardiologist

Consulting Rooms:

Sunnybank Hospital
Suite 10, 245 McCullough Street
Appts: 3344 5588
Wynnum Specialist Centre
91 Clara Street
Appts: 3396 1177

Wesley Medical Centre
Cardiology
49/40 Chasely St
Auchenflower 4066
Appts: 3876 1400

To: The Hon Kate Jones, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Change
Ashgrove Central
221 Waterworks Road
ASHGROVE Q 4060
29 June 2009

PLASTIC BAG REFORM part2!

Dear Kate,

As it turned out, the very day after I sent you my first letter on plastic bag reform, South Australia banned them. I was thus dismayed to read the recent Courier Mail article below:

They're marine killers so it's time to . . .

Get tough on plastic bags

Brian Williams
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

CLEAN Up Australia boss Ian Kiernan has called for a national ban on plastic bags after a United Nations report found they and plastic drink bottles are the most pervasive marine litter on the planet.

Mr Kiernan said the report showed that a ban on plastic bags needed to be a priority.

He said that when state and federal environment ministers met last month to discuss national waste issues a solution for plastic bags again stalled.

"It's incomprehensible that they would continue to let such a critical issue slide," Mr Kiernan said.

The report, the first-ever attempt to assess the impact of marine litter across the world, found that Australia's plastic bag dependence was contributing to a global marine debris crisis.

Plastic bags and polyethylene

terephthalate or PET drink and water bottles, made up more than 80 per cent of rubbish found in seas worldwide.

After last month's Environment Protection and Heritage Council meeting, Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said it would be up to individual states to decide on a plastic bag ban. South Australia last month banned checkout-style plastic bags.

A spokesman for Mr Garrett said yesterday state ministers were not able to agree on a national approach.

Queensland Sustainability Minister Kate Jones rejected any move to ban bags, with a spokesman saying Queensland would wait for a national agreement.

UN environment program executive director Achim Steiner said single-use plastic bags should be banned everywhere because there was no justification for manufacturing them.

The report found that much of

the rubbish that found its way into the sea off Western Australia ended up carried by currents to the east coast of South Africa. Along the way, the plastics could be mistaken for food by numerous animals, including mammals, birds, fish, and turtles.

"Almost four billion plastic bags are still being produced for Australian use every year," Mr Kiernan said.

"This report again highlights that 80 per cent of the rubbish found in our oceans comes from the land.

"It's environmentally negligent to allow this to continue, when the solution for plastic bags is so simple — ban them."

A Federal Government scientific committee on threatened species has found plastic bags and other debris are a direct threat to 20 marine species.

In 2001 a whale was found dead in north Queensland with 6sq m of plastic in its gut.

So Peter Garrett says it is up to you to ban plastic bags and you say it is up to Peter Garrett to ban plastic bags. Isn't that a classic game of "passing the buck"?

That is simply not good enough, Kate.

Further information in the general media recently (documentary on ABC TV, article in SMH weekend magazine) indicated the environmental ravages of discarded plastics are far worse than we have hitherto known. I previously mentioned the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean garbage patches, however there are actually five extensive patches of ocean (North and South Pacific, North and South Atlantic and the Indian Oceans) or "gyres", where plastic detritus have accumulated. Not only do they pose a physical hazard to marine animals and birds, they also absorb and concentrate **persistent organic pollutants** (especially pesticide and herbicide runoff from our agriculture) which pose a chemical hazard to the entire ecosystem.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The first and easiest step to halt this madness is to ban non-biodegradable plastic bags.

Kate, there is simply no excuse to delay.

Having not received a reply from my first letter to you about plastic bags, I am sending this followup letter to you. I am also sending these letters to our D3SJ group for their comments/action and am posting them as open letters to you on our website at the downloads section of www.d3sj.org.

A positive response from you will be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,

Geoffrey