

SUSTAINABLE OTAUTAHU - CHRISTCHURCH NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2010

Welcome from new SOC Chair; Tom Taylor

I was elected Chair in June but I'm a "newbie" to Christchurch relatively speaking so I thought I would introduce myself.

I moved here from the UK in 2000 and joined SOC in 2006. My background is in analytical chemistry in the water industry, mainly the 'mucky end' (sewage and sludge) though my sole claim to scientific fame is a rapid method for measuring fluoride in drinking water. After the water industry in the UK was privatised in 1989 I worked as an advisor to the company on legislation and EC Directives and as a negotiator with the Environment Agency on discharges from our sewage works etc. (odd job for a Green!).

I've been a Green since 1978 and SOC, with its commitment to Strong Sustainability, is very much in tune with my beliefs.

Sustainability is under attack with the "quick buck, growth at all costs" mentality badgeing just about any development as "sustainable" irrespective of damage to the environment or communities. We need to stand up against that mentality and SOC is a key player in that public debate.

SOC stands for Strong Sustainability. As the SANZ document, *Strong Sustainability for New Zealand* summed it up:

1. Strong sustainability is the prerequisite and foundation of sustainable human development, whether social, economic or technological.
2. Strong sustainability means preservation of the integrity of all ecosystems in the biosphere. Ecological integrity means the ability of an ecosystem to recover from disturbance and re-establish its stability, diversity and resilience.
3. A strongly sustainable human society lives and develops as an integral part of ecosystems that have ecological integrity.
4. Strong sustainability requires a shift in societal ethics and values. This is key to humans being willing to adopt a path that leads to strong sustainability.



Our logo reminds us of our vision of people / families / generations in a pleasant and sustainable environment.

To put it bluntly, sustainability = survival. Over the next few issues of our newsletter John Adams (our new editor) will be expanding on what Strong Sustainability is about and its implications for how we live. Watch this space! Oh, and please join in the discussion.

Tom Taylor.

Strong Sustainability

SOC's approach is to develop understanding of long term strong sustainability in Otautahi Christchurch. These notes are taken from the document "Strong Sustainability for New Zealand" produced by Sustainable Aotearoa New Zealand. You can find a copy on the web at http://www.phase2.org/documents/SSFNZ_web_310809.pdf

Strong Sustainability for New Zealand Principles and Scenarios Sustainable Aotearoa New Zealand Inc (SANZ)

Definition

1. Strong sustainability is the prerequisite and foundation of any human development, whether social, economic or technological.
2. Strong sustainability means the preservation of the integrity of all ecological systems in the biosphere.
3. Ecological integrity means the ability of an ecosystem to recover from disturbance and reestablish its stability, diversity and resilience.
4. A strongly sustainable human society lives and develops as an integral part of ecosystems that have ecological integrity.
5. Ethics, values and 'world views' directly support strong sustainability because people know that they are integral with the ecological systems of the biosphere and therefore desire their integrity.



Incompatibility of "Business as Usual"

The daunting truth is that this utilitarian ethical stance – which is currently accepted essentially without question by society in the capitalist mixed economy world – is incompatible with strong sustainability because:

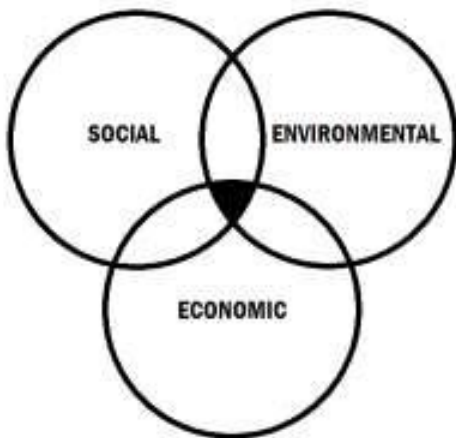
1. Perpetuation of economic growth is deemed to be intrinsically good – indeed aspects of the money and credit system depend on growth for their integrity – whereas this is actually impossible because the biosphere has finite limits.
2. Markets do not even acknowledge the services of ecological systems, or value the huge societal

assets provided to humans through access to the biosphere. The assets and services that are essential to strong sustainability are not even part of the market mechanism, which therefore has nothing useful to offer.

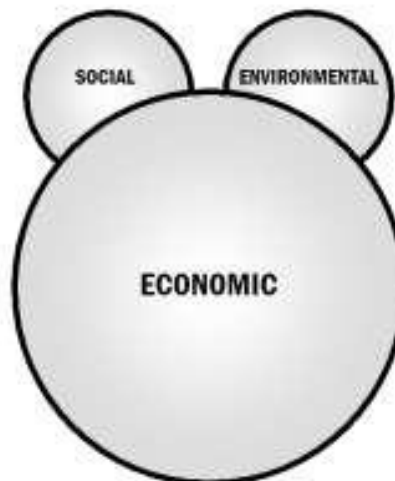
3. It is held that humans are separate from nature and are therefore free to exploit it, which is untrue.
4. It is held that individualistic human activity will bring best outcomes, whereas strong sustainability requires that humans respond interdependently to the interacting ecosystems in which they are embedded.

Diagrammatic representations

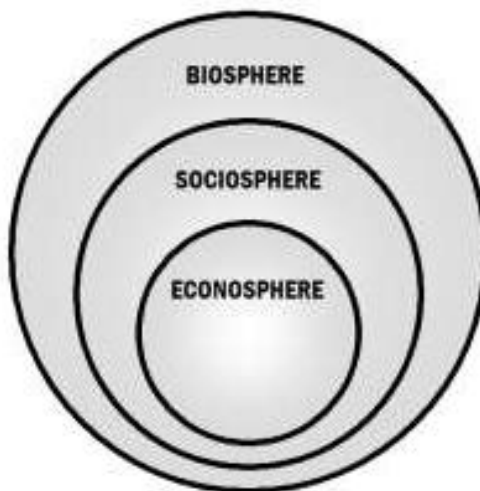
Triple Bottom Line model



Mickey Mouse version of Triple Bottom Line model



Strong Sustainability model



Strong Sustainability Ethics & Values

A very different set of societal ethics and values is needed by those who commit to strong sustainability, including:

1. Placing great importance on non-material sources of happiness.
2. Removing the perceived linkage between economic growth, material possessions, and success.
3. Affirming the deep interdependence of all people. The associated community values include a robust sense of mutual respect, fairness, cooperation, gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, humility, courage, mutual aid, charity, confidence, trust, courtesy, integrity, loyalty, and respectful use of resources.

4. Affirming the value of local community, with associated benefits of reduced environmental footprints and increased cooperation between people.
5. Valuing nature intrinsically through knowing that human society and its political economy is an integral and interdependent component of

nature and the biosphere. Humans have reverence for nature and know that they are responsible for their impact on the integrity of all ecosystems in the biosphere. These ethics and values are the core of the needed societal understanding about how to live within the Earth's limits and in harmony between people and all other species.

We'll be looking further at the meaning of "Strong Sustainability" in future issues of this newsletter.

Recent Events 1

Liz Slooten

At the AGM of SOC at the end of June, the guest speaker was Dr. Liz Slooten of Otago University. Her presentation was entitled **Sustainable Christchurch: a Myth?**

Liz is known to many as the Dolphin Expert because of her work with, and on behalf of, Hector's Dolphins around the coast of NZ. She commented that she had originally begun work with Hector's Dolphins to learn about their essential ecology; what they eat, how they live, their social interactions etc. It quickly became apparent that she was studying a species in decline and so her studies moved to questions like "why are they dying?" and "how can we save them?" Thus the academic ecologist evolved into the active conservationist.

The harbours and bays of Banks peninsula are a significant area for the Hector's Dolphin - a species that tends not to travel large distances. There is limited contact between the Banks Peninsula animals and the other populations, for example around the Catlins coast or on the West of the South Island. Hector's also spend a lot of time close to shore, so land based activities that affect water quality can have an impact on the dolphins.

Human activities such as housing developments, industry, agriculture, weed spraying and sewage discharge can all affect coastal water quality. Of particular concern around the Peninsula and at Akaroa is the discharge of treated sewage waste.

Liz was quick to point out that we have moved a long way from the days of large quantities of untreated sewage going into coastal waters, but the threat to mammals like the dolphins comes from the chemical residues left in the "clean" water that is returned to the sea. Her data on cancer rates was disturbing: dolphins living in off-shore open waters have a cancer rate of 2% whereas inshore species such as

the belugas of the St. Lawrence have cancer rates of 27%, (which is even above the human rate of 23%).

She also acknowledged that Akaroa has some unusual demands on its sewage treatment system with a relatively small resident population that swells massively in the tourist season. The challenge is to find a treatment and discharge mechanism that works under a wide range of flow conditions, has minimal impact on the marine life and doesn't cost a fortune.

The bulk of Liz's talk was a consideration of the pros and cons of some of the proposals that are under consideration for wastewater treatment at Akaroa. You can find details of these on the CCC website at <http://www.ccc.govt.nz/thecouncil/policiesreportsstrategies/strategies/akaroaharbourwaterstrategy.aspx>

The discussion was taken a step forward when it became clear that Simon Collin was in the audience. As the staff member at CCC with responsibility for consultation on the Akaroa options, Simon was well placed to add to the comments made by Liz and to add a reminder about the workings of local government and the budgetary pressures involved. The Peninsula has about 3% of the City population, yet is spending 17% of the water and wastewater investment budget.

These are not irrelevant academic discussions. Dolphin numbers are in decline. Council budgets are not elastic. The Peninsula is part of the city. We all use the toilet and shampoo our hair. No easy answers, but a valuable discussion.

You can contact Liz Slooten on liz.slooten@stonebow.otago.ac.nz.
You can contact Simon Collin on Simon.Collin@ccc.govt.nz

Recent Events 2

Foundations for the future

Perspectives from the Environment and Conservation Organisations of New Zealand's recent conference at Living Springs, by Shane Orchard .
(Reprinted from Transition Forum Info, August 2010).

The Environment and Conservation Organisations of New Zealand (ECO) were treated to sparkling Canterbury weather for their annual conference held at Living Springs in Lyttelton. Delegates from around the country joined the national summit aimed at the sharing of information between community groups and academics.

Alongside the academic presentations, many local groups were present to share their ideas and experience in helping Canterbury make good decisions for the future. All up there was a wealth of experience in making practical change happen which translated into an insightful programme of speakers, workshops and discussion sessions.

The conference worked towards an appraisal of key issues for the future management of the environment, conservation and the economy. Some of the subjects debated included the use of non-market values in economics, water management and marine issues, the relationship between biodiversity management and tourism, and the effects of recent changes to regional decision-making policy.

The relationship between poor environmental and conservation measures and risks to the economy was an issue raised by many presenters. For example, amongst the points made by Kay Booth, a tourism consultant and former senior lecturer in Parks, Recreation and Tourism was that "Seventy percent of overseas tourists are here for nature based activities, and nature-based international tourists stay longer and spend more than other tourists". A key conclusion was that the value of the environment to society and the economy must be better identified and protected in the future, and that this perspective is not well reflected in current government policy.

Both the content and the process by which recent Government policy changes were arrived at were topics in the spotlight. In particular, many contentious issues surfacing in the resource management field were

explored. For example "The Environmental Protection Agency is being designed to fast track infrastructure projects for the government and vested business interests," said Barry Weeber, co-chair of ECO. As a result this and other reforms "Irrigation will be fast tracked: the environment, conservation and communities are being seen simply as obstacles to be shoved out of the way," he said.

Many delegates also identified that a trend exists towards the erosion of the rights of people to be consulted and considered. "There is increasing concern that economic interests are being privileged while citizen values and voices are being shut out of policy and decision making", said public policy specialist Cath Wallace.

The conclusion of many was that many elements the Government's current economic strategy and the suppression of community voice both pose considerable risks for not only the environment, but for a prosperous society.

With a focus on the future the Conference was especially interested in 'where to from here?' Despite the considerable disquiet which emerged concerning public policy, there was no shortage of success stories from the local presenters who added greatly to the event.

The Environment and Conservation Organisations of NZ was established in 1972 and now represents 66 groups with a concern for the environment. As well as working on national level issues, ECO provides a network between member groups and several resources to assist local groups in their activities. Working groups from across the network are also used to advance projects on common interests and the new working parties for 2011 invite involvement from any member of the public who wishes to contribute. To find out more or get involved with the ECO network visit www.eco.org.nz, or contact Amelia on eco@eco.org or (04) 385 7545.

Recent Events 3

The Christchurch branch of NZAEE held their AGM on 20th July. Review by Jocelyn Pappriill, NZAEE branch secretary jyc@caverock.net.nz

Our new committee is chaired by Jen Rodgers of Enviroschools. The AGM was followed by a most engaging presentation by Professor Dave Kelly, ecologist from the University Of Canterbury.

Dave spoke about the impact human populations have had on biodiversity over time, not just in NZ but globally. The images and graphs he shared reminded us of the degradation we humans have wrought but also clearly showed the positive things many individuals and groups are presently doing or have done over time to maintain biodiversity. He encouraged us all to be active as citizens

to protect our diverse environments and pointed to the power of democracy with respect to the National Parks - Schedule 4 proposal. Dave also discussed just how important education is to ensure people understand the interdependence of all aspects of the environment and in particular why the maintenance of biodiversity is essential for our well-being. He particularly recommended reading the Millennium Ecosystem Report

<http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/index.aspx>, writings by George Monibot, Lester Brown's Plan B 3.0 <http://search.barnesandnoble.com/Plan-B-30/Lester-R-Brown/e/9780393065893/> and a recently published NZ book, The Carbon Challenge: NZ's Emissions Trading Scheme (Bertram & Terry) <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/SC1006/S00045.htm>

Challenges for SOC Members & Supporters

*We welcome comments and suggestions from readers of this newsletter.
Please email you thoughts to The Editor, John Adams on jrjandm@callsouth.net.nz*

Conferences

At the conclusion of her talk, Liz Slooten asked the SOC a question, and we are interested in gathering your thoughts through this newsletter. She is part of a group organizing an international conference for marine biologists which is planned for New Zealand in 2013. Around 1,000 experts are expected from around the world. Liz is looking for suggestions of ways to make the conference more sustainable, and in particular to reduce its carbon footprint. A number of suggestions were made, we welcome further ideas and comments, which we will forward to Liz.

Ideas raised at the SOC meeting in June:

- ➔ tree planting, to be funded as part of conference costs and to involve delegates
- ➔ a levy on conference delegates to fund an urban bike rental scheme
- ➔ hold an e-conference rather than encouraging so much international travel

Banking

There has been discussion recently among the SOC Committee members about the sustainability or otherwise of our banks. Most of us who are connected with the 21st Century use banks for storing and handling money as well lending and saving. But how much does the banking business support our preference for Strong Sustainability? Are our banks out to exploit us, the environment and the future for their own economic betterment? Does your bank have a policy on ethical investment? Is your bank supporting the arms trade, or drugs or deforestation? Does your bank care about the things that you care about? We'd like to hear from members about their views and experiences of the banking business. Please send your thoughts into the newsletter. Since access to banking information can be quite sensitive, we'll collate comments, but not link your name with any particular organisation.

Coming Events 1

Sustainable Otautahi Christchurch (SOC)
and the
Canterbury Workers' Educational Association (WEA)
are hosting a
Mayoral Candidates Forum
on **Wednesday 8th September starting at 7.30 pm**
The Forum will take place in the
Christchurch Girls' High School Auditorium



The Forum will give mayoral candidates the opportunity to speak directly to the public of Christchurch about their plans to address issues related to sustainability in its broadest possible sense. Because it will be a public forum and widely advertised, we also expect that questions raised will not be confined to this area.

The meeting will be a structured event, with a chairperson and timekeeper, each candidate having an initial speaking time, and a time limit on the questions asked.

If I was speaking to a candidate for a Council election what might I ask...?

- ➔ *What is your vision for this community 50 and 100 years into the future?*
- ➔ *What are you doing NOW to bring that vision to reality?*
- ➔ *How do you predict that Peak Oil will impact on this community in the years ahead?*
- ➔ *What steps will we as a community take to cope in the "post oil" world?*
- ➔ *What provisions can your Council make to help people access healthy, locally grown food?*
- ➔ *Do you spend as much time reading, learning and talking about issues relating to sustainability, the environment, conservation, family and society as you do about money, finance and budgets?*
- ➔ *Have you read the Strong Sustainability document from SANZ yet? Would you like a copy?*

The Local Government Act 2002 defines the purpose of local government:

The purpose of local government is—

- (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and
- (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future.

- ➔ *Does that imply a hierarchy that puts "economic" ahead of other types of well-being?*
- ➔ *Does that imply that the present is more important than the future?*

Coming Events 2

Transition Initiatives Forum

The next Christchurch Transition Initiatives Forum is on Tuesday 10 August from noon to 1.30pm (bring your lunch) at St Albans Community Centre.

Sumner Redcliffs Project monthly meeting

The Sumner Redcliffs Project is a transition town project supporting a vibrant Sumner Redcliffs Community. On the last Wednesday of each month the steering group meet at 7.30pm to discuss progress, make plans and meet new people. This is a completely open public meeting so come along to find out more, share your thoughts or get involved with future plans. You can also find out more or join the project's email list by contacting Esther at sumnerbays@xnet.co.nz or Shane at shane.orchard@ymail.com.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 25 August, 7.30pm at the Sumner Union Church Hall on Nayland Street. All welcome!

Items from The Press Christchurch Writers' Festival

<http://www.chchwritersfest.co.nz/index.php>



Requiem for a Species - An Hour with Clive Hamilton

'Sometimes facing up to the truth is just too hard. There have been any number of urgent scientific reports in recent years emphasising just how dire the future looks and how little time we have left to act. But around the world only a few have truly faced up to the facts about global warming.' So writes Australian academic and public intellectual Clive Hamilton in his provocative new book, *Requiem for a Species*. Clive argues eloquently for people and governments to heed the warnings, take note of our human failings and be prepared to act now. Clive Hamilton is the author or co-author of the best-selling *Affluenza*, *Growth Fetish*, *Scorcher* and *Silencing Dissent*. One of Australia's leading thinkers, he is Charles Sturt Professor of Public Ethics at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, based at the Australian National University.

Saturday 11 September 2pm Conference Room at the Christchurch Town Hall.

Recovery or Revolution?

Economics increasingly rule our lives, but after the recent recession, and in the face of climate change, how can we be confident about what lies ahead? Do we need to change our economic ways? Is New Zealand doing all that it can or should? In this session, Marilyn Waring, Rod Oram and Clive Hamilton tackle the big issues.

Rod Oram has more than 30 years' experience as an international business journalist and a frequent public speaker on business, economics, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. Marilyn Waring is former National MP and now Professor of Public Policy at AUT. She is the author of the significant *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth*. Clive Hamilton, co-author of *Affluenza*, is Charles Sturt Professor of Public Ethics at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, at the Australian National University.

CHAIR: Colin Espiner is the political editor of *The Press*.

Sunday 12 September 9.30 am Conference Room at the Christchurch Town Hall.

Coming Events 3

Engineers for Social Responsibility

Jointly with Sustainable Energy Forum, NZ Centre for Sustainable Cities,
Institute for a Sustainable Society, Transition Aotearoa

12-13 November 2010, the country of New Zealand

Signs of Change

The organizers of this Signs of Change conference are seeking contributions from a wide range of society: engineers, scientists, business people, council workers, educators, students, transition town members ... The conference does not seek to discuss "what we should do" or "what we could do", but rather will be a show-case for examples of fundamental change that has been happening. Our perceptions and expectations of the future are shaped by our experiences. If we can see and hear about signs of change in a direction that is fruitful, restorative, respectful and sustainable, then it can become our reality.

We seek Change Report Papers, which can be prepared by any participant or observer, but must be rigorous in observation, measurement and description of the activity and provide an analysis and assessment of how this change is fundamental to the path-break to sustainability. The signs of change can be found in research, innovation, practice, governance, organization, social action or any number of areas.

Conference Design:

The meeting will last for two days in November 2010.

The meeting nucleus will be in Christchurch. The presentations will be given in Christchurch with live video feed to three hubs at universities in Dunedin, Wellington and Auckland.

There will be seven 20 minute invited keynote addresses at the opening of each session reviewing the state of change for the meeting topics:

- ➔ Energy,
- ➔ Transport,
- ➔ Environment,
- ➔ Society,
- ➔ Business,
- ➔ Governance/Law,
- ➔ Agriculture.

The remainder of the plenary presentations will be Change Reports selected by the committee from among the submitted abstracts. The Change Report papers will be 10 minutes in length. Change Report papers can be presented live in Christchurch, or they can be presented as produced 10 minute videos. There will be one presentation stream only so that all meeting participants share the same experience.

For more details, contact the Conference Organiser:

Associate Professor Susan Krumdieck, University of Canterbury [susan.krumdieck@canterbury.ac.nz]

or

<http://www.aemslab.org.nz>

Gazing at our GDP navel

This is an abridged version of an article by John McCrone that first appeared in the Christchurch Press on 10 July. You can read the full article at <http://www.sustainablechristchurch.org.nz/resources/thepressongdpandgpi.pdf>. The article reminds us there's more to progress than economic growth.

The traditional measure of a country's progress is its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita - the total of its economic activity, divided by the size of its population.

It is the dial on the dashboard telling us just how fast New Zealand Inc is moving towards the future. And governments shape their policies to nudge the needle ever higher.

But GDP is merely the sum of anything that results in a movement of money - dollars changing hands. So for example, floods and road accidents are a boost for national GDP because someone somewhere has to buy new carpets, or restock on bandages.

At the same time, GDP fails to measure much we might value. When someone stays home to look after the kids, or volunteers down at the homeless shelter, NZ Inc registers no benefit. The GDP needle does not even flicker.

It sounds like we ought to have a better measure of what counts as economic progress. A Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI).

From World War II until the late 1970s, GDP and GPI roughly kept track. Any expansion in economic activity registered directly as a general increase in reasons to feel good about life.

But from the 1970s, raw economic output has continued to soar while GPI has stagnated. Spinning the wheels faster has not necessarily been paying off.

"This is going to be very politically challenging, because if governments - both Labour and National - have been promoting economic growth beyond almost all else, and it can be shown that economic growth has not actually delivered improvements in wellbeing or any of the other indicators of real progress, then what the hell is it all about?" asks John Peet, a retired Canterbury University engineering professor and ecological economist.

Clive Hamilton, a professor of public ethics at Charles Sturt University says we really have been driving our economies using a false measure.

Hamilton says there are three kind of capital to consider when talking about increasing levels of wellbeing - the social, environmental and economic. And each needs to be properly costed to see if we are ending the year in credit, a step better off than the year before.

"If you're running down your environment to sustain economic growth - polluting your waterways, filling the atmosphere with greenhouse gases, chewing up your native forests - then that's a cost that has to be taken into account in any national measure of wellbeing.

"And you also need allow for any run down in social capital that follows from pursuing growth in a single-minded way - things like health, unemployment, drug-taking, gambling and unequal distributions of income." But Hamilton says it is as though we have created a voracious growth machine - a self-perpetuating monster - which has become quite detached from where we want to go.

"You have to ask who benefits from having GDP as our primary measure of national progress, and therefore the principle focus of government policy? And you have to say the answer is business."

Yet there is enough research to show that consumption is not what makes humans happy. Past a certain point, Hamilton says, a new pair of shoes, a bigger house, a flashier car, become just fleeting moments of gratification.

A recent report by Nobel laureate economists Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen, commissioned by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, centred on rethinking national measures of wellbeing. And there are others making moves as well. Statistics NZ has come out with its own analysis of GPI measures in a report entitled "Measuring NZ progress using a sustainable development approach".

Updates

Land & Water Forum

from the July 2010 Rural Bulletin published by Rural Women NZ

The Land and Water Forum of 58 organisations (21 of which form a working group), is to report to the government at the end of August. The Forum was asked to identify shared outcomes and goals for fresh water and related land management through a consensus process, and recommend reform of NZ's fresh water management.

It says it has looked at the rules of engagement and trust building, and it was surprising how quickly members began to realise that there was much they could agree on. It is now working on recommendations relating to quantity, quality, and governance, including the so-called "new water" (more efficient use of old water and water storage) with water being seen as an opportunity rather than a problem for NZers.

The Forum says it will be presenting a consensus around key points rather than a complete prescription for freshwater management. Points it makes now include:

- first-served doesn't serve any longer as a method of allocating water in a growing number of catchments;
- new water would have a key role in easing over-allocated resources; and
- security of supply can help engender more efficient use.

It gives an example of collaboration: what if a big storage facility was built in the Southern Alps foothills and the water was delivered under pressure in pipes to minimise evaporative loss so that upper-plain irrigators didn't have to pump up from 100 metres down, making large savings on electricity, raising hydro-lake levels, and the Canterbury Plain aquifers were recharged, so that lower-plain water users benefited from reduced pumping distances, and recharged aquifers benefited rivers.

Business as Usual

Abridged from the website of The Guardian in the U.K

The world's largest oil company is continuing to fund lobby groups that question the reality of global warming, despite a public pledge to cut support for such climate change denial, a new analysis shows.

Company records show that ExxonMobil handed over hundreds of thousands of dollars to lobby groups such as the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA) and the Heritage Foundation.

According to Bob Ward at the London School of Economics, both the NCPA and the Heritage Foundation have published "misleading and inaccurate information about climate change."

In its 2008 corporate citizenship report, published last year, ExxonMobil said it would cut funds to several groups that "divert attention" from the need to find new sources of clean energy.

Ward said: "ExxonMobil has been briefing journalists for three years that they were going to stop funding these groups. The reality is that they are still doing it. If the world's largest oil company wants to fund climate change denial then it should be upfront about it, and not tell people it has stopped."

A spokesman for ExxonMobil said: "Only ExxonMobil speaks for ExxonMobil and our position on climate change is clear. We have the same concerns as people everywhere, and that is how to provide the world with the energy it needs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We take the issue of climate change seriously and the risks warrant action."

Book Review

Common Wealth by Martin Large

Reviewed by John Adams

I approached this book with some enthusiasm since the subtitle spoke of moving towards a free, equal, mutual and sustainable society, and I enjoy learning about ways that communities and societies can be positively reformed for the long term benefit of ordinary people.

Large's analysis of society appears accurate. He suggests that there are three intersecting spheres of interest; the economy, politics and culture, centred on business, government and civil society respectively. His concern, which is supported by numerous examples, is that there is inequality between these three and that the political interest of government has deliberately or carelessly come to serve the economic interests of business to the exclusion of the cultural and community interests of civil society. His examples are generally drawn from the U.K. but no-one who has been in New Zealand in the last few years will fail to see the applicability here.

Any government that proposes to legislate in favour of business and the doctrine of economic growth over the needs of individuals, families, communities and the environment has clearly lost sight of the necessary boundaries that should exist between these three components of society.

However, the author's enthusiasm for his theme seemed to be at odds with reality at times. Few would argue that the financial world has suffered a series of international shocks in recent years and has been unquestioningly supported by governments who argue that the banks are too big to fail. And similarly, few in civil society will be happy with the bonuses paid to the bankers who have brought about this downfall. But to suggest that this signals the death of capitalism seems to me to be premature. Capitalism is all too well and strong and is supported by government the world over. We are not in a position to write the obituary just yet.

From a U.K. base in 2009 it may have looked as though the financial crisis, bankers bonuses, media monopolies and the MP expenses scandal signaled a major redistribution of power between the three spheres of society. Seen from the outside a few months later it is clear that big government and big business are mutually still very strong and civil society still relatively weak. There has not been the pressure for revolutionary change that Large suggested.

A good proportion of the book is dedicated to practical suggestions of how society might be transformed to re-establish appropriate boundaries between the three sectors of government, business and civil society. The author gives time to consideration of reform in democracy, land ownership, housing, the citizen's income and education. All laudable and coherent but, with the exception of the community housing model, all unrealistic in the current climate. Ordinary people have no ability to change the rules on democracy or create a citizen's income if their government is opposed to the idea. And, as Large's example show, governments are much more influenced by the dictates of business than by the wishes of voters.

If you want to write about ways to reform society it is important to start from where we are (capitalism is unhealthy, but not yet dead) and to suggest changes that can be implemented by those who stand to gain rather than relying on those who would lose their power. Similarly, the book appears to leave some very significant issues unconsidered. If we plan to make suggestions for the future structure of society, it is important to factor in the known challenges that will be faced. So a book about the economic future that fails to discuss Peak Oil and Climate Change has surely missed the point. I was disappointed that Large failed to pick up on the challenging question of economic growth. It is a mantra in most western countries yet it is logically unsustainable and is increasingly being questioned as the underlying principle of our economic model. Large has nothing to say on the question in this book.

So if "Common Wealth" ultimately failed to satisfy, where should the reader turn? My own suggestions are as follows. If your concern is in the combined powers of business and government to work against the benefit of real communities then "A Short History of Progress" by Ronald Wright is a timeless classic. His examples are drawn from all cultures and throughout history. The depressing story is the same; those with money and power cling on until they have destroyed the environment and opportunities for everyone. On the other hand, if you prefer to read about practical small scale steps that families and communities can take to redress the balance the Rob Hopkins in "The Transition Handbook" is the most optimistic I have seen.

Martin Large is justifiably worried that business and government are together conspiring to rob us of our future, but this book fails to get to the heart of the issue or to propose workable solutions.

Consultation

Draft New Zealand Energy Strategy and Draft New Zealand Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy.

The Minister of Energy and Resources has released the Draft New Zealand Energy Strategy and Draft New Zealand Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy for public consultation.

The two drafts are presented together in one document. They are available through the Ministry of

Economic Development's website in both html and PDF formats at www.med.govt.nz/energystrategy.

We encourage everyone interested in New Zealand's energy future to provide feedback on the drafts. Details of how to submit are on the website and in the document. Submissions must be received by 5pm, Thursday 2 September 2010.

We encourage you to forward this message to your networks.



We welcome comments and suggestions from readers of this newsletter.

Please email you thoughts to The Editor, John Adams on jrjandm@callsouth.net.nz

SOC information is at: www.sustainablechristchurch.org.nz

**SOC newsletter welcomes contributions, information requests
and topic suggestions from members.**

Views expressed in this Newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the SOC Committee.