

The Greens

Talk to Huntingtower School Year 10

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The Greens policy platform has four pillars – social and economic justice; environmental sustainability, democracy and peace and non violence.

Some of the issues you may know us for span these four pillars and include

- Protection and a fair go for refugees and asylum seekers
- Indigenous rights
- Protecting our natural environment – forests, rivers, oceans, coasts
- Quality health care for all – especially preventative health
- Quality education for all – especially increasing funding to ensure all schools are great schools
- Improving public transport
- Peace – out of Afghanistan
- Equal marriage – no discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, or gender identity
- Urgent action on climate change by transforming our economy into a safe climate economy

We aim to help bring into being an environmentally sustainable, personally fulfilling, socially just human presence on this planet.

We think long term: we ask ourselves will our children and grandchildren thank us for doing something?

And we know that all life on this planet is connected, that we are part of nature not separate from it.

As Greens we know we need to act about issues like child slaves in Ivory coast to produce the cocoa that goes into your chocolate, we care and think it's tragic that 90% of the large fish species in the world are virtually extinct, and that so many other species on land and sea are going the same way.

I'd like to share four stories with you relating to each of these four pillars that illustrate what the Greens are all about

Protecting forests and forming The Greens

The first one concerns what many people first think of when they think about The Greens – protecting our magnificent forests. It was pivotal to the start of the Greens. I was one of the founders of The Greens in Victoria, almost 20 years ago – a few years before you were born, so ancient history I know.

I'd been working in the environment movement as a forest campaigner, working for protection of East Gippsland's wonderful ancient forests, trees 600 – 800 years old, home to amazing wildlife so rare in other parts of Victoria – animals like the carnivorous marsupial the tiger quoll, and the long footed potoroo.

We'd been successful in our campaigns and had managed to get two significant national parks in the tall forests. But there was still a lot of priceless forest heritage outside the parks, which was due to logged, clearfelled, primarily to be turned into woodchips for paper.

So in the lead up to 1990 federal election we held protest actions in the forests to apply pressure to get more forest protected. It worked. The federal ALP government of the day was very keen to present themselves as

green. They negotiated with the state government to get the logging temporarily stopped. And reached an agreement to do studies after the election that we were confident would result in the forest being protected. I had a personal phone call from the Environment Minister of the day, Graham Richardson saying, 'Don't worry Janet, those National Estate forests will never be logged.'

Then came the election which Labor narrowly won. Then it turned out that a critical letter setting up the terms of reference for the studies so that they would result the forest being protected hadn't been signed by the Minister. Richardson wasn't the Minister anymore, we'd been done over, sold up the creek without a paddle.

I was furious. I realised from that day that we could never rely on the word of the old parties to protect our environment, they just weren't committed to it, and didn't see it as fundamentally important. It was just another political football to them. The only thing that might make them see it as important was when they started losing seats in Parliament because of Green issues. I realised we needed Greens in our Parliaments, like they already had in Tasmania by that stage, including Bob Brown and Christine Milne; politicians and a party who had the environment and social justice at its heart.

So I threw myself into forming The Greens, and 20 years on we've come a long way with now 9 senators and the seat of Melbourne in the Federal parliament. Winning Melbourne was a big breakthrough at the last federal election – we are on our way to not just 'keep the bastards honest' but to replace them. We have three upper house Members of Parliament in the state parliament, many more across the country. We have 19 Greens councillors in Victoria, and over 100 across the country. And thousands of members, and tens of thousands of supporters, and over a million voters.

Denticare

The second story I want to share fits under our social and economic justice pillar. I was a Greens councillor on Maribyrnong Council for 6 years, including being Mayor for a year. I got to know lots of residents of course, but one woman sticks in my mind. I knew her from before I was a Councillor – her kids went to my kids' kindergarten a few years before mine. She was much the same age as me but looked much older – and one day whilst chatting to her on the street I realised the main reason she looked older was that she didn't have any teeth. When she spoke she always had her hand over her mouth so you couldn't see her lack of teeth. I got chatting to her about this... she hadn't been able to afford to go to the dentist – so her teeth got more and more rotten. Finally after years on the waiting list she saw the public dental service and there was no hope for her teeth – they all had to come out. She'd had false teeth fitted but they didn't fit very well, and she couldn't afford to get another set. So she got by with no teeth. It limited what she could eat, it meant she was embarrassed every time she spoke to anyone – it marked her with the stigma of being poor. She was lucky she lived on a supporting parents benefit and in public housing – this is the sort of thing that makes it hard to get a job and rent a house.

So you can imagine how pleased I have been to see the success that Greens Senator Richard di Natale has had in getting Denticare adopted. – the first stages of including dental care as part of Medicare – it makes sense. We've managed to get half a billion dollars committed to Denticare – a downpayment on the approx. \$5 billion per year it is going to cost to have everyone able to see a dentist when they need to, the same way as they see a doctor. The good news is that it will also save the government money because there will be less money needed to treat other health problems that stem from poor dental health – it is estimated this is currently costing half a billion a year. This is economic justice too – thinking long term, not just about short term profits for already wealthy people.

Democracy – Global Greens

The third story relates to democracy. I've had the great privilege of being an Australian Greens delegate to the three Global Greens congresses, involving over 500 Greens at each from other 70 countries. The third one was

in Senegal in West Africa just 2 months ago. The overwhelming sense I've come home with from each time I've attended a Global Greens Congress is how precious our democracy is. In Senegal I met Frank Habineza, the President of the Greens in Rwanda – he's currently living in exile in Sweden since his vice president was assassinated. You might have heard that one of the things former Senator Bob Brown is going to do now he's retired is to accompany Frank back to Rwanda later this year as they attempt to get the Rwandan Greens up and running again.

We have a democracy that could be improved, but is basically pretty good – we need to make it work for us, to empower and facilitate people being involved in taking action on things that matter to them, and to be involved in politics to change the world for the better

Climate change

And finally related to peace, I want to talk about climate change. Climate change crosses all 4 pillars, and I could talk for hours about it – acting on climate change is my number one over-arching passion and motivation - if I had to pick just one issue that sums up why I'm in politics it would be that, because it's the future of humanity, of diversity of life on this planet that's at stake.

But why is climate change a peace issue?

Think of issues with refugees now, think of people fleeing wars now, think of famines and already climate change is playing a part, and is poised to play more. Already people in Bangladesh are suffering from sea water flooding into their farmlands; think of the millions of people around the world not being able to afford to buy wheat because the price has been high because of drought in Russia.

Just think what's going to happen when the Himalayan glaciers all melt and hundreds of millions of people in India and Pakistan have their water supplies stuffed up. And both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons. That's scary.

Wars are almost all about access to resources. If there's not enough food, and water to go around then people fight for access to what is there.

Why are China and India buying up vast swathes of Africa to grow food crops for their populations, throwing people off the land they have farmed for generations? It's their growing populations, but it's also to safeguard themselves as their land gets too drought stricken to farm

The science is clear.

Temperatures are rising, ice is melting, sea levels are rising and we're getting stormier and more extreme weather - more floods as well as more droughts because warmer air holds more moisture, so can dump more rain in shorter spaces of time. Who has been to the tropics and experienced a tropical downpour? You'll know what I mean if you have.

We are experiencing the biggest change in our environments, the biggest species extinctions for 65 million years and climate change is a big part of that. We are on track to making most of the world uninhabitable for humans.

This is what we are on track to do if we keep belching out 30 000 000 000 tonnes of CO₂ each year. That's 30 Gigatonnes

To give you a feel for how much that huge number is a small car weighs about a tonne. That's 30 000 000 000 small cars worth of CO₂ into the atmosphere every year. Each tonne would fill up a 25m long swimming pool. Line up those 30 000 000 000 swimming pools end to end and you'd get from the earth to the moon and back

975 times. That's a lot of CO₂, so it's no surprise that the concentrations have gone up from 280 ppm before the industrial revolution to almost 400 ppm now., and it's no surprise that our climate is changing. CO₂ acts as a blanket, keeping heat in –increasing its levels is like throwing another doona on your bed when you don't need it.

That's why we need to urgently reshape our economy and work collaboratively around the world to reshape the global economy to be a net zero carbon economy before it's too late. We can do it. The biggest barrier is getting community and political will to act.

We have to remember that the economy is a subset of the environment, and we are currently living beyond our environmental limits. If everyone in the world lived like Australians do at the moment we would need five earths. We are currently living the high life but not paying for it – the costs are all going on our global credit card – eventually we are going to have to pay the bills.

Other parties can say it's too expensive to act on climate change, that it will destroy our economy to shift away from coal and gas to renewable energy– but keeping on the way we are going at the moment is not an option. Sir Nicholas Stern showed comprehensively in his report to the British parliament that it's much cheaper to take action now to reshape our economy than leaving it till later, and have to deal with the economic and social consequences of droughts, floods, refugees, sea level rise. The carbon tax and the \$10 billion clean energy fund are good starts; other actions would be to remove the \$5 billion of subsidies that fossil fuel production and use currently gets in Australia and redirect that money to more productive and sustainable pursuits

That's what I'd like to end on – I've been motivated to spend big chunks of my life in Green politics because I want to make a difference. I want political power – to do good with that power, to share that power with the community and the environment and the future. We can create change in the world, and everyone can play a role. Including each and every one of you. If there are things in the world that you think need to change, then don't be a bystander – you can play a role in helping to get that change – to be the change you want to see in the world as Gandhi said

Unfortunately you can't vote yet – but Greens policy would let you – we reckon 16 year olds should be allowed to vote

This short talk has just touched the surface of what the Greens are about – I encourage you to go to the Greens website, and have a look there for more stuff, or friend me on facebook or follow me on twitter and stay in touch.

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