

## Canberra's Energy Future

*Canberra Conversation held on Thursday 26th of February at the ACT Legislative Assembly from 6-9pm.*

A Chorus of Women is a group of Canberra singers whose mission is among other things "to sing out in the theatre of life, commenting and telling what must happen".

This was the first in a series of conversations in which the group is seeking to engage citizens in the ACT in thinking together about the way forward in the context of the climate crisis and other environmental and social issues. The topic "Energy future" was chosen in an effort to "make some sense of all the information that comes with calls to use less energy, news about new technologies and proposals to develop new infrastructure."

The conversation was expertly facilitated by Dr. Janet Salisbury a member of the chorus, and it brought together a broad range of activists, ordinary citizens and people with special expertise in the field of energy including Dr. Hugh Saddler from Energy Strategies and Mr. Mike Johnson a former specialist in ACTEW-AGL

This series of conversations is a joint effort of the chorus with the ANU Climate Change Institute, whose Director, Will Steffen, made several valuable contributions to the discussion, pointing out that returning from Sweden, where public discussion is a central feature of civil society, he felt a relative lack of such opportunities in Australia.

The facilitator made it clear that this would be dialogue, not debate and got us all engaged in listening to other people in groups of two, four and eight as well as giving us time for social chit-chat over nibbles and well moderated plenary discussion. All of this was interspersed with musical presentations by the choir ranging from a piece called "I am Ethos" to a "Lament for Gaia" and concluding with a rousing rendition of "We are the weather makers", the chorus of which says:

*"We are the generation that needs to take a stand.*

*We are the weather makers, the future's in our hands".*

I found this an inspirational event; a nice balance between real dialogue on a topic on which we are all quite confused, and enjoyable social and cultural activity

Where should ordinary people put their own energy on energy? Some of the group, frustrated by the inadequacy of the Rudd government's carbon pollution reduction scheme want to put people pressure on the political process and to

urgently get on with the business of shutting down Australia's dependency on coal, if necessary by civil disobedience. There was recognition also in this to respect the needs of the thousands of Australians who have made our coal industry the centerpiece of our energy system.

Others want to focus on changing our current lifestyle in simple and obvious ways while awaiting the essential leadership that will give the climate challenge the priority it deserves and demands. Many people spoke of the need for access to reliable information about the costs and benefits of the various actions they can take.

In the final session, Janet invited us articulate our vision for a future Canberra.

I came away from the discussion, with the vision that if we could replicate the sort of openness, dialogue and imagination present at this first Canberra Conversation in SEE-Change groups across Canberra, our city could very rapidly change its energy profile

Bob Douglas

Chair SEE-Change ACT

27/2/09