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A CLEANER FUTURE? COAL, ENERGY AND THE NEXT STEPS

This issue of Watermark will explore what Pope Francis teaches us about care for creation, the current status of coal as an energy source and future directions in energy production.

POPE FRANCIS ON CARE FOR CREATION

In a letter written for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1, Pope Francis suggested that Catholics worldwide add two items to the traditional fourteen spiritual and corporal works of mercy. These two items are, firstly, care for our common home, and, secondly, peaceful, individual action to push governments to fulfil their commitments to those global environmental agreements aimed at mitigating human-induced climate change.

"If we look at the works of mercy as a whole, we see that the object is of human life itself and everything it embraces... Obviously 'human life itself and everything it embraces' includes care for our common home... Let me propose a complement to the two traditional sets of seven: **may the works of mercy also include care for our common home.**"

Pope Francis also reiterated the call to peaceful political action from the 2015 ecological encyclical *Laudato Si'*

"Economics and politics, society and culture cannot be dominated by thinking only of the short term and immediate financial or electoral gains... instead, they urgently need to be redirected to the common good, which includes sustainability and care for creation."

"We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.

Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature'

- Pope Francis

THE GLOBAL LOVE AFFAIR WITH COAL

40% Coal-fired electricity is responsible for producing of the world's energy

The coal industry employs millions worldwide



The environmental consequences of coal use can be **severe** and **often irreversible** and can include water overconsumption and contamination and habitat destruction.

Coal processing and consumption is responsible for more than **\$50 billion** in medical costs each year in the European Union alone.

RADIO NATIONAL: BEYOND THE COAL RUSH

In August and September of this year, ABC Radio National broadcast a three-part series, "***Beyond the coal rush***". This series investigated the current status of coal as an energy generator, some of the struggles against coal around the world, and the potential for a renewable energy future.

One of the struggles mentioned in the series is that of Sahli, a small village in central India. Many of the people living in Sahli are Gonds, indigenous people whose land rights are protected under Indian law. In 2011, an Adani PEKB mine, located only several kilometres from Sahli, was approved by the then-environment minister, Jairesh Ramesh. The mine location was in an area of forest important for wildlife habitat and rich in biodiversity.

Local villagers, working with Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment, challenged the decision. Chetu Ram (pictured below), one of the elders leading the campaign against Adani, said "we will not let them end our settlements like this... If our land is gone then our everything is gone."

In 2014, the National Green Tribunal overturned the minister's approval for the Adani PEKB mine, stating that in the decision too much value had been given to economic interests, to the detriment of thorough consideration of environmental interests. Adani has appealed the National Green Tribunal's decision with the Indian Supreme Court and a final outcome has not been reached.



Image by Areeb Hashmi

"Humans have massively speeded up geological time by burning coal. But we've been all too slow to wake up to what it means for the planet. It's hard for us to grasp the pace at which the physical world is changing"
- Tom Morton, narrator of '*Beyond the coal rush*'

LOCAL STRUGGLES AGAINST A GLOBAL ISSUE

Local struggles against transnational coal companies are not unique to India. In Palawan, an island in the Philippines, local communities of Narra and Aborlan, along with civil society groups, have been campaigning for several years to prevent DM Consunji Incorporated (DMCI) from building a coal-fired thermal power plant in the region.



Community members and environmentalists have stated their concerns about the risks associated with a coal-fired thermal plant, including damage to surrounding ecosystems, health risks to communities, and water pollution which would, in turn, affect the local fishing industry. Further concerns have been raised as to the track record of DMCI in terms of worker health and safety. For instance, in July 2015, nine mine workers were killed in a landslide in the coal mine of the Semirara Mining and Power Corp, a DMCI-subsiary. In March 2015, DMCI's Berong mine was fined Php\$120 million (AU\$3 million) for illegal road construction and river destruction.

Responding to these and other such incidents, National Coordinator of the Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment, Clemente Bautista, asserted, "DMCI operates several mining, power, and logging operations across the country, most having long records of forest denudation, water pollution, community displacement, and human rights violations."

Last year in September, Langogan Power Corporation (LPC) was granted a renewable energy contract in Palawan. This was celebrated by activists as a step towards a clean energy future away from coal power. A final decision on the DMCI proposal, is yet to be made.

A FUTURE FREE FROM COAL? COP21 - AN UPDATE

The April edition of Watermark summarised the key components of the COP21 Agreement which was reached in Paris in December, 2015. In order for the agreement to come into force, at least 55 countries who accounted for at least 55% of global greenhouse gas emissions were required to ratify.

The threshold was reached on the 5th October 2016, with 77 Parties out of 197 Parties to the Convention having ratified.

The ratifying group are made up of a number of low-lying nations (including the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands and the Maldives), industrialised nations such as New Zealand and France, and industrialising nations such as India and Argentina. Notably, Australia has yet to ratify the Agreement.



GLOBAL PROBLEM, LOCAL SOLUTIONS

POLLINATE ENERGY



Pollinate Energy is an organisation run by young Australians to bring sustainable energy access to urban communities in India. Pollinate Energy has established distribution networks in slums in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Kolkata. Local sales men and women provide door-to-door products including solar lights and cookstoves.

The effect of this is two-fold; firstly, it generates income for the salespeople (referred to as pollinators) and secondly it provides renewable, cheap energy for urban slum dwellers. So far, the organisation has reached over 42,000 customers, and saved a total of 2,010 tonnes of carbon dioxide.



COMMUNITY SOLAR PROJECTS IN AUSTRALIA

The Coalition for Community Energy (C4CE) estimates that, in 2015, there were 19 community energy groups operating in Australia, with a further 59 projects in development. A community energy group is an organisation which funds and runs its own (mostly solar) energy project.

In 2015, Repower Shoalhaven raised \$119,800 from its members and investors to pay for 400 solar panels which were installed on the Shoalhaven Heads Bowling and Recreation Club roof (below). Repower have three solar energy projects being developed for which more than \$200,000 has been raised.

Enova Community Energy Ltd is the first community-owned renewable energy retailing and installation business. Established in 2015 with the support of the Byron Bay Council, Enova provides 100% green power to customers and partners with community energy projects to buy energy and sell it back to the community.



MARKET FORCES

Market Forces is an Australian-based organisation established to expose institutions that are financing environmentally destructive projects and to help Australians hold these institutions accountable. The organisation campaigns and advocates to put pressure on banks, insurance companies, superannuation funds and governments to invest in projects that protect, not damage, the environment. Recently, *Market Forces* organised a National Divestment Day, in which hundreds of Australians turned out to close their accounts with the big four banks.

Participant Rachel Whiteley, an environmental science graduate and bush regenerator, explained her reason for being involved "The fact that the four major Australian banks have promised to help keep global warming under two degrees and yet still invested six billion Australian dollars into fossil fuel projects that cause warming shows that unless we take a stand, corporations will keep doing what they like. I chose to divest because I believe that by continuing to live the way we do now, our children will never get to see the Great Barrier Reef, or know what a quokka is... Aussie banks need to care about the future of their customers, and I don't believe that the big four banks are doing that".

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

[Listen](#) to the full audio of Radio National series "*Beyond the coal rush*":

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/search/?query=beyond+the+coal+rush>

[Join](#) others in taking action and add your name to the climate-related petitions at:

http://www.cana.net.au/taking_action

[Learn](#) more about your bank and how they may be making dirty profits:

<https://www.marketforces.org.au/banks-new/>

[Read](#) Sharyn Munro's study on how coal is killing Australia: <http://richlandwasteland.com/>



Image from Market Forces

A PRAYER FOR THE EARTH

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in your smallest of creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

- From *Laudato Si'*

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