

A change of pace

The significant national announcements on energy and water made over the last few months seem to signal that mainstream policy makers are now firmly grappling with a bigger, long-term picture of environmental changes. While there are arguments that not enough steps have been taken – particularly in relation to energy reforms – it is encouraging at least that we have new national initiatives to debate.

Opportunities have been missed of course, but small, initial steps seem understandable at the beginning of such a deep, multi-stakeholder, change process. It shows, in fact, that we do have a healthy government system that responds to the important signals emanating from non-government quarters. Let's hope that more cooperation on pressing issues might flow from the impetus of this start.

The Australia Institute's report in June suggesting that, for the latest available figures to 2001, Australia has the highest total per-capita emissions of any developed country (see page 3) should be a bit of a shock. According to the report we rank 27% higher than the next biggest emitter – the US – and behind European countries. The generally accepted understanding had us positioned behind the US, but this has apparently only been based on energy-related emissions. Being in this particular spotlight isn't great – our global responsibility is raised many notches, and we now need to re-assess our industrial, agricultural, and domestic habits.

More to be learned

On page 8, Steve Davidson reveals the little-discussed fact that Canberra's local catchments and water supplies have been devastated by the last fires. It may be over 30 years before local catchments fully recover. The Focus article *Burning issues for water supplies*, lays out the vulnerability of our water supply catchments to bushfire, and points to the requirement that we better understand and manage the ecological services that normally, unerringly, deliver clean, high quality water. This means re-thinking land clearing, general fire management and controversially, forestry in catchments.

The second Focus article, *Dried-up ideas: our changing approach to drought*, assesses our entrenched, traditional views of drought and describes how they are slowly evolving given the latest climate knowledge and drought policy re-thinking. According to climate scientists, drought may be worsening. How will we adapt to that pressure?

Another opportunity has opened for Australia to nominate its first ever winner of the Rolex Awards for Enterprise. On page 16, Julian Cribb profiles Gordon Sato's ingenious mangrove plantation project which is giving Eritreans a livelihood and new leaders. *Ecos* invites readers to consider their nominations for Australian Rolex Award candidates. We look forward to encouraging any of your nominees to apply to Rolex, and to supporting them through the magazine.



The Australia Institute's report in June suggesting that, for the latest available data to 2001, Australia has the highest total per-capita emissions of any developed country should be a bit of a shock.

Bi-monthly reading

This is the first bi-monthly issue of *Ecos*. We hope you enjoy the greater frequency of publication and notice a difference in the range of subjects we now cover. As always, please get in touch with your comments and suggestions.

Enjoy the issue.

James Porteous
Managing Editor

COMING UP

The following Focus topics* will feature in forthcoming issues. Topics for 2005 will be decided shortly.

* May be subject to editorial change

September–October (Issue 121)

- Leadership and governance for sustainability
- National infrastructure and its relevance to sustainability

November–December (Issue 122)

- Logging/Forestry issues
- Environmental flows