

Climate Action Summit 2010

Summary

Richard Hil

Preamble

The following is a record of some key conclusions, pointers, prompts and recommendations stemming from the Climate Action Summit held at the Australian National University, Canberra, 13-15 April, 2010. Inevitably in an activist conference that draws on principles of participatory democracy, it was always likely that this event was going to have its ups and down, challenges, and positive and negative outcomes. And so it proved. But to be part of this event was amazing, if only to hear the views and arguments of different organizational representatives and to learn about the challenges facing a fledgling national community-based organization. It was a privilege to witness the intelligence, clarity and conviction of some very focused and committed individuals. If the cerebral energy from the Summit could be harnessed into renewable energy there'd be enough power to drive the national grid.

The conclusions etc from the conference can be gleaned from the Summit's website; therefore I will not repeat them here. Additionally, I have gathered a considerable amount of material from the conference which I have lodged with Gecko. Over the three days I met a number of people representing an eclectic range of community organizations. Many commented on how delighted they were that Gecko had sent a representative to the Summit for the second successive year. (A number of participants spoke highly of Patrina for her involvement at last year's event, particularly in relation to the issue of population control). Gecko's membership of CANA was also warmly greeted.

In light of my experience at the Summit and from conversations with many participants it is my view that it is vitally important that Gecko continue to be part of this Summit as well as the conference organized by CANA. The former represents a disparate number of climate action community organizations, while CANA is essentially a forum for climate action groups. (This distinction is important as there are some tensions between the two camps and an attempt to bring the two conferences under one umbrella failed because of the feeling among some Summit members that certain groups in CANA might hijack the agenda). Nonetheless, Gecko's attendance at both events is especially important given that, as Senator Christen Milne

pointed out in her address, that civil society will have the most telling impact on the development of progressive government policies and that the climate action social movement should take a lead in proposing policies that will bring about the changes that are so urgently sought. (I was delighted, for instance, that the Summit voted in favour of a Carbon Tax even though there was some understandable concern among participants about the effects of this on certain social groups). There is certainly power in numbers especially when consensus decisions are reached about the ways forward in terms of meaningful environmental policy.

About 450 people registered for the conference, a little down on last year's attendance. As Patrina will have informed you of last year's inaugural Summit, the structure and decision making process can at first sight appear very confusing. It is impossible to attend everything, not least because the various streams and issues/skills workshops run concurrently. Essentially, there were 5 decision making campaign streams which included '100% renewables', 'coal campaigning', 'climate emergency', and 'vote climate'. Decisions regarding policy formulation relating to these streams were discussed further at a Campaign Stream Synthesis and then voted on at a plenary. The discussions at the plenary were often very heated but with a highly effective system of facilitation and voting it was possible to get through most proposals without too much blood being spilt. Again, the outcome of these decisions can be found on the Summit's website. It is worth noting that the discussions at the conference were such that proceedings went on from 9 in the morning through to 8 at night.

I have left a program of the summit with Gecko. This will give you an idea of the various topics and themes over the three days.

The main aims of this year's Summit were to:

1. Develop campaign priorities
2. Build the capacity of community networks
3. Build a network structure
4. Build skills/knowledge
5. Develop a comprehensive policy document

Here I will note the session I attended:

Saturday 13 March

9am - 11am: Welcome etc

11.30am - 1pm: Speakers: Damien Lawson (FOTE), Christine Milne (Greens)

2.30pm - 3.30pm: Campaign stream: Climate emergency

3.30pm - 5.00pm: Campaign stream: 100% renewables

5.15pm - 6.30pm: Plenary

Sunday 14 March

9am - 10.30am: Speakers: George Woods (CANA), Genevieve Kelly (NTEU), Ian Fry (Tuvalu negotiator at Copenhagen conference)

1pm - 2.30pm: Skills workshop: climate litigation

2.30pm - 6pm: Plenary

Monday 15 March

9am - 11.30am: Plenary/speakers: Bernard Keane (Crikey), Kate Lee (community organizer), Sam La Rocca (Change Agency)

11.30am - 1pm: Skills workshop: Building our base

Based on the above, I will highlight some key points that may be of particular significance to Gecko as it seeks to develop and build on its approach to climate action. These points will be put simply but should form the foundation for further discussion in Gecko, particularly in respect of the policies, strategies and tactics that will prove most effective in contributing to a national climate action campaign.

Main points

Federal election

1. The upcoming election requires community organizations to take steps to put pressure on local MPs to respond to the challenges of climate change by:

- Supporting the introduction of a carbon tax
- Continually making contact with MPs to promote messages on climate change (MPs must respond to their constituents)

- Participating actively in national climate action campaigns and active participation in the Climate Action Summit and CANA conferences.
- Contributing to building a broad-based social movement on climate action
- Support door knocking day

2. Suggestions on general strategies/tactics etc:

- Engage people face to face when talking about climate change
- Develop literacy on renewable energy and capacity of Australian governments to deliver
- Place less emphasis on campaigning and more on building support/volunteer base. This means welcoming volunteers, finding out and building on their strengths, and following through with support and encouragement.
- Think about 'organized power' realized through organized people and organized money
- Develop organized responses at seminars and conferences
- Attempt to influence debate on climate change: talk about 'war on young people', make denialists account for their positions; spell out the consequences of their arguments, bombard them with questions, get personal, make them accountable.
- Position climate scientists as rational and denialists as not
- Scientists need to play a more assertive role in getting their message across to the public
- Climate litigation is a very powerful tool for brining corporations to task but is very expensive, often unsuccessful. There have been some notable successes: climate risk report (changes to attitudes of some companies in respect of false/misleading claims), petitions to World Heritage Committee, amendment to operational guidelines at local government level, litigation in respect of Hurricane Katrina, legal actions in Europe relating to demonstrators (eg. in UK several activists who protested against the Kingsnorth power station were acquitted).
- Join Transition Decade Alliance – there was a lot of support for this movement at the Summit
- Use positive/simple messages about climate change where possible
- State that a greener world is more interesting, colorful, climate friendly, and cheaper than existing fuel sources
- Establish a local Granpower group (grandparents for climate action)

- Internationally the climate action movement should focus less on the US and concentrate on building a truly global movement. (Some positives emerged from Copenhagen not least that so many nations attended and that over 100 nations signed up to the Accord and have committed to making emissions cuts