 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk.2***

ABC Radio interview No.28 – 5 November 2019

**REDUCING THE USE OF PLASTIC**

Today I’m speaking to you from Adelaide Convention Centre where I’m attending the Annual Conference of the Environment Institute of Australia & New Zealand. The EIANZ is the professional association of those whose core discipline is environmental management and environmental science. I am amidst hundreds of the leading professional practitioners in the field from across Australia and New Zealand.

Drawing on what I’ve been absorbing from some of the presentations and being part of a conference organised so that its environmental footprint is reduced to the minimum, I thought that today I’d talk about **reducing the use of plastic**.

No one denies that plastic, which is a chemical product made out of petroleum, has been and is a very convenient commodity in modern society. We’ve all enjoyed its convenience. But we now know that there are some very serious down sides to the use of plastics. Many plastics don’t break down. They become waste, rubbish, that stays around for years. Some plastics break down into micro particles and become absorbed into the food chain of many creatures. Plastic pollution has become a true modern day curse.

I once visited Sabah, or as it was once known British North Borneo, which is now one of the states of Malaysia. Sabah is known for its wonderful, indeed extraordinary wildlife. But, sadly, much of its wildlife is endangered. Many listeners will have heard of the disappearing Asian Rhino, the threatened Orang Utang, the Proboscis monkey and the Giant Green Turtle. One of the most shocking things I’ve ever seen, during my visits to a chain of islands just off shore from mainland Sabah, was the hundreds of metres of washed up plastics (seemingly from every corner of the world) that ringed these islands. These same islands have for thousands of years been the breeding grounds of the Giant Green Turtles. But today they are threatened. We were shown these turtles struggling through the plastics that had washed up, having been drifting across the world’s oceans from the ‘advanced’ nations like Australia. We were shown how these turtles got caught up in the plastic waste, some became lassoed, some become strangled, some choke on the plastic. It was awful – a scene I’ll never forget.

In Australia, many places are trying to get rid of the use of plastic bags – some Council’s have actually declared their municipalities to be ‘plastic bag free’.

Most supermarket chains in Australia have moved away or are moving away from single-use plastic bags. As a community, I think we are getting better at taking one’s own reusable cloth bags for shopping. At last weekend’s Perfect Light Film Festival, guests were given by the sponsors reusable shopping bags to keep - emblazoned with their logos – but that was fair enough, still a useful gift. We are all seeing efforts by communities to reduce their use of plastics.

ABC TV’s own War on Waste series was really great in highlighting issues with plastic waste.

I was really pleased to see the recent State Landcare Conference in Broken Hill that the **CWA had made all the conference bags out of recycled colourful cotton cloth**. These cloth bags were used instead of the plastic satchels that used to be characteristic of all such conferences – so well done to the CWA!

So here in Adelaide at the EIANZ Conference there are:

* no conference bags;
* the pens we’ve been given are about 90% made out of cardboard and wood;
* the drinking cups are made out of recyclable cardboard;
* there are no plastic plates or utensils for the meals;
* people have brought and are using their own keep-cups;
* the Conference programme is received electronically onto your smart phone via the use of a QR scanner;
* all conference papers will be available electronically.

We’ve all heard about the curse of plastic straws, which are being banned in many places. One of the give-aways at the Conference is a little cardboard tube containing a pair of **reusable steel drinking straws and a straw cleaning brush**. This brush looks like a mini bottle washing. These steel straws can be reused time and time again, by simply washing and using the little brush.

On the flight down to Adelaide, the Rex in-flight Oct/Nov magazine “True Blue” has a feature article outlining how Rex has made a whole-of-company management decision to reduce single-use plastics. They’ve dropped individual plastic-wrapped sweets, they’ll no longer have polystyrene or plastic cups, plastic stirrers have been replaced with wooden ones. They’ve set up an internal review team to examine all uses of plastic and determine their phase out.

**Waste plastic recycled to become road material**

I also heard a presentation from Macquarrie Lakes Council which has adopted one of the most ambitious and impressive waste reduction schemes I’ve yet heard. Admittedly a big municipality with 209,000 people and so the Council has a big rate revenue, compared to Broken Hill, so they can afford to spend more. In the plastics area, they’ve formed a partnership with a private sector company that receives and sorts plastic waste and recycles bitumen. They combine both waste streams – plastic & bitumen – and process it to produce a road-surfacing material. So Council’s roads are now being sealed with a mix of recycled plastic.

**Negative change in the supermarkets with cling wrap**

But there has been a change for the worst in the supermarkets, which just about coincided with the removal of single use plastic bags. That is the heat-**sealed clear plastic wrappers now put around meat and many** **vegetables** and fruit. There seems to have been a massive increase in such plastics over the last couple of years. Why?

I’ve read that the supermarkets say it keeps food fresher and capable of being kept longer. They say there will be less food waste. But I think we’ve all got a responsibility to manage our food buying better – we should plan our food purchases better. We should use our purchasing-power to tell the supermarkets to reduce their use of plastic. For me, if it comes down to a choice between plastic wrapped food, leaving me with a plastic wrapper which will become waste, or fresh food that may go off and rot quickly and then become waste, I’d prefer the latter. At least food waste can be composted or put in a worm farm. Whereas the plastic wrapper will curse the environment for years to come.

**In conclusion there is much that we can all do as individuals, to reduce the harmful effects of plastic. We should all strive to be more vigilant. We need to change our community’s behaviour. We also need to make our purchasing-power voice be heard, so as to encourage the dropping of all non-reusable plastics.**

**The next public meeting of Landcare Broken Hill will be**

**at the Centre for Community, 200 Beryl Street, Thursday 28 November 7.00pm**

**when we will discussing the plans for *GREENING THE HILL MK2* in 2020**

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