 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk2***

ABC Radio interview No.52 – 20th May 2020

**Green economic recovery post COVID-19**

**New directions & fresh opportunities for Regional Australia**

**When Landcare’s Greening the Hill Mk2 initiative was launched thirteen months ago, a number of our projects were directed at better ways to manage the environment – aimed at achieving sustainable modes of living. Embedded in those projects are achievable economic opportunities for a place like Broken Hill. Now that we are all focussed on life after COVID-19, if we are clever all the proverbial “ducks should be lined up in a row” for us all to venture forth in new directions.**

**LESSONS LEARNT FROM COVID-19**

**But before we talk about these economic opportunities for Regional Australia, let’s focus on some lessons we’ve learned from COVID-19.**

**First, if disregard environmental care, we are at risk of harming life, particularly humankind. COVID-19 has caused incredible harm to humankind – it can be characterised as an instance of the consequences of environmental harm.** Both the 2003 SARS virus and 2019-20 COVID-19 are believed to have been caused by harmful pathogens passing from wildlife to humans. The World Health Organisation has confirmed that the most likely cause of SARS was an animal virus that passed from bats to civet cats in Guangdong Province in China. In the case of COVID-19, the most likely cause is another animal virus, quite possibly from bats again but this time passing to pangolins in Wuhan. The process may have been a case of natural evolution of the virus between the wildlife, but the danger to humans is when they adopt practices which expose them to animal viruses. In these instances, the Asian wet markets – where fresh wildlife meat is sold for human consumption – have been identified as the likely pathway of harmful pathogens from wildlife to humans. Whereas wildlife such as pangolins are considered to be endangered species by the international wildlife agencies, which are in urgent need of protection, pangolins are butchered in parts of Asia for traditional medicine and ‘bush’ meat. **The lesson to be learnt: protect, rather than exploit, the natural environment.**

Secondly, whereas COVID-19 has been undiscerning in its capacity to infect all people - whatever their location, ethnicity or social-economic status – it is apparent that the most vulnerable are those unable to easily adhere to high levels of cleanliness, such as in the slums of some nations like Brazil, and those whose living conditions are characterised by higher density. The more challenged one is to achieve social-distancing, the more vulnerable are such people. Consequently, the most concentrated urban communities have been most vulnerable to rapid spreading of the virus. The more a country is characterised by giant cities, like New York, the more vulnerable they are to a pandemic. **The lesson to be learnt: pursue policies that disperse the population by a process of regionalisation. Create and foster regional centres.**

Thirdly, if we work together in a coordinated fashion, we have proved how effective we can be in achieving good outcomes. If we put aside rivalry, particularly political rivalry, we can sensibly work towards overcoming our problems. I think the National Cabinet that was created to address COVID-19, comprising the PM, Premiers and Chief Ministers, has been a magnificent initiative, akin to a wartime cabinet, whereby our political leaders chose to work together and the result has been laudable. By contrast, in the USA and in Brazil, where the respective administrations have been chaotic with differing levels of government out-of-step with each other, with the States at loggerheads with the Central Governments, the result has been escalating human tragedy. **The lesson to be learnt: even in the face of the greatest challenges, if we work together determined to achieve shared outcomes, putting aside parochial partisanship, we have the capacity to succeed against adversity.**

**Takeaway messages**

**So the takeaway messages: (1) respect and protect the environment; (2) support the strengthening of regionalisation initiatives; and (3) provide real leadership by adopting co-ordinated and cooperative policies.**

**Embracing these three messages, how do we move forward?**

**A GREEN ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

On Monday this week, 18 May, the **Australian Sustainable Finance Initiative**, which is a joint venture of the big four banks, major insurers, super funds, asset managers and financial regulators, released a major statement, its first since COVID-19, in which its members collectively argued that simply throwing money at old forms of infrastructure was no longer appropriate.

Australia’s major banks, insurers and superannuation funds urged a radical rethink in how to steer the economy out of the pandemic-induced economic crisis, calling for stimulus measures that are consistent with the Paris Agreement climate targets.

Quoting from an **Australian Financial Review** article: “Instead an innovative approach was needed that accepted the science of climate change and made sure any infrastructure or other stimulus spending would solve rather than contribute to the problem of global warming. It urged governments and businesses to view the pandemic as a taste of the sort of shocks climate change will bring, and to take the opportunity to learn from it so they are prepared for the next shock”.

"Global voices from business, civil society and finance have begun calling for a recovery that responds to two critical crises: the social and economic upheaval of this global COVID-19 pandemic as well as the rapidly accelerating impacts of climate change."

The ASFI referred to a report released last week by Oxford University which recorded the outcome of a survey of more than 200 global central bankers, G20 finance ministries and academics from across 53 countries.

"The report concludes that recovery packages should ensure alignment to Paris Agreement commitments and set the pathway to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

"When assessed, the most economically effective policy levers open to governments responding to the economic crisis are also those addressing the climate representing dual benefits for our economy, dealing with both short- and long-term challenges."

**BACK TO BROKEN HILL**

Landcare Broken Hill’s ***GREENING THE HILL MK2*** projects included a focus on stimulating renewable energy; water conservation measures; the reduction of waste and better management of it; the reuse and recycling of materials (especially organic material) to provide an essential resource for horticultural purposes – in both the home yard and on a large scale with our proposed regional-scale native plant propagation nursery.

**So let us connect the dots.**

1. Broken Hill is a major regional centre, connected to capital cities via the transcontinental railway and major highways. (But our airport really needs upgrading)
2. The district has an abundance of renewable energy capacity – currently with one of the Nation’s largest solar plants & one of the largest wind farms. We are in the natural epicentre of some of the most intense solar conditions in the country providing a perfect opportunity to significantly expand.
3. The dry atmosphere is perfect for industrial activity, including storage of product, that needs to avoid rusting processes (with salty air being a curse in all our capital cities except for Canberra). What about dismantling and recycling aeroplane parts in Broken Hill?
4. The district has vast tracts of land within easy reach of the City. All that is needed is for Government decision to make more land available. Compared to any Australian capital city, the price of land in Broken Hill is literally dirt cheap.
5. From a security perspective, we are conveniently remote from major population centres. Such a security characteristic may be an advantage for some industries.
6. These location and space characteristics lend themselves to new industries which might be problematical close to existing major urban centres.
7. The housing in Broken Hill is cheap compared to all Australia’s capital cities and we have excellent health care facilities and many great schools.
8. The Nation has a waste disposal problem. This waste problem should be seen as a resource recycling opportunity. (On 28 February 2020 the Victorian Government released its new $300 million Circular Economy Strategy, a 10 year plan, creating 3,900 new jobs. Specifically for Regional Victoria: there will be also $14.6 million to support local projects that boost recycling, reduce littering and take advantage of economic opportunites to reduce waste in regional communities). What is NSW doing???? **Let us become a recycling hub for NSW**, or Australia. If anyone thinks the distance might be a problem, well they used to ship our waste to China and Indonesia!
9. There are many **good precedents** for start-up recycling industries, such as the soft plastic recycling business in Mildura making railway sleepers and other products out of domestic plastic bags.
10. We should become a **manufacturing hub**, that relies upon and leads to an increase in our local renewable energy production. Avoid the transmission problem of taking the power away o the national grid, let’s convince government to allow its use here.
11. We should be incentivising raw material producers to **process their material here**. A perfect example would be to incentivise Cobalt Blue to not only extract their resource from the ground, but to also value-add the processing of the raw material.
12. Finally, let us all really get behind creating a **major Arid Zone horticultural centre**, with Landcare Broken Hill overseeing the growing, at commercial scale, plants in the 100,000s for planting not just in this City and this region, but in arid zones generally, so that we can supply the plants to create significant carbon sinks with the hardy plants acclimatised to harsh conditions

**Landcare Broken Hill’s public meetings have been cancelled for the foreseeable future due to COVID-19.**

**All Landcare Broken Hill’s on-the-ground projects have been deferred until further notice, although ‘backroom’ planning and preparation continues.**

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