

The Australian Advocate

Shining Light Where Other's Won't

HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINT AFTER POST-BONDI RESPONSE

By Rob Mellett

IN the wake of the Bondi terrorist attack, Shooters Union Australia has submitted a formal complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

It claims that the Federal Government's recent measures on firearms unfairly target lawful gun owners without addressing underlying security issues.

The organisation argues that changes to firearms legislation and the introduction of a national buy-back scheme will disproportionately affect nearly one million Australians who own guns responsibly, while failing to enhance public safety.

Shooters Union Australia President Graham Park stated that lawful firearms owners were being blamed and penalised despite having no connection to extremism.

'Punishing farmers, sport shooters and recreational firearms users for the actions of terrorists is unjust, discriminatory and completely ineffective,' Mr Park said.

'These Australians are already heavily vetted, tightly regulated and overwhelmingly compliant. They are not the cause of terrorism, and none of the measures would have prevented the Bondi attack.'

The complaint highlights potential human rights violations, including discrimination, lack of procedural fairness, forced loss of lawful property, and the stigmatisation of a lawful section of the community.

'Nearly one million Australians are being targeted because they are politically convenient, not because they present a risk,' he said.

'Lawful firearms ownership may be regulated, but that does not strip people of their right to fair treatment, meaningful consultation, or protection from being punished for crimes they did not commit.'

Additionally, the filing criticises the expedited and inadequately prepared nature of the reforms, pointing to insufficient consultation with those impacted or their representatives.

'Legislation of this scale should not be rushed through without proper scrutiny, evidence or consultation,' Mr Park said.

'Excluding affected communities from decisions that directly impact their livelihoods, property and lawful activities is negligent and unacceptable.'

Read more page 2



'Terrorists do not surrender weapons under buy-back schemes..'

BRISBANE

New Olympic Stadium

AT WHAT COST?

Read Story Page 3

FIREFIGHTERS

Fighting 'Blind'

WHAT IS THE THREAT?

Read Full Story Page 7

NEW RULES FOR TASMANIA'S SMALL PRODUCERS

The consultation period for Tasmania's proposed Primary Produce Safety (Horticulture Produce) Regulations 2025 closed in December, leaving small-scale growers facing an anxious wait.

As harvest season peaks, producers are watching

closely to see whether the state government will deliver on promises to tier the new rules – a move many say will determine whether their businesses remain viable.

Draft regulations released by Biosecurity Tasmania in late 2025 set out a one-size-

fits-all compliance regime, placing micro-growers of leafy greens, berries and melons under the same regulatory framework as large commercial operations.

READ FULL STORY PAGE 2

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HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINT AFTER POST-BONDI RESPONSE

By Rob Mellett



‘Terrorists do not surrender weapons under buy-back schemes, and they do not abandon violent intent because compliant civilians are further restricted.’

‘These measures are symbolic, not effective, and they divert attention from intelligence failures and existing powers that were designed to address terrorism.’

‘Australians expect their government to respond to terrorism with competence and fairness.’

‘Targeting innocent people may look decisive, but it undermines public trust and does nothing to make the community safer.’

Can small growers survive Tasmania’s new produce rules?

By Rob Mellett



THE submission period for the Primary Produce Safety (Horticulture Produce) Regulations 2025 closed in December, leaving Tasmania’s small-scale producers facing months of uncertainty.

‘It perplexes us somewhat that this really could have been in the draft regulations to start with,’ Ms Robinson said.

She said that the approach ignored the financial reality of artisanal agriculture.

‘It just doesn’t make sense, both based on the commensurate level of risk, but also the business model itself in terms of the low level of income across each of those product types,’ she said.

The proposed regulations involve a fee structure that many small growers argue is disproportionate.

For a new grower starting out at a local market or on social media, the initial costs for accreditation and licensing can exceed \$650 before a single sale is made.

Ms Robinson argues that these costs, combined with the time required to manage the paperwork, could force current growers to quit.

‘For some of them, it would be the thing that would make them take a very long, hard look at their business model and whether it was worthwhile continuing,’ she said.

The government maintains these rules are necessary to prevent foodborne illnesses like salmonella and listeria, citing national outbreaks that occurred between 2011 and 2019.

However, Ms Robinson points out that these incidents have almost exclusively been linked to large-scale, industrial processing systems rather than small, local farms.

‘We actually haven’t had any [foodborne illness] episodes from small-scale farming production systems,’ Ms Robinson said.

‘Most of the outbreaks... were from larger-scale farms where they have multiple people involved, and inherently more risk.’

She suggests that rather than a ‘punitive approach,’ the government should focus on ‘proactive education and support’ for small growers and consumers alike.

Beyond the commercial growers, there is a risk to the informal ‘cyclical production of food’ that defines many Tasmanian towns. Under the current draft, a person providing surplus basil to a local cafe would technically require accreditation.

‘If you pass [basil] on to a friend who runs a cafe and they use your bunches of basil on their pizza... that producer is meant to be accredited,’ Ms Robinson said.

‘It would be a real shame [to lose that].’

As the government reviews the submissions made in December, Ms Robinson says the sector is under significant pressure.

‘There’s been a lot of stress within the small-scale producer sector. Reading regulation and understanding it is not something they have to do every day.’

The outcome of this review could determine whether Tasmania maintains its diverse agricultural landscape or moves toward a system where, as Ms Robinson warns, ‘we have all our eggs in one basket.’



DR. ANN TENNAE PHD

SHE doesn’t attend press conferences. She doesn’t do photo ops. And she certainly doesn’t care about buzzwords.

Dr Ann Tennae is The Australian Advocate’s miniature correspondent, reporting on national issues from the ground up – literally. While others analyse politics from podiums, Ann observes what happens when policies land in the real world.

From government decisions and environmental misadventures to community quirks and national obsessions, she has a knack for noticing the small details that reveal very large problems. Grand announcements make her suspicious. Unintended consequences? That’s her beat.

Ann’s columns are playful, pointed, and occasionally uncomfortable – especially for those who prefer their scrutiny abstract and their accountability theoretical. She doesn’t shout, moralise, or editorialise. She observes, connects the dots, and leaves readers thinking – often uncomfortably.

Read Dr Ann Tennae’s latest column on page 9

The Australian Advocate

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ICONIC PARK TO CLOSE IN MAY FOR STADIUM

By Rob Mellett



BRISBANE's Victoria Park precinct – a must-visit location for sporting joy, family picnics, and community bonds – will close at the end of May this year.

As bulldozers loom to build the \$3.8 billion Brisbane 2032 Olympic Stadium on the park which was gazetted in 1875, locals are mourning the loss of an accessible oasis, traded for a fleeting Games spectacle.

Now, the Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority (GIICA) and Brisbane City Council have slapped a notice of vacant possession, clearing the decks for the 63,000-seat stadium – a 'Queenslander'-inspired behemoth with semi-open verandas, natural ventilation, and a wrap-around LED rooftop, designed by COX Architecture, Hassell, and Azusa Sekkei.

Early works like geotechnical drilling are already scarring the site, but the legal battle for the park's future has reached a critical juncture.

On January 14, Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt declined a Section 9 emergency declaration to halt drilling, opting instead to appoint an independent facilitator to work with the state and Traditional Owners.

While this allows immediate works to proceed, Save

Victoria Park maintains the fight is far from over.

'Section 9 is for emergency intervention only,' Save Victoria Park spokesperson Rosemary O'Hagan said, noting that three Section 10 applications for permanent protection are still being evaluated under a different legal test.

Yagarabul elder Gaja Kerry Charlton described the plan to build a 'great, big, metal cement building' on the site as 'disrespectful colonial violence.'

The land was a site of forced displacement and killings of Aboriginal people in the 1840s-1860s.

Building a stadium on a site where camps were burned and Elders were killed is seen as a repeat of the 19th-century displacement.

David Hinchliffe, former Councillor for Brisbane Central Ward (1988-2012), Deputy Mayor (2004-2008), and Chairman for Parks (1991-2004), said the concept designs were 'classic "green washing".'

Drawing on his decades in politics and artistry, he warned: 'There is absolutely no way on earth anything like these extravagant artist concepts will ever be constructed in concrete and steel in Victoria Park.'

'This is government simply pulling the wool over the public's eyes. We know the very first things that will be dropped in any construction will be the "green" bits. It doesn't take Einstein to work out this stadium will go massively over budget.'

Mr Hinchliffe said the plans clash with priorities: 'In no way shape or form do these plans align with the community's aspirations. They also don't align with what was agreed to by the International Olympic Committee... It's fast turning into the most environmentally destructive and financially incompetent Olympics in the modern era.'

'A number of infrastructure and engineering experts... estimate that 66 percent of the park will be destroyed... All that will be left will be patches of trees – not a cohesive park. Many of the trees are more than 300 years old – pre-dating the early colony of Brisbane.'

'The major legacy will be the carve up of one of the most historic heritage listed green spaces... The stadium will become a very ugly costly white elephant... parks are forever once this park is gone it's gone forever.'

In a May 2024 plea to then-Opposition Leader David Crisafulli, Save Victoria Park and allies urged no stadium and protective legislation.

Mr Crisafulli said: 'The LNP will immediately appoint an independent Olympic Coordination Authority... prioritise roads and rail... use existing venues (this means no new stadiums like the Victoria Park proposal)... achieve this with a funding envelope that is no greater than what is currently on the table.'

Mr Hinchliffe said the government should honour its commitment to repurposing existing sporting facilities such as the Gabba: 'If politicians want to break their promises... then they should look at a flat brownfield site... the best example of that is the massive area in Hamilton next to the Brisbane river.'

'Books will be written about the decisions made for the 2032 Olympics – the books will be about how not to plan an Olympics.'

He said Queensland's Deputy Premier, Planning Minister Jarrod Bleijie was wrong when he called those who want to save the park 'loopy'.

'Bleijie is a poor man's Trump... he resorts to name-calling rather than dialogue. He is beneath contempt,' Mr Hinchliffe said.

Locals dread the ripple effects of the stadium: parking woes could gridlock Herston and Butterfield streets, already choked during hospital shifts and events, with rat-running through quiet suburbs. Noise from functions, fireworks, and the unmitigated Inner City Bypass threatens wildlife – despite Master Plan goals for habitat corridors.

Activist Jonno Sri, a vocal Brisbane ex-councillor, warned of the financial pain to come: 'The phenomenal cost of this stadium is going to be borne by taxpayers in the form of asset sales and cuts... we're seeing hospital projects delayed. We're seeing school projects delayed... these stadiums are hurting, going to hurt Queenslanders right across the state.'

'The destruction of public green space, of course, is

lamentable and reprehensible... particularly this site, which is of such huge significance to First Nations people, it's very clear that it should be protected.'

'It's really important for people to protest and to push back... governments need to pay a political penalty... the LNP were very clear. Before the last election, they promised repeatedly that they would not build new stadiums in Victoria Park, and... they broke that promise.'

'We do not need to host the Olympics at all, and if we are set upon hosting the Olympics, we can do so without building any new stadiums... there's no reason that more athletics events couldn't be held, for example, at Carrara stadium... the QSAC site at Nathan with some minor improvements, could be perfectly serviceable... sites like that could be repurposed, but... we would be better off using the land and construction resources to build public housing and schools.'

'The thing that makes Brisbane different is its natural green spaces... the level of biodiversity, the level of tree canopy cover in Brisbane, that's actually what sets Brisbane aside... whether Brisbane has a big new stadium or not isn't going to make very much difference to tourists, because tourists are coming here to connect with nature.'

'The LNP are getting a little arrogant if they think that the majority of Queenslanders are on their side.'

Read about the Human and Cultural Cost of Olympic Stadiums Page 4



Hon David Crisafulli - LNP

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THE HUMAN AND CULTURAL COST OF OLYMPIC STADIUMS



criticised for accelerating gentrification and erasing much of the city's industrial history.

TOKYO 2020: faced scrutiny for both its social and environmental impacts. The construction process led to the destruction of housing for the elderly and utilised timber that contributed to tropical rainforest loss, resulting in a heavy ecological footprint and the erasure of the architectural legacy from the 1964 Games.

SEOUL 1988: remains one of the most extreme examples of displacement in Olympic history, with 720,000 people forcibly moved from their homes. This was part of a state-led 'city beautification' campaign that focused on demolishing poor districts to present a more polished image of the city to the world.

ATHENS 2004: left a legacy of financial and urban struggle. The games resulted in the loss of vast tracts of public land to private developers, ultimately creating a series of 'white elephants' – expensive, specialised venues that fell into dereliction shortly after the closing ceremonies.

ATLANTA 1996: significantly altered its urban core by demolishing 2,000 public housing units. This move led to the forced displacement of roughly 6,000 low-income residents, highlighting the tension between Olympic hosting duties and the preservation of affordable housing.

BEIJING 2008: saw a massive transformation of the city's landscape, but it came at a steep human cost. Approximately 1.5 million residents were displaced as ancient Hutong neighbourhoods were razed to make way for modern Olympic infrastructure, effectively sacrificing centuries of cultural heritage for the sake of rapid modernisation.

RIO 2016: was marked by significant social tension, particularly regarding the destruction of the Vila Autódromo favela. This move was largely driven by real estate speculation, which prioritised high-end development over the established community rights of local residents.

LONDON 2012: focused its redevelopment on the East End, resulting in the removal of over 200 small businesses and various social housing projects. While the area was revitalised, the outcome was

The 'revolving door' : a threat to Australian democracy

By Rob Mellett

MORE than one in four former ministers or assistant ministers have moved into roles with special interests since 1990, according to landmark research by the Grattan Institute.

This so-called 'revolving door' – the transition from public office to lobbying or industry positions – threatens the integrity of decision-making and public trust, warns Kate Griffiths, a public policy expert at the Grattan Institute.

'Policy makers should be listening to those with the best ideas, not simply those with the right connections,' Ms Griffiths said.

Grattan's 2018 report, *Who's in the Room? Access and influence in Australian politics*, confirmed what many Australians long suspected: money and history buy a seat at the table. The study found that lobbying firms employing former government officials are significantly more successful at securing

'For example, at the federal level, there are restrictions on post-ministerial employment under the code of conduct for ministers. But the Code is enforced by the Prime Minister, and the only sanction explicitly provided for is loss of ministerial duties, which of course means nothing to a former minister.'

To fix the system, Grattan suggests an overhaul of oversight. Ms Griffiths argues that 'potential breaches should be independently



'The revolving door between politics and lobbying roles is unfortunately really common in state and federal politics,' Ms Griffiths said.

'When public officials and political staffers move directly from a position of great public power and trust into a lobbying role for a private interest, it undermines the integrity of the parliamentary system.'

Grattan's research highlights three critical risks that emerge when the line between public service and private profit blurs: anticipatory policy – public officials might make decisions with a view to their future employment; information trading – they might trade on privileged information after leaving public office; the 'cosy' factor – personal relationships providing privileged opportunities to influence.

meetings with senior ministers.

In industries like gambling and property development – which the report found to be 'hugely over-represented' relative to their economic contribution – this access is a powerful tool. When the 'right people' are in the room, the public interest often ends up out in the cold.

While federal codes of conduct exist to prevent ministers from lobbying on portfolio-related issues for 18 months post-office, the system is functionally broken. Currently, the Prime Minister acts as both judge and jury for breaches of the Ministerial Code.

'Existing rules around the revolving door are often meaningless or unenforceable,' Ms Griffiths said.

investigated' by an arm's-length body rather than a political peer.

In a 2019 submission to a Senate inquiry, Grattan outlined even tougher measures: denying Parliament House access to those who breach the rules and imposing penalties for those who facilitate these breaches.

Ultimately, the goal is to slow the 'golden escalator' that takes politicians from the front bench to the boardroom. As Ms Griffiths puts it, enforcing these restrictions requires a cultural shift: 'The cooperation and commitment of governments and political parties in denying access.'

Until then, the door continues to spin, and the public's trust continues to fall.

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RIGHTS IN RUINS AS EX-PREMIERS SOAK UP CASH

By Rob Mellett

IN the aftermath of Australia's covid lockdowns – when GDP plunged a record 7 percent in mid-2020, and unemployment spiked to 7.4 percent amid forced closures and border barricades – the premiers who ruled over us in those dark times have now leapfrogged into million-dollar corporate sinecures.

They now rub shoulders with mining magnates, telecom giants, and global consultants, pocketing salaries that dwarf the average Australian's wage while avoiding a reckoning for the human and economic toll during the lockdown years.

This pivot from public 'sacrifice' to private windfall exposes an accountability vacuum in Australia's governance which demands an immediate reform: a federal Human Rights Act (HRA) to shield citizens from future overreach.

The Universal Periodic Review was showcased at the United Nations Human Rights Council in January, where Australia's patchy rights record faced global scrutiny and showed how the push for an HRA has never been more urgent.

Bill Rowlings OAM, CEO of Civil Liberties Australia (CLA) and a veteran journalist who advised ministers in government communications, doesn't mince his words on the 2020-2022 debacle.

'The covid laws lacked any mechanism for independent, external judicial review of those "emergency supremo" decisions. Australia still lacks a comprehensive "bill of rights" like those in Canada, the UK, New Zealand, or the US.'

'You have no rights if there's nowhere to contest breaches, no impartial court to enforce justice. During covid, appeals looped back to the same bureaucratic overlords who stamped out your freedoms – your job, your business, your suburb's mobility, even your right to leave the country. There was no fair go. We saw suburbs locked down like prisons, families barred from aged care visits or funerals, and arbitrary edicts that

defied logic.'

Civil Liberties Australia's Universal Periodic Review submission demanded that 'Australia enact a Human Rights Act within two years, review and amend existing laws to ensure human rights compatibility, advance Human Rights Acts in all states and territories, develop a transparent national human rights indicator index, and commit to best practice human rights education to promote a national human rights culture.'

Mr Rowlings highlighted one typical travesty during the years of 2020-22: the Australian golf green-keeper denied exit from the country to claim a prestigious job in Germany, where his fiancé awaited their wedding – despite Germany welcoming arrivals and Australia desperately needing repatriation flights.

'Two appeals to the same body that rejected him initially? No valid reason existed, yet he was trapped. That's "emergency" control gone berserk,' he said.

Mr Rowlings insists that era's scars demand twin reforms. 'First, embed appeal clauses in all emergency acts and regulations, granting citizens swift review of any decision that unreasonably hammers them individually. If that produces a flood of appeals? That would be a red flag the controllers botched it badly – remember those suburbs-wide lockdowns or funeral bans that covid produced?'

'Second, enact a federal Human Rights Act (HRA) in 2026 to enshrine protections for all – individuals and groups – beyond pandemics. Did you know Australia has no explicit right to free speech, just an "implied" one for political comment? Post-covid, emergency laws remain unrevised, and we're still without an HRA, despite overwhelming backing by the people.'

That support is quantifiable and post-pandemic: Amnesty International surveys reveal 73 percent of Australians want rights entrenched in federal law; 87 percent of

submissions to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (PJCHR) inquiry endorsed it.

Leading the charge are the Human Rights Law Centre, Amnesty, CLA, and 150+ social justice groups declaring 2026 the 'Year of Human Rights for Australia.'

Bolstering this, the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) began the process with its four-year Free+Equal review, released December 2023, which urges a national HRA to modernise protections, with a model bill outlining enforcement via courts and duties on public authorities.

The PJCHR's 15-month inquiry, concluding May 2024, echoes this with its own draft Human Rights Bill 2024, recommending rights like freedom from torture, cultural participation, and environmental health – plus cost protections for litigants and consultations with Indigenous peoples.

Three jurisdictions already have HRAs: ACT (2004), Victoria (2006), Queensland (2020). Notably, only the ACT retained government post-'pandemic' – and it never

suspended rights, later empowering individuals with low-cost conciliation and tribunal access.

'The ACT's post-covid tweaks amplify individual power,' Mr Rowlings said. 'Rights can go to quick, cheap resolution, escalating only if needed.'

A core peril of emergency laws, he warns, is appointing 'command-and-control' types – police chiefs or military brass – as enforcers.

'Their mindset is obedience or punishment, bred from careers in hierarchy. But crises demand balance: you can "live" under lockdown, but without liberties, it's no life. Both reforms are essential – appeal mechanisms in emergency laws and a baseline HRA for all issues. Without them, we're ripe for repeat abuses.'

Attorney-General Michelle Rowland's impending report on HRA plans looms as a litmus test.

Yet, as Australians grapple with lingering economic scars – over 20 percent of small businesses never reopened, per ABS data – these ex-leaders thrive.

The Great Premier Cash-Out: Power, Pensions and Private Profit

These gilded exits aren't anomalies – they're the system. Without an HRA, Australians remain vulnerable to whims of power. As Ms Rowlings urged:

'2026 must deliver rights, not rhetoric.'

Further details on each former premier's post-political roles can be found on page 6

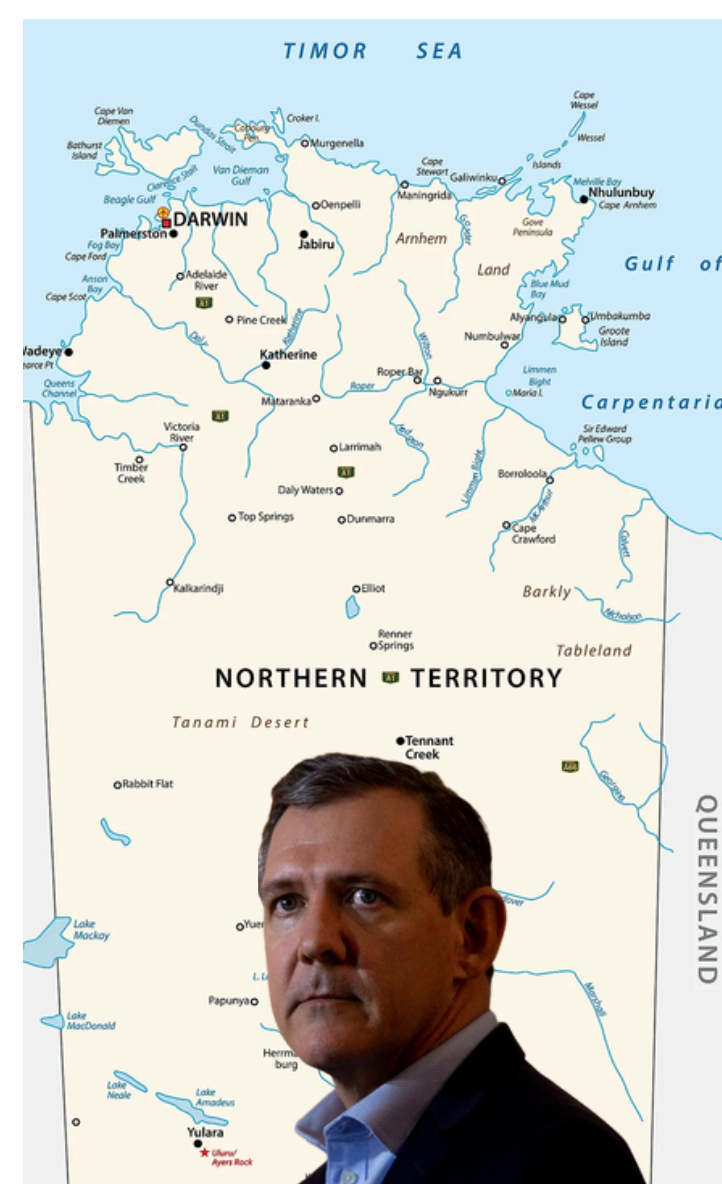


Daniel Andrews



Dominic Perrottet

Gladys Perejikian



Michael Gunner



Mark McGowan



Anastacia Palaszczuk

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The Great Premier Cash-Out: Power, Pensions and Private Profit

Daniel Andrews (Victoria):

Resigned September 2023 amid ballooning state debt forecasts of \$171 billion by 2027. Co-founded Wedgetail Partners and Glencairn Street for Chinese business interfaces, plus Forty Eight & Partners for advisory. Earnings undisclosed but estimated over \$1 million annually from consultancies, atop a lifetime pension nearing \$300,000.

Dominic Perrottet (New South Wales):

Succeeded Berejiklian, lost 2023 election, bolted to BHP's Washington D.C. office in 2024 for corporate/external affairs, liaising with U.S. government. Added TCorp board in 2025. Exact salary undisclosed, but such senior mining roles typically exceed his ex-premier pay of \$416,000, likely six figures plus.

Annastacia Palaszczuk (Queensland):

Resigned December 2023, scooped federal appointment to Australia Post board in 2024 (\$107,000/year for three years), plus University of Queensland Senate election and adjunct professorship in 2025. Less aggressive than peers, but supplements her ex-premier pension – projected at \$476,323 by mid-2025 had she stayed, now a lifetime entitlement.

Mark McGowan (Western Australia):

Quit June 2023 pleading exhaustion, yet snagged advisory gigs at BHP and Mineral Resources (industries he regulated), plus Bondi Partners with ex-treasurer Joe Hockey. Parted from Frontier Energy chairmanship in 2024. Combined earnings: \$500,000–1 million yearly, plus \$275,000 pension totalling a package that mocks his fatigue claims on standing down.

Gladys Berejiklian (New South Wales):

Ousted October 2021 via ICAC probe, landed bespoke Managing Director role at Optus amid its outages and scrutiny. Earnings around \$400,000+, with exec pay jumping 23 percent in 2025 to \$18.9 million pool.

Michael Gunner (Northern Territory):

Post-tenure, joined Fortescue Future Industries before elevating to KPMG partner in 2025 – one of 70 new partners amid firm growth. Earnings in high corporate brackets: KPMG partners average \$350,000, ranging \$300,000–2.5 million for seniors, despite 9% profit dip in 2024.

FROM LOVEABLE ROADBLOCK TO SAND SCULPTURE

By Rob Mellett



Photo credit: nytimes.com



Photo credit: pulsetasmania.com.au

IN early January, a giant sand sculpture of Neil the Seal appeared on Hobart's Bellerive Beach, quickly drawing widespread attention.

Created by professional sand artist Yves Geradts using several tonnes of compacted quarry sand, the metre-high sculpture was completed over a single weekend.

Commissioned by Clarence City Council, it serves as a playful tribute to Tasmania's most famous seal and has already become a popular attraction.

The lifelike artwork celebrates Neil's unlikely rise as a local icon and reflects the public fascination with his regular coastal appearances.

Neil, a southern elephant seal born on the Tasman Peninsula in 2020, has become a familiar – and sometimes mischievous – presence along Tasmania's coastline.

Weighing around 700 kilograms, he has blocked driveways, fallen asleep in the middle of roads, nudged traffic cones and drawn crowds wherever he hauls out to rest.

Because he cannot be safely moved once he lies down, Neil first made headlines in November 2023 after falling asleep in front of a woman's car. He has since caused a commotion outside a fish and chip shop and gained a reputation for biting the tops

off traffic cones.

Neil's antics have earned him more than 120,000 followers on Instagram and widespread attention across other social media platforms.

One social media user, TikToker Jason Howlett, recently made headlines after raising funds to pay a \$1,200 fine he received for allegedly getting too close to Neil.

Parks and Wildlife issued two fines – \$808 for disturbing wildlife on reserve land and \$404 for trespassing on restricted reserve land. Howlett later launched a GoFundMe campaign, which quickly raised the full amount from his followers.

Marine Conservation Program wildlife biologist Sam Thalmann said Neil's behaviour on land is natural.

'Hauling out is normal behaviour for a seal and it should be left alone to rest,' Thalmann said, adding that it is important people stay at least 20 metres away and do not disturb the animal.

Dr Kris Carlyon, also with the Marine Conservation Program, warned that wild animals are unpredictable and could be dangerous if harassed.

He said Neil's social media fame has raised concerns about large crowds gathering, noting that 'our natural interest in rare wildlife sightings ... can lead to negative outcomes for wildlife.'

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Corporate secrecy sparks safety crisis for fire crews

By Rob Mellett

FIREFIGHTERS are effectively fighting 'blind' against a new wave of household threats, as an internal government report reveals that the surge of lithium-ion batteries in Australian homes has officially outpaced emergency safety protocols.

The new document issued by Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW), titled *Management of lithium-ion battery safety risks* (Document ID: D25/93142), shows a major culprit in tackling these fires is corporate secrecy.

The specific chemical recipes inside the cathode and electrolyte of the batteries are often treated as 'proprietary information' or 'commercially sensitive' by Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), meaning critical chemical compositions are 'rarely disclosed'.

Consequently, fire crews often arrive without knowing the precise chemical cocktail fuelling the blaze. The report notes that different manufacturers use different proprietary blends to gain competitive advantage, leaving safety researchers and first responders to guess at the specific hazards hidden inside the casing.

According to the report, FRNSW recorded a 66 percent increase in lithium-ion battery fires in the 2022–2023 period alone.

The data reveals that a fire sparked by a lithium-ion battery is four times more likely to result in injury than any other type of fire or explosion.

Perhaps the most grim milestone in the document shows that FRNSW recorded its 'first deaths in a fire caused by a LiB,' with two



fatalities in 2024 and one in 2025.

The report shows when these batteries fail, they don't just burn; they enter a self-sustaining chemical chain reaction – known as thermal runaway – that generates intense heat and toxic gases, often exploding in confined environments.

These toxic gases, specifically Hydrogen fluoride (HF) from electrolyte breakdown, represent a major hazard. HF is highly corrosive

and can cause delayed lung damage; the report notes that a single electric vehicle fire can release between 400g and 1200g of the gas – five to seven times more per gram than a conventional car fire.

The report admits that 'knowledge gaps have been identified that limit FRNSW's ability to apply research outcomes to emergency response procedures.'

Essentially, the technology has outpaced the safety doctrine.

The document details why these fires are a unique nightmare for urban environments. Unlike a wood or petrol fire, a lithium battery fire poses a risk of 'stranded electrical energy'. Even after visible flames are extinguished, the battery can retain a high-voltage charge, leading to risks of 'reignitions' hours or days later.

Extinguishment is described as 'difficult and protracted,' often requiring massive amounts of water for cooling to prevent the battery from

reigniting.

While dry chemical powders or carbon dioxide can provide a quick knockdown of flames, they offer almost no cooling, leading to frequent re-ignitions. Even fire blankets, often used as a safety measure, carry risks; while they suppress flames, they can trap toxic gases that lead to a larger explosion once the blanket is removed.

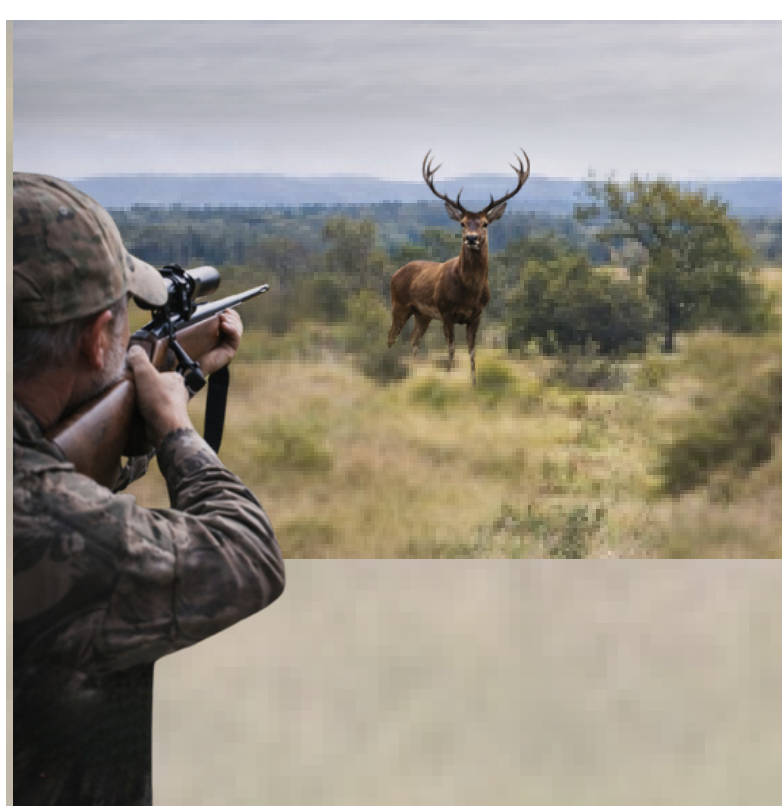
The document also identifies a chronic issue: waste. It shows that while demand for other battery types will stagnate, lithium-ion battery sales in Australia are expected to increase six-fold, reaching over 600,000 tonnes per year by 2050.

This surge is already being felt in the waste sector, with an estimated 12,000 battery-related fires occurring annually in Australian waste and recycling facilities, often driven by accidental crushing or shredding.

While Australia has initiatives like the national B-cycle stewardship scheme and a National Battery Strategy aiming for better sustainability, there is no fully comprehensive, mandatory end-of-life plan – particularly for larger batteries from electric vehicles and energy storage systems. This has led to low recycling rates, a reliance on exports, and ongoing concerns about safe hazard management.

In response, FRNSW is launching the Safety of Alternative and Renewable Energy Technologies (SARET) program.

This initiative will focus on four key projects: improving response tactics, managing end-of-life risks, handling electric vehicle fires in structures, and addressing battery energy storage system propagation.



Feral deer numbers are estimated at between one and two million nationwide

Licensed volunteer hunters vs Government-led operations
Hear from Sean Kilkenny (Australian Deer Association)
Read the full story - page 8

Can volunteer hunters save taxpayers millions?

By Rob Mellett

LICENSED recreational hunters could deliver continuous, year-round control of feral deer populations at minimal direct cost to taxpayers, according to Sean Kilkenny of the Australian Deer Association (ADA).

'The best practice for recreational hunting on public land, proven over decades in Victoria, allows licensed hunters to access public land without needing to book their hunts,' Mr Kilkenny told *The Australian Advocate*.

'Recreational deer hunters do the heavy lifting of deer management while covering their own costs. This is a fantastic model.'

'There is an annual harvest in Victoria of well over 100,000 wild deer, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to regional economies and supporting full-time jobs.'

'A model proven in Victoria – and now closely watched by other Australian jurisdictions and overseas – recreational deer hunting has a strong social licence because of the value placed on the utilisation of the resource and the families that are fed by it; an R-licence style (a restricted licence allows the hunting of game and feral animals on public land opened to hunting, or on private land with the landholder's permission) adapted to Queensland would certainly be better than no public land access.'

Feral deer numbers are estimated at between one and two million nationwide, according to the National Feral Deer Action Plan.

The Victorian Government's Game Management Authority (GMA) reports that licensed hunters there have access to around four million hectares of public land. According to the GMA's 2024 Deer Harvest Report, hunters removed an estimated 167,600 deer in one year – an 83 per cent increase on the long-term average.

Recreational hunting in New South Wales is more than a pastime – it's a \$509 million

contributor to the state's Gross State Product. According to the NSW Department of Primary Industries, the figure reflects the economic impact of hunters' spending during the 2021–22 financial year, including licences, equipment, travel, accommodation, food, fuel and related services.

Of that total, \$196 million came from direct spending, while an additional \$312.8 million flowed through the economy as businesses and workers re-spent that money.

The report estimates that recreational hunting supports 4,192 full-time jobs across NSW.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) estimates that feral pigs alone cause more than \$156 million per year in agricultural production losses and control costs nationally, including impacts on crops, livestock and disease risks.

Katter's Australian Party (KAP) continues to advocate for weapons licensing reforms. Meanwhile, e-petition 4329-25, which closes in May, calls for an R-licence to legalise regulated public land hunting and create a Queensland game hunting licence.

Amid the ecological and economic strain, policy debate revolves around two distinct models for pest animal control: reliance on licensed volunteer hunters versus government-led operations using helicopters and drones.

Queensland prohibits recreational hunting on public land such as state forests and national parks, allowing it only on private land with landholder permission. This places Queensland among the most restrictive mainland jurisdictions for public land hunting access.

Instead, Queensland councils and the state government run high-cost, large-scale feral animal control programs using helicopters and thermal drones.



The Whitsunday Regional Council reports coordinating 20–35 helicopter flights annually with an operating budget of up to \$170,000. Council data shows helicopter hire costs about \$850 an hour, with staff and consumables bringing the total to roughly \$930 an hour. Natural Resource Management reports estimate this equates to around \$87 per animal removed.

Other councils, including Hinchinbrook and Charters Towers, conduct planned aerial shoots, baiting and trapping. In the Central Highlands, councils combine drone monitoring, GPS collaring and landscape-scale baiting to manage populations.

However, the Invasive Species Council (ISC) strongly opposes the expansion of recreational hunting.

There was significant public opposition to the NSW Conservation Hunting Bill in 2025, with more than 2,600 submissions to the parliamentary inquiry, the majority opposing it, alongside campaigns from groups including the Invasive Species Council, the Alannah & Madeline Foundation and the Greens.

Speaking at a NSW parliamentary inquiry in August 2025, ISC chief executive Jack Gough described the push for recreational hunting access as 'politics before conservation.'

The ISC argues that recreational hunting can undermine coordinated government programs.

'You don't reduce invasive species by doing a bit of weekend pig shooting,' Mr Gough told the committee. 'This bill is setting up a taxpayer-funded propaganda unit for the shooting lobby.'

'Recreational hunting is not conservation. It rarely delivers environmental benefits, and in many cases actively obstructs professional control programs,' he said.

'You need coordinated, expert-led programs like aerial shooting, baiting and trapping.'

NSW Premier Chris Minns later backtracked on the concept of a 'right to hunt' in September 2025, stating it risked US-style gun laws and reaffirming that gun ownership is a 'conditional privilege, not a right.'

The full debate can be viewed via the August NSW parliamentary hearing available on YouTube.

The question remains: will Australia leverage a large volunteer workforce to supplement professional culls, or continue to rely primarily on expensive, short-term interventions.



Jack Gough - ISC Cheif Executive



The Australian Advocate

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When the Government Tries to Quiet the Room - Australians Respond

By Dr Ann Tennae

Super Pest. Doctor of Colony Behaviour. Reluctant Civil Liberties Expert.



I am a super pest.

This is not my word. This is the government's word. It appears on documents. Official documents. Documents printed on very serious paper by people who wear laminated lanyards and speak almost entirely in acronyms. The red cape I am wearing in today's photograph is not required under legislation, but once you've been officially declared a national problem, it feels rude not to dress accordingly.

Being a super pest teaches you things. For example, once you are labelled a threat, everything you do becomes suspicious. Gathering? Suspicious. Communicating quickly? Highly suspicious. Organising efficiently?

Practically a crisis. I mention this because humans are now experiencing something similar – only instead of bait, you're being offered laws.

Australia's new hate speech laws, I am told while hiding inside a discarded sausage roll wrapper, are designed to make people safer. Ant colonies love safety. We love it so much that we eliminate anything that might possibly cause future inconvenience. We do not wait for harm. We anticipate it. Humans, however, prefer a gentler approach. Rather than removing you outright, they simply ask you to be careful, polite, and legally aware at all times.

This is adorable.

The process is elegant. The government redraws the boundaries of acceptable speech, attaches consequences, and reassures everyone it will all be used responsibly. Then it does something very clever: nothing. No shouting. No crackdowns. Just waiting.

Australians are expected to

respond by toning it down. Being calmer. Saying less. Becoming the sort of people who pause mid-joke and think, Is this worth a fine? This expectation suggests the policy designers have never attended a barbeque.

Tell an Australian to lower the volume and they will ask why, crack a joke about it, and then explain their position at length to three strangers. Tell them certain opinions are risky and they will immediately repeat those opinions louder, with friends, and possibly merchandise. This is not rebellion. This is muscle memory.

From my vantage point beneath a picnic rug, this is endlessly entertaining. The government is betting on quiet compliance. Australians are responding with sarcasm, memes, and what I believe is called 'having a whinge.'

Eventually, humans develop a new dialect. It consists mostly of throat-clearing, nervous laughter, and sentences that never quite land. Jokes are abandoned halfway through. Opinions are

left in the car.

In the ant world, this is considered peak efficiency. When no one finishes a sentence, nothing needs enforcing. Even the enforcers get bored.

I do not deny that words can hurt. Ant pheromones have started wars over crumbs. But trying to manage speech based on how it might be received is like trying to manage ants by posting signs asking us to 'Please Consider Not Swarming.'

**We will read the sign
We will discuss the sign
Then we will swarm anyway**

Humans, unlike ants, are gloriously bad at uniform behaviour. You grumble. You test boundaries. You comply loudly. You discover sarcasm is difficult to regulate and immediately lean into it. You follow the letter of the rule while tap-dancing around its spirit. Honestly, it's impressive. So yes:

**I am a super pest
I wear a cape
I am officially unwanted**

But as I watch humans attempt to regulate speech into politeness, I am struck by a comforting truth: Australians are terrible at whispering.

You may hesitate. You may pause. You may lower your voice briefly. But eventually, someone will say the thing. Someone always does.

And when that happens, I'll be here – beneath the picnic rug, cape fluttering, clipboard in tarsi – taking notes on a species that simply refuses to tone it down.

Trust me. I'm an ant.



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COMMUNITIES benefit most when commercial enterprises and local stakeholders are empowered to compete openly and fairly. Healthy competition isn't just about profit – it's about creating fit-for-purpose, cost-effective, and customer-focused solutions that genuinely serve local needs.

Innovation thrives when businesses and communities are challenged to think differently, improve efficiency, and respond quickly to real-world demands. Commercial operators and local participants, accountable to those they serve, consistently develop practical solutions grounded in lived experience, often at a fraction of the cost of traditional bureaucratic programs.

Government departments, by contrast, often operate through layers of process and risk aversion. While their intent is public service, they are not always structured to

deliver outcomes efficiently or in tune with community priorities.

A clear example is the National Fire Ant Eradication Program. First detected in south-east Queensland in 2001, fire ants were initially confined to 36,000 hectares. Over two decades, despite being promoted as a 'world-first' effort to eradicate the largest infestation globally, the distribution of fire ants has grown to over 1.1 million hectares in 2026. Efforts focused on bureaucratic milestones and public messaging, rather than empowering local landholders and industry experts, have generated poor environmental outcomes, community outrage, and declining trust in government programs. A far more effective approach would be to empower local landholders, industry specialists, and community groups to implement targeted, fit-for-purpose strategies.

Similarly, in managing wild

dogs, feral deer, and feral pigs, private contractors, landholders, and recreational shooters – operating under sensible permits – can deliver agile, effective solutions. With government support to develop wild game meat outlets and regional markets, these programs could generate revenue, create jobs, stimulate small business growth, and help reignite dying outback communities, all while reducing the taxpayer burden.

In renewable energy, competition and innovation are delivering tangible results both in Australia and internationally. Private operators rolling out community solar projects and microgrids demonstrate that locally tailored solutions can reduce costs and speed deployment. Globally, microgrids in Yemen and other regions provide energy at a fraction of traditional diesel costs, while ensuring reliable, resilient supply.

Emerging technologies such as small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) are showing promise in stabilizing grids and delivering reliable, low-carbon power to remote or industrial regions. Russia's floating nuclear plant, Akademik Lomonosov, powers Arctic communities more efficiently than coal, while corporations like Amazon are exploring modular nuclear plants to supply consistent, carbon-free energy at scale. Integrating SMRs with microgrids and renewables

can reduce emissions, lower operational costs, and provide resilient energy solutions – demonstrating that competition and innovation, not bureaucracy alone, drive better outcomes.

These community-led and commercially driven approaches also help reduce government spending and reliance on debt. Australia's combined federal, state, and territory net debt reached around \$846.6 billion in 2023-24, roughly 31.7% of GDP, and continues to rise.

Rising debt diverts funding from essential services and constrains future budgets. By reducing unnecessary bureaucratic costs and empowering businesses and communities, governments can curb spending growth, stimulate regional economies, and reduce dependence on public funding.

Government support for industry – through low energy prices, streamlined regulation, and reduced red tape – is critical. When industry and communities are empowered to innovate, we build a circular economy: practical solutions lead to employment, skills development, sustainable growth, and stronger, more independent communities.

Regulations and oversight remain essential – but they should enable, not replace, local innovation and competition. Healthy competition drives innovation

that works. Community-led approaches reduce costs, create jobs, protect the environment, improve energy security, and reignite regional economies. Together, these principles can lead to stronger communities, a healthier economy, and a more fiscally responsible future.



FEBRUARY 14th is Valentine's Day, a celebration of love with roots reaching back to ancient Rome.

Named after Saint Valentine, a priest who secretly married young couples against imperial orders, the day has evolved over centuries. From handwritten notes in medieval times to today's cards, chocolates, and flowers, it's all about showing care for those we love. In the middle of the Australian summer, it's the perfect excuse for picnics, beach dates, or simply a thoughtful message.

Big gesture or small, Valentine's Day is a reminder to celebrate connection and affection.



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49.9MW battery proposal will dodge state scrutiny *By Rob Mellett*

A controversial proposal for a large-scale Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at Karrabin in southeast Queensland has sparked urgent questions about potential planning loopholes, after the project's capacity was reduced by the developer to just 0.1 megawatts below the threshold that would trigger state government assessment.

In 2025, Queensland introduced stricter planning rules for BESS projects, mandating that facilities of 50MW or more be assessed by the State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA) rather than local councils.

These reforms introduced requirements for Social Impact Assessments and community benefit agreements, aiming to ensure consistent, rigorous oversight for major energy infrastructure.

However, shortly after the new legislation was announced, EIWA – the Japanese developer behind the project – requested a reduction in capacity from 50MW to 49.9MW. The move effectively keeps the decision-making power with Ipswich City Council and, crucially, keeps the application 'code assessable.' Unlike 'impact assessable' projects, code assessment does not require public notification, offers no formal submission process, and provides residents with no appeal rights once a decision is made.

The avoidance of state-level scrutiny is contentious given the site's location on a floodplain along the Bremer River. The proposal (DA 7150/2025/CA) sits on land prone to flooding and overland water flow, raising significant concerns regarding lithium-based battery units.

Residents point to the dangers of toxic smoke and the containment of contaminated firewater in the event of a thermal runaway or explosion – risks they say require the environmental oversight that a SARA assessment could provide.

Beyond the battery units themselves, the site is subject to bushfire overlays, adding another layer of risk to an already complex safety profile.

Council correspondence indicates that key safety and risk assessments, including fire, flood, and hazardous materials management plans, remain outstanding. While Ipswich City Council has requested further information, concerns about the proximity to the Bremer River, soil and groundwater contamination from potential chemical runoff, and the proximity to RAAF Base Amberley remain unresolved.

The planning process has created a confusing landscape for the community. While the BESS application remains code assessable, a linked proposal for an industrial area on the same site (DA 2449/2025/MCU) is impact assessable.

Public consultation for the industrial component took place in late 2025, with many submissions addressing the battery project due to the overlapping risks—including 24-hour industrial noise, air pollution, and increased traffic. Residents specifically highlighted rail crossing safety concerns and potential impacts on the local rail network, which serves as a critical artery for the region. However, only the industrial proposal afforded residents formal objection and appeal rights.

The site, much of which falls within an Environmental Management Zone, contains mature trees and ecological corridors supporting native fauna, including koalas. Residents describe the disconnect as a failure of transparency.

Locals note that despite the scale of the BESS, there has been no formal consultation process tied specifically to the battery application.

The developer has characterised the project as an 'interim use,' yet residents question how this aligns with the concurrent application for long-term industrial

development.

Speaking to the Australian Advocate, the chief spokeswoman for the We Say No way to Karrabin BESS group said it is important locals present a united front.

'It seems that these proposals are cropping up across the state,' she said. 'We want to know how we are going to be kept safe, how the environment is going to be protected, and exactly what the benefits to the local community will be.'

'We are calling on planners, MPs and decision-makers to come and talk to us about our concerns – sitting behind desks looking at maps on a screen does not capture all of the necessary information you need to assess these projects appropriately.'

The Karrabin case has become a litmus test for Queensland's new energy infrastructure framework.

Residents are looking to the state government for clarity on how transitional applications – lodged before legislative changes but decided after – will be handled.

They argue that while



BESS PROJECT IN FLOOD-PRONE KARRABIN, QLD.

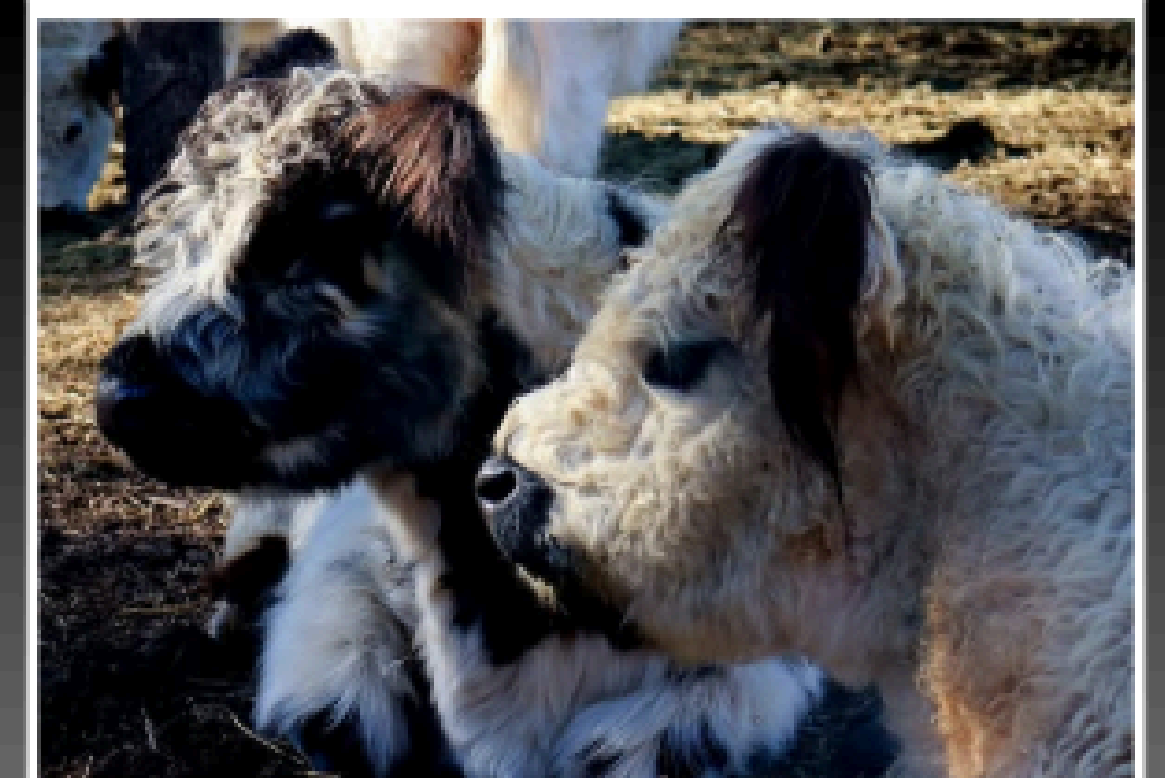
landowners have rights to develop, those rights must be balanced against safety and community impact.

As large-scale energy projects proliferate across the state, Karrabin locals say their experience highlights a critical need for transparency and early engagement, rather than technical adjustments that shut the community out of the conversation.



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CITIZENS' INQUIRY QUESTIONS GOVERNMENT NARRATIVE

By Rob Mellett

A people's investigation established to probe the causes of South Australia's algal bloom crisis is continuing its probe after the findings of a federal Senate inquiry last November left many environmentalists frustrated.

The Citizens' Inquiry into South Australia's Coastal Crisis (CISACC), led by the Australian People's Tribunal and supported by the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA), is exploring alternative avenues of enquiry for the disaster after the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee concluded that it was a 'perfect storm' of natural factors that caused the disaster, including a marine heatwave, nutrients from the 2022-23 Murray River floods, and seasonal cold-water upwellings.

However, some independent scientists suggest the crisis could be more complex – and potentially more human-driven – than official reports indicated.

Industrial chemist Victor Vorel submitted evidence (Submission 88) at the inquiry last year, arguing that fire retardant dropped across 2,500 kilometres of the Murray River catchment during bushfire seasons was the primary culprit.

'I base my statements on evidence and science,' Mr Vorel told the hearing.

'Millions of litres of retardant dropped from the sky have leached into our waterways, creating an underwater graveyard.'

Mr Vorel argued that the red aerial firefighting liquid contains high levels of phosphate. He testified that the chemicals funnelled into the Murray mouth, creating a 'nutrient-rich soup' that fuelled the unprecedented growth of the algae.

Mr Vorel proposes using natural bacteria found in native seagrass to break down excess nutrients and neutralise the algae.

'We need to move beyond monitoring the death of our coast,' he said. 'We need to use the ecosystem's own defences to inhibit [algae species] Karenia before the damage is irreversible.'

This theory finds support in the United States, where the ecological side effects of ammonium phosphate retardants are under intense scientific scrutiny.

Data from the US Forest Service shows that retardant use has reached record levels, with research by the National Marine Fisheries Service and NOAA ecotoxicologist Joseph Dietrich confirming that these formulations remain lethal to aquatic life even when diluted to less than 1 percent of their application strength.

Experts like Timothy Ingalsbee of Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics and Ecology have warned that these long-term retardants cling to the landscape. When washed into waterways, their high chemical load can trigger the same types of harmful algal blooms and ecosystem shifts observed along South Australia's coast.



IMAGE SOURCE: www.aussieanimals.com

In Australia, scientists have confirmed that the SA crisis has evolved into a multi-species event, initially dominated by Karenia mikimotoi.

The bloom has spanned hundreds of kilometres, covering the Fleurieu, Yorke, and Eyre Peninsulas, Kangaroo Island, Spencer Gulf, and the Coorong wetlands and causing the mass mortality of countless thousands of marine animals.

The controversy deepened last month when prominent estuarine ecologist Faith Coleman testified before the South Australian Parliament's Joint Committee on Harmful Algal Blooms.

On January 7, she stated that public servants had told her they were instructed not to investigate the bloom's causes until after this March's state election.

Speaking under parliamentary privilege, Dr Coleman said: 'On three occasions so far I have been

told by department staff of different agencies and units that they have been asked not to investigate the cause of the algal bloom until after the election.'

She added that she was 'deeply disturbed' by the perceived political interference, stating: 'The political spin that has come into discussing the causes of this bloom has deeply disturbed me.'

Following her testimony, Dr Coleman confirmed her intention to resign from the SA HAB Scientific Advisory Committee and the SA Algae Bloom Reference Group.

In a follow-up emergency hearing last month, senior officials strongly rejected the claims. South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) executive director Professor Mike Steer described the allegations as 'gobsmacking' and said he was 'blindsided,' insisting his team was under pressure to accelerate research rather than delay it.

The Malinauskas Government dismissed the allegations as unsubstantiated hearsay and pointed to its response, including its \$100 million summer plan – which includes accommodation vouchers, a dining cashback program and grants of up to \$100,000 for commercial fishers.

Fisheries and tourism operators have reported sharp drops in foot traffic and bookings while First Nations communities have cited deep damage to ancestral lands.

Business surveys indicate a 40 percent downturn for seaside operators.



IMAGE SOURCE: www.weatherzone.com.au

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THE DATA WAR BEHIND WA FISH BAN

By Rob Mellett

When fisherman John Higham chained his boat to the Department of Primary Industries (DPIRD) gates in Geraldton, Western Australia, it wasn't just a protest – it was a funeral for an industry.

On January 1, a permanent ban on bottom-feeding fishing turned multi-generational businesses into ghost fleets overnight.

While Premier Roger Cook has defended the intervention as a 'decisive' move to save fish for future generations, fish industry veteran Phil Clark said the science appears to have been manipulated to fit a political agenda.

At the heart of the conflict is CPUE (Catch Per Unit Effort) – the gold standard for measuring fish abundance.

In WA, CPUE was at the highest level for pink snapper ever recorded just before the demersal fishing ban, but Clark said the government avoided employing it as a key metric.

'The department stopped using CPUE as a key indicator about four years ago, which seems quite a convenient thing to do,' Clark said.

'In a fishery that's supposedly



collapsing, you don't see record catches of pink snapper. That simply doesn't line up.'

Clark argued that if fish stocks are truly in the 'high risk' category as the government claims, it is a reflection of the Department, not the fishers.

'If we were really the best in the world, do you think every single one of our fisheries would be in a high-risk category when no fishers have fished over their allocations? It stinks,' he said. He also points to a pattern of 'mysterious' shifts in data.

'Two years ago in the Pilbara, they said the fishery was amazing. Then all of a sudden, the government's position suggests decades of previous assessments were wrong for 20 years. When you get these

things that pop up and change things so dramatically, it's hard to trust they are based in reality.'

According to the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource 2025 science update from DPIRD, WA dhufish spawning biomass is 85 per cent below unfished spawning biomass reference levels, with northern and southern snapper similarly depleted at 83 percent and 80 percent respectively.

Clark is particularly critical of the government rhetoric regarding species survival, calling government claims of extinction misleading.

'No fish species have gone extinct in 500 years. You can have local depletion, but fish are very fecund – their reproductive ability is immense,' Clark said.

'I've tried to get Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis to stop saying that, but her response is that it's language the public understands.'

A major point of bitterness for commercial fishers remains the 'fish bank' incident, where commercial fishers claim they were misled into giving up their quota.

The government bought back about 38.5 tonnes of commercial quota from 12 operators.

At the time, it was stated that a portion of this would go to other commercial sectors, and the remainder would be used to accelerate the recovery of the biomass (essentially leaving the fish in the water).

'We bought an extra 20 tonnes of quota and were told to put it in a "fish bank" to help the fishery improve faster,' Clark explained.

'Two weeks later, it was given to the recreational sector so they could have another week of fishing in the school holidays.'

Beyond the fish, Clark suggests there may be broader industrial motivations behind clearing the waters, particularly regarding offshore energy.

'If you take out the fishing

industry, you take out probably the biggest voice in opposition to wind farms,' Clark said.

'If we aren't a stakeholder in those areas, we don't have the right to complain. It'll make it a lot easier to get a whole bunch of wind farms in.'

As WA moves toward importing fish from New Zealand and Indonesia to fill the gap, Clark warns that the real victims will be the citizens.

'Everyday West Australians are paying the price for a political decision. Fish prices are already up 30 to 40 per cent,' Clark said.

'We're not fighting for commercial fishers – we're fighting for West Australians and their right to access wild-caught seafood. It's not fair taking this away from the majority so a few individuals with expensive boats can enjoy it.'

Requests for comment were sent to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis, Recfishwest, Nationals MP Rob Horstman, and the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council. None responded by the time of publication.



Senator Malcolm Roberts

The debt trap: Labor government's housing mirage

I have expressed grave concerns that we are signing our young Australians up to be 'debt slaves' to the big banks. It's one thing to offer a 'leg up' onto the property ladder, but it's another thing entirely to push them into a lifetime of unmanageable debt.

During my questioning of Housing Australia, I pointed out a massive flaw in how they report their success. The department 'brags' about a low default rate – only 11 claims out of 250,000 – yet admit that they stop tracking borrowers the second they refinance or exit the scheme. Think about that. If the families under the most financial stress are the ones forced to refinance or leave, they vanish from the government's data. We're essentially flying blind, ignoring the very people who might be 'going backwards.'

I've said it before on the Senate floor, and I'll say it again: this scheme is 'smoke and mirrors.' Pumping more low-deposit buyers into a market where there aren't enough houses to go around, the government is just upping the price of entry-level

homes. This completely ignores the root of the problem—supply, caused by mass immigration. We're watching house prices increase and the very people this was meant for— the younger Aussies – can't even afford the 'starter' homes.

I'm not going to let this rest. We need to see the real numbers, not just the cherry-picked stats that make the government look good.

Australians deserve to know if their 'dream home' is actually a debt trap.

Read the latest news from
Senator Malcom Roberts



malcolmrobertsqld.com.au



**Dr Matt Landos - Director, Future Fisheries
Veterinary Service Pty Ltd**
**highlights the shortfalls of the current
APVMA legislation and calls for it to be
reformed.**

Read full report on page 14.

Australia's outdated and risk-loving pesticide regulation

By Dr Matt Landos



Dr Matt Landos
Director, Future Fisheries Veterinary
Service Pty Ltd
Adjunct Associate Professor,
University of Queensland School of
the Environment.

AUSTRALIA is amongst the top per capita consumer of pesticides in the world, ranking around eighth in total volumes of use. Around \$4.5 billion dollars of pesticides were used in Australia in 2023-24. Use estimated from sales value, as volumes are not publicly reported, has roughly doubled over the last decade.

Concurrently, environmental and public health researchers continue to document a decline in biodiversity, degraded water quality in many rivers, declines in fishery abundance, and a rise in many human diseases linked to pesticide and other environmental pollutant exposures. Read on to learn about the inadequate regulation of pesticides in Australia, where collateral damage to human and environmental health is built into the system and is the inevitable consequence of the vast use of pesticides used on food, fibre and the consumer economy.

WHAT IS PESTICIDE?

The term 'pesticide' is defined in federal legislation as an 'agricultural chemical product' used to destroy, repel, modify pests or plants, or attract pests for destruction, covering substances for controlling insects, weeds (herbicides), fungi, and plant growth. Hence 'pesticide' is a catch-all term which includes categories such as herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, rodenticides, algicides, disinfectants and others listed at:

<https://www.apvma.gov.au/about/accountability-and-reporting/annual-product-sales-data/publication-annual-product-sales-data-2023-24>

WHO REGULATES PESTICIDES IN AUSTRALIA ?

Pesticides are assessed and regulated, up to the point of sale, by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), which is a statutory authority within the portfolio of the Minister of Agriculture. In

many other comparable countries, such as Canada, the pesticide regulator is placed under the health portfolio, in part, to avoid potential conflicts of interest in assessing risks from pesticide use to public health, versus advancement of agribusiness agendas. In Australia, state and territory government agencies are responsible for the control of use regulation of pesticides after the point of sale.

ARE PESTICIDES ASSESSED FOR THEIR COCKTAIL MIXTURE EFFECTS?

Pesticides are assessed one product at a time, in isolation from other products. Data is not requested nor assessed on the potential complex mixtures which may occur at locations where multiple products may be applied. Even the common addition of wetting agents to spray tank mixtures are considered individually, and not for the effects they have on changing pesticide toxicity and mobility. Since there are hundreds of pesticides in use, researchers typically find numerous residues in the water, soil and air environment, as well as in food.

HOW IS PESTICIDE RISK ASSESSED?

The APVMA still relies upon outdated toxicology methods to predict risk of harm to humans and the environment by calculating what is called a No Observed Adverse Effect Level (NOAEL). The inputs to this calculation are drawn from limited toxicological data and often do not include studies of endocrine (hormone) disrupting effects, epigenetic effects, immunotoxicological effects and behavioural effect studies. This data is commonly generated either by the chemical registrant or funded by the chemical registrant. It is often not independently peer-reviewed, nor publicly available to be

scrutinised, as the APVMA holds the data as commercial-in-confidence.

ARE PESTICIDES ROUTINELY CHECKED TO ENSURE THEY REMAIN SAFE?

There is no mandatory or systematic re-registration or review process applied to registered Australian pesticides, unlike the USA, EU, Canada and Japan. Such processes allow contemporary data, which can include new and more sensitive analyses, to be considered, as to whether a product is still considered safe enough to keep using. In 2013, after much work from the National Toxics Network, WWF and many others, such a re-registration scheme was put in place by the Gillard Labor Government, however the incoming Abbott Liberal Government rescinded the legislation just before it commenced. Subsequent Labor Governments and the Department of Agriculture have not reinstated it. This ongoing deficiency of pesticide legislation prevents routine updates to assessments, impeding regulation's ability learn from the dent of scientific knowledge and advancement. The current legislation sees APVMA deliver resources to expanding access to pesticides whilst maintaining existing pesticide inventory on the market.

WHAT REVIEW PROCESS DOES THE PESTICIDE REGULATOR HAVE?

The APVMA have a review process, which is occasionally triggered, if it perceives some red flags, such as trade concerns when a country may no longer tolerate a residue in Australia's exported produce for example. New human health publications, international convention listings (eg Stockholm Convention), or other adverse reports can be potential triggers for a review but are often deemed insufficient to change APVMA's assessment settings and thus approval of uses. When these reviews do

commence, they have historically been open-ended and take decades to complete. Meanwhile the pesticides typically remain in use, sometimes with additional instructions. Even at the completion of such reviews it is rare for a pesticide to be removed from all uses, unlike in UK or Europe.

CHEMICAL COMPANY INTERESTS AND THE PESTICIDE REGULATOR

The progenitor to the APVMA was the National Registration Authority (NRA). On the board of the regulator were life members of CropLife. CropLife are the fulltime professional lobbyists for the multinational agrichemical industry, with members including: Bayer (Monsanto), B.A.S.F., NuFarm, Sumitomo, Corteva, and Syngenta. CropLife maintain a fully staffed office in Canberra, handy to parliament house, so they can use their politician sponsored parliamentary passes to offer privileged guidance to parliamentarians. They sponsor an annual agricultural address at the Press Club, where the agriculture minister of the day stands at the lectern, emblazoned with CropLife logos, to deliver their vision for Australian agriculture. Funnily enough, perhaps by happenstance, the visions align strongly with CropLife's interests.

The notion of a conflict of interest did not appear to be uppermost in mind of Government when it established the public regulator at that time. Instead, from its conception, public interest in public and environmental health have been afterthoughts to decisions that benefit the financial interests of the agrichemical industry.

The lobby group, Agricultural Biotechnology Council of Australia Limited (ABCA), was co-created by CropLife. Its former chair was Ken Matthews, a formerly highly credentialled senior public servant in the Department of Agriculture. It again was perhaps happenstance that

he should be selected to chair the 'Independent reviews of the agricultural and veterinary medicines regulatory system of Australia' whilst being chair of CropLife's ABCA. Once again Department of Agriculture waved away concerns of conflicts of interest. Participating civil society stakeholders were so incensed as to the entire reviews lack of scientific integrity and due process that they authored a public Consensus Statement critique with an array of signatories.

<https://www.toxicsfreeaustralia.org.au/our-work/pesticides/>

Concerns about the independence of the APVMA are not just raised by civil society groups. In 2023, scandalous workplace behaviour led to then Agriculture Minister Murray Watt MP calling top legal firm Clayton Utz to undertake a rapid review. This report concluded the APVMA as likely 'industry-captured.' The Government then appointed Ken Matthews to formulate the recommendations flowing from the review. A hastening of reviews was called for, but the underpinning risk assessment methodology was largely out-of-scope and remains untouched to today.

WHAT PESTICIDE USE DATA IS PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE TO PUBLIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RESEARCHERS?

THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION AND MORE CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 15.

DO YOU THINK APVMA REGULATIONS NEED A REFORM?



Continued from Page 14

Australia's outdated and risk-loving pesticide regulation

By Dr Matt Landos

Whilst farmers are required to keep a pesticide use log under various State pesticide control of use legislation, this data is not collated by Government, nor the regulator. It is not made public. This omission of data collection halts public or environmental health epidemiologists exploring links between pesticide exposure and the rising array of modern diseases including cancer, neurodegenerative disease, infertility, and behaviour disorders to name just a few.

The APVMA makes public only very high-level data on the value, not volume, of pesticide sales by category, not product. No detail on volumes of active ingredient in use, where, or when are made public. Again, public and environmental health researchers are left without data to conduct research.

Unlike many other comparable countries, Australia does not conduct any human biomonitoring programs- that is, there is no coordinated measurement of which pesticides turn up in the bodies of Australians, nor how much, nor how often.

Meanwhile the APVMA undertakes a risk assessment, using a calculation of: exposure x hazard = risk. Underlying this simplistic method is a presumption that the 'dose equal the poison,' presuming that there will be a lower safe level of exposure without a health consequence. Problem is that for some compounds there appears to be no lower safe dose- such as the organophosphate insecticide chlorpyrifos which damages brain development at any exposure dose to a developing foetus. Without real world measurement of exposure, the risk assessors are left to guess at the exposure.

Other countries take protecting their citizens and environment from unsafe exposure to pesticides far more seriously. EU countries have removed many pesticide active ingredients from use that were deemed unsafe. Australia continues to allow them. Whilst the agricultural chemical companies boom, the unmeasured costs of reckless pesticide management are quietly foisted upon the public health, water treatment plants and the environment.

TAKE ACTION

It is abundantly clear that the APVMA's legislation needs to be reformed, so that the regulator can deliver protection of human and environmental health from the adverse effects of pesticides. This must be paired with a much larger shift of support for farmers to transition food and fibre production away from pesticide dependency.

The costs of pesticides to the environment and public health must be placed back on agrichemical companies, in line with the polluter pays principle.

Make wise personal purchasing decisions to choose organic and regenerative produce grown without pesticides.

Write to your local MP that the regulator is outdated and unsafe and needs an urgent full legislative revamp to halt the costly harm to people and the environment from excessive use of unsafe pesticides.

Write directly to the Ministers for Agriculture, Health and Environment and demand a reform of Australia's outdated AgVet chemical legislation led by truly independent public and environmental health scientists.

PLASTICS: THE INVISIBLE INVASION

By Don Want PhD

The plastic crisis is one of the most urgent environmental and health issues of our era. Of more than 10,000 chemicals used in plastics, researchers have examined only 30% for health impacts, leaving us to navigate a complex chemical landscape with most components still undiscovered.

Only 10-15% of plastic is recycled globally. Recycling costs more than producing new plastic from oil, which provides economic reasons to keep making it. Microplastics are common in oceans and waterways, with synthetic fabrics shedding fibres that enter the food chain and reach humans.

Children face the greatest dangers. Research connects plastic exposure to childhood cancer, ADHD, and autism. These chemicals disrupt the body's hormone system by acting like thousands of fake keys that randomly fit into biological locks meant for real hormones.

Phthalates and bisphenol A (BPA) are especially notorious. Found in 79% of tested food items, these chemicals are linked to childhood cancer, ADHD, and autism. Phthalates make plastics flexible and create that new car smell. They increase the risk of bone cancer nearly threefold and double the risk of lymphoma. Research detected phthalates in 80% of fast-food samples.

BPA is found everywhere: in food packaging, kitchenware, can linings, toys, dental materials, and receipts. Baby exposure is especially high since formula often comes in BPA-lined cans. This chemical interferes with the endocrine system, which can lead to autoimmune responses, Type 2 diabetes, and prostate cancer. "BPA-free" products often use bisphenol S (BPS), which might be even more harmful. Recent tests have found that "BPA-free" baby pacifiers (Dummies) can contain significant levels of BPA.

Microplastics—particles usually smaller than rice grains—now spread across the planet. They do not biodegrade and keep breaking into smaller pieces.

Each year, humanity releases 300 million tonnes of plastic, with more than half used just once. These particles enter every organ: the digestive system, blood, heart, lungs, and brain.

Microplastics have been detected in human placentas. Babies fed from polypropylene bottles could swallow 4.5 million plastic particles each day. Microplastics are found in 75% of breast milk samples. Each litre of bottled water may contain up to 330,000 tiny particles. When bottles go through temperature fluctuations during shipping, more plastic leaches into the water.

Daily coffee routines carry risks. Single-use cups are coated in plastic, releasing microplastics when touched by hot liquid. Coffee pods and plastic coffee machines present similar concerns as hot water goes through plastic parts.

In the digestive system, plastic particles promote bacteria to develop antibiotic resistance by up to five times. Research indicates particles can breach the gut's protective lining and migrate to the brain, liver, and kidneys. These microplastics mimic oestrogen, disrupting reproductive health in both sexes.

Studies link microplastics to inflammatory bowel disease. Animal research shows microplastics alter gut microbiome composition, increasing harmful bacteria while decreasing beneficial ones. This damages the gut's protective layer, leading to leaky gut and systemic inflammation affecting insulin sensitivity, immune function, and mental clarity.

People with microplastics in their carotid artery tissue face a 3.5 times higher risk of heart attacks or strokes. Researchers examined 257

patients who had carotid artery surgery. They found that 58% had measurable polyethylene in their arterial plaque. These patients faced a 4.53 times higher risk of heart attack, stroke, or death compared to those without detectable microplastics.

These particles lead to oxidative stress, tissue harm, and inflammation.

Understanding the fertility crisis involves recognising the effects of plastic exposure.

More couples require IVF, women experience early menopause in their twenties and thirties, and fertility rates have significantly declined. Microplastics build up in the brain and reproductive organs, disrupting hormones and reducing fertility.

Recent research found microplastics in human brains, with levels rising by 50% from 2016 to 2024. Dementia cases had five times higher microplastic levels. Every human and canine testis sample tested contained microplastics, with certain plastics linked to reduced testicular function.

Simple steps can lower exposure: boiling tap water removes up to 90% of microplastics, using glass or stainless steel instead of plastic, avoiding hot beverages in plastic cups, and supporting gut health through fibre and fermented foods.

However, tackling plastic pollution demands systemic changes: bans on single-use plastics, better waste management, investment in biodegradable alternatives, and holding the plastic industry responsible. The plastic invasion might be invisible, but its health effects are becoming undeniable. Only through collective awareness, action, and advocacy can society turn the tide.



This has been a summary of a more-detailed article on
environmentalhealtheffects.substack.com