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## **Tipping Point Alliance**

### **How to make our local community more sustainable, self-sufficient and resilient**

#### **Principle**

Climate change is real and will make our life conditions worse in future. Governments and corporations show that they do not intend to act. Richest people defend their interests and live with an extravagant life style that destroys the planet and they tend to oppose popular initiatives. We need to be in charge according to the following principles:

- 1) We, ordinary people, have to become the acting forces on that matter. We need urgently to re-organise our local community in order to make it more sustainable, more self-sufficient and more resilient in case of further bush fires or drought. This complete reconversion must happen in the ten next max 10 years if we want to succeed.
- 2) The basic principle is the following: Because we are very aware that we can wait for ever if we continue to expect that our political and economic leaders will bring new solutions, we prefer to empower ourselves directly here and now and to recreate locally the society we wish to live in. We cannot do everything but we can organise the most elementary necessities - especially in what concerns our basic needs - in the limits and to the very limits of what we can do now.
- 3) We need to ensure that our local community of some 33'000 people (Bega Shire Council for instance) will be as soon as possible able to provide the necessary goods to cover our most basic needs. This requirement means that we must reconstitute now locally a form of economy that will be soon able to provide locally everything we need for our subsistence and be fully sustainable.
- 4) Our present consumption is indeed completely dependent on fossil fuels. Whether it is food which has travelled many kilometres or has been grown on large scales thanks to fertilisers that are based on fossil fuels, or whether there are goods from China, most of what we buy is not sustainable. We must progressively disconnect from this wider market and recreate locally trustworthy sources of renewable goods.
- 5) It is also only locally that we can reconquer our empowerment as citizens. It is the only place where to practise a local direct democracy and where issues become visible, choices possible and consensus a creative challenge that teaches us to rediscover the dimension of true community, i.e. the real community on which we all depend.

- 6) This evolution will be progressive. Step by step we will replace the present products we consume and the present providers we are clients of by more local ones. Instead of products that are transported from far away we will prefer local products. Instead of large supermarket chains we will prefer small local businesses.
- 7) As long as all providers are still locally active, each one of us remains free to consume what he or she wants. There is no limitation until the external sources will dry out by lack of consumers. Our personal role is yet to support this evolution by committing to it.
- 8) Sustainability is the real priority, and sustainability will make us more resilient. The change in the way we supply for ourselves the most basic goods can be relatively rapid. But the recovery of our wider environment will be slow because of the inertia of natural equilibrium. In a first stage we will have to cope with the effects of climate change and with the effort of installing new sustainable systems without seeing much improvement. But time will justify us. As soon as we will stop having harmful behaviours, the negative impacts on the environment will stop immediately and nature will have the possibility to start slowly to recover.
- 9) We do not need to be many people at the start. The priority is to start the process and make it visible. This is the only way we can convince others to join. They will join us if we can demonstrate how it can function and be realistic and also prove that this is the solution.
- 10) We will show that we are evolved people who can be in charge of ourselves as a community. We can even do that without our political leaders and without the richest class of people who do not seem to be involved in solving the problem of climate change nor of social inequity. Nevertheless we hope to generate a process that will involve everybody, whether poor or rich, whether powerless or powerful. I'm convinced that such a movement will soon grow because it is indeed the only possible response to climate change. It will need also the implementation of further measures which are not in our hands as simple citizens. Our initiative will inevitably generate reactions: opposition but also cooperation.

Here below are presented a few ideas how to do that in very practical terms. This is only a first draft to be improved, deepened, adapted, discussed. It is only a starting point for a broader discussion and action. But only a discussion that aims at direct and immediate action. We have to stop talking about climate change. We must now change the way we live and re-organise radically our society.

The big challenge is whether we want to do that or not, because it is possible and we can start today. Shall we start? Our doubt and lack of motivation or our attachment to the present way we do things are the main obstacles for our action. Remember, change can only bring improvement.

Rebuilding our local society in a creative way will be very healing after the shock of recent events. Our own life and practice are probably the best means to heal the present trauma, to bring deeper meaning and liveliness into our community and to put pressure on governments to act. It is also self-empowerment.

Let's consider each theme one after the other.

## **Citizen council**

The first and most important aspect is that we have to act in a democratic way that will ensure that all members of the community are taken care of and that we share in equity the resources which are available. There is no solution to climate change without equity.

The first step will consist in creating a local citizen council. If, as ordinary people, we become the main actors, we have to organise a structure which will take decisions in a democratic, public, open and transparent way. This can be done by a body of a few local motivated and committed citizens that will debate the issues, propose a wider vision for our local strategy and design the practical solutions.

At a first stage this council can be formed by volunteers, mainly by people who have a clear vision how to do what we intend to do and who are capable to build the foundations of the process.

At a second stage, which should follow very soon, we will have to establish a way of selection of the people who represent us in the citizen council, unless the form of a mission assumed by volunteers satisfies everyone. The electoral system is not necessarily the best. It is indeed important that the members of the citizen council represent the whole range of the local community. It means probably rather a selection on the basis of criteria of diversity.

This citizen council will not be the body which will decide everything. It will only define the main guiding lines and then delegate each mission to a specialised group (committee, association, corporation) that will be in charge of implementing in a specialised field (such as food, energy, transports, etc.) the general decisions that will have been taken by the citizen council (CC) and translate them into practical measures of all kinds. Delegation is an important aspect of direct democracy which goes also with a possibility of assessment of what has been done finally.

## **Food**

Food production should be local, according to the following principles:

- 1) A form of association of producers and consumers will offer a stability of income for the producers and a regularity of delivery for the consumers. Farmer's basket type.
- 2) A few shops (some already existing such as Candelo Bulk Food) will distribute the products for the members of the association.
- 3) A stable average price will be paid by the consumers to the producers. This price will remain stable despite the irregularities of quantity and quality of production caused by events such as drought or floods or heat. What is crucial is the regular subsistence of producers and consumers, not so much quantities.
- 4) Producers will propose a calendar of production of certain basic products they can offer. Consumers will subscribe to a certain number of farmer's baskets composed of a combination of these products according to their wish and or to season and availability.
- 5) Different categories of products can be produced, preferably organic but not necessarily if health and quality are guaranteed. A priority will be given to vegetarian products.
- 6) Producers and consumers will meet when investments are necessary and find ways to make these improvements possible. The association will be committed to support a reflection about better practices of market gardening.
- 7) Part of the payment can be made by the consumers in the form of work for the producers.
- 8) If enough producers are not available, we can also reorganise supply in the most local and reliable way.

## **Energy**

The recent fires have shown how our infrastructure (especially energy) is fragile and exposed to extreme natural events. The guiding principles should be:

- 1) A sustainable source of energy that does not rely on any fossil fuel. It means solar, wind or hydro energy. Fossil fuels remain in the ground.
- 2) A network of small production units, all interconnected by a network of connections that substitute themselves to one another in case of interruption or damage to one of the lines of distribution. The network: not a tree structure but a net of many interconnected meshes.
- 3) As renewable energy is not constant, it needs to be stored. Batteries are not an efficient means for storage. They have limited life duration and need a lot of special material resources and energy to be produced. It cannot be a solution on long term for a wide generalised use. The best way to store energy is, each time there is a surplus (mainly during the day when the sun shines or when wind blows), to pump up water into a higher storage from where it can flow down when it is needed for hydraulic production (at night). See Andrew Blakers ANU : out of river energy hydrostorage.  
<http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/hydrostorage.pdf> or directly the more documented website at ANU: <http://re100.eng.anu.edu.au> . And see existing examples: at Wivenhoe QLD: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wivenhoe\\_Power\\_Station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wivenhoe_Power_Station) or Kidston QLD: <https://www.genexpower.com.au/project-details.html>
- 4) The production has to be community-owned as a not for profit organisation.
- 5) Solar panels will be installed on houses or as solar farms, in a dispersed way that can answer local needs without depending on external support.
- 6) Users consume in priority the energy they produce on their own roof or such.
- 7) The size of the network will be defined by the quantity of energy needed to make an out of river energy storage with its own hydraulic production adequate in size.
- 8) This relative form of local autonomy does not prevent the network from being connected to the neighbour ones.
- 9) The network will be managed by the community owned association which brings the capital, installs all the elements and remains the owner of all installed parts: solar panels, converters, meters, network, dams, pumps, hydrostorage, hydro turbines, etc.
- 10) Users will pay the power they use at the effective price that results from production costs. The tariff can be progressive in order to favour small consumers. Subsidies can help to correct inequities related to income differences between the users.
- 11) It is important to see that, each time one installs some new renewable power production, one also needs to dismantle at the same time some corresponding existing fossil fuel power production. If we don't we just produce and consume more power, certainly more sustainable, but we do not solve anything because we do not reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as long as we do not dismantle traditional plants. The dismantling of present sources can only be done by steps and not progressively as plants are units that form a whole. Is there a way to reduce progressively the activity of a given plant?
- 12) The earlier we do what is described here, the more we will save. The price for installing the system will remain roughly the same, and as well the effort to do so, whether now or later, and energy will then be free, except functioning costs. So let's then start as soon as possible.
- 13) NSW is miles behind the other States (especially ACT, SA, TAS) in installing renewable energy.
- 14) Australia's economy is mainly based on export of raw material from prime sector (mining). This form of income does not involve many jobs because this sector is highly

automatized and the material is not processed in Australia. In reconverting our economy into a more sustainable all-encompassing process we will create many more qualified jobs that will offer opportunities of personal expression, especially for our youth. For each job in the present mining sector we can probably propose 10 qualified jobs in the second sector (factories).

- 15) There is a high contradiction in job creation in Australia: our government does not want to dismantle mining jobs. But the extension of the mining sector generates the loss of much more jobs in the touristic sector (destruction of the Barrier Reef, bush fires) or the farming sector (pollution and exhaustion of water sources). Mining jobs must evidently be taken care of, i.e. each job must be replaced by a more adequate one and provide security for the concerned worker. This should not be a problem.

## **Transport**

I live in the bush, some 20 km from Bega. If I want to travel to Bega, as I'm not self-sufficient and need to go regularly shopping (without mentioning social contact), I need a means of transport that would not use any fossil fuel. My need, I believe, is representative of the needs of most people in this Valley, even for the people living in Bega who need also a car to move locally. We need to reinvent mobility according to the following principles:

- 1) We have to replace all forms of transport that use fuel.
- 2) Private transport (cars) should be reduced strictly to local mobility.
- 3) Public transport can answer needs for further transport to Canberra or Sydney.
- 4) We will create small workshops that will produce very light solar cars (like solar rickshaws). It means vehicles as light as possible.
- 5) The main problem is the question of range. Further range means more batteries, i.e. more weight = more powerful engine and more batteries, and so on. Difficult balance to find. Lightness and slow speed are certainly the conditions for effectiveness.
- 6) Different solutions can be proposed depending on the range that is wished for. Some 80-100km in total seems to be a reasonable range for country settings. Is it realistic?
- 7) Some examples of such cars exist: the solar race through Australia although it concerns high speed and high technology solutions. A Swiss fellow travelled once to Australia in a solar car which relied only on its own solar panels (see <https://www.solartaxi.com>). A US guy (in Maine) proposed a light solar car for US\$ 6'000.- which had a speed of some 40km/h and a range of some 50km, depending on the topography (now out of production – [www.sunnev.com](http://www.sunnev.com)).
- 8) The car can pull a light trailer to double the surface of the solar panels and increase autonomy.
- 9) It will be rechargeable, either at the recharge stations in town (even if the source of this power is not presently renewable) or at home on the solar system, with a controller that will avoid depleting home batteries.
- 10) These cars will be used in car sharing.
- 11) The restricted mobility that will result from the limited resources and from the time they are available will teach us to be mobile in a different way that will be in tune with the environment. Also in organising shopping for many neighbours at a time.
- 12) Electricity is not a solution as such for cars. It is only a very practical way to store energy for transport (in batteries). It is only clean, i.e. renewable if electricity is produced by a renewable source: solar, wind, hydro. Most of our electricity is yet presently produced by coal plants. Some people believe they are connected to renewable energy sources, but this “clean power” is only available because other sources are used as well (at night). In

fact, one cannot choose the source when one is connected to the grid; one relies on the mix that it provides. The billing system does not change the source. It is like a river where clear water is mixed with polluted water; one can only consume the mixed water. No way to get only the clear one. And this is especially valid for electricity because the production of renewable power is not constant or stable.

- 13) Electric cars are not a solution for transport, because they need batteries and it would be impossible to provide so many batteries to satisfy the needs of 25 mio people in Australia or 7 bio in the whole world. Light solar cars, as proposed here, have the advantage to reduce considerably the range and by consequence the consumption and use of them and their number. It invites a necessary reconversion of our needs and means.
- 14) Speed has to be limited on the local roads as solar cars will not be very fast vehicles and the cohabitation of vehicles with very different speeds will be a source of accidents. Security will be then improved in general. Less death in car accidents. 80km/h should be a good maximum speed, as practised in many European countries. It saves fuel and gives more time for reaction in case of danger. This could be applied for the whole Bega Shire Council area, or more.
- 15) Public transports can be considerably improved and provide the necessary complement to private cars when they are restricted to local mobility. But public transport is rather a State issue. No investment into roads should be made anymore but concentrated on a railway line for a train along the coast.

## **Work – small businesses**

The principles:

- 1) The objective will be to develop a local economy that can satisfy most local basic needs.
- 2) Most trades can find a local form of production that will allow youth to see perspectives in living locally. People will then be valued by their work and recognised for their useful contribution.
- 3) These fields can be: food production, basic local trades, building, production of simple tools, repair. Services such as education, health, for all.
- 4) Workshops such as the ones producing solar cars will be small workshops that show how even a car can be produced locally. We can imagine producing locally a number of tools of all types, from spades to computers. These local workshops will evidently not produce all the parts but rather adapt them and assemble them.
- 5) The final cost of such items will be probably higher than the one of larger production plants. But the salary of the workers will be higher too, the income will remain more local, the skills too. And the work conditions are incomparably better. More human and more convivial. The local circulation of local wealth will largely compensate the difference of prices.
- 6) The service of such local workshops will be flexible and adaptable to demand.

## **Trade**

We need to develop a local economy where wealth circulates as much as possible locally.

- 1) We have to revive the LETS system and extend it to as many trades and services as possible.
- 2) The local currency will only be valid in the local shops which recognise it.

- 3) We will need to make most services and trades accessible for this currency, either completely or partly (in a proportion of LETS and \$ which are necessary when external resources are involved).
- 4) Incomes in LETS can be even taxed in LETS and taxes have to be payable in LETS!
- 5) We will develop a new relationship with money as just a commodity. No profit, no speculation, no interest. It is only a tool for transfer of value. It has no value as such.

## **Building**

A few principles can be proposed to people who want to build in an ecological way that may save energy. Our rammed earth house here at DCH is always cool in summer and warm in winter without using any air conditioning. Principles:

- 1) A place (a public office) has to be organised where people can get free advice about the best way to build.
- 2) Bioclimatic buildings need thermal mass (thick earth wall or water drums inside) in order to stabilise the inner temperature. A good insulation especially in the roof.
- 3) Big windows on the North front, but protected by an eave that project shadow on the whole North windows between mid-September and mid-March.
- 4) Very small windows on the East and West fronts. A well-insulated roof. These are the parts which are most exposed to summer sunshine.
- 5) Possibilities of cooling by air draft through the house in the summer evenings.
- 6) Advice could also be given how to protect the building from fire danger.

## **Finance**

This is the big topic. Principles:

- 1) We will first create a local financial institution or bank that will collect the necessary funds for all the investments. This fund could be managed by a local bank; not one of the big ones but rather an ethical one, such as Horizon or similar.
- 2) A new logic will be applied for the funds which will be made available: they are not meant to bring an income but they have two purposes: 1) to make local development possible in terms of sustainability and justice, and 2) to keep their value so that their owners can get them back with the same purchasing power they had when invested.
- 3) The interest rate will be the equivalent of the economic price index, or a fix modest rate that will maintain the purchasing power of the invested amount.
- 4) People will be invited to withdraw all their investments from coal and fuel industries or from all forms of stock exchange or similar lucrative purposes. The urgency now is not for making profit but for reconverting our society in order to make it sustainable and resilient to climate change. Question of life and death.
- 5) The services provided by the infrastructure that these new investments will have made possible will be available in priority for the people who have invested in it or have been involved in the implementation of this infrastructure. Maybe also to the others if there are enough resources to satisfy their needs as second priority. The intention is to bring all the members of our community together but yet also to stimulate personal involvement and commitment.

- 6) As the investment is not meant for profit, a regular interest rate can also be chosen, instead of the price index. But profit is not the purpose. It would on the contrary generate more problems than solutions.
- 7) Investors and users would become members of the association that manages the fund. The fund would be managed democratically, not according to proportion of shares but to proportion of participants.
- 8) Investors and users do not need to be the same people, but both functions are of course compatible. If we have as many small investors as users, we can probably do it, one share financing one small system. If bigger investors come in the game it is still easier. The question is of course whether bigger investors have more power than smaller investors. The ideal will be that investors and users have each one a vote. Is it feasible?
- 9) Investors will choose for which purpose (project) they will invest: energy, food production, transport, etc... They will buy shares. But these shares will not fluctuate but keep a constant value. They are not meant to be object of speculation or profit.
- 10) These shares can be sold too, at a fixed price, if newcomers want to be part of the system, as investors and as users, or if participants want to withdraw. They could even be bought back by the association or institution that manages them.
- 11) To become a user of one of the facilities (energy, food, etc.) one needs to be member. Members can also have to pay a regular fee for covering the management costs of the fund and of the association if necessary, or these costs will be covered by consumption prices of the goods and services delivered.
- 12) The role of the State or federal government will be to subsidise the investments as state participation to infrastructure costs and especially to offer a warranty for the value of the funds invested by private people so these can be refunded with the same value (price index or small interest) whatever happens.

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And many other ideas...

Contribute to this reflection. Make comments and propositions. Brain storming is excellent. We do not need to be immediately 100% right. It is more important to dare and try. It is only a first attempt.