

TALKING POINT

The good times of government handouts are well and truly over and the sooner Australians accept this the better

John Gardiner, of Nambour, advocates a review of unemployment benefits and age pension eligibility

The Courier-Mail

Together we can weather any climate challenges

LAST year it was droughts. This year it could well be flooding rains, if scientists' forecasts of a pending period of high cyclonic activity prove correct. Australia's changeable weather has always had a significant place in our national psyche but its influences on public policy seem to be more prominent than ever before. This time last year, the Bligh Government's fortunes were tied to delivering the \$9 billion water grid in time to stave off massive water shortages in southeast Queensland. Federally, the new Rudd Government was under strong pressure to agree to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25 to 40 per cent by 2020.

But then it rained, and the global financial crisis struck, and priorities shifted. A year later and the water grid has been built, but with some significant changes. Purified recycled water will now be added to our dams only in emergencies, thereby removing

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a significant political challenge for Premier Anna Bligh as she faces this year's looming state election. The controversial Traveston Dam has been put on hold while politically sensitive environmental issues are addressed. Such adjustments were only possible because the dams began to fill again. The Rudd Government demonstrated flexibility and common sense by opting for a target range for cutting carbon emissions — from a

low of 5 per cent to a high of 15 per cent if there is a global agreement on targets later this year. Hard-line environmentalists attacked the Government for being too cautious, but the global financial crisis gave more power to Labor's argument that a balance had to be struck between protecting the environment and protecting jobs.

When it comes to setting policies about the climate and human impact upon it, governments will be influenced not just by the science but also by political and economic realities. It was ever thus, but that should not stop all of us from doing all we can to minimise our collective impact on the globe. Governments can, and will, affect behaviour through regulations and charges. But addressing the challenge of climate change is not simply a matter of waiting for someone to set the rules for us to follow. It is not something passive, but rather something that all of us, each of us, can actively engage in.

As a simple and sensible rule for living, thinking about just how we use the resources available to us makes a lot of sense. At least some of the solution lies in reconsidering how we do things. Less than a decade ago, Brisbane residents were each using close to 500 litres of water a day, a third of it on gardens and swimming pools. Today the figure is 155 litres per person a day, the result of new water usage rules and growing awareness of just how precious and finite our water resources really are. It is true that excess or illegal water users face fines. But it is a fair bet that for the great majority of us, it is not the fear of a fine but rather the desire to do the right thing that motivates us to be water misers. There is no reason why this same sentiment cannot be effectively used in our collective effort to control greenhouse gas emissions.

We do need our governments to establish sensible rules and regulations, and we can judge them accordingly. But that does not let us off the hook. Individual behaviour and responsibility can, and will, make a difference.

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Cuts would benefit nation

FEDERAL Treasurer Wayne Swan has put Australians on notice that the Government will be looking at cost savings in respect of government benefits this year.

This is not before time as Australia has one of the most generous benefits situations in the world. In some respects this is to our credit as the poor, aged and handicapped need ongoing help and this should not be tinkered with to their disadvantage.

That said, we have a far too generous unemployment protection program in place which virtually ensures that a person can live a life without contributing a single dollar to the economy.

This must cease and if a person can work he or she should work and excuses for one reason or

another should not be acceptable. Further, it is not unreasonable to expect people, where possible, to contribute through their lifetime taxes to enable them to be part of the age pension system in addition to any superannuation benefits they may accrue.

Benefits should be in accord with what they have contributed throughout their lifetime.

Another area which the Government needs to look at is the age eligibility for the age pension. This should be lifted on a gradual basis to 70 years.

More people are working longer in any case and also living much longer. The younger population are not particularly interested in paying for others and, to their credit, accept they will have to be virtually self-supporting in

later life. The good times of government handouts are well and truly over and the sooner Australians accept this the better for all concerned.

John Gardiner, Nambour

AS Australians get over their Christmas and New Year hangovers, is it unreasonable to expect that we now face up to the size of the problems we face in 2009 and let the Rudd Government get on with inflicting the pain necessary to minimise our long-term suffering?

Or are we going to see the Opposition and its followers, who are still in denial, make every effort to prolong Rudd's work just for the sake of being obstructionists and a pain in the rear end.

D.J. Fraser, Mudgeeraba

IN BRIEF

● I NOTICED a change in the mains water several days ago (C-M, Jan 1). It tastes like water from a creek run-off — on the nose a bit but just drinkable. The authorities say the water is healthy, which may be the case, but I might still seek a government allowance for bottled water until the mains water is acceptable and palatable to drink.

Dan Dickson, Oxley

● IT IS often said that the population of southeast Queensland is increasing at a rapid rate. Statistics show there has been an increase of about 3.7 million in the past 110 years. Population was estimated at December 31, 1898, to be about 498,189. Now it is about 4.2 million — not what you would call a gigantic leap in 11 decades.

Ray Thurlow-Berthelsen, McDowall

● AS A journalist of more than 40 years, recently retired, I have been privileged to read some of the best writers and columnists in the Australian print media. Trent Dalton is one of the "must read" columnists in *The Courier-Mail*. His articles are well written, witty and timely. His take on the Shirley Club (CM2, Dec 31) was a delight. Superannuation might be in the doldrums but Dalton always gives me a lift.

Terry Shaw, Samford

● CRICKET is a confusing enough game for those who haven't grown up with the sport without some commentators and players referring to the cricket pitch as a "wicket". How can a novice understand the jargon when the experts fail to distinguish the difference between a set of three stumps and two bails and the central playing surface which is a strip of turf?

Jack Nickerson, The Gap

● THE impact of flying foxes is vastly overstated and their role in carbon sinking is underestimated. Every bat will sink many tonnes of carbon in its life. (Their vital pollinating and seed-dispersing activity is core carbon-sinking work with millions of trees produced each year.) Queensland horticulturalists would be better off lobbying for bat-carbon credits linked to the shooting ban and netting subsidies, not alienating the community by seeking to kill this vital species.

Lawrence Pope, North Melbourne

● TEN years ago when I first drove my current vehicle, I noticed that while the speedo registered 100km/h, my speed was 95km/h. I wrote to the manufacturer asking for an explanation and was told that a speedo could be up to 5 per cent out and be legal. It dawned on me that there could be two vehicles travelling at 100km/h by their speedos and one was doing 95km/h and the other was doing 105km/h. Since that time I have had significantly more patience with faster and slower vehicles. Their drivers may be victims of an inaccurate speedo.

Bill Gabriel, Morningside

Thought for today

To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe. — Anatole France (1844-1924) French novelist

Alcohol fuels bad behaviour

WHAT is happening? I worked a night shift on New Year's Eve for the Queensland Police (I am not an officer). Every problem was soaked in alcohol — be it drink-driving, domestic and general violence or disgusting behaviour.

It's time we started pushing politicians to make a bigger issue of alcohol's effect on our society in terms of the crime rate and families in general. Either that or we need to invest in rehabilitation facilities. How sad. I have children, and this is not the world I thought I was bringing them into.

Tolerance and acceptance is the answer, not violence and alcohol.

Sally Laws, Bulimba

I WENT to bed at 9pm on New Year's Eve because I was tired. After reading about the incidents that occurred across Queensland on that night, it sounds like it was the best place to be.

Josh Mansfield, Redbank

HOW disappointing that people can't keep their behaviour under control. Why can't they go out and have a great night to celebrate the year that was, without the need for all of this rubbish?

Amanda Stinson, Boronia Heights

IT IS a serious problem that people feel the need to drink themselves senseless to have a great time. If it affected only them, no one would care, but it usually affects sensible people, too.

Patrick Ellis, Parramatta, NSW

SOUTHERNERS must feel a bit silly having to celebrate the start of the new year at 11pm.

John Leal, Caloundra

Unable to see the light

DESPITE the urgings of a desperate tourism industry, Premier Anna Bligh obstinately refuses to revisit daylight saving (C-M, Jan 1).

The Queensland Government seems to mirror the attitude of the Australian cricket selectors: too frightened to embrace change, and yet too short-sighted and too self-serving to realise the long-term consequences of failing to do so. Both ruling bodies resemble a kangaroo caught in a spotlight, mesmerised and living, all too briefly, in the hope the shooter's gun will jam.

Crispin Walters, Chapel Hill



NATURE'S emissions ... a smoking volcano in Rabaul.

Prosperity best weapon

I REFER to Graham Readfearn's article "Light up the new year, but don't mention global warming" (C-M, Dec 30).

In targeting the puny energy consumption of Christmas lights, perhaps your journalist has been blind to the energy involved in the spectacular fireworks put on by nature with the thunderstorms sweeping across the city. The energy consumed by that lot certainly surely puts twinkling Christmas lights in the shade.

The greatest greenhouse gas by far, water vapour, continues to be ignored by members of the sky-is-falling brigade who use worm's eye views of coal-fired power station cooling towers to promote their low-level arguments in vilifying carbon dioxide, a gas friendly to life on Earth.

I suggest a flight over cooling towers at 10,000m (minuscule when viewed from that height), and then a trip over a volcano in

Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, at the same level to contemplate the comparison.

Emissions from our efficient coal-fired power stations, which use scrubbers to remove undesirable gases and particulate matter, are nothing compared with those from natural events.

Developing nations certainly have to clean up their act, but the best weapon to clean up pollution is prosperity.

Carbon taxes and emissions trading schemes are a sure way of destroying our prosperity and rendering our nation impotent to deal with natural calamity.

Droughts, floods, cyclones, bushfires, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, disease and famine, cannot be fought with candlesticks and second-hand bicycles (the only things available after the steel mills and aluminium smelters are closed).

John McRobert, Indooroopilly

Hoping for Hayden ton

AS A big fan of Australia's opening batsman Matthew Hayden, watching his decline is not a pleasant experience.

The signs have been there for some time that maybe it is time to draw the curtain on what has been a magnificent career.

Hayden no longer intimidates bowling attacks as he has for many years, and failure at the top of the order, which has been one of Australia's strengths in its long successful era, is applying more pressure to those who follow.

I believe that the best time to replace Hayden would have been for the Brisbane Test, giving his replacement two Tests against a standard New Zealand attack before taking on South Africa.

Hayden deserves to finish his cricket career in style and, to that end, I hope he scores a ton in Sydney in the third Test against South Africa.

However, even if he does, it is not the answer to the Australian team's many problems.

T. Brimson, Ferny Grove