

A bright green future

Queensland's newest environmental warrior is practising what she preaches this World Environment Day, writes
Graham Readfearn

KATE Jones, ever so slightly breathless, drops her diminutive frame on to the big brown leather couch in her even bigger ministerial office and immediately points to a half-full plastic bottle of mineral water on the coffee table.

"That's not mine," she says.

Among many environmentally conscious voters, the bottled water industry is an icon of society's eco-ignorance and environmental excesses. As a media adviser to two former cabinet ministers, she's well aware that details can matter, even when the detail is as ubiquitous as this one.

It is eight weeks since Kate Jones, pictured, was handed her debut ministerial portfolio of Sustainability and Climate Change, becoming Queensland's youngest minister for almost 120 years.

But if only the member for Ashgrove's problems were as small as a 600ml bottle of mineral water.

According to US President Barack Obama, there are few challenges in the world "more urgent than combating climate change".

Conversely, in Queensland the climate change portfolio is the most junior ministerial position in Premier Anna Bligh's Cabinet. Understandably, Jones would like this to change.

"Anna knows I think this is one of the most fundamental challenges that business, the community and Government have to confront," she says.

Jones turned 30 last month, but it was an occasion which she says passed without ceremony. A look back through her day-to-view ministerial diary, she says, reveals not a single day off since she took office.

But it's the kind of position which, she believes, suits her "generation Y" take on life.

"Politics has changed. People are not getting into politics to be there until they're 70 any more. They go there to make a difference. Ours is the 'can do' generation," she says.

"We are used to things happening pretty fast. We get annoyed if the computer takes longer than two minutes to load up."

Jones grew up in the Brisbane suburb of Ashgrove, went to Kelvin Grove High School and then took a degree in journalism and politics at Queensland University of Technology.

In 1996, she became Queensland's first "youth premier" after being spurred towards politics by George Orwell's political novel *1984*. She entered politics as a media adviser before winning her local seat of Ashgrove in 2006.

Currently there are two jobs dominating her time. One is a review of Queensland's whole-of-Government climate change strategy and the other is the introduction into Parliament yesterday of legislation to cut by half the polluting farm chemicals running into the Great Barrier Reef. Jones will make a World Environment Day announcement today on an expansion of the D'Aguiar National Park and, tomorrow, will be speaking at the city's Greenfest expo.

One job which is not occupying her time, is her marriage in November to Paul Cronin, the former chief media adviser to Premier Bligh (and Peter Beattie before her) who now heads media relations at Queensland Rail.

"I'm not really a wedding kind of girl, I've not thought about the dress or the



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flowers," she says, although she does say she's ordering a small fleet of eco-friendly hybrid cars for her wedding transport.

"I put 'green wedding' into Google and loads of pages came up. These are the kinds of things people are doing everyday."

By the time she comes to exchange her vows, the level of interest in climate change in Australia and around the world will be reaching a crescendo.

Bookmarking the end of this year, will be COP15 — the United Nation's talks in Copenhagen where world leaders will try to agree new targets on cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will be hoping that by then Australia's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme will be making a passage through Parliament, but few share his optimism.

In Queensland, mining companies and industry groups have warned that introducing emissions trading would cost the state thousands of jobs. Jones is sceptical.

Unions and environment groups have claimed that rather than cost jobs, emissions trading represents a chance to

create new industries in green technology.

"We do have a reliance on coal in our economy and each state will need to react to the CPRS differently and that part of my portfolio is really important," Jones says.

"There's a lot of argy-bargy about the model, but there will be a CPRS — this is the new world that we now live in.

"We are going to have new green-collar jobs and new industries that we have not had before."

Whatever the outcome of Australia's CPRS, she says there's an expectation among the electorate that the world needs to start counting the cost of carbon.

"People are happy to make choices themselves, but now they want the entire economy to come to the table."

So what is Kate Jones bringing to the table?

"Probably enthusiasm ... and great expectations," she says.

On the web

<http://www.unep.org/wed/2009/english/>

Your planet needs you

WORLD Environment Day was established by the UN General Assembly in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

Commemorated yearly on June 5, WED is one of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political attention and action.

The theme for WED 2009 is "Your Planet Needs You — UNITE to Combat Climate Change".

It reflects the urgency for nations to agree on a new deal at the crucial climate convention meeting in Copenhagen some 180 days later in the year, and the links with overcoming poverty and improved management of forests.