

# Eco Voice interviews Monica Oliphant

Monica Oliphant is a physicist and expert on sustainable energy. She is vice president of the International Solar Energy Society and a member of the Premier's Round Table on Sustainability. Last year she won the SA Great Environmental Award for 2002. Monica Oliphant is currently working at the University of SA's Sustainable Energy Centre



**Q: Where did your interest in energy come from?**

**A:** My background degree is in physics and my career started out as a laser researcher, however, I knew early on that a lifetime job in lasers was not for me. I can remember the day when it came to me what I wanted to do: it was the time of the 1973 Arab Oil Crisis and Sir McFarlane Burnett was speaking on the radio.

He said that if nations were not so reliant on oil and could make more use of solar energy, then there was a likelihood that the world would be a safer and more equitable place. It seemed to me a fairly sensible premise and sealed my fate for the direction I have travelled in ever since.

**Q: Why does Australia have the highest carbon dioxide emissions per capita in the world?**

**A:** Australia has never been troubled with a lack of energy. We have vast fossil fuel reserves and, until recently, low energy prices that for the majority of us represented less than 4 per cent of both living costs for householders and running costs for commerce and industry.

As a result there has been no real incentive to reduce energy usage – although recent tariff increases have started to change this.

Our homes are often poorly designed for minimising heating and cooling needs; high efficiency appliances are often expensive or not readily available and most of our cities are very spread out, with large distances between population centres serviced by poorly patronised public transport systems.

**Q: What's your vision of a sustainable South Australia?**

**A:** My vision for a sustainable South Australia is that we become the Clean Green Capital of Australia in all aspects of our living – food, water, energy, environment, lifestyle, primary production and tourism.

And that we become the model that others will aspire to. We have all the attributes to achieve this. The hope is that in doing so there will be a net increase in jobs, more development in the regions, export potential for new products as well as greenhouse gas reductions.

**Q: What's your view of hydrogen as a fuel?**

**A:** Naturally I would like to see a higher penetration of renewable energy in our energy mix, and I believe that a hydrogen fuel economy will come, but it is just a matter of when.

However, a phased introduction of renewable energy sources, fuel cells and hydrogen must of necessity be combined with efficiency improvements in fossil fuel energy supply and use.

In the short term it is these latter two that are most likely to produce the greatest reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

**Q: How can we best reduce energy?**

**A:** On the user or demand side, it is best in general, to tackle the largest energy users which are: **industry** – electric motors and drives and industrial process heat; **commerce** – lighting, heating, ventilation and cooling; and **households** – water-heating, refrigerators and space heating.

Monica Oliphant is currently, or has recently been:

- A panel member reviewing Australia's Mandatory Renewable Energy Target (MRET). At the time of writing

the findings have not yet been released.

- A committee member on the Premier's Round Table for Sustainability.
- Vice president of the International Solar Energy Society.
- Helping conduct baseline studies of electricity and gas use in SA households.
- Involved in sustainability in the Grote Eco precinct.
- Monitoring energy use for Urban Ecology Australia, so that electricity use by environmentally designed homes at Christie Walk can be compared with traditional homes.
- Monitoring energy use for the SA Housing Trust for information and education purposes at the Whyalla Eco Renovation Centre and at new innovative homes at Princes St, Port Adelaide.
- Part of a consultancy group undertaking work for ESCOSA on electricity metering and demand management.
- Looking at the potential for PV to reduce peak loads on the distribution network.

Some of the above projects are being undertaken in conjunction with the University of SA Sustainable Energy Centre where Monica Oliphant is adjunct associate professor of research.

## The State of the Environment Report for South Australia 2003 will be out soon...



### THE STATE OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

- The State of the Environment Report for South Australia 2003 provides an objective assessment of the condition of our environment and the nature of the pressures upon it.
- The report comments on the adequacy of our responses and makes recommendations on how we can improve efforts to protect the environment.
- The Report is intended to inform public debate on environmental issues and underpin environmental policy and program development.
- The Report and a summary leaflet will be available on the internet from the last week of November at [www.environment.sa.gov.au/soe2003](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/soe2003).



## The Collins Dictionary goes feral

The word 'feral' has officially entered the lexicon. According to the 2003 edition of the Collins Australian Dictionary, published in October, feral describes 'a person tending to be interested in environmental issues and

having a rugged, unkempt appearance'. Other uniquely Australian words in the new edition include: Baggy Green – the Australian Test Cricket cap; sanger – a sandwich; unco – uncoordinated, awkward or clumsy; and derro – a vagrant.

We welcome suggestions for people to interview and questions to ask. Send ideas to [news@ecovoice.com.au](mailto:news@ecovoice.com.au) or ph 8338 0033.

## Coober Pedy bush camp

People unite in opposition to nuclear dump

*Kelly Allen, Adelaide Kungka Tjuta Group*  
Along with around 200 others, I made the journey to 10 Mile Creek, Coober Pedy, to support the indigenous opposition to the proposed national nuclear waste dump.



Earlier this year the senior Aboriginal women of Coober Pedy, the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta, sent letters inviting people to a four day bush camp to listen to their story. People travelled from all over Australia to attend, including grandparents, parents, children, activists, media, international students, politicians as well as members of the surrounding communities.

At the September bush camp we listened to horrific tales by survivors of the land desecration and deadly poison left by the atomic bomb testing at Maralinga and Emu Fields 50 years ago, and talked about the possibility of further poisoning if the waste dump goes ahead.

**Get involved in the campaign**

The Prime Minister John Howard is accepting feedback on the dump. Contact: PM John Howard, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600 or [www.pm.gov.au/your\\_feedback/feedback.htm](http://www.pm.gov.au/your_feedback/feedback.htm)

More info: [www.iratiwanti.org](http://www.iratiwanti.org), Jim Green on 83791701 or [jimgreen3@ozemail.com.au](mailto:jimgreen3@ozemail.com.au) or Kelly Allen on 84434642 or [alle0163@flinders.edu.au](mailto:alle0163@flinders.edu.au)

## City of Playford wins green city award

*Kevin Lowe, group manager, Parks & Recreation, City of Playford*

The City of Playford has gained international recognition at the prestigious *Nations in Bloom* competition, held recently in Apeldoorn, The Netherlands. *The Nations in Bloom* competition recognises the creation of liveable communities and good environmental practice and management. Playford won the *Planning for the Future* Award ahead of cities including Chicago in the USA; Quanzhou, China; Enköping, Sweden, and Tshwane (formerly Pretoria) in South Africa.



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