



Extreme Weather Heroes

Supported by:

Promoting emergency volunteering to Gen X/Y



Introduction

Thanks for the opportunity to address such an important gathering from the volunteering community. As a new NGO, we are delighted to share the story for why we have chosen to support generational shift in emergency volunteering as one of Green Cross International's first initiatives through our Australian Office.

In this talk I will first offer some background comments about Green Cross Australia, and then will focus on two key points:

1. *Why we need to link climate change to emergency volunteering in the public imagination.*
2. *How **Extreme Weather Heroes** will spread this crucial message among Australia's new generation of emergency volunteers.*

About Green Cross Australia

Our organisation has different mission compared to most environment groups. **We aim to foster a global values shift towards a sustainable and secure future.** We work in the overlay between environmental and humanitarian issues, due to our unique heritage. Volunteering is at the heart of the values that motivate us, so it's no surprise that our efforts will connect us to your sector. Young people care most about two issues: climate change and animals. Both are crucial in terms of our sustainability challenge.

Green Cross International was born from the ashes of the cold war. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and structural change across Europe, Mikhail Gorbachev was propelled into global citizenship. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, and set out on a personal journey towards a lasting contribution to peace. His journey took him to the Rio Summit in Brazil in 1992, where together with Canadian Maurice Strong; President Gorbachev gave birth to one of the world's most democratically developed principles statements, the Earth Charter.

As President Gorbachev delved into the sustainability agenda, he became increasingly clear that a crucial future source of conflicts would be environmental conflicts and disasters. He saw the writing on the wall: as populations grew, so would the impacts of environmental pollution on our public commons. In the context of growing inequality and profoundly lacking basic human needs for billions of people around the planet, the potential for local, regional and even global conflict was real.

President Gorbachev founded Green Cross International in Geneva in 1993 in order to build a social movement capable of anticipating and resolving environmental conflict, while caring for those most vulnerable to environmental impacts and least able to protect themselves. The core focus on values results from a strong feeling that we will only truly commit to sustainable lifestyles if we are ethically motivated.

From this birth, 31 Green Cross Chapters have emerged around the world. Our activities include global campaigns such as promoting a United Nations convention which aims to resolve conflicts between countries that share major river borders, as well as promoting the development of solar energy policies and distribution in developing countries. Each office is encouraged to develop unique projects consistent with our particular focus on sustainability through the lens of humanity. Here are some examples:

- In New Orleans our US Affiliate Global Green is building low income, sustainable housing to welcome back victims of Katrina. The project showcases affordable sustainable technologies such as passive solar, community gardens, toxic free and recycled materials, and public transport and bicycle friendly access. Brad Pitt champions this project and chaired the panel of eminent architects who selected the winning design.
- In Japan Green Cross has pioneered a magnificent environmental diary program which has captured the imagination of young Japanese students using a “*manga*” style. Since 1994, over 500,000 10 year old Japanese students have completed intensive three month diary programs, and each year the top ten students and their families are flown to Tokyo for a national celebration where the Environment Minister chooses the Diary of the Year. Families actively participate in this program and it is now tracking to influence environmental career choices as students grow up.
- In Switzerland our Green Cross office pioneers delivery of social and medical assistance to communities impacted by the legacy of environmental conflicts and disasters. For example, in Vietnam Green Cross provides humanitarian assistance to families coping with third generation consequences of Agent Orange.

Our small but dynamic Brisbane office has been open for just under a year. We work on some international campaigns (see www.greencrossaustralia.org) and have chosen two projects in Australia, focussing on preparing for sea level rise and extreme weather. Our focus is on impacts because Australia, like Africa, is on the frontline of climate impacts as Ross Garnault so convincingly demonstrates. Not a month goes by without a large flood, fire, wind storm, mini-cyclone, or deepening drought. Events which were supposed to occur once every 100 years seem cross our TV screens regularly. Scientists predict deeper, more frequent impacts. We need to support each other for the challenging decades ahead. It is our great hope that in confronting these challenges together, here and in the Asia Pacific where our neighbours’ problems will become our own, we will find hope, and inspiration to cut greenhouse pollution to minimise the climate impacts ahead.

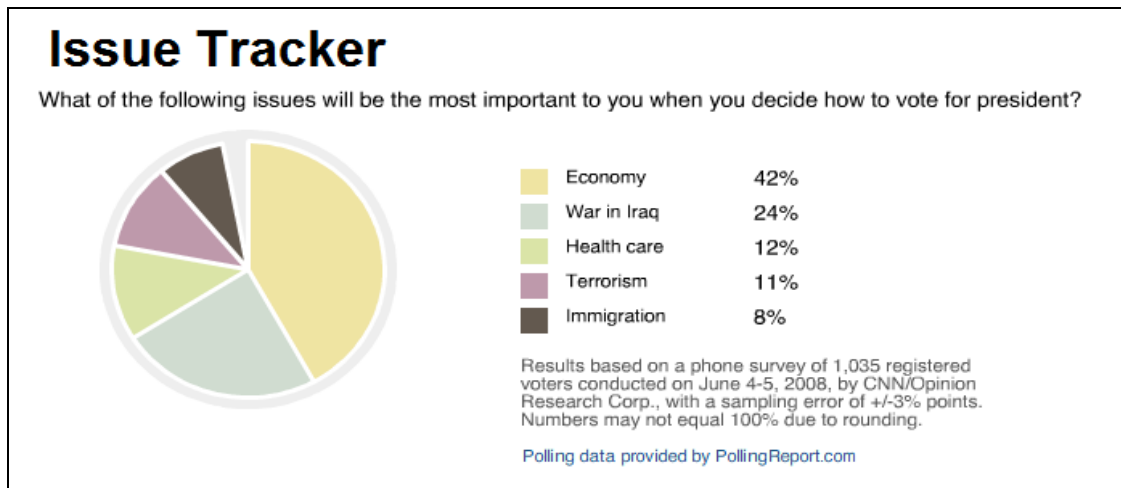
Linking climate change to emergency volunteering

Exit polls from last year’s federal election indicate that climate change was a critical issue for Australian voters, along with health, the economy and industrial relations.¹

In contrast, climate change appears to be nowhere as a US presidential issue.

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/11/24/2100160.htm>

US Presidential Issues tracked by CNN:



Source: <http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/issues/index.html>

Climate change is a bottom 20 issue in the US and a top 3 issue in Australia. Why the difference? Two factors have galvanised the Australian community over recent years.

- The first is the prolonged drought, its impact on farming communities, and images of our beloved, dying river system the Murray-Darling, that has sustained generations of communities and rich biodiversity.
- The second ironically was imported from the US, but found far greater resonance in Australia. Al Gore and his inconvenient truth message, with its relentless evidence of the impacts of climate change which reinforced drought experiences and the Murray Darling crisis.

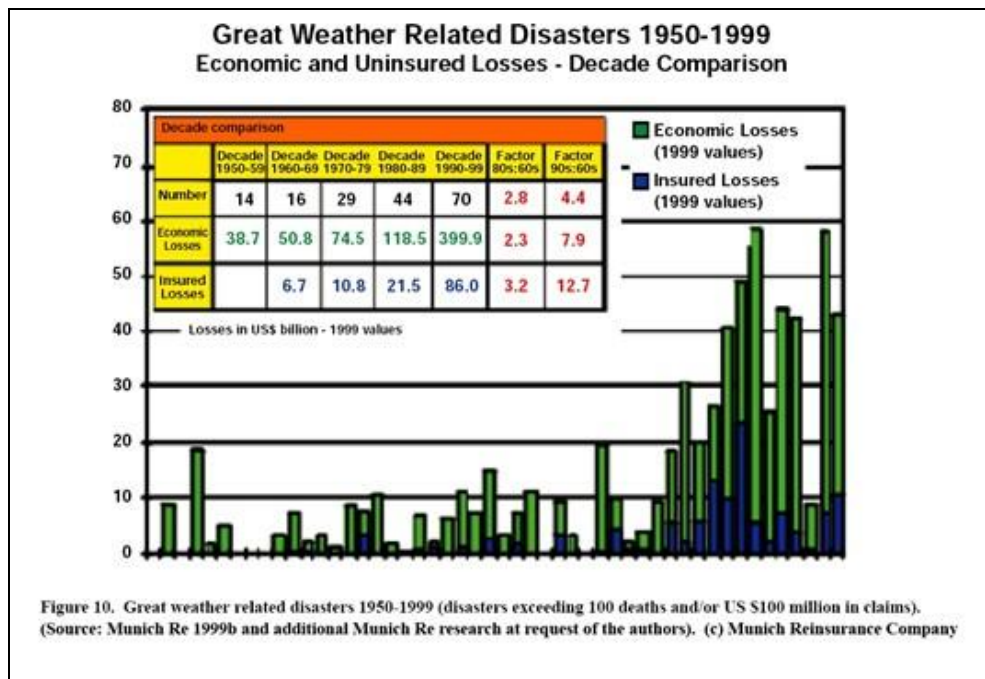
However, despite heightened awareness about climate change and growing community concern, the links between floods/fires/storms and climate change are weak in the Australian public mind compared to the drought as a singular factor.

Consider a typical Channel 9/ninemsn news story about wild weather earlier this year (<http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=384763>). A clinical discussion is provided, beginning with *“Extreme weather patterns have hit Australia with tropical cyclones, snow and heatwaves this month — but the weirdness is set to continue with an active monsoonal trough over north Queensland and a storm front heading for Sydney this evening.”* The article covers 370 words with not one reference to climate change.

Over the past year, each time a TV story about a fire, flood or storm cross the TV screen, I have looked for references to climate change. I have heard the connection made just once despite dozens and dozens of stories including references to hailstorms, wild seas, wind damage etc., sometimes quite severe. Not even the ABC draws the connection, though the Foxtel weather channel is finding real traction in which is encouraging.

Why does this matter? Munich Re, the world’s largest reinsurance company, reveals a disturbing extreme weather trend, measured on the balance sheets of the world’s insurance companies.

Munich Re Tracking of Extreme Weather Events



Source: <http://www.greencrossaustralia.org/our-work/extreme-weather-heroes/insurers-believe-extreme-weather-events-are-on-the-rise.aspx>

This graph highlights the significant increase in economic and insurance losses (the dollar cost of damage done and the portion of this cost that was insured) when we compare great weather related disasters during the 1990s compared to previous decades. Some portion of this dollar comparison arguably is due to reasons other than climate change such as growing capital investment, population and migration to areas where disasters hit. But climate change must feature strongly in the explanation if we observe the sheer number of significant events: 70 during the 1990s compared to 44 in the 1980s and 29 in the 1970s. We need to prepare for extreme weather on a much greater scale.

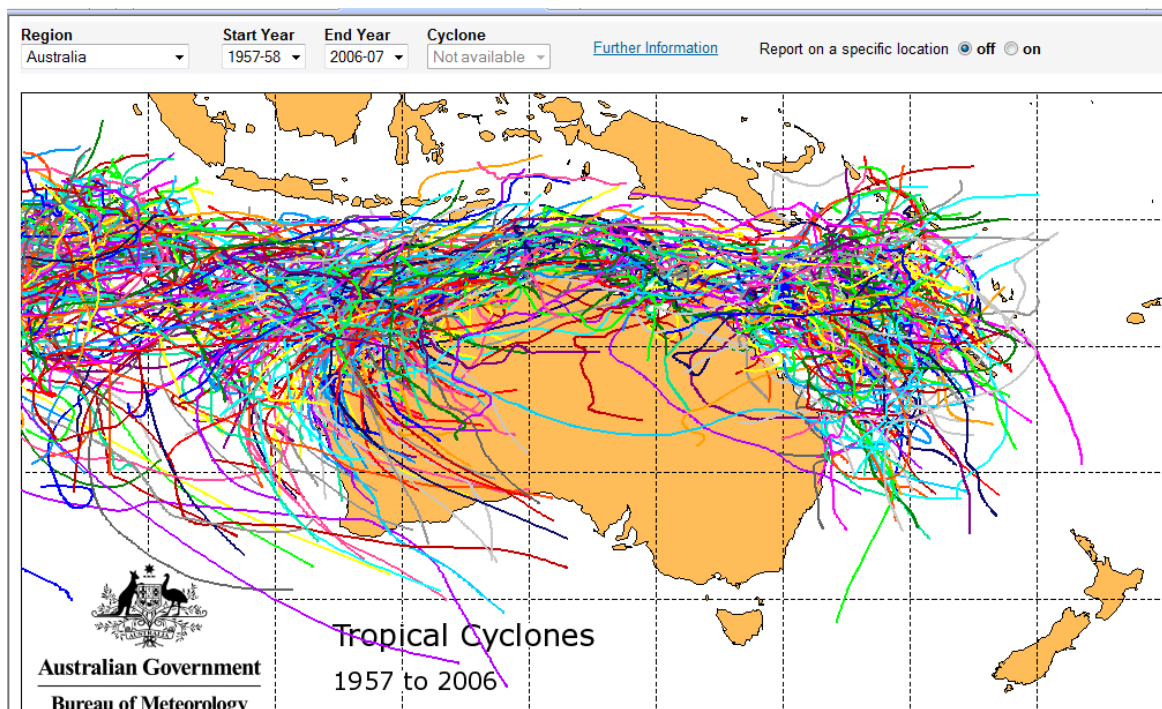
Insurance Australia Group's submission to the Professor Ross Garnault's Climate Change Review inquiry said this: *"IAG anticipates a likely increase in both the cost and the variability of weather-related claims as a result of climate change. Severe weather events affecting heavily populated regions are a significant driver of property insurance costs in Australia. As referenced in the Garnaut Review's Issues Paper, IAG-sponsored research indicates that the frequency and/or severity of cyclones over south-east Queensland and hailstorms over the Sydney Basin are expected to increase as a result of climate change."*

Although the evidence remains sparse, it appears that weather related natural disasters are climbing in line with a warming planet. The past 19 out of 20 major Australian insurance events were weather related, and this increase reflects European insurance findings. The average number of annual disastrous weather and climate related events in Europe doubles over the 1990s compared with the previous decade according to the European Environmental Agency. Earthquakes and other non-climatic events remained stable over the same time period.

Supporting indigenous Australia in the Top End

Indigenous Australia has managed harsh weather conditions for many thousands of years. The following map of cyclonic activity over the past fifty years shows just how deeply cyclonic activity cuts through Australia's North. We can learn much from Aboriginal communities across the top end about cyclone survival strategies. However we also have an obligation to share the science community's warnings that also cyclones may become happen less frequently in a warmer world, their impacts may become more severe. Communities are unprepared for changes ahead.

Bureau of Meteorology Website: <http://www.bom.gov.au/cgi-bin/silo/cyclones.cgi>



According to the federal Department of Climate Change: “If climate change increases the energy of tropical cyclones and severe non-tropical depressions then the return frequency of severe storms (like cyclone Tracy) could reduce significantly with an associated increase in exposure. Linked with increasing sea level and hence more dangerous and extensive storm surges, this could put some of our significant population and tourist centres like Cairns, Broome, Darwin and Townsville, as well as remote communities, at considerably increased risk.”²

Indeed, the Department of Climate Change foreshadows – “In many temperate urban and rural centres, any increase in severe weather events linked with climate change — bushfires, heavy and sustained rainfall, high winds and in particular cyclones, sustained heatwaves — could cause significant damage. This is particularly so in inner areas of older cities that have progressively increased population density and hardened surfaces above stormwater infrastructure put in place fifty or more years ago. *Demographic changes could exacerbate these effects as they impact both on the volunteer base for emergency services and increase the population at risk.*”³

² <http://www.climatechange.gov.au/impacts/publications/risk-vulnerability.html>

³ Ibid.

This takes us directly to the link between climate change and emergency volunteering which is not yet commonly understood. Once this link is forged, it is Green Cross Australia's hope that the emergency volunteering sector will become reinvigorated to rise to the very different and substantially different challenges ahead.

Extreme Weather Heroes

When our team at Green Cross began to examine community vulnerability to climate impacts and the role of the volunteer sector in our emergency management system, some key concerns began to emerge. The emergency management sector is at the forefront of climate impacts. Scientists predict more devastating storms, increased coastal and riverine inundation, more intense bushfires and extended periods of heat. We urgently need to prepare our vital emergency volunteer base for a future that will be very different from recent decades.

Over the past eight months we have engaged in deep discussions with Volunteering Queensland, the Queensland Department of Emergency Services, the Victorian SES and Victorian Department of Emergency Services, the national and Queensland Red Cross, and a number of Green Cross volunteers with deep experience in the sector.

Chief among these is Jelenko Dragisic, a Green Cross volunteer and Advisory Panel Member. Jelenko is Manager, Centre for Public Culture and Ideas at Griffith University. Prior to joining Griffith University, Jelenko spent 11 years with Australian Red Cross, including five years as Regional Manager, South-East Qld. Jelenko has significant experience in volunteer management, having worked with thousands of volunteers across Queensland. He led a team of volunteers in assisting local communities in Far North Queensland affected by Cyclone Larry in March 2006. His most recent emergency volunteering work has been in Central Queensland during the January/February 08 floods.

Thinking out loud together with this diverse network of committed and insightful people, including the uniquely insightful Richard Williams from the Volunteering Queensland Board whose strategic perspective is invaluable, we have framed the following diagnostic of the climate change driven emergency volunteering challenge.

The big picture: Is our Emergency Response System ready for climate change?

We need to prepare for a different type of world to combat the effects of climate change. Now is the time to plan for how business, government and society will change over the next fifty to hundred years. Governments fund emergency response services to deal with business as usual. If the unusual occurs then 'surge' is initiated, often in the shape of volunteers. With really big events inter-government agreements come into play, potentially using the Australian Defence Force.

Australia's integrated emergency response system has never been truly stressed by the concurrent major catastrophes which is a real risk in a changing climate.

Inter-government support works well in Australia through a range of agreements. SES volunteers travel inter-state to fight fires, equipment and personnel are lent between states and territories and seasonal arrangements are in place to lease high capital cost items like helicopters. But will this be sufficient in a globally warming future?

Australia can capitalise on its resources to address this challenge. We have a robust industrial and business sector with tremendous capacity to provide logistical support; cohesive and well developed communities; well organised volunteer NGOs; and a strong democratic framework.

However, while a country like a sporting team can be full of stars, it is also true that a well organised team of average players will always beat a team of uncoordinated stars. We urgently need to coordinate different sectors of our society to maximise the capacity of the country to adapt to climate change.

How well would Australia respond to a set of major catastrophes happening concurrently? In the United States they talk about ‘surge capacity’, the ability to ramp up your resources to address different scales of event. A national understanding of ‘surge capacity’ and how Australia would respond to concurrent major catastrophes would position Australia well.

One major threat to ‘surge capacity’ is demographic change which impacts on our emergency volunteer base. Aging ‘baby boomers’, over many years the back bone to emergency volunteering, will no longer be physically capable to help, or they will be enjoying retirement. In their place will be Generation X and Y who, according to the literature are interested in ‘episodic’ volunteering rather than turning up to weekly training sessions. Do we need a strategy that hits different buttons to attract the next generation to emergency volunteering? Do we need large numbers of free volunteers or will we have to adapt to smaller numbers, better trained and partially remunerated? These are issues that require attention now. Here are some simple, low cost actions that could help build our national emergency response capacity:

- 1. Identify which national resources need to work jointly in the event of major catastrophes. Put in place agreements on roles, responsibilities and ongoing working relationships – as a US Katrina observer said: ‘it’s no good exchanging business cards when the hurricane is happening’.***
- 2. Focus on ‘at risk areas’ to develop specific risk and response plans. Australia remains unaware of its own geography, particularly coastal digital elevation mapping and bathymetric profiling. A ‘Financial Review’ article pointed to the last canal development in northern NSW - who is responsible for future coastal inundation with rising sea levels?***
- 3. Harden up communities to be self reliant after major events. New Zealand runs a sophisticated public programme called ‘What’s the plan Stan’ which is aimed at making individuals self reliant for at least 72 hours.***
- 4. Develop a national database of pre-qualified specialists who can respond to different types of events. Retired medical specialists who approached Australian organisations to help after the Boxing Day tsunami were turned away because they were an unknown quantity in terms of currency of qualification and physical fitness. Plumbers, builders and vets want to help – we can make it easier for them to participate.***

With smart thinking we can come up with a range of initiatives to prepared Australia for the consequences of climate change. Time is still on our side to get this work underway but it requires creative thinking, a national approach and leadership.



Extreme Weather Heroes Project

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Green Cross Australia's first contribution to the sector will be focussed, electrifying, controversial, and risky. Our **Extreme Weather Heroes** campaign is deliberative disruptive to current arrangements in the volunteering sector. Some people will not like what we are doing, because it confronts traditional models and messages. But we are prepared to take the risk because of what is at stake – an aging volunteer base at a critical time of growing need. We aim to foster a generational shift in engagement, reaching out to the treacherous territory of GenX/Y – whose participation will be vital to build community resilience over coming decades right across Australia.

The project

We will build an online social networking campaign to celebrate the contribution that emergency volunteers make; link this effort to climate change; make flood, fire and storm volunteering sexy to Gen X/Y; and grow an online community which takes action to save energy.

We will recruit six under-25 emergency volunteers to spread their stories/videos/pictures over the Internet through Facebook and MySpace.

We will equip our six **Extreme Weather Heroes** with camcorders, mobiles and blackberries, and we will upgrade their Facebook and MySpace pages. Young people will be able to follow the journeys of our heroes through enhanced YouTube networks and blogs on www.greencrossaustralia.org.

Green Cross will train these Heroes about climate change and the network will offer tips for saving energy at school, home and work. We will provide cut-through messages that work in social networking sites.

Our partners

Red Jet (the Virgin Blue Foundation) will support web development, volunteer recruitment and training, and volunteer gear.

Green Cross will introduce this project in partnership with Australia's most listened to under-40 **national radio network, Nova**. Nova will run 125 community service announcements nationally and will link each of their capital city green websites to Green Cross for three months once the campaign is launched. Nova's people are much funnier than Green Cross' team so we are happy that they will help us use words and images that strike the right cord with young people!

Nova spread the message and will help us to select our heroes in each capital city, from the **Red Cross, SES, St John Ambulance, Surf Lifesavers, Rural Bushfire Brigade**. One **young indigenous volunteer** will be recruited from the north of Australia. We will also develop appropriate ways of reaching indigenous communities in the top end beyond radio and Internet social networks.

The online community that we are building

The Extreme Weather Heroes online community will Reach across MySpace, YouTube, Facebook and Flickr and back into the Green Cross website in order to:

- Build a viral youth network, a place to learn about emergency volunteering from volunteers who are already involved, and to learn about what is causing climate change and its impacts, and how we can support our local communities if we build the right skills
- Provide an opportunity for people to follow the journey of our six emergency service volunteers
- Give users a first-hand look at what's involved in being an emergency volunteer in fires, floods, storms, etc and build confidence that we can get through what's ahead if we rely on each other
- Provide users with tips about saving energy and school/home/work
- Offer digital tools that help to spread the climate change message

Project leadership

The Extreme Weather Heroes program will work with Nova's creative team and Green Cross' award winning web design consultants Zeroseven. The project will be led by an Advisory Board that includes young emergency services professionals as well as experts in environmental and digital communications areas. Members of the Extreme Weather Heroes Advisory Board:



Fran will Chair the Advisory Board. She is Green Cross Australia's Administration & Communications Coordinator, and was responsible for development and ongoing evolution of our hot website. Fran runs the design, content and operations of the website including new modules and social networking communities including the Extreme Weather Heroes program.

Fran has degrees in Business (Marketing and Public Relations) and Creative Industries (Media and Communication) from the Queensland University of Technology.

Fran Curro
Administration &
Communications
Coordinator
Green Cross
Australia

Most recently Fran has worked for the Queensland Performing Arts Centre in the Visitor Services and Marketing departments, Brisbane Festival 2006 as Marketing Assistant to Cirque du Soleil.

While working with the Brisbane Festival Fran had the opportunity to work extensively on the 2006 Mikhail Gorbachev Earth Dialogues, which led to the formation of Green Cross Australia. Fran helped to develop the Extreme Weather Heroes as part of Green Cross' strategy of empowering Australian communities to build resilience to climate change impacts, in order to also motivate green lifestyles.



Katie Greenwood
Coordinator
Operations –
Emergency Services
Red Cross

Katie is Operations Manager (North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery) for the Red Cross since January 2008. Katie has been with the Red Cross for nearly 10 years, with diverse roles including: National Emergency Services Project Officer; Fiji Red Cross Youth Policy Project; Cyclone Larry Response and Recovery; National Manager – Youth & Education Services; Manager – Special Projects; and Manager – Youth & Education Services. Katie's operational experience is extensive, and she has made a pivotal contribution to how the Red Cross engages with young people.

Katie has hand on experience in managing volunteers during extreme weather events. Australian Red Cross recently undertook a significant role in responding to community need during and in the immediate aftermath of severe flooding in Emerald and Mackay. Katie was responsible for management of Red Cross response and recovery activities in the first ten days of each activation.

The role managed more than 80 staff and volunteers on the ground operating three evacuation centres in each location, a number of recovery centres in conjunction with Department of Communities and personal support outreach to evacuated areas and surrounding locations which had been isolated during peak flooding.



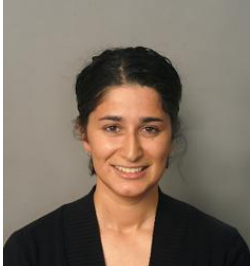
Phillip Toyne
Director, Ecofutures

Green Cross
Australia
Advisory Panel
Member

Phillip is one of Australia's best known environmentalists, and is a longstanding volunteer with the Gundaroo Rural Fire Brigade outside of Canberra. His personal passion is for biodiversity conservation management in the context of fire hazard reduction and management in an area which is extremely prone to major fires. Phillip was formerly Head of the Australian Conservation Foundation & Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Environment.

From 1994-1997, Phillip was Deputy Secretary in the Commonwealth Department of Environment, where he played a major role in the international policy arena on issues such as biodiversity, sustainable development and climate change. Between 1986 and 1992, Phillip was Executive Director of the Australian Conservation Foundation, where he led successful campaigns on mining in Kakadu, the Wet Tropics, Antarctica, and began the long process of merging green and aboriginal partnerships. He also developed the National Land Care program with NFF head Rick Farley, a movement which has radically changed land use practices in Australia and which is now moving to Africa and America.

Before ACF, Phillip spent 14 years in the desert, first as a school teacher then as a lawyer when he negotiated the passage of the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act, and then led the negotiations for the traditional owners of Uluru (Ayres Rock) resulting in them receiving title to the National Park.



Rubyah Haouchar is a Forensic Technical Officer at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine. She has been seconded to Thailand in 2005, on behalf of the Australian Federal Police Disaster Victim Identification team following the Indian Ocean Tsunami and to Tonga after the November 2006 riots. Rubyah has also conducted research on the interface between Islamic faith and medicolegal issues.

Rubyah has been involved with the Victorian State Emergency Service since 2002 in various volunteer capacities. The SES is responsible for flooding and storm emergencies including rescue and logistics management on the ground. In 2007 Rubyah accepted a 3 month secondment position as a Regional Officer in Emergency Management at the Victorian State Emergency Service Central Headquarters. She assisted in the 2005/2006 campaign fires in Bairnsdale, VIC and the 2007 floods in Gippsland, VIC. Her role as Deputy Controller includes managing emergency operations of the unit.

Rubyah was selected to attend the Volunteer Leaders Program in Mainly NSW in 2007. The course was held at the Australian Institute of Police Management on behalf of the Australasian Fire Authorities Council. Currently Rubyah is a volunteer Deputy Controller of the Footscray State Emergency Service in Victoria. Her role involves implementation of administrative systems and processes including promotion, recruitment and integration of new volunteers into her SES unit.



Tom is a Director of the Green Cross Australia Board, and provides thought leadership and tactical advice on Green Cross's Internet based campaigns. He has over 20 years experience in media and technology markets, covering software publishing, marketing, distribution and interactive content creation and management. He has been involved in Industry development and policy throughout his career and has been a champion for the future potential of the Australian content and the digital media industry.

Tom Kennedy
CEO, Mediacast Australia
Green Cross Australia
Board Member

Tom's community and commercial experience will guide Green Cross in its Internet engagement strategies, including the Extreme Weather Heroes project. In 2007 Tom assisted Love Communications in development of the digital strategy for the Climate Institute's Election campaign which involved multimedia promotion of a 10 year old climate change candidate.

Tom has been Commissioner of the Australian Film Commission (AFC); President/Board member of the Australian Interactive Media Industry Association (AIMIA); Chairman of Digital Content Action Agenda, Experts Group; Director of the Biennale of Sydney – Contemporary international Arts Festival; Member of the Digital Television Advisory Group; and Member of the Australian Government's Broadband advisory Group (BAG). Prior to leading Media cast Australia, Tom was founder/owner of MediaZoo (now owned by the Photon Group) and Brainwaave Interactive – which was bought out by Fairfax. Prior to that Tom was Managing Director of Beyond Online Limited from 1999 to its public listing in 2003 and was also CEO of the Hyro digital strategy group.