



Butts in the Burdekin Dry Tropics

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Changing Places

By Terry Butts

Until recent times the subject of global warming has been dismissed by the rank and file as some form of greenie gobbledegook. Even scare mongering. Proportionately very few of us wanted to know. Simply didn't care.

The weekend weather forecast was about as much as we wanted to know. Such was the limit of our concern.

But, just like the weather, that perception has changed. Quite dramatically too. In fact the subject of climate change has spread through the local community like a whiplash, according to Paul Wuth who is in charge of the key climate change project being undertaken quite seriously by Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resource Management (BDTNRM). The project is working with Local Government, Industry and the Burdekin community to develop plans for dealing with the possible future impacts of climate change.

"It's been quite amazing. There is a genuine concern now about our future weather patterns that is being shared not only by the hundreds of scientists around the world who are actively devoted to the subject, but people of all ages and backgrounds. And more especially, residents of North Queensland," he said.

Paul concedes however that Australians generally are still a fair way behind the Americans and Europeans on the score of awareness and acceptance of the inevitable weather changes and the inherent dangers. But he says that the changes in those countries have been more visible, citing the current floods in UK, the devastation of hurricanes in the US in recent years and the heat wave that took 15,000 lives in France three years ago. The bad news is that there is more to come. Of that, he declares, there is no doubt.

Its possible, he adds, that Cyclone Larry gave residents in the north a wake up call of things to come, and even Al Gore's timely (if not commercial) Inconvenient Truth prodded our sense of complacency. But whatever, North Queenslanders are becoming more aware and conscious that things will not be as they have been, on the sea, or on the land. And the lifestyle we have taken for granted since granny was in nappies, are all bound to change.

Paul Wuth says scientists are reluctant to pin point exactly when we will experience or feel the change. Or to what degree. But he is adamant people in 30 years won't be clambering to purchase properties by the seaside, a phenomenon that has seen 80 percent of the population residing within 50 kilometres of the coast. And with the most expensive properties bordering the high-water line or lapping the surf.

He says research already shows that coastal settlements, some very close to Townsville, may well be impacted by rising water levels inside 30 years, and local developers and researchers are said to be waiting with considerable interest in a report soon to be released by GRMPA on that very subject.

He is quite adamant that we are in for longer and hotter summers. Rain will be less frequent but torrential when it comes thereby creating more problems with run-off and flooding. And while the cyclones might be less frequent in future predictions are they will be much more ferocious.

Inland, farmers are also being told to brace for considerable change. The ground will be less productive because of the increased heat, it will be much harder to grow and sustain feed, and stock will also find it much harder cope with the extremes of climate. There is also the very real threat of weed infestation likely to blossom in the changing conditions. And then there is the problem of evaporation that will require new levels of handling water efficiency.

"There is consensus amongst most scientists that the changes in rainfall, climate, sea levels and severe weather events (cyclones) will intensify in the coming years. And everyone needs to be prepared," asserts Paul Wuth.

Of course it is not only in this part of Australia that is subject.

The stone fruit industry in the southern colder regions is already under stress from changing, warmer weather patterns. Some experts are predicting an end to such a vast and valuable industry, unless new methods of growing stone fruit are developed.

Meanwhile city dwellers might consider their retirement options. While sea change is still the buzzword, and an apartment down by the seaside is still the preferred way of idling away the lazy days, it might not be so for the upcoming generation.

They might be more inclined for tree change, away from the rising sea levels. The tablelands might beckon.

A cyclone proof apartment.

With a rainwater tank, of course and air conditioners powered by the wind or solar panels.