

CONCORD MONITOR

Drought produced by climate change drying up Australia Act now to prevent even more disasters

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For the Monitor

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G'day from Down Under. I am in Australia visiting my sister, a hobby farmer north of Melbourne. Far from my green hills in Bow, New Hampshire, this is quite a different scene - and it isn't pretty.

Climate change is plain to see in southern Australia. After 10 years of seriously below average rainfalls, folks have had to adapt: There is a weekly two-hour outdoor water restriction. Residents collect every bit of what little rain they get. They have re-landscaped their yards with indigenous plants and given up English-style gardens. It is no longer a question of whether to get an 11,000-gallon cistern for rain collection - the question now is how many.

We just spent a day driving around Victoria, going up mountains (small ones) with vast lookouts over dry barren land. I am told that in the springtime the land is green for a few weeks, but right now that is hard to imagine. Every land holder determines the lowest point on their land and collects water in a small dugout pond. However, this prevents the water from flowing into creeks, so it was no surprise to find all of the creeks bone dry. What few rivers we did drive over had stagnant puddles of water with tiers of grass between them - no flowing water was anywhere to be seen.

Cities have had to abandon several reservoirs and resort to just one that is usually less than 30 percent capacity. Farms are being abandoned because the water for irrigation has dried up. My sister's land has huge cracks from lack of rain. The trees she planted have barely grown.

Back in New Hampshire, we talk about the weather, while here they talk about the rain - in milliliters. It drizzled 4 ml shortly after I arrived, which barely wet the leaves and then evaporated with the high winds (another result of climate change).

It rains perhaps once a month, averaging only half an inch. Wells have gone salty, and drilling good water is now rare. A severe wind storm blew up red dust from the north and

became a blinding dust bowl which then rained mud (that was the 4 ml). The number of days over 100 degrees has increased steadily each year.

Nervousness is in the air at the mention of fire. Down here, the sea level has risen 4 inches in the past 60 years. Urbanites are arguing with farmers about water usage - the war on water has begun.

Taking action

But there is good news. Every day the newspaper has articles about climate change. The government is taking action and dealing with CO2 emissions. Melbourne is updating its public transportation system to deal with its 4 million people which is growing at the rate of 1,500 per week. Downtown trolleys are free to encourage their use. Bicycle lanes are provided on city and village roads. The city is spending \$60 million for a new comprehensive bicycle path system, including stations with showers at the end of the ride with the hope of increasing rider ship by 400 percent.

Motorcycles and mopeds are allowed to park on their wide sidewalks to help alleviate the choked highways. Gasoline is \$6 per gallon, and the cars are smaller. Almost every trash can is buddied with a recycling can. To save water, toilets have two options for flushing (you're on your own with this one).

The Australian lifestyle is more modest, having maintained their British roots, which is one way to cut down on energy consumption. The houses are smaller, only 50 percent of Australians have clothes dryers, and reusable shopping bags are much more prevalent. Fortunately, Australians have not developed the love affair with plastic bottled water that we Americans have. Their more modest lifestyle plays a big part in decreased per capita energy use.

During Earth Hour, Melbourne reduced electricity consumption by 11.5 percent. That was a savings equivalent to shutting down two power plants. The farmers' market emphasizes local and organic (both use less energy) and the idea of a sustainable future is everywhere. Australians have seen such dramatic changes in 10 years and know it is impossible to continue on their current course.

Our lifestyle is not yet as affected as the Australians', but that is no excuse not to take action. Americans consume 25 percent of the world's energy despite being only 6 percent of the population. Each American produces about the same greenhouse emissions as 60 Bangladeshi, 20 Indians or eight Chinese. What we spew into the atmosphere circles and comes right back to haunt us. We have an obligation to the world, to ourselves, and to our children to do better. We can not continue on this current path of destructive pollution. Our world is having major violence even this week over basic food. We must come together and work toward sustainability.

One person's actions can make a difference. Take with you the Native American philosophy that you question every choice you make and how that choice affects many

future generations. Many hands make light work. Let's hold hands and make every hour Earth Hour (that's figuratively - I'll settle for changing all your light bulbs to CFLs and turning off unnecessary lights) and make every day Earth Day. Our future is counting on us.

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