

Climate Action seek volunteers as climate change news get ‘pushed below the surface’

By Griffith University Journalism Student Sophia Thomas

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Photograph of the Queensland Conservation Council market stall by the Riverside.

A LOCAL climate action group is seeking more volunteers in Brisbane after a Griffith University meeting last Friday night.

Climate Action, part of the Queensland Conservation Council, has called on volunteers from among university students and the public to address climate change.

The Queensland Conservation Council established Climate Action after recent bushfires raised public awareness of the need for urgent climate action, prompting people to display signs on their property.



Photograph of the Green Drinks Event at Griffith University.

Climate Mobiliser Simona Holzer said recruiting volunteers and informing people about the issue would raise more awareness and give the organisation a bigger voice.

“The meeting was a very powerful way to get more awareness, but what’s also important for us is we really do want people to be inspired to take actions as well,” Miss Holzer said.

Miss Holzer further stated the topic has been overshadowed by recent world events, resulting in less exposure and urgency from people.

“I feel like world events took the media over these last few years and it hasn’t been in front of people’s minds,” she said.



Photograph of the BioBlitz Protesting with the Queensland Conservation Council.

Professor and Director of the Griffith Climate Action Beacon, Brendan Mackey, said Australians are still concerned about climate change despite minimal news coverage based on his research.

“Eighty-five to eighty-seven per cent of Australians are still very concerned about climate change,” Professor Brendan Said.

“It is true that climate change will always be under headlines, but it is always going to be with us as an issue for a very long time,” he said.



Photograph of the Queensland Conservation Council Dirty Dozen protest.

The Queensland Conservation and Climate Action has encouraged people to join their rally next Thursday at the Queensland Government Energy and Jobs Day to protest for renewable energy.

ENDS.

Interview Transcript

Interview with Climate Mobiliser Simona Holzer

Phone Number: 0435 792 348

Email: climateaction@qldconservation.org.au

Sophia Thomas: For the record, can you please state your occupation, first and last name, and how to spell it?

Simona Holzer: My occupation is called Climate Mobiliser and my name is Simona Holzer. My last name is spelt H-O-L-Z-E-R.

Sophia Thomas: Here's my first question for you, what are the goals, values, and beliefs of Climate Action?

Simona Holzer: Climate action now has been taking off after the bushfires and there has been several people who started putting yellow signs out on their properties because they have really been damaged by the fires. QCC got on board with that, and we started printing all those Climate Action Now signs that people put on fences around Queensland and also nationally become a campaign. During the federal election last year, the Climate Action Now campaign really was a grassroots movement that was supported by- it involved a lot of people around whole Australia just getting that message out and leave it to see that people really cared about the government having more ambitious climate action, the climate action targets and being more ambitious with that. So that's kind of like the Climate Action Now campaign now as like the topic campaign and during the election, that was like a huge success. We got so many, around 17,000 signs and stickers out in Queensland. Since the election, which has been a success, the Climate Action Now Sign, there has been a little bit less request. Obviously, because there was a lot of motivation from people during the election and as we change government, people are like "yeah, now we don't have to do that much anymore," which is actually not true because we still have too many comas around and too high emissions, especially in Queensland.

So, we, Climate Action, apart from the Climate Action Now campaign with the signs, really advocate for, like, lobbies the government to reduce its emissions and shift quicker to renewable energy because last year the Government released a plan on how to shift to renewables and how to reduce emissions, but it's all too late and not enough ambitious. That's why we still need to ask for more ambitious climate action from the government and we want to do this with people power because that's the only way we can really make the Government believe that Queensland do want to change

Sophia Thomas: Would you say your goal right now is to try and get the government on board with, you know, that mission? Can you elaborate on that, if that's okay?

Simona Holzer: Yeah. So, one of the goals at the beginning of the year was this safeguard mechanism that those in climate policies that target them. Big polluting companies like Glencore, Shell, and Santos. With that campaign, really, our aim was that – those companies and the government sees that people really, really want that, those polluters have to reduce their emissions because they make 12 per cent of Australia's emission, which is huge for only 12 companies and so like 3-4 weeks ago, that safety mechanism got passed and the big polluters of Australia, they need to reduce their emissions now every year. Which is great and so that was on the federal. I should have mentioned that first that even though we're Queensland based, we're still doing a lot of federal work as well so that was a part in the beginning of the year. Now we're really focused on the government and taking more climate action. We do that through – like we get people together to visit their local MPs, like your local state, state MPs so those MPs realises they are not taking climate action. If they're not paying attention to that, they might lose their seat. So that is kinda like how we try to influence the politics. And then we've also got, like some people of our team, they really, they hold a lot of personal relationships with the government, and they really do, more like submit submissions and stuff like that where you need a little bit of

lesson people power, you just need a lot of, like good, good knowledge and good relationships.

Sophia Thomas: Do you have any current opposition to your goals, and would you say the purpose of holding the meeting with Griffith University students, a few weeks ago, is to provide information and recruit more volunteers and voices to represent the organisation?

Simona Holzer: There is on one side of the political opposition. Some politicians in Queensland or the network that those politicians hold weight with fossil fuel industry, it's like, very, they're really tight knit so they're like a family? They often take decisions that actually are not benefiting the community or not benefitting the shift to renewable energies because Queensland's just benefiting one way, like financially so much from the fossil fuel industry that these politicians can like – they seem to really be intertwined in that fossil fuel network family and so I think that is definitely opposition.

It is so hard to shift away from fossil fuels in a fair way because a lot of communities rely on it so if you could go one day and stop everything (unintelligible) you don't have anything that replaces those jobs. So, it's a hard thing and that is kind of like an opposition too, not in a political sense, more like a challenge.

Also, I would say, I think it's more like a global think. I think COVID and the war in Ukraine has been taking so much space up in the media. Because when you, I think we talked about that at the meeting as well when you think back of like four years ago, there had been huge rallies and so many people were like, climate action and climate change was all over the media all the time, and that really make people aware. And I feel like COVID took the media over these last 2-3 years and people kind of forgot a little bit? And it hasn't been in front of people's minds.

Sophia Thomas: Just a little question to follow up on that. Would you say climate change and the topic of climate action should be discussed more, especially given the state of our world right now, so there's exposure?

Simona Holzer: I really think it should be way more in the media, like when we have actions, it's really hard – because at QCC we would like to have way more media coverage, but it's really hard to get, like your story actually on, because there's so much happening. Especially during COVID was really hard because everything has been taken up through that. Also, in all with social media is something that, and I think that is, definitely one of the climate action movement problems, that we need to improve. Like, how can we be more visible on social media? How can we be more cool, you know? It's hard. QCC is on Facebook but the posts we do they rarely get more than 30 likes. How can we do it then? People do sharing with everyone and people like those things, you know?

Sophia Thomas: Would you say getting attention and getting more people aware of climate action by having meetings, like you did at Griffith University a few weeks ago, was a way to inform people about the organisation and what climate change doing to the world, specifically in Queensland as well – would you say recruiting volunteers and getting people more informed about the issue would raise more awareness and give the organisation a bigger voice to be heard?

Simona Holzer: Definitely. I think meetings like we had with The Green Drinks at Griffith University, I think it was a very powerful way to get more awareness because it's all about people talking to their friends and getting more people involved, getting their friends involved. And with those meetings, that's right, like we do want to raise awareness and do that, but what's also really important for us is we really do want to get people inspired to take action as well. Like once people are more involved with us, we do want to support them to organise their own thing or take action and go see their MP by themselves without our help. So we kind of want to build that leadership among our community and we will just be here as a helper. So that is the main

goal to build more advanced and resilience communities, in that way.

Sophia Thomas: You'd say the more people that turn up to actions like that, the more powerful your voice would be then?

Simona Holzer: Definitely, yes, and especially at those meetings like its people who really have time and are engaged. But if those people talk to their friends about like a rally or choose an action that you don't have to be committed one day a week but you maybe want every couple of months you go and do a protest or a rally like that. That's how we get people there you know when the communities like the organisations in the communities or Griffith uni group, when they talk to their people, so we can just share what we're doing with more organisations and people then it will be easy to recruit, also like a large amount of people to something where powerful when there is a lot of people around.

Sophia Thomas: As you've discussed before, climate change is an urgent and delicate issue that continues to devastatingly impact our world – how significant is that impact in Queensland based on your research or the organisation?

Simona Holzer: It's affecting Queensland in different ways like the more severe weather patterns like floods and heat waves.

It's really impacting Queensland's biodiversity and Australia Natives – forest and animals.

Queensland is cutting down a lot of trees and native habit and it is a huge problem as the habitats of koalas and greater gliders and others native species just declining so quick and if we want to have them around still in a couple of years then we really need to make the Government stop doing that.

Sophia Thomas: Is there anything you'd like to let me know or talk about in terms of your organisation? Or anything really?

Simona Holzer: I can add as well that the Queensland Conservation Council was founded in 1969 and is also the peak body for regional and conservation counties like Cairns or Rockhampton or Gold Coast. So, they're everywhere in the region that conservation counties and we support them. We come together twice a year and brainstorm about campaigns we want to do and how we can support each other. We support them with Climate Action Now Signs and sometimes with trainings all sorts of stuff – that's the role of QCC and that's also why we focused state-wide and not just in Southeast Queensland. Our vision really is to get people together to take action for a safe climate to protect nature, to make nature thrive in Queensland

Sophia Thomas: What are some recent or campaigns that Climate Action is hosting?

Simona Holzer: The next important day for us is in a week on Wednesday next week, 26th of April because we're going to have a climate team volunteer meeting and we haven't had one in 2 years, I think. Where volunteers can come and join and bring in their ideas and how everyone can get involved and how we can build more power in different the different electorates and especially around Brisbane. So, we want to turn that group into a local group where people can come and join in person and meet with each other. So that's exciting.

Next week, as well, there's an Energy and Jobs Day from the Queensland Government in the city and they're going to show everyone all of their plans and how good their plan is to shift to renewable energy, so we'll rally some people to get their interest and ask questions like, "do you really think that we'll reduce our emissions to keep up with the Paris Agreement?" and be there and show that we need a more ambitious energy plan than what they're showing.

Sophia Thomas: And when is that being held?

Simona Holzer: That's actually next Thursday on the 27.

We're getting people together to bring this report their MP and to show that the community cares.

Sophia Thomas: Fantastic! Then that's all I have for you, Simona. Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview with me. It's been such a pleasure to have you talk to me today.

Interview with Professor Brendan Mackey

Phone Number: N/A (meeting via Microsoft Teams)

Email: b.mackey@griffith.edu.au

Sophia Thomas: For the record, can you please state your occupation, first and last name, and how to spell it, please?

Bredan Mackey: Yes. I'm a professor at Griffith University at the Gold Coast Campus, and my last name is spelled M-A-C-K-E-Y

Sophia Thomas: Given your expertise in this area, what are your thoughts on climate change and what are some of the effects that we are seeing in Queensland today?

Brendan Mackey: Well, Queensland's very exposed to the impacts of climate change.

The climate change that we're now experiencing from global warming, which is I think most people know, is because of the greenhouse gases that come from burning fossil fuel for energy, coal, oil and gas, and also from land clearing, produces a lot of emissions when we chop down trees as well. And so, and that's changing our climate a lot. And one of the things that well, for a start, everything's getting a lot warmer and a lot hotter.

So, we're starting to see hotter temperatures and
there's also those higher temperatures are also heading up the

ocean and as the ocean warms, it expands. If we put a kettle on and boil it. You look in the kettle and the water expands. But the same thing happens to oceans and so we're starting to see those impacts on the coastal zone beside and get, you know, more heat waves and that's having a big impact. So more dangerous extreme weather events and more intense tropical storms and worst floodings.

So yeah, Queensland naturally is exposed to a lot of these extreme events, and unfortunately, due to climate change, we're seeing a lot more of them.

Sophia Thomas: In your professional opinion, do you think there is still time to reverse climate change?

Brendan Mackey: We can't actually reverse the climate change we've cause. Not while on the clock back, but we can limit how much more climate change we get, how much worse it gets, so it's never too late to do that.

The more quicker we do, the quicker everyone does that, the more we will limit the amount of climate change we get. But we're kind of stuck with the climate change we've got so far. We can't reverse it. We can't wind the clock back, unfortunately, but we can stop it from getting worse.

Sophia Thomas: To what degree do you think that volunteer work and protesting with organisations such as Climate action – to what degree do you think would help with that?

Bredan Mackey: Well, I think people need to be climate active. It's very important that they are and there's many different ways people can take climate action, certainly. I mean, when we talk about projects, we're talking about peaceful nonviolence protest. That's a civil right and in fact, I would argue it's being a responsible citizen if you go out there and make your views known.

If you join a peaceful, nonviolent protest to let the government know how strongly you feel about the climate problem and that you want them to take effective action, I think that's a positive contribution.

I think it's very important that people take climate action and there's many different kinds of action people can take.

Sophia Thomas: A follow up question to that, climate action leader Simona Holzer stated that climate change news has been overshadowed by the events of the world, like for recent news such as the war in Russia and Ukraine, or previously like COVID-19. Do you think that is true, that climate change news has been overshadowed?

Bredan Mackey: I think so and this is part of the challenge, you know, the climate change problem is a long-term problem, and the solutions are long term, and it's hard to keep people's attention when you've got an issue which is kind of on-going cause' people's attention is naturally distracted by other things. So yeah, when we have COVID or when we have the war in Ukraine and these geopolitical big picture geopolitical issues arising, it's, I think to be expected that that's where the media will, you know, our media, our commercial media is very much focused on what's on the news.

Problems got worse. You know, public concern has risen and that's not going away. But I think what we'll see is that the public interest, well, the public interest in the climate change problem is very high. It hasn't really gone away at all, but the popular media coverage from day-to-day, week to week is obviously going to be attracted to what's the hot news item that day and.

You know, kind of long-term important issues like climate change get pushed below the surface a bit.

We do a lot of research and kind of social science research into surveying people, analysing what Australian public thinks. 85 - 87% of Australians are still very concerned about climate change. But obviously from day-to-day, week to week, people are worried about cost of living, and the prospect of war and the region and things like this so it may not be foremost in people's mind. I mean, people get reminded of it when there's a big natural disaster, like a bushfire or a flood – it's back on the headlines again, but in the absence of that, we're in a bit of a lull at the moment.

It is true that climate change will always be under headlines, but it's always gonna be with us as an issue for a very long time.

Sophia Thomas: Thank you and is there any other information regarding climate change or, for example, the organisation that you're a part of that you would like to talk about, anything at all?

Brendan Mackey: Well, just to mention that here at Griffith, I'm the director of a major university program called Climate Action Beacon. Which is about helping bringing the expertise of the university to help society and different sectors of society take climate action to help deal with the climate problem.

The message there is, it's a big problem, but there's a lot we can do, and everyone's got a role to play and it's important. People, you know, think about what they can do to contribute.

Sophia Thomas: Well, thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview with me today. It's been a great pleasure of talking to you. I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording.

