

Buzz of the nation

Australians discuss their thoughts about their country.

Sam Eyles
Visual Artist, QLD



"I think we're very lucky because it's a multicultural country. We've got access to education. We're open-minded, very easy-going and there's a lot of opportunity for people. Whether you were born here or migrate here, whatever, there's plenty for people to get involved with."

Dave Towers
Area Supervisor, NSW



"At the moment we're on a bit of a high, winning the cricket. We're a sporting country. It is a bit hard at the moment at the tennis with a bit of racism, the fighting and stuff like that. It's not too good racial-wise but I think the country itself is goin' real well."

Bruce Wilson
Life Guard, WA



"I think living in Australia is like living in Wonderland. Compared to other places in the world we are beyond lucky. We are so fortunate to be living in a peaceful country that has so much freedom and be able to enjoy such a wonderful, relaxed lifestyle."

Jodie Tallon
Teacher, QLD



"I think Australia is the best country in the world to live in. I think that we have everything and we have every opportunity, and that the people who live here are diverse and we get to experience all of that without even leaving our shores."



Jerry Zremski (right), of the National Press Club, asks Bindi Irwin a question with her mother Terri Irwin.

Bindi at the National Press Club

Bindi Irwin joined one of the world's most exclusive clubs on Friday January 19 when she delivered a speech to the National Press Club (NPC) in Washington, DC.

"G'day. I'm Bindi Irwin," the eight-year-old enthusiastically said as she walked up to the podium.

The NPC is one of the most sought-after public speaking

engagements, with world leaders such as Winston Churchill, Indira Gandhi, Charles de Gaulle and a who's who of kings, queens and princes invited to give addresses in the past.

Bindi, who is in the US to perform concerts with The Wiggles, promote Australia as a tourist destination and participate in the G'Day USA Festival, was joined by

her mother, Terri, at the podium. Bindi used her address, which was beamed live in the US on CNN, to continue the animal conservation message of her father Steve "The Crocodile Hunter" Irwin, who was killed by a stingray on Queensland's Great Barrier Reef last year.

"I don't want to grow up in a world without wildlife," Bindi said

to the 100 or so guests in the NPC's ballroom.

"We must do something now to help save their homes.

"We have to stop cutting down forests and polluting our oceans and rivers."

"...My daddy was a wildlife warrior and I'm going to continue his work."

AAP

Flag controversy for Big Day Out

Music fans will be able to take Australian flags into the Big Day Out festival despite an attempt from organisers to lock out the "gang colours" they claim incited racial hatred last year.

Prime Minister John Howard said on Monday it was "stupid and offensive" for Big Day Out (BDO) promoter Ken West to attempt to stop fans taking Australian flags to Thursday's concert at the Sydney Showground.

But BDO organisers insisted their plea to the expected crowd of 60,000 not to bring flags was "simply a request, not a command".



PM John Howard has criticised Big Day Out's anti-flag policy.

"If people show up with a flag they will not be refused entry if they have a valid ticket," a spokeswoman said.

Mr West said the display of nationalism under the flag at the Sydney leg of BDO last year, a month after the Cronulla riots, was intolerable.

"The Australian flag was being used as gang colours. It was racism disguised as patriotism and I'm not going to tolerate it," Mr West was quoted as saying in News Ltd papers.

Mr Howard was joined by Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd, NSW Premier Morris Iemma, the RSL and the Australian National Flag Association in condemning

Mr West's comments.

"The proposition that the display of the Australian flag should ever be banned anywhere in Australia is offensive and it will be to millions of Australians," Mr Howard said.

"The reason given at the time was quite unacceptable. They're running their own political agenda, but because of public pressure they're now backing down."

Mr Howard rejected Mr West's claim that flags created the nationalistic fervour which sparked the

Cronulla riots and generated a similar atmosphere at last year's Big Day Out in Sydney.

"Flags don't have legs and arms, if anyone was breaking the law at Cronulla or breaks the law at any time in the future, they should be dealt with by the authorities," he said.

Mr West refused to reply, other than through statements on the Big Day Out website, which said: "We are not banning the Australian flag, but are simply discouraging its use for anti-social purposes at the Big Day Out."

One teenage fan, Kate Hall, said she understood why the organisers wanted to stop flags at Thursday's concert after witnessing the "horrible mentality" of flag-waving racists last year.

"People were wearing the Australian flag and were a bit racist," said the Canberra 19-year-old.

"There was a group of Middle Eastern people sitting down and they went up to them and said: 'you're not Australians.'

"They were really, really drunk. There was this real yob mentality."

Ms Hall said the flag was not to blame for the anti-social behaviour, suggesting the event could have been better controlled.

"I don't blame the flag. There

were a lot of drunk people and it was hot and it wasn't controlled particularly well," she said.

Harold Scruby, executive director of Ausflag, the organisation that wants to change the Australian flag, says the national flag has imperialistic and racist overtones because of the presence of the Union Jack.

"I've no doubt that in the Cronulla riots, those waving it in the opposition were saying: 'I'm Australian and you're not because I'm of British descent,' and it would be similar in this case [BDO]," he said.

John Vaughan, from the Australian National Flag Association, was offended the flag was referred to as "gang colours", but said Mr West's bid may backfire on him.

"Calling it gang colours and a symbol of hate is just total garbage," Mr Vaughan said.

"Is it a gang to be a Western democracy?"

"I think there'll be Australian flags everywhere on Thursday; I wouldn't be surprised if you see 99 per cent of people there with a flag."

Mr Vaughan said the best way to ensure no conflict was caused by the flag was to issue one to every BDO fan.

AAP

Rural shire to tackle climate change

David Rubacek

The little shire of Bega Valley unveiled Australia's first green energy surf life saving club last week. It is one of many steps the community has done to curb climate change.

On Saturday January 20, local lifesavers from the NSW south coast beach-side town of Tathra, unveiled a wind turbine and solar panels, hoping to save the club \$1000 a year on its electricity bill and cut its carbon output by almost three tonnes a year.

Club President Tony Rettke thinks there might be interest from some of the 300 life saving clubs across Australia.

"We feel the majority will be keen and I think there will be quite a strong movement toward it," Mr Rettke told the ABC.

The \$20,000 venture was jointly funded by the Bega Valley Shire Council and the local community, with a Federal Government rebate assistance.

This is part of the Council's 50-50 campaign - to reduce the shire consumption of energy by 50 per cent and derive 50 per cent of energy from clean, renewable sources by year 2020.

The ambitious energy targets set by the predominantly farming community are more advanced than state or Federal measures.

Since the council adopted the ambitious energy targets, prompted by a community meeting organised by the Clean Energy for Eternity (CEFE) group, it is now funding feasibility studies for wind farms, considering introducing hybrid vehicles into council, setting up an electric bus service and building more bike paths.

"Bega Valley is in many ways a conservative community, but is seizing the initiative to minimise carbon emissions that threaten

future global health and wealth," Bega Valley Councillor Keith Hughes said.

What has become a mainstream campaign is the product of local Bega Valley orthopaedic surgeon Dr Mathew Nott. He founded CEFE, a grassroots organisation of "concerned" and "average working-class people". CEFE was honoured as the 2006 "Energy Champion", awarded by the NSW Department of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability.

"There's a big need in the community to change the way we think about energy and I think a lot of people agree with that," Dr Nott said.

"I guess its all about getting people to wake up; it's about getting the town to talk about these issues and it's about local councils and MPs in this marginal electorate knowing what the community really wants - clean energy, reducing consumption and getting on with it now," Dr Nott says.

2006 was a big year for him. Inspired by Tim Flannery's book *The Weather Makers* Dr Nott would rally local emergency services, sports and social clubs, hospitals and schools, and amassed 10 per cent of the Shire's residents on the beach in May to spell out the 182-metre phrase "Clean Energy for Eternity". This was followed later in the year by a 6km swim in the alpine Lake Jindabyne in midwinter, successfully lobbying the council to adopt the 50-50 campaign, arranging a protest in Canberra and the 2007 New Year's Day was marked by a giant sculpture of more than 1000 energy-hungry white goods arranged into a formation of a cyclone.

"We're going to have some fun with all of this, but we're serious too - this is about our future," said Dr Nott.

Peak snake-bite season

A man forced to fend off a deadly snake with a garden rake is one of three victims being treated following attacks in two states.

Two NSW men were undergoing treatment in Newcastle hospitals while a Victorian man was recovering in Frankston Hospital following the attacks.

Neil Jordan, 59, was gardening on his six-acre property in the NSW Hunter region town of Kitchener on Monday when a 1.5m eastern brown snake lunged at him, penetrating his tracksuit pants and biting him just above the knee.

The Jordans have sighted eight eastern brown or red-bellied black snakes on their property this summer.

Ms Jordan said their neighbour's draft horse had died three weeks ago from a snake bite after it was grazing close to their fence.

Mr Jordan was taken to John Hunter Hospital where another man had been attacked by a deadly tiger snake and was being treated with anti-venom.

The NSW attacks follow the death of a 16-year-old Sydney boy last week after he was bitten by an eastern brown, considered

one of the world's most dangerous reptiles.

He was one of three people killed this summer from brown snake bites, according to the Australian Venom Research Unit.

The victim of Monday's snake attack in Victoria was bitten in the southern Victorian seaside town of Somers, the state's Metropolitan Ambulance Service (MAS) said.

He was being treated in Frankston Hospital, where his condition was described as stable.

Experts have warned that Australia's long drought is forcing snakes out of hiding and into urban areas this summer in search of moisture.

Last week, Associate Professor George Braitberg, co-director of the Austin's state-wide toxicology service, said snakebite presentations were increasing because of the weather and climate conditions.

"But across Australia we're seeing far more snake bites than we have had for many years," he said.

He said people needed to remain calm and still if bitten and seek help immediately.

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