

EVE KANTOR DOESN'T normally give interviews. As the niece of Rupert Murdoch and the grand-daughter of Dame Elisabeth, she is too keenly aware of how her words might be misused as weapons to damage her family, or more particularly, her famous uncle. She would hate to see that happen. Besides which, her natural disposition is for privacy, the kind that life on a 5000-hectare farm in western Victoria allows her and her husband and their four young children.

These aren't normal times, however – and that's why Eve Kantor has agreed to something she wouldn't normally do. "I've decided to talk publicly," she tells *The Weekly*, "because the issue of global warming is so urgent, so desperate, that you have to do whatever is in your power. Even if what you do has only a minimal impact, then you have to do it."

Until about five years ago, Eve and her husband, Mark Wootton, would have described themselves as climate change sceptics. They listened to the doubters. They hoped for the best. Today, they can see what has happened to the once lush pasturelands and prime merino country of western Victoria. They can see the stripped, straw fields, the denuded soil, the empty dams and creeks, the dark, scudding

clouds that refuse to blink. And they are convinced that this is not just part of a cyclical weather pattern involving inevitable drought periods, but rather a fundamental change in the climate itself. They have read the weight of evidence from the scientific community and, as Eve says now, "It's ridiculous to deny it any longer."

"I feel a bit of a zealot on this," she continues. "We all need to do what we can, but the urgent change that is needed is from government and large-scale carbon-emitting industries. They absolutely have to do their bit."

Eve and Mark have, for the past few years, been drought-proofing their farm, minimising water use, creating wildlife corridors, planting with native trees and grasses, restoring the wetlands and using the land as a sink to offset carbon dioxide emissions.

More importantly, though, for its wider implications, they have also set up the Climate Institute, which aims to raise public awareness about the dangers of global warming and failing to act now.

Established in 2005 with a \$10million grant from Eve's late younger brother, Tom, the institute has already produced a ground-breaking report that brought together for the first time 16 Australian-based >>>

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Farmer and Climate Institute campaigner

WOMEN UNITE TO SAVE OUR PLANET

Global warming has become such a pressing issue that, as governments fail to act, individual Australians are being galvanised into action in a bid to help save the planet, reports **David Leser**.

PHOTO: SCOTT WILSON/SHUTTERSTOCK



"IT'S QUITE SAD TO ME THAT THE HUGE BOOM IN HOUSING IN WA HAS NOT RESULTED IN HOUSES BEING BUILT WITH THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT IN MIND."

JANET HOLMES A COURT
Businesswoman

religious faiths united in their concerns. In a divisive age such as this, the Common Belief Report was a remarkable document.

Many Australians have long had a sense of foreboding. We've sensed something was wrong mainly because of that precious resource we've long taken for granted. Water.

For the first time in our history, there is an emergency in the water supply affecting both the bush and the city, one that is creating a common purpose between diverse communities, not to mention a possible new bipartisanship among some politicians. (Last month, the federal Opposition leader Kevin Rudd upped the ante on the Howard

own – if greenhouse gas emissions are not drastically reduced.

Monica's stark warnings are based on indisputable evidence showing direct correlation between the warming of the planet and the amount of carbon dioxide being spewed into the atmosphere, in other words, human activity.

At the advent of the Industrial Revolution, there were 280 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere compared to 383ppm today. By the end of the century, that level is projected to be 750ppm, a hellish figure that would bring with it six degrees of warming.

"Even two degrees will be catastrophic for many people," she says. "It will affect so many people that I don't think we can even fathom what it will be like. The difference between now and the last ice age was only five degrees. We don't

And it could do so while achieving a level of economic growth only slightly lower than if it were to do nothing: 2.1 per cent per annum as opposed to 2.2 per cent.

"The effect on GDP would be so minimal that it would be unbelievable for us not to act," Sam Mostyn says.

As the AFL's first female commissioner, Sam Mostyn is credited with helping transform the culture within our largest insurance group. She understands the way businessmen in particular tend to come at problems like global warming. They want to bring about structural change, capture new markets and, of course, make money.

Women, on the other hand, tend to be more concerned with the finer details of life: the raising of children, the preparation of meals, the choice of which product to buy or not to buy. They are constantly

FACT: WATERFRONT PROPERTIES – CANAL ESTATES, BEACHFRONTS, PORT FACILITIES – ARE AT RISK OF BEING DESTROYED OVER TIME BY RISING SEA LEVELS.

government's \$10billion plan to buy out irrigators and take over the Murray-Darling Basin, by calling for a national summit on climate change.) It no longer requires – if you live in the city – a leap of imagination to understand why a proud but broken man might walk off his land, leave his family behind and take his own life. (An Australian farmer kills himself every four days.)

Cities such as Adelaide, with a million people plus, are now in the grip of their own fully-fledged water crisis. Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney are not faring much better. Towns throughout regional Australia have already begun to truck in water.

And in response to the growing calamity, women around the country have responded as never before. During The Weekly's four-week investigation into this issue, it has been staggering – and reassuring – to learn just how many women and women's groups have formed in response to the crisis, networks within networks, overlapping church, community and P&C groups, housewives and small businesswomen, philanthropists and entrepreneurs, lawyers, scientists and bankers, rich and poor, Right and Left, conservative and progressive.

"The problem is very serious," says the Australian Conservation Foundation's Monica Richter. "We need to act within the next 10 years to dramatically cut greenhouse pollution, otherwise there is a very big chance of losing the things that are dear to us."

The names of iconic Australian destinations roll off her tongue: the Great Barrier Reef, the wetlands and rainforests of the Daintree, the Australian snowfields, Kakadu ... all partially gone or destroyed within our children's lifetimes – if not our

have a lot of wiggle room. We are now at the 11-and-a-half-hour moment."

There was a time when an intelligent, thoughtful woman like Monica Richter might have been dismissed by some as a "greenie". Today, her views are taken with the utmost seriousness by leading companies, which, together with the ACF, formed the Australian Business Roundtable on Climate Change last year. (The Roundtable includes BP Australia, Origin Energy, Swiss Re, Visy Industries, Westpac and Insurance Australia Group (IAG), organisations that collectively employ 40,000 people and reach into nearly 100 per cent of Australian households.)

Sam Mostyn from IAG, the country's biggest insurance organisation, believes one of the unique approaches of the Roundtable was to treat environmental groups with respect. "We weren't going to turn into activists ourselves, but we needed to build a case for action on climate change based on good science."

And what the Roundtable concluded was that, by failing to act now, Australia is putting at risk its \$32billion-a-year climate-dependent tourism industry, its \$17billion-a-year livestock export industry and the future of the entire Murray-Darling Basin.

Conversely, by putting a price on carbon today, by reducing greenhouse emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 and by investing as much as \$30billion in breakthrough technologies, Australia could significantly reduce its vulnerability to climate change.

assessing – without necessarily realising it – what a sustainable future, *what a sustainable planet*, might look like.

"If you bear children, you think about the future," she says. "And that's what women are doing. Thinking about the future. All across Australia, they are coming together in all sorts of ways to help save the planet. And they're talking in tough language about what used to be seen as a soft issue. They are saying – and this is from housewives through to businesswomen – 'We are going to sell our family car and buy a Prius [hybrid petrol *and* electrically-run car], or we're going to switch to GreenPower, or we're going to have showers lasting only three minutes'."

Kate Mannix is an example in point. A self-described conservative mother-of-four living in Sydney's north-west, she is setting up a new national organisation called Mothers Against Climate Change.

"Mothers have never organised themselves as a political force to achieve change before," she says. "But the thing about climate change – and this makes me very cross – is that women will be the ones who will have to accommodate the completely predictable changes that will occur in their lives because of it."

"And they'll be doing it while the decision makers [mostly men] sit in their air-conditioned offices and say: 'Isn't this dreadful, all those Pacific Islanders drowning?' even though we knew this was going to happen."

"My job as a mother is to make sure my children stay alive, so I think we should all be very cross that our ability to feed our children, to produce >>>

a healthy environment, to give them clean water or any water at all, is now really under threat."

With her flaming red hair and alluring presence, Sydney mother-of-four Natalie Isaacs looks more like a figure out of a Raphael painting than a woman trying to spread a global, humanitarian message. Yet that's what this highly successful chief executive of the Natalie range of cosmetics is trying to do: raise awareness about climate change by parlaying her skills from the beauty industry into community action.

Together with friend Michelle Grosvenor, she has launched Climate Coolers, a national women's organisation devoted to getting householders to cut down on their carbon dioxide emissions.

"Michelle has lived and breathed activism," Natalie explains, on a day when 600,000 hectares of bushland are burning out of control in the so-called Garden State of Victoria. "I have been in the cosmetics industry, but I have talked to thousands of women about relaxation, what to do to be beautiful on the inside as well as out. And I realised that I could shift all that and be as passionate about climate change as I have been about beauty products. Same skills, different message."

Natalie and Michelle's plan is to help train a virtual army of women to fan out across the country – along the lines of the Tupperware brigade back in the 1950s – equipped with a six-pack of long-life, low-energy light globes and a

sharp reductions in water usage, greenhouse gas emissions and solid waste output, as well as a program of installing solar panels and tree planting.

Already 1000 schools nationally have done it, including St Catherine's, Clare's own daughters' school in Toorak, Melbourne. "There's been a big turnaround this year," the school principal, Laraine Sharr, told *The Weekly*. "All the girls have become more empowered, more aware."

Now think about what it would look like if the whole country began to respond in similar fashion – from households through to industry through to government.

Instead of continuing to invest heavily in polluting industries, such as coal-fired electricity, instead of planning to increase our greenhouse emissions by 22 per cent in the next 15 years, over and above 1990 figures, instead of refusing to ratify the Kyoto Protocol as 166 other nations have seen fit to do, Australia could begin to seriously embrace a broad range of cleaner, non-nuclear technologies, such as carbon storage, wind power, geothermal, solar thermal, solar hydrogen, biomass and the construction of cutting-edge natural gas plants. (Australia has 100 years of proven natural gas reserves available and by 2030 will produce nearly 3 per cent of the world's supplies.)

Imagine solar panels and glazing in every home. Rainwater tanks. Recycled greywater. Water-saving showerheads and buckets to catch the wasted drops. Shorter showers. Energy-efficient lightbulbs. Switching appliances off at the power point. Ceiling fans instead of air-conditioning. Pulling up lawns and replacing them with pebbles, native gardens and succulents.

"It's ridiculous in a city like Perth to have acres and acres of lawn," laments

carbon trading system and invested massively in carbon neutral technologies.

"It's affordable, achievable and the costs of not doing it are significant," she says. "We need to think about this like we are going to war. It requires a complete revolution."

On March 31, an unprecedented event will take place in the life of a consumer-driven city like Sydney. For an hour from 7.30pm, the

Emerald City will turn off its lights as part of a plan by the environmental group, the WWF, to demonstrate the connection between the electricity we use and the greenhouse gases generated by coal-fired power stations.

Households and empty office blocks that normally blaze brightly through the night will be plunged into darkness, just at the time a 22-year-old Brisbane woman, Sarah Bishop, will be completing her nine-week walk to Sydney. It's part of a one-woman crusade aimed at spreading the message about greenhouse pollutants.

Sarah's voice is part of the hum that grows louder by the day.

In November, actor Cate Blanchett completed a training course with former US Vice-President Al Gore in Sydney, along with 84 other Australians, as part of a joint project with the ACF to present the reality of climate change to community groups around the country.

At the same time, thousands rallied in capital cities calling for action. On the Seven Network's *Sunrise* program, a highly successful Cool the Globe campaign resulted in the federal government

FACT: THE GREAT BARRIER REEF WILL BECOME "FUNCTIONALLY EXTINCT" IN LESS THAN 20 YEARS, ACCORDING TO A REPORT BY THE UNITED NATIONS.

water-saving showerhead worth about \$100.

Working with the environmental group Easy Being Green, the women will aim to get each household to install the equipment (with help if necessary) so as to reduce their energy and water bills by \$150 a year. If one million homes took up this option, it would cut the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by one million tonnes a year, equivalent to removing 300,000 cars from the roads permanently. "As ordinary people, we have enormous power ... if we choose to act," she says.

And that's just in the home. Think about, as Melbourne mother Clare Cannon has been doing for years, what the effect would be if every school in the country signed on to the Victoria-initiated Australian Sustainable Schools initiative and committed itself to

businesswoman Janet Holmes à Court down the telephone line from her office overlooking the Swan River. "I still have friends with astonishing gardens, massive lawns and roses ... and it's quite sad to me that the huge boom in housing in WA has not resulted in houses being built with the changing environment in mind.

"As I look out of my window, there are few that have been built with verandas and most don't have eaves. They're mock Tuscan – which means the sun is on the walls all day. We really haven't paid attention."

Quite the opposite. We have grown rich, according to Monica Richter, on the back of burning coal and fossil fuel. It is time now the party stopped. It's time the federal government ratified Kyoto, imposed a price on carbon, implemented a national

backing down on plans to scrap its solar rebate scheme. In just over a week, 170,000 people signed an online petition protesting the move.

On December 4, *Sunrise* became the first program in the country to become Greenhouse Friendly. "That's when we became carbon neutral," the show's co-host, Melissa Doyle, proudly told *The Weekly*. "We now add up all the emissions we create through lights, travel, cameras, computers, make-up and hairspray, and offset those through tree planting."

A week later, organic farmer Patrice Newell, a former model and TV reporter, announced she was standing as an independent candidate for the NSW Legislative Council. "I am not doing >>>

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PATRICE NEWELL
Organic farmer and former TV reporter



"EVERY MONTH AND YEAR THAT GOES BY, THE DATA AND SCALE OF THE PROBLEM GETS WORSE ... AND YET THE US IS INCREASING ITS EMISSIONS, AS ARE WE IN AUSTRALIA."

CATHY ZOI
CEO of Alliance for
Climate Protection

this because I need a career in politics," she said. "I am doing it because we need a lot of attention on this. There has to be government policy, there has to be vision. We haven't started yet with the structural changes. We are still tinkering on the edge."

And that's exactly why American-born, Sydney-adopted Cathy Zoi decided recently to return to America to take up a position as founding chief executive of Al Gore's Alliance for Climate Protection. Having served as chief of staff of environmental policy in Bill Clinton's White House, having worked on the issue of climate change since 1989, she now sees no alternative but to do what she can to save the planet.

"I think climate change is the most important issue facing the globe and until we get the US taking a leading role, the solutions will be vexed," she said just before leaving Australia.

"Every month and year that goes by, the data and the scale of the problem gets worse, not better. And yet the US is increasing its emissions, as are we in Australia. So this is a huge opportunity to maybe help expedite a wholesale change in our thinking. The technical solutions are available. All we need to do now is mobilise."

Who's to say when the public consciousness first began to shift?

In October last year, Sir Nicholas Stern, a former World Bank chief economist advising the Blair government on climate change, released a report warning that the economic impact of global warming could be greater than the combined effects of World War I,

World War II and The Great Depression. Not acting now to cut greenhouse emissions was simply not an option.

That was a sobering moment. As was the period a month earlier when Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, began screening in cinemas around Australia.

For the first time, the general public began seeing the dramatic consequences of an overheated world: ice caps melting in Greenland and Western Antarctica. The tundra disappearing. The snows of Mt Kilimanjaro and other mountain glaciers vanishing. Lakes and rivers drying up. Deserts spreading. Millions scrambling for food and water.

And that was just the beginning of worldwide chaos. Global warming has already produced – in the past 14 years – the 10 hottest years on record. If unchecked, it will bring more bushfires, droughts and heatwaves, more severe flooding, more typhoons, cyclones and hurricanes of the kind that levelled New Orleans in 2005.

Coral reefs will bleach and die. Marine life will be obliterated. Thousands of species will become extinct. Pacific islands will sink under rising waters, as will low-lying cities such as Shanghai and Venice, or entire nations such as the Netherlands. Environmental refugees could soar into the millions. The map of the world will be re-drawn.

And this is now no longer supposition, the kind that has for too long hijacked the debate in Australia. What the documentary has shown beyond dispute – and this has been backed up by 2500 world scientists working for the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as well as data from our own CSIRO – is that global warming is now a true planetary emergency. The burning

of fossil fuels is threatening to warm the planet by as much as 6.4°C by 2100. As the French president, Jacques Chirac, said in February, "We are coming to realise that the entire planet is at risk, that the wellbeing, health, safety and very survival of humankind hangs in the balance."

In the former Victorian gold mining town of Castlemaine, more than 350 people piled into the Theatre Royal recently to see a special screening of Al Gore's documentary. Until this moment, the local council had been resisting calls to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions. A few days after seeing the film, the council passed a resolution committing itself to zero emissions by 2030.

"Extraordinary things are happening in this town," says Bindi Gross, one of the local women who helped organise the screening. "The community is galvanising around climate change."

How could they not with Gore's words, quoted from Winston Churchill, ringing mellifluously in their ears: "The era of procrastination," he said, "of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to a close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences. We didn't ask for it ... but here it is." ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON GLOBAL WARMING CONTACT:
Australian Conservation Foundation at www.acfonline.org.au
The Climate Institute at www.climateinstitute.org.au
Climate Action Network Australia at www.cana.net.au
For more ideas on combating global warming in your home or business – from carbon neutral offset calculators to water-saving tips – visit The Weekly's website www.aww.com.au

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