

## The Cleantech Cure for Climate Fatigue

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A new challenge for those fighting the effects of climate change is on the horizon - 'climate fatigue'. Each day the public is bombarded with terrifying prognoses for the future that they and their forebears have created.

Many people are understandably confused about the possible effects of climate change and feel an inability to make any meaningful difference. They sense a lack of control and eventually fear will give way to resigned boredom and the distractions of more immediate and local issues. So, ironically, as media exposure on the issue of climate change increases so too does the danger of climate fatigue.

Yet it is essential that individuals and their communities do stay motivated and engaged with the solutions to climate change – it is not enough simply to rely upon scientists and politicians to alleviate the consequences. Cleantech provides the solutions that will deliver both global and local benefits and ensure the community engagement is maintained.

“Climate fatigue” may be compared with the well documented phenomenon of famine fatigue. The BBC has recorded the example of Victorian England’s fatigue of the Irish famines and there are numerous examples in Susan Moeller’s book, *Compassion Fatigue*. Everyone remembers their ‘first’ famine: the first one they really cared about. Mine was the Ethiopian famine in 1984. As news of ever more famines continue however, the length and depth of compassionate feelings reduces until there is tendency to accept famines as unavoidable.

Famine fatigue or, more generally, compassion fatigue occurs fastest when the suffering is far removed. Climate fatigue is no different, as shown by Putin’s retort that Russians are unlikely to suffer from a slight rise in temperature, and the effects of climate change are often seen as a problem belonging to the distant future and far flung places of the world. However, recent Australian weather conditions – both floods and droughts – have focussed many Australians on the immediacy and relevancy of the problems created by climate change. Extreme weather patterns elsewhere, such as the US and parts of Europe, have had the same effect. Enthusiasm for change is high, both here and abroad, and fatigue has yet to set in.

To harness this enthusiasm and secure its benefits requires two aspects: firstly, local benefits must be visible to communities so that the benefits of change are clear; and secondly, networks and forums must be established to facilitate new connections and enable new collaborations. This is where cleantech comes in.

For example, the adoption of revised town planning to improve public transport, pedestrian and bicycle facilities whilst reducing suburban satellite housing will reduce commuter traffic and have a significant long term impact on emissions. It may also facilitate an improvement in the overall fitness of the community. Similarly, networking and collaboration may be used to reduce food transport, leading to lower emissions, increased local production and possibly even more nutritious diets.

Focusing on local benefits whilst also delivering part of a national or international solution is not easy. It requires collaboration and understanding between business, investors, academia, all three tiers of government and most importantly the general public. Providing a forum to have these conversations is a vital first step to delivering the greatest benefits from changes that are going to be required as a result of climate change.

One example of this first step is the recently formed Adelaide Cleantech Network. This brings together all of the disparate groups and enables discussions to start on wider more ambitious solutions.

By changing the story from one of worry to one of opportunity, cleantech alters the whole dynamic of climate change. It is a twist on the concept “think global - act local” which has historically been seen as taking local detrimental actions to achieve global benefits. Instead this is thinking about worrying global events and turning them into an excuse to deliver local benefits.

Imagine the change to a region such as the Hunter Valley once it moves on from fear regarding the decline of the coal industry to embracing the opportunities associated with becoming a centre of excellence of cleantech manufacturing. The subsequent economic development, healthier work environments and improved prospects for all will make the community look back and be thankful that climate change became so serious.

By focussing on how cleantech solutions can deliver local, as well as global, benefits and by starting new conversations and collaborative relationships, we have the opportunity to make climate change seen as the great motivator to a better world.

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