



Editor's inbox

With World Environment Day approaching on 5 June, in this issue we have turned our attention to many ways we can make an effort to live more sustainably. Certainly there's no shortage of information – and encouragement – to reduce, recycle and re-use. While it's not so good news to discover that as consumers we are more likely to *think* about how we can act responsibly than we are to actually *do* the right thing, it was just as disconcerting to discover that there are many among us who are taking the re-use principal quite a bit too far.

A survey has revealed that we love to hang on to our toothbrushes – unfortunately way too long. In fact we change our kitchen dishcloths more frequently. In the survey, conducted by research agency PureProfile for Colgate, 70 per cent of people polled were quite happy to keep their toothbrushes more than three months and one in three people kept using the same brush for at least six months, even though it was a breeding ground for harmful germs and bacteria. This is definitely not what the doctor, or in this case the dentist, ordered. No matter how good your intentions are in saving the planet, the general expiry date for toothbrushes is three months if you want to really *clean* your teeth, but if that's too hard to remember then you can get reminder stickers from Woolworths until 6 June or sign up to www.betteroralhealth.com.au for quarterly email reminders.

But, just like our attitude to changing our habits for the benefit of the environment, PureProfile's survey showed most people know that they should be changing their toothbrush, they just don't *do* it. Maybe it's time to change our behaviour.

Heather

Is the eco-crash coming?

As we approach World Environment Day on 5 June, experts in the field warn our future is far from being green. Story by **Graham Readfearn**

About a year ago, Brisbane's marketing gurus unleashed a new catchline for a city which was striking a perfect balance between progress and environmental sustainability. No longer the sleepy backwater, Brisbane was the "New World City" which, according to the official brand guidelines, is the "city du jour with its eyes set firmly on the future".

The Brisbane brand might excite global investors and spread lashings of "feel good factor" but according to many environmental campaigners and sustainability experts this "city du jour" has a bumpy future ahead. Because, they say, climate change, a pending global shortage of cheap oil and a booming population are converging to create a "perfect storm" that will challenge the city's eternally optimistic green brand.

"All the indicators are showing us that Brisbane is becoming an increasingly unsustainable city," says Toby Hutcheon, executive director of Queensland Conservation Council. "Policy makers are still living under the idea that we live in an infinite world in which resources are plentiful and the impacts we generate can be easily absorbed. They are wrong."

Brisbane and the surrounding South East Queensland region is considered to be among Australia's most vulnerable places to the impacts of climate change, with rising sea levels, heightened flood risk, extreme heat and lower rainfall among the issues causing most concern.

Outside the US, Brisbane is also among the most car reliant cities on the planet. Reliance on private vehicles means a reliance on cheap liquid fuel – namely oil. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, less than 10 per cent of Brisbane's grown-ups use public transport for their daily commute. Less than five per cent use a bicycle or walk, even though, according to the ABS, 20 per cent of

people have less than five kilometres to travel to get to work or study.

These realities come as several studies suggest that the world's oil supply is about to peak, with the latest research from scientists in Kuwait saying the world's love affair with cheap oil will end in 2014. "That oil is going to become more and more expensive and it's a particular problem for us because we live in a city which is spread out," says Hutcheon. "People on the fringes are among those who can least afford those price rises. In a 21st Century city like Brisbane it should be the case that it's easier to get somewhere by jumping on a bus, train or tram than it is to jump in a car. Unfortunately, it's the other way around."

While defenders of Brisbane's transport policy will point to the creation of busways and improved cycling facilities, others point to the fare rises and the road, bridge and tunnel building that do little to encourage more people out of their cars.

Brendan Gleeson, professor of urban policy at Griffith University, has been looking long and hard at these multiple challenges for a new book due out in July called *Lifeboat Cities*.

He believes Brisbane and many other cities around the globe are indeed moving to a "new world" status, but not in the way that marketeers or political leaders would be keen to promote.

"Like it or not, we are moving to a new world – one that will be changed by climate disruption and a collapse in our resources stocks, food and oil. That's not a prospect, but a certainty. But we do have some time to determine what that new world will look like," Gleeson says.

For Brisbane, that new world will need to take into account the current population boom bringing 16,000 citizens a year that will need 145,000 new homes by 2026. This will need to be done in a way that, by the end of the century, accounts

for a sea level more than one metre higher than it is now and a near 30-fold increase in the number of days each year when the city mercury tops 35°C.

"We will have a period that will feel like a kind of emergency and, I believe, we are going to have to prepare and provision the lifeboats," says Gleeson. "We'll have to move Brisbane from vulnerability to resilience. We'll have to be a far more self-sufficient city." Among other things that will mean, he says, more food being produced and consumed locally, a replacement of fossil fuels with renewable sources and an acceptance of the need to queue for the things we want.

According to Darren Kindleysides, director of the Australian Marine Conservation Society, the environmental challenges facing Brisbane are not restricted to dry land. Marine conservationists are worried that Moreton Bay, the city's blue heart, is suffering as coastal developments and population reshape the coastline and pollute waterways.

"Globally there are few cities of this size that have a marine park right on its doorstep," says Kindleysides. "It's an area of international importance with populations like shore birds, dugongs and turtles. But we are seeing a death by 1000 cuts with developments on the coast taking a patch of mangrove here and there until they're disappearing from our coastline."

Known as the kidneys of the sea, mangroves help to filter pollution that would once have been captured by exposed soil and vegetation on land, but now cheerfully flow down concreted streets into the ocean.

Kindleysides adds: "People love the lifestyle here and Moreton Bay is a big part of that. If we really do want to be a progressive city then we can't be resistant to the need to better protect the bay."

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