



2022  
December



**SOCIAL WORKERS**  
For **CLIMATE ACTION**

# Table of Contents

01

Hello from Emma

02

Our 2022 highlights

03

Decision fatigue as a barrier to action

06

Eco social work placement: A reflection

08

Field education for Eco-social work ready graduates

11

Podcrawl

13

Qld Mental Health Week workshop photos

# Hello

**2022 has been a year of much activity, and yet, sometimes it feels like there's been no activity at all. I have definitely felt extremely busy, and yet also struggle with feelings of nothing to show for all the hard work.**

So with that in mind, I proposed to my fellow Social Workers for Climate Action activists that we collect not only stories of our own actions from this year, but stories from others also fighting against climate change, to celebrate our great work and to motivate each other to keep going. It's been great touching base with others in this field, and while many interested parties ran out of time to put their thoughts down for this



newsletter, we are definitely keen to try this again. So if you missed contributing to this newsletter, feel free to email us with something to add to the next one.

This newsletter also sees the return of the Podcrawl. Don't know what that is? Turn to page 11 to find out and get started. This podcrawl jumps right in with an interview with Jason Moore, sociology professor, environmental historian and historical geographer from Binghamton University, and coordinator of the World-Ecology Research Network. I particularly appreciated the new angle explored when discussing climate change as a human-driven issue, and ultimately a new way to consider "how humanity as a whole does not actually exist as a historical agent." This interview made me consider that if actors like Jeff Bezos have contributed much more than, say, a small farming family in the 1300's, or ancient Egyptians, or Indigenous cultures worldwide right up until colonisation, while also giving all these different actors the same level of humanity, than is it really 'humanity' that has caused climate change? I'm not trying to confuse you, I'm trying to pique your interest so you will go have a listen.

The podcrawl ends on what I found to be a very exciting interview that recharged my soul for the future. The interview with Professor Michael Munger of Duke University gave me a lot of hope that change can, will, and is happening. It takes time yes, but a lot of what is already happening, we don't get to see it. This is where I normally go on about mainstream media actively keeping us ignorant of our different options, but I won't, because I am determined to end this podcrawl on a high note.

# Our 2022 highlights

## 1

### World Social Work Day

We were greatly honoured to be asked to speak at the North Queensland Australian Association of Social Workers branch's World Social Work Day event held in Townsville this year. The theme this year was "Co-building a new eco-social world: Leaving no one behind." It was a beautiful morning in the tropical North, with inspiring speakers and delicious food.

## 2

### Park Art

Now held on the first Sunday of each month in Townsville, our Park Art sessions are a relaxed and fun way to explore eco-social work while we connect with each other and with our local natural environment.

## 3

### Queensland Mental Health Week workshop

We started the workshop learning and practicing a new tool that can be used therapeutically, as a group building exercise, or alone for self-care. We then enjoyed lunch and moved in to the second part of the workshop, with a lot of great discussion and collaboration. Have a look at page 13 for a few photos from the day.

## 4

### Collaboration

From fundraisers, to protests, to guest speaking at different events, we have really enjoyed collaborating with other passionate people and organisations, all fired up for environmental and social justice.



# Decision fatigue as a barrier to action

Emma Small from Social Workers for Climate Action

Do you often find yourself learning about a new disaster that has been caused by climate change, and made up your mind that you are going to 'do better' with your own carbon footprint? You're going to cut down on plastic waste, you're going to make more food from scratch, you're going to do more of that thing we're told is our individual fault for climate change, only to find yourself a couple of weeks (or days) back to your old, environmentally unsustainable habits? And you just don't understand why you can't stick to something when it is so important? In my opinion, there are so many things at play in this scenario, but one that is often overlooked is decision fatigue.

We have to make so many decisions throughout every single day, that when it comes to taking an individual part in completely changing life-long habits, that alone is difficult, (even when we ignore the many other huge societal and governmental influences we have no control over that we also have to contend with).

There is extensive research on decision and cognitive fatigue and its destabilising effects on our personal choices and goal-directed behaviour (e.g., Kok, 2022; Mullette-Gillman et al, 2015; Hogan et al, 2020, Oto, 2012) to be able to confidently say fatigue plays a big role in blocking individuals' ability to change to sustainable lifestyles.

Even small changes can involve a lot of decisions. Just changing one well known food product in your home will involve having to decide which one you believe is more environmentally friendly, which will fit in your budget, will your family eat it, does it involve more transportation, and if someone in the household has a food allergy,



which new product can be substituted that will still be safe, and so on. And when you're already fatigued, just the thought of having to think about it can be exhausting.

First, don't beat yourself up if you find yourself going back to old habits, such as packeted snacks in the kids' lunchboxes, throwing food scraps in the bin rather than composting them, or having to buy another 15c plastic bag at the grocery store because you forgot to bring some again. The situation of climate change will not, and cannot, be fixed by individuals' actions alone. Yes, it is important we all do our part, but you also need to remind yourself about the good things you are doing to play your part. And build from there.

Don't expect to be able to make all the 'right' decisions overnight. Start with one and focus on making it your new habit, so when you try to make another sustainable choice that involves mental effort and memory, your new habit will now just be another of your old habits. And like other forms of fatigue, the good news is that by simply being aware of it, you can help avoid it (Oto, 2012).



And finally, effectively addressing the issue of climate change and environmental degradation requires a collective approach. None of us individually caused the destruction of our natural environment, so none of us should feel the burden of 'fixing' the problem individually. Because it is an interplay of economic, political and everyday decision making about our personal wants and needs that we created collectively it can only be solved collectively. Each of us holds some level of economic and political influence. Collectively we can, and need to, engage in conversation with decision-makers in politics and big business to create new approaches to value and foster sustainability for the benefit of all.

Being part of a collective can provide relief from decision fatigue and invigorate individual and collective action.

Hogan, P. S., Chen, S. X., Teh, W. W., & Chib, V. S. (2020). Neural mechanisms underlying the effects of physical fatigue on effort-based choice. *Nature Communications*, 11(1), 4026–4026.  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-17855-5>

Mullette-Gillman, O. A., Leong, R. L. F., & Kurnianingsih, Y. A. (2015). Cognitive Fatigue Destabilizes Economic Decision Making Preferences and Strategies. *PloS One*, 10(7), e0132022–e0132022.  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0132022>

Kok, A. (2022). Cognitive control, motivation and fatigue: A cognitive neuroscience perspective. *Brain and Cognition*, 160, 105880–105880.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bandc.105880-105880>. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bandc.105880-105880>.

# Expression of Interest Callout



Social Workers for Climate Action invite NQ based Climate Action groups and environmental organisations to join us in a collective.

The aim of the collective is to create a forum for networking and collaboration to increase the impact of each and everyone's work.

Please contact us if you are interested in more information.



[info@socialworkersforclimateaction.org](mailto:info@socialworkersforclimateaction.org)

# Eco Social Work Placement: Reflection

Brigit Irwin

I am a Master of Social Work Student, who is in the process of completing my final field placement working remotely as part of a student research team within the field of eco social work. While I am located in Mackay, QLD, my placement is hosted by Darling Downs Environmental Council (DDEC), working alongside Toowoomba Eco Social Work Group (TESWG). The research project I have been working on has been exploring the impact extreme weather events, such as heat waves have on vulnerable populations within the community. In addition to the research project, I have had the opportunity to engage in conversations and observe the amazing work that is being done on the ground by DDEC, such as land conservation and the advocacy and protection of threatened species like koalas. Prior to this placement, although I was aware of the many fields that social work engages in, I was unaware social work could be so strongly reliant on the environment; and the environment on it. To clarify, I did have previous knowledge and have read literature based on the different domains of health, with connection to country being one of them, specifically for Indigenous Australians. I didn't however stop to reflect on what this may mean in action, unaware of the



importance that koala conservation and weed pulling may have on an individual, and its strong links to the micro, mezzo and macro layers of professional social work practice. While I was aware of the detrimental impact climate change is having on our earth and its most vulnerable occupants, I was unaware of the positive impact I could have working within this field, coming together with other social work professionals in the form of advocacy, education, research, and collaboration. Thus far, my social work journey has not been linear, nor has it been predictable, it has led me down paths that prior to this, I may not have ventured. I feel incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to learn about eco-social work and feel particularly inspired to come together to promote social justice and human rights moving into the future. I both recommend and encourage other social work students to consider integrating eco social work into their learning journey and practice framework, for I feel this is such an exciting time for social work, and I predict big, yet positive changes are on their way.





Are you passionate about climate justice?

Do you enjoy using social media?



Would you like to join our team of volunteers in the fight against climate change?



We are looking for people who can spare a couple of hours a month to help us keep our website and social media up to date. If you think that's something you can do, please get in touch



Please email  
[info@socialworkersforclimateaction.com.au](mailto:info@socialworkersforclimateaction.com.au)

# Field Education for Eco-social work ready graduates

Sandra Croaker from Social Workers for Climate Action

## **Could caring for the environment help social workers to improve personal and professional wellbeing and reduce anxiety, stress and burnout?**

Environmental degradation disproportionately impacts already marginalised groups of people, the same individuals, families and communities affected by complex social issues that social workers work with. Moreover, Social work operates in an environment where institutional or systemic barriers to supporting clients could lead to a sense of powerlessness.

Feeling powerless is at the heart of 'moral distress', a term coined in 1984 by philosopher Andrew Jameton to describe the suffering nurses experience when institutional or systemic barriers prevent them from acting with integrity. Moral distress leaves the bitter taste of feeling restricted, unheard, or dismissed; feelings not unfamiliar to Social Workers in their daily work with individuals, families and communities impacted by complex social issues. Research shows that moral distress has long-term

consequences, such as burnout, exhaustion, numbness, disconnection and compassion fatigue. These are contributing or leading factors to needing time off, switching sectors or leaving the profession altogether.

None of these is a desirable objective for graduates entering the field, workers already in the field or prospective students of Social Work.

Self-care is the buzzword describing the process to stay well on the job. Pages are filled with self-care tools to use as a preventative method, a crisis response, or as a restorative method.



Better self-care is often the focus of interventions with clients. However, we seem to be doing poorly in taking our own advice. Exploring the reasons for that is beyond the point here. But what if there would be a way to do social work that aims to nurture and sustain clients and workers?

**Eco-social work is as much of a theory and practice as it is a self-care tool to promote sustainable social work practice with long-term benefits for people, societies and the planet.**

Eco-social work recognises that human and environmental wellbeing are interdependent. It aims to support people in creating and maintaining a healthy, sustainable, and biodiverse ecosystem for all living organisms. The term refers to a broader eco-centric perspective (humanity in service to the environment) which affirms humans' reciprocal interconnection with the natural world. The dual focus on ecological justice (wellbeing of the natural environment) and social justice (wellbeing of people) makes eco-social justice a fundamental concept of eco-social work.

One of the key arguments for eco-social work is the acknowledgement that people's disrupted connection to nature, expressed in a misguided sense of mastery and control of nature, enables the continuation of exploitative practices harmful to people and nature. Shifting our thinking about the world around us

and our experience of our relationship with nature towards a new paradigm that values interdependency and collectivism over individualism, connectedness rather than dualism, holism rather than reductionism' (Coates, 2000) in our personal and professional lives address the ills of modern societies

### **Who cares for the environment?**

I haven't yet encountered a person who does not care for the natural environment. However, I have come across many people who compromise to the detriment of nature without a clear understanding of what they are bargaining with or without an understanding of the alternatives.

This creates a complex situation for social workers, as we are switching between multiple identities as perpetrators, helpers/supporters and victims.

As an educator in Social Work, I see a professional and personal responsibility to inform and empower the next generation of social workers to lead as ethical, passionate and dedicated social workers.

With an expected rise in crisis responses and interventions due to natural disasters and environmental degradation, we need new ideas on taking care of the people that are supposed to take care of people in need. Our humanity, the very essence of our being, demands of us to do better for our own sake.

That the time is rife to challenge ourselves in our thinking is evident in

some of the data from a recent survey with Bachelor of Social Work students from JCU.

The majority of responding students (87%) felt concerned about the state of the natural environment and a responsibility to care for it. However, only 19% of respondents felt they had control over the situation and felt overwhelmed when thinking about the state of the natural environment. I also asked students about their ideas for bringing an eco-social justice perspective to their placement learning. Students identified:

### **Supportive learning environment (50%)**

Guidance from FE and liaison

Discussion with and support from other social workers

Time and space to unpack how to adapt eco-social justice principles to the organisation

Resources/handouts to share at placement

Clarification on student role and capacity to encourage change

### **Needs to be part of the assessment (19%)**

Eco-social justice principles build into the learning plan

Complete a journal on how eco-social justice relates to the role

Included in placement guidelines and assessments

### **Organisational context matters (31%)**

Openness from agency

Guidance from agency

Level of ecological consciousness in organisation

Tension with core duties

Not mainstream – agency don't really consider this perspective

The students identified the tension between doing their social work placement in a traditional social work model while living and working in a changing environment. Complex issues such as climate change and environmental destruction, directly and indirectly, affect clients' help-seeking behaviour. However, organisational objectives along with social work theory and practice struggle with the inclusion of environmental objectives. Our joined efforts in practice, research and education are needed to re-think how we do social work to stay relevant in a time of great change.

Coates, J. (2000). From modernity to sustainability: New roles for social work. Paper presented at the Joint Conference of the International Federation of Social Workers, the International Association of Schools of Social Work, and the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work.

Mosher, Craig (2010). A wholistic paradigm for sustainability: Are social workers experts or partners?. *Critical Social Work*. 11 (3).  
<http://1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/a-wholistic-paradigm-for-sustainability-are-social-workers-experts-or-partners#top>



# Just what is a PODCRAWL?



A podcrawl is a selection of podcasts for you to listen to. Each day for a week, a different podcast episode will be shared with you ..... **HANG ON! What is a podcast? You may ask...**

A podcast can be described as a radio show you get to choose. It is an audio file you can listen to online (stream) or download on to your computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone. If your device doesn't come with a built-in podcast listening app, you can download one for free from your app store. Podcast apps and episodes are free to enjoy.

Many great and interesting conversations happen in podcasts but finding and listening to them can be time-consuming. To make it easier for you, we have searched far and wide to bring you a selection of episodes we think are engaging and informative.

Day	Podcast	Episode
1	S-Work Podcast	S: Why the Social Work Profession Needs to Start Addressing Climate Change
2	Mothers of Invention	Nothing Happens Unless You Press the Button

Once you have your app set up, search for the podcasts and the specific episode listed in our podcrawl list. You can listen by yourself while walking the dog, going for a run, cooking dinner...you get the idea. Or you could come together with a friend or colleague and listen together. Podcasts can be enjoyed exactly how you want to.

After listening, you can leave a comment on our Facebook page. If you valued what you listened to, share it with others, and have a conversation or 2 (or more!) with friends, colleagues, anyone! It's all up to you how you want to podcrawl.



Don't just plod along alone –

# POD ALONG WITH US!

## Catastrophic Capitalism and some Alternative Actions



SOCIAL WORKERS  
For CLIMATE ACTION

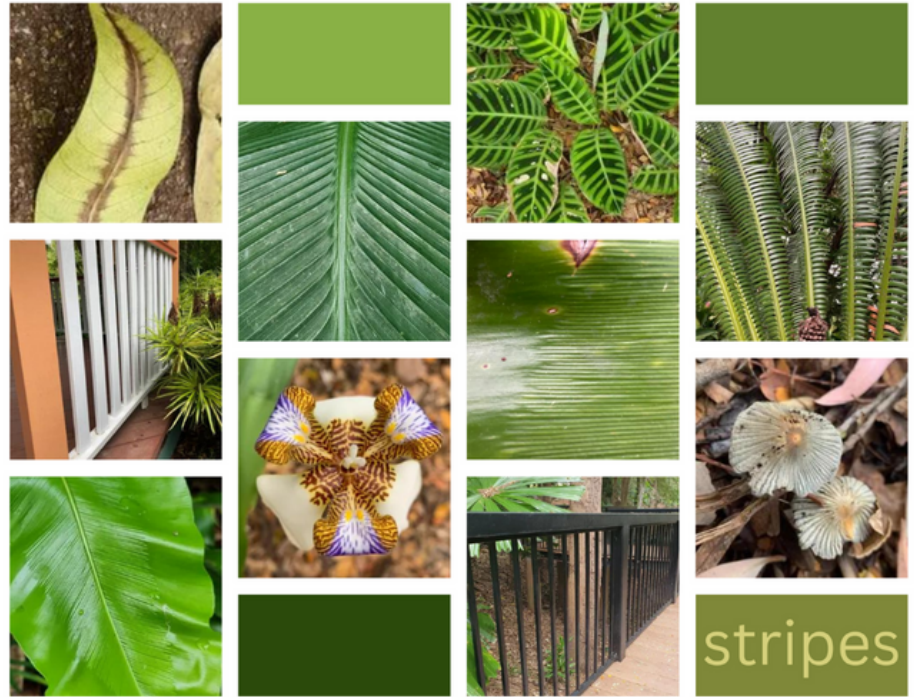
Day	Podcast	Episode	Length
1	Green Dreamer	353) Jason Moore: The impossible endless accumulation of capital	53:22
2	Stuff You Should Know	We need more sustainable packaging, like, yesterday.	50:36
3	Reversing Climate Change	81: The business of “waste” – with Lindsey Engh	54:05
4	Green Dreamer	321) Dr. Tyson Yunkaporta: A different kind of growth	1:04:38
5	UNECE	Innovation Matters: The platform economy – Revolutionizing how we produce, consume and interact?	37:45
Bonus	Stuff You Should Know	Composting: Nature’s most interesting process	54:20







FILM NEGATIVE



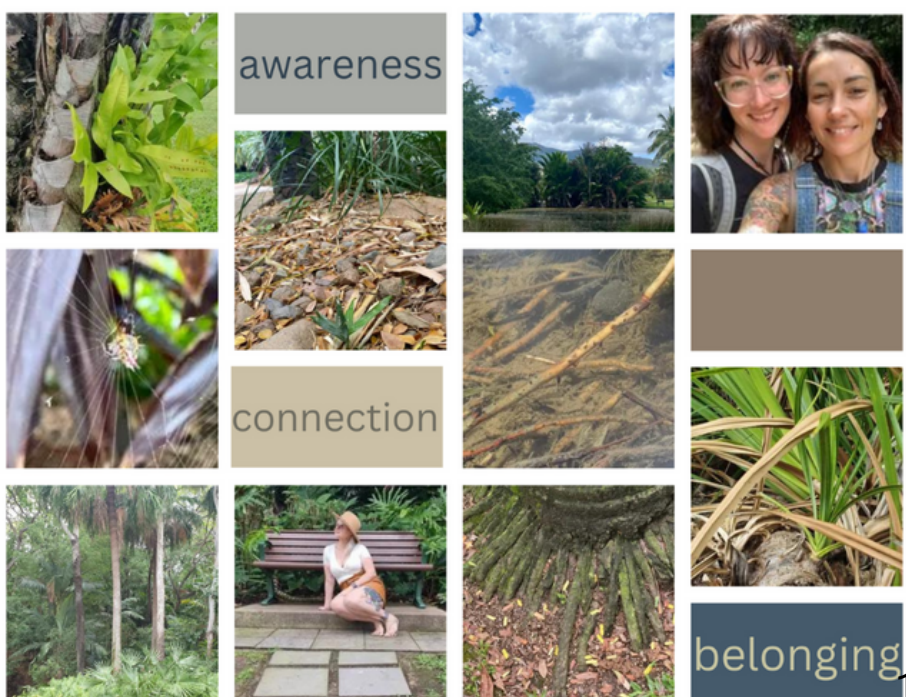
stripes



**SOCIAL WORKERS**  
For **CLIMATE ACTION**



Queensland  
**Mental Health**  
Week



awareness

connection

belonging



We thank you for your ongoing support. If you have something to share in the next newsletter, please email [info@socialworkersforclimateaction.org](mailto:info@socialworkersforclimateaction.org)

