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# LAND MARK

transform

2011 AILA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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# Climate stresses

Paul Costigan, AILA Chief Executive Officer

The AILA continues to put a lot of emphasis on the issues of climate change. A key outcome early on was the development of the Australian Landscape Principles. These principles in turn underpinned national policy developments as well as providing the focus for advocacy.

Once the AILA adopted an ethical position based on the Australian Landscape Principles, this position became the point of reference for partnerships and arrangements for joint programs and other initiatives. There remains some major national initiatives that the AILA would very much like to be a partner, but to date this has not happened, despite much effort. On all these occasions we have requested open and transparent discussions about how such a partnership could be structured. Sadly on a few significant occasions the AILA has not had its principled position accepted as a point of reference for discussions. But all is not lost. There are more wins than losses and slowly a principled based position and the importance of landscape values are being accepted. But I am not going to pretend that this ethical and principled based position has not caused some stress at times.

Meanwhile at a national political level we are witnessing a very confusing situation when it comes to national leadership on Climate Change. Our political leaders are struggling to deal effectively with providing the country with effective leadership in dealing with this country's serious carbon issues. May I recommend that members remain focused on what the reality of the issue are. For example, it is strongly recommend that you download the document put out by the Australian Academy of Science later last year.

[www.science.org.au/reports/climatechange2010.pdf](http://www.science.org.au/reports/climatechange2010.pdf)

The document aims to summarise and clarify the current understanding of the science of climate change for non-specialist readers. The document is structured around seven questions and is worth using as part of your advocacy. The seven questions are listed below—and I am reproducing them here—not because you may not have heard them before—but hopefully to keep us all focused on the real issues and not the silly issues dominating the national airwaves.

## 1 What is climate change?

Climate is a statistical description of weather conditions and their variations, including both averages and extremes. Climate change is a change in the average pattern of weather over a long period of time. Greenhouse gases play an important role in determining climate and causing climate change.

## 2 How has Earth's climate changed in the distant past?

Global climate has varied enormously through Earth's history. Evidence from the past shows that global climate can be sensitive to small influences. Past records also show that climates can shift abruptly.

## 3 How has climate changed during the recent past?

Global average temperature has increased over the past century. Evidence for this comes from instrumental temperature records in the air and the ocean. Temperature observations are not the only evidence of recent climate change: other sources include trends in sea levels, glaciers, ice caps and atmospheric water vapour that are consistent with global warming. Australia's climate has changed along with global climate.

## 4 Are human activities causing climate change?

Human activities are increasing greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere. It is very likely that most of the recent observed global warming is caused by this increase in greenhouse gases.

## 5 How do we expect climate to evolve in the future?

Climate models and studies of past climates indicate that global warming and associated changes will continue if greenhouse gas levels keep rising as they are now. It is very likely there will be significant warming through the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions could significantly reduce long-term warming.

## 6 What are the consequences of climate change?

Climate change will have significant impacts on our society and environment, both directly and by altering the impacts of other stresses.

## 7 How do we deal with the uncertainty in the science?

Although climate forecasts are uncertain and will remain so, the broad conclusions of climate change science as outlined above are based on many lines of evidence which together give a high degree of confidence. Partly because of scientific uncertainty but also because many aspects of human life are involved, decisions about action on climate change will need to involve extensive consideration of issues beyond science, including ethics, economics and risk management.

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A Publication of the  
**Australian  
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# Joining dots—Books, Music and Precinct Planning

## Paul Costigan, AILA Chief Executive Officer

How many of us have not been saddened by the news that the Australian booksellers and the music industry are both very much in trouble. The demise in these important aspects of Australia's cultural fabric has been linked to the dual pressures of the value of the Australian dollar and the sharp rise in the Internet sales, particularly from overseas online retailers. However I think that this conclusion avoids the reality of the more complex nature of what has been happening. These problems should not be surprising anyone who has recently stepped out to wander down their main street to do some browsing for either music or a book. These problems predate the rise of Internet sales. Time to join the dots—from books, and music back to the bad planning decisions of the last decades.

Up front I admit to being one of the many who press these keys and do some of my music and book buying online. But every so often I think maybe I should support the local industries and venture out to 'shop'—to search out some local purchases. As my job often involves travel throughout Australia, I take the time to roam and to witness the local retail precincts interstate. Increasingly it has become very hard to find a local music shop with the range of music that I wish to spend time exploring. As for those local book shops, they have been evaporating at a steady pace till one has to rely on inside knowledge as to which ones are still surviving. But even more devastating, is the current state of what used to be the main streets of many major centres and suburbs. The whole concept of a main shopping street may have already become a thing of the past. If you still have one in your locality—take a photo—but do not share it around as there are developers and supermarkets around who will see the untapped opportunities and quickly provide you with a retail box or two as their alternate for your retail pleasures. It will no longer be 'shopping'.

The Internet and the value of the Australian dollar (against such currencies as the US dollar) are very definitely the very latest (maybe the final) spoilers for the local booksellers and music stores. But the real damage had already been inflicted. I suggest that those in charge of our local and state planning regimes are the main culprits for this very poor community outcome. For too many years Australian communities have been subjected to decisions to modernise the way we do our

shopping. Most of the retail precincts have dramatically changed in nature and I suggest that these latest announcements on the demise of the book stores and the music industry are the most recent symptoms of the disease. Much of the recent planning for our retail spaces has at best been ad hoc, laissez-faire, or at worst been driven by agendas not with the longer term community benefit as the main drivers. It is not just the book and music stores that are disappearing, but many of the local shops that used to provide variety, real choices and the opportunities just to roam and to 'shop'.

Recent UK research has looked into particular regional cities that have been reshaped by the installation of major supermarkets as the key points in the city centres. It also highlights the tragedy that has happened when supermarkets have failed and have left the townships bereft of their town centres especially as the former local shops had been replaced by the chain stores and dreaded franchised stores. So much of the former versatility and vibrancy within the high street had been replaced by major retailer boxes. We see it here in Australia. So many main streets have become occupied by one dollar and bargain stores while most of the retail activity has been sucked into a nearby boxed mall or into one purposely positioned away from the traditional centre and designed to be accessed by car.

Here in Canberra, a range of very important decisions on shopping centres are about to be made. In some cases the suburban centres are well overdue for an upgrade. The previous architecture has become shabby and there is a need to bring in more residential apartments to breath life into the retail precincts. Some 21<sup>st</sup> Century integrated design thinking is desperately required. And of course, all our planning mandarins are under pressure from developers to open up opportunities—as they see the 'rivers of gold' that await them. Also in the wings are the large supermarkets that have convinced the ACT Government that more competition is required between the supermarkets within Canberra's suburbs. Sadly, this has translated to mean that the usual suspects in the supermarket world are about to be given more opportunities to descend into our suburban centres. I remain unconvinced that this simple translation of 'increased competition' will deliver the quality of life and shopping experiences that we should expect in our commercial centres. I am sure the bigger retailers

will relish their own style of competition. After all, in the very recent past, we have all witnessed the rise of the larger supermarkets and the boxed malls and by absolutely no coincidence, the demise of the smaller stand alone retailers. This is not competition—this is something else! Go for a walk around Civic in Canberra. The evidence awaits you. I am sure particular finance companies have something in mind. But the Canberra community may be overdue for some design and community oriented leadership from our local government planners and politicians.

In the not too distant past, the Civic precinct as well as many of the suburban centres, had a range of retailers selling books and music, amongst many other smaller retailers. A few independents have somehow struggled to maintain a presence despite the huge buying power of the larger supermarkets and other franchises within the boxed malls. But as these larger retailers continue to extend their ranges of goods, being anything they can ship in at super low prices, they have trained more and more of us to do the one stop retail dance along the aisles and to conduct your own check out and then to wander back to our cars to make the journey home. All satisfied that we have obtained the best bargain. That's modern retail as we have been trained to accept. It is not shopping.

With the recent changes to the ACT planning structures announced by the Chief Minister, maybe we can start to be optimistic. Will we see precinct design and planning that does not shut out the smaller retailers? That actually provides a style of shopping and community precinct to be celebrated and not just another series of chain stores. Is it just too much to ask that future design of Canberra's commercial precincts should deliver real competition between local retailers and even the possibility of another mid size supermarket being allowed to enter the local mix? Shall we dream that dream of having small book and music stores again or at least streets, plazas or laneways of small stores to roam amongst. Maybe we could learn again to enjoy roaming through outside precincts and even get to embrace leisurely shopping.

A version of this article was published in *The Canberra Times*, March 2011

## Key landscape architecture messages

Throughout 2011 the AILA is to address the AILA's Vision through actions and advocacy based on the following Key Messages:

**Climate Change:** Climate Change adaptation and mitigation can be addressed through good urban design that recognises that healthy ecosystems provide the fundamental support system for life on earth.

**Green Infrastructure:** The Planning and Design of our cities and settlements needs to proactively maximise opportunities for ecosystem enhancement and regeneration through the incorporation of Green Infrastructure.

**Integrated Design:** Australian Governments should adopt an integrated whole-of-government approach to design, planning and development for all settlements, large and small, metropolitan, rural, regional, remote or coastal.

**Stewardship:** Stewardship of our unique Australian environment should underpin the management, master planning, design and construction of urban, regional and rural landscapes and embrace recycling, conservation, regeneration, and restoration of natural systems.

**Community Engagement:** All agencies involved in the planning, design and development of our cities, including new and infill developments, should use inclusive models of collaboration and transparent decision-making processes that promote positive engagement and consultation with communities to raise public awareness of design.

All members are encouraged to visit the national web site and to use the policies as the basis for advocacy. A copy of the above Key Messages are available online.

## AILA and public sector landscape architects

The National Office has recently uploaded the list the Registered Landscape Architects employed in the public sector. This includes within government at all levels as well as semi government agencies and authorities - and university staff (excludes casual and sessional).

The listing includes those Registered members employed under all government employment titles—such as Landscape Architects, Landscape Planner, Procurement Officers, Policy Officer, Heritage Officers, Conservation Planner, CEO, Director, Project Manager, Urban Designer—any title!

The accuracy of information relies on the individual Registered member supplying updates and amendments. The current list is online under the directories: [www.aila.org.au/directories](http://www.aila.org.au/directories)

So much of the AILA's work in assisting the membership has historically been focussed on the registered members in private practice. This new listing is small beginning to shift the balance. We hope that with the assistance and guidance of those concerned, that there can be more recognition for the many and complex roles these public sector landscape architects undertake.

We are open to ideas on how to lift the profile of this section of the profession—over to you!

**Christine Ten Eyck**

“We don’t work in a fancy part of the country, but I think it’s still possible to do things that are meaningful, even if they aren’t these big-budget projects. If you have the passion for what you do, you can make a difference, no matter how big the office or what the situation.”

**Sarah Gaventa**

“Having a landscape architect who can come up with a plan for each city in England in terms of what it should be thinking about in landscape for the next 20 odd years would be an extremely worthwhile thing to do.”

**Sarah Gaventa**

“The wonderful thing about landscape architecture, rather than architecture, is that it isn’t about marking your mark, it’s about making places better. So it’s not about the master approach, it’s very much about unlocking the potential of a place.”

**Tim Waterman**

“Much of what we do cannot be reduced to a single cash value. We must be prepared to defend and promote our profession based on its moral worth as well.”

**Stephen Sheppard**

“What does the future with climate change, clean energy and low-carbon neighbourhoods look like?”  
“There are thousands of option. Business as usual isn’t one of them.”

**Tim Waterman**

“Multidisciplinary activity is finally being accepted and encouraged—not just as a nice idea, but as a necessity for regenerative thinking and working.”  
“Operating across boundaries means we must be prepared to share territory.”

**Tim Waterman**

“Landscape Architecture is the militant wing of geography—we actively shape what others assess.”

**Anne Whiston Spurr**

“A place is particular, a tapestry of woven contexts, enduring and ephemeral, local and global, related and unrelated, now and then, past and future. Landscape context is a fabric whose strands are narratives of landscape elements and features, both the persistent and the fleeting. All that has happened in a place, all the lives lived there contribute to a sense of place; identity is defined by the common and the rare alike.”

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# What is happening to the world?

## Paul Harding AILA National Vice President

Back in 1997 snow fell on Uluru, an event that had not occurred in living memory, including Aboriginal memory and that's going back a long way, a lot further than our modern history.

Reading the papers lately makes me wonder again, what is happening to the world, our world?

Floods, cyclones and bushfires in Australia over the last couple of years have made everyone sit up and take notice. Apparently though, flooding of the Brisbane River in 1893 was more than three metres above the levels reached earlier this year and current flooding of the River Murray and Victoria will not compare with the inundation of 1957 and bushfires are not uncommon in Australia. However, it seems our collective memories of natural disasters are short, houses are built on flood plains and in fire prone bushland and we believe that natural disasters will not affect us. The trouble is that our modern world is made of bricks, mortar and concrete, it is immovable and much is at risk.

At Lake Mungo, a few years back, I heard a story of 40,000 years of climate change. The land was hotter, then colder, the country was more saline, the water levels of the lakes rose and fell. Even the earth's magnetic north changed direction. The old people moved around with the weather but they still lived there. The lakes dried up for the last time around 10,000 years ago. Now the winds blow the sands eastwards, uncovering thousands of years of human habitation embedded in the earth. The world's climate is changing constantly and modern civilisation is merely a blip on the radar.

Since the industrial revolution we have been pumping CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere, using resources and clearing the forests at an alarming rate. It seems the planet is not happy and it's fighting back. Who would blame it? Although the climate is changing, is the underlying problem that we have lost our respect for and connections with, the earth on which we depend for our survival?

Twenty years ago, I read the 'Mists of Avalon' by Marion Bradley. It was a work of historical fiction, of myth and legend set in the time of King Arthur. It was also around the time of the separation of art and science in European history and the ensuing dominance of arithmetic over geometry in architecture. In the story, Druid shamans drew the mists closed around their spiritual home of Avalon for protection from the new world order of science and patriarchal religion. The Island of Avalon disappeared from history and access to the spirit world was closed for the common people.

I reckon that symbolic event was an important one as it seemed to signify the point at which the western world lost its connections with the natural world, a world that is best described in spiritual terms of feeling and emotions. Daybreak and sunsets,

the wind in the trees, bird song and the lure of broad horizons are all things that most of us, as landscape architects, understand and appreciate.

In Bruce Chatwin's 'Songlines' the Aboriginal people talk of 'singing up the country' to give it life, to care for it, when was the last time we sang a song for country?

Where do we go from here? Who knows what the future holds? I don't doubt the human race will survive, but not all of it. The science and technology we now master means we can build more sustainable cities and it might even allow us to recolonise Mars. In the meantime, hope for the best but plan for the worst and never give up.

I need to say that these are my personal thoughts while listening to Irish songstress, Imelda May, singing rockabilly on a Japanese amplifier on a CD purchased over the internet from the UK ten days ago and do not necessarily reflect those of the AILA.

At least the soundtrack lifts my spirits.



photos by Paul Harding



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At Eureka, we believe that our difference is achieved by creating a landscape true to its design. And the best way to do that is to truly understand our clients – their thoughts, their ideas and their creative vision. We approach all our projects with the attitude of working as partners with our clients. This ensures that the entire process runs smoothly, efficiently and produces the expected results.

Communication, collaboration and teamwork are an integral part of every Eureka project. And you'll find that it's not just between us and our clients, but between the Directors, the Project Managers and the 100+ employees at Eureka. All large projects are managed by one of Eureka's directors, which ensures that decisions can be made on the spot and solutions are identified where necessary, avoiding lengthy delays in internal approvals.

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PO Box 178  
Chermside South  
QLD 4032

P: 07 3350 8300  
F: 07 3256 3022



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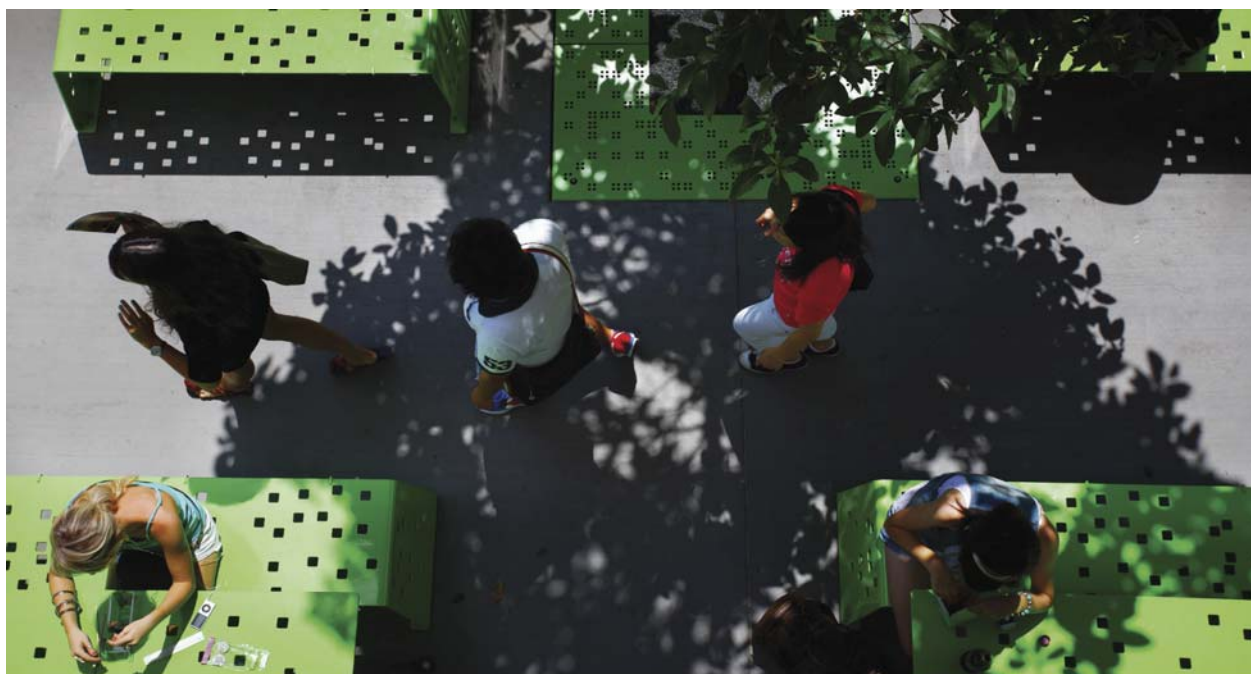
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PlantUp are proud Gold Level Sponsors of the AILA Transform Conference in 2011. We have chosen to sponsor this years event as we believe that Landscape Architects are able to engage with designers of all sectors to encourage change and the implementation of new design concepts ie. greenwalls & greeroofs. Ideas which are going to change the way all designers view landscaping projects in years to come.

PO Box 178  
Chermside South Q 4032  
P: 07 3350 8333  
F : 07 3256 3022

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## Revival

An exhibition of projects that have revived dormant urban landscapes in Queensland  
 Curated by Gamble McKinnon Green and sponsored by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects  
 4 May to 4 June 2011  
[www.gad.org.au](http://www.gad.org.au)  
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### Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

GPO Box 1646  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601  
 Telephone: 02 6248 9970  
 Facsimile: 02 6249 7337  
 Email: [admin@aila.org.au](mailto:admin@aila.org.au)  
[www.aila.org.au](http://www.aila.org.au)

## AILA State Group Contacts

**ACT AILA Group President**  
 Michael Reeves AILA  
 GPO Box 1646  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

**NSW AILA Group President**  
 Jane Irwin AILA  
**NSW AILA State Manager**  
 PO Box 655  
 LANE COVE NSW 2066  
 02 9427 4669  
[nsw@aila.org.au](mailto:nsw@aila.org.au)

**NT AILA Group President**  
 Tony Cox FAILA  
 GPO Box 3359  
 DARWIN NT 0801

**QLD AILA Group President**  
 Jean Rousseaux AILA  
**QLD AILA State Manager**  
 PO Box 7342  
 East Brisbane QLD 4169  
 07 3040 2452  
[qld@aila.org.au](mailto:qld@aila.org.au)

**SA AILA President**  
 Alison Radford AILA  
 GPO Box 1584  
 ADELAIDE SA 5001

**TAS AILA Group President**  
 Lesley Gulson AILA  
 GPO Box 374—D  
 HOBART TAS 7000

**VIC AILA Group President**  
 Scott Graham AILA  
**VIC AILA State Manager**  
 03 9016 0111  
[victoria@aila.org.au](mailto:victoria@aila.org.au)

**WA AILA Group President**  
 Matt Huxtable AILA  
 PO Box 5680  
 St George Terrace  
 Perth WA 6831  
[wa@aila.org.au](mailto:wa@aila.org.au)

ISSN 1328-5181

### Chief Executive Officer

Paul Costigan

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