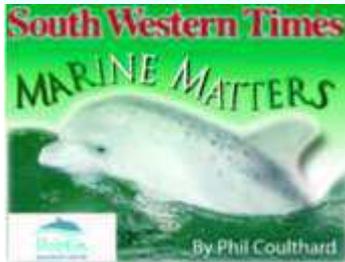




Focusing on the future



THERE is no doubt that Sunday's Carbon Tax announcement has everyone talking about the issue of environmental pollution.

Finally, after years of blah blah blah, an action appears to be in place to address the issue. Aimed more so at big business polluters, the idea is to introduce a levy for those who create carbon dioxide through the burn-off of fossil fuels.

While the tax will aim primarily at the top 500 businesses who produce the most carbon emission in Australia, clearly we are all guilty in some way, leaving us with no choice but to pay some sort of tax levy within this new management strategy.

Unfortunately, the current focus from the media and the general community seems to again be around the short term loss rather than the long term gain. In this case, how much will it cost "me" and will "I" be compensated?

The bigger picture of course would be to focus on an action that promotes long term sustainability of our environment and at the least, initiating mainstream thinking within our community that we are having an impact and that we must change how we live and how we consume.

A fine example of this realisation would be the gradual acceptance of global warming and the effects

it may have and already has had on our coastal and marine ecosystems.

Rising atmospheric greenhouse gases for example are warming the oceans and increasing ocean acidity. Increasing air and sea temperatures are also melting polar ice caps causing sea levels to rise.

In combination, all of these will likely result in driving stronger ocean currents that can persist for longer periods of the year and dramatically change the flow and productivity of our oceans on an international scale.

This type of impact is serious and could either be gradual or instant, depending on the response from the animals and plants that exists within each ecosystem and environment. The evidence will often be in the form of slight or unusual changes in "Mother Nature" herself.

We have already seen potential evidence of this with a record warm Leeuwin current flowing down the WA coast towards Tasmania over the past six months.

Short term impacts observed from this current have already been recorded, including the presence of tropical marine species within southern waters, a change in the birthing and migration patterns of humpback whales and unusual mass fish kills along our beaches.

All of these suggest something has changed and may be an important piece of the puzzle desperately needed for our science community to understand what is going on. Because of this, the Earth Watch Institute has recently launched ClimateWatch Australia.

It is aimed at people of all ages Australia-wide to join forces in gathering data to aid scientists in their research on climate change.

Participants are invited to regularly register sightings of specific animals or plants onto a website.

It is easy to use and allows those who may have the time and interest, a chance to learn more about our natural environment.

Teachers can also register the school or class, or an entire community group can create local trails for long term monitoring.

For those who spend a lot of time on the beach or out in the water, Climatewatch Marine was launched here in WA on June 8.

At this stage, ClimateWatch Marine only has four iconic whale species and a range of jellyfish within the program however more species will likely be added in the future.

For more information on the program visit www.climatewatch.org.au.



A whale calf was born near Broome on Monday, however there have been reports of new mums and calves as far south as Albany due to the warm water current. PICTURE: dave_and_fiona@hotmail.com