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This month in sustainability...

UTAS signs international Scientists' Declaration against marine plastics

Associate Professor Joanna Vince hasn't always been a champion against marine plastics pollution.

Her research career began looking at issues of Australia's oceans policy and governance more broadly.

But a chance interdisciplinary project led to a collaboration with marine plastics researcher Dr. Britta Denise Hardesty from the CSIRO, which resulted in one of the most downloaded papers in the journal *Restoration Ecology's* history.

Today, Joanna is a leading researcher in marine plastic pollution, blending policy and science to develop best-practice approaches to develop solutions to this complex challenge.

Dr. Vince has brought the **Scientists' Declaration on the Need for Governance of Plastics Throughout their Lifecycles** to the University of Tasmania.

In signing the Declaration, UTAS has agreed to the call to action from scientists to global policy leaders for a legally binding global treaty on marine plastics pollution.

"When I saw it, I thought, as a university we need to be part of this, and we need to sign it, because of all the sustainability work we've been doing, it's showing that we are serious about [plastics pollution], as a sustainable university."

The Scientists' Declaration calls for an approach to plastics management that begins at the start of the lifecycle – not just at the end, when the item is discarded.

While waste management is one piece of the puzzle, Dr. Vince says that just looking at "end of pipe solutions" isn't going to fix the problem.

The Declaration suggests a number of solutions to be considered by the international community, such as a cap on the production of virgin plastics, developing repair and reuse infrastructure, and regulating the use of additives to prevent chemical leeching, in addition to waste management.

The need for a global approach to manage plastics pollution is becoming urgent, says Dr. Vince.

"[...]We're finding [plastics] everywhere, we're finding it in the Arctic in the snow, in the Antarctic, we're finding microplastics are now so much part of the sea bed that you can't take them out, and we're finding more and more evidence of it impacting our health. Microplastics have been found in human placenta, human lung tissue in table salt, the list goes on and on and on... so we are now impacted through physiological responses in addition to our environment by plastic."

In March, United Nations member states agreed to negotiate a legally binding globally treaty to end plastics pollution.

For Dr. Vince, it's crucial that the treaty is based on the science, and the Scientists' Declaration will be a powerful force to ensure that the global resolution has the support of the world's scientists.

From a policy perspective, it's also crucial that the treaty is legally-binding.

"We need clear directions about which way to go. It needs to be fair to developing nations, because they don't have the resources or the power to make some of the changes needed to lessen plastic pollution, so we as a world need to be working together to ensure that those countries that need a helping hand do get it through this process. "And to make sure we don't let the biggest polluters get away with it," said Dr. Vince.

Right now, plastics are mostly managed at the local level in a waste management context, in Australia through local councils and on similarly small scales globally.

Local changes do make an impact – Dr. Vince's research has documented the effectiveness of **local coastal stewardship and waste management policies for reducing coastal litter**, for example.

But the source and impacts of plastics pollution are "transboundary and transgenerational" and complex to address.

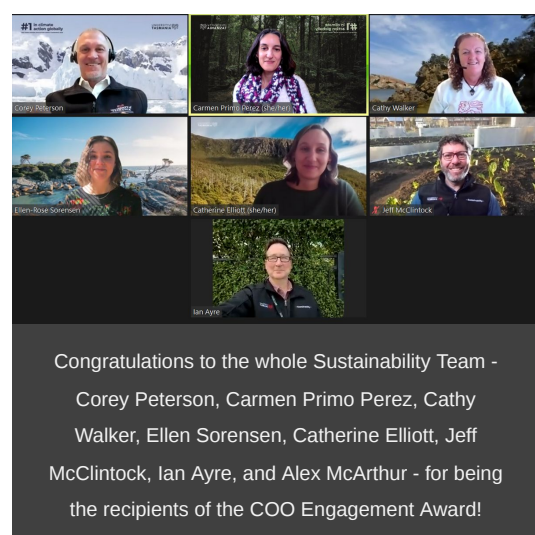
"I would personally like to see holistic governance approaches, where governments work with NGOs, civil society, community groups, as well as industry to come up with solutions rather than everyone just being told what to do. I don't think that's ever going to work, it does have to be a holistic approach," say Dr. Vince.

Plastics pollution has been a major focus of COP27, which is currently underway in Egypt, and negotiations on a global plastics treaty will begin in Uruguay in November, with the goal to have a treaty in place by the end of 2024.

"Watch this space!" says Dr. Vince.

If you are a student or staff member interested in joining the University's plastics minimisation working group, contact the Sustainability Team.

Find out more about Dr. Vince's work here.



Congratulations to the whole Sustainability Team - Corey Peterson, Carmen Primo Perez, Cathy Walker, Ellen Sorensen, Catherine Elliott, Jeff McClintock, Ian Ayre, and Alex McArthur - for being the recipients of the COO Engagement Award!

Campus sustainability in focus at the TEMC Conference

The Tertiary Education Management Conference (TEMC) was held in Hobart in early September, with the theme for this year's event being 'regenerate and thrive'.

Delivered virtually and online, the conference program was stacked with presentations and workshops from institutions across Australasia.

Higher education is a complex field, and the presentation topics were correspondingly diverse, covering issues like the post-COVID campus experience, workspaces for HDR students, gender parity in facilities management, student-centric building design, with sustainability a focus throughout.

The program also included site tours, movement sessions, and choir sessions, where attendees could drop in, learn a few singing techniques, and have the chance to perform in front of a crowd on the final day of the event, which was a highlight of the event for UTAS Community Garden Coordinator Jeff McClintock.

"I honestly thought an event aimed at tertiary management staff would be the most boring thing on the planet," said Jeff.

"But the choir leader just had the knack of drawing everyone in and within minutes producing an amazing sound."

The keynote address for the in-person program, delivered by Alex Hanlon from Reconciliation Queensland on leadership and reconciliation, was another highlight for Jeff.

"To have the keynote speaker on day one do a passionate, personal, informative and challenging talk on Aboriginal reconciliation just completely blew me away and set the scene for the next few days".

The University of Tasmania was well-represented at the conference, with a number of presentations from People and Wellbeing, Facilities Management, and the Sustainability Team.

Sustainability was a major theme for the conference, and the UTAS Susty Team spoke about decarbonising campuses, sustainable transport, divestment, creating an edible campus, waste management, and student and staff expectations of sustainability on campus.

"I was very pleased to see sustainability as a main focus of TEMC as I believe sustainability is a key aspect of tertiary education," said Carmen Primo Perez, UTAS Senior Sustainability Officer.

"[The conference] was an amazing opportunity to share knowledge and experiences among institutions that are at different stages in their sustainability journey, and I am glad to report that I made great connections with people from all around the world."

Chief Sustainability Officer Corey Peterson was also a regular up on the conference stage, delivering a number of presentations and participating in a keynote panel discussion about the state of sustainability in higher education.

"One of my highlights was chatting all things sustainability as a member of the panel and fielding questions from the moderator and conference participants," said Corey.

"Higher Education institutions have a key role to play as exemplars of sustainable organisations, including leading in research to improve sustainability outcomes and then sharing that knowledge with our students, fellow staff and our communities."



Inveresk Apartment students with their compost caddies

Composting trials at Student Living

Students at Sandy Bay and Inveresk are able to compost their food waste thanks to the rollout of two new composting projects.

Sandy Bay Student Accommodation have just received FOGO (Food and Organics) bins, which will allow students to compost food waste, organic materials, and industrially-compostable items like take-away containers.

In early September, Garden Facilitator Alex McArthur ran a composting workshop for students living in student accommodation, so they could familiarise themselves with the do's and don'ts of FOGO before the rollout.

At Inveresk, SIPS Intern Lars Roberts has been undertaking a project under the supervision of Community Garden Co-ordinator Jeff McClintock, using the new COMET composting machine, a key component of the Inveresk Community Garden.

The COMET composter takes just 14 days to turn food waste and garden scraps into rich, nutritious compost, which will go directly to enriching the soil of the community garden.

The students living in the Inveresk Apartments were identified as a likely source of suitable food scraps, and a compost caddy trial was rolled out in early October.

The initial pilot program involves ten students, who are collecting their food scraps in the caddies and depositing them ready for use in the composter.

It's hoped that the program will be opened up to more students in the Inveresk Apartments in the future.

Decomposing food generates methane, a greenhouse gas with around *30 times the warming power of carbon dioxide.

When food scraps are placed in the landfill bin, this methane gas is released into the atmosphere.

Composting prevents this methane from being released and instead the carbon is held in the material for use by plants.

The COMET composter has so far generated more than four cubic metres of compost.



We're always looking to share great sustainability stories from across our campuses. If you would like to submit a piece to the Sustainability Bulletin, get in touch with us here.

Next Bulletin Date: December 13

Interact and Engage

Click the button below to download the Useful Sustainability Links PDF, which includes a list of our programs, facebook pages, resources and more.

